

**Company – Pret A Manger**

**Sector – Food & Drink**

*Sustainability is a dynamic process; there are no easy answers.*

*We want to make the right decisions to reduce our impact on the environment.*

*Pret A Manger*

**Background and Context**

Established in London in 1986, fresh sandwich retail chain, Pret A Manger have long been strong advocates of responsible and sustainable business practices, and their commitment to reducing waste has shown them to be innovators in the sandwich business. Not only do they ensure all their packaging can be recycled, they were the first retailer in the 1990s to use cardboard sandwich boxes as opposed to the more usual plastic sandwich containers. Furthermore, they ensure that sustainability is topmost when developing any new packaging lines. Recent packaging developments include:

- Reducing the amount of material used in baguette bags and bloomer wraps, saving 8.27 tonnes of packaging material a year.
- Swapping from plastic salad bowls to sustainable cardboard packaging, saving 7,000 kilos of plastic a year.

Pret's ultimate aim is to ensure all their packaging is made from recycled materials or renewable sources and is 100% recyclable (currently 96% of their packaging lines are recyclable).

**Thinking Green and Planning for Impact**

Pret believe in continually reviewing the ways in which they approach sustainability. They examine their green activities all the way down the 'sustainability chain', giving a critical eye to how they integrate into the rest of society. An example of this is the research Pret conducted, looking at the real impacts of their packing materials, which has led them to depart from their use of moulded plastic pots.

In 2005, they began using yoghurt pots made from a biodegradable plastic known as PLA or cornstarch plastic. However, from March 2007, Pret returned to using virgin PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate), that will eventually be replaced by 100% recycled PET (rPET).

"Why did they switch? Isn't biodegradable green?" you might ask. Well, yes. However, these biodegradable pots could only break down properly in large scale composting disposal systems. Most of the biodegradable plastic yoghurt pots used by Pret stores are taken away by customers and are then thrown away. Currently, there is no infrastructure for composting this type of plastic in the UK efficiently. During a screening process, all material for composting is screened and the plastics are removed. As it's impossible to separate different types at the composting plant, both biodegradable and non-biodegradable plastics are removed. Sadly, biodegradable plastics can act as a contaminant, when added to plastic collection for recycling. This in turn reduces the quality of the plastic waste stream making it unsuitable to be used for the purpose of recycled plastic.

Pret A Manger are now making it easier for their customers to recycle their plastic pots, having established recycling facilities in the vast majority of their stores. These collected recycling materials are 'co-mingled', meaning that all recyclables are mixed together so that customers do not need to separate them out. Pret are now focusing on the packaging that is taken away from their stores. In the future, they plan to develop new solutions for workplace recycling.