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Advancing Sustainable Packaging

I recently had the opportunity to share [WestRock's perspective on sustainable packaging in The Guardian](#). The key takeaway: WestRock is committed to advancing sustainable packaging. It's the right thing to do for the planet. It's the right thing to do for our customers. I find it noteworthy that many of the accompanying stories on the [campaign homepage](#)—from key opinion leaders—are calling for organizations to think differently about packaging.

Sustainability has always been an important part of our company's history—conservation and sustainable forest management are in our DNA. Today our customers' demands for sustainability are driving more conversation about what is needed to ensure that product packaging is made from renewable resources, is recyclable and is even compostable. The only thing as embedded in our DNA as sustainability is partnership. Right now, our customers need both.

Helping customers win means developing new ways to connect people to products-- packaging that enhances relationships between brands and their customers while also minimizing environmental impact. Our Packaging Matters data show that these two priorities are not mutually exclusive. Three-quarters of consumers say packaging is an important way for them to learn more about a brand's interests around sustainability (source: *WestRock Packaging Sustainability Study*, December 2018).

It's time to think of sustainability not only through the lens of reducing our impact on the environment, but also *increasing* our transition to the circular economy. One of my favorite definitions of the circular economy comes from the UK-based NGO, the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#), which describes it as a multifaceted approach with a focus on producers embracing sustainable design, using regenerative materials and collecting end-of-life products and materials for continuous use in the economy. From responsible fiber sourcing to advanced machinery and robust recycling facilities—capabilities in support of the circular economy are a true differentiator for WestRock.

The challenge before us is to move toward packaging that is right-sized, made from renewable materials, recyclable and/or compostable. **Plastics replacement is important, but we are thinking beyond replacing plastics and exploring ways to advance the strength and sustainability of fiber-based packaging.**

We are developing new models for sourcing virgin fiber in partnership with landowners and certifying organizations. We are exploring technology that makes fiber-based packaging resistant to water and grease, with enhanced thermal insulation, while preserving its recyclability. We are working with customers to create packaging that is right-sized for use, with advancements in design and customer machinery that increase the overall efficiency of their operations through on-demand machinery solutions.

The most exciting part is applying those discoveries to solve customer problems. We have to make sustainable packaging at scale. We have to do it at a reasonable cost. And we already do. But it's a journey and we're stepping on the gas pedal. By leaning into the partnerships we have built with our customers over the years, we are committed to accelerating sustainable packaging in a way that serves them and the environment—together.