PACKAGING AT UNICORN

The world of disposable packaging is an unfortunate one indeed, and we wish it didn't exist. Where possible, we offer non-disposable versions and we know you know the reasons to reuse – like the price incentive at the deli! – but this isn't feasible for everyone, all the time.

After exhaustive research into the lifecycles of different materials, we have a good idea of the pros & cons of various types of packaging, but we still haven't found a perfect solution. It's a question under constant review as new alternatives arise. For the curious, here is what we know so far.

WHAT WOULD THE IDEAL DISPOSABLE PACKAGING LOOK LIKE?

- Made from recycled goods (but 100% recycled plastic isn't suitable for unwrapped food), or perhaps an industrial by-product (like sugar cane bagasse, although processing methods are uncertain)
- Made locally (ideally from local recycled goods, not from places where we know less about environmental and labour standards, with minimal transport footprint – remembering that long distance ship freight can be more efficient than European lorry freight)
- Produced using methods that don't require much energy, water, chemical inputs or pollution (debates rage about recycled vs. non-recycled goods, paper, cellophane, bamboo)
- Fully recyclable (although Manchester only takes plastic bottles)
- Fully degradable (but degradable plastic can weaken the recycling stream, may release methane faster, and still leaves tiny particles of plastic – plus it only degrades in "ideal" conditions, i.e. not landfill)
- Suitable for what's inside (e.g., airtight or oil-proof), robust, light, good-looking on the shelves (card or paper struggle here)
- Not supportive of oil companies (plastic), GM farming (corn starch), oppressive regimes or land clearing (renewable sources).

WHAT DO WE USE?

Note, especially on the deli, options change as we find alternatives. Also, though we feel it is a decent option in some cases, we do not entirely trust the 'biodegradable' standing of any plastic. It may all, in short, be rubbish.

On the tills

- Reused carrier bags. As long as they're clean and the right size, these nearly new bags are perfectly useful. Happily though, people are using less disposable carriers so supply has dwindled in recent years.
- Reused cardboard boxes and wooden crates generated from unpacking our deliveries.
- Sturdy, degradable carrier bags. We know we're not the only ones who pop in unexpectedly or buy more than expected, so this is a non-disposable, affordable option made in the UK.

On the deli

For almost all of these, at the time of writing (2018) we are not satisfied with current options and looking for something better.

- Plastic tubs. These are a source of near-constant discussion and change. Currently we've settled for a good-quality, easy-to-reuse option, but it is not recyclable in Manchester.
- Paper bags, same as you find in the veg section. (For fresh produce feel free to put your fruit and veg directly into your basket without bagging it up.)
- Paper with plastic film for more oily snacks.
- Paper soup cups with plastic lining and lids.
- Card cake boxes with 'biodegradable' plastic lining

In our packed goods range

- Reusable, UK-made, 'biodegradable' (excepting the grip-seal bags) plastic. Again, we continually assess other options.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR WASTE PACKAGING?

- Reuse veg bags, carrier bags, packed goods bags and deli tubs until they give up the ghost.
- Soup cups (due to lining) & spent plastics go in the bin, sadly.
- Paper can be recycled (if clean) or composted.