



PRESS RELEASE

Government-commissioned study validates industry call for a 'function-first' approach to Sustainable Produce Packaging

OTTAWA, ON (January 19, 2026) – Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) have released a [new study](#) highlighting the economic impact of replacing fresh produce packaging based on material alone on consumers and the entire supply chain.

The report, "Estimating the Cost Implications of Reducing Plastic Packaging for Fresh Produce," reinforces the fresh produce industry's long-held position that sustainable packaging solutions must be evaluated holistically, with food waste prevention as the primary goal.

This costing analysis builds on the findings of a 2024 government study, "Quantifying the Functionality Importance of Plastic Packaging in Fresh Produce from a Needs/Benefit Perspective," which established an innovative framework to understand the critical role packaging plays in protecting fresh produce. While the initial study defined why functionality is crucial, this new report quantifies the significant economic consequences of ignoring it.

Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) applauds the government for investing in this evidence-based research, which highlights the complex trade-offs between packaging materials and their impact on food affordability and accessibility. The findings strongly validate the principles behind the joint Sustainable Produce Packaging Alignment ([SPPA](#)) initiative co-led by CPMA and Western Growers, a US-based association, which seeks to create a science-based, functional approach to packaging for the North American fresh produce industry.

Key findings from the Government's costing study include:

- **Significant price increases:** Transitioning from a low-cost plastic bag for apples to a cardboard box could result in a retail price increase of approximately 42%. A simpler transition for tomatoes from a plastic clamshell to a fiber tray with a plastic lid could still increase the retail price by 11%.
- **The high cost of loose produce:** Contrary to popular belief, selling produce loose can be more expensive. The study found loose apples cost consumers 39% more by weight in Canada than pre-packaged options, largely due to operational inefficiencies and increased shrink.
- **Consumer resistance to non-transparent packaging:** The report highlights that trials of non-transparent packaging have led to significant drops in sales, even without a price increase, because consumers value the ability to visually inspect produce for freshness and quality.

"Last year, we commended the government for commissioning a study that validated the essential functions of produce packaging," said Ron Lemaire, President of CPMA. "Today, this new costing data provides the missing pieces of the puzzle. It proves what we have been saying all along: if packaging



policy is driven by a narrow focus on materials, it will be Canadians who pay the price at the checkout, all while risking an increase in food waste. This evidence underscores the urgent need for pragmatic, harmonized regulations that reward functionality and demonstrably positive environmental outcomes, rather than penalizing materials without considering the consequences."

The findings come at a critical time, as the fresh produce industry navigates a complex landscape of differing regulatory and retailer demands that often overlook the primary purpose of packaging—to protect food from waste. The resources invested in growing produce—including water, energy, and land—are immense, and the environmental impact of food waste far exceeds that of its packaging.

The report underscores how fragmented, material-ban approaches create inefficiencies and economic burdens for growers and consumers on both sides of the border, reinforcing CPMA's commitment through the SPPA initiative to lead with science and functionality. This direction aims to create a clear, harmonized roadmap that supports innovation and delivers meaningful, measurable sustainability gains for the entire fresh produce sector.

CPMA will integrate the findings of this costing study into the SPPA framework, using its data to further develop industry-wide guidelines that help all stakeholders make informed, evidence-based packaging decisions that balance environmental, economic, and social priorities.

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About the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA):

Based in Ottawa, Ontario, CPMA is a not-for-profit organization that has been supporting a diverse membership made up of every segment of the fresh produce supply chain for 100 years. CPMA represents nearly 900 member companies responsible for 90% of the fresh fruits and vegetable sales in Canada and an industry that contributes over \$18 billion to Canada's GDP annually, supports over 187,400 jobs, and improves the health and productivity of Canadians.