

# Industry report: Lack of responsibility on food waste

Australia's first industry insight reports for the Save Food Packaging Design project have been released by the Australian Institute of Packaging in partnership with RMIT. Nerida Kelton shares the key findings.



ABOVE: Fresh Technologies: Where valorisation and intuitive SFP that extends shelf life meet.

packaging, if marketing is ensuring that on-pack communication provides the best messaging to consumers, and what the barriers are to implement SFP strategies.

As a core participant of the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre, the Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP) Save Food Packaging Design project has released two stakeholder industry insight reports that will help to set a baseline for current design practice and enable a path forward for areas of improvement.

These reports represent the current landscape of the food and packaging industry regarding perceptions and practices of food waste and SFP.

The findings of *Industry Insights Report: Stakeholder Online Survey of Product-Packaging Design Processes*, are outlined here

The report reviews expert knowledge and perceptions of industry stakeholders in the Australian food industry gathered by assessing their current organisational roles and practices regarding food waste and SFP strategies.

## KEY INSIGHTS

**1** A number of key executive and management levels are unfortunately not claiming responsibility for food waste reduction with marketing standing out as the least invested.

**2** Food waste mitigation considerations are mostly made in the early stages of the new product development (NPD) process and significantly less in the later stages.

**3** Approximately 30 per cent of stakeholders are unwilling to redesign a product's packaging to save on food waste. Industry will only act on this if it does not increase cost (this was also supported by the business case).

**4** Terminology and definitions of SFP design features are still unclear and not fully recognised within the industry. There is also disparity between academic and industry terminology.

**5** There are a number of key SFP design features that are already adopted in organisations, including usage and storage instructions, extension of shelf life and barrier, openability, date labelling and on-pack

**S**ADLY, Australia is one of the worst offenders for food waste and loss in the world with a staggering 34 per cent (2.5 million tonnes) of all food wasted in the household, followed very closely with 31 per cent (2.3 million tonnes) in primary production. In economic terms, food waste in Australia has become a \$20 billion problem that sees each person waste on average 298 kilograms of food a year. Add to that the environmental impacts that sit behind food production including water, land, energy, labour, capital and the fact that far too much food waste is heading to landfill and creating greenhouse gas emissions.

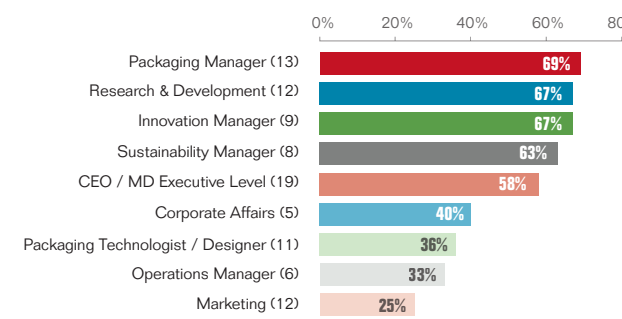
Australia needs to build a sustainable food system that delivers food security, considers social, economic and environmental impacts and no longer sees food waste heading to landfill. This is where innovative Save Food Packaging (SFP) design has a role to play within the food supply chain.

## WHAT IS SAVE FOOD PACKAGING?

Save Food Packaging (SFP) uses innovative and intuitive design features that can contain and protect, preserve, extend shelf life, easily open and reseal, provide consumer convenience and portion control – all the while meeting global sustainable packaging targets.

To embed SFP design into businesses we first need to understand whether manufacturers consider food waste and loss, how packaging technologists are designing food

**30%**  
of stakeholders are unwilling to redesign a product's packaging to save on food waste.



communication. Active and intelligent packaging and controlled dispensing are areas identified as underutilised.

**6** Greater SFP adoption within the food industry requires leaders to promote and give 'case study' examples of SFP value.

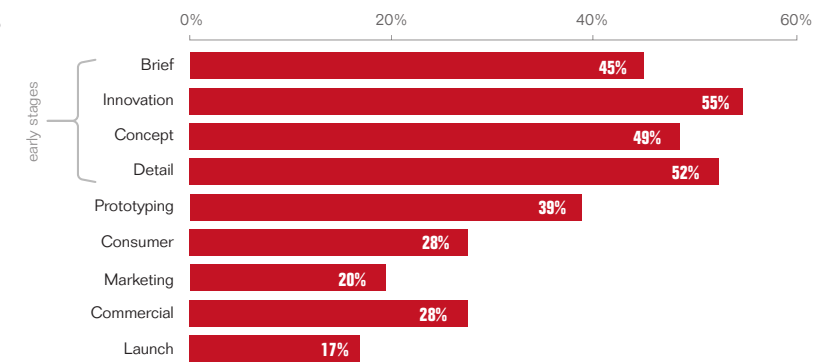
**7** The greatest perceived barriers to SFP adoption is that it adds cost and time to production and organisations lack resources.

**8** Sustainability is also perceived by industry to be a SFP function. This is the continued discussion around the balance between sustainable packaging design and SFP, identifying trade-offs and finding optimum pack design.

**9** Most participants are willing to access the SFP design criteria (when available), which are being developed through the AIP-led Fight Food Waste CRC Save Food Packaging Design Criteria and Guidelines project.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1 BUY-IN FROM DECISION MAKERS:** Equipping CEOs/MDs and marketers with an awareness of the decision-making power they hold is key to reducing food waste through packaging.



**2 EARLY-STAGE FOOD WASTE CONSIDERATIONS CARRIED THROUGH TO END STAGES:** More consideration of SFP design criteria was made in the early stages of the design process, however, food waste is less considered in the later stages.

**3 OPPORTUNITY TO ACTIVATE CONSUMER RESEARCH:** Consumer trialling appeared to be a stage in which food waste implications are not being considered. This insight suggests that food businesses are not considering consumers' attitudes to SFP innovations and their benefits.

**4 SFP VALUE-CREATION CASE STUDIES AS A BEST-PRACTICE BENCHMARK:** Close to a third of stakeholders were unwilling or unsure if they would redesign a product's packaging to reduce food loss/waste.

**5 MEANINGFUL SFP LANGUAGE:** Clarity of Save Food Packaging Design terminology is essential for widespread industry adoption. For instance, it was indicated that 'controlled dispensing' was potentially not fully understood by all participants.

**6 UNLOCKING BARRIERS TO SFP ADOPTION THROUGH COST-TO-VALUE RATIO EXAMPLES, IMPROVED RESOURCES, AND TIME:** Barriers hindering organisations in adopting SFP

ABOVE LEFT: Levels of investment by role in preventing food waste through packaging.

ABOVE RIGHT: Food waste mitigation is lower in later stages of product development.

features include the concern of added costs, a lack of resources, and additional time. Cost-to-value ratio analyses presented as case studies to the food industry would justify SFP adoption and guide hesitant organisations to act on new investments and dedicate resources and time to SFP design strategies.

It is hoped that this research will guide future design direction and form a baseline for the food and packaging industry. These results are just the start of many conversations around how improved SFP design can help minimise food waste all the way across the value chain to the household.

We look forward to working with food and beverage manufacturers to design innovative Save Food Packaging solutions that offer the lowest environmental impact and minimise food waste wherever possible. ■

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