



SEEING THE LIGHT

While recycling is a welcome bonus in the industry's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, substantial gains can be achieved through bulk importing and alternative packaging, says *Sally Easton MW*



SPURRED by government targets and consumers' concerns, the drinks industry is getting serious about its impact on the environment. While traditional glass may be completely inert and fully recyclable, it's heavy. As we ship more wine half way round the world, the impetus is increasing both to reduce the carbon footprint of transport and to reduce packaging. Recycling, it seems, is a bonus, which is just as well, given the UK's poor performance in this area.

So, what are the options available to the industry?

Option 1: bulk ship

The wine industry is by now familiar with the work of WRAP (Waste Resource Action Programme) to promote bulk shipping into the UK for bottling. The biggest benefit is reducing the carbon footprint (and the cost) of transporting heavy glass bottles as well as wine. WRAP has also contracted leading UK retailers and suppliers to further reduce packaging by bottling in lighter weight glass, in the GlassRite scheme.

Option 2: non-glass packs

A number of non-glass wine packing options have also been developed, most notably in response to a drive by Canada's LCBO to reduce packaging by a significant 10 million kg per year (see box).

French producer Boisset was the first to launch a wine under Tetra Pak in 2005, specifically to meet the LCBO brief. Jean-Charles Boisset says, "Even with 70 competitors in the Tetra Pak market in Canada, French Rabbit is leading by far." But success in the UK has proved elusive. Bottle Green's Masterpeace Australian Shiraz and Chardonnay, in the same pack, is having more luck, with recent listings in the Co-op, Nisa Today and Asda. Priced at £5.99, part of the purchase incentive is getting a Tetra Pak litre for the same price as a glass 75cl bottle.

The Cheer Pack is a plastic/aluminium combo, being introduced into the UK by Palandri, whose general manager for UK/Europe, David Hodgson, says, "It is a foil laminate pack, coming in two formats, which can be produced in single-serve through to 2-litre sizes." Weighing a meagre 15 grams, it is a considerable weight reduction on a glass bottle, which might reasonably weigh anything from 400g to 700g.

CANADIAN DRIVERS

The LCBO (Liquor Control Board of Ontario) has been the main driving force behind wine packaging innovation in Canada. As a retail monopoly it has the necessary buying power to compel suppliers to innovate. The stated aim of its environmental strategy in 2005 is to reduce the amount of waste generated by more than 10m kg per year by 2008, a target which a spokesperson says is close to being achieved.

LCBO has about 60 wine SKUs in Tetra Pak. There's another 20 in the pipeline, including Ontario wines. French Rabbit became the most successful new wine launch in the history of the LCBO. Another dozen products in PET are due by the end of the year. The Cheer Pack and aluminium packs are also used.

Such is the support for alternative packaging, that a Tetra Pak contract packing facility opened in mid-2006, just north of Toronto. While this provides local producers with the option to pack in Tetra Pak, a real opportunity is to reduce transport costs further by importing in bulk and packing at the facility for the Canadian and US markets.

A spokesperson says, "LCBO remains committed to encouraging suppliers to find innovative environmentally-friendly packages, and sales of these products have exceeded all expectations. Research shows that consumers like alternative packaging – it's lightweight, convenient and shatterproof. The benefits of innovative packaging go well beyond helping to reduce waste. For instance, Tetra Pak containers require less material, are lighter than glass containers and also require less energy to produce and ship. So they help limit waste and reduce emissions."

Wolf Blass introduced Bilyara Reserve in 75cl PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) for the LCBO. Weighing in at 54 grams, it's a bit heavier than Cheer Pack. There are no plans to sell it in the UK.

Australia is clearly at the vanguard of packaging innovation. The wine can has taken on a new millennial look from Barokes. Greg Stokes, chief executive officer, says, "This was 10 years in development, something that could hold wine and not interact with it." The single-

serve slimline can needs wine specifically made to be packaged in the can, and there is even a bubbly version, containing semi-sparkling wine.

The USP for these alternative pack formats is all to do with convenience. The "friendliness" of non-glass packs for the outdoors is stressed: lightweight, no breakable glass, mostly re-sealable, easy to pack for picnics, etc.

Even with non-glass options, the bulk shipping option remains, provided the relevant packing facilities are available in or near the country of destination, such as the Tetra Pak facility in Ontario. Barokes is also looking at installing packing facilities in the US and Europe.

Option 3: Recycle

Bulk shipping takes weight out of the transport system. Less carbon is emitted. Lightweight packs reduce packaging. So it's a double-whammy win: less carbon and less packaging. Even the LCBO says recycling is a bonus to the gains made from reducing the packaging weight, and therefore waste.

Recycling is another part of the equation. PET is readily recyclable and has found recent favour in the burgeoning fashion demand for fleece jackets, as well as being used for polyester carpet fibres and filling for sleeping bags.

The issues for beverage cartons, such as Tetra Pak, and the Cheer Pack, are more complex, where the different layers need to be separated before potential re-use. Tetra Paks, for example, comprise 70-90% paperboard, 10-25% polyethylene and 5% aluminium.

A unified approach to recycling comes via the trade association ACE (Alliance for Beverage Cartons and the Environment), which includes Elopak, Tetra Pak and SIG Combibloc. Richard Hands, chairman of ACE UK and environment manager of Tetra Pak UK & Ireland, says, "Local authorities have a weight-based target [for recycling]. Lightweight packaging doesn't help them meet their targets. Our industry has committed £1.2m to recycling, and we're on target to have 70% of LAs with recycling by the end of the year." He says the further aim is to cover the whole of the UK by the end of 2008 with some sort of recycling system in every local authority.

Packaging innovation for the drinks industry is not a simple equation, technically, environmentally or emotionally. The three Rs take on new meaning for this playing field; reduce, re-use, and only finally recycle. **db**