

## **Voluntary Producer Responsibility: Carton Packaging Recycling in the United States**

Alan Murray, board member of Carton Council of North America (CCNA), just concluded a conference call with his team. The team was updating him on the issues that would be discussed at CCNA's next meeting. As he walked out of his office for a lunch meeting with a Navy SEAL, who was looking for advice on how to build a brand for himself, he thought about the future of CCNA. Murray was instrumental in the 2009 launch of CCNA when he was the CEO of Tetra Pak U.S. and Canada. He and his CCNA team were proud of increasing carton recycling access rates from 18% in 2008 to 40% in 2013. Bringing fiercely competitive packaging companies together to work through CCNA toward improving carton recycling access was not an easy feat. CCNA had earned a seat at the table, and had become a thought leader in the recycling space. Its initiative came to be known as Voluntary Producer Responsibility (VPR).

But there was much more to be done. Unless the recycling access rate reached the 60% mark, the unconditional Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recyclable logo could not be placed on packages. Yet, increasing access beyond large metro centers to small, dispersed communities would be a challenge. Further, just because a community accepted cartons for recycling, did not mean consumers would recycle. To improve recovery rates, the organization would have to find the right communication plan to educate consumers. But what was the best way to reach consumers? Regulators and the public were increasingly focused on environmental responsibility. But U.S. post-consumer recycling performance paled in comparison to European recycling rates. There was growing clamor for similar action in the U.S. Murray was anxious to boost U.S. recycling performance before regulators stepped in and imposed their own requirements.

### **Milk and Beverage Packaging**

Milk and beverages like soda, beer, water, and juices, were sold in a number of different types of packages. The packages included cans, high-density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic, polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic, glass, cartons, and pouches. (See **Exhibit 1** for retail beverage packaging distribution by region in 2009.) In the U.S. beverage market, cans, PET, and glass dominated. (See **Exhibit 2** for market share by beverage and package in 2006). Brands such as Coke, Pepsi, Tropicana, and Silk considered a variety of factors when choosing packaging including price, weight, ease of handling, and protective capability. Brands also responded to retailer packaging preference, which was in turn driven by consumer preference.

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