

NAVIGATING THE RECYCLING SYSTEM

For packaging to be recycled successfully, we must consider how it flows through each of the five elements of the recycling system: manufacturing, reprocessing, sorting, collecting and engaging consumers. To start thinking about the criteria that can help assess the recyclability of a product and its ability to create reliable and valuable manufacturing feedstock, use the table below. Think of this as a starting point for a conversation about the recyclability of a product. Start by considering the ultimate goal: that a recycled product finds an end market.



END MARKETS (Feedstock for Manufacturing)

Supply/Demand

Is there demand to use the recycled material in products?

Design

Are brand companies creating a "Demand Pull" by using recycled materials?

Specifications

Do the product specifications allow for the use of recycled content in it?

Contamination

Are there contaminants in the material that hinder the end application?

Infrastructure

Education

Profitability

Does it have a positive profitability analysis?



REPROCESSING (Paper Mills, Plastic Reclaimers, etc.)

Supply/Demand

Is there demand for the reprocessed material?

Design

Are there design flaws that prevent reprocessing and recoverability?

Specifications

Can material be combined or is it compatible with other currently recycled material?

Contamination

Does the material cause harm or contamination to other materials?

Infrastructure

Is a new investment required to reprocess the material? Are there markets in different geographic areas?

Education

Profitability

Does it have a positive profitability analysis?



SORTATION (MRF – Materials Recovery Facility)

Supply/Demand

Do reprocessors want to buy the material?

Design

Are there design flaws that impact sortation? Does its form enable it to be properly and consistently sorted (size, flatness, 3D, labeling, etc.)?

Specifications

Do new bale specifications need to be developed? Do bale specs allow for inclusion of the material?

Contamination

Can the product damage the recovery of other materials? Are there contaminants (moisture, food, etc.) that impact sortation?

Infrastructure

Is a new investment required to sort the material? Are there MRFs available that can sort and market the material?

Education

Do MRFs know that it is possible to sort the material? Are pick line workers trained to identify the material?

Profitability

Is there adequate volume to justify recovery, particularly if it must be marketed independently? Does it have a positive profitability analysis?



COLLECTION (Curbside and Drop-Off)

Supply/Demand

Design

Is there a defined common suite of outreach materials that includes this material?

Specifications

Contamination

Does this material hurt the recyclability of other materials?

Infrastructure

Is an investment required to collect the material? Are there collection carts or bins? Vehicles? Drop-off locations?

Education

Do local governments know all the materials that their MRF will accept?

Profitability

Is there adequate volume being collected to support recycling?



CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT (Access and Participation)

Supply/Demand

Design

Does it have a How2Recycle® label to describe recyclability and any actions consumers need to take to recycle it, such as removing components or returning to a store drop-off location?

Specifications

Contamination

Do consumers know how to prepare their materials for recycling (no food residue)?

Infrastructure

Education

Do consumers know the material is accepted? Do they know how to recycle it (via curbside, or community or store drop-off)?

Profitability