

## **How to Eliminate Single-Use Plastics From Daily Living?**

My wife, Penny and I have been using Tesco for our weekly shop for many years. Not that we have anything against any of the other major supermarket chains or discounters, but it is convenient as we use Tesco's car park while visiting Lichfield city centre and Beacon Park. So, in October, following increased media coverage of the environmental impacts of plastic waste and as we were about to start our weekly shop I wondered how difficult it would be to avoid plastic packaging. Penny was not immediately impressed, as we had a busy day ahead of us and this was an additional burden that would potentially lengthen our visit to Tesco! Furthermore, I hadn't given her any warning, so, she wasn't pleased.

We bought a pack of paper compost caddy bags, a roll of greaseproof paper and a roll of baking foil and our first challenge was in the fruit and veg section. Apples, bought loose, weighed, placed into one of the caddy bags and labelled, satsumas and bananas the same, although, how ridiculous that organic bananas, our first choice, are only supplied in plastic bags, so we compromised with a bunch of Free Trade bananas. Unfortunately, all the soft fruits are in plastic punnets and wrapped in cellophane. Moving on to salad crops, no problem with peppers, large tomatoes, spring onions and radish, but we couldn't find any cherry tomatoes, lettuce, or celery that weren't in plastic bags and all the cucumbers are vacuum sealed in plastic. Now for vegetables: potatoes, carrots, sprouts, broccoli, courgettes, onions, leeks and parsnips, no problem but swede is vacuum sealed in plastic and cabbages, cauliflowers and runner beans are all in plastic bags.

The next challenge was the meat, we previously used the pre-packed products, but moved to the deli counter, accepting that our bill would increase! Having explained our motives to the very understanding and somewhat amused sales assistants, we chose two fresh trout, which were wrapped in the baking foil that we provided, labelled and placed into our shopping bag. The bacon, sausage, chicken and lamb chops were all placed into grease-proof paper before going into the caddy bags, labelled and into our shopping bag. Likewise the cold meats. So, fairly straightforward, but an added burden for the sales assistants, so, Penny, subsequently sent a message of thanks for their cooperation to Tesco via Facebook Messenger and received a nice response.

Without describing every item of our weekly shop, we had moderate success, but on examination of the recycling information on the packaging, we realised that much of our regular purchases are wrapped in non-recyclable plastic. Fortunately, Penny found Flannagans Organic Porridge, which is in a paper bag and all McVities biscuit packaging provides information for where to send wrappers for recycling, a company called TerraCycle. Tesco's own cereal has similar advice and we now use washing powder in a cardboard box rather than liquid in a plastic bottle. We also bought much more tinned produce to avoid the plastic, but, there were a number of insurmountable challenges requiring investigation of other suppliers. Overall, however, we achieved about 80% reduction of plastic waste in that first experiment, so, it was a success!

We have since broadened our shopping habits, so, we use the Farm shop at Plantation Lane, which has far less in plastic packaging, we have bought toilet rolls in bulk from 'Who Gives a Crap' on the internet, which uses 100% recycled paper, delivers the rolls in a cardboard box and each roll is individually wrapped in paper. They also donate 50% of their profit to build toilets in the developing world. We now use bars of soap, in small cardboard boxes, for personal hygiene, which can be obtained from Natural Collection via the internet, rather than using liquid in plastic bottles. And we've found toothpaste in a glass jar from Truthpaste, also via the internet. This is a natural product, which does not contain fluoride, which may concern some people, although I've been using a toothpaste without fluoride for many years and I still have some of my own teeth left!

I eat lots of nuts and dried fruit but, unfortunately, the packaging used in Tesco and Lichfield Holland & Barrett is not recyclable. However, Holland & Barrett in Birmingham sell all their nuts and dried fruit loose and provide paper bags, so we visit Brum every couple of months. I put my fruit and nuts in yogurt, so, now we make our own, which is a fairly straight forward process and we have changed our milk supply to Wilmotts local delivery, which supplies it in glass bottles.

Everything seemed to be proceeding extremely well and following the furore about plastic waste in our oceans highlighted by the outstanding Blue Planet television series and the continuing coverage of the same subject in The Daily Mail and other media services, we felt quite smug about being ahead of the curve. We also experienced a huge reduction in the recyclable waste in our blue bin. We continued using Tesco and took our own tupperware containers, which we've had for years, for them to put the fish and meats directly into until their staff, apologetically, showed us a directive they'd received from Head Office, prohibiting the use of customers' own containers and insisting that their produce had to be pre-wrapped in their plastic bags. Our Facebook messages to their Head Office has confirmed this as a national directive and, although their company policy, under the heading "**Changing Customer Behaviour**" clearly states "We (Tesco) can use marketing and promotions to encourage recycling, use of own containers and choice of packaging purchase" it appears that they have been taken by surprise by the number of people taking their own containers into the stores across the country and are concerned that these practices may be in breach of Health and Safety legislation. They are, apparently, seeking legal advice, "exploring all options" and considering changes to their company policy to placate customer demand and they are "fully committed to making all packaging fully recyclable or compostable by 2025". Unfortunately, this is not soon enough, so, we now use Walter Smith butchers in Lichfield, who use waxed wrapping paper and are happy for us to use our own containers. Coates butchers at Alre-was are equally amenable.

Finally, my chosen coffee supplier is Costa, which featured in a Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall programme a couple of years ago along with all the big coffee outlets as part of his campaign against the takeaway cardboard cups, which, despite their suppliers assurances, are not recycled owing to the presence of a polythene sleeve inside the cup. There are two sites within the UK that have facilities to recycle these cups but only a tiny percentage of them are ever recycled and the rest go to general waste. So, a couple of years ago, Penny and I bought biodegradable and reusable cups of the same size, which we use at their express delivery machines at service stations. However, this week, on my almost daily visit to one of these I met the Costa representative, who was servicing a brand new machine and was informed that only their own cardboard takeaway cups will enable coffee to be dispensed from the new machines. At Christmas I received a stainless steel Costa Coffee takeaway mug, with my name on it! But the representative told me that not even these can be used unless the customer first fills one of the cardboard cups and then pours its contents into their own container. What nonsense and I'm contacting Costa!

Our journey has begun, but has a long way to go and companies will not change their policies unless forced to by customer demand, so, this is a plea to all readers to have a go yourselves, it really isn't difficult and, if we all share examples of our successes then progress can be quite rapid. WFEG will provide regular updates, information and support to help with the reduction and, ultimately, removal of plastic waste.

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