

**R**electing the Spanish economy as a whole, the country's packaging industry appears to be in good health. According to the MarketAAD consultancy report for the Hispack show, the sector achieved a 22 per cent increase in turnover in 2022 over the previous year, reaching €40.4 billion (\$44bn).

The number of companies involved in packaging in Spain rose by 8.3 per cent over the same period, and 90 per cent of them are small or medium-sized enterprises. The largest subsector is plastics materials, followed by paper and cardboard. In terms of geographical distribution, Andalusia has experienced strong growth, while Valencia and Madrid are also active areas. Catalonia, however, holds the lion's share, with a third of all companies situated in the region. It was fitting, therefore, that the Hispack packaging exhibition was held in Barcelona, its capital.

"Like several of its neighbouring countries, Spain has witnessed increasing market demand for sustainable packaging," says Xavier Pascual, director of Hispack. "Turnover in the packaging machinery sector grew by 12.3 per cent to €4.6bn [\$5bn] in 2022, while plastics packaging companies maintained a steady turnover of €9.6bn [\$10.4bn]."

Yet, the trading environment is far from simple for Spanish plastics producers. On 1 January 2023, a tax on non-reusable plastics packaging products entered into force in Spain, as part of broader legislation concerning waste and contaminated soils. The law transposes into Spanish law the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD). Its objective is to discourage the production and use of non-reusable plastics products

# SHINING LIGHTS

As the sun shone on Catalan's capital, **Dominique Huret** was on hand to discover the burning issues facing the country's packaging trailblazers

by imposing a tax of €0.45 (\$0.49) per kilogram of non-reusable plastics packaging and an additional tax on waste incineration and disposal in landfill.

This tax is levied on the manufacturing, importation and intra-EU acquisition of several types of plastics: non-reusable plastics packaging, semi-finished plastics (used for producing preforms or thermo-plastics foils) and plastics used for single-use plastics packaging.

As might be expected, 'reusable packaging' refers to packaging designed for multiple uses throughout its lifecycle. However, there are notable exemptions from the tax: recycled plastics; non-reusable plastics packaging that is not designed to be delivered jointly with the goods that it

contains; non-reusable plastics packaging used for special medical, agricultural and livestock products; and – last but not least – non-reusable plastics packaging directly exported by a manufacturer to another Member State or outside the EU. And that is a big portion of the pie!

Among the exhibitors at Hispack was Barcelona-based Side, a manufacturer of PET blow moulding machinery with 50 years of experience in the industry. Running up to 18,000 bottles per hour, Side's systems produce PET containers up to 5 gallons in returnable format and up to 50 litres for single-use. The company has more than 800 machines in current use globally.

"Our knowledge of technological innovations, uses and applications of PET helps



Ulma's Aitor Castro Miguelez presented his company's flexible vacuum packaging innovations and packaging designs for medical devices

to develop new projects,” explains Angel Catalán Estapé, senior sales manager at Side. “We look at achieving maximum profitability in the manufacture of PET containers, based on a sound knowledge of the industry of raw materials with ever-changing needs in terms of the use and application of plastics containers.”

One of Side’s engineering solutions is the T-handle system for containers that need a handle moulded from a preform. The handle is formed by the same blower system, without the need for any further changes to the container.

With its 50l ‘one way’ PET container, the company claims to manufacture the biggest PET container on the market – but it also manufactures reusable packaging such as demijohns for coolers. “In this type of format, recyclable material is necessary, and it is because of this that PET is consistently preferred to other plastics resins that are not recyclable,” says Catalán Estapé. “In addition, PET allows robust weight reduction.”

According to Catalán Estapé, Side is “working extensively” on adjusting blowers to produce preforms for refillable bottles at the lightest weight. “This is a serious challenge as the previous preforms for refill used to be double the weight,” he adds.

A highly regarded delicacy in Spain, ham was also on the agenda in Barcelona – most

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Angel Catalán Estapé, Side

notably on the Ulma Packaging stand. The company showcased an automatic high-speed line for sliced products suitable for flexible vacuum packaging and modified atmosphere packaging. The thermoforming machine is synchronised with the automatic feeding system to achieve optimum productivity, along with options that facilitate traceability throughout the machine.

“For the first time, we are also exhibiting a flow pack machine specifically designed for the packaging of medical devices and pharmaceuticals,” explains Aitor Castro Miguelez, marketing and communications manager at Ulma. “Called Artic SS [side seal], it produces an easy-open chevron pack. This machine produces side-seal packaging with no seams on the front or back.”

The machine is also equipped with a DuPont Tyvek applicator for ethylene oxide gas sterilisation – one of the most in-demand features in the medical sector, according



Side’s Angel Catalán Estapé tells visitors that PET allows for robust weight reduction

to Castro Miguelez. “Different types of medical devices such as dressings, syringes, medical kits, and gauzes are packaged in easy open formats, which is an important asset for medical staff using hygienic but cumbersome gloves,” he points out.

From this month, attached caps of one kind or another are a fact of life for consumers throughout the EU. A prominent producer of bag-in-box, Smurfit Kappa was keen to



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Patxi Polo explains that rising exports and Spain's plastics tax have provided a boost for Oxifilm's sales

highlight its Vitop Uno, which the company claims is the first tap in a bag-in-box to have attached tamper protection compliant with the SUPD.

"We really need to avoid these little plastics pieces going to waste," suggests Loli Prats, marketing and communication lead at Smurfit Kappa. "So, for the moment, our tap is made of PP but built with the prospective option of a full transition to mono-material, to be suitable for recycling into the existing flexible PE stream."

Also on display was the Viscotainer, Smurfit's liquid container for the replacement of industrial bulk containers. It is made from 92 per cent heavy-duty corrugated cardboard with polymer for the inside pouch. Several sizes are available, including 200l, 500l and 1,000l, either in aseptic or non-aseptic bulk liquids. The inner bag or pouch can be a pillow, with gussets or form fit.

"With the plastics tax in operation, we can see a real opportunity for food, drink, cosmetics and pharma," explains Prats.



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Loli Prats, Smurfit Kappa



Loli Prats of Smurfit Kappa is keen to transition its Vitop Uno to mono-material



Marta Ortega shows off Fatecsa's award-winning 'BIT' Bag-in-tube



The EU wants a refill-reuse revolution

Staying in the pouch arena, Toledo-based Fatecsa won a Liderpack Award for its 'BIT' Bag-in-tube, with the company citing several advantages to its system.

"The tube is fully mono-material, while the inner pouch is made of laminated films or composite foil materials," explains Marta Ortega, who is responsible for exports at the company. "These materials remain effective in preventing oxygen contact, thanks to their ability to contract as the pouch empties. In addition to protecting quality, the existing pouches are very light, and that is important for the cost of transport."

The tube can be customised and decorated and only the pouch needs to be replaced when empty, says Ortega. "For bars or restaurants, this offers an elegant, cost-effective, and hygienic solution for wine refill offerings, or oil, juice, or even detergents."

Valencia producer Oxifilm, meanwhile, calls itself a world pioneer in macro-perforated films, and sales manager Patxi Polo says that the country's plastics tax and rising exports have provided a boost for the company's film sales.

"We propose films with or without reinforcements and with various types of perforations," he details. "The OXI 300 Revolution allows a pre-stretch of 300 per cent while guaranteeing the stability of the load on the pallet and the essential ventilation of the wrapped products. This is key for Spanish exports of fruits and vegetables, but it is not limited to fresh goods. By drastically reducing the amount of plastics, we are also offering a sustainable solution to the market."

Another pioneer, this time of digitally printed flexible packaging in southern Europe, Enplater Group was busy promoting recycle-ready solutions, including PEfull,

Paperfull, OPPfull, PETfull, post-consumer recycled and post-industrial recycled formats, and compostable and rigid amorphous PET with the option of 100 per cent recycled content.

"All of these are European Food Safety Authority approved," adds marketing manager Albert Valldeperes.

But what caught the eye the most was the glossy marketing on the firm's red pet food pouches, with each pack containing the photo and name of a specific pet. A personal touch enabled by the use of digital printing, of course. **EP**

*More information from:*

- Enplater Group* [enplater.com/en](http://enplater.com/en)
- Fatecsa* [fatecsa.com](http://fatecsa.com)
- Oxifilm* [oxifilm.es/en](http://oxifilm.es/en)
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