

## Steel is the sustainable packaging choice for the 21st century

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Steel is the sustainable packaging choice for the 21st century, writes Alexis van Maercke



Photo credit: APEAL

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Achieving a more circular economy and addressing the growing issue of food waste are high on the European political agenda, as well as my own.

At APEAL, the association comprising Europe's four major producers of steel for packaging - ArcelorMittal, Tata Steel Packaging, thyssenkrupp Packaging Steel and U.S. Steel Košice - we work hard to ensure steel is recognised as a positive environmental packaging choice for both businesses and consumers.

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Commonly used to manufacture cans for packaging foods and beverages, aerosol spray cans and many other uses, today more than 80 percent of all steel packaging is recycled across the European Union.

Despite being the most recycled primary packaging material in Europe, we would like to see recycling rates increase across all of the European Union's Member States - with no steel packaging being sent to landfill.

Steel scrap is needed to produce new steel, and therefore is an important commodity for our industry as well as a key component for efficient resource use.

As a permanent material, steel can be recycled forever as its inherent chemical and physical properties do not change, regardless of how many times it is recycled. Meaning that even steel produced 150 years ago can be recycled and used in the manufacture of new steel products. Today's food or beverage can could be tomorrow's electric car, wind turbine or even another item of packaging.

This is the circular economy at work. Beyond recycling, steel packaging can help address the growing issue of global food waste. Across the European Union, a staggering 88 million tonnes of food is wasted every year.

“Today's food or beverage can could be tomorrow's electric car, wind turbine or even another item of packaging”

The need to preserve food effectively is more important than ever, and because no other packaging material equals steel's strength, total barrier properties or shelf life, packing food in steel cans is the best way to ensure effective preservation with minimal waste.

Capturing food in productive years and balancing production with consumer demand, cans easily outlast their three-year best-before date. Steel's unique 100 percent barrier against light, water and air also minimises product loss during transport and storage.

Meanwhile, misshapen food, easily rejected as fresh produce by stores, can be canned and processed as normal. I look forward to working with the new members of the European Parliament and their staff over the next five years, and most particularly to celebrating the achievements of those that share our drive for sustainable solutions when we present the Environment category award at the next Parliament Magazine MEP Awards ceremony in Brussels.

Demonstrating our commitment to help Europe improve its use of resources, reduce waste and achieve its circular economy vision, steel's real and successful recycling story can be found in our

2018 report Good Practices on Separate collection, Sorting and Recycling of Steel for Packaging.

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### About the author

Alexis Van Maercke is secretary general of APEAL, the Association of European Producers of Steel for Packaging.

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