

# Recycling or Reuse

An evidence-based decision



**DO WE REALLY WANT A  
PLASTIC ECONOMY?**



# Used corrugated is a valuable resource

A PACKAGING MATERIAL THAT BENEFITS THE PLANET, SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY

Severe consequences for trade, e-commerce, retail, and ultimately, logistics, would occur if cardboard were replaced by reusable transport packaging. There is no valid justification for this shift.

## Waste from corrugated packaging

returns to the economy as a valuable resource. There is a well-established and effective market for secondary raw materials, driven by market forces and customers.

Cardboard protects around **75%** of logistics goods in Europe.

The recycling rate for corrugated cardboard exceeds **90%**



Cardboard can be



**recycled indefinitely**

with minimal addition of fresh fibres

## BENEFITS FOR SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY

### The fibres that make up cardboard

can be recycled more than **25 times** with no significant loss in quality, reducing the need for virgin fibres.

The corrugated sector employs over

**100 000**  
people directly and over  
**270 000**  
people indirectly

The industry generates about

**€50 billion**  
in turnover  
across the continent, and much of that value is reinvested into local communities.

Used corrugated cardboard packaging = an essential resource for new packaging

On average, new corrugated cardboard is made of



# The corrugated cardboard industry has consistently reduced its environmental impact

Between 1997 and 2021, there has been:



**39% reduction**

in the use of fossil fuels at paper mills.



**27% reduction**

in water use\*.



**25% increase**

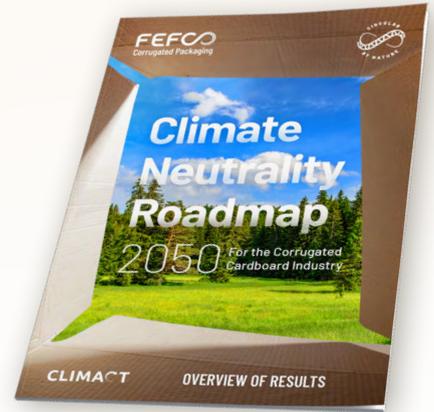
in the use of recovered paper\*.



**53% decrease**

in virgin fibre consumption\*.

\*per tonne of production



## Safe and hygienic

Up to **3 more days of freshness on the shelf.**

Scientific studies confirm that corrugated trays are the best option for ensuring that fresh produce keeps its shape, feel and taste.

University of Bologna, 2016

Corrugated cardboard is safe, hygienic and helps prevent loss and food waste, which has a far greater economic and environmental impact than the packaging that protects it.

On average, only



**3% TO 3.5%**

of the climate impact is linked to the packaging process itself.

Source: [Guideline StopWaste](#)

**The European corrugated sector has pledged to reach climate neutrality by 2050.**

[FEFCO Climate Neutrality Roadmap](#)

Regarding the decarbonisation of the electricity supply, a corrugated cardboard plant can produce between 10% and 40% of its current electricity needs with onsite renewables, depending on its location.

Up to



**3** more days of freshness



# The corrugated cardboard industry has long supported sustainable forest management practices

**90.6%**  
of forests

owned or managed by the European pulp and paper industry are **forest management certified**.\*

**92%**  
of the fibres

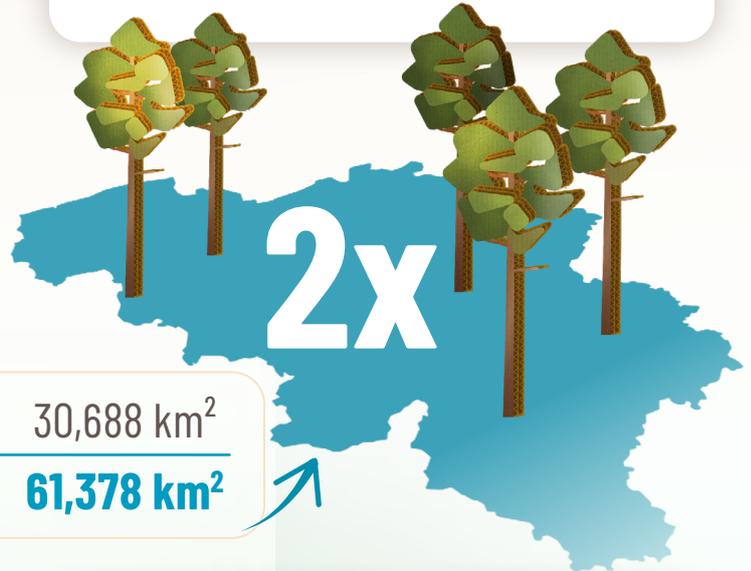
we use are sourced from the EU, which has responsible **forest management practices**.\*

**93%**  
of the water

is returned clean to its **source in nature**.\*

\*Source: [Sustainability Report by CEPI](#)

IN THE LAST 15 YEARS,  
**European forest growth** has amounted to the equivalent of twice the size of **Belgium!**



**Corrugated cardboard** utilises mainly recycled fibres and for a small part by-products from the wood industry and/or virgin fibres from responsibly managed forests (FSC and PEFC certifications), therefore minimising the environmental impact on resources.

On average,

**3 trees**

are planted for each tree that was felled to produce virgin fibres.



# Reusable transport packaging increases logistics complexity

THE DECISION BETWEEN RECYCLING AND REUSE MUST BE EVIDENCE-BASED

REUSE IN TRANSPORT LOGISTICS WOULD HAVE  
DRAMATIC CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

To replace corrugated transport packaging, Europe would need an additional



**12 million tons of plastic**



This constitutes

**2x plastic**  
that's currently on the market

## The supply chain demands

Sometimes  
**Cardboard**

OR

Sometimes  
**Reusable**

Reuse targets should only be applied if proven to be beneficial to

the **society**

the **economy**

the **environment**



Further data about the **real number** of reuses and the recycling rate for reusable is needed.

Foldable plastic crates require



**5x** times more space

Crates Require



**Extra** transport for empty packaging.

They increase logistics complexity, which means

More **CO<sub>2</sub>** emissions

One study\* found that just considering fresh produce in France, shifting to reusable would mean

**10k** extra truck trips per year



\*Source: [REVIPAC/COF/FEFCO](#)

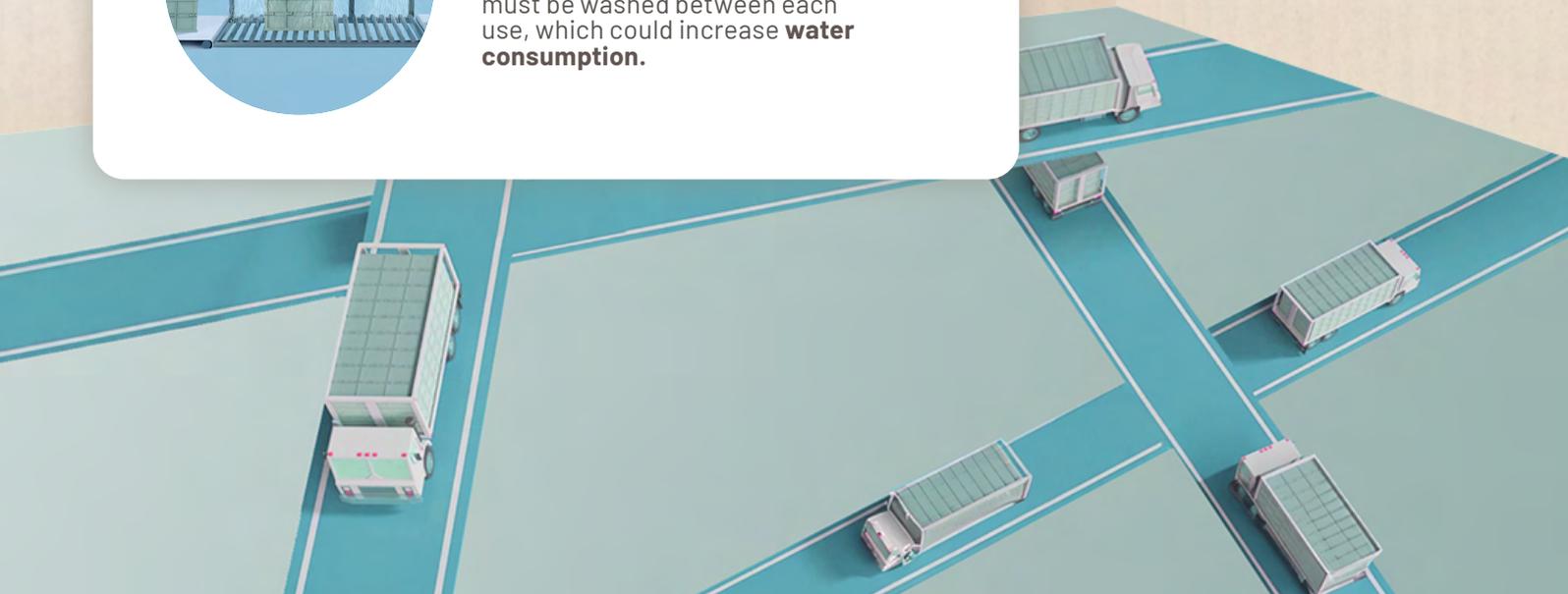


## Reusable packaging

must be washed between each use, which could increase **water consumption**.



For more information, read FEFCO's peer reviewed [comparative LCA](#) for transport packaging. It clearly demonstrates that single-use systems outperform multiple use systems.



UNINTENDED  
CONSEQUENCES  
OF REUSE



WATCH OUR VIDEO



The European Federation of Corrugated Board Manufacturers

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