

The illusion of sustainability: how packaging appearance can mislead consumers

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The problem

Without clear labeling, consumers may assume certain food packaging materials are eco-friendly based solely on sensory cues such as texture or appearance—, which can lead to misinformed choices and undermine genuine sustainability efforts.

The solution

Educating consumers on which sensory attributes truly indicate sustainable materials and promoting transparency can bridge the gap between perception and reality, aligning consumer choices with authentic eco-friendly options.

Benefits

-  Consumers make better sustainable choices based on accurate information, reducing reliance on misleading sensory cues.
-  Reduced confusion and enhanced satisfaction with purchases as consumer expectations of sustainability are met.
-  Producers are engaged to design packaging with both sensory appeal and environmental performance in mind, improving alignment between consumer expectations and material performance.
-  Advancement of industry standards in packaging design, supporting genuine eco-friendly practices.

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PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for consumers

- Recognize that sensory attributes like rough texture or earthy color do not always indicate a sustainable choice.
- Investigate packaging materials beyond their look and feel, seeking for verified sustainability certifications.
- Learn to distinguish between materials with real eco-friendly properties and those with superficial “green” aesthetics.
- Support brands that actively communicate the environmental impact of their packaging to encourage industry-wide transparency and accountability.



About SISTERS and this Practice Abstract

This practice abstract was elaborated in the framework of the SISTERS project, based on the EIP AGRI practice abstract format. © 2024

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Goal: to systemically reduce food loss and waste in the main stages of the food value chain in Europe through innovations targeted to each stage of the chain.