

flex forward

A recycling solution for animals, for people, and for the Earth.

Pilot Program FAQ's

1. What is the purpose of the flex forward program?

According to research conducted on behalf of the Pet Sustainability Coalition (PSC), it is estimated that 300 million pounds of plastic pet food and treats bags are generated in the United States each year. Currently, nearly all these bags are made by co-extruding and laminating multiple layers of film plastics into a multilayer sandwich structure to form the package. Each layer performs a different functional purpose and it is nearly impossible to separate layers from each other with the current state of recycling technology. Furthermore, the cost of recycling is more than the value of the materials in the package. As a result, the PSC estimates that over 99 percent of all pet food bags in the United States are disposed to landfill rather than recycled.

Some bag manufacturers have begun to offer "recycle-ready" bags that are considered to be recyclable in a polyethylene stream. To date "recycle-ready" bags only have a small percentage of the market (currently in the single digits of overall market share) as packaging manufacturers continue to invest in innovation and technology.

We have a goal to improve the sustainability of pet product packaging. Of course, that's going to be a long way off, and in the meantime, our hope through Flex Forward is to work on reducing the 99% of all pet food bags in the United States being disposed in landfills. Flex Forward aims to create recycling & upcycled solutions for flexible packaging produced by the pet industry. In 2020, our regional pilot will test the collection, recyclability, and full-circle product potential to inform an industry-wide expansion in 2021. Our goal is for at least 300 retailers to participate and to collect a minimum of 5,000 lbs. of plastic pet packaging to recycle into functional products that we will donate to animal care centers, shelters and rescues nationwide.

2. Who is spearheading the Flex Forward Program?

Flex Forward is a collaborative initiative by the program brand sponsor, Earth Animal®, the Pet Sustainability Coalition, Pet Food Experts Distribution, recyclers, US-based manufacturers, retailers, and pet parents.

3. Why do customers need to bring their food or treat bags back to retail stores? Can't they be recycled with other plastic bags?

Unlike the average grocery store bag, most pet food and treat bags are made from multiple layers of different kinds of plastic. Plastic bags offer many environmental advantages; however, our recycling system is not currently able to separate the different layers of plastic, making most food and treat bags unacceptable to the majority of recycling centers around the country.

4. Why should retailers participate in the Flex Forward Program?

Offering consumers an easy way to recycle their pet packaging is a great way to establish a values-aligned relationship with retailers. By participating in Flex Forward, retailers get to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and a healthy planet while strengthening engagement with their consumers. In addition, working with consumers to return to the store to drop off their food and treat bags inherently encourages more store visits!

5. Why does pet food packaging have so many different layers of flexible plastic and why can't manufacturers just use pet food and treat bags that can be recycled?

Flexible packaging for the pet industry needs to meet several different needs at the same time. Packaging needs to hold a protective barrier for the food to remain fresh and offer shelf life while also being very sturdy, often containing significant weights. Additionally, companies use packaging to communicate important information about the product including nutritional information and other branding, which requires versatility with color, see-through windows, and closures. For these reasons, flexible packaging in the pet industry is almost always made of several different materials glued together to meet this variety of needs, as one type of plastic can't always meet all those requirements. Because the bags are made of a variety of different

materials glued together, separating those layers, or recycling it all together has proven very difficult, and very few bags have been able to overcome this challenge. However, there is good news on the horizon. Several pet companies and packaging manufactures are actively working on recyclable solutions (primarily made of a single type of plastic) and some companies have already begun transitioning their packaging line to mono-plastic, recyclable materials.

6. What kind of flexible plastic bags will be collected?

All types of flexible plastic bags (regardless of brand) and pouches used for pet products are being accepted. This does not include paper bags, cans, or boxes used for some pet foods and litter.

7. Can raw food packaging be returned in this program?

Yes, but all raw food packaging must first be rinsed of all food residue before being placed in the collection vessel.

8. How does the Flex Forward program work?

Flex-Forward is a multi-stakeholder pilot project that brings together consumers, retailers, distributors, recycling manufacturers and with Earth Animal as the brand sponsor, to evaluate the potential success of a new recycling and upcycling system for the pet industry.

- First, an independent retailer located within the pilot region will register for Flex Forward by visiting: earthanimal.com/flexforward. Once registered, Pet Food Experts will deliver the retailers Flex Forward

Activation Kit – this kit includes:

- 1 - Flex Forward Vessel
- 10 - FLEX Forward vessel recycle-ready liners
- 10 – FLEX Forward stickers to ID the retailer
- 2 – FLEX forward window decals
- 2 – 8.5" X 11" Sign with easel back for the retailers
- 2 – Aisle Interrupter Signs to hang near the retailer's food and treat areas of the store
- 100 – Bounce backs for the retail store use as handouts or bag stuffers on the FLEX Forward program

In addition, located on our website for the retailers will be:

- o Social media badges for the retailer to use on their social media platforms and website
- o "How to" video on the FLEX Forward program for the retailer's social media and website
- o FAQ's on the FLEX Forward program
- o Reorder Form

- Then, independent retailers (located within the pilot region) will encourage their customers to bring back all types (regardless of brand) of flexible plastic packaging including food and treat bags and place them in receptacles conveniently located in-store.

- Then, Pet Food Experts will collect packaging from retailers during their normal delivery route therefore minimizing additional transportation miles. Collected bags will be stored at a single distribution center where it will be weighed and then shipped to our recycling partner.

- Our recycling partner will grind down the collected flexible packaging into pellets that can be reused by the plastics industry for a variety of purposes. An additional portion of the recycled packaging will be used to test new products right here in our industry from crates and toys to toy boxes and litter boxes.

9. How are you measuring the effectiveness of Flex Forward?

The goal of Flex Forward is to investigate a fully closed loop recycling solution for plastic pet packaging. Flex Forward will illuminate the possibility of a national recycling program that rescues plastic packaging from the landfill and instead recycles the plastic material into new products. Key metrics that will be evaluated during the 2020 Flex Forward pilot are the quantity of bags that are collected & potential impact, the level of participation from retailers and consumers, the logistics of collection and transportation, and the durability, safety and quality of the plastic material after recycling processing. Our hope is that based on these metrics, we will be able to roll the Flex Forward program out nationally.

10. What stores can participate in the Flex Forward program?

From April through June of 2020, all independent pet stores located in the program's pilot region (To be determined after Global Pet Expo) can opt-in at no cost. A map of participating retailers can be found at www.earthanimal.com/flexforward.

11. What can retailers do if they aren't in the pilot region?

Please let your Earth Animal Regional Sales Manager or a team member from the PSC if you are interested so we can get you preregistered and on an emailing list to send you updates on the Flex Forward pilot. In addition, please follow and share our progress on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn and cheer on your fellow retailers to reach our goal of collecting 5,000 lbs. of plastic bags!

12. What support will retailers receive as part of Flex Forward and how much does it cost?

Participating retailers will receive Earth Animal, Pet Food Experts and the PSC's marketing and PR support. In addition, they will receive a Flex Forward retailer activation kit that includes consumer and employee educational resources, in-store flyers, regular progress reports, social media elements including posts and graphics to share. During the 2020 pilot phase of this project, there will be no cost for retailers or consumers to participate.

13. What is the difference between Flex Forward and Terracycle?

Terracycle is an incredible organization working with individual brands to recycle plastic packaging. Flex Forward is modeling a completely inclusive and collaborative system for our industry that would allow pet brands and pet retailers of all types and sizes to participate.

14. When will the program be rolled out nationally?

This date will be a moving target until we hit our goals of 300 retailer's participation and 5,000 lbs. of flexible packaging collected. Our goal is to take the lessons learned from this pilot and launch a nation-wide program by 2021. However, we cannot anticipate all the challenges that may arise and therefore, an exact date is not available at this time.

15. Is sending bags back better for the environment even though it requires shipping and processing?

During this pilot we are taking advantage of already utilized transportation routes to minimize the carbon released into the atmosphere during transport. Our distribution partner will be picking up the bags to be recycled on routes they would already be traveling to distribute product. Therefore, transportation impacts of picking up the bags will be minimal. There will be, however, some impacts associated with shipping the bags to the recycler, and the process required to manufacture new products. The total environmental impact of a national expansion will be measured as part of the pilot analysis to ensure that the overall impact of recycling pet plastics is better than landfilling. When materials go to our landfills, they no longer drive benefit to our society. Though some of the gas created during the landfill decomposition process can be captured, this is generally not as beneficial as continuing to recycle materials in a circular model. To determine the overall improvement in environmental impact from Flex Forward, we will compare the energy required to landfill plastics and use virgin plastics in the manufacturing process with the energy required to collect, transport, recycle and distribute recycled plastic pet bags and pouches.

16. Are the final products made from the upcycled plastic safe for dogs to use?

Additional healthy and safety tests will be conducted to ensure safety.

17. How will you choose the animal care centers to donate the recycled products to?

One of the goals of the pilot is to test whether flexible plastic pet packaging can be collected and manufactured into new products. When a national expansion begins, a formal process will be determined for distributing the final recycled products that will include ideation from our partners who participated in the pilot.

18. Who can I contact with questions or additional support?

As the project manager for this Flex Forward pilot program, the Pet Sustainability Coalition welcomes questions and comments by email to: info@petsustainability.org.