

Hinged lid fiber-based tray with apertures




Partially closed punnet-style tray




The Tomato Stall Introduces First-to-sector Fiber-based Tomato Pack, Eliminating Plastic Flow-wrap from Multiple Tomato Varieties

Isle of Wight, UK based tomato producer, The Tomato Stall, is a forward-thinking brand with a modern ethos around sustainable tomato production. Utilizing a completely biodegradable growing system, the company composts plant waste to enrich its soil for future crops and uses natural predators to control pests. Such is the brand’s affinity with nature, pollination is carried out by a team of bumblebees. To complement its natural ethos, The Tomato Stall required a sustainable, fiber-based packaging solution to eliminate plastic flow wrap on specific ranges while reducing flow-wrap usage overall. The Tomato Stall partnered with Graphic Packaging International (Graphic Packaging) to support its transition to eliminating flow-wrap on its cherry, tiger and beef tomato ranges, while significantly reducing the amount of plastic in its packaging portfolio.


Case Study: Sustainability | Convenience | Operational Efficiency

Challenge 

- **Circularity**
A fiber-based solution that is sustainable and circular, without compromising on protection or freshness
- **Customer Appeal**
Elevates tomato ranges through high-quality structural design and vibrant graphics
- **Differentiation**
Commands in-store attention and communicates the natural ethos of the brand while attracting the consumer to sustainable packaging options

Solutions 

- **Custom designs per application**
A hinged lid, fiber-based ProducePack™ tray with apertures (cherry) and partially closed punnet-style tray (tiger, beef) to create a cohesive look
- **Eliminates flow-wrap**
Removes the need for flow-wrap (traditionally used to package tomatoes) on all tomato varieties and reduces overall use of plastic
- **Robust structure**
Structural integrity throughout the supply chain ensures the pack is fit for movement through e-commerce and bricks and mortar channels

Results 

- **Optimum circularity** with recyclable paperboard tray
- **Reflects natural ethos** with a first-to-market design, and sustainable, fiber-based option. Printed on the outside for a natural, tactile finish
- Carefully developed apertures **protect the product** while giving visibility inside to maintain consumer confidence
- **Suitable for multi-channel retail** Designed to protect delicate tomatoes through various retail channels to maximize sales potential

Challenge

In a category that is typically dominated by flow-wrapped punnets, The Tomato Stall required a fiber-based solution that eliminated flow wrap from specific ranges while reducing the overall amount of plastic in its packaging portfolio. The sustainable solution needed to reflect the brand's natural ethos and sustainable growing methods. Importantly, the new solution should provide the same level of protection through multiple retail channels as the previous pack.

An additional challenge was that the fiber-based ProducePack carton, as a first to the tomato aisle, should not only catch the eye of the consumer but also maintain confidence that the product inside was fresh and undamaged. To meet this challenge, the teams collaborated to reach a solution that offered adequate protection but also gave visibility of the tomatoes inside.



Solution

The Tomato Stall and Graphic Packaging worked together to develop two complementary solutions from our ProducePack range for three different sized tomato varieties. First, a hinged lid concept was developed for The Tomato Stall's cherry tomatoes to ensure that optimal protection was achieved. As a result of the need for greater protection of the small, delicate tomatoes, the design which features several strategically placed apertures, was tweaked and adjusted before a final design was agreed upon. The hinged-lid mono-material tray was printed on the outside to create muted, natural print tones that gave a natural look, as well as creating a tactile finish.

A secondary design was developed for The Tomato Stall's tiger and beef tomato varieties. To package six large tomatoes effectively, Graphic Packaging developed a partially enclosed punnet with a tab lock. The fiber-based carton featured apertures at each end and a central circular feature aperture. In this design, the tomatoes are firmly held in place due to their positioning and, therefore, larger apertures were utilized to give visibility of the product to the consumer. Like the hinged-lid design, the carton was printed on the reverse in The Tomato Stall branding to create a cohesive look to the range.

Both designs were supplied pre-glued and flat packed to The Tomato Stall, for hand erecting and manual filling, to keep carbon impact during transport from Graphic Packaging to a minimum. Extensive fridge and shelf-life testing was carried out to ensure the trays did not absorb moisture. While it is not necessary to store the product in the fridge, public opinion dictates that most people still do. This was accounted for within the design phase.

Results

As a leader in the field of sustainable fiber-based packaging, Graphic Packaging is committed to supporting a circular economy at scale. By partnering with The Tomato Stall, Graphic Packaging increases the potential for the consumer to choose sustainable packaging.

The Tomato Stall has successfully eliminated flow-wrap from three of its tomato varieties, significantly reducing the use of flow-wrap in its overall packaging portfolio. The efficient collaboration of the two teams has ensured that the consumer can shop with confidence, having good visibility of the delicate tomatoes. The new pack offers enhanced consumer appeal to the previous solution, encouraging optimal adoption of renewably sourced packaging solutions in the tomato sector.