

BUSINESS HQ

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## Keep packaging made from plants out of Scotland's single-use plastic ban, Vegware warns

By Victoria Masterson



Vegware makes compostable food packaging made from plants.



**VEGWARE, which makes compostable food packaging from plants, is calling on the Scottish Government not to include compostable food containers in its proposed ban on single-use plastics.**

The Edinburgh-based company, which employs 80 staff and grew sales 43% to just under £46 million last year, makes plant-based catering supplies including cutlery, cups, straws, sandwich boxes and takeaway containers and exports to more than 70 countries.

Founder and chief executive Joe Frankel said compostable takeaway packaging – which can be fully biodegraded without releasing

microplastics into the environment – should not be bundled in with legislation on synthetic plastics, which do not biodegrade and harm the environment.

The Scottish Government is currently consulting on how it will implement the European Union Single-Use Plastic Directive, and has drafted particularly tough legislation that it expects to come into force in 2021.

“The Scottish Government has put really far-reaching proposals on the table, with the prospect of basically banning all kinds of containers that have a polymer lining,” Mr Frankel said. “So you couldn't use one of our soup containers, for example. The question is – should the Scottish Government legislate out all food on the move or for delivery? Do you want people to be able to get a coffee and take it away, or eat their lunch at their desk or have a home delivery? Because if you're willing to allow the Uber Eats, Deliveroo and pop-up food service providers of this world to continue, then you have to allow disposables. We will have a problem because the materials under review are required for the functionality foodservice needs in takeaway packaging – for avoiding spills and providing transparency.”

Scotland's proposed version of the single-use plastics ban is tougher than the EU's because, as well as plastic plates, it includes all takeaway bowls, trays and platters with any form of polymer lining or window. The EU legislation only covers 100% plastic plates. The Scottish Government said it hoped the legislation would “re-affirm Scotland's position as a world-leader in the circular economy” and help to tackle Scotland's plastic problem.

Lucy Frankel, Vegware's environmental and communications director and Mr Frankel's sister, said: “The EU directive on single-use plastics focuses on the top ten most littered items found on European beaches and is recommending plastic cutlery, plates, straws and stirrers be banned. Every member state has until July next year to put the

directive into their own national laws and decide exactly how they're going to meet the broad aims of the directive. In our experience, different member states are taking quite a different approach to how they achieve those aims. I'm not aware of any EU country banning most food containers, like Scotland is proposing.”

Portugal and Italy, for example, are not including plant-based bioplastic in their proposed implementation of the law.

Ms Frankel said Vegware was encouraging industry partners, stakeholders and the public to respond to the Scottish Government's single-use plastics consultation, which closes on 4 January 2021. The company has posted a guide to the proposed changes on its website.

On Brexit, Mr Frankel said Vegware had fully prepared, including registering for VAT in Europe and readying its warehouse in Holland. But there would be a cost to the business.

“A no-deal Brexit will probably cost us £15,000 a month, which is very frustrating, but it's not a showstopper,” Mr Frankel said. “There are new duties, because suddenly, we're not in a harmonised tariff zone. So if we produce, for example, a bioplastic sandwich bag in the UK, and we take it over to Europe, we're paying 6.5% in duty where we didn't before. There's also additional costs to declare goods at borders. And it's thrown lots of freight operators into turmoil, also adding cost around that.”

On a personal level, Mr Frankel said he appreciated the benefits of being a European citizen and added that he and his sister had applied for German passports, as their grandfather, Eric, was a German Jew who escaped to Britain from Nazi Germany in 1933. However there are no plans to relocate the business.

“Edinburgh is home,” Mr Frankel said. “We feel very attached to our roots as a company in Scotland – 100%. The idea of uprooting to avoid a regulatory or tax environment is alien to us.”