

Position paper about edible packaging October 2016

On a regular basis, publications shed light on research on new materials that would make edible primary packaging (in direct contact with the product) a reality. Researchers from the USA recently indicated that they had found an edible and biodegradable transparent plastic material made out of milk protein (casein).

The French Packaging Council (CNE) would like to recall that primary packaging has diverse functionalities, including foremost the good preservation of the contained product and its protection from all external contaminants. This basic quality of packaging is called "barrier". It ensures that the contained product cannot be altered by anything coming from the external environment.

It goes without saying that if an edible packaging that is to be eaten itself is not protected; it is exposed to all kinds of contaminations of the daily life like dust, machines and air humidity, and especially many hands, which we know carry all kinds of bacterial pollutions. An example of edible packaging was brought to the USA market a few years ago (wikicells) where the product and its edible packaging were sold in a grouping packaging (blister) in order to protect them until they were consumed and thus ensure perfect hygiene conditions for the consumer.

Other functionalities such as protection while transporting and product information to the consumers could also be a difficult challenge for such edible packaging, if not impossible.

As things stand at present in terms of distribution circuits for high consumption food products in the world, the CNE considers that imagining products with edible primary packaging which wouldn't be packaged itself in order to be perfectly safe for the end consumer seems utopian. The environmental balance of producing these edible materials also remains unknown to this day.

The CNE considers that the allegation according which such edible packaging would replace and eliminate packaging and their waste is deceiving. The CNE recalls that any package designing approach, and to a greater extent any eco-designing approach must concern the product/packing pairing and the entire packaging system, including primary, secondary and tertiary packaging. It is only in respect of these principles that can be verified if the imagined packaging answers the expected functions towards the product and enables a real reducing of environmental impacts. These principles are listed in the CNE's Practical Guide for eco-designing packaged products¹.

The French Packaging Council (CNE), a non-for profit organization founded in 1997, is a platform for exchange and a forum for dialogue between various players in the packaging industry: packaging material manufacturers, packaging manufacturers and machines producers, consumer goods companies, distributors, approved collection and recovery operators, local authorities and consumer and environmental organizations.

The principal mission of the CNE is to develop and disseminate better practices with regards to the design, usage and distribution of product packaging.

The CNE remains permanently available to all stakeholders in the pursuit of best packaging solutions.

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¹ <http://www.conseil-emballage.org/guide-pratique-pour-leco-conception-des-produits-emballés/>