eunomia

Grocery Reuse in the Canadian Prairies

Key Considerations

Submitted January 2026



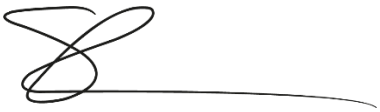
Report For

SASKATCHEWAN WASTE REDUCTION COUNCIL

This project was undertaken with the financial support of:
Ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier de :

Environment and Climate Change Canada | Environnement et Changement climatique Canada

Approved By



Sarah Edwards

Project Director

Eunomia Research & Consulting Inc
61 Greenpoint Ave
New York, New York
United States

Web www.eunomia.eco

Project Partners

This project is primarily funded by **Environment and Climate Change Canada** (ECCC), the federal department responsible for clean growth and climate change, prevention and management of pollution and conservation of nature. ECCC collaborates with provinces, territories, Indigenous communities, and other partners to implement national strategies and provides essential services such as weather forecasting, environmental monitoring, and scientific research to inform evidence-based decision-making.

The SWRC is a non-government, non-profit charitable organization advocating for a waste free Saskatchewan. Its strategic priorities include creating a strong waste-focused community, serving as a key resource for backyard composting and larger-scale organic waste management, and facilitating the adoption of reduction and reuse practices. SWRC's membership spans individuals, non-profit organizations, small businesses and associations, waste regions and municipalities, and larger institutions and corporations.

Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) is a wholesaling, manufacturing, marketing and administrative co-operative owned by over 160 independent local co-operative associations across Western Canada. Through its CO-OP Food division, FCL offers seven own brands totalling more than 1,500 products. Many of these could transition from single-use to reusable packaging.

SARCAN Recycling (SARCAN) operates a province-wide network of container-return depots that has the potential to accept reusable grocery packaging. Contracted by the Government of Saskatchewan, SARCAN manages the province's beverage container recycling program and also collects residential paint, end-of-life electronics, household batteries, and non-beverage glass jars. SARCAN has recycled more than 10 billion beverage containers and maintains one of the highest return rates in North America at 86.5%. Its commitment to environmental sustainability and community development makes it a key partner in supporting reuse initiatives.

Executive Summary

Why this guidance matters now.

Reusable packaging is becoming a core part of global packaging strategy, with retailers and policymakers increasingly viewing it as essential for reducing waste and environmental impact. While this transition is still in its early stages in Canada, and particularly in the Prairie provinces, the region has unique advantages that position it well for scalable reuse, including strong depot-return culture, trusted collection networks, and integrated supply chains.

What this guidance does.

This guidance document provides practical guidance for Prairie retailers, depot operators, reuse service provides and policymakers on how to design, test, and scale **prefilled, return-on-the-go** grocery[1] reuse systems.

The guidance translates lessons from pilots and existing infrastructure networks (e.g., depot networks like SARCAN) into clear actions for implications grouped by audience.

Key findings in brief.

Prairie fit

- The region's strong depot culture and established reverse collection networks provide a foundation to test return-on-the-go models, especially in urban centres.

What limited trials can and can't tell you

- Low volume pilots without incentives can validate workflows for reverse collection, packaging robustness, and basic customer experience—but they do not simulate integrated governance, cleaning economics, or realistic participation rates.

Near-term product opportunities

- Shelf-stable goods in glass jars, selected deli items, and non-food liquids show early feasibility. Beverages present potential where refillable formats or depot integration exist; broader food categories follow once infrastructure and governance are ready.

System pre conditions

- Internal alignment, a named trial coordinator, return point logistics, access to food grade cleaning, minimal digital tracking, and clear consumer instructions are required to generate useful learnings.

[1] A reuse system where products are filled into reusable containers by the producer and sold in retail. Consumers purchase the product, return the empty container to any participating return point, and the container is then washed, refilled, and recirculated through the same supply chain.

Recommendations at a glance (grouped by audience).

Retailers

- Appoint a trial lead; start with 2–3 standardized container formats; integrate returns via store and SARCAN depots; pilot deposit/loyalty incentives; capture rotation/loss data; plan a shared wash solution.

Depot operators (e.g., SARCAN)

- Define intake standards; set inspection protocols; align data capture with retailers; test aggregation routes; co develop consumer messaging.

Provincial policymakers

- Introduce reuse definitions; pilot category targets; enable licensing for commercial wash facilities; support multi retailer hubs; coordinate across SK/MB/AB.

Federal policymakers / funders

- Develop national standards for reusable packaging; provide food safety guidance for reusable formats; co fund shared infrastructure and data systems.

What's next.

The transition to reusable packaging in the Prairies requires a coordinated, system-wide approach rather than isolated pilots. Three key recommendations emerge:

1. **Adopt systems thinking**. Reuse depends on integrated packaging design, logistics, washing, digital tracking, and consumer engagement. Given the Prairies' vast geography, interoperability (e.g., shared formats, infrastructure, and data) is essential for efficiency and scale.
2. **Build retailer buy-in and clear governance**. Success hinges on early retailer engagement, strong business cases, and coordinated roles across retailers, suppliers, wash providers, and depots. Shared standards and joint decision-making structures are needed to ensure consistency and accountability.
3. **Design for scale from the start**. Drawing on global lessons, the Prairies can bypass fragmented pilot cycles by planning a phased, long-term system from day one. Standardized packaging, expandable infrastructure, scalable digital tools, and strategically designed pilots will accelerate regional adoption and enable multi-category, multi-retailer growth.

Delivering prefilled, return-on-the-go reuse systems in the Prairies will require coordinated action across the value chain. Section 6.0 of this report sets out recommended actions for key stakeholder groups, distinguishing between immediate steps, next phases, and the enabling conditions required to support scale. Overall, the Prairies have an opportunity to accelerate reuse adoption by planning a coordinated, interoperable system from the outset, turning pilots into catalysts for regional scale rather than stand-alone trials.

1.0 Table of Contents

Executive Summary **1**

1.0 Introduction **4**

2.0 Why Grocery Reuse Matters in the Prairies **4**

2.1 Single Use versus Reuse Systems 5

2.2 What is Driving the Shift Toward Reuse 6

2.3 Key Opportunities and Challenges and in the Prairies 7

3.0 Focus and Scope of this Guidance **8**

4.0 Understanding the Prefilled Reuse Model **9**

4.1 Key Elements of a Prefill Return-on-the-Go System 10

5.0 What It Takes to Implement Prefilled Reuse in the Prairies **11**

5.1 The Building Blocks of a Prairie Reuse System 11

5.2 Identifying the Right Product Categories for Reuse 14

6.0 Moving from Insight to Action **18**

6.1 Recommended Actions by Stakeholder Group 19

Appendix **25**

A.1.0 Archetype Shortlist and Evaluation Approach **26**

A.2.0 Policy Landscape **37**

A.3.0 Industry Collaborations and Commitments **39**

A.4.0 Grocery reuse trials in other jurisdictions **41**

A.5.0 Refill Coalition Case Study **47**

A.6.0 Existing Reuse Infrastructure in Saskatchewan and Canada **48**

A.7.0 Policy Enablers for Scalable Reuse in the Prairies **51**

1.0 Introduction

Reusable packaging is moving from the margins to the mainstream of global packaging strategy. Across Europe, the United States, and parts of Asia, grocery retailers, brands, and policymakers are increasingly recognising reuse as a necessary complement to recycling in reducing material use, cutting waste, and lowering the environmental footprint of everyday products. Large-scale pilots, new service models, and emerging regulation are accelerating this shift, signalling that reuse is no longer experimental, but an expected part of the future packaging system.

In Canada, and particularly across the Prairie provinces, this transition is only just beginning. While beverage container reuse once played a significant role, reuse market share has significantly declined over the past decades, and most grocery products remain locked into single-use packaging formats. At the same time, the Prairies possess several distinct advantages: strong return-to-depot culture, trusted container collection networks, and integrated regional supply chains. These conditions create a rare opportunity to move beyond isolated pilots and begin building the foundations of a scalable, interoperable reuse system.

This guidance document sets out why grocery reuse matters in the Prairie context, what it would take to implement consumer-facing prefilled, return-on-the-go reuse systems,[2] and how retailers, service providers, and policymakers can work together to move from small trials to coordinated system development. Drawing on international experience, regional infrastructure, and emerging practice, it provides practical direction on the conditions, design choices, and sequencing required to make reuse work in Saskatchewan and across the wider Prairies.

2.0 Why Grocery Reuse Matters in the Prairies



The Prairie grocery system operates under a set of structural conditions that make the transition to reusable packaging both challenging and strategically significant. Long transport distances, low population density, and highly optimised distribution networks shape how products move from manufacturers to stores and, ultimately, to households. These characteristics influence the feasibility, cost, and environmental performance of any packaging system change.

At the same time, Saskatchewan and the wider Prairie region benefit from an unusually strong foundation for container return. High participation in deposit systems, trusted depot infrastructure, and established reverse-collection routes mean that consumers are already accustomed to returning packaging as part of everyday life. This behavioural norm, combined with existing logistics networks, creates conditions that are rare in other regions and directly relevant to the design of return-on-the-go reuse systems.

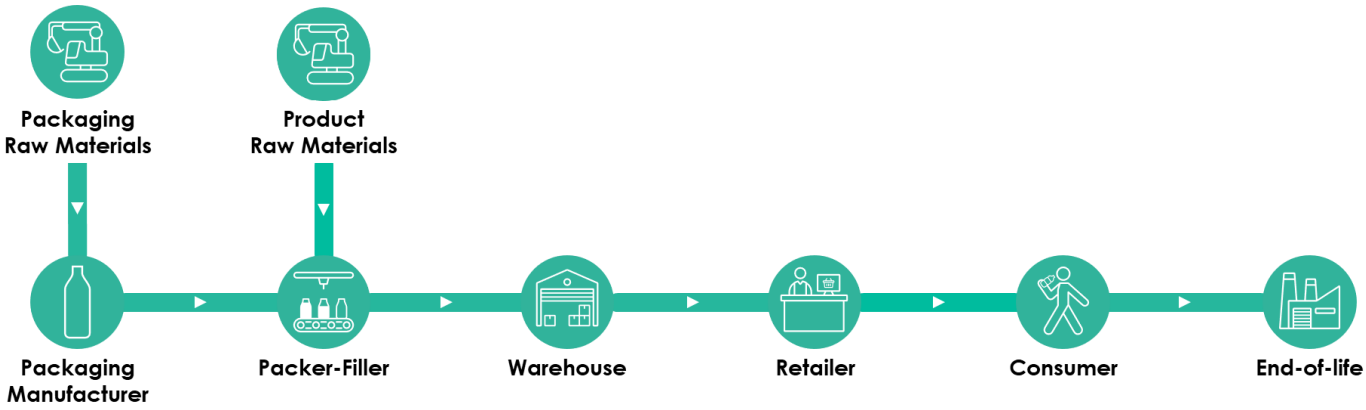
This section therefore examines how Prairie-specific geography, infrastructure, policy context, and consumer behaviour interact with emerging reuse models. It sets out the opportunities that can be leveraged and the constraints that must be designed around when implementing reusable grocery packaging in Saskatchewan and across the wider Prairies.

[2] A reuse system where products are filled into reusable containers by the producer and sold in retail. Consumers purchase the product, return the empty container to any participating return point, and the container is then washed, refilled, and recirculated through the same supply chain.

2.1 Single Use versus Reuse Systems

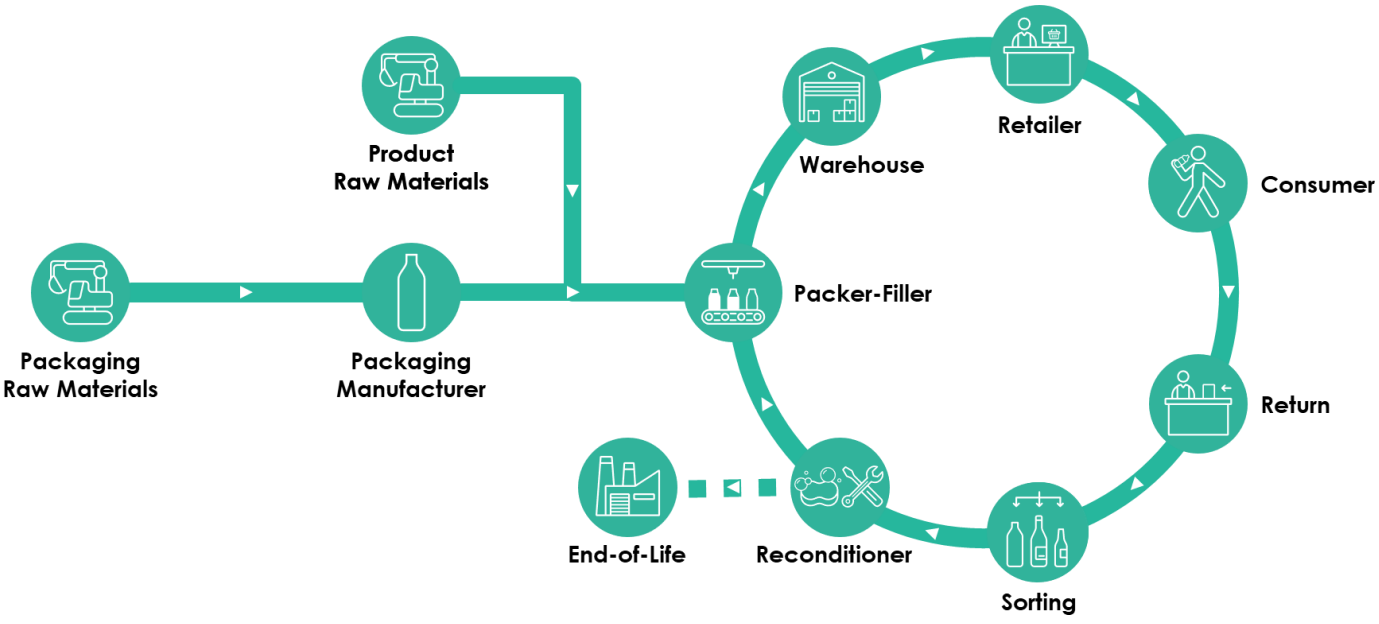
The grocery supply chain across Saskatchewan, the wider Prairie region and globally largely operate within a single-use linear supply chain, as shown Figure 2-1. Because the regulatory environment allowed for externalizing the costs of waste, linear systems have been optimised over decades for high throughput, consistent supply, low per-unit cost, and operational efficiency across distribution and retail environments. However, they require continuous input of new materials and generate waste after a single use. Even when recycling occurs, materials are frequently transported long-distances for sorting and reprocessing, and are often downcycled into lower-value applications rather than kept in a closed, high-value loop.

Figure 2-1: Current single-use linear supply chain



By contrast, circular packaging systems, shown in Figure 2-2, treat packaging as a durable asset that cycles repeatedly through the supply chain. While this approach has the potential to reduce lifecycle impacts and retain material value for longer, it also introduces new operational, behavioural, and economic considerations that must be acknowledged for reuse to scale effectively.

Figure 2-2: Circular supply chain for consumer-facing prefilled reuse system



2.2 What is Driving the Shift Toward Reuse

Rising policy momentum

Canada's regulatory landscape increasingly targets plastic waste reduction, with a federal goal of zero plastic waste by 2030[3] and growing municipal efforts to cut unnecessary single-use items and normalising reuse. However, current EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) frameworks still center almost entirely on recycling, with no reuse targets or reuse-supportive EPR mechanisms in place. Meanwhile, in the United States, California is moving further by introducing explicit, binding reuse and refill targets, signalling a clear shift toward policies that prioritise reuse and creating a pathway that other jurisdictions can more easily follow. A more detailed list of the Canadian and international policy landscape elements is in A.2.0.

Industry collaboration and market expectation

Canadian retailers and suppliers are increasingly participating in multi-stakeholder initiatives focused on reusable packaging. Major grocers are piloting at scale return-from-home[4] and return-on-the-go[5] systems in other provinces. These developments signal clear expectations that reuse will play a role in future packaging strategies. More detailed list of global and Canadian industry collaboration is in A.3.0.

Consumer demand for credible sustainability

Canadian consumers show growing willingness to support brands that offer sustainable products and meaningful reductions in packaging waste. The desire for more sustainable products is verifiable through the way that consumers utilise their buying power, rewarding brands that deliver on their sustainability promises. Some examples of this preference towards sustainability are listed below:

- 62% of Canadians are reportedly willing to pay a premium of 20% or more for brands that provenly deliver on sustainability.[6]
- 72% of Canadians are willing to participate in reuse and refill.[7]
- 61% of Canadians have brought their own reusable item at least once per week to avoid using a single-use item.[8]
- 81% of individuals are more likely to use reusable and refillable packaging if it were more convenient and cost effective.[9]

---

[3] Canada, Environment and Climate Change. "Canada's Zero Plastic Waste Agenda", 2021. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/managing-reducing-waste/reduce-plastic-waste/canadaaction.html.
[4] A reuse model where consumers return reusable packaging from home via doorstep pickup or parcel return, after which containers are washed and refilled. Example: reusable grocery containers collected during home-delivery returns. For example, Loop x Loblaw trial launched in 2021 and discontinued since https://www.loblaw.ca/en/loop-launches-in-canada-with-founding-retail-partner-loblaw/.
[5] A reuse model where consumers return reusable packaging at public drop-points such as stores or depots for washing and recirculation. Example: reusable grocery containers returned at depots. For example, Circulr https://circulr.ca/ drop off network across Toronto.
[6] Deloitte. "Creating value from sustainable products". 2023. https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/docs/industries/consumer/2023/gx-consumer-creating-value-from-sustainable-products-aoda.pdf
[7] Program of Applied Research on Climate Action (PARCA) "Ongoing Surveying of Canadians' Climate Change Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviours Over Time" 2024. https://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublications.gc.ca%2Fcollections%2Fcollection_2024%2Fbcp-pco%2FCP22-216-2024-eng.pdf
[8] Program of Applied Research on Climate Action (PARCA) "Ongoing Surveying of Canadians' Climate Change Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviours Over Time" 2024. https://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublications.gc.ca%2Fcollections%2Fcollection_2024%2Fbcp-pco%2FCP22-216-2024-eng.pdf
[9] Greenpeace. "People vs Plastic – Global support for a strong Plastics Treaty" 2024. https://www.greenpeace.org.au/greenpeace-reports/report-people-vs-plastic-global-support-for-a-strong-plastics-treaty/

In addition, Canadians are already conditioned through widespread beverage deposit systems to return containers for recycling, meaning the behavioural shift required for reuse adoption is relatively low compared to other markets.

2.3 Key Opportunities and Challenges and in the Prairies

The Prairies present a distinctive combination of challenges and enabling conditions for reusable packaging systems.

Key Opportunities:

- **Strong return-to-depot culture** - The Prairies benefit from one of the strongest return-to-depot cultures in North America, particularly through Saskatchewan's SARCAN network, which consistently achieves return rates around 85% for beverage containers.[10] This familiarity with returning containers provides a behavioral foundation that most regions lack. Consumers already understand deposit systems, return logistics, and the act of physically bringing items back to a designated point.

- **Existing return infrastructure** - Although originally designed for recycling, the Saskatchewan and Alberta benefits from well-established return-to-depot systems, efficient logistics routes, and regional aggregation hubs offer a starting point for reuse with far lower capital requirements than building a system from the ground up. These networks already manage high-volume container flows and are embedded in local communities, with the opportunity for reusable containers to be embedded. Note, Manitoba currently does not have a depot-based deposit-return system, meaning comparable return infrastructure has not yet been established.

- **Opportunity to coordinate across three Prairie provinces** – Building on the strengths of existing return infrastructure in Saskatchewan, and Alberta, the Prairies present a unique opportunity to coordinate reuse efforts. While Manitoba would require new and adapted return pathways and supporting infrastructure, the provinces already share many interprovincial supply chains, retail distribution routes, and co-packer networks. . A coordinated tri-province approach could harmonize container formats, intake standards, deposit mechanisms, and washing requirements, creating the scale and consistency needed for reusable packaging to compete with single-use.

Key Challenges:

- **Lack of policy mandates, targets, and regulatory clarity** - Unlike jurisdictions with clear reuse targets, defined performance expectations, or structured incentives, Canadian provinces currently operate without any specific regulatory direction for reusable grocery packaging. While Saskatchewan's EPR framework does include an exemption allowing producers with their own reuse systems to avoid packaging-related EPR fees, the Prairie region still lacks clear reuse targets, system requirements, or regulatory mechanisms designed to actively incentivise or scale reusable grocery packaging. At federal level, strategies similarly stop short of setting binding reuse requirements.
- **Long distances and low population density** - The Prairies' vast geography and dispersed populations create a fundamental logistical challenge for reusable packaging. While Saskatchewan and Alberta benefits from optimized return routes for single-use beverage containers, these do not yet handle reusable grocery packaging, and Manitoba has no comparable return-to-depot infrastructure in place.

[10] SARCAN. "Environmental Stats". https://sarcan.ca/about-sarcan/our-impact/#environmental-stats

As a result, large distances still increase cost and time to move empty containers back to cleaning facilities, especially when return volumes are low and routes are not yet optimized.

- **Limited existing infrastructure** - Although the Prairies benefit from strong return networks for single-use beverage containers, depot systems were built for recycling of one-way materials and do not yet incorporate the inspection or sorting workflows required for reusable containers. Similarly, there are currently no large-scale commercial washing facilities capable of meeting the hygiene, validation, and throughput requirements that a grocery reuse system would eventually demand.

Taken together, these conditions shape which reuse models are realistically implementable in the Prairie context. Systems that rely on consumers refilling containers in-store require significant retail space reconfiguration or depend on dense urban footfall and face structural challenges in low-density, car-oriented regions. By contrast, models that leverage existing return-to-depot behaviour, operate through centralised washing and redistribution, and integrate with established logistics routes are more closely aligned with Prairie realities.

These dynamics do not dictate a single approach, but they do narrow the field of viable options. In particular, they point toward return-based, centrally managed reuse systems that minimise retail disruption, build on existing collection infrastructure, and can be scaled across regions. It is within this context that prefilled, return-on-the-go models emerge as a strategically relevant focus for the Prairies.

3.0 Focus and Scope of this Guidance

This guidance focuses on how consumer-facing reuse systems can be designed and implemented in the Prairie grocery context, with particular emphasis on prefilled, return-on-the-go models. It is intended to support retailers, cooperatives, brands, service providers, industry associations, and policymakers in moving from small, isolated pilots towards coordinated, multi-phase implementation across Saskatchewan and the wider Prairies.

The aim is not to evaluate reuse as a concept, but to set out the practical conditions required for reuse systems to function effectively at scale. This includes identifying the design choices, infrastructure requirements, governance arrangements, and sequencing considerations that enable reusable packaging to move beyond experimentation and towards integrated system development.

Scope and System Boundary

This report focuses on business-to-consumer (B2C) sales packaging within grocery retail, including food, beverages, and household products. These systems depend on consumer participation for returns, making convenience, communication, hygiene assurance, and incentives critical to success. While B2C reuse is operationally more complex than business-to-business (B2B) reuse, it offers the most visible and system-transformative opportunity to reduce single-use packaging in everyday consumption.

B2B reuse systems, such as reusable crates, pallets, and transport packaging, are generally easier to implement and already deliver strong environmental and commercial benefits through closed logistics loops. For the product archetypes considered in this guidance, retailers would be expected to adopt both reusable sales packaging and reusable grouped and transport packaging over time, enabling products to move through the supply chain in fully circular systems at both unit and logistics levels.

Why Prefilled, Return-on-the-Go

Packaging reuse can take many forms, ranging from in-store refill models to centrally managed return and redistribution systems. In practice, however, not all models are equally suited to all geographies, retail formats, or consumer behaviours. A summary of grocery reuse trials is provided in the A.4.0.



Consumers return the empty container to an in-store or centralised drop-off point, and it is refilled centrally.

In the Prairie context, the combination of long travel distances, low population density, established return-to-depot behaviour, and existing reverse-collection infrastructure strongly favours models that:

- minimise disruption to retail operations,
- leverage existing return networks, and
- operate through centralised cleaning and redistribution.

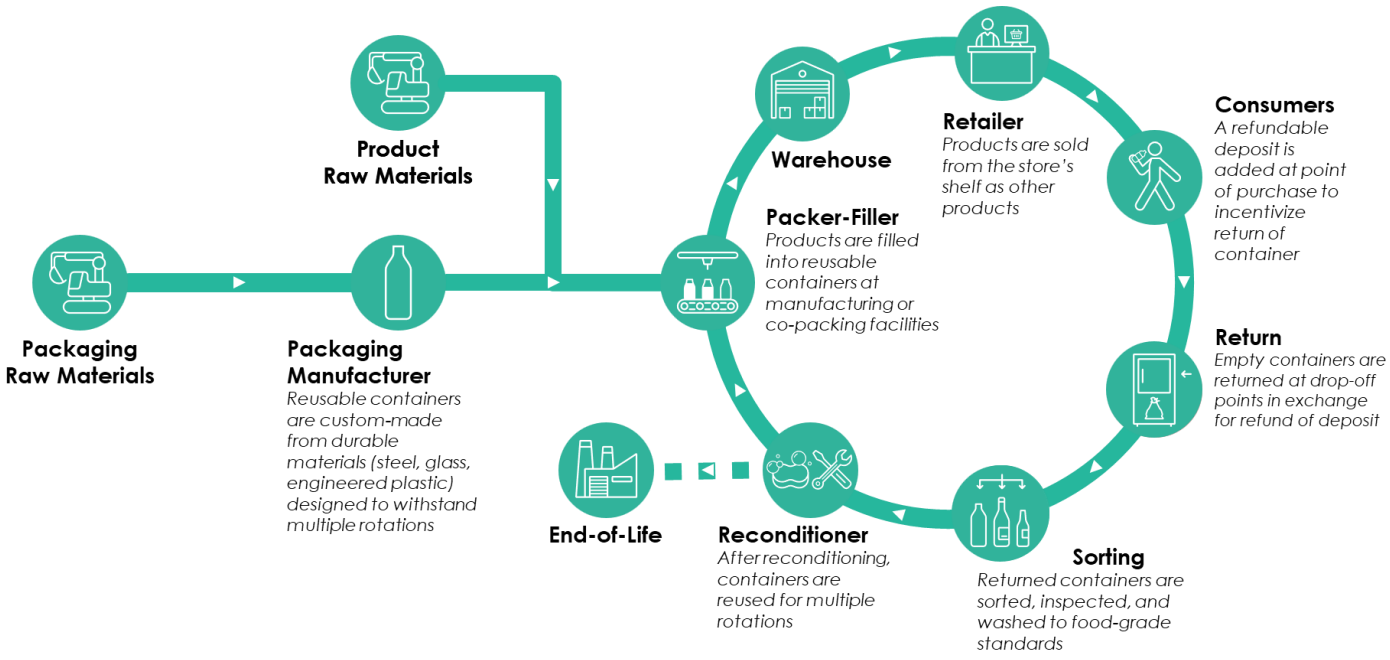
For these reasons, this guidance focuses on **prefilled, return-on-the-go systems,** in which products are sold in durable containers and returned by consumers to designated points for cleaning and refilled by producers. This model aligns most closely with Prairie infrastructure realities, can be integrated with depot networks such as SARCAN, and offers a scalable pathway across urban and regional markets. Where relevant, the guidance also highlights opportunities to integrate return-from-home models, particularly in areas with established e-commerce and home delivery services. A case study and summary of refill-in-store models are provided in the A.5.0.

4.0 Understanding the Prefilled Reuse Model

Transitioning to packaging reuse is not a simple swap of materials; it is a fundamental system redesign. In a prefilled, return-on-the-go model, products are sold in durable, refillable containers that move repeatedly through a loop of filling, distribution, consumer use, return, cleaning, inspection, and redistribution. This model introduces a series of new operational stages (e.g., collection of empties, sorting, cleaning, quality checks, and re-filling) that must integrate seamlessly with existing forward logistics to maintain efficiency, food safety, and consumer trust. Successful implementation therefore requires a coordinated system operator to oversee and align processes across retailers, depots, washing providers, packaging suppliers, distributors, and other value-chain partners.

Figure 4-1 illustrates how the model operates in practice. Reusable containers are distributed through conventional supply chains and sold on retail shelves in much the same way as single-use packaging. The primary difference for consumers is the inclusion of a refundable deposit at the point of purchase, which incentivizes the return of the container. Digital tracking technologies (QR codes, RFID, or data-linked deposits) support asset management, rotation monitoring, and consumer engagement.

Figure 4-1: System Map for Prefilled Return-on-the-go systems



4.1 Key Elements of a Prefill Return-on-the-Go System

Designing a prefill return-on-the-go system requires coordinated planning across a set of interconnected elements. Each of these parameters influences system performance, cost, scalability, and user experience, and all must work together for the model to succeed:

- **Governance and system operator** - A reuse system requires clear governance and a defined system operator to coordinate partners, manage container ownership, oversee performance standards, and ensure accountability. This role can be played by a retailer, a collaborative group, or a third-party operator, depending on the level of system maturity.
- **Products & Package –** Prefilled return-on-the-go models are suitable for diverse product types, including dry goods, liquids, and semi-prepared foods. Selecting the right product categories and the appropriate reusable packaging formats is foundational. Packaging should use durable formats—such as stainless steel, glass, polypropylene, or other high grade reusable plastics—capable of withstanding high rotation counts and centralised washing processes. Early-stage pilots should prioritise items that are operationally simple, have high-turnover, and are compatible with existing filling lines, expanding over time as capacity matures.
- **Level of standardization -** Standardised packaging specifications, such as container shapes, materials, neck finishes, and label formats, enable pooling of containers across different product categories and brands, reduce handling complexity, and support cost-efficient washing and logistics. Standardisation also enhances interoperability across provinces and between retailers.
- **Consumer Experience & Incentives -** Consumer participation is central to reuse. Simple, intuitive return pathways, clear instructions, transparent hygiene assurance, and meaningful incentives (deposit or deposit-equivalent rewards) all contribute to higher return rates and overall system performance.
- **Geographical coverage** - Decisions about whether a pilot covers a single city, region or an entire province shape logistics design, consumer experience, and achievable return rates. Geography also influences the locations of aggregation hubs, wash facilities, and return points.

- **Return Options -** Although this report focuses primarily on return-to-depot models, several return pathways can be integrated into a reuse system. These include in-store returns (with or without automated reverse vending machines), depot networks such as SARCAN, other return locations across a city, home pick-up routes linked to e-commerce, mail-back options, or even curbside return in specific jurisdictions.
- **Reverse Logistics Routes** - The movement of empty containers from return points to washing facilities requires carefully designed routing, aggregation, and scheduling. Reverse logistics must integrate with existing forward -distribution networks wherever possible to minimise cost, distance travelled, and environmental impact.
- **Cleaning & Quality Assurance -** Food-grade cleaning, sanitisation, and inspection are essential to consumer safety and trust. Most systems rely on specialised third-party wash providers who can validate hygiene, manage rejection rates, and ensure compliance with national and provincial food-safety requirements.
- **Digital Tracking & Asset Management -** Digital systems support container lifecycle management by providing visibility into rotations, return rates, loss rates, and pool-size requirements. Tracking technologies also enable seamless deposit refunds or loyalty rewards and help system operators optimise stock levels and operations.
- **Retail Integration -** A key advantage of prefilled return-on-the-go systems is that they avoid using retail floor space for refill stations, making them compatible with both physical retail and e-commerce. Prefilled containers plug into existing shelf and online merchandising, reducing operational disruption at store level.

In the next chapter, we will focus on some of these elements in more details.

5.0 What It Takes to Implement Prefilled Reuse in the Prairies

To consider how prefill return-on-the-go could be implemented in Saskatchewan and the wider Prairies we first reviewed the current reuse landscape and infrastructure, identifying both enablers and gaps that influence feasibility. Next, we evaluated product categories within the grocery sector to determine which could be most suitable for early-phase implementation in reusable packaging. Together, these two elements inform the recommended sequencing of pilot activities and the conditions required for scalable and interoperable reuse systems.

5.1 The Building Blocks of a Prairie Reuse System

The Prairie region has a number of foundational elements that support the introduction of return-on-the-go reuse systems, but also structural gaps that must be addressed in early phases. A more detailed list of the existing reuse infrastructure is included in A.6.0. Across the reuse ecosystem, five components were assessed: system operation, collection at depots, washing and reconditioning capacity, reverse logistics, and the digital tracking architecture required for container management.



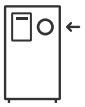
System Operator



Similar to the role played in single-use beverage deposit-return systems (DRS) or the Producer Responsibility organization under EPR, reusable container systems require a central coordinating body to oversee critical functions such as container ownership, financial flows, data management, materials handling, labelling rules, return incentives, fraud prevention and system performance. Because reuse introduces multiple new operational stages (e.g., collection, inspection, washing, redistribution, digital tracking), the presence of a system operator is essential to ensure that each part of the chain works together efficiently and consistently. At present, this is an emerging role within the Prairies, and no single organisation currently occupies it. This role could be filled by the same operator for the beverage container system or EPR system (e.g., SARCAN or Recycle SK in Saskatchewan).

A system operator for reuse can take multiple forms, depending on the stage of development and the level of coordination required; the most effective system operator model is likely to evolve over time. In early phases, a retailer-led model may be appropriate, where a single retailer or cooperative temporarily takes on coordination roles such as container sourcing, basic tracking and managing returns for a limited set of product categories or stores. This approach enables quick testing without needing to establish a formal stewardship organisation upfront. However, retail-led models typically have higher per-unit operational costs and fewer efficiency to scale. As volumes grow and multiple retailers participate, a joint industry organisation—similar to the stewardship bodies used in beverage DRS—can offer a more neutral and interoperable structure. In some jurisdictions, a third-party operator manages core functions such as digital tracking, data governance, container pooling, and reverse logistics, while retailers focus on the consumer-facing experience. Each model has advantages, but all require clear allocation of responsibilities across packaging specifications, service standards, hygiene compliance, and financial management.

Return Options



Return-to-depot networks are a natural starting point for reusable packaging systems in Saskatchewan. The province benefits from a well-established and trusted network of depots operated by SARCAN, offering province-wide coverage and strong familiarity with returning containers for deposit refunds. These characteristics make depots an obvious candidate for receiving, sorting, and aggregating reusable containers.

However, depot infrastructure is currently designed around single-use containers. Integrating reusable, multi-material, food-grade packaging introduces several challenges, including the need for separate intake processes, enhanced inspection to identify contamination or damage, dedicated staging for different container types, and additional staff training on handling, sorting, and digital tracking of reusable assets.

While depot returns offer a strong foundation, a scalable reuse system might require multiple, complementary return pathways. Options commonly used in other regions include in-store return points, automated return kiosks, and return-from-home collection tied to grocery delivery services. Some jurisdictions have also tested curbside or mail-back models to increase accessibility. Together, these pathways can offer consumers multiple, convenient options and distribute return volumes across the system, supporting higher participation rates and more resilient operations.

Washing



Washing and reconditioning form the technical core of any prefilled return-on-the-go system. Unlike recycling, where materials are broken down and reprocessed, reuse requires containers to be safely and efficiently returned to a food-grade state and prepared for multiple rotations. High-quality washing is therefore essential for maintaining hygiene standards, ensuring regulatory compliance, protecting consumer trust, and preserving the environmental benefits of reuse.

Although some sectors have integrated washing into filling operations – such as large beer brewers in Ontario, who wash the refillable bottles directly on their fill lines – this practice relies on uniform container formats, similar and predictable residue, and highly specialized glass bottling equipment. For grocery reuse, where containers vary in material, size, residue profiles and allergen considerations, full food-grade washing is typically better suited to a dedicated wash facility.

In the Prairie context, washing represents one of the most significant gaps in the current infrastructure. Our research team could not identify a dedicated commercial wash facility in Saskatchewan capable of handling food-grade reusable packaging at scale. Existing washing assets used in foodservice reuse or industrial cleaning are not immediately equipped for the specific needs of grocery packaging, such as label removal, residue variability, allergen separation, and multi-material sorting.

A centralised washing hub located in Saskatoon or Regina would be the most efficient long-term solution. Such a facility would serve multiple retailers, depots, and product categories, enabling economies of scale across washing, drying and inspection. Empty reusable packaging would be returned through depots, consolidated at regional hubs, transported to the wash facility, and then redistributed to producers or fillers.

To bridge this gap in early phases, one of the viable pathways is to rely on the National Wash Network [11](NWN), Canada's emerging alliance of commercial washing and logistics providers supporting reusable food packaging nationwide. NWN currently operates or is establishing wash facilities in several major metropolitan areas across Canada, including Calgary and Edmonton, which are listed as forthcoming network sites. Given Saskatchewan's proximity to Alberta, partnering with the National Wash Network to access washing capacity in Calgary or Edmonton is the recommended cross-province solution for early phase.



Reverse Logistics

Efficient and reliable reverse logistics are essential to keeping reusable containers in circulation and maintaining the economic and environmental performance of the system. In a prefilled, return-on-the-go model, reverse logistics encompass all movements of empty containers – including collection from return points, transport to aggregation hubs, delivery to washing facilities, and redistribution of cleaned containers back to fillers or production lines. Without well-designed reverse flows, containers cannot complete sufficient rotations, volumes remain too low for meaningful evaluation, and per-unit costs appear artificially high.

In the Prairie context, characterised by long distances, dispersed communities, and varied store formats, reverse logistics must be designed to leverage existing transport routes wherever possible. Opportunities include backhauling empty containers on trucks already delivering goods to retail locations, integrating with SARCAN's established container transfer routes, or using regional aggregation hubs to consolidate returns from multiple depots. These approaches minimise additional kilometres travelled, reduce operational costs, eliminate deadhead milage by utilising trucks that would otherwise return empty and help maintain the environmental benefits of reuse, which depend heavily on efficient transport.

Reverse logistic must also support flows of cleaned containers from washing facilities back to filling lines. Reliable, scheduled transport is essential to avoid bottlenecks and maintain steady filling operations. Wherever possible, washing hubs and filling lines should be located in close proximity within existing industrial centres to minimise transport distances and improve system efficiency.

[11] https://www.nationalwashnetwork.com/

Because Prairie retailers and distributors often operate on tightly optimised schedules, integrating reusable packaging flows requires thoughtful planning of collection frequency, route timing, and load balancing to ensure that empty containers do not bottleneck the system. Aggregation points, particularly in urban centres such as Saskatoon or Regina, can help consolidate returns before long-haul transport to washing facilities and may also unlock additional efficiencies when aligned with existing pallet or crate return logistics. Over time, shared hubs or cross-retailer consolidation points may reduce duplication of effort and support the scale needed for commercial washing operations.



Asset Management

Digital tracking and asset management are essential components of a reusable packaging system, but the level of sophistication required depends on the stage of implementation. Early-phase pilots do not necessarily need a unique identifier on every individual container; instead, they can rely on batch-level or pool-level tracking to monitor container flows, estimate return rates, and right-size the overall container pool. What matters most initially is the ability to track the number of containers in circulation, how many are returned, and how many cycles the pool completes, not individual item histories. As systems grow, more granular tracking, via QR codes, barcodes, or RFID, can be layered in to support automated sorting, improved loss prevention, and more precise performance data. QR codes are typically the easiest to deploy in the short term, while RFID becomes more useful at scale or when handling large mixed batches at wash hubs.

Several Canadian reuse operators already offer digital tracking capabilities that could be leveraged for Prairie pilots. Circulr[12], for example, operates a cross-category, cross-retailer reuse system in Ontario and provides a consumer-facing app that allows users to return packaging and track rewards, demonstrating capacity for container-enabled or batch-based tracking and deposit/refund integration. Similarly, ShareWares[13] in Vancouver and Muuse in the Greater Toronto Area[14], both part of the National Wash Network, use digital identifiers to link returned containers to wash cycles, support deposit refunds, and monitor operations.

5.2 Identifying the Right Product Categories for Reuse

Selecting the right product archetypes for a prefilled, return-on-the-go reuse system is a critical success factor. The categories chosen will determine whether the system will generate sufficient volumes, manageable operations, meaningful learning, and strong consumer engagement. They also set the foundation for long-term interoperability, standardisation, and cost efficiency.

The shortlist for this assessment was developed through discussions with Prairie-based stakeholders, insights from reuse experts in Canada and other jurisdictions, and learnings from Eunomia's previous international reuse projects. These conversations helped identify product categories that are both operationally realistic for initial stages and strategically valuable for enabling future scaling.

The considerations that informed the packaging selection are shown in Table 5-1.

[12] https://circulr.ca/
[13] https://www.sharewares.ca/
[14] https://www.muuse.io/toronto-11

Table 5-1: Packaging Selection Considerations

High sales frequency	**Fast-moving consumer goods companies generate the volume needed for meaningful data and operational efficiency.**
High plastic reduction potential	Categories currently in single-use plastic offer visible, measurable reductions.
Beverage return norms	The Prairie region already has behavioural familiarity with returning beverage containers (e.g., beer bottles), reducing the behavioural shift required.
Low-hanging fruit	Glass jars and bottles are inherently durable and have established precedents in reuse programs (e.g., Circulr).
Global feasibility evidence	Packaging formats that already exist in durable materials or can be readily adapted for reuse and there are real-life examples in other jurisdictions.
Shelf stability	Starting with shelf-stable products avoids refrigeration challenges.

The four shortlisted archetypes are:

	Home care liquids	**Non-alcoholic beverages**	**Glass jar foods**	**Deli products**[15]
Product examples	Laundry detergent, dish soap, all-purpose cleaners	Oat beverages, fruit juices	Products that are currently in single-use glass jars like pasta sauces, salsas, jams, pickles	Hummus, dips, coleslaw, potato salads
Current packaging formats	Single-use HDPE bottles	Single-use bottles	Single-use glass jars	Single-use plastic tubs with lids
Proposed reusable packaging formats	Reusable HDPE/PP bottles	Reusable glass bottles	Reusable glass jars (with single-use lids)	Reusable PP tubs with lids
Potential to expand	Extend to personal care products	Non-alcoholic beverage in currently in other packaging formats (e.g., single-use plastic bottle or single-use glass bottle)	Products currently sold in single-use plastic tubs or pouches that are suitable for glass jar formats	Other chilled prepared foods or grab-and-go items currently packaged in single-use plastic tubs

[15] Note that these are prepacked, prefilled deli products, not deli products being served over a deli counter.

After developing the shortlist, each archetype was assessed using a structured evaluation framework that considered operational feasibility, consumer acceptance, environmental impact, and scalability potential across retailers and provinces (see Table 5-2). Detailed description of the selection, shortlisting, evaluation criteria can be found in A.1.0. These categories provide a balance of operational simplicity, consumer familiarity, and early-stage feasibility, while offering clear pathways for expansion into more complex food categories in later phases.

This report does not intend to prescribe a fixed priority order for implementation. Decisions about which product categories to introduce first should be made collaboratively by the future Prairie reuse system actors - retailers, producers, depots, wash providers, and potential system operators - based on practical considerations such as SKU-level sales volumes, private-label readiness, and filling and packaging capabilities. This ensures that category sequencing reflects real market conditions and the commercial and logistical capacity of participating organisations, rather than a pre-determined hierarchy.

Table 5-2: Result overview of Archetype Shortlisting and Evaluation Approach

	Operation feasibility	Environmental Impacts	Consumer acceptance and engagement
Home care liquids 	High. Reusable HDPE/PP bottles are widely used in other reuse pilots	Strong potential due to direct avoidance of single-use plastics and no need for food-grade wash protocols.	Moderate to high. Consumers understand the format but may be less familiar with reusable options; clear communication supports uptake.
Non-alcoholic beverage 	Moderate. Standardised reuse bottle formats exist and can integrate with return-to-depot systems already functioning in Saskatchewan.	The switch from single-use plastic to reusable glass delivers strong plastic-reduction benefits, , provided that return rates remain high and regional logistics are efficient.	High. Consumers are familiar with beverage return systems and often perceive reusable bottles as premium and sustainable.
Glass jar foods 	High. Glass jars are durable, easy to clean, and widely used in reuse pilots globally. Programs such as Circulr in Ontario already reuse glass jars at retail scale.	Medium. Glass has significant embedded carbon, so avoided single-use glass production delivers meaningful reductions when reuse cycles are optimised. No	High. Consumers already associate glass packaging with durability and quality, and returning jars is intuitive.

				immediate plastic reduction.[16]		
Deli products 		Moderate. Requires more complex cleaning, residue removal, and inspection processes. Food-grade protocols for reuseable plastic must be strictly applied.[17]		High if cleaning efficiency is optimised. Direct single-use plastic avoidance		Moderate to Low. Hygiene perception is a key factor; strong messaging and incentives help establish trust.

[16] The establishment of the infrastructure could permit adoption of reuse for products currently packaged in plastic in a later phase.
[17] Plastic requires stricter hygiene controls because it is more easily scratched or heat-damaged, creating micro-harbourage points for residue and microbes

6.0 Moving from Insight to Action

Based on lessons learned from other studies and the assessment of Prairie infrastructure, product archetypes, and system requirements, three overarching recommendations emerge. These recommendations form the foundation for a scalable, interoperable, and long-term reuse system—moving beyond isolated pilots toward coordinated system transformation.

1. System Thinking for Prairie Context

Transitioning to prefill return-on-the-go reuse systems in Prairie grocery retail is not simply a matter of swapping packaging formats. A successful system requires the integration of packaging design, supplier filling practices, staff training, consumer engagement, return-point networks, reverse logistics, washing capacity, and digital tracking. Because the Prairies cover a vast geographic area with a mix of urban centres and dispersed rural communities, fragmented pilots risk inefficiencies and may undermine environmental benefits. Interoperability—shared formats, shared infrastructure, and shared digital tools—is essential for building a coherent, scalable system.

2. Buy-In & Governance

As in many global markets, Prairie retailers vary in readiness to adopt reuse. Competing operational priorities, limited resources for innovation, and uncertainty about consumer acceptance can delay adoption. Some retailers may assume reuse is too complex, costly, or inconvenient. Early engagement, co-design with retailers, and clear business cases—including potential EPR savings, operational efficiencies, and consumer loyalty benefits—will be critical to securing buy-in. For reuse to scale, retailers must see it not as an "environmental add-on" but as a strategic shift aligned with long-term packaging and regulatory trends.

Clear governance is essential for interoperability. Retailers, suppliers, packaging manufacturers, washing providers, and depot operators must share responsibilities for hygiene, logistics, quality assurance, and data management. Defining ownership of reusable assets, agreeing on service standards, and establishing joint decision-making structures (e.g., a multi-retailer stewardship group) ensures accountability and consistency across participating partners.

3. Moving Beyond Pilots: Designing for Scale From Day One

Global experience shows that most reuse transitions begin with a series of small, disconnected pilots. These early initiatives are often perceived as "failures," when in fact they represent normal experimentation phases as markets test formats, technologies, return systems, and consumer behaviours. Over time, innovation theory and international practice demonstrate that these fragmented pilots tend to consolidate around shared standards—unlocking the conditions for coordinated, system-wide scaling. However, the Prairies do not need to repeat this slow, fragmented trajectory.

Other jurisdictions have already generated a decade of experimentation—across packaging formats, deposit models, washing systems, logistics, and digital platforms—from which the Prairies can directly learn. Rather than starting with isolated pilots, a more strategic, long-term approach can accelerate progress: planning a multi-phase reuse system from the outset, designed to scale across multiple categories, retailers, and potentially provinces.

To achieve this, the implementation plan must be:

- Forward-looking, embedding the infrastructure, standards, and governance structures required for large-scale interoperability.

- Flexible, allowing for adjustments informed by local context, consumer behaviour, and retailer needs as the system grows.

This means building the conditions for scale from day one:

- **Standardised packaging** (formats, materials, labels, barcodes) to enable shared pools that move seamlessly between retailers and depots.
- **Infrastructure designed for expansion**, beginning with depots, transport routes, and reverse logistics, while planning future washing capacity and distribution hubs.
- **Scalable digital systems**, starting with simple container tracking and evolving toward full interoperability and category expansion.
- **Pilots with a strategic purpose**, not to test reuse as a concept, but to validate the business model, demonstrate value creation, and generate data for joint investment and governance decisions.

When pilots are embedded within a phased, long-term roadmap—rather than run as isolated experiments—they become accelerators of a regional reuse system rather than standalone demonstrations. The Prairies can therefore leapfrog the "fragmented pilot" stage seen elsewhere and move directly into coordinated system building, drawing on proven global insights while tailoring the approach to local realities.

6.1 Recommended Actions by Stakeholder Group

Delivering prefilled, return-on-the-go reuse systems in the Prairies will require coordinated action across the value chain to build system readiness and actively de-risk participation. The following section sets out recommended actions for key stakeholder groups, distinguishing between immediate steps, next phases, and the enabling conditions required to support scale. While this list does not represent every operational task required to implement reuse, it outlines the *core foundational actions* needed to move from concept to pilot and to reduce the likelihood of stranded, low-volume trials.

Retailers	
Do now	**Do next**
Appoint an internal reuse lead with cross-functional authority (operations, procurement, sustainability, IT). Initiate structured conversations with other retailers, private label brands, system operators, and depot operators in the region to explore shared approaches. Assess private-label supplier readiness and identify the 2–3 product archetypes with the highest feasibility for your organisation (e.g. home care liquids, beverages, selected glass-jar foods).	Co-fund shared washing and inspection capacity, either through regional hubs or partnerships with national wash providers. Expand into additional food categories once shared wash capacity, quality assurance processes, and return logistics are established. Integrate digital tracking (e.g. QR or RFID) into POS and inventory systems to support deposit processing and performance monitoring. Test in-store communications, incentives, and staff training to build consumer familiarity and trust.

Agree on common packaging formats and specifications with suppliers and filling lines to enable interoperability. Map current store layouts and back-of-house processes to identify practical return points and handling constraints. Engage existing logistics providers early to understand implications for store collections and backhaul. Identify operational risks (e.g., potential bottlenecks, contamination points, stock-balancing requirements) and define mitigation protocols before pilot launch.	Participate in joint performance reviews with system operators and other retailers to adjust packaging specifications, logistics flows, and operational standards.

Preconditions (Funding & Policy Needs)

- Access to wash infrastructure (e.g. National Wash Network partners; future Saskatchewan hub).
- Provincial, federal, or public-private support for capital investments in filling line modifications and container handling equipment.
- Policy clarity on reuse definitions, hygiene requirements, and EPR crediting.
- Temporary risk-sharing or grant funding from provincial, federal, or public-private sources to de-risk early participation.

System Operator (Interim Role Leading to Future Stewardship Body)

Do now	Do next
Define packaging standards, material specifications, and design requirements to enable pooling and interoperability. Establish a shared data architecture for tracking container rotations, losses, and return rates. Develop common hygiene, inspection, and quality-assurance protocols aligned with food safety requirements (e.g., CSA Group and PR3 RES-002:25/CSA R303:25, Reusable Packaging System Design Standard: Container Washing, Inspection, and Packing for Distribution[18])	Formalise into a multi-retailer stewardship or coordination organisation. Develop long-term infrastructure and investment roadmaps to guide expansion across categories and regions. Govern deposit/refund harmonisation, performance reporting, and fraud prevention mechanisms. Establish system-wide performance benchmarks and minimum return, rotation, and loss-rate

[18] https://www.csagroup.org/news/new-standard-sets-guidelines-for-safely-washing-reusable-packaging/?srsltid=AfmBOorVjJTVD-gVniGxLur_QZhf8QJtahVOdzg0RygJnH13roE4333R

Coordinate reverse logistics design across depots, retailers, and washing providers. Convene an initial multi-stakeholder working group to agree governance principles and decision rights. Design deposit, refund, and reconciliation flows in collaboration with retailers and depots , including opportunities to leverage existing DRS systems where appropriate.	thresholds before expanding to additional regions or categories. Oversee cross-province interoperability (Saskatchewan–Alberta–Manitoba) and system expansion. Manage accreditation of wash providers and service partners. Coordinate system-wide consumer communication, branding, and education to ensure recognisable and consistent messaging.
Preconditions (Funding & Policy Needs)	
• Clear retailer commitment to shared governance and standards. • Seed funding, federal innovation grants, or provincial support for system design and coordination. • Policy recognition of reuse systems within EPR and waste reduction frameworks. • Establishment of a regulatory designation or recognition enabling the system operator to act as a stewardship/coordinating body.	

Depot Operators	
Do now	**Do next**
Assess space and redesign depot workflows to accommodate intact reusable containers, including dedicated staging, contamination holding areas, and clean/dirty separation zones. Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for receiving reusable food and non-food containers. Implement basic inspection, sorting, and staging procedures to separate reusable containers from single-use packaging. Pilot digital scanning or manual logging for deposit/refund processing. Train staff on hygiene handling and contamination control.	Scale handling standards across the depot network. Expand acceptance to additional depots and product categories. Harmonise standards across multi-site depot operators to ensure consistent handling and efficiency. Integrate fraud prevention measures and quality checks. Optimise backhaul and transfer arrangements to washing facilities. Adopt harmonised signage and customer experience standards across participating depots,

Agree on early volume forecasts and data requirements with the system operator to plan staffing and equipment.	in coordination with retailers to ensure consistent communications .

Preconditions (Funding & Policy Needs)

- A clear depot compensation model covering labour, handling, equipment, and data submission requirements.
- Capital support for depot retrofits (space, storage, equipment).
- Investment in data systems and connectivity.
- Regulatory clarity on food-contact handling at depots.

Washing Providers

Do now	Do next
Validate sanitation protocols against food safety requirements and regulator expectations. Align wash processes with agreed container specifications and materials. Define throughput capacity, unit costs, and operational constraints. Design inspection, relabelling, and redistribution flows.	Scale hub capacity in line with retailer demand and geographic coverage. Integrate logistics with depot and retailer collection systems. Adopt shared data standards and reporting formats. Develop contingency plans for peak demand and system disruptions, including management of loss, damage, and unreturned containers.

Preconditions (Funding & Policy Needs)

- Minimum throughput guarantees or multi-year agreements to underwrite facility financing.
- Capital support or loan guarantees to enable facility investment.
- Regulatory approval and licensing pathways for commercial wash operations

Federal Policymakers / Funders (ECCC, Health Canada)

Do now	Do next

Issue national standards or guidance for reusable packaging, including food safety and hygiene requirements. Provide national guidance on food-grade safety for reusable packaging. Support pilots that build shared, interoperable infrastructure rather than isolated trials. Fund interoperable data platforms and system design through CCME or circular economy programmes. Embed reuse requirements or pilots into federal procurement (cafeterias, facilities, catering).	Align reporting standards for rotations, return rates, and loss rates across jurisdictions. Expand funding for regional wash hubs and shared logistics infrastructure. Support national knowledge sharing and technical assistance. Create a national accreditation framework for wash providers and reuse service operators. Publish a national cross-sector reuse roadmap. Fund national consumer education campaigns to support awareness and trust in reuse systems.

Preconditions (Funding & Policy Needs)

- Clear national definitions of "reuse" aligned with international best practices.
- Long-term co-funding to de-risk capital investments in washing, logistics, and data systems.
- Recognition of reuse within federal waste reduction and circular economy strategies.

Provincial Policymakers (SK, MB, AB)

Do now	Do next
Define reuse and refill terminology consistently across provincial frameworks. Pilot category-level targets or performance expectations for reuse. Issue interim guidance for health authorities and environmental regulators on sanitation, wastewater discharge, and inspection of reuse infrastructure. Enable licensing and permitting pathways for commercial wash facilities. Convene a cross-provincial working group on reuse system development.	Create provincial infrastructure roadmaps identifying ideal siting for wash hubs, depot upgrades, and logistics corridors. Harmonise deposit/refund frameworks to support cross-border interoperability. Support multi-retailer wash hubs and shared logistics systems. Integrate reuse performance into EPR reporting and compliance mechanisms. Coordinate tri-provincial consumer education and communications, ensuring consistent messaging for residents who travel across provincial borders.

Preconditions (Funding & Policy Needs)

- Grants or tax incentives for reverse logistics, wash infrastructure, and depot upgrades.
- Stable, long-term regulatory pathways for reuse systems, reducing investment risk for private-sector partners.
- Policy clarity on how reuse is credited within EPR and waste diversion targets.

Additional detail on policy enablers is provided in A.7.0

Appendix

A.1.0 Archetype Shortlist and Evaluation Approach

As part of the study, we undertook a **structured assessment** to evaluate the suitability of different pre-selected product archetypes for prioritizing for a pilot in the Prairies. The goal of this assessment was to:

1. **Identify product formats** that could realistically be included in the trial, and

2. **Apply a criteria-based evaluation matrix** with Red-Amber-Green (RAG) rating to assess operational feasibility, environmental impact potential, and consumer acceptance and engagement

Scope and Limitations

It was agreed with project partners that this assessment would **focus exclusively on private-branded products**, for which the retailer manages packaging, labeling, and communications end-to-end. This ensures greater control and flexibility during the trial. However, we suggest in the future similar assessment to be conducted for products from locally produced partner producers and fillers who might be interested in joining a reuse system with their products.

A.1.1 Selection of Product Archetypes

The selection process began with a **scan of FCL's private-label product portfolio** https://www.shop.crs/thecentre and was shaped by a series of interviews and engagements with key project partners, including FCL representatives, members of the advisory board, and the funding agency. These discussions revealed diverse priorities, motives, and operational considerations. Therefore, a **shortlist of four distinct product archetypes** was curated, each representing a different packaging context. As part of this process, product categories were first identified, after which the specific private-label SKUs within each category were reviewed—for example, juices and oat drinks were the relevant SKUs within the non-alcoholic beverage category.

The main considerations for the selection process included:

- **Plastic reduction potential** (advisory board) – Preference for products currently packaged in single-use plastic.
- **Inclusion of beverage** (RFP) – Aligns with existing beverage return systems in Saskatchewan.
- **Low operational complexity** (FCL)- "Low-hanging fruits" where current single-use packaging format can be reused with minimal changes (e.g., glass jars and glass bottles).
- **Locally filled in/near Saskatoon** (FCL)
- **General feasibility** (research team) - Archetypes with precedent in other reuse systems globally.
- **High sales frequency** (research team) with consistent repeat purchasing to ensure high container turnover and return rates.
- **Additional considerations** for prioritization (research team):
  - **Shelf-stable and long shelf-life** - minimize refrigeration needs and related potential complications.
  - **Non- food product** – reduce regulatory complexity.
  - **Minimal food residue** – reduce storage concerns for packaging before washing process.

A.1.2 Shortlisted Archetypes

The four shortlisted archetypes are food products in glass jar, deli products in plastic tubs, home care liquid in plastic bottles, and non-alcoholic beverage (oat drink and juice) in paperboard beverage carton, see Table A-1, representing diverse packaging contexts and operational considerations. Once private label SKUs with current packaging were identified, we determined the most appropriate reusable packaging format for each category, drawing on global precedent and technical feasibility.

Table A-1: The four shortlisted archetypes

	Product examples	Current packaging format	Reuse alternative	Notes
Food in glass jar 	Pasta sauces, salsas, jams, and pickles	Single-use glass jar with single-use lid	Glass jars to be reused. Single-use lids	• Glass jars represent a "low-hanging fruit" opportunity, as the primary packaging format is already durable and reusable with minimal design adaptation. • Glass jars are widely recognized in reuse schemes globally (e.g., Loop, German voluntary system for yoghurt jars) for their robustness, ease of cleaning, and consumer familiarity. • These products are shelf-stable, have long shelf lives, and minimal food residue, reducing cold chain and sanitation challenges
Deli products 	Hummus, coleslaw, potato salads, and dips	Single-use plastic tub with lid	Reusable plastic tubs with lids	• Deli products are normally produced locally which allows for a smaller reuse loop. • These items have shorter shelf lives but high turnover, particularly in urban stores, offering frequent packaging return potential. • Similar reuse trials globally (e.g., RePack, Loop) have demonstrated feasibility for this format, given manageable food residue and consumer familiarity.
Non-alcoholic beverage 	Oat beverage and juices	Single-use plastic bottle	Glass bottles to be reused. Single-use lids	• • Glass bottles were chosen as the reusable alternative due to their durability, hygiene assurance, and global precedent in beverage reuse systems.

				• While refrigerated storage is required, oat milk and juices are relatively low-residue products, supporting manageable cleaning and high return potential.
Home care liquids 	Cleaning products, laundry detergent	Single-use HDPE bottles	Reusable HDPE bottles	• This non-food archetype reduces regulatory complexity and simplifies cleaning requirements. • These products are shelf-stable, consistent repeat purchasing and generate minimal residue. • Reusable HDPE bottles are well-established in refill and return models globally, making this archetype technically and operationally feasible. • Including non-food items also supports system design across categories, enhancing scalability.

Each archetype has been paired with a **proposed reusable packaging alternative**. The reusable formats were selected based on:

- **Compatibility with existing infrastructure** - minimal filling line changes.
- **Consumer familiarity** - glass jars and bottles are widely accepted.
- **Global precedent** (reuse systems for these formats exist in other jurisdictions), more information on grocery reuse in other jurisdictions in A.4.0.

Glass jars and bottles were prioritised for products already packaged in glass, offering a practical transition with minimal system disruption. Reusable plastic tubs and bottles were chosen for deli and home care liquids respectively, based on their durability, relatively low cost, and proven use in other reuse systems. All selected formats align with the project's emphasis on reducing single-use plastics while balancing operational feasibility and user experience.

A.1.3 Criteria for Evaluation

To assess the shortlisted product archetypes, we developed a **structured evaluation framework** grounded in the key success factors for a prefilled return-on-the-go reuse system.

This assessment is based on a combination of expert insight, precedent analysis, and learnings from previous reuse initiatives. Given the limited availability of robust, category-specific consumer or operational data in the Prairie context, the evaluation draws on practitioner experience from comparable projects in Canada and internationally, as well as insights from industry interviews, prior consultancy engagements, and published results from reuse pilots and trials. Accordingly, the RAG ratings represent a qualitative, expert-informed judgement designed to surface relative opportunities and risks—not prescriptive or modelled outcomes.

This framework is **not designed to prescribe a definitive ranking or recommendation,** but rather to provide a **comparative and qualitative basis for decision-making** by highlighting trade-offs between options. Each archetype was assessed using a **RAG methodology** across a set of criteria grouped under three core dimensions:

- **Operational Feasibility**
- **Expected Environmental Impact**
- **Consumer Acceptance and Engagement**

Operational feasibility

Evaluates the practical and technical viability of integrating each archetype into the proposed reuse system with minimal disruption. Key considerations include:

- **Technical compatibility existing infrastructure** - Can the reusable packaging format be integrated into current filling lines, storage systems, and transport logistics without significant redesign or retrofitting? Are secondary and tertiary packaging formats compatible with the proposed reusable primary packaging?
- **Return and cleaning system integration** - To what extent can the product be incorporated into a depot network (e.g., SARCAN) for consumer returns and back-end processing (e.g., sorting, cleaning, redistribution)?
- **High-level cost considerations** – While detailed financial modelling is beyond project scope, the assessment considers:
    - Estimated upfront investments (e.g., reusable packaging procurement, filing line adaption)
    - Expected savings over time (current unit cost for single-use packaging vs estimated unit cost for reusable packaging and average lifespan)
    - Operational costs, such as collection fees, return logistics, depot handling, consumer deposit systems, and sanitation, are not included in this assessment. While recognised as critical system components, they are assumed to be similar across archetypes and will be addressed in more detailed modelling in later phases of the project.

Expected environmental impact

This criterion evaluates the potential of each archetype to deliver meaningful environmental benefits by aligning with sustainability commitments, reducing single-use packaging, and conserving virgin materials. The evaluation is based on established reuse literature and high-level estimation, recognizing that detailed lifecycle or GHG modelling is beyond the project scope).

- **Alignment with Environmental sustainability goals** – for example members of the Canada Plastic Pact (CPP), a collaborative initiative aimed at eliminating plastic waste and promoting a circular

economy for plastics in Canada. The CPP outlines a number of environmental and reuse related priorities and objectives, including four key targets by 2025[19]:
    - Eliminate problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging.
    - Ensure 100% of plastic packaging is reusable, recyclable or compostable.
    - Achieve at least 50% effective recycling or composting of plastic packaging.
    - Reach 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging
    - Additionally, **participation in reuse or refill trial projects** and compilation lessons to inform future directions as well as establishing a coalition of organizations that are investing in reuse and refill business models innovation, such as business accelerators, incubators and universities.[20]
- **Reduction in single-use plastics** - Estimated volume of plastic (or other disposable materials) avoided annually through reuse implementation, based on current packaging weights and sales volumes. These estimates are informed by current product sales volume data, providing an indication of potential scale and environmental return on investment.
- **Virgin material savings** - Potential reduction in the need for raw materials through reuse of durable containers, including glass, HDPE, or PP.

Consumer acceptance and engagement

Explores behavioral and social factors influencing adoption, based on existing consumer research, precedent reuse systems, and retail purchasing patterns:

- **Purchase frequency and familiarity -** High-frequency, habitual purchases are more likely to support a viable reuse loop (e.g., dairy, cleaning supplies, deli items).
- **Ease of return participation -** Likelihood that consumers will engage with depot-based return logistics, influenced by packaging type (e.g. glass vs plastic), product category, and perceived cleanliness or effort required.
- **Precedent data and behavioural insights**: Where available, we draw on comparable reuse models (in Canada or internationally) to estimate potential participation rates, acceptance levels, and risk of drop-off in engagement over time.

Note the following assumptions have been made, all reusable packaging format will be overseen by a system operator and being returned to SARCAN depots. The cleaning and sanitation of reusable packaging will be done professionally by a third party operator.

[19] Canadian Beverage Association. "The Canada Plastics Pact." Accessed May 28, 2025. https://www.canadianbeverage.ca/industry-initiatives/the-canada-plastics-pact/.
[20] Canada Plastics Pact (CPP). "Roadmap to 2025: A Shared Action Plan to Build a Circular Economy for Plastics Packaging". October 2021. https://roadmap.plasticspact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CPP_Roadmap_V1_Oct2021.pdf.

A.1.4 Result assessment

Table A-2: Results of RAG assessment – Operational Feasibility

	Technical compatibility with infrastructure	Return and cleaning system integration	High-level cost considerations	Overall
Home care liquids 	HDPE/PP bottles are widely compatible with existing fill lines; minimal retooling typically required. Non-food simplifies sanitation and QA.	Non-food containers simplify wash protocols (no food-grade constraints); high throughput feasible.	Upfront procurement of returnable-grade HDPE bottles; label durability (or sleeve) and cap reuse spec; minor SOP updates. Lower infrastructure cost to reuse transition	Standardised HDPE/PP bottles well-suited to reuse and operationally proven in similar reuse trials.
Non-alcoholic beverage 	Moderate level adjustments needed for filling lines. Existing plastic bottling lines can often be adapted for durable, reusable PET/HDPE formats with some retooling (e.g., container handling, rinsing modules, cap sterilisation).	Depot return behaviour already established; bottles are a mature format for high-throughput washing when standards are set.	Reusable glass bottles are more expensive upfront than single-use plastic bottles. Transport weight increases logistics costs, and breakage control becomes a cost driver. Breakage control and protective secondary	High. Standardised reuse bottle formats exist and can integrate with return-to-depot systems already functioning in Saskatchewan.

				packaging are cost drivers.		
Glass jar foods 		Glass jars already run on current lines; no packaging redesign needed; durable and label removal is manageable with validated wash cycles.		Voluntary collection for single-use jars via SARCAN exists. Depot workflows for non-deposit jars need refinement. Requires food-grade wash, and inspection.		Wash and relabel costs moderate; breakage control and protective secondary packaging are cost drivers.		High. Glass jars are durable, easy to clean, and widely used in reuse pilots globally. Programs such as Circulr in Ontario already reuse glass jars at retail scale.
Deli products 		Moderate level adjustments needed for filling lines. Refrigeration and tamper-evidence required.		Higher food residue increases complexity. Depot sorting and pre-processing steps needed. Wash validation achievable but stricter hygiene QA required.		Procurement of robust PP tubs/lids. Potential saving on packaging cost		Moderate. Requires more complex cleaning, residue removal, and inspection processes. Food-grade protocols must be strictly applied.[21]

[21] Plastic requires stricter hygiene controls because it is more easily scratched or heat-damaged, creating micro-harbourage points for residue and microbes

Table 6-1 Results of RAG assessment - Expected environmental impact

	Alignment with Wider Sustainability Goals	Reduction in Single-Use Plastics	Virgin Materials	Overall
Home care liquids 	Clear single-use avoidance, aligns with corporate plastic reduction targets and CPP-style commitments.	Direct plastic displacement in high-volume SKUs (detergent, cleaners).	Significant avoided virgin resin across rotations; logistics efficiency further improves footprint; proven in global reuse trials.	Strong potential due to direct avoidance of single-use plastics and no need for food-grade wash protocols.
Non-alcoholic beverage 	Replacing single-use plastic bottles with durable reusable glass aligns strongly with CPP-style commitments focused on reducing single-use plastics and increasing reuse.	High plastic reduction potential: shifting from single-use PET/HDPE bottles to reusable glass eliminates plastic packaging entirely for this category	Glass has high embedded carbon; reuse offsets this only with sufficient rotations, return rate and logistics efficiency is decisive.	The switch from single-use plastic to reusable glass delivers strong plastic-reduction benefits, , provided that return rates remain high and regional logistics are efficient.
Glass jar foods 	Eliminates single-use glass jars over multiple trips; supports CPP targets for reuse.	Plastic reduction indirect (if baseline is glass); still reduces waste and supports circularity.	High embedded carbon in single-use glass—reuse delivers strong lifecycle	Medium. Glass has significant embedded carbon, so avoided single-use glass production delivers meaningful reductions when

					benefits at adequate rotations.		reuse cycles are optimised. However, no direct plastic reduction.
Deli products 		Direct single-use plastic avoidance in a visible category; strong alignment with corporate reduction goals.		Clear displacement of one-way tubs; measurable reductions.		Significant avoided virgin resin across rotations; logistics efficiency further improves footprint;		High if cleaning efficiency is optimised. Direct single-use plastic avoidance

Table 6-2 Results of RAG assessment - Consumer Acceptance

	Purchase frequency and familiarity	Ease of return participation	Precedent data and behavioural insights	Overall
Home care liquids 	Medium purchase frequency; habitual category. Format familiar and easy to explain.	Less legacy habit than beverages; needs simple cues, clear instructions, and light incentives. Depot return easy for non-food items; low hygiene concerns.	Growing but not universal; lessons from pilots show good uptake with deposit/loyalty. Consumers value convenience and cost savings.	Moderate to high. Consumers understand the format but may be less familiar with reusable options; clear communication supports uptake.
Non-alcoholic beverage 	High purchase frequency and strong format familiarity support rotations and learning. Oat drink and juice less common in glass, which could be a novelty factor.	Returning beverage containers is already habitual in SK; deposit/refund mechanics are well understood.	Extensive DRS/refill precedents; clear playbooks for incentives, fraud control, and routing.	High. Consumers are familiar with beverage return systems and often perceive reusable bottles as premium and sustainable.
Glass jar foods 	Very familiar format; shelf-stable SKUs provide predictable demand and rotations.	Depot-based return requires effort but jars are familiar and perceived as hygienic.	Canadian precedents (e.g., Circulr) and international systems (e.g., yogurt jars in Germany) show	High acceptance: Familiar format, strong sustainability signal; minor friction from depot returns.

			Already existing voluntary single-use jar return at SARCAN depots		strong acceptance and operational viability. Positive consumer perception of glass as premium.		
Deli products 		Regular purchase cadence; hygiene perception is the key risk—needs strong comms and clear sealing/inspection.		Depot return less intuitive for chilled items; residue concerns may deter participation. Requires clear rinse guidance		Fewer large-scale grocery precedents; foodservice pilots exist—adaptation to retail requires careful messaging.		Moderate to low. Hygiene perception is a key factor; strong messaging and incentives help establish trust.

A.2.0 Policy Landscape

Canada

Key federal strategy and targets:

- **Zero Plastic Waste Agenda** (2018)[22] aims to reduce plastic pollution and promote a circular economy. Including a Canada-wide Strategy and Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste, which is built on Canada's Ocean Plastics Charter, providing a framework for action on plastics reduction. Including targets for plastic packaging:
    - 55% of plastic packaging to be reused or recycled by 2030,
    - 100% recovery of all plastics by 2040, and
    - a ban on certain harmful and unnecessary single-use plastics.[23]
- **A Roadmap to Strengthen the Management of Single-use and Disposable Plastics** (2022) of which the P2 Notice supports by encouraging retailers to innovate and adapt new business processes such as reuse and refill models.[24]
- **Recycled Content and Labelling Rules for Plastics: Regulatory Framework** (2023)[25] (as part of the Zero Waste Agenda), outlines the federal government's intent to introduce regulatory targets for recycled content for plastic packaging and certain single-use plastics.[26] Early draft objectives and targets were shared as part of a proposed Pollution Prevention (P2) Notice[27] during consultation; however the P2 Notice was never finalized or published. As a result, the specific proposed objectives and targets originally presented remain indicative only and do not carry regulatory status.
    - Objective 1: elimination of unnecessary or problematic food plastic packaging and ensure packaging is designed for circularity, by 2035.
    - Objective 2: increase sales of fresh fruits and vegetables in bulk and/or plastic-free packaging to 75% by 2026 and 95% by 2028.
    - Objective 3: ensure100% of primary food plastic packaging[28] is reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2028.
    - Objective 4: Increase sales of reuse-refill, plastic-free, and concentrated products, of which at least half must be reuse-refill, to 20% by 2026, 50% by 2030, and 60% by 2035.
    - Objective 5: Achieve minimum post-consumer recycled (PCR) content levels in non-reusable plastic food packaging containers of 10% by 2028, 20% by 2030, and 30% by 2035.

Key provincial legislation:

---

[22] Canada, Environment and Climate Change. 'Canada's Zero Plastic Waste Agenda', 2021. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/managing-reducing-waste/reduce-plastic-waste/canadaaction.html.
[23] Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. 'Canada-wide Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste: Phase 1'. PN 1589. Winnipeg, MB: CCME, 2019. https://ccme.ca/en/res/1589_ccmecanada-wideactionplanonzeroplasticwaste_en-secured.pdf.
[24] 'Government of Canada'. Accessed May 15, 2025. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/corporate/transparency/consultations/consultation-pollution-prevention-planning-notice-primary-food-plastic-packaging.html
[25] Canada, Environment and Climate Change. 'Recycled Content and Labelling Rules for Plastics: Regulatory Framework Paper', 2023. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/canadian-environmental-protection-act-registry/recycled-content-labelling-rules-plastics.html
[26] Canada, Environment and Climate Change. 'Consultation document: Pollution prevention planning notice for primary food plastic packaging', 2023. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/corporate/transparency/consultations/consultation-pollution-prevention-planning-notice-primary-food-plastic-packaging.html
[27] Canada, Environment and Climate Change. 'Pollution Prevention Plans under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act: Guidelines'. Education and awareness, 14 May 2019. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/pollutionprevention/planning-notices/guidelines.html.
[28] This P2 Notice define primary plastic packaging as 'packaging designed to come into direct contact with the product' for example, bottles, jars, pouches, and blister packs.

Deposit return schemes are prevalent throughout Canada, with 11 provinces having established systems for single-use beverage containers such as glass bottles, cans, plastic bottles, and cartons. While some systems historically included refillable and returnable formats, reuse now represent a small share of the market. In Saskatchewan and other provinces, return-to-depot networks provide established collection infrastructure that could be adapted to support reusable packaging systems in the future.

United States

In the United States, individual states have also started implementing reuse and refill mandates: including:

- **California Senate Bill 54**[29] includes source reduction targets requiring producers to reduce single-use packaging and food ware by at least 25% by 2032 and 4% of this reduction must be achieved through transitioning to reuse and refill systems.
- **New York State's 2025 AB A8007** mandates that food service establishments to permit the use of reusable beverage and food containers provided by customers when requesting a beverage refill or requesting leftovers from a partially consumed meal to be packaged and they are also required to post signs to inform customers that they are permitted to do so.[30]

Europe

The European Union (EU)is driving the transition to circular packaging systems through several measures:

- **Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP - 2020)**[31], aiming to ensure all packaging reusable or recyclable in an economically viable way by 2030.
- **EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD 2018)**[32] encourages Member States to implement measures to promote the reuse of packaging, including setting up systems for packaging reuse.
- **Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR 2024)**[33] introduces reuse and refill targets and bans certain single-use packaging, such as single-use plastic packaging for unprocessed fresh fruit and vegetables.

Several EU countries have also begun implementing their own national reuse policies to encourage reuse in the retail sector. For example, France, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden has introduced overarching reuse targets, while Germany, Austria and Spain and Latvia have set up beverage sector specific reuse targets. These targets are list below:

- **France:** Producers with over 50 million euros revenue must have 10% of the packaging placed on the market in reuse format by 2027.[34]

---

[29] 'CalRecycle'. Accessed May 15 2025. https://calrecycle.ca.gov/packaging/packaging-epr/
[30] New York State Assembly. *Assembly Bill A8007: Right to Refill Act*. 2025–2026 Legislative Session. Introduced April 21, 2025. https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/A8007.
[31] European Commission. *A New Circular Economy Action Plan: For a Cleaner and More Competitive Europe*. COM(2020) 98 final. Brussels, March 11, 2020. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:98:FIN
[32] European Parliament and Council, *Directive (EU) 2018/852 of 30 May 2018 Amending Directive 94/62/EC on Packaging and Packaging Waste*, Official Journal of the European Union L 150, 14 June 2018, 141–154, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018L0852.
[33]European Parliament and Council, *Regulation (EU) 2025/40 of 19 December 2024 on Packaging and Packaging Waste, Amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and Directive (EU) 2019/904, and Repealing Directive 94/62/EC*, Official Journal of the European Union L 40, 22 January 2025, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/40/oj.
[34] *Décret n° 2021-517 du 29 avril 2021 relatif aux objectifs de réduction, de réutilisation et de réemploi, et de recyclage des emballages en plastique à usage unique pour la période 2021-2025*. Légifrance. April 29, 2021. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000043454495.

- **Portugal:** 30% of all packaging placed on the market to be in reuse formats by 2030.[35]
- **Romania:** 5% of all packaging placed on the market to be in reuse format by 2020, with a 5% annual increase.[36]
- **Sweden:** 20% increase in reusable packaging placed on the market between 2022 and 2026 and a 30% increase between 2022 and 2030.[37]

Additionally, Spain requires food retail outlets to dedicate 20% of their space to the bulk sale of products presented without primary packaging, including those sold loose or in reusable packaging[38] and similarly by 2030 retail businesses, in France, of more than 400m^2 will be required to dedicate 20% of their sales areas to the sale of products without primary packaging, including bulk sales.[39] Italy has legislation that supports reuse and refill by allowing customers to bring their own containers for refill.[40] Germany obligated the Hotel, Restaurant, and Café/Catering (HORECA) sector to offer reuse alternatives to take away at the same cost as single-use.

A.3.0 Industry Collaborations and Commitments

Global

Globally, collaboration across brands, retailers, and producers has accelerated as companies work to meet ambitious circular packaging targets. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Global Commitment[41], a major international voluntary initiative involving leading FMCG companies, retailers, and governments, has driven collective progress. Signatories have pledged to reduce virgin plastic use, eliminate problematic formats, and significantly increase recycled content, demonstrating that coordinated industry action can meaningfully advance reuse and circularity goals. The World Economic Forum's Consumers Beyond Waste programme[42] also highlights reuse as a central market shift needed to curb plastic pollution, noting that building shared infrastructure and collaborative models is essential for reuse to scale competitively against single-use packaging.

Canada

Canadian Plastics Pact (CPP), a multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2021 that brings together businesses, government, and non-profit organizations committed to creating a circular economy for plastics in Canada. The CPP is part of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Plastics Pact network worldwide and aims to eliminate

---

[35] *Lei n.º 52/2021 de 10 de agosto*. Diário da República. August 10, 2021. https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/lei/52-2021-168201240.
[36] Romania. *Ordonanța de Urgență nr. 74/2018 pentru modificarea și completarea Legii nr. 211/2011 privind regimul deșeurilor*. Monitorul Oficial al României, Partea I, nr. 1054. December 12, 2018. https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/207723.
[37] Naturvårdsverket. *Återanvändning av förpackningar – Sveriges miljömål*. Miljömålsportalen. Accessed June 13, 2025. https://www.sverigesmiljomal.se/miljomalen/gifttfri-miljo/uppfoljning-av-miljomalen/etappmal/ateranvandning-av-forpackningar/
[38] KPMG Abogados S.L.P. "Spain: Royal Decree 1055/2022 of 27 December 2022, on Packaging and Packaging Waste.' *Legal Alert*, January 2023. https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/us/pdf/2023/02/tnf-spain-feb8-2023.pdf.
[39] Government of France – DGCCRF (Direction générale de la concurrence, de la consommation et de la répression des fraudes). "Consultation concernant l'application de l'article 23 de la loi 'Climat et résilience' relatif à l'objectif de 20 % de surface de vente dédiée au vrac." Accessed June 11, 2025. Économie.gouv.fr. https://www.economie.gouv.fr/dgccrf/actualites/consultation-concernant-lapplication-de-larticle-23-de-la-loi-climat-et?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[40] Grand Voyage Italy. 'Zero-Packaging Shopping in Italy: Refilling Saves Cash.' Grand Voyage Italy. https://www.grandvoyageitaly.com/piazza/zero-packaging-shopping-in-italy-refilling-saves-cash.
[41] Ellen MacArther Foundation. 'The Global Commitment: A Common Vision for a Circular Economy'. https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/global-commitment/overview.
[42] World Economic Forum. 'Consumers Beyond Waste'. Accessed 5 January 2026. https://initiatives.weforum.org/consumers-beyond-waste/home.

plastic waste and pollution by redesigning the production, use, and reuse of plastics.[43] Its 2025 Roadmap[44] includes actions to support reuse and refill models, including:

- Defining the state of plastics packaging reuse and refill models and innovations in Canada, identifying barriers to achieving scale, and proposing a new set of recommendations on areas where scale could have impact;
- CPP signatories will participate in at least 10 reuse or refill pilot projects, compiling insights to guide future strategies. The roadmap also calls for the formation of a coalition of organizations, including business accelerators, incubators, and universities, focused on advancing reuse and refill business models; and
- Establishing a coalition of organizations that are investing in reuse and refill business model innovations, such as business accelerators, incubators, and universities.

CPP's four national 2025 targets aim to eliminate problematic packaging, ensure all plastic packaging is reusable, recyclable, or compostable, achieve a 50% recycling or composting rate, and reach 30% recycled content across all plastic packaging

The CPP has also launched a Reuse Accelerator Program, partly funded by ECCC, to support the development and scaling of reuse and refill applications, with selected participant.[45] CPP and ECCC have additionally partnered to showcase emerging reuse innovations through national events that highlight companies developing reuse-related technologies.

Circular Innovation Canada[46] leads a collaborative reuse initiative for the food serving sector, supported by major grocery retailers Metro and Sobeys, and funded by ECCC and the City of Ottawa. This national program begins with Reuse Ottawa, a large-scale pilot launched in mid-2024 that enables consumers to access reusable food containers across participating grocery stores, restaurants, and food service locations at no additional cost. This pilot focused on deli food and take-out food. The pilot includes shared container ownership, centralized washing and redistribution, and multiple convenient return options, facilitated by technology partner Reusables.com.

The Consumer Goods Forum's (CGF) Plastic Waste Coalition of Action and Reposit announced the completion of the design phase for a reusable packaging program tailored for personal and home care categories in Ottawa, in April 2025. The initiative brings together global retailers and brands, Walmart, Loblaw Companies Limited, L'Oreal, Unilever, and Procter & Gamble, to create a standardized scalable approach to reusable packaging.[47] Implementation of the initiative is expected to begin in the first quarter or 2026 and if successful could be implemented within food and beverage goods in Walmart and Loblaw stores.

These initiatives illustrate increasing alignment across sectors, both internationally and within Canada, around the need for interoperable, collaborative reuse systems to meet climate, waste-reduction, and circular-economy goals.

---

[43] Canada Plastics Pact. Accessed May 15, 2025. https://plasticspact.ca/
[44]Canada Plastics Pact. 'Roadmap to 2025: A Shared Action Plan to Build a Circular Economy for Plastics Packaging'. October 2021. https://roadmap.plasticspact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CPP_Roadmap_V1_Oct2021.pdf.
[45] Canada Plastics Pact. *2023–24 Impact Report*. January 2025. https://plasticspact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2023-24-impact-report.pdf.
[46] Circular Innovation Council. Reuse Program. https://circularinnovation.ca/reuse/.
[47] The Consumer Goods Forum. "The CGF and Reposit Invite Consumer Goods Industry to Join City-Wide Reusable Packaging Pilot in Ottawa." *The Consumer Goods Forum*, April 2025. https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/news_updates/the-cgf-and-reposit-invite-consumer-goods-industry-to-join-city-wide-reusable-packaging-pilot-in-ottawa/.

A.4.0 Grocery reuse trials in other jurisdictions

We summarised our desk research in an overview table, see Table A-3, that captures **29 distinct reuse pilots** across **16 countries**, illustrating the fragmented and exploratory nature of current activity in the grocery sector. The vast majority of initiatives—around **93%**—are concentrated in **Europe**, with the **UK, Belgium, France and the Netherlands** emerging as clear hotspots for experimentation. Across reuse models, **return-on-the-go systems account for the largest share (45%)**, followed by **refill-on-the-go (38%)** and a smaller number of **return-from-home pilots (17%)**, many linked to online grocery delivery. While the pilots span a wide range of product categories—from dry goods and liquids to fresh produce and frozen foods—the diversity of approaches underscores that no single reuse model has yet emerged as the dominant or scalable solution. Examples from Canada are not included in this table, as they are presented separately in section A.6.0, which covers existing reuse infrastructure in Saskatchewan and across Canada.

Table A-3: Overview of Grocery Reuse Trials

Reuse model	Product categories	Example case study	Geography	List of product categories (case study)	Description (case study)
Return-on-the-go	Various food items	Loop by TerraCycle	Tesco (UK), Carrefour (France), and other retailers	**Personal care, home care, pet food, dry food and snacks)**	Loop is a global circular shopping platform designed to reduce waste by transforming the products and packaging from single-use to durable, multi-use, feature-packed designs. Products are sold in branded prefilled containers, which are collected after use.
		Bringback.be	Belgium	**Pre-cooked food and sauces**	Bringback have stores in Belgium with a range of standardised reusable glass jars for precooked food and sauce brands.
		CU Mehrweg reusable plastic container system	Germany	**Dry snacks** (e.g. nuts, dried fruit and banana chips)	CU Mehrweg partnered with snack brand Seeberger to pilot a reusable plastic snack cup system across 18 REWE Südwest stores. Consumers pay a €0.50 deposit per cup and return it via standard deposit machines.
		Buddie Pack project - reusable sealed trays in stores	France, Belgium, Poland – with pilots in major cities and Carrefour hypermarkets	**Ready meals**	Customers purchase ready-to-eat meals packaged and sealed in reusable trays from the catering section of the supermarket, paying an additional 1€ deposit for each unit. Once they return their trays to a collector machine in-store, they receive a 1€ voucher.
Return-on-the-go	Personal care and home care	SEA ME - skincare products in reusable packaging	Germany and Austria	**Personal care products**	"Zerooo" is a German startup focused on reusable packaging systems, particularly in the cosmetics industry, which aims to replace single-use containers with ones designed for repeated use.
		Reposit x Beauty Kitchen	UK	**Personal care products**	This collaboration allows customers to drop off their empty packaging at any UK Holland & Barrett store or to mail them back via the Beauty Kitchen website. Customers are then given a discount on their next purchase.

Return-on-the-go	Ready to eat food	GRIN	Norway (Oslo, Trondheim), Netherlands	**Takeaway, beverages, other grocery items in prefilled packaging**	GRIN have developed a digital return system for packaging, focused initially on the takeaway sector, but adaptable across other packaging and products types.
		EINFACH MEHRWEG containers	Germany	**Takeaway food/grocery items/salad bars in supermarkets**	An open, deposit-based reusable packaging system for food retail, where customers borrow containers or cups for a small deposit and return them via reverse vending machines or store checkouts.
Return-on-the-go	Grocery carrier bags	Återpåsar - returnable grocery bag	Sweden	**Grocery carrier bags**	Returnable is a Swedish project led by Axfoundation, bringing together retailers including Axfood, Coop, ICA, Lidl, and Svenska Retursystem, to develop a deposit-based "borrow bag" for home delivery and in-store shopping.
		LoopTas	Netherlands	**Grocery carrier bags**	LoopTas runs a circular shopping bag program where customers borrow a reusable bag for a small deposit at participating supermarkets. If the customer brings their own bag they earn reuse points that can be exchanged for discounts or donated to charity.
Return-on-the-go	Fresh produce (e.g., mushrooms, berries)	Reusable mushroom trays pilot in Mechelen	Mechelen, Belgium	**Fresh produce** – specifically mushrooms under 1.5 kg (Complies with EU PPWR ban on single-use for <1.5kg produce)	Reusable blue mushroom trays launched in Mechelen supermarkets, coordinated by Reusable Packaging Coalition.
Return-on-the-go	Homecare Products	M&S x Reposit	UK	**Homecare products** (e.g., cleaning sprays, laundry detergents, fabric conditioners,	M&S partnered with reposit to launch 'Refilled,' a pre-filled, returnable packaging system for own-brand homecare products in selected stores. Customers return empty bottles to the same M&S store after use and a QR-enabled return point or kiosk facilitates automated voucher issuance.

				and washing-up liquids)	
Return-from-home	Dry food	Refill Coalition x Ocado	UK	**Dry goods** (e.g. oats, rice, cereal)	Ocado's reuse pilot uses durable vessels for dry goods that are delivered pre-filled and returned empty to the driver for cleaning and reuse.
Return-from-home		Yoyo Grocery	UK	**Dry goods** (e.g. oats, rice, cereal, pulses, tea and coffee)	Yoyo delivers organic groceries in reusable packaging, which customers return by post for cleaning and reuse
Return-from-home	Personal care and home care	Refill Coalition x Ocado	UK	**Home care products**	Ocado's reuse pilot uses durable vessels for detergents and fabric conditioners that are delivered pre-filled and returned empty to the driver for cleaning and reuse.
Return-from-home		Påfyll (Orkla)	Norway	**Laundry products, soap, shower gel, dish washer soap**	Laundry products are delivered in bulk, solid rigid plastic packaging (branded Påfyll), with customers refilling dispensers at home and returning empty containers via 3rd party logistics services (Helt hjem).
Return-from-home	Beverages	Milk & More doorstep reuse system	UK	**Milk, milk alternatives, and juices**	A doorstep delivery and collection reuse model where consumers receive milk and other beverages in reusable glass bottles, and empties are collected at the next delivery round.
Refill-on-the-go	Dry goods	Albert Heijn Refill dispensers	Netherlands – starting in Rotterdam, with planned rollout to stores in Amsterdam, Leidschendam, and others.	**Dry goods** (e.g. muesli, pasta, nuts), also **other food products** like dried tea, coffee beans and also **spreads**.	Customers refill their own containers in-store using smart dispensers. Trial began at Albert Heijn XL Rotterdam, with reusable jars and bags and the tareless weighing system, and plans to expand to 50 stores.
		Carrefour Refill Stations in-store refill stations	France, Belgium, Poland	**Dry foods** (e.g. pasta, rice, cereals)	Refill stations integrated with Loop and Carrefour's sustainability strategy in France, alongside Swapp! refill stations in Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Krakow.

		Refill Coalition x ALDI in-store refill	UK	**Dry foods** (e.g. oats, rice, cereal)	In-store refill stations for dry goods using reusable bulk vessels, delivered through two systems: refill-on-the-go (in-store via Aldi) and return-from-home (online via Ocado).
		Miwa Prefilled Modules	Czech Republic (origin), Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, UK.	**Dry foods** (e.g. coffee, pet food, cereals)	MIWA's prefill containers are smart, reusable capsules for B2B and B2C use. The polypropylene containers are vacuum-sealed for hygiene and shelf life and inserted directly into modular dispensing systems to avoid direct food handling.
Refill-on-the-go	Liquid personal and home care products	Carrefour Refill Stations in-store refill stations	France, Belgium, Poland – with pilots in major cities	**Home and personal care products**	Refill stations integrated with Loop and Carrefour's sustainability strategy in France, alongside Swapp! refill stations in Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Krakow.
		Algramo's in-store refill stations	South America - started in Chile	**Homecare products or bulk food products** - e.g. washing powder or food staples such as lentils and beans.	Algramo operates a pay for product not packaging model, offering affordable quantities of everyday products without single-use packaging by leveraging smart technology, dispensers, and containers. After their success in Chile, Algramo's system is being scaled through partnerships with Walmart, Unilever, Nestlé's Purina, with pilot programs in the US and Indonesia.
		Body shop in-store refill system	UK	**Personal care products** e.g. shampoo, shower gel, handwash	The Body Shop has an in-store refill system for personal care products where customers purchase a reusable aluminium bottle and refill it at participating locations often at a lower price per ml than buying new plastic bottles.
		Re Smart Bottles	UK	**Personal care products (body care to makeup)**	Reuseable steel, glass, or plastic bottles - bought empty of prefilled (additional £2) with personal care products; returned for deposit refund and reuse. When the empty bottle is returned, the consumer receives a £2 coupon for their next Re Bottle purchase.

		Ecourage	Norway	**Liquids - food grade and non-food grade**	Ecourage provides a smart refill system using NFC-enabled reusable containers, combining modular refill stations with digital tracking to enable refill verification, product customisation, and customer incentives.
		Fyllar	Netherlands, Norway, Oslo	**Homecare products – liquids,** in Norway own brand Vilje (UNIL)	A branded refill pouch system using standardised pouch sizes for in-store refilling only. re Customers purchase a refill pouch and bring it back for repeat refills, supported by closed-fill technology, RFID-enabled smart caps for product–container matching and traceability, touchscreen selection, automated leak-free dispensing, and modular refill stations suitable for a range of liquid products.
Refill-on-the-go	Frozen food products (frozen fruit, vegetables, pastries, fish)	Fieldfare	UK - Kent	**Frozen food products** (fruit, vegetables, fish, pastries, ready meals, desserts)	A refill-on-the-go system which started with 'scoop your own' frozen fruit and vegetables, now includes pastries, desserts, fish, and ready meals.

A.5.0 Refill Coalition Case Study

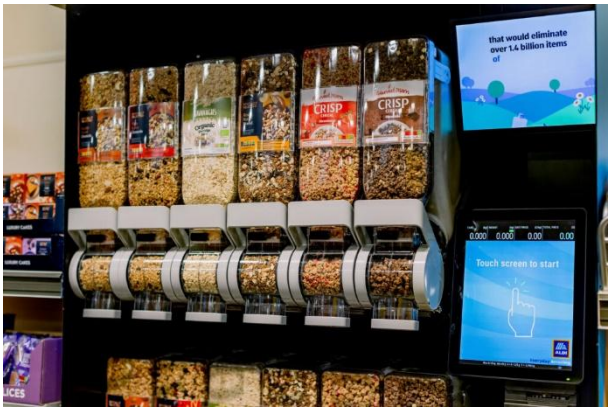
Although this guideline focuses primarily on prefill return-on-the-go systems, we also highlight the experience of the Refill Coalition in the UK. Their work is one of the most advanced real-world tests of refill-in-store and return-from-home grocery reuse, demonstrating how standardised refill and return models can operate at scale across both physical retail and online channels. Their results offer valuable insights for any reuse system, even those focused on prefilled packaging.

The Refill Coalition[48] - led by GoUnpackaged[49] with Aldi UK instore, Ocado Retail Ltd online, CHEP; a supply chain solutions company, and UKRI Innovate UK - was established to design and test standardised, scalable reuse systems for dry goods and household products across both in-store refill and online return-from-home systems.

In-store trial (Aldi UK) [50]

Two Aldi stores piloted reusable vessels installed in refill stations, replacing single-use packs for cereals and other dry goods, see Figure 6-1. Customers refilled their own containers with Aldi pricing refill options ~5% cheaper than packaged equivalents. Refill products regularly achieved 30% sales share (peaking at 56%). Staff found vessels quick to refill (around one minute), with opportunities to improve cleaning logistics and introduce tare-less weighing. Customer feedback was highly positive: 97% found the system hygienic and 89% found it easy and quick to use.

Figure 6-1. Example of a Refill Station in an Aldi Store



Online return-from-home trial (Ocado) [51]

Ocado tested returnable vessels delivered with customers' online orders and returned empty to the driver. Products included pasta, rice, detergents and fabric conditioner. The system integrated smoothly into existing operations, achieving an 86% return rate despite no deposit being charged. Average sales shares were 13% for dry goods and 19% for liquids, reaching up to 43% at peak. Customer satisfaction was extremely high, with nearly all users finding the system clean, hygienic and easy to order.

Environmental performance

- Life cycle assessment found that a breakeven points of between 5 and 20 rotations (uses) in the online system and 20 rotations in the in-store system, for the number of rotations needed for the reusable packaging items in order to perform better, environmentally, than the single-use alternatives, with the manufacturer of all vessels estimating that each vessel has a lifespan of at least 60 uses.

[48] The Refill Coalition
[49] GoUnpackaged | Imagining & Delivering the Future of Reuse
[50] The Refill Coalition
[51] The-Refill-Coalition-Key-Learnings-for-Industry.pdf

A.6.0 Existing Reuse Infrastructure in Saskatchewan and Canada

Canada has a long history of reuse, beginning in the 19th century with deposit-return systems for beer bottles and widespread door-to-door milk delivery in reusable glass containers. These early models functioned as true closed-loop systems, with dairies collecting, washing, and redistributing bottles daily. Reuse also became embedded in the beer industry[52] through standardized refillable bottles, most notably the 341 ml "stubby" introduced in 1961, which was designed for durability and multiple rotations. Although consumer preference shifted toward long-neck bottles in the 1980s, Ontario's Beer Store continues to operate one of North America's strongest refillable systems, with refillable bottles used up to 15 times and still representing the majority of beer containers sold in the province[53].

Canada's reuse landscape has expanded rapidly in recent years, with a growing number of startups and service providers offering reusable packaging solutions across both B2B and B2C segments. Although most activity is concentrated in major metropolitan areas, several models and services provide a foundation that Prairie retailers can learn from or potentially partner with. Existing infrastructure can be grouped into five key categories: **B2B reuse services**, **consumer-packaged goods reuse systems, food-service reuse programs**, **beverage return systems**, **return services** and **washing and logistics networks**.

Business-to-business (B2B) reuse businesses:

- **ReThink BioClean (Regina, SK)** [54]**:** A Saskatchewan-based- company, ReThink BioClean operates Canada's first janitorial liquids refillery. They provide mobile refill systems for cleaning, personal care, and laundry supplies to hospitality and restaurant businesses. Clients receive customized refill schedules, equipment, and 24/7 on-demand- service. Originally founded in Saskatchewan, ReThink BioClean now also serves BC, Alberta, and Manitoba—making it one of the only Prairie-rooted reuse businesses operating at scale.

Reuse for Consumer-Packaged Goods:

- **Circulr (Toronto, ON)** [55]**:** Circulr partners with CPG brands to operate a reusable glass jar system. Packaging is collected from consumers, washed, and returned to brands for refilling. Their model includes consumer deposits, digital tracking, and incentives through the Circulr app. While not Prairie-based, Circulr demonstrates a scalable, brand-aligned reusable packaging loop that could be replicated regionally.

- **Reposit (Ottawa, ON)**[56]**:** Reposit is actively expanding its reuse-as-a-service model in Canada through a major city-wide reusable packaging initiative in Ottawa, developed in partnership with the Consumer Goods Forum's Plastic Waste Coalition of Action. The first phase of the programme, which is focused on personal and home-care categories, has completed its design phase and is now preparing for implementation in Q1 2026, bringing together leading retailers and CPG brands such as Walmart, Loblaw, Unilever, L'Oréal, and Procter & Gamble to co-design a standardized, pooled

[52]Schulz, Peter, Bill Lockhart, Carol Serr, Bill Lindsey, and Beau Schriever. 'A History of Non-Returnable Beer Bottles'. Society for Historical Archaeology, February 2019. https://sha.org/bottle/pdffiles/NRBeers.pdf.
[53]'Bottle Bill'. Accessed May 15, 2025. https://www.bottlebill.org/legislation/canada/ontario.htm
[54] ReThink BioClean. Accessed May 15, 2025. https://rethinkbioclean.com/about/
[55] Circulr - Responsible Packaging Reuse Program
[56] https://reposit.world/news

packaging system. The pilot features a return-to-store model supported by incentives like "return for reward," with a strong emphasis on consumer-centric design, operational efficiency, and building the reuse infrastructure required for scale. By establishing a unified, data-driven reuse platform, Reposit aims to lower system costs, simplify logistics, and accelerate Canada's transition toward circular packaging solutions.

Food Service Reuse Programs including Container and Cup schemes

- **Reusables (Vancouver, BC)** [57]**:** Reusables provides durable stainless-steel food containers and coffee cups to restaurants and food-service operators. Customers pay a small fee, return containers within two weeks, and receive refunds via a digital platform. Containers can be returned to any participating business. Washing occurs onsite at restaurants using existing dishwashers. Reusable's have partnered with companies throughout Canada such as UberEats, in Vancouver[58] and Canadian grocery retailers Metro, Sobeys, and Walmart Canada throughout Ottawa, through the Canadian Innovation Council.[59]

- **Friendlier (cross multiple cities, BC, ON and QC**) [60]: Friendlier operates a deposit-return system for reusable food containers across more than 200 drop-off locations. Customers scan a QR code to initiate their deposit refund, and Friendlier handles the washing, sanitization, and redistribution. Their breadth of container formats and growing network make this one of the largest reusable food container systems in Canada.

- **Suppli (Toronto, ON)**[61]**:** Suppli supports restaurants and delivery platforms with stainless-steel reusable containers. Customers have two weeks to return containers to city-wide drop-off bins to receive a deposit refund. Suppli partners with over 100 restaurants and more than 35 return locations.

- **Share Wares (Vancouver, BC)** [62]**:** ShareWares provides reusable alternatives for food businesses and event operators, including collection, washing, and inspection services. Businesses pay a deposit and wash fee, and ShareWares manages container return, cleaning, and customer deposit refunds.

- **Muuse (Toronto, ON and Banff, AB)**[63]**:** Muuse supplies reusable dishes and drinkware for events, providing staff training, signage, return stations, and post-event washing. This demonstrates an event-based reuse model suitable for high-volume, controlled settings.

- **BoPAQ (Montreal, QB)**[64]**:** BoPAQ provides reusable packaging to restaurants, cafeterias, and event caterers. Two models exist: a free program where businesses do their own washing, and a deposit-based program where BoPAQ handles reverse logistics and cleaning.

- **Retournzy (Montreal, QB)**[65]**:** Retournzy provides reusable food containers, utensils, and cups to restaurants, caterers, and events. Retournzy also offers washing services.

---

[57]'Reusables'. Accessed May 15 2025. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) | Reusables: Your Sustainable Solutions – Reusables.com
[58] Uber Eats, "Uber Eats Partners with Reusables.com for Sustainable Packaging in Vancouver," Reusables.com, June 15, 2023, https://reusables.com/en-us/blogs/news/uber-eats-partners-with-reusables-com-for-sustainable-packaging-in-vancouver
[59] Reusables.com. "Canadian Grocers Join Forces with Reusables to Tackle Single-Use Plastic Waste." February 6, 2024. https://reusables.com/blogs/news/canadian-grocers-join-forces-with-reusables-to-tackle-single-use-plastic-waste
[60] Friendlier. "For Businesses." Accessed May 15, 2025. https://www.friendlier.com/for-businesses.
[61] https://mysuppli.ca/
[62] ShareWares. "For Businesses." Accessed May 15, 2025. https://www.sharewares.ca/for-businesses.
[63] Muuse."Reuse, the Smart Way." Accessed May 15, 2025. https://www.muuse.io/.
[64] Bopaq. "Bo | Emballages Réutilisables." Accessed May 15, 2025. https://www.bopaq.com/.
[65] https://retournzy.ca/en/our-products/

- **La Vague (QB)[66]:** La Vague provides reusable food containers and cups to restaurants and cafés as well as institutions like universities and hospitals.

Beer industry:

- **The Beer Store (ON)** [67,68,69]**:** The Beer Store operates one of North America's most successful reuse systems for beverage alcohol packaging. They manage returns of bottles, cans, kegs, and secondary packaging, including items sold outside Beer Store locations under the Ontario Deposit Return Program. In 2024, they diverted over 92,000 tonnes of beer packaging and more than 84,000 tonnes of ODRP containers from landfill, with refillable glass bottles used up to 15 times before recycling. Their model demonstrates a highly efficient, province-wide reuse ecosystem built on standardized packaging, strong logistics, and widespread return points.

Return services:

- **SARCAN (SK)** [70]**:** As previously mentioned SARCAN operates 73 depots across 65 communities, making it one of the most extensive return networks in Canada. With a return rate of 86.5% and over 10 billion containers recycled to date, SARCAN is a trusted, community-embedded system with strong logistics and processing capabilities. While currently focused on beverage containers, its infrastructure and public familiarity position it as a strong potential partner for Prairie grocery reuse systems, including return-on-the-go models.

Washing and logistics networks:

- **National Wash Network:** The National Wash Network is a network made up of businesses throughout Canada that operate commercial washing facilities and provide logistical solutions and services for reusable packaging programs to a variety of business types. The four founding partners of the National Wash Network are ShareWares; who service the Metro Vancouver area, BoPAQ; who service the greater Montreal region, Muuse; who service the greater Toronto Area, and Earthware Reusable Inc; who serviced Calgary and Edmonton but have since closed, with further expansion expected soon.

- **BOXSYS (Canada):** BOXSYs are a container cleaning and maintenance solutions provider for the food, beverage, pharmaceutical, automotive, and retail industries throughout Canada. In the food and beverage industries BOXSYS offers washing solutions for plastic containers.

---

[66] https://la-vague.ca/
[67] The Beer Store. 2025. *Better Returns 2025*. Accessed June 10. https://www.thebeerstore.ca/api/images/wyfly6ekgxs8/iWBPhfbjRKdi59a01lr65/aab8780b7428ea4435a0a6eb55f0f3d4/BetterReturns_2025_8.5x11__1_.pdf.
[68] The Beer Store. 2025. *Stewardship Report 2024*. Accessed June 10. https://assets.ctfassets.net/wyfly6ekgxs8/7zqyljjOioQMKcrPxlvrqO/fcdc39ecb56d7607a470fcd95afe7008/StewardshipReport2024_SinglePages.pdf.
[69]The Beer Store. 2025. "Every Container Counts." *The Beer Store*. Accessed June 10. https://www.thebeerstore.ca/return-empties/every-container-counts.
[70] 'SARCAN Recycling'. Accessed 15 May 2025. https://sarcan.ca/about-sarcan/our-impact/

A.7.0 Policy Enablers for Scalable Reuse in the Prairies

Scaling reusable packaging systems across grocery retail in the Canadian Prairies (SK, MB, AB) requires coordinated enabling policy across federal, provincial, and local level. Canada currently has no legally binding reuse targets, clear definitions or minimum system requirements. Existing provincial EPR frameworks (BC, SK, MB, ON, QC, NS, NB) remain recycling-centered and treat reusable packaging the same as single-use, charging fees by material/weight without recognising reuse or differentiating reporting obligations. As a result, there is no regulatory incentive for retailers, brands, or system operators to invest in reuse at scale.

Three overarching policy needs stand out:

- **Harmonised definitions** - Clear, harmonised definitions of reuse, refill, reusable packaging, rotations, ownership models, and sanitisation requirements are foundational. Currently, neither Canada nor Saskatchewan legally define reuse, creating uncertainty for retailers and washing operators and leaving room for inconsistent claims or greenwashing. Nationally aligned definitions would provide the conceptual backbone needed to integrate reuse into food safety rules, EPR systems, and municipal permitting processes across the Prairies.

- **Harmonised and binding reuse targets** - Binding, category-specific reuse targets are critical to shift the market beyond single-use and unlock investment in shared washing and reverse logistics infrastructure. Canada has no federal reuse targets, and Prairie provinces do not include reuse obligations within EPR systems. Introducing harmonised Prairie-wide targets (e.g., beverages, deli/ready-meal containers, takeaway serviceware) would create the predictable volume required for economic viability of pooled container fleets and regional washing hubs. Targets must be tied to transparent reporting and verification to avoid nominal compliance.

- **Minimum system requirements**—covering material durability, sanitisation, traceability, consumer information, and performance measurement—would ensure that emerging systems are safe, interoperable, and credible. These requirements would help create a level playing field across operators and between provinces.

The additional recommendations below outline the types of regulatory action and pathways that would further support system-wide adoption.

A.7.1 The Federal Role in Enabling Reuse

National Standards for Reusable Packaging

Federal leadership can accelerate market confidence by establishing Canada-wide standards for reusable containers covering durability, material specifications, formats, washing, and food-safety requirements. Momentum is already growing: CSA Group, in partnership with PR3, has begun publishing a series of binational reusable-packaging standards, starting with the August 2025 standard on washing, inspection, and handling of reusable containers. ECCC is actively engaged in the development of these standards. These standards, recognised by the Standards Council of Canada, form a strong foundation for a national approach.

Harmonized Food Safety and Sanitation Regulations

Health Canada could issue reuse-specific food safety guidance or amendments clarifying how reusable packaging systems can comply with federal food-safety rules. Clear expectations around sanitisation validation, allergen segregation, contamination control, and supply-chain responsibilities would reduce uncertainty for operators and improve enforcement consistency. A relevant precedent exists in the U.S., where the FDA updated its federal food code to explicitly support reusable and refillable containers in grocery, foodservice, and event settings—helping unlock market-wide adoption.

A.7.2 The Provincial Role in Enabling Reuse

Canada's EPR systems are provincial, and all provinces (BC, AB, SK, MB, ON, QC, NB, NS, YT) currently classify reusable packaging as "obligated packaging," requiring producers to report units placed on the market and pay EPR fees with no recognition of reuse. Unlike jurisdictions such as the EU or California, the Prairies have no mandatory reuse performance standards.

Reform EPR Rules

Saskatchewan's current EPR rules do not yet distinguish reusable from single-use packaging. Instead, all household packaging is regulated identically under the Household Packaging and Paper Stewardship Program Regulations (2023) and the new SK Recycles full EPR program. In practice, this means reusable packaging currently receives no regulatory recognition, financial incentive, or differentiated reporting treatment in Saskatchewan, despite its potential to reduce waste. Integrating reuse into EPR frameworks is therefore a critical policy opportunity across the Prairies.

Provincial Reuse or Refill Targets

Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta could introduce voluntary or binding reuse targets for certain product categories, aligned with broader EPR requirements. Well-designed targets can help create predictable market demand and volumes for washing facilities and reverse logistics hubs, providing the investment certainty needed to scale reuse systems. A similar approach has been adopted in the European Union, where binding reuse and refill targets have been introduced within packaging regulations to support the development of shared reuse infrastructure.

Licensing and Standards for Washing Facilities

Provincial ministries of health could introduce standardized licensing for commercial reusable-packaging washing facilities, with compliance demonstrated through recognised technical standards such as those developed by CSA Group in partnership with PR3. A consistent licensing framework covering sanitation processes, traceability, and inspection would reduce regulatory uncertainty and support consistent enforcement. This would enable safe, scalable washing services across regions, while increasing confidence among retailers, producers, and reuse system operators.

Enabling Reverse Logistics Infrastructure

Effective reuse systems depend on reliable, low-cost reverse logistics to move empty packaging from consumers back to washing and redistribution facilities. Provinces can play a key role in reducing costs and enabling scale by supporting multi-use infrastructure rather than fragmented, single-operator solutions. This includes enabling multi-retailer aggregation hubs, depot-based return systems (e.g., SARCAN), and shared transportation networks. Provinces could support this by:

- Allowing return-from-home integration through recycling collection frameworks, enabling reusable packaging to be returned alongside established kerbside or depot services where appropriate.
- Offering grants or tax incentives for high-efficiency reverse-logistics projects.
- Supporting innovation zones or pilot programmes that allow reuse systems and reverse logistics models to be tested under real-world conditions, helping de-risk investment and inform longer term regulatory design.

Alignment Across Prairie Provinces

Interoperable reuse systems are more likely to succeed if policies are harmonized across SK, MB, and AB, given shared supply chains, long transport distances, and overlapping retail markets across the Prairies. Alignment can help minimize duplication, reduce logistics and compliance costs, and avoid inefficiencies that would otherwise be passed on to consumers. Cross-provincial working groups could coordinate container standards, deposit and return rules, collection requirements, and sanitation guidelines, reducing fragmentation for reuse operators. In the context of ongoing cost-of-living pressures, harmonised approaches that support shared infrastructure and efficient supply chains will be particularly important to limit cost impacts on households while enabling multi-retailer and multi-provincial reuse systems to scale.