We’re calling on Whole Foods to ditch single-use plastic packaging

By Alex Truelove, director of PIRG’s Zero Waste Campaigns

Whole Foods can set a bold example and reduce harmful plastic waste by eliminating single-use plastic packaging from its stores.

Without decisive action, especially from major corporations such as Whole Foods, the amount of plastic waste polluting our communities and environment will only continue to grow.

Right now, our country throws out enough plastic every day to fill 1.5 football stadiums. Worldwide, plastic waste outweighs all land and marine animals combined.

Currently, Whole Foods is not living up to its reputation as a sustainable, environmentally conscious company—due in large part to its continued use of wasteful, single-use plastic packaging. So Maryland PIRG and our national network are mobilizing thousands of citizen advocates to call on Whole Foods to move beyond plastic and help turn the tide on our waste crisis.

At Maryland PIRG, we know that when everyday people organize around commonsense solutions to our shared problems, we can make real change. That’s why, this past summer, our national network knocked on more than 24,000 doors across the country (including 1,500 here in Maryland), talking to people like you about slashing plastic waste.

Members like yourself had already helped fuel a digital organizing push that saw 59,000 people, including more than 40 state lawmakers, add their voice to a petition urging Whole Foods to take bold action on plastic. And now your support is helping us take the campaign to the next level.
Whole Foods can do better

Last year, a report gave Whole Foods an “F” on reducing plastic waste. Why? The company has failed to embrace reusable packaging and recycled content, and it hasn’t been transparent about the packaging materials it uses or taken responsibility for the plastic waste its packaging becomes. That puts Whole Foods behind even Walmart and Kroger when it comes to leadership on reducing plastic pollution.

Such a disappointing grade is certainly surprising for Whole Foods. At one point, the grocer was a prominent leader on cutting out unnecessary plastic, from eliminating plastic bags at checkout in 2008 to removing plastic straws from its stores in 2019.

The good news: Whole Foods can make a huge impact on this issue if it acts right now and sets an example on plastic waste reduction that others in the industry can follow.

We need all hands on deck to tackle plastic pollution

There’s no denying our plastic waste crisis is a daunting one. But as bad as plastic pollution has gotten, there remain concrete, achievable solutions we can enact to move our country beyond plastic and toward zero waste.

PIRG knows what it takes to get decision-makers to act on plastic pollution, and in cities and states across the country, our national network has won efforts to reduce waste, including pro-recycling laws and bans on some of the worst single-use items such as plastic bags and polystyrene foam containers.

Now, we’re turning our focus to include the corporations that produce and use all this plastic in the first place—and companies big and small are already starting to move in the right direction. Regional grocer Giant Eagle has committed to eliminating single-use plastics by 2025; Target has announced a goal to reduce its use of virgin plastic 20 percent by 2025 across its own brand frequency products; and the Coca-Cola Company (the world’s top plastic polluter according to a global audit by the nonprofit Break Free From Plastic) has pledged to use bottles made with 100 percent recycled plastic for certain brands in some states.

Of course, none of these commitments are “silver bullets” to our plastic waste crisis. They’re good starts, but if we hope to pass on litter-free communities and a healthier planet to future generations, we need to go bigger.

That’s where Whole Foods comes in. A nationwide commitment to get single-use plastic packaging off its shelves would be a landmark step toward moving our country beyond plastic.

In our United States Against Plastic rally last April, PIRG and Environment America went on a virtual road trip to discuss policies to combat the plastic pollution crisis.

Our Mission

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, Maryland PIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. Maryland PIRG’s mission is to deliver persistent, results-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

RIGHT TO REPAIR

President Biden signs executive order supporting right to repair

The right to repair our stuff—without having to pay an arm and a leg to the manufacturer—used to be the status quo. Now, thanks to a presidential executive order, right to repair is on its way back.

President Joe Biden’s July 9 executive order called on the Federal Trade Commission to limit software locks on farm equipment and compelled the agency to prohibit “anti-competitive restrictions on using independent repair shops or DIY repairs of your own devices and equipment.”

In the span of a few years, PIRG, the independent repair hub Repair.org, and the online repair community iFixit have helped propel right to repair from online forums and local fix-it-yourself clinics to state legislatures—and now even the White House.
“This is great news for everyone concerned with repair monopolies. It shows that the Right to Repair campaign is moving forward and winning new support,” said Nathan Proctor, PIRG’s Right to Repair senior campaign director. “Already, the majority of American people agree with us. Now, it appears, the president does as well.”

**PUBLIC HEALTH**

**The results are in: Laws to reduce the overuse of antibiotics work**

The routine use of antibiotics in agriculture puts us at greater risk of antibiotic-resistant infections, which kill up to 162,000 Americans every year. But Maryland’s new law to address this pressing threat is showing promising results.

In 2019, Maryland PIRG helped pass a law that has driven down antibiotic use on farms across the state. We hosted a webinar on June 18 to break down the results of the Maryland Department of Agriculture’s first annual report on antibiotic use in agriculture, thank state Sen. Paul G. Pinsky and state Del. Sara N. Love for their co-sponsorship of Maryland’s Keep Antibiotics Effective Act, and discuss ways to reduce medically unnecessary antibiotic use even further.

“Maryland’s law is the strongest in the country, and Maryland farms have demonstrated that reductions in antibiotic use for animals is possible,” said Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr. “We hope that other states will use Maryland as a blueprint to reduce antibiotic use and reserve these lifesaving medicines for when people and animals need them most.”

**DEMOCRACY FOR THE PEOPLE**

**Maryland electoral reforms go into effect without governor’s signature**

Maryland is taking major strides toward a fairer, more accessible democracy.

In May, several Maryland PIRG-backed electoral reform bills went into law without Gov. Larry Hogan’s signature. The new policies will increase student and military voter participation, expand access to early voting, improve the state’s mail-in voting system, and reduce the influence of wealthy donors and corporate interests in our elections by updating and fully funding the small donor public campaign financing program for the gubernatorial race. Most of the bills passed with significant bipartisan support.

As the federal For The People Act stalled in Congress, Maryland implemented many of the bill’s provisions on the state level—providing an example to other states for how to improve our elections right now.

“Democracy works best when we all participate and everyone’s voice is heard—in Maryland, the 49 other states and in Washington, D.C.,” said Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr. “Instituting these electoral reforms is a powerful way to ensure we have a government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

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**BE AN ADVOCATE FOR MARYLAND’S FUTURE**

Support our work in the public interest by including a gift to Maryland PIRG or Maryland PIRG Foundation in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: plannedgiving@marylandpirg.org
Bayer to remove toxic glyphosate from Roundup

As Bayer plans to reformulate its weed killer Roundup, the company has a chance to finally ensure its product is safe—but only if it doesn’t just replace one toxic chemical with another.

After a federal judge rejected a proposal in May to resolve future claims that Roundup causes cancer, Bayer has now announced it will remove the weed killer’s main active ingredient, glyphosate, which has been recognized as a probable human carcinogen since 2015.

Thousands of people have made legal claims that using Roundup caused their non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. And years of organizing, activism and public pressure, fueled by members like you, has helped make this progress possible.

“A product we use for lawn care shouldn’t put us at risk of developing cancer,” said Danielle Melgar, advocate for PIRG’s toxics campaigns. “We’re calling on Bayer to reformulate its product the right way with chemicals that don’t pose risks to human health.”