



## **Sophie Guillin, Director of the Guillin International Group, speaks**

# **'Packaging regulation: common sense and a scientific, not ideological approach are needed'**

Packaging continues to be at the centre of the debate, particularly with regard to the packaging regulation. On the subject, Sophie Guillin, General Manager of the Guillin Group, has clear ideas.



"First of all, I would like to say that we are totally in line with the objectives of the regulation, which are virtuous and in line with what we have always defended at Guillin Group level. The very idea of a regulation is a very good thing, because it will finally lead to harmonisation, which is the only way to stop dealing with things on a case-by-case basis and to have real visibility so that we can invest with greater peace of mind. It is also a guarantee that there will be no over-transposition, as has happened in France and other European countries. The approach is therefore more than commendable and I would like to welcome an ambitious and structuring text'.

"On the other hand, I have very mixed feelings about the proposed strategies and, above all, about the possibility of achieving these goals. Packaging cannot be isolated from its primary functions and it is absolutely necessary to assess the impact not only of the packaging itself but also of its contents. We believe that the impact study carried out is not very robust, and this is a widely shared opinion. Finally, many aspects of implementation will be left to delegated acts, which will therefore be decided unilaterally by the European Commission, without discussion in Parliament, with the risk of counterproductive measures because they are far removed from the daily reality of European citizens: beyond the democratic issue, this adds uncertainty. Finally, a regulation cannot ban packaging that complies with the terms of the regulation itself'.

She says: "Regarding the status of the European packaging regulation, everything is still under discussion, but we have to admit that it is rather complex. To date, of the four parliamentary committees charged with drafting the text, three have already published their contributions, making significant, realistic and positive changes. However, we are very concerned about the direction the last committee in charge of finalising the text is taking. It is still working on the changes but, based on the information we have received, does not seem to take into account the work of the other committees and is reverting to unjustified dogmatic positions. The European Council plans to vote on 24 October, and the plenary vote in the Parliament is scheduled for 20 November. For its part, the European Council expects to reach a text in December. There will then be the so-called 'trialogue' to define the final text by May 2024, which will be a compromise of the three texts approved by Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

"This is an overly tight timetable. I deplore the fact that this text is coming at the end of the mandate: it is clear that debates are being held in a hurry and in the context of an election campaign, with Parliament eager to vote on this text before the next elections... when everyone would benefit from a calmer debate. The result is counter-proposals that pit materials or re-use solutions against single-use, not in the interest of the consumer or the environment, but of special interests.

Take for example mandatory recycled content levels for plastics: apart from PET, which is suitable for food contact, this is currently impossible for other resins. Why should these obligations only apply to plastics and not to other materials such as glass or cardboard? This is clearly unfair treatment and a violation of the level playing field.

In any case, for our part,' Sophie Guillin continues, 'we are doing a lot to try to change things at the parliamentary level, to make parliamentarians aware of the real impact of the various articles: we must do everything we can to remove

certain bans and have amendments adopted on certain obligations, in particular on the issues of reusability and the incorporation of recycled materials, for which we must get reasonable and realistic values accepted. We are undertaking numerous actions, in collaboration with other actors: partners, customers, suppliers, associations, etc. We are a company that offers 100% recyclable packaging solutions, single-use or reusable, in cardboard, pulp or plastic: we are legitimate in what we say and what we do. Our goal, as experienced and professional manufacturers, is to do everything we can to ensure that the actions we take ultimately have the least possible impact on both the environment and the end consumer'.

'Take Article 22 and the ban on single-use packaging for fruit and vegetables weighing less than 1.5 kg: first of all, apart from watermelons, who buys more than 1.5 kg of fruit? More seriously, this measure overlooks the purpose of packaging: to reduce waste for farmers and food waste for retailers, while ensuring hygiene and health safety for consumers. The measure also forgets to analyse the real relevance of the proposed alternatives: with cartons, water consumption increases dramatically; the cost of packaging increases by 30%, which is problematic at a time of inflation; it is also impossible to incorporate recycled material; food waste has increased by 58% among producers and 30% in shops... but above all, we know that the fruit and vegetable sector is subject to the vagaries of the weather, which means that volumes can vary significantly. The ability to adapt to this great constraint is only possible with plastic. And why, for some obscure reason, should producers be forced to implement solutions that generate food waste and additional environmental and financial costs? How can we expect to end up with an obligation to market solutions that unnecessarily increase the final selling price in an inflationary environment? I dare not even think about it'.

"Plastic and paper in fruit and vegetable packaging can co-exist! We should not oppose materials or uses, but rather offer the right packaging for each use. This is the philosophy of the Guillin Group. From the point of view of marketers, it must be understood that it is not easy to make the purchasing, marketing and CSR departments work together, sometimes with very contradictory instructions! That is why the Guillin Group has invested in certified life cycle analyses, using Simapro software, to compare our products for equal use.



*Sophie Guillin*

In general, plastic is the only material that allows optimal product preservation and guarantees strict and standardised hygienic conditions: there is less deterioration and less rot due to the accumulation of water in the carton. "But you also have to look at the details: raspberries in a cardboard box will crush, like all fragile fruits, whereas a cardboard base around a melon makes sense, especially from a presentation point of view. But let's not forget that we are currently facing a ban on all packaging!

On the research front, the Guillin group is very active. "Innovation is in our DNA. Our aim is to reconcile the multiple needs of our customers and to offer the best product at the best price for its use. Specifically, the fruit and vegetable sector today uses a lot of single-material plastic packaging that is 100 per cent recyclable. This packaging is optimised, and this is our know-how within the Guillin Group: reduction of stacking distances, reduction of thickness, eco-design to optimise functionality; in the end we have fewer tonnes than cardboard or other packaging, and the packaging waste is 100% recyclable.

"For many years we have pursued a policy of constant innovation, investing between 5% and 8% of our turnover each year; but even more markedly, we have established priority areas for development. We are innovating at all levels: design and functionality, new materials, development of recycling channels, but many of these eco-design-led projects are still reserved. Whatever happens, we will be able to support our customers in any situation, whether it is a change, a transition or not,' she concludes.

For more information:



## Groupe Guillain

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