

Evaluation of a plastic-free/loose fresh produce trial



Morrisons Supermarkets - member of The UK Plastics Pact and Courtauld Commitment 2025

Background

Established in 1899, **Morrisons** is the fourth largest UK supermarket with 494 stores serving 12 million customers every week. Over 100,000 colleagues work across its stores, head office, manufacturing, logistics, online and wholesale operations. Morrisons is also the second largest fresh food manufacturer, owning 18 fresh food manufacturing sites across the UK.

Key facts

- 'Reducing plastic packaging' was ranked the second most important issue to Morrisons customers in Morrisons 2018/19 corporate responsibility customer insight survey.
- 'Reducing, reusing and recycling the plastic we use' forms one of Morrisons 10 key focus areas for its corporate responsibility programme.
- According to research by the British Growers' Association ProduceView Spring/Summer 2018, Morrisons had the highest percentage of loose fresh produce of any major retailer, with 21% of its fresh produce SKUs sold without any packaging.



"Less loose produce gets thrown away, because I'm not buying as much. When there's only one or two of you, it doesn't always get eaten if you have to buy a large pack. I have been making a conscious effort - it's a waste of money for starters, then the environment, it's just waste ..."



About Morrisons

Morrisons was a founder member of The UK Plastics Pact, a collaborative industry agreement to ensure that all plastic packaging will be recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025. Morrisons has also committed to reducing own brand plastic packaging by 25% by 2025.

Morrisons is also dedicated to reducing food waste from farm to fork and has been a Courtauld signatory since its inception in 2005. Morrisons is committed to reducing its operational food waste by 50% by 2030 (2016 baseline).

Introduction

The Government's current Environment Plan introduced its policy to achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042. One of the aims is to reduce the amount of plastic in circulation through reducing demand for single-use plastic.

WRAP has been working closely with retailers to explore plastic-free/loose supermarket aisles and has supported a leading UK retailer, Morrisons, to evaluate a plastic-free/loose fresh produce trial in its store in Skipton, North Yorkshire.

Background

In June 2018, responding to customer requests to make it easier and more accessible to buy fresh produce loose, Morrisons began its first trial of a dedicated area within Market Street for customers of its Skipton store. The aim was to understand the impact on customer demand, costs and waste.

WRAP and DEFRA supported an evaluation of the impact of selling more fresh produce lines plastic-free/loose by examining customer, colleague and supplier opinion in terms of satisfaction, attitudes and behaviour.

The trial involved making several significant changes including:

- Increasing the number of fresh produce lines sold loose
- Changing the way fresh produce was merchandised
- Displaying loose vegetables in wooden crates and creating chalkboard signage to enhance the 'market feel' of the aisle
- Replacing plastic bags with recyclable brown paper bags for customers to use for loose fresh produce
- Removing plastic wrapping from cucumbers during the summer season
- Changing the price of some fresh produce lines from £ per kilo to per unit



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Example of changes in-store:



Observation

Trial store
Comparison store

Customers

Depth interviews
Accompanied shops

Staff

Depth interviews
Survey

Suppliers

Telephone
interviews



Approach/Method

Qualitative research consisted of several elements, summarised in the diagram above. The approach included a comparison store, Congleton, to provide a point of reference when exploring findings arising from the trial store, Skipton. Morrisons supplemented this with quantitative research of Skipton store customers using an online questionnaire.



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Results/impact – a positive story...

The findings from the research suggest that the trial has been successful in many ways and overall, customers like the plastic-free/loose experience.

1. Most of the customers interviewed say they prefer to purchase loose fresh fruit and vegetables; and the greater selection of loose fresh produce is encouraging many customers to purchase more loose produce and less packed produce.

Out of 48 respondents surveyed in Skipton, three-quarters said they prefer to buy loose fresh produce. A further 13 out of 14 customers in the Congleton store also said that they prefer to purchase loose fresh produce. In the Morrisons Skipton customer survey, out of 443 people asked, 72% said they preferred to buy loose fresh produce.

2. Customers say they prefer loose fresh produce as it allows them to purchase the quantity of fresh produce that they need, and to select fresh produce that meets their requirements/standards in terms of size, quality and condition.

In the Morrisons Skipton customer survey, out of 712 people asked, the top three reasons for customers who said they preferred to buy fresh produce loose, for doing this were:

- I can choose the size/ condition (95.5% agreed/ strongly agreed)
- I can buy the exact quantity I need (93.8% agreed/ strongly agreed)
- It doesn't have plastic packaging (86.1% agreed/ strongly agreed)

3. There is a small group of customers that is less likely to choose loose fresh produce due to a perception that loose fresh produce is more expensive than packed; packed being quicker/easier to pick up when in a rush; and a perception that packed fresh produce is cleaner/more hygienic.

In the Morrisons Skipton customer survey, out of 249 people asked, the top three reasons for customers who said they preferred to buy fresh produce packaged, for doing this were:

- Quicker/more convenient (65% agreed/strongly agreed)
- Cheaper (38.8% agreed/strongly agreed)
- Cleaner/more hygienic (31.1% agreed/strongly agreed)

4. Customers reported that purchasing loose fresh produce has potentially reduced food waste occurring in the home.

Overall, customers participating in the research believe that they have less food waste when they purchase loose fresh produce. In the Morrisons Skipton customer survey, out of 471 people asked, 59.4% of customers who said they preferred to purchase fresh produce loose said they wasted none of the produce (tomatoes, carrots, apples, onions, potatoes & broccoli) they purchased, whilst 55% of customers who said they preferred to purchase packaged fresh produce claimed to waste nothing.



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The reported reasons for this are as follows:

- Customers claim they purchase in smaller quantities (compared to when they purchase packed fresh produce);
- Customers are purchasing loose fresh produce with the expectation of consuming it in the next two to three days;
- Customers can choose which items they want and ensure that they are satisfied with the condition.
- Some customers commented that they felt plastic packaging made fresh produce 'sweat' and it deteriorated more quickly.

5. Loose fresh produce tends to be a more 'considered' purchase.

The research has highlighted that the shopping experience is very different for customers when purchasing loose fresh produce compared to when purchasing packed. For example: customers report spending more time looking at and touching loose fresh produce to ensure that it meets their requirements in terms of size, quality and desired specification.

6. Customers buy lower quantities of fresh produce, more frequently.

Customers commented that having the option to buy loose has led them to purchase fresh produce in lower quantities at a time, but more frequently. Customers mentioned selecting fresh produce that will be consumed in the next 2 - 3 days, before doing a top-up shop.

Key Learnings

1. Robust process developed to ensure food waste in-store was kept to a minimum

Food waste was 2.7 times higher at the start of the trial versus pre-trial. However, through improved store processes and management, waste returned to average levels within a few weeks.

2. Position and aesthetics are key

The layout and aesthetics of the aisle contribute towards customers purchasing more loose fresh produce.

Customers held very positive views about how the aisle looks, commenting that the fresh produce looks more visually appealing in the wooden crates, which encourages customers to purchase loose fresh produce.

The positioning of the aisle as the first in the store is also likely to have an impact on purchasing decisions, 'encouraging' customers to view and 'consider' the purchase of the loose fresh produce before seeing the packed fresh produce.

3. Customer demographic consideration

The typical customer demographic in the Sipton store is older families and seniors with relatively higher levels of affluence and time to shop. Increased loose fresh produce aisles might not be as successful in areas where customers prioritise price and convenience.



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4. Increased communications to ensure greater customer participation

Morrisons had a number of in-store communications at point of sale to encourage purchase of loose produce - through chalkboard signage and explaining changes from plastic to paper bags to the removal of plastic sleeves on cucumbers.

More communication to tell the story of why Morrisons is increasing loose fresh produce options and storage advice to help to further reduce food waste in the home could support more customer participation.

Next steps

Following the success of the 10-month plastic-free/loose fresh produce trial in Skipton, (and in stores in Guiseley and St Ives), Morrisons will be rolling out the initiative to 60 stores by the end of 2019. Morrisons estimates this initiative alone will save over three tonnes of plastic per week, equating to 156 tonnes a year.



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