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 MASSPIRG 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 MASSPIRG, 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 11,000 here in Massachusetts), 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.

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. But this past summer, a MASSPIRG report titled “What Bay Staters are Fixing” demonstrated the hurdles consumers currently face when trying to repair their devices.

Now, thanks to a presidential executive order propelled by PIRG’s work, right to repair is on its way back. President Joe Biden’s July 9 executive order called on the Federal Trade Commission to prohibit “anti-competitive restrictions on using independent repair shops or DIY repairs of your own devices and equipment.”

“This is great news for everyone concerned with repair monopolies. It shows that the Right to Repair campaign is moving forward and win-
NING new support,” said Nathan Proctor, PIRG’s Right to Repair senior campaign director.

MASSPIRG Executive Director Janet Domenitz added, “The Massachusetts Legislature could even go further to strengthen repair rights by passing bills to give Bay Staters more ability to repair their devices.”

DEMOCRACY FOR THE PEOPLE

MASSPIRG calls on Legislature to modernize elections

Massachusetts has a chance to improve how we vote, and hundreds of Bay Staters have made it clear that we want our leaders to take it.

On May 11, MASSPIRG, along with partners in the Election Modernization Coalition, organized a virtual lobby day in support of the VOTES Act, which would institute election-day registration and expand mail-in voting, among other reforms. The event drew more than 150 citizen advocates and featured bill sponsors state Rep. John Lawn and state Sen. Cynthia Creem.

“Our coalition of advocates, attorneys and community organizers says it’s well past time for major improvements in the way we vote in Massachusetts,” said MASSPIRG Executive Director Janet Domenitz in a July 2 op-ed.

“With passage of the VOTES Act, we’d be lifting up the commonwealth’s founding values of liberty and democracy in a manner truly worthy of a Boston Pops fireworks celebration.”

The bill received a favorable committee vote in July, and MASSPIRG is now calling on the full state House and Senate to pass it.

BAN TOXIC PFAS

Raising awareness on toxic PFAS, the ‘forever chemicals’

Massachusetts has a lot to learn about toxic PFAS “forever chemicals.”

That’s why, on July 13, MASSPIRG and Clean Water Action joined U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern and state Sen. Jo Comerford for a webinar about PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). A bill to ban toxic PFAS from carpets, rugs, furniture textiles, cookware and personal care products is under consideration on Beacon Hill. And this summer, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection found that 50 public drinking water systems exceeded the new state guidelines for PFAS.

MASSPIRG Legislative Director Deirdre Cummings outlined what our lawmakers can and must do to address the problem. “Given how long PFAS chemicals last and what we know about their harmful effects, we should stop using them,” she said.

“It’s simply not worth risking exposure to these chemicals. We know we will need to clean up the damage already done—but unless we turn off the tap, the health and environmental risks will continue to compound.”

Support our work in the public interest by including a gift to MASSPIRG or MASSPIRG Education Fund in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: plannedgiving@masspirg.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.”

Roundup, and generic versions of it, is the most widely used herbicide in the U.S.—despite being linked to cancer.