

To: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
From: Jeanne Roy, Board Chair, Eco-School Network
Date: February 14, 2023
Subject: SB 545, Legalize Reusables for Food

As parents who desire to live lightly on the planet, we strongly favor SB 545, which directs the State Department of Agriculture and Oregon Health Authority to adopt rules allowing consumers to take their own containers to stores for grocery shopping and to restaurants for leftovers.

Our understanding is that in 2012, the ODA adopted the USDA's law preventing customers from bringing in their own reusable containers to restaurants and grocery stores. This law is unnecessarily cautious and creates undue burden on both the customer and stores that wish to sell in bulk.

Almost one-third of solid waste in the US is made up of packaging, and the packaging industry continues to grow. Much of this waste is single-use plastic, which is likely to remain in the environment longer than we do. Or if it becomes litter, it could be carried by the wind to waterways and make its way to the ocean contributing to a mass of plastic debris. Many food items now come in mixed materials like resin-impregnated paper, such as deli boxes and frozen-food cartons, or plastic-aluminum, such as candy, snack bars, and chips. There's no way to recycle such packages.

All this packaging waste is visible, but the upstream costs to the environment are even greater. Consider the raw materials that are needed for packaging: petroleum that must be drilled, bauxite and iron that must be mined, trees that must be cut. Then we must consider the manufacturing processes that use enormous amounts of water and energy and produce air and water pollution.

We urge you to take one small step to reduce this harmful packaging. Pass SB 545.