

## **Category: 06. Public Affairs Campaign**

**Entrant Company: apetito and Wiltshire Farm Foods**

**Entry Title: EPR Legislation Lobbying Campaign**

### Entry Text

apetito UK is the leading frozen meal producer in the health and social care sector, operating across both B2B and B2C markets with a passion for “making a real difference”. Our B2C business, Wiltshire Farm Foods, is the UK's largest home delivery ready meal brand, operating nationwide via 65 depots and making thousands of deliveries to customers every week.

In 2021 we introduced a world-first industrial-scale closed-loop recycling system for meal trays. This recycling system, “Project Boomerang”, involves collecting washed, used meal trays directly from customers and sending them back to our specialist recycling facility in Durham. Here, 100% of the trays are recycled into brand new trays which are then distributed back to the business for use.

The proposed Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) packaging legislation comprises of several core components, designed to shift the costs of waste collection and recycling that enters kerbside collections away from local authorities and back onto producers, an ambition we completely support.

However, it became apparent that under these proposals, our business would be unfairly taxed as if placing all plastic waste into kerbside, which, through our closed-loop recycling system, it is not. In fact, our system after just two years of operation demonstrates better collection and recycling results than current kerbside collections – we collect around 50% of our trays, vs. only 38% collection rate through kerbside, and we recycle 100% of those collected, vs. just 47% through kerbside.

The unjust penalisation of this innovative scheme that is “doing good” for the environment led to launching apetito's first ever political lobbying campaign against the Government's proposed EPR legislation.

### **Objective**

When launching this lobbying campaign, our objective was clear and simple – to influence the opinion of relevant and necessary stakeholders in Government in such a way that would secure an exemption from EPR for our closed-loop recycling scheme and others like it, should they exist.

Were we subject to being unfairly taxed, we would have no option but to pass these costs on to the consumer at a time when consumers could least afford it due to other cost of living pressures.

To achieve success with this lobbying campaign, we knew a multi-faceted approach was required to provide consistent and strong engagement reaching the key decision makers within DEFRA.

### **Method**

The first step in the campaign was contacting over 600 UK MPs on a personal basis, raising our relevant concerns with the proposed EPR legislation, how it would negatively impact our scheme and the resulting increase in costs to the consumer. We asked for their support in writing to the Secretary

of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the matter. In addition, we invited those MPs in which a Wiltshire Farm Foods depot resides in their constituency for a visit at the local site.

Undertaking this level of personalised engagement was no mean feat, requiring significant resource and exceptional organisation from our team in a time sensitive manner – as we knew the laying down of the legislation could be imminent.

In addition to this outreach, we drove significant media coverage throughout the campaign. In April we took the decision to launch a national press campaign to support our campaign with an aim to influence opinion and raise further profile for our concerns. As well as that, following each MP site visit a press release was written for local press to reinforce the political support on a local level and increase awareness of our recycling system.

Fostering strong political connections during this campaign led to debates on the matter being held in both Westminster Hall (by Dame Nia Griffith on 5th April) and the House of Lords (by Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville on 5th June), both of which specifically referenced *apetito* and Wiltshire Farm Foods and highlighted key points of our campaign.

We then went one step further and hosted our own ‘drop-in’ session within the House of Commons, sponsored by Sir Charles Walker MP. Considerable work was carried out to ensure the session was memorable and influential to our cause. All MPs were again contacted personally with an invitation to the session, and we created a suite of bespoke materials to use including informative leaflets and a photo opportunity board for MPs to showcase their support.

To drive maximum attendance at the HoC session, we orchestrated for members of staff at every Wiltshire Farm Foods site across the UK to write to their local MPs, reiterating our key concerns with the legislation and asking for their support in attending the drop-in session. This approach, whilst a significant undertaking to execute, boasted extreme success of over 150 written letters reaching 89 MPs, driving numerous MPs to attend on the day.

As a result of this pro-active internal push, the overall attendance of this event exceeded our expectations, resulting in many positive conversations and even a visit from Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons. In Sir Charles’ own words “I have never seen so many people attend an event of this nature”.

## **Results**

In total, our outreach successfully resulted in positive engagement from circa. 50 MPs nationwide and 21 MP visits were carried out at depots across the UK over a four-month period, leading to a raft of support and stream of communications with DEFRA.

In addition, our campaign gained significant levels of media coverage including in five national titles and over 120 local/regional titles, two interviews on BBC Radio 4 Today Programme and a ‘Letter to Editor’ published within the Financial Times – a total reach of 1,060,630,423.

Following this intensive lobbying, Paul Freeston (Chair and CEO) and Lee Sheppard (Director of Corporate Affairs, Policy, and Sustainability) of *apetito* were invited for a meeting with Rebecca Pow MP, Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience. This led to DEFRA advising that it is now looking to incorporate pre-existing closed-loop recycling schemes that are driving better results than

kerbside collections into EPR legislation – the exact outcome that we were striving for (evidenced within supporting materials).

Achieving our desired objective highlights the true success of this campaign and is a testament to the dedication and hard work demonstrated by the team. Importantly, this change in the policy will result in an estimated saving of £500k-£1 million p.a. for the business due and means that no additional cost will have to be passed on to consumers.

A secondary outcome of this campaign is that it has significantly raised apetito's political profile regarding work in sustainability and environmental policy and built significant ongoing political relationships that can be drawn upon moving forward.

Total budget spent was c. £13,000