

# CASE STUDY: RICH PRODUCTS



## COMPANY

*A food company committed to transforming their packaging for circularity.*

In 1945, Rich Products was born when its founder Robert E. Rich, Sr. created the world's first non-dairy whipped topping. Over the next 75 years, Rich's has pioneered many of the food industry's most game-changing products, setting – and resetting – a new benchmark of success. From Rich's Whip Topping – dubbed the miracle cream from a soya bean – to acquisitions, international expansion, and continued innovations, the company hasn't slowed down since.

Rich's has participated in sustainability work for the last 12 years through its energy and water efficiency projects, and established a more formal sustainability strategy in 2020. Rich Products is committed to scaling change and advancing a circular economy through partnerships. Working together to close the loop – from strengthening recycling infrastructure to giving new life to materials.



**RICH FAMILY  
FOUNDATION**



# CHALLENGES

*Rethinking the entirety of packaging including the life cycle of the material used for packaging and the product within.*

Thinking about how to evolve packaging requires partnership with customers, suppliers and industry bodies. Packaging must not only facilitate transportation and storage of a variety of items in a variety of environments; above all it must preserve the food safety, integrity and shelf life of its contents.

# SOLUTIONS

In order to meet our goals at Rich's, we've created design guidelines in partnership with our packaging engineers and procurement, established responsible sourcing standards for paper-based packaging and set recyclability criteria for new packaging we buy. These design guidelines get after barriers and design for the change that we and our customers want to see and achieve.

Within our Desserts and Bakery portfolios we've replaced black plastic dessert bases with clear plastic ones, because we know recycling facilities can have difficulty detecting and sorting darker pigments in plastics. Focusing on ways to optimize materials and lessen our plastic usage, we partnered with our packaging and machine suppliers to reduce the plastic content in trays and film for various pastries, which we expect to cut over 8 metric tons of plastic waste per year for our U.K. operation. Another example is our switch from a square to a "scround" pail (think square + round) for a frozen food item, which not only reduced the amount of plastic needed, but made it easier to stack on the shelf—a benefit to customers—and had the added environmental impact of requiring less energy to freeze the product inside. We're also exploring new packaging formats, such as modified atmospheric packaging that can extend product integrity, as well as intelligent packaging that can communicate remaining shelf-life to operators and consumers. This is linked to our commitment to halve our food loss and waste by 2030 as a member of the 10x20x30 initiative.

# RESULTS

Ultimately, organizations need to be accountable for their entire supply chain. This can be overwhelming given the breadth and complexity of where our food comes from and how it is made, but corporations have the power—and an obligation—to do the work. It helps to start with what is in your direct control: the packaging you buy and how you make design choices for products. 75% of our plastics packaging in the U.S. and Canada is technically or widely recyclable. We also know that deciding what to recycle can be complicated for the consumer, so we're taking the guesswork out labeling such as How2Recycle™ and On-Pack Recycling Label. Sustainable innovation is the future of food, and we're working at Rich's to make that future a bright one.

“

Understanding where that starting line is grounds establishing opportunities and goals as we work towards making progress for the future.



**Rich's actions and results have been reported within the framework of The WNY SBR's Recognition Program, a continuous improvement program structured to help businesses reach achievable sustainable targets. The program encourages companies to implement a comprehensive sustainability plan. This includes systematic benchmarking, identifying further environmental efficiency opportunities, and quantifying results when improvements are put into place.**

**For more information please contact:**

Njohri@rich.com or 716.878.8000 (Buffalo)  
www.richs.com/ourimpact/responsibility/  
health-authenticity-sustainability  
info@wnysustainablebusiness.org

Funding provided by the Environmental Protection Fund as administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

©2021 WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable. Any opinions, findings, and/or interpretations of data contained herein are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the opinions, interpretations or policy of Rochester Institute of Technology and its NYS Pollution Prevention Institute or the State.