

# Purchasing unpacked products

## Results of a customer survey



The amount of plastic packaging used for food and cosmetic products has been steadily increasing over the years.

*„80 % of participants say they refrain from buying products with a lot of packaging.“*

Dr. Frieder Rubik,  
sustainable consumption expert at the IÖW

Consumers in Germany attach great importance to reducing packaging when shopping. However, only few take advantage of unpackaged food options. There is also a lack of transparency regarding packaging produced prior to sale. In order to avoid or reduce packaging in supermarkets, active commitment on the part of retailers and transparent guidance from policy-makers are necessary.

### Customers are increasingly aware of the need to avoid packaging

In the last 25 years, the use of plastic packaging has doubled. A study by the Institute for Ecological Economy Research which included more than 1,200 participants showed that consumers are very much aware of the problem of increased plastics use. 99 % of respondents say that less packaging would be sufficient for many foods, and 97 % support offering unpackaged foods in grocery stores. Nevertheless, customers lack more detailed information on the production of plastic packaging: 87 % of respondents would like to see more transparency from retailers regarding packaging generated during production, delivery and storage.

### Reducing packaging is also a major task for producers, retailers and policymakers

In the above-mentioned survey, 76 % of respondents believe that consumer actions are important for reducing packaging waste, e.g. through purchasing goods in recyclable packaging. However, business and politics also bear responsibility: 97 % of respondents indicate that manufacturers should be held accountable. Moreover, 87 % of respondents point to retailer responsibility and 95 % believe politicians also need to work towards reducing packaging volumes.

The amount of packaging influences the purchase decision. 80 % of respondents stop buying products that are overly packaged.



Photo: @PickPik

## Research on business models for plastic waste reduction.

The survey on shopping habits surrounding unpackaged products was carried out as part of the project "Business Models for Reducing Plastic Waste along the Value Chain: Paths to Innovative Trends in Retailing" (Innoredux). The aim of the

survey was to determine the extent of consumer acceptance of omission of plastic packaging as well as the potentials offered by unpackaged goods. In the further course of the project, packaging saving innovations will be tested and evaluated in a living laboratory.

## The advantages and constraints of purchasing unpackaged goods

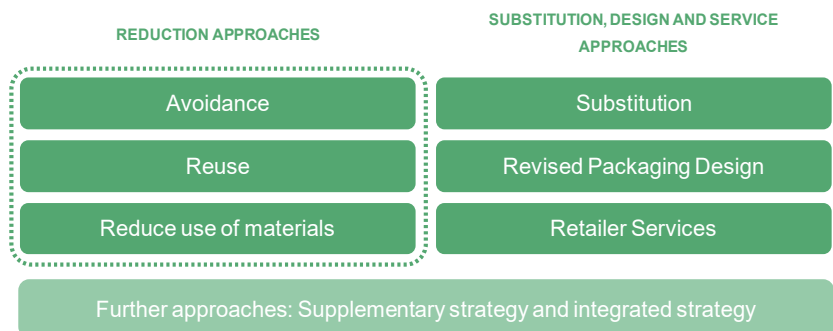
In addition to saving plastic, the benefits of purchasing unpackaged goods also include increased purchases of regional products and/or organic foods. In addition, customers tend to only buy what they need, thus counteracting food waste. In order to make it easier to buy unpackaged goods, existing barriers such as distances to stores that offer unpackaged goods, higher prices and a smaller product selection should be addressed.

More and more customers are turning to unpackaged foods in order to avoid plastic packaging altogether.



Photo: © Monika Stawowy on Pxhere

The Innoredux project identifies solutions for sustainable packaging. Avoiding packaging is a priority of the German federal government.



Source: © Innoredux

## IMPRINT

**Authors**  
Marken, Gesa, Rubik, Frieder


**Institution**  
Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW)

**Contact**  
frieder.rubik@ioew.de

**Design**  
Lena Aebli, Ecologic Institute

**Status**  
March 2021

[www.bmbf-plastik.de/en](http://www.bmbf-plastik.de/en)

 @plastik\_environment

This fact sheet was prepared as part of the research focus „Plastics in the Environment“ (duration 2017-2022), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The authors are solely responsible for the contents of the fact sheet. They do not reflect the official opinion of the BMBF.

Marken, Gesa; Rubik, Frieder [2021]: Purchasing unpackaged products: Results of a customer survey. Fact sheet 3 of the BMBF research focus „Plastics in the Environment“.