



# TRENDS REPORT

2021 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



FOODSERVICE PACKAGING  
INSTITUTE\*

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## INTRODUCTION

Every year, the Foodservice Packaging Institute conducts a survey to gather information about the latest trends in the industry. The 13th annual survey, sent in September 2021, asked members to share their opinions on the following topics:

- Foodservice packaging.
- Raw materials used to make foodservice packaging.
- Machinery used to convert foodservice packaging.
- Foodservice distribution.
- Foodservice operations.

The survey includes responses from the entire value chain in North America, including:

- Raw material suppliers.
- Machinery suppliers.
- Converters.
- Foodservice distributors.
- Foodservice operators.

The results of the survey were compiled to create FPI's "2021 Trends Report." This year's 18-page report contains two sections: a compilation of member submissions and the top trends based on FPI staff analysis of members' submissions and other general industry observations. The report is available for all FPI members. Highlights from the 2021 Trends Report are included in this Executive Summary.

Please contact Ashley Elzinga, Director, Sustainability and Outreach at [aelzinga@fpi.org](mailto:aelzinga@fpi.org) with any questions.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If 2020 was the “year of acceleration” then 2021 has been the “year of amplification.” We thought 2020 was wild, but this past year has been filled with cost, supply, logistical and labor challenges that have exceeded the nightmare predictions of our pandemic-riddled year, along with a large focus on delivery and curbside pick-up.

The main theme for 2021 is the increased business costs seen across the board. Whether due to logistics, labor shortages, storm-ravaged supplier disruptions, rising inflation or all of the above, the continued volatility associated with costs and pricing have affected the entire value chain. Nothing remains untouched. It’s a near-constant battle of short supply and heavy demand. Transportation issues ranging from the importing of materials and packaging, to driver shortages and long wait times are commonplace. The availability of materials and products — including raw materials, machinery, foodservice packaging or the food items being served in those packages — have all been held hostage at one point or another by labor shortages. These shortages, seen as a pandemic within a pandemic, are expected to remain for the foreseeable future.

For those respondents who can focus beyond the supply chain woes, the disruptions of the pandemic era have created new and amplified growth opportunities. Advancing in the foodservice arena at rapid paces across multiple sectors is technology. There’s new technology specifically for the delivery and takeout space; meals may be delivered over the counter to a customer in minutes, travel in a car, robot or drone for 30 minutes, or it may sit in a heated or cooled locker for an extended period of time. Foodservice packaging plays a central role in delivering quality products to customers, especially as more channels involve less human interaction. The package sometimes becomes one of, if not the first and only interaction a customer may have with a particular brand, making it even more important that a packaging product has the ability to perform across a number of applications while fulfilling a variety of needs.

Amid a confluence of legislative and consumer concerns, the conversation around sustainable packaging has come back to the forefront. As we continue to navigate the pandemic, recyclable, recycled content, compostable, reusable and bio-based are the five key phrases we see and hear when discussing sustainable packaging. We know tamper-evident and tamper-resistant packaging remains in demand, but the conversation around end-of-use recovery options for that packaging is also on the table. Cost is still top of mind in packaging selection, but more and more operators are searching for packaging that checks all of the boxes.

We continue to navigate these ongoing effects of the pandemic as only the foodservice packaging industry can. We are confident that this year of amplification and disruption will also bring new growth and opportunities. We’ve proven through these difficult times that our industry is resilient and ever-evolving to meet the needs of foodservice operators and their customers — pandemic or not.