

## **Wegmans Silicone-Coated Liner Recycling Case Study**

### **Program Overview**

Wegmans Food Markets, Inc. is a regional supermarket chain with stores located in the eastern U.S., primarily across the Northeast. As a large private grocery retailer operating more than 100 stores, they are known for their commitment to quality and sustainable store operations, including Zero Waste goals. Wegmans has initiated numerous waste reduction efforts, including store trials to segregate their silicone-coated release liner waste in order to recycle it into new fiber. Currently, Wegmans is collecting and recycling release liner at nine locations in New York, and by the end of 2025, the company plans to scale release liner recycling to 54 stores.

Silicone-coated paper release liner is generated from labels used in-store to mark prices on products (e.g., deli and prepared foods). Previously disposed due to incompatibility with the corrugated recycling stream, Wegmans searched to find a solution that could truly recycle this otherwise hard-to-recycle form of fiber waste to advance their waste reduction goals and increase diversion to more sustainable solutions than landfill.

### **Recycling and Aggregation Partners**

Today, Wegmans partners with Sustana Fiber, one of only two paper mill operators in the U.S. with floatation deinking systems that can effectively remove silicone from release liner and recover the fiber. Sustana Fiber has been recycling silicone-coated paper release liner for years at their two white fiber paper mills (one located in De Pere, WI, and the other in Québec, Canada), giving Wegmans confidence that their release liner is being truly recycled by an established end market.

Wegmans also identified Sustana Recycling, the brokerage arm of Sustana Fiber, as an aggregation partner. The Sustana Recycling facility in Buffalo, NY, (one of seven Sustana Recycling locations across the Northeast corridor) takes the waste silicone-coated paper release liner from Wegmans' distribution center for preprocessing, bales it, and transports it to one of Sustana Fiber's paper mills for recycling.

### **Store Practice**

As a retailer with a focus on efficient store operations, creating an internal recycling program that aligned with existing operations and minimal use of resources was essential to a sustainable program. Generated at different locations within their stores, small release liner collection bins are deployed to segregate the rolls of liner waste from other streams. As part of daily maintenance practices, these bins are collected and the rolls are put in repurposed banana boxes near the loading dock. When these boxes are full, they are loaded onto trailers and backhauled along with other damaged goods to a Wegmans distribution center that receives materials from other stores. The release liner from all

stores is further aggregated into larger repurposed watermelon gaylords. Once 10 gaylords are filled at the distribution center, they are sent to a Sustana Recycling facility that prepares the material for shipment to Sustana Fiber paper mills. Sustana Recycling reports the weights of the release liner so that Wegmans can factor it into their recycling tracking.

### **Key Highlights/Learnings**

- By placing small bins where the liner is generated, it is convenient and simple for store employees to take the correct action and segregate release liner from other waste.
- Repurposing other internally generated waste packaging, like banana boxes and watermelon gaylords, to serve as containment and storage for release liner waste requires no cost and conserves back-of-store space.
- By leveraging existing transport relationships and their own distribution center practices, Wegmans has built a cost and labor efficient reverse logistics system to aggregate material from diverse store locations – a highly scalable internal model.
- Currently, silicone-coated paper release liner is not tied to any fiber market indices, so Wegmans is not paid for their material, however, this may change if a market for the material develops. For now, the primary benefit of recycling is to offset high regional landfill costs and advance Zero Waste goals.
- The focus on sustainability and Zero Waste goals within Wegmans empowers their employees to find solutions for waste and drive further efficiency in their operations – a win for Wegmans and for the planet.