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ECOLOGY » MARKETS SAVE ENVIRONMENT, SHOPPERS SAVE CASH



PHOTOS BY FRANCISCO KJOLSETH | *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Lisa Hoagland, customer service associate for Harmons Brickyard in East Millcreek, loads up a customer's "Go Green" reusable bags. Harmons has reduced its ecological impact by 19 percent, according to a 2007 report by the Environmental Performance Group.



At all of its 13 stores, Harmons sends its cardboard boxes to a recycling company and then buys back paper bags that contain some of the chain's own recycled materials.

GREEN GROCERS

They've adopted reusable bags — even wind power.

By **DAWN HOUSE**

The Salt Lake Tribune

Jill Blevins makes it a point to bring along a reusable bag when she stops at Harmons Brickyard store. Her habit likely saves 800 plastic bags and the landfill 11 pounds of garbage from her shopping trips each year.

"Our dad is an old Navy man; we were taught whatever we pack in, we pack

out," Blevins said, pausing at the produce counter. "It's good that grocery stores are catching on to recycling, too."

Nationwide, businesses generate more than 90 percent of the solid waste, with one-third coming from product packaging, according to the Salt Lake City consulting firm Environmental Performance Group (EPG).

While Harmons has sold reusable

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Grocery

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shopping bags since the mid-1990s, newer designs and lower costs make them more practical. Instead of the old \$5 burlap bags or plastic mesh, the chain now sells \$1 stackable handle bags with wide, flat bottoms for easy packing. And the bags are washable.

Signs posted in stores and parking lots remind shoppers to bring their reusable bags. At Harmons, Smith's Food & Drug, Whole Foods and Sunflower Farmers Markets, shoppers get a small discount for each reusable bag they bring to the checkout stand.

Last spring, Utah-based Harmons sold or gave away 200,000 reusable handle bags, reducing the number of plastic bags by 3.9 million, according to EPG.

"When we first got started, we had to pay it forward, but as recycling businesses have sprung up, it's easier to participate," said company Vice President Bob Harmon. "The grocery industry as a whole has taken steps in the right direction, but in many ways we're breaking new ground."

Chainwide, Harmons reduced its water use by 40 percent and its ecological impact by 19 percent, according to a 2007 environment report by EPG. Those efforts were equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas production by nearly 15,000 tons, akin to removing 2,475 cars from the roads. Harmons also uses wind power for 5 percent of its energy use, and has installed skylights in new stores with dimmers that automatically reduce electric lighting on sunny days.

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Harmons has implemented pilot projects at its Brickyard and Bangerter Crossing stores with the goal of zero waste. Efforts are made even in employees' break rooms, where only ceramic plates, glasses and silverware are stocked, along with dishwashers, eliminating throwaway paper and plastic tableware.



FRANCISCO KJOLSETH | The Salt Lake Tribune

Sous-chef Adam Kanter, left, and assistant produce manager Lee Ensign unload a large crate of perishables to be turned into compost, at Harmons Brickyard in East Millcreek. The store sends produce and floral waste to the Salt Lake County compost facility.

In addition, the Brickyard store and Harmons floral distribution center in West Valley Center send produce and floral waste to the Salt Lake County compost facility.

Whole Foods Markets also sends its green waste to the landfill and to Wasatch Community Gardens to be turned into compost.

Among other recycling programs, the Whole Foods Highland Drive store has started

offering organic cotton reusable bags for bulk bin and produce items.

"We want our customers to get accustomed to reusable bags, even for fresh produce and items such as bulk flour," said store employee Kip Lente. "That saves even more plastic bags."

Smith's, the state's largest grocery chain, recycles 1 million pounds of cardboard from its 48 Utah stores each month.

And pallet wrappings and plastic bags, about 10,500 pounds each month, are sent to the Layton Distribution Center.

Several stores' parking lots also have bins for community newspaper recycling. Smith's commits one-third of the proceeds from the bins to Utah Food Bank. The bins last year generated \$20,000 for the organization.

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