**Plastics and packaging statement**

**Current Practice**

OrganicLea's **box scheme and stalls** reduce the negative impacts of packaging significantly - relative to other retailers - by receiving and selling the majority of produce loose. The produce is received in either:

- rigid, highly durable plastic crates which are re-used for many years;

- wooden crates which are reused by our market garden for shipping in-house or to external customers, or used as kindling for the solid fuel stove which heats our offices and classroom. (The ash is utliised in the garden);

- cardboard boxes, which are reused by our market garden for shipping in-house or to external customers, or composted on site .

The box scheme packs loose produce in paper bags which are returned by members for reuse, and are compostable and recyclable.

For hygiene reasons, some produce is sometimes packed separately in paper bags which are reuseable and recyclable.

The majority of the produce is sold loose on the stalls. Here customers have the option of utilising paper bags which are reuseable and recyclable, as well as reused plastic bags that other customers bring to the stalls. We sell a reusable OrganicLea tote bag printed on organic cotton.

OrganicLea's **Market Garden** dispatches most produce loose, in reuseable crates/ boxes as stated above. Some of our external customers require all produce to be transported in sealed packaging - either plastic or cardboard - in order to comply with their environmental health guidelines.

Easily damaged produce such as soft fruit and tomatoes is usually packed into punnets made out of either recycled cardboard or corn starch. Both can be returned for reuse and are compostable.

Our dried products - herbal teas, dried chillies etc - are sold in bags made of paper and plant-based starches, compostable except for the tin tie, which is recyclable. When making apple juices, wines and vinegars we reuse bottles that have been returned to us as much as possible.

**Plastics**

The use of "single use", non-compostable, petro-chemical based plastics in our operation is restricted, by both our market garden and our other suppliers, largely to highly perishable items. These are mainly leaves: salad, fresh herbs, kale, spinach etc.

When it comes to bagged greens that we buy from other suppliers, we collect and return these from suppliers who will accept and reuse them (and in turn we prioritise produce from these suppliers).

Since 2009 we have run a number of trials on plant starch bags as alternatives to plastic for our salads. Unlike plastic, this material "breathes" and with each trial, the resulting spoilage to the product we felt was unacceptable, given many of our customers would expect the leaves to last up to a week. Furthermore, our trials of selling loose salad **(in previous years)**  on the stalls resulted in a drop in demand and good salad having to be composted, as customers seemed to prefer a sealed "grab bag".

With leaves (like certain kales) that are hardy enough to survive not being bagged, we bunch them with rubber bands, and we are now using compostable packaging for the dried chillies and herbs we sell.

It is worth noting that "single use" plastic bags can often be effectively cleaned and reused; and that London Borough of Waltham Forest now takes plastic bags for recycling, although as noted before this is the " last resort" in the hierarchy of waste reduction.

**Future Developments**

We believe that, to a great extent, OrganicLea is fulfilling its Vision, Mission and Policy in relation to the environment, and that our approach to packaging is of a high standard, relative to the wider food system. A recent eco-audit of all our operations by *Three Acorns Eco-Audits* (2017) concluded that," Organiclea is one of the most environmentally responsible organisations, that we have eco-audited [for the City Bridge Trust]... Naturally as with any organisation there are still areas where improvements can be made".

With this in mind, we welcome constructive suggestions from members, customers and partners, as to how we could do things better. In particular we are interested reviewing any alternatives to single-use petrochemical plastics. However, for a successful review they have to *work* - that is, ensure that the product reaches the customer in good condition and with a reasonable life; and that the product is bought and consumed, rather than left on the shelf. All our food "waste" is composted and put back on to the land but, as growers, it is a saddening when we see leaves that we have invested much love and time in, in order to feed people, return to us unused and unwanted.

Ru, Tsouni, April 2019