

2.2.4. Mars Incorporated

Mars Incorporated is a privately owned US multinational company, well known for manufacturing confectionary such as Mars bars, Milky Way, M&M's, Snickers and Skittles. It also produces Uncle Ben's rice, Dolmio sauce, Pedigree pet food, Whiskas pet food, Wrigley's gum and more than 50 other global brands.¹ Mars declared its plastics footprint as 184,000 metric tonnes,² and was identified as the sixth-worst polluter, in the Break Free From Plastic 2019 Audit.³

Mars mentions collection and sorting systems as crucial to ensuring its packaging is reusable and recyclable, and acknowledges the need for 'the recycling and regulatory environment to evolve in significant ways'.⁴ However, the company does not expand further with details of how they would like to see the regulatory environment evolve; nor does it allude to the companies' responsibilities to collect the plastic they place on the market, nor call for over 90% mandatory separate collection of plastics in all markets.

Mars talks about the opportunity to develop new business models for reuse, and has pledged to have at least 10 reuse programmes in markets by 2025, although the New Plastics Economy Global Progress Report states reuse delivery models are only in place for a small proportion of its products.⁵ Like several other multinational companies, Mars is keen to highlight its current partnership with TerraCycle's Loop initiative as its primary foray into developing reuse models; however, how this initiative will be scaled up remains to be seen.⁶

Mars also committed to including 30% average recycled content across its portfolio of plastic packaging by 2025. While this is slightly further reaching than many other companies, the convenient use of the word 'average' indicates not every item of plastic packaging will contain at least 30% recycled content. The other concern here is that Mars currently says none of its plastic packaging contains recycled

content, and plans to achieve its target entirely based on chemical recycling - a false solution (see Box 3.1). This suggests Mars is primed to roll back on its voluntary recycled-content target without a significant technological breakthrough in chemical recycling.

Mars commits to making 100% of its plastic packaging reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025 - as do many other companies. However, it should be noted that it is starting from a current figure of 19%, and therefore has a lot of ground to make up. As part of this, the company is conducting research into biodegradable and compostable packaging materials; but its approach is unclear, and the proposed applications for these materials are unknown.⁷ Furthermore, Mars has missed these sustainability targets in the past; in 2007, it pledged to design its packaging to be 100% recyclable or 'recoverable' by 2015, but only managed to achieve 89% by the deadline.⁸

The company also pledges to eliminate single-use plastic straws by 2020,⁹ but appears to be replacing plastics with other single-use materials, such as paper. For example, in the UK in 2019, Mars replaced the plastic wrapper and carton in a Maltesers Truffles Treat pack with cardboard; in 2020, the company will 'test the use of more paper packaging materials where we can replace plastics with paper'.¹⁰

Finally, although Mars has announced targets of a 25% reduction in virgin plastics used in its packaging by 2025 (versus today's tonnages), this does not appear to be in terms of absolute reduction of the total number of single-use plastic-packaging units. Meeting this target seems to be heavily dependent on immature - and questionable - chemical-recycling technology.¹¹

Plastic pollution of a Mars Incorporated brand |

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References

- 1 Mars (2020) Made by Mars [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.mars.com/made-by-mars>
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- 3 Break Free From Plastic (2019) Branded vol. II: Identifying the world's top corporate plastic polluters. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.breakfree-fromplastic.org/globalbrandauditreport2019/>
- 4 Mars (2020) Plans to rethink our packaging, today [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.mars.com/sustainability-plan/healthy-planet/sustainable-packaging>
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Mars (2020) Sustainable packaging [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.mars.com/sustainability-plan/healthy-planet/sustainable-packaging>
- 8 Mars (2015) Principles in action: Summary 2015 [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/59229276/mars-principles-in-action-summary-2015>, p.4
- 9 Ellen MacArthur Foundation and UN Environment Programme (2019) The New Plastics Economy global commitment: 2019 progress report [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.newplasticseconomy.org/assets/doc/Global-Commitment-2019-Progress-Report.pdf>
- 10 Mars (2020) Plans to rethink our packaging, today [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.mars.com/sustainability-plan/healthy-planet/sustainable-packaging>
- 11 Ibid.