



# Recycling versus reuse: are they really so different?

As you know, at Upstream we are Team Reuse all the way, and we often talk about how, despite its image, recycling is not such a great solution to our waste or climate crises. And yet, recycling tends to get the spotlight while reuse is seen as niche or too nascent to take seriously as a scalable solution.

To get at what's up with these perceptions, we sat Recycling and Reuse down together to talk out their differences—and they learned quite a bit from each other.

How we typically talk about recycling	 <b>Recycling's POV</b>	<b>Reuse's POV</b> 
It's a system for collecting post-consumer packaging that accommodates all brands together	<b>Yep, that's us!</b>	<b>Hey, us too!</b> Really! ALL brands in one interoperable reuse system. In fact—if you're willing to share and think outside the box—we can even use the same system for recyclables and reusables.
We need to get containers back repeatedly and in high volume for the system to work best	<b>True</b> — so we set up a system to make collection easy everywhere, and now <a href="#">73% of Americans</a> have access to some form of recycling system.	<b>This used to be the only way to shop</b> and continues to be the business model for beverages around the world. But we keep hearing it's too hard to do this again in the US. We don't buy it! Plenty of companies working to shift us back to returnable packaging have demonstrated <a href="#">it's possible to achieve high return rates</a> .
We need public education campaigns to ensure people know how to participate	<b>This is key!</b> And that's why industry-funded organizations like <a href="#">The Recycling Partnership</a> support public education on how to properly recycle.	<b>See? Public outreach is entirely do-able</b> , and besides, the recycling industry already did it for us. Thanks to their outreach, people know how to separate out their waste and put it in a bin (especially if reusables and recyclables could be commingled in <a href="#">EPR and DRS programs!</a> ).
We need to invest in infrastructure for systems to work	<b>This is why we've been pursuing EPR policies</b> for packaging across the nation — it's time for producers to take on the cost of the system that collects their own packaging when consumers are done with it.	<b>Same here.</b> And hey, while we're raising money for recycling, let's raise money for reuse, too. We can even build one efficient system that allows for both, together. <a href="#">EPR &amp; DRS laws should have funding for reuse built into them.</a>

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It reduces climate impacts	<b>Yes! Well... maybe?</b> Kind of? Sort of? Like, <a href="#">recycling can deliver 30%</a> of the needed GHG reductions to meet the IPCC target of net zero by 2050 from the packaging sector. (If it's done flawlessly... in every household in America...).	<b>We've got the rest covered!</b> Reuse systems have the most carbon reductions of all packaging systems— <a href="#">up to 70%</a> — when done well. So we should probably be prioritizing reuse.
It creates jobs	<b>Yep!</b> Recycling creates an average of <a href="#">9 times more jobs</a> than landfills.	<b>Oh yeah? Reuse creates up to 30 times more jobs</b> than landfills — and they're <a href="#">way safer than recycling jobs</a> .  And what's more, reuse creates good green jobs that bolster the local economy. It is estimated that in a 300,000 resident city, a widespread reuse system can create 150-250 local jobs that can't be exported.
It requires buy-in from CPG brands	<b>Yep, and they're all for it!</b> Campaigns like " <a href="#">Every Bottle Back</a> " and " <a href="#">Recycle Right</a> ", plus all those ESG commitments, demonstrate companies' love of recycling.	<b>Yep,</b> and even though <a href="#">we outcompete recycling on every measure</a> , reuse hasn't been embraced as readily by CPG companies to date. Many claim consumers aren't ready for reuse, even though <a href="#">we know that's not true</a> .  But we do appreciate the innovative companies who are leading the way with reuse pilots, research, trials and commitments—and we hope to see more soon!

**Sounds like we're after the same big-picture goals... maybe we should team up!**

