

# Extrupet's listens to the market and installs its third food grade rPET line

Extrupet recently installed and commissioned its third food-grade line and is now supplying global brands from its premises in Johannesburg. **Food Review** spoke to Jiney Jutley about this exciting journey; what this installation means for recycling food-grade rPET in South Africa and the way forward.



The Phoenix PET Starlinger line

**Q:** Tell us how the installation of your third food-grade line has been going.

**A:** Wow, what a journey. The start of lockdown, at the end of March 2020, brought with it the arrival of our new Starlinger and all installation plans had to be pushed back to the end of the year, while lockdowns around the world took their course. We thankfully justified the arrival of the engineers from Europe over December 2020 and have been running the new line since end MARCH 2021.

**Q:** Much has been said about the flagship PhoenixPET® brand, which has grown into an rPET that we believe is now used commercially in 100% mineral water applications. Do all three of your food-grade lines use the same technology?

**A:** We currently have one Vacurema line and two Starlingers, all making food-grade rPET. Our total capacity now is just under 3 000 MT per month.

**Q:** The certification levels are remarkable, from BRC to ISO, FDA, EFSA, GRS. What is



The Phoenix PET Starlinger line

the driving force behind a rPET recycler being so focused on quality?

**A:** I think many of these requirements have come directly from our multinational partners that have global standards in place. We have been blessed to work with such wonderful partners over the last two decades and the quality standards are the output of these collaborations.

**Q:** Have you seen the recycling space change much with the advent of the pandemic?

**A:** We have seen pressure placed on the supply of raw materials, due to slower economic activity, but we did prepare for this in advance and thankfully are in a good position to keep our three lines running well into the future. However, the quality of the



# Three lines are better than one

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feedstock has become very important. We've noticed that it hurts the whole value chain when brand owners do not take a relevant position on how their packaging will be reused or recycled in a South African context.

**Q: What do you mean by relevant position?**

**A:** There needs to be an understanding of what is relevant in the specific geography that you are doing business in. Our reality in South Africa is that most of the raw material we use originates from landfill. Therefore, when designing packaging, brands need to understand how their packaging will be collected from landfill and whether there is value in the chain to make sure they are recycled.

**Q: But surely anything can be recycled?**

**A:** Unfortunately, that is not the case. From a 'green washing' perspective, anything can be recycled yes, but from a practical repurposing perspective, unless the packaging is designed well enough in advance, the packs are doomed to an end of life end up on the landfill or in our oceans. For instance, Sprite bottles are now clear instead of green, as brand owners have taken the correct steps to ensure that the bottles are designed better for greater recyclability. Coloured bottles have limited use and are harder to recycle. Although bottle design is progressing, the same cannot always be said about the labels on the bottle - that's another challenge entirely.

**Q: Do you have an example of this?**

**A:** There are many. For example, PVC and rPET shrink sleeve labels cannot be recycled in South Africa. They cause real problems on our line if they slip through our system. But it is not just that - brands need to understand the circular nature of their choices. Extrupet is constantly challenging the 'alleged' benefit of recycling shrink sleeve labels. It simply doesn't exist in South Africa or anywhere else in the world. Post-consumer recycling faces huge issues when processing rPET bottles with rPET or PVC labels. Polyolefin wrap-around labels are the preferred option as there is less adhesive, again reducing issues at the point of recycling. In an ideal world, no label would be preferred.

We are fighting hard to change this perception and along with PETCO, we're educating the industry - both converters and brand owners. However, it starts at the very beginning with packaging and bottle design. The design is imperative to the whole circular

economy and that's something the entire value chain needs to be aware of. Ribena is a great example of a company making a change and looking to improve recycling rates. They have redesigned the sleeves on their plastic bottles to prevent down cycling and ensure that more bottles are collected.

**Q: That's just incredible. I am sure many more brands will be taking this to heart and making sure their design choices have a circular view when implementing changes.**

**A:** I think that it's important to have the courage to talk about real solutions that are relevant to your geography and economy. Standing up for what you believe in does not always make you popular, but it is still the right thing to do. •

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