

Steel Packaging: Always There for You

Steel food cans are a staple of America's pantry. Reliable, recyclable and shelf-stable, steel food cans are there when you need a quick snack, a pre-measured ingredient, or an extra vegetable for the family's dinner. In fact, the convenience of canned food is only one of the many reasons why steel cans make good sense for food packaging.

Steel cans provide an efficient and effective way to store food in a package made from North America's most recycled material. Steel's very nature offers two important considerations for widespread use: first, it serves well as a safe, effective food packaging material; and second, it has favorable qualities that promote recycling and ultimately benefits a more sustainable lifestyle.

Consumers can feel good about using steel cans because they are made of recyclable material made into a durable, pre-measured package that ultimately helps to decrease food waste that may occur with fresh or frozen counterparts. With over 1,500 canned food varieties available today, the options are nearly endless! Americans use over one hundred million steel food cans every day, enough each year to reach the moon and back seven times!

A study by the United States Department of Agriculture indicates that 40 percent of all food produced in the U.S. is not eaten. This means the average American family throws out an estimated 25 percent of the food and beverages it buys.

Packaged food in steel cans

While misconceptions may persist, many families realize it's not necessary to sacrifice nutrition and health when using canned food. In fact, a finding of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion's (USDA) notes that "registered dietitians believe that canned fruits and vegetables provide equal or greater value, nutrition, convenience and taste, when compared to their fresh counterparts."

Online resources, like Mealtime.org are dedicated to highlighting some significant advantages related to incorporating canned foods into our daily life. The site provides families with a one-stop source for easy, cost-effective and nutritious recipes that use canned fruits, vegetables, beans, meats and seafood. Created and maintained by the Canned Food Alliance (CFA), the online source features free and sharable resources about canned foods, including research, recipes and family mealtime tips.

Today when families have less time to spend together at the dinner table, efficient and delicious meal options allow extra time to be spent enjoying each other's company rather than in the kitchen. Research shows that one-third of Americans typically decide what to make for dinner at the last minute, so keeping nutritious foods, like canned fruits, vegetables and beans on hand can help people make healthier eating choices.

Fruit and vegetables canned within hours of harvesting retain their nutrients throughout their shelf life. Thanks to impermeable and durable steel packaging, the contents are protected from light, air, gasses, fragrances, oils and fluids, which allows the food to be shipped, shelved and stored more efficiently than other packaging options. This also means the food can travel further and more safely, making nutritious

food available to those who may not have easy access to, or means of storing, fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables.

Recyclable steel cans

Addressing the importance of recycling “just one can” has been part of the Steel Recycling Institute’s (SRI) mission since its inception, over 25 years ago. This importance extends to everyone who cares about the environment and sustainability.

“The infrastructure for steel can recycling is well in place and has been for several years,” says Gregory L. Crawford, Executive Director of SRI. “The recycling coordinators know the value of a single empty steel food can and consumers should be well aware also.”

How do you know the can is steel? Easy, just use a refrigerator magnet. If it sticks, it’s steel!

Recycling a single, empty steel food container conserves enough energy to watch television for one hour or light a 60-watt light bulb for more than four hours. Additionally, every ton of steel recycled conserves 2,500 pounds of iron ore, 1,400 pounds of coal and 120 pounds of limestone. With an estimated ton of steel cans being recycled every 30 seconds, one can easily see how these resources make a significant difference.

Steel containers are the most recycled packaging material in North America. More than 71 percent of all steel containers are recycled and more than 97 percent of Americans have access to local steel can recycling curbside service or a drop-off program.

Steel, as a material, is made with an average minimum of 25 percent recycled content. Recycled steel cans then serve as a key ingredient in creating new steel products and are vital to the steel industry. Melting down recycled steel rather than virgin materials reduces energy usage without any loss of strength or durability of the final product. Finally, when steel cans go into recycling bins, they are diverted from landfills.

Benefits of steel packaging

“There has been a steady call in recent years to increase consumption of fruits, vegetables, seafood and higher fiber foods, such as beans,” says Rich Tavoletti, Executive Director of the CFA. “This can present a challenge for many people managing their food budgets or who rely on food assistance programs, as well as for those who lack easy access to grocery stores. Canned foods can help all families achieve a healthy, balanced diet by providing access to affordable, nutritious and convenient foods that can be purchased and stored until needed.”

Steel cans lock in flavor and nutrients; are easy to ship and store; prevent food waste and spoilage with its long shelf life and therefore save households money.

When they’re done being used, steel cans are easily recycled, thus conserving energy, resources, and landfill space. They may then be melted down to form new steel products, such automotive parts, kitchen appliances, or more cans. With a full repertoire of benefits, it’s clear that steel cans are going to be use for a long time. Bon appétit!