



Press Release
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Sectors: Industry / Household Packaging / Green Technologies
Supermarkets / Wholesalers / Distributors /
Small Shops / Grocery Shops

Bill relating to the fight against waste and the circular economy:

**THE SPHERE GROUP CALLS ON THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO REJECT THE AMENDMENTS
AIMED AT PROHIBITING BIO-SOURCED, BIODEGRADABLE AND COMPOSTABLE BAGS**

On Thursday evening, two amendments aimed at removing the prohibition exemptions on bioplastic bio-sourced compostable bags were tabled by the Members of Parliament, Ms Barbara Pompili and Mr Damien Adam, as part of the review of the draft law relating to the fight against waste and the circular economy. Although the SPHERE group welcomes the action of the Members of Parliament in addressing the issue of combating plastic pollution, the ban on compostable bioplastics will have significant environmental consequences, will hinder the development of the compostable sector and will also result in all research and innovation into alternatives to conventional plastic being halted.

“As a French business leader, I am very worried about these two amendments tabled prohibiting compostable bioplastic bags, because they will not only have counterproductive effects on the development of the composting sector and therefore employment, but also devastating effects on research and development in Europe, on-going over long periods, and acknowledged for their global excellence”, John Persenda, CEO of the SPHERE group said.

The value of compostable bags in the recycling of biowastes acknowledged by ADEME

On Thursday, 14 November 2019, the Environment and Energy Control Agency (ADEME) issued an opinion on the environmental impact of fruit and vegetable bags in which it acknowledges the interest of compostable bags in the development of the composting sector. To this end, it recommends using compostable bags for collecting biowaste combined with an organic waste mesh bucket. It emphasises that these bags do not block the evaporation of moisture from biowastes and facilitate the transport of biowastes to collection bins.

These bags can therefore be processed with their contents in domestic or industrial composting systems, to obtain natural fertilizers that enrich the soil, and in methanisation systems to produce renewable energy.

It should be recalled that the separate collection of biowaste only covers 6% of the French population compared to 60% in Germany, 80% in Austria and 90% in Wales. It is bound to grow due to regulatory obligations relating to sorting at source and the recycling of biowaste (Directive 2018/851).

Examples of municipalities successfully recycling biowaste!

Municipalities like Colmar, Lorient, Montpellier, or the Paris districts have already adopted the separate collection of biowaste using compostable bags, much more efficient than paper bags that degrade in contact with damp materials.

These municipalities: have very quickly gained acceptance by their citizens, created jobs, obtained a stable sorting quality of biowaste and good quality compost appreciated by the farming world and the users.

Banning compostable bags would amount to killing off the development of the composting chain by discouraging local authorities from setting up the separate collection of biowastes.

The SPHERE group, working with local authorities to establish the collection of biowaste, recalls that biowaste represents 1/3 of French household waste and that household waste is the 2nd highest expenditure item of local authorities. In the current context of the impoverishment of soils, it is therefore urgent to recycle this bio-waste rather than seeing it burned or put into landfill.

Domestic composting reduces the cost of household waste needing to be processed by local authorities

ADEME also acknowledges that compostable bags comply with domestic compostability requirements. It notes that they are completely biodegradable when the consumer complies with good composting practices. The agency has also shown that these materials do not disrupt recycling flows. Indeed, as is stated in the opinion, *“near optical infra-red sorting technologies can separate compostable films from LDPE films without significant efficiency differences”*.

As ADEME mentions in its opinion, it is necessary to reuse a reusable cotton bag 40 times to obtain a better environmental footprint than a bio-sourced bag and 8 times for a thick fossil-plastic bag. Can this number of uses be realistic in practical terms for the general public?

Compostable bioplastics: a 21st century innovation for a sustainable economy

In July 2019, the World Economic Forum placed in first place in the TOP 10 innovations: **“bioplastics for a circular economy”** as the number one emerging technology to combat plastic pollution. Indeed, this innovation is part of a circular economy where the material is organically recycled to produce a fertilizer, a very useful amendment for agriculture. In France, several research programmes aim to develop new generation bioplastics, such as the BlueEcoPHA project in which the University of South Brittany is taking part or the Glipack project with INRA. Several countries, such as Italy, Spain, Great Britain, and Japan, are also investing in this now-proven technology in the sectors of health and cosmetics, etc.

In 2015, the Green Growth Energy Transition Act (LTECV) recognised the economic and environmental value of compostable bioplastics. Sphere has thus been able to repatriate from Asia more than 95% of the production of conventional plastic fruit and vegetable bags by producing LTECV-compliant fruit and vegetable bags in France in its factories. Moreover, the SPHERE group has invested 140 million euros in equipment, research & development and recruitment.

“It is inconceivable that the National Assembly is revising the rules by wanting to ban compostable bioplastic bags without being concerned about the environmental and economic consequences, in contradiction to a law and decree even though we are in compliance with the French and European legislation”, John Persenda, CEO of SPHERE stated.

If the Government rejects innovation and the development of the composting sector

It is likely that there will be disastrous consequences for jobs in France, as well as diminished position of France in terms of research and development. Internationally, this would cancel out SPHERE's efforts to establish compostable bioplastic bag sectors in Africa and India.

Besides the environmental considerations, banning compostable bags would also have disastrous consequences for jobs.

Indeed, by choosing to produce in France, the SPHERE group, which has nearly 1,000 employees in France, actively contributes to the development of the region in which its production facilities are located.

In the past 15 years, SPHERE has created many direct but also indirect jobs through the impact of SPHERE's subsidiaries on the local economy: transportation, maintenance, handling, building maintenance companies, etc.

This ban would lead to a decline in the group's industrial relocation momentum by creating legal instability. If it were adopted, the SPHERE group and the French bioplastic sector would be forced to restructure itself, leading to the loss of thousands of direct and indirect jobs in France and to relocate to one of the many European countries that has chosen composting and innovation.

For all these reasons - development of the composting sector, innovation and jobs - the SPHERE Group is calling on the Members of Parliament to bolster the provisions adopted by the senators which are the result of an overall thinking process, backed by arguments, in favour of the development of biowaste collection and compostable bioplastic innovations.

About SPHERE

SPHERE is a family-owned French group founded in 1976. It is the leading European company of household packaging, present in three markets: consumer, professional and local authorities, and producer of bioplastic resins.

Since its creation, SPHERE has always had the following objectives:

- Reduce the volume of virgin plastic used in its products and replace it with recycled materials;
- Develop new biodegradable and compostable materials;
- Use bio-based raw materials.

It has been involved for more than 20 years in the research and development of increasingly environmentally friendly materials.

With 15 production sites in Europe, of which 8 are located in France, the group has an annual production of 150,000 tonnes of films. In 2019, the group SPHERE expects to achieve turnover of circa 600 million euros with 1450 employees.

The SPHERE group markets and produces: refuse bags, fruit and vegetable bags, freezer bags, films and papers for food contact, aluminium trays and foil.

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