FMCG and retail leaders join forces to boost flexible plastic recycling in UK

- **Mars UK, Mondelez International, Nestle, PepsiCo and Unilever to finance and launch £1m Flexible Plastic Fund**
- **Manufacturers, retailers and recyclers urged to join the collaboration**
- **Fund designed to drive progress towards household collection of flexible plastic for recycling**

Five of the UK’s largest branded manufacturers: Mars UK, Mondelez International, Nestle, PepsiCo and Unilever, have collaborated to form a £1 million fund to help make flexible plastic recycling economically viable for recyclers and easier for consumers.

The Flexible Plastic Fund is a UK industry first and is being led by producer compliance scheme, Ecosurety, with support from environmental charity, Hubbub.

In collaboration with manufacturers, retailers and recyclers, the Fund intends to improve flexible plastic recycling and reduce plastic pollution by giving the material a stable value. This will in turn increase the supply of recycled plastic enabling industry to become more ‘circular’ and meet the forthcoming UK plastic packaging tax obligations. This will motivate investment in much needed jobs and infrastructure to make flexible plastic recycling a financially sustainable system in the UK.

New research from the University of Sheffield suggests there is strong consumer demand for recycling flexible plastic with 95% of participants saying they would be willing to recycle their flexible plastics. Sainsbury’s and Waitrose have already signed up to support the initiative by hosting flexible plastic collection points in selected stores across the UK. Several other major retailers are set to follow suit. As a result, recycling this material will become increasingly accessible to consumers, as they will be able to recycle all types of flexible plastic packaging with participating retailers.

With just 16% of UK local authorities currently offering household collection of flexible plastics, the amounts of this material collected for recycling are low. Flexible plastics include plastic bags, wrappers, films, pouches, packets and sachets and is described as ‘plastic bags and wrapping’, ‘soft plastics’ or ‘flexible plastics’. The Fund will guarantee a minimum value of £100 per tonne of recycled product to incentivise recyclers to process flexible plastic.

The long-term ambition of the Fund is to drive progress towards creating a circular, UK based flexible plastic recycling market that allows flexible plastic recycling via household collections. As part of the UK’s drive to boost recycling, WRAP recently announced new recommendations to support flexible plastic recycling.

Flexible plastic represented 22% of all UK consumer plastic packaging in 2019 but only 6% was recycled. This type of plastic must be processed in a different way to other plastics due to its unique properties - it often contaminates rigid plastic recycling and clogs up machinery – something that could be overcome by creating a separate flexible plastic recycling stream.

The initiative will provide fully audited transparency – at least 80% of the plastics collected will be recycled in the UK – rising to 100% by 2023. Until 2023, where there are currently limits in UK capacity and technology, up to 20% could be exported to qualifying facilities in Europe only. All material will be fully traceable and tracked from the collector through to new products. Unlike many other schemes, recyclers will only be paid if the plastic is definitely recycled. The manufacturers contributing to the Flexible Plastic Fund will then be able to access the Packaging Recovery Notes (“PRNs”) generated by this high-quality, tracked recycling scheme.
The recycled plastic will be turned into a range of products including non-food grade plastic, non-food-grade film and food-grade film. Through its graded payment hierarchy, the Flexible Plastic Fund is actively incentivising the development of a circular model of production where flexible plastic packaging can be recycled into plastic packaging, including food-grade, again and again.

The Flexible Plastic Fund is calling for recyclers, manufacturers and retailers to get in touch to play their role in this vital scheme that is driving solutions to flexible plastic waste in the UK.

For more information about the Fund and how to request a nearby collection point, please visit the Flexible Plastic Fund website: [www.flexibleplasticfund.org.uk](http://www.flexibleplasticfund.org.uk)

**Robbie Staniforth Head of Innovation and Policy at Ecosurety** said: “Historically the UK recycling system has not provided enough motivation to recycle flexible plastics. By creating a sustainable market for this material, longer term improvements can be made to ensure the flexible plastic that remains necessary for packaging is reliably recycled and eventually contributes to a circular economy, thereby tackling plastic pollution.”

“We hope that by boosting this infrastructure, government and local authorities will be motivated to quickly facilitate flexible plastic recycling in the UK by making it easy for consumers to recycle via household collections in the future.”

**Trewin Restorick CEO and co-founder of Hubbub** said: “The Flexible Plastic Fund is a really important initiative to show that flexible plastics can be recycled and be financially sustainable. People are ready and willing to recycle their flexible plastics - we just have to make the infrastructure work. Collaboration is key to making this a success and we are urging more manufacturers to invest in the Fund, more retailers to collect flexible plastic for recycling and more recyclers to recycle flexible plastics.”

**Rebecca Pow, Environment Minister** said: “Plastic pollution poses a major threat to our precious environment and wildlife, and that’s why the Government is committed to eliminating all avoidable plastic waste by 2042.”

“Through our plans for consistent recycling collections, extended producer responsibility for packaging manufacturers, a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, and a world-leading plastic packaging tax, we will go further and faster to recycle more plastic and throw less away.

“I very much welcome the new Flexible Plastic Fund which will help to recycle more plastic, and I encourage retailers, manufacturers and recyclers to lend their support.”

**Mark Pawsey, MP and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Packaging Manufacturing Industry** said “It’s really encouraging to see some of the UK’s largest brands and retailers come together with the launch of the Flexible Plastic Fund. This will give flexible plastic recycling the kick-start it needs to be viable on a much larger scale. I believe industry-led collaboration is at the heart of tackling many of the environmental challenges facing us. I hope to see more and more corporations joining together as a force for good over the coming months.”

**Marija Rompani, Director of Ethics & Sustainability at the John Lewis Partnership,** comments: “This initiative could be the spring board needed to change the way we handle flexible plastics in the UK, creating a recycling system that is both accessible to the public, circular and UK based. In support, we’re currently conducting a trial in 37 of our stores to allow customers to drop off their flexible
plastics waste - from crisp packets to bubble wrap and cling film, which we hope will provide us with the intelligence needed to roll out more widely in the future.”

Claire Hughes, Director of Production, Packaging & Innovation at Sainsbury’s, said: “We’re proud to sign up to the Flexible Plastic Fund and becoming members of the initiative is the latest move in our mission to reduce, reuse, replace and recycle plastic in our own operations. Joining the Fund will give our customers access to a flexible plastic recycling system that we can all have confidence in. As part of our commitment to reduce plastic packaging by 50% by 2025 across the Sainsbury’s business, we’re dedicated to working with our suppliers, manufacturers and third party organisations to continue exploring innovative ways to support a circular economy and to make it as easy as possible for our customers to recycle.

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Notes to editors

1. EPPIC survey on flexible plastics (Jan21) - https://osf.io/fexdt/?view_only=75075bd4bb5c4c3f9a67f897f62bd5d
3. Packflow Covid-19 Phase 1: Plastic - A review of the quantity of plastic packaging being placed on the market (POM) and recycled in 2019 (Oct20)

The Flexible Plastic Fund is also being supported with additional communications funding from the British Plastics Federation, Bunzl and the Waitrose & Partners Plan Plastic Fund.

About Ecosurety

Ecosurety is the market leading producer responsibility compliance scheme investing in quality recycling. It works on behalf of its customers to source quality evidence and ensures they comply with the UK’s packaging, e-waste and batteries regulations.

With more than 1,000 customers including Nestlé, The Co-operative Group, Innocent, and Morrisons, Ecosurety supports efficient and transparent investment in UK recycling projects through improved infrastructure, innovation and consumer awareness campaigns.

As the only B Corp certified compliance scheme in the UK, Ecosurety is committed to the balancing of profit with social and environmental performance. Ecosurety seeks to deliver change for good for its staff and its community, as well as helping businesses minimise their impact on the environment and drive a tangible increase in UK recycling capacity.

In 2019 Ecosurety launched its Exploration Fund – providing £1million of funding over three years for projects that offer tangible solutions to the negative effects that packaging, batteries and electronic waste have on the environment. It is the first ever such fund to be launched by a UK based recycling compliance scheme.

https://www.ecosurety.com/
About Hubbub
Hubbub is an award-winning charity and social enterprise that inspires ways of living that are good for the environment - disrupting the status quo to raise awareness, nudge behaviours and shape systems. Hubbub’s aim is to revolutionise communications with the public about environmental issues - using everyday language and good design to make environmental actions desirable and tapping into things people are passionate about such as food, fashion, homes and neighbourhoods. This innovative approach saw Hubbub win the Charity of the Year Award at the prestigious Charity Times Awards in 2020.

Since its formation in 2014, Hubbub has delivered more than 60 trailblazing environmental campaigns in collaboration with over 700 partners, helping to shift the national debate on key environmental issues such as food waste, sustainable fashion, air pollution and recycling. Hubbub’s campaigns include #LeedsByExample which brought together 25 of the UK’s largest companies to boost recycling on the high street, a 3-year partnership with IKEA to create the world’s largest consumer-facing sustainability campaign ‘Live Lagom’ and creating a Network of 100 Community Fridges across the UK, each redistributing on average 1.5 tonnes of food every month that would otherwise have gone to waste.

https://www.hubbub.org.uk/
Twitter: @hubbubuk
Facebook: @HubbubUK
Instagram: @helloHubbub
LinkedIn: Hubbub-UK

About Mars UK
Mars is a family-owned business with more than a century of history making diverse products and offering services for people and the pets people love. With more than $35 billion in sales, the company is a global business that produces some of the world’s best-loved brands: M&M’s®, SNICKERS®, TWIX®, MILKY WAY®, DOVE®, PEDIGREE®, ROYAL CANIN®, WHISKAS®, EXTRA®, ORBIT®, 5™, SKITTLES®, BEN’S ORIGINAL®, and COCOAVIA®. Mars also provides veterinary health services that include BANFIELD Pet Hospitals, Blue Pearl®, VCA® and Pet Partners™. Headquartered in McLean, VA, Mars operates in more than 80 countries. The Mars Five Principles – Quality, Responsibility, Mutuality, Efficiency and Freedom – inspire its more than 115,000 Associates to create value for all its partners and deliver growth they are proud of every day. For more information, please visit www.mars.co.uk.

About Mondelēz International
Mondelēz International, Inc. (Nasdaq: MDLZ) empowers people to snack right in over 150 countries around the world. With 2020 net revenues of approximately $27 billion, MDLZ is leading the future of snacking with iconic global and local brands such as OREO, belVita and LU biscuits; Cadbury Dairy Milk, Milka and Toblerone chocolate; Sour Patch Kids candy and Trident gum. Mondelēz International is a proud member of the Standard and Poor’s 500, Nasdaq 100 and Dow Jones Sustainability Index. Visit www.mondelezinternational.com or follow the company on Twitter at www.twitter.com/MDLZ.

About Nestlé
Nestlé is the world’s largest food and beverage company and is present in 191 countries globally. With a portfolio of products spanning confectionery, pet food, coffee, soft drinks, food and dairy,
infant and medical nutrition, breakfast cereals and chilled dairy, the global business has more than 2,000 brands ranging from global icons to local favourites.

In working towards net zero emissions, this year Nestlé has announced that several of its biggest brands – including KitKat and Nespresso – will become carbon neutral this decade. In recent months Nestlé UK and Ireland has also acquired a majority stake in a number of exciting companies, expanding their offering into recipe kits with Simply Cook and the healthy recipe box market with Mindful Chef. For more information, please visit www.nestle.co.uk.

About PepsiCo
PepsiCo products are enjoyed by consumers more than one billion times a day in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. PepsiCo generated more than $70 billion in net revenue in 2020, driven by a complementary food and beverage portfolio that includes Walkers, Doritos, Pepsi-Cola, Quaker and Tropicana. PepsiCo's product portfolio includes a wide range of enjoyable foods and beverages, including 23 brands that generate more than $1 billion each in estimated annual retail sales.

Guiding PepsiCo is our vision to Be the Global Leader in Convenient Foods and Beverages by Winning with Purpose. "Winning with Purpose" reflects our ambition to win sustainably in the marketplace and embed purpose into all aspects of the business. For more information, visit www.pepsico.com.

About Unilever
Unilever is one of the world's leading suppliers of Beauty & Personal Care, Home Care, and Foods & Refreshment products, with sales in over 190 countries and products used by 2.5 billion people every day. We have around 400 brands found in homes all over the world – including iconic global brands like Dove, Lifebuoy, Knorr, Magnum and Surf.

Our vision is to be the global leader in sustainable business and to demonstrate how our purpose-led, future-fit business model drives superior performance. The Unilever Compass, our sustainable business strategy, is set out to help us deliver superior performance and drive sustainable and responsible growth, while:
- improving the health of the planet;
- improving people's health, confidence and wellbeing; and
- contributing to a fairer and more socially inclusive world.

While there is still more to do, we are proud to have been recognised in 2020 as a sector leader in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and - for the tenth-consecutive year - as the top ranked company in the 2020 GlobeScan/SustainAbility Sustainability Leaders survey. For more information about Unilever and our brands, please visit www.unilever.com.