



# The Daily Gleaner

March 14, 2009

## Everyday Environmental Choices - Buying Milk and OJ

Some time ago a neighbour asked me what the most environmentally friendly option is for buying milk: plastic jug, cardboard carton, or bags? And since that time, several people have asked the same question of orange juice: frozen concentrated orange juice (FCOJ) or not-from-concentrate in large cartons or plastic jugs?

First let's be clear, the milk and orange juice production and transportation cycle is incredibly energy intensive and thus has a very high carbon footprint. So if we choose to buy these products, then at the very least we should consider the most environmentally friendly packaging choices available.

Starting with milk containers, it is important to know that Fredericton Region Solid Waste Commission ([www.frswc.ca](http://www.frswc.ca)) does recycle all milk containers: plastic jug, cardboard carton, and milk bags (rinse all and put in your blue box). So now, let's expand the research to look at the 'total environmental footprint' of the containers, in terms what materials they are made from, and the process by which they are made, transported and disposed of, or recycled.

Canada has been very fortunate in that for more than 30 years milk has been available in bag form. In fact, more than 50 percent of fresh milk sold in our country is sold in bags. This concept is just taking off in the UK now and has yet to be embraced in the US. Based on the research, milk in bags has a lower carbon footprint for processing, transportation and disposal compared to plastic jugs.

When in doubt about which packaging to choose, remember 'reduce' is the most important action of the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), and milk in bags means a significant reduction in packaging (75 percent less plastic than jugs!). As well, both the outer bag and the washed and dried milk bags themselves can be reused over and over (e.g. for freezer bags), and can then be recycled in your blue box.

Now let's figure out which orange juice container is best from an environmental perspective. According to National Geographic's well-reputed 'Green Guide' ([www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com)), it takes more energy to make frozen concentrated orange juice (than not-from-concentrate) due to the evaporation process. However, frozen concentrated orange juice has significantly less packaging when compared to large jugs and cartons. This equates to fewer emissions from materials production and transportation (higher quantity can fit in a truck) and less end waste, which makes it the environmental choice. The Green Guide notes, however, that the very best choice is organic frozen concentrate, due to the fact that no nitrogen fertilizers are used (a greenhouse gas contributor).

The type of frozen concentrated orange juice to buy gets a bit tricky though. The traditional style of packaging has a tin bottom and top, which can be removed from the cardboard sleeve and recycled in your blue box. If there is no wax or foil coating on the cardboard sleeve it can be rinsed and dried and put in your grey box. However, if the cardboard sleeve is waxed or foiled, it cannot be recycled at all. There is a new fully recyclable packaging option available – the Tetra Pak container (McCain's Old South is one option). This is an easy choice because the entire container can be recycled without dismantling – just rinse and put in your blue box.

Due to taste or convenience, you may still choose to buy milk and orange juice in large plastic jugs or cardboard/paperboard cartons. If so, the final question is: which of these is the 'greener' alternative? From both a renewable and a recycling standpoint, the carton is preferable to the plastic jug, given that the cardboard is made from trees and plastic from petroleum.

And remember, no matter which container you use, if it has a recycling symbol on it, rinse it out and make sure it ends up in your blue box not your garbage can!

*Sonya Hull is a local consultant and Project Manager for Fredericton's Green Matters campaign. If you have topics you would like the Green Matters writers to cover in this column, please e-mail us at [greenmatters@fredericton.ca](mailto:greenmatters@fredericton.ca). To read past topics go to [www.greenmattersfredericton.ca](http://www.greenmattersfredericton.ca) and click on the 'Green Matters in the Gleaner' button.*