



- Advertisement -

Kurt Zuhlke & Associates is educating the produce community about recycling

By

Seth Mendelson

November 27, 2023

What is Kurt Zuhlke's objective at the New York Produce Show? It is to connect and even reconnect with retailers and repackers and get them more familiar with the idea of product reuse.

The president of Kurt Zuhlke & Associates, a nine-person Bangor, Pa.-based company that produces 44 different packaging molds, Zuhlke has been on what seems a lifelong mission to explain to everyone and anyone that benefits of recycled packaging.

He is taking his message back to the New York Produce Show, hopeful that he can win additional converts to his cause at the event and help save the environment in the meantime. "Our entire objective is to show the industry that we can stop cutting down much of the hectares of trees that are used to create packaging," the 43-year veteran of the produce industry said. "We have been tearing down whole areas of trees — about the size of the state of Rhode Island — in just six months. In 10 years, an area of trees the size of new England would be gone."

Zuhlke emphasized that his company offers an alternative. The key is to educate everyone about the benefits of recycling and how, in the long-term, it will help business as well as the environment. "Our job is to teach not to throw away bottles and packaging and to get people back into the mindset of recycling products. Plus, we have to get local governments, like New York City, to get back into the recycling business and stop listening to some unions who are against it because of money."

Zuhlke, who joined his father's company in 1980 after a stint in real estate, emphasized that it is not just the produce industry that needs to be educated. "Our job goes way beyond that," he said. "We have to explain to everyone about the benefits of recycled packaging and allow them to see the product, touch it and see how it fits with their own plans. We have to connect with these people outside of the produce industry, like in the floral and other categories.

"Packaging is not evil. Packaging is good. Some stereotype it as bad for the environment and bad for the product. Our job is to show them the proof that recycled packaging is good for the environment and good for the product."

Zuhlke said that consumers are demanding better packaging that will keep the product fresh for a longer period of time and allow them to see the product and determine if anything is wrong with it. He stressed that retailers will be better and more profitable operators by using his products, particularly by being able to be more efficient at stocking product in-store.

"Our company was the first one to come out with 100 percent recycle PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) packaging," he said. "We still believe that by using recycled packaging, it will take plastics out of rivers and off the beaches. Every time I see a plastic bottle thrown in basket, it drives

me crazy.

“This is how we solve a problem,” Zuhlke continued. “Frankly, right now there is not enough education about this issue coming from the government. We need to keep explaining how important it is to use recycling to stop product from ending up in rivers and, eventually, the oceans. If more companies used a recycling method, we would reduce waste and get materials that can be used over and over again.”

So, he welcomes retailers and suppliers to visit his booth at the show to work to develop a packaging strategy that will both save them money and help make a greater profit.

“As I always say, I just ask for them to give me a phone call and I will make them a lot of money.” he said. “I just want a chance to show the industry what we can do in terms of advancing sales, helping you merchandise products with longer shelf life and lower costs.”

This is just another step in the right direction, he said, “Our mission is to keep talking to everyone and to keep teaching them about what we do and how it benefits our community. We will keep expanding, growing and providing more innovation. We know that retailers realize this is the way to go. We are just helping them to get there.”

[Print](#)