

The Digest's 2026 Multi-Slide Guide to the Composter's Veto on Bioplastics

Compostable packaging ends its life at a facility that sells compost and often treats packaging as a cost. The processor, not the polymer, decides the route.

THE PUZZLE · OBSERVED DATA

Most US composters take compostable packaging. Few take bioplastic.

ACCEPT SOME COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

71%

of US food-waste composters, up from 58% in 2018 —
mostly paper formats

Industry benchmark · CLP Composting Consortium / BioCycle, 2023

ACCEPT BIOPLASTIC-COATED PAPER

31%

of the same facilities; rigid PLA and PHA items are not
reported separately

Industry benchmark · CLP Composting Consortium / BioCycle, 2023

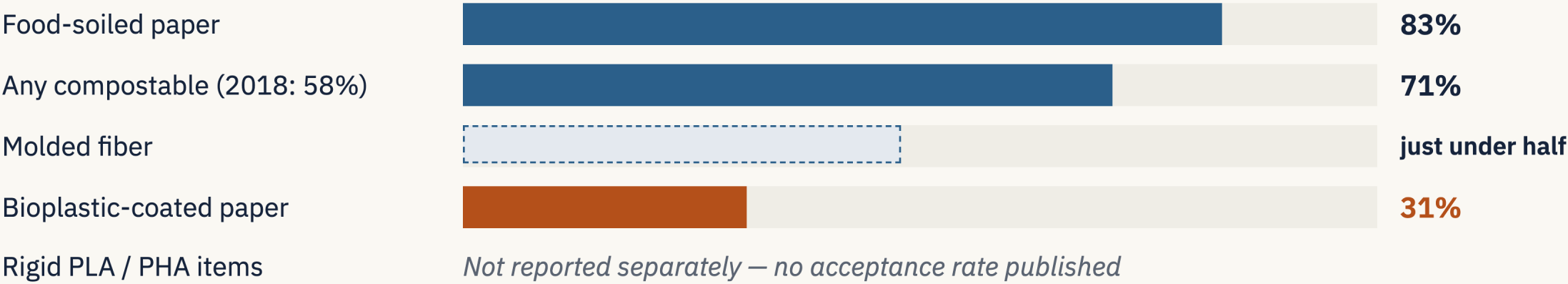
THE QUESTION · INTERPRETATION

Does the final processor want bioplastic packaging?

A certified-compostable label does not settle it. The route is set by the composter's acceptance list, its contamination rule and the buyer for its compost — and, increasingly, by regulators.

ACCEPTANCE BY FORMAT • OBSERVED DATA

Acceptance falls as packaging moves from paper to plastic coating.



Share of US food-waste composters accepting each format; full track = 100%. Food-soiled paper: 141 respondents. Molded-fiber bar is indicative — the survey gives no exact figure. Industry benchmark.

A third of composters reject a contaminated load outright.

AUTOMATIC REJECTION

31%

45 of 145 facilities reject
contaminated loads automatically

Industry benchmark · CLP /
BioCycle, 2023

BELOW 5% OR NO DEAL

66

of 145 facilities require
contamination under 5% to accept
a load

Industry benchmark · CLP / BioCycle, 2023

THE OUTLET ITSELF

~4%

of US food waste is composted
at all

Industry benchmark · CLP /
BioCycle, 2023

Interpretation: when the threshold is per load, one item that reads as plastic puts the whole truck at risk.

Source: Closed Loop Partners Composting Consortium with BioCycle, 2023 composting survey (industry-backed), via Waste Dive,
7 Aug 2023

Leading Oregon composters ask consumers to keep compostables out.

Look-alikes

Compostable items draw look-alike conventional plastic into the stream

Fragments

Pieces turn up in finished compost — the product they must sell

Organic rules

USDA Organic standards restrict packaging as a compost input

Cost

Compostable items cost up to 5× their conventional equivalents

2019: Rexius, a major Oregon composter, stopped accepting compostable packaging after about a decade, saying it could not hold contamination to an acceptable level.

Curbside: Eugene and Portland do not accept compostable packaging in their organics collection.

PFAS threatens the compost product, with no standard to meet.

EPA ORD ranking of PFAS by feedstock

1 · Biosolids

2 · Food waste

3 · Yard waste

Rank order only — the review gives no concentrations. Academic inference · EPA ORD literature review, Aug 2021

Packaging is identified as a major PFAS source

No US standard exists for PFAS in compost or digestate

BPI stopped certifying PFAS-containing packaging in 2020
Reported · BPI is a certification body (advocacy)

Food waste — the stream compostables travel with — ranks second. Risk is inferred, not measured.

Source: US EPA Office of Research and Development, PFAS in compost and digestate review (Aug 2021), incl. BPI policy, via Waste Dive, 7 Sep 2021

EU law confines mandatory compostability to a short list of items.

ALL OTHER PACKAGING, INCL. BIODEGRADABLE POLYMERS

Must be material-recyclable

From 12 Feb 2028 · Regulation (EU) 2025/40

Regulator-observed · law text summarised by Keller & Heckman

Must be compostable

- Permeable tea and coffee bags and single-serve units
- Sticky fruit labels
- Very lightweight carrier bags

Member States may add a few more items

Compostable plastic packaging is exempt from PPWR recycled-content targets — a carve-out, not a demand signal.

EPR DOESN'T SORT IT EITHER · REPORTED

Oregon's packaging EPR funds collection, not a compost buyer.

CONTAMINATION, YEAR ONE

24.73%

across 544 audits

Reported · Packaging School, 2026

95.97% of material went to 44 self-attested end markets

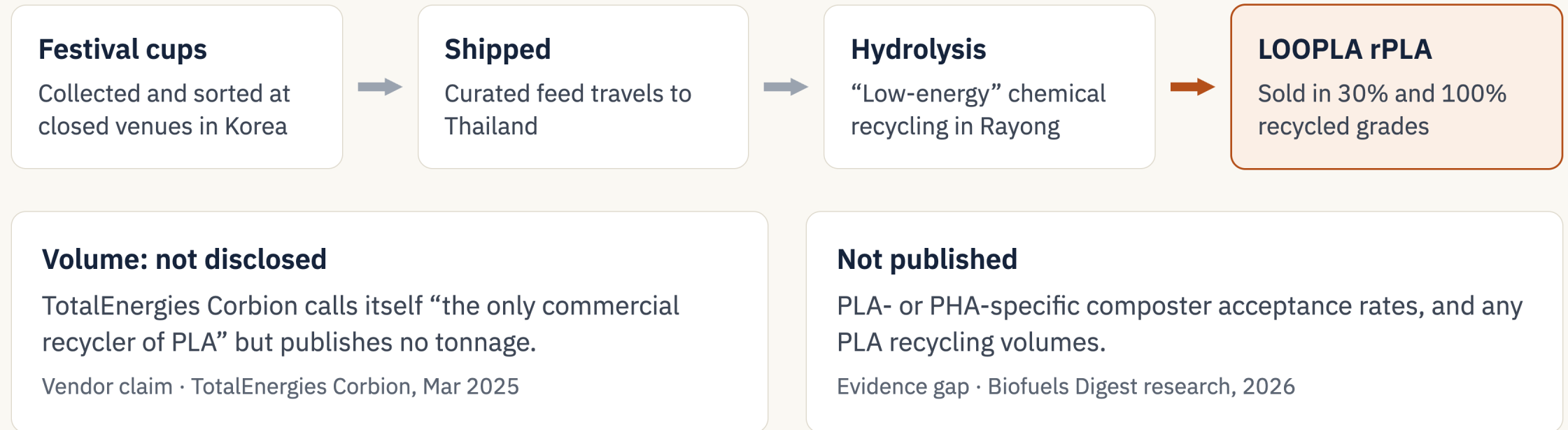


Bar = number of end markets; 4 are disposal sites. Self-attested, not verified, so 96% is not a recycling rate.

Producer fees fund collection; no case was found of EPR directly financing a reprocessor or end market.

Sources: Packaging School, “Oregon’s Packaging EPR Program Turns One” (2026); Resource Recycling, 6 Jul 2026; Biofuels Digest Family 18 Evidence Library (law L8)

The only commercial PLA recycling found runs on curated festival cups.



A loop that works has narrow feed and a buyer under contract.

	Eastman Kingsport, Tennessee	LOOPLA, Rayong
Polymer	PET / polyester — not a biopolymer	PLA, a biopolymer
Feed	Narrow polyester stream	Curated festival cups
Buyer	PepsiCo, under contract	Not disclosed
Utilisation	>75% after Oct 2025 changes	Volume not disclosed

Kingsport’s result does not transfer to PLA. It shows the conditions a loop needs, not a chemistry that carries over.

WHAT MOST READERS MISS · INTERPRETATION

The composter has a veto.

Polymer chemistry does not decide end of life; the facility that must sell the compost does. Certification gets a bioplastic into the bin. Only an acceptance list, a contamination rule and a compost buyer get it out the other end.

Competing view: BPI, a certification body (advocacy source), says compostables are unfairly blamed for contamination.

DECISION TEST

Six questions before choosing an end-of-life route for bioplastic packaging

1. Which facilities in your market accept your format — in writing?
2. Can your item be told apart from conventional plastic at the tipping floor?
3. Does it carry PFAS or other additives the compost buyer rejects?
4. Is your product on the EU's short compostable list, or must it be recyclable?
5. Is there a closed venue where you control collection?
6. Who buys the output — and under what contract?