

From Patchwork to Performance: Scaling **Recycling Infrastructure** to Meet **PET Plastic Demand**

PET Recycling: An Untapped Economic Engine

- **Made to be Remade:** PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic, identified by the #1 inside the triangle on most beverage bottles, is designed to be fully recyclable and can be made with up to 100% recycled PET.
- **Good for the Economy and the Environment:** PET sustains thousands of jobs and channels billions of dollars into the economy, while supporting industries people rely on every day. With a greenhouse gas footprint that is less than half that of an aluminum can and about a fifth of a glass bottle, PET beverage bottles are the most environmentally friendly packaging option.
- **The United States is Losing Billions:** In the US, millions of pounds of PET that could be recycled are instead landfilled. Globally, \$80–120 billion in material value is lost each year because plastic waste is not collected or recycled.
- **Infrastructure Gap:** Today's system lacks the investment needed for collection, processing, and food-grade recycling infrastructure to turn waste back into US manufacturing feedstock.



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The Problem

- **Fragmented Policy:** A patchwork of bottle bills and state-by-state recycling proposals causes regulatory inconsistency, raising compliance costs, supply chain friction, and investment risk.
- **Low Recycling Rates:** The US PET bottle recycling rate reached 30.2% in 2024. This rate has remained steady over the past decade, and we can do better. Getting bottles back remains one of the top barriers to achieving circularity.

The Solution

- **Enable investment through tax incentives (e.g., CIRCLE Act):** A 30% investment tax credit for recycling and waste management infrastructure over 10 years can jump-start the deployment of needed capital.
- **Establish a harmonized national EPR framework:** A harmonized extended producer responsibility (EPR) framework means the whole country follows the same recycling playbook, making it easier for companies to invest, for communities to recycle, and for us to turn American plastic waste into new American products.
- **Commit funding to the modernization of collection & processing infrastructure:** Federal funding or matching grants can upgrade sorting and cleaning plants to produce food-safe recycled PET plastic, while easing the cost burden on local governments and making recycling more cost-effective.
- **Expand bottle bills that include PET bottles:** Strong deposit return systems (DRS), also known as recycling refunds, significantly boost collection rates. Expanding recycling refund programs across more states, whether as part of EPR or as standalone legislation, would ensure more PET bottles are returned, recycled, and remade into new bottles.