

Nespresso Canada president Jean-Luc Valleix addresses attendees of PAC's recent PAC to the Future conference in Montreal last fall, holding up samples of the two different collection bags distributed by Nespresso at no charge to its Club Member customers for the collection and free shipment of used aluminum coffee capsules back to the company.



# THE PERKS OF LEADERSHIP

Leading coffee producer spares no effort to lessen the carbon footprint and negative perception of single-serve coffee capsules

BY GEORGE GUIDONI, EDITOR

If the much-lauded Circular Economy model of waste-free packaging design and reuse ever needed a corporate poster child to inspire consumer product companies to step up their sustainability efforts, then the multinational coffee giant **Nespresso** would be a fitting choice by any objective measure.

As a company that introduced the world's first single-serve coffee machine back in 1986, the Swiss-headquartered coffee producer has naturally endured plenty of environmentalist backlash in the last decade over the alleged ecological crises caused by surging worldwide production of single-serve coffee capsules.

But despite widespread vilification of single-serve coffee pods as one of the worst excesses of unnecessary packaging waste messing up recycling streams and overwhelming landfills, the growing popularity and sales of this consumer-friendly packaging format has left leading coffee producers with a heavy burden



Having invented the world's first single-serve coffee pods and machines back in 1986, Nespresso has been at the forefront of the industry's recycling efforts since 1991.

of lessening the carbon footprint of their capsules in dramatic leaps and bounds, at the risk of facing outright legislative bans and consumer boycotts.

In many ways, Nespresso has had the luxury of being an early pacesetter in this race to coffee pod sustainability by virtue of making all its coffee pods, including the lidding, exclusively from aluminum, which is an infinitely recyclable material that can be reused again and again to make a highly diverse range of new products.

In fact, Nespresso launched its first capsule recycling program back in 1991—long before either single-serve coffee capsules or recycling, for that matter, became popular with the public at large.

According to Nespresso, the negative public image that single-serve capsules contend with today is largely the result of many of its competitors flooding the market with their own single-serve solutions that were not designed with recyclability in mind from the outset.

Late last year, Nespresso signed a Memorandum of



The upscale Caran D'ache Nespresso Capsule Coffee 849 Darkhan Blue Edition ballpoint pens are made entirely from the recycled single-serve Nespresso brand aluminum capsules.



Understanding with leading global aluminum producer **Rio Tinto** to ensure that all the Nespresso capsules manufactured worldwide will be made from “responsibly-sourced” aluminum, as defined and certified by the international **Aluminum Stewardship Initiative (ASI)** group.

As one of ASI’s founding members, Nespresso’s close familiarity with the world’s second most-used metal makes the company an important link and stakeholder in creating and maintaining a sustainable aluminum value chain, according to Nespresso’s chief executive officer Jean-Marc Duvoisin.

“Nespresso is proud to have been a driving force in creating and implementing the ASI,” Duvoisin stat-

ed during the formal signing of the MOI with Rio Tinto in November of 2018.

“Together we have made responsibly-sourced aluminum a reality, and the ASI traceability mechanism will enable us to meet our commitment to customers to reduce the impact of their consumption,” Duvoisin stated.

“This is a positive step towards creating a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly future.”

The new sourcing initiative is a fitting follow-up to Nespresso’s *AAA Sustainable Quality Program*, rolled out in 2013 in partnership with **The Rainforest Alliance**, which pledges to secure the supply of highest-quality coffees, to protect the environment and

improve the livelihood of over 75,000 farmers in 12 countries where Nespresso sources its raw product.

As with the ASI initiative, Nespresso aims to source 100 per cent of its coffee from its *AAA Sustainable Quality Program* by 2020.

For all that, overcoming the negative publicity generated by widespread backlash over single-serve coffee capsules remains something of a work-in-progress for Nespresso globally and here in Canada, where the company’s **Nespresso Canada** business is making concerted far-reaching efforts to get Canadian consumers fully on-board its progressive capsule recycling initiatives.

“It is not enough for a package to be fully recyclable; it actually has to be recycled in order to be a fully sustainable package,” says Caroline Duguay, Nespresso Canada’s director of communications in Montreal.

To make this happen, Nespresso Canada is focusing on making it as effortless as possible for consumers to do their part by including special recyclable plastic bags with the purchased Nespresso brand packs to collect the used capsules at home—without any extra handling or cleaning of the used pods.

“Our unique aluminum capsules are the only ones that enable our Club Members [Nespresso coffee machine owners] to enjoy their coffee and recycle the package without having to touch or even look at the grounds inside,” Duguay points out.

“There is no separating the lids, scooping out the grounds or rinsing out the cap ... just bag it, seal it and drop it off at no charge.”

Depending on the region, Nespresso-supplied green-colored bags can be picked up through lo-



Produced by Swiss army knife manufacturer Victorinox, the limited-edition Pioneer Nespresso Shakan knife is made entirely from the recycled Nespresso coffee capsules.



Being made of 100-percent aluminum provides Nespresso brand single-serve coffees pods with compelling recyclability advantages over many other brands.

cal waste diversion agencies, while the red-colored bags can be sent by mail at no charge via **Canada Post** directly back to Nespresso Canada, which works with various local recycling partners to separate the coffee grounds from the aluminum shell and lidding.

“The used coffee grounds are sent to local farmers for them to add in their compost solutions,” says Duguay, “so at the end of the day there is really no waste left behind whatsoever.

“Even the bag is being recycled.”

As of last spring, the red-bag program has been expanded to cover all Canadian provinces except for British Columbia and Quebec, where consumers use the green-bag option for pod recycling and collection.

“The red bag solution aims to increase the collection capacity of used aluminum Nespresso capsules by making it as easy as possible for our customers to participate,” says Nespresso Canada president Jean-Luc Valleix.

“We have always set ourselves apart, as evidenced by our decision to develop capsules with aluminum—a material that not only preserves the freshness of coffee grounds but is also infinitely recyclable.

Says Valleix: “Nespresso has been committed to ensuring sustainability for more than 25 years, taking an active stance in working with local partners and governments and investing in tailored recycling solutions across Canada and around the world.”

While Nespresso Canada has now reached an estimated 95-percent recycling capacity for all the single-serve capsules it sells in Canada, according to Duguay, the company is launching a new complementary incentive program designed to remind its Club Members to recycle all of their Nespresso pods properly—using advanced tracking technology to collect data and monitor how well individual Nespresso machine owners are playing their part.

Duguay says the Nespresso Canada team is now actively working on a launch of a unique pilot program—part of the company’s *Ethical Living Strategy*—in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) region that will see Nespresso Canada introduce specially-coded individualized collection bags to thousands of local Club Members who have consented to be entered in a special database that will keep track of how many of the purchased Nespresso capsules they actually re-

turned back for recycling.

Embedded with personalized invisible but scannable product codes, the new high-tech bags will enable Nespresso to identify and reward its best-performing recyclers based on the data obtained from the returned bagged capsules, as well as to reach out to any underperformers to entice them to be more diligent in their capsule recycling.

As Duguay proudly points out, “This is a truly unique first-of-its-kind, only-in-Canada pilot program that will serve as a blueprint for Nespresso’s other global operations if it proves

to be a success.

“We see this as a real vote of confidence by our parent company in our approach to reducing the carbon footprint of coffee capsules in Canada,” says Duguay, “so there is a lot at stake for us in seeing this innovative program succeed.

“It definitely represents a big investment for the company,” she states, “but Nespresso Canada has always been serious about maintaining its market leadership position, and progressive environmental stewardship is a big part of our ongoing success.”



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