



March 20, 2019

## **Reusable Packaging Association Statement on the Reported Risk of Spreading ToBRFV through RPC Use**

The commercial use of reusable plastic containers (RPCs) for the packing and distribution of fresh tomatoes presents a negligible risk to the potential spread of the tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV). In fact, based on overwhelming historical experience and everyday testing results, RPCs supplied by major pooling operators match, if not surpass, the same risk profile of single-use corrugated packaging regarding the presence of human or plant pathogens.

The cleaning and sanitation practices of today's RPCs ensure that any pathogens including ToBRFV, if hypothetically are present on a container after a use, are killed and removed during the RPC wash process. Commercial RPCs are collected after every single use and sent to service centers to be cleaned using a validated wash and sanitation process. RPCs are never used twice before collection, wash and sanitation.

The RPC cleaning process uses high-pressure wash machines, water temperatures between 135 – 145 degrees F, caustic detergents, and EPA-approved sanitizers. RPCs are designed and constructed of materials that can be easily cleaned and sanitized, and following wash, drying and inspection operations, the surfaces of RPCs leaving the facility for reuse are as safe from pathogen contamination as a newly manufactured, first-time use RPC or a virgin single-use corrugated container.

Communication recently sent by the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) association to their members misrepresented the facts about RPCs. OGVG's references to RPC "sanitation challenges" and RPCs "may present an easy way for the virus to transfer" are inaccurate characterizations. With over a billion RPCs used worldwide each year for fresh



produce, and with routine testing by independent laboratories and daily screening by RPC suppliers confirming the absence of human or plant pathogens, the OGVG recommendation to “convert 100% to virgin corrugated as a primary safety measure” over RPCs is simply not based on historical or scientific evidence on RPC risk potential.

The recent confirmations of the presence of ToBRFV in North America is rightfully a concern to the tomato industry, and RPA shares this concern. The adoption of precautions to prevent the contamination and spread of the plant virus is a prudent step. Additional precautions should include further scrutiny of all materials brought into tomato growing and packing operations. However, a quick decision to discontinue the use of RPCs should not be made based on the well-established low-risk RPC profile. Any suspension of RPC use based on pathogen contamination concerns runs counter to the known safety track record and comprehensive data developed every day to ensure that clean and sanitized RPCs are safe to use in any food production environment.

**About the Reusable Packaging Association (RPA).** RPA is a non-profit trade organization representing and promoting the common business interests of member suppliers, users and service providers of reusable transport packaging products and services. Since 1999, RPA has been a collaboration between supply chain partners to promote the use and value of reusable packaging systems. RPA works to expand markets by raising awareness of the benefits of reuse, to spur innovation through best practices and process optimization, and to validate impact based on industry research, modeling and case studies. For more information, visit the RPA website at [reusables.org](https://reusables.org).

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Tim Debus  
President & CEO  
Reusable Packaging Association  
(813) 358-5327  
[tdebus@reusables.org](mailto:tdebus@reusables.org)