

**TO THE ATTENTION OF
JANCIS ROBINSON
THE FINANCIAL TIMES**

Brussels, 02 March 2020

Subject line: Comments on your FT article “Why it’s time to cut back on glass wine bottles”

Dear Jancis,

At the European Container Glass Federation, we have read your article “Why it’s time to cut back on glass wine bottles” (Financial Times, February 21) and would like to clarify some important elements. As one of the world’s foremost wine connoisseurs, you would appreciate that wine texture or structure is not just a matter of ingredients, but alchemy in which packaging plays a key part. Glass has a lot to offer. No other packaging materials come close to glass for recyclability, health, and taste preservation. But as an industry, we are committed to doing more to increase the sustainability of glass.

It is a fact that glass production is energy-intensive and generates emissions, and we are strongly committed to address these limits by continuously investing in research and innovation and implement practical solutions. Despite being the old kid on the block, glass is already today -30% lighter, 70% less energy-intensive and emits 50% less CO2 than fifty years ago. As we speak, we are exploring new breakthrough technologies to make production climate-neutral, and forging partnerships throughout the value chain to ensure that we maximize recycled content for use in new production loops. Further improving the carbon footprint of the industry is a challenge that requires a collective effort, and this is why we work hand-in-hand with all stakeholders, from suppliers to local communities, political decision-makers, and our customers.

Latest industry figures put collection rates at 68% in the UK, placing glass head and shoulders above alternatives of plastic pouches or cartons (whose recycling is almost impossible due to the use of several materials glued together like plastic or aluminum). Reusable glass is indeed part of our industry’s journey toward carbon neutrality, with bottles that can be used up to 50 times before being recycled for a new production; fortunately, for those not lucky enough to live in proximity to a vineyard, Europe’s extensive spread of glass packaging manufacturing plants means that bottle supplied for our customers are at a short distance. Raw materials like sand are also sustainably and locally sourced at less than 300 km from the glassworks, dramatically reducing the carbon footprint.

In short, glass is a brilliant material that deserves a complete analysis compared to its competitors. We’ve outlined some further points in the attached document, and we hope that you will be eager to restore glass to its rightful place.

We’d like to take this opportunity to invite you on a trip to one of our production locations at your convenience, where you can see how glass packaging is produced, recycled and used to bottle one of the wines you love.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Michel Giannuzzi

President of FEVE – the European Container Glass Federation

ANNEXE

4 REASONS WHY GLASS IS BEST PACKED IN GLASS

1. Glass deserves a full analysis beyond Life Cycle Assessments, as a permanent material which is endlessly recycled and reused to reduce CO₂ emissions.

We would assume your position stems from Life Cycle Assessment conclusions, yet LCAs do not fully capture the environmental benefits of glass compared to other packaging materials. For example, current methodologies do not properly assess end-of-life nor consider that glass is endlessly recycled in a closed loop.

It's true that in glass production, some 30% of production emissions are generated by the combustion of virgin raw materials like sand, soda ash and limestone. However, by using more recycled glass, we can dramatically reduce CO₂ emissions, by 5% for each 10% increase in recycled glass. Unlike other packaging such as 'bag in a box' pouches or cartons which are not effectively recycled today, once produced, a glass bottle becomes the main resource needed to produce new bottles – meaning the more recycled content we can use, the more we reduce our need for virgin raw materials, lowering energy and CO₂ emissions.

Today, by endlessly recycling most of the 76% end-of-use glass bottles and jars collected throughout Europe into new production, we save some 9 million tons of CO₂ per year. The only limit to using more recycled glass is availability and quality. The 'typicity' of glass collection and recycling require a very local approach. That's why this year we have initiated the ['Close the Glass Loop' multi-stakeholder platform](#) with the ambition to increase glass collection up to 90% by 2030. The platform wants to help exchange of best-practice around countries, to drive progress in all countries where there is still much to do, and to optimize the closed-loop business model where this already works well.

2. Glass is produced locally and recycled locally

What's more, LCAs completely neglect the end-of-life impact of plastic material – missing out marine littering, micro-plastics issues and potential poisoning of the environment due to chemical substances. Where are plastic materials produced, and how do they get to customers? Where does oil come from, as a main raw material? When you compare glass packaging with other materials it is important to have the full picture in mind. Just think of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Given its inertness, glass does not impact on the environment or on human health even if it ends up in landfills – which it shouldn't, given the extensive recycling infrastructure and high recycling rates in place across Europe. Glass packaging can be also reused and refilled up to 50 times, which is why reusable glass is part of our industry's journey toward carbon-neutrality.

Europe is home to around 150 glass packaging manufacturing plants. This means producers are close to their customers and recycling plants, while raw materials like sand are also sustainably and locally sourced, dramatically reducing the transport impact. At the same time, the industry is investing hugely in energy saving measures, such as replacing fossil fuel trucks with electric trucks and investing in transport by rail or boat.

3. Wine in glass tastes of nothing but wine

As you also acknowledge, consumers know very well that glass is "the most suitably inert material". It does not leach any chemical components into wine, unlike other packaging materials which suffer from the well-known scalping. This very inertness is why glass is exempt from EU REACH regulations, and why glass is used in all laboratories throughout the world.

Because it doesn't leach, because it doesn't react chemically with the content and because it offers an excellent barrier to gases, glass is the only packaging material that fully preserves the original taste of food and beverages. With glass, wine tastes like wine! Unlike any other materials you mention, glass does not need any plastic layers or other additives to preserve the taste, avoid corrosion or decrease gas permeability. In this respect, there is

something fundamentally flawed with the idea that wine, which can stay fresh for decades in a glass bottle, must have a “sell by date” if it is packaged in other materials. This speaks volumes about the impact a packaging has on the purity of products, which should not only concern consumers but also winemakers whose reputation rests with the quality of the products they produce.

4. Consumers prefer glass

Last, but not least: when it comes to preserving wine, glass is best, and consumers know it! It’s a little unfair to deride as “snobbish” the 87% of European consumers which recommend glass as the best packaging material for their food and beverage products, and the 79% of European consumers who would never opt for wine in anything other than glass for a nice dinner at home¹. Taste and quality preservation and shelf life matter, and most of us would struggle to imagine a celebratory dinner where a pouch or a box has taken glass place on the table – whether it’s fine wine or the cheapest Bordeaux. A Europe-wide community of consumers supports glass as their loved packaging and gather together on the [Friends of Glass platform](http://www.friendsofglass.com).

¹ InSites Survey 2014 – 2016 data available on www.friendsofglass.com