



Making on-the-go water more sustainable in Malaysia

The Watertree Project™

 **Tetra Pak®**
PROTECTS WHAT'S GOOD

“It’s our ambition to change people’s minds. The less plastic there is, the better”



Two entrepreneurs are inspired to change public perception and, with time, replace plastic water bottles with paper-based carton packages in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, there is a massive need for water-on-the-go. Each year, consumers there use 100,000 tonnes of PET bottles¹, and despite the presence of recycling infrastructure, many of these end up in landfills or waterways. The Watertree™ Project, a start-up company, set out to change this, and with support from Tetra Pak, introduced the very first locally-branded carton-packed water to Malaysians.

“It’s our ambition to change people’s minds. The less plastic there is, the better,” states Paul Rogers, one of the founders of The Watertree™ Project.

The start-up story

The company was founded in 2019 when Paul Rogers and his business partner, Christine Teh, with engineering and legal backgrounds, learned of the scale of PET consumption in Malaysia. Through dealings with the PET industry, they realised that Malaysia consumes millions of single-use plastic water bottles per month.

Paul and Chris, on the other hand, were stunned. How could this be a good thing knowing the environmental issues facing Malaysia, particularly around waste?

Landfills are the most common methods of waste disposal, with 230 of them dotting the landscape². Waste is generated faster than the natural degradation process, which is why recycling plays an important role in the country’s waste management. However, only 16% of PET bottles are collected for recycling³.

“By using our water packages, companies can demonstrate CSR leadership”



The partners began to ponder how they could spark change and help get people to act more responsibly in relation to single-use plastic – and the idea of The Watertree™ Project was born. This is, as the name implies, not a regular company but a movement with a clear aim to reduce the estimated 11 million single-use plastic bottles a month⁴ to 0 by 2024.

“Malaysia is a hot country, and the need for water will always be pressing, but this number of PET bottles was mind-blowing. We needed a non-plastic alternative, and we knew Tetra Pak had already come a long way in terms of sustainable beverage cartons. That’s why we wasted no time in approaching them.”

Challenging guidelines and habits

In Malaysia, Tetra Pak has been actively working with multiple stakeholders to ensure there are local solutions for used beverage carton recycling.

Today, there is a solid infrastructure in place for the collection, sorting and recycling of used beverage cartons.

“We can tell our customers that they can recycle their beverage cartons, and that adds to our value proposition. It also means that we don’t have to worry about the end-of-life solution for our cartons,” Paul explains.

This was just the start. Paul knows that it will take time to change consumer habits on several levels.

“Firstly, consumers need to understand that water in a carton is just as legitimate and safe as water in a transparent bottle. Secondly, pricing is currently too high for many consumers. We need to invite people to think about their plastic usage and get them to understand that they have a choice and that they can help build a more sustainable future.”



“**Tetra Pak is committed to always improving, and you get all the information you need at every step**”

Progress step-by-step

Just as Covid-19 hit the world, The Watertree™ Project were ready to launch their carton-packed water in a 330 ml pack. Despite the pandemic, the product is now available in Kuala Lumpur's three premium supermarkets, and several corporates have bought into the idea of having co-branded paper-based Watertree™ packages instead of PET bottles at their offices and production sites.

“By using our water packages, companies can demonstrate CSR leadership and help to build a better public perception of carton-packed water and why this the responsible way to go.”

Sustainable support from Tetra Pak

Throughout the process, Tetra Pak helped The Watertree™ Project with everything from business development, packaging design and marketing.

“We got fantastic support in so many areas. Tetra Pak is committed to always improving, and you get all the information you need at every step.”

For example, Tetra Pak helped the Watertree™ Project understand how to promote the new paper-based carton packages by explaining why they are better for the environment in the first place.

“Not only do they help reduce plastic pollution, but cartons also have a lower carbon footprint than plastic. That's because they're made of plant-based raw materials that absorb CO₂ in the atmosphere, as opposed to fossil-based materials like plastic that release new CO₂ that was in the ground for millions for years,” says Paul.

Tetra Pak also explained the importance of responsible sourcing. All Tetra Pak packages are Forest Stewardship Council™(FSC™)⁵ certified, meaning they are made of paperboard from responsibly managed forests and other controlled sources and support the well-being of the world's forests. And the carton caps are made of renewable sugarcane-based plastic certified by Bonsucro. This ensures ethical, responsible business practices across the full supply chain.

The journey continues

As part of its ambition to replace PET bottles, The Watertree™ Project will continue communicating and influencing society:

“We can help people make the change by communicating that they now have a more sustainable choice. We tell them that choosing carton is like a vote for Malaysian sustainability,” Paul concludes.

Read more at
<https://www.thewatertreeproject.com>

¹ WWF, 2020, Plastic packaging in Southeast Asia and China

² Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 2008, An overview of Landfill Management and Technologies: A Malaysian Case Study at Ampar Tenang

³ The Star, 2019, Study shows low rate of recycling plastic bottles in Malaysia

⁴ The Watertree™ Project's estimate based on industry and retail sources, 2020

⁵ The FSC™ license code for Tetra Pak is FSC - C014047