



ASSOCIATION OF PLASTIC  
**RECYCLERS**

# PLASTICS RECYCLING MARKETS UPDATE

## ECONOMIC CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

WI Council on Recycling, June 5, 2026

## Who is APR?

APR is an international non-profit and the largest North American organization focused exclusively on improving recycling for plastics.



## What Do We Do?

Our mission is simple:  
**RECYCLE MORE PLASTIC**  
to reduce waste.

# STEPS OF PLASTICS RECYCLING

## Collecting



**Haulers** collect plastic and other recyclables from homes and businesses.

## Sorting



**Material recovery facilities (MRFs)** sort types of plastics into bales.

## Processing



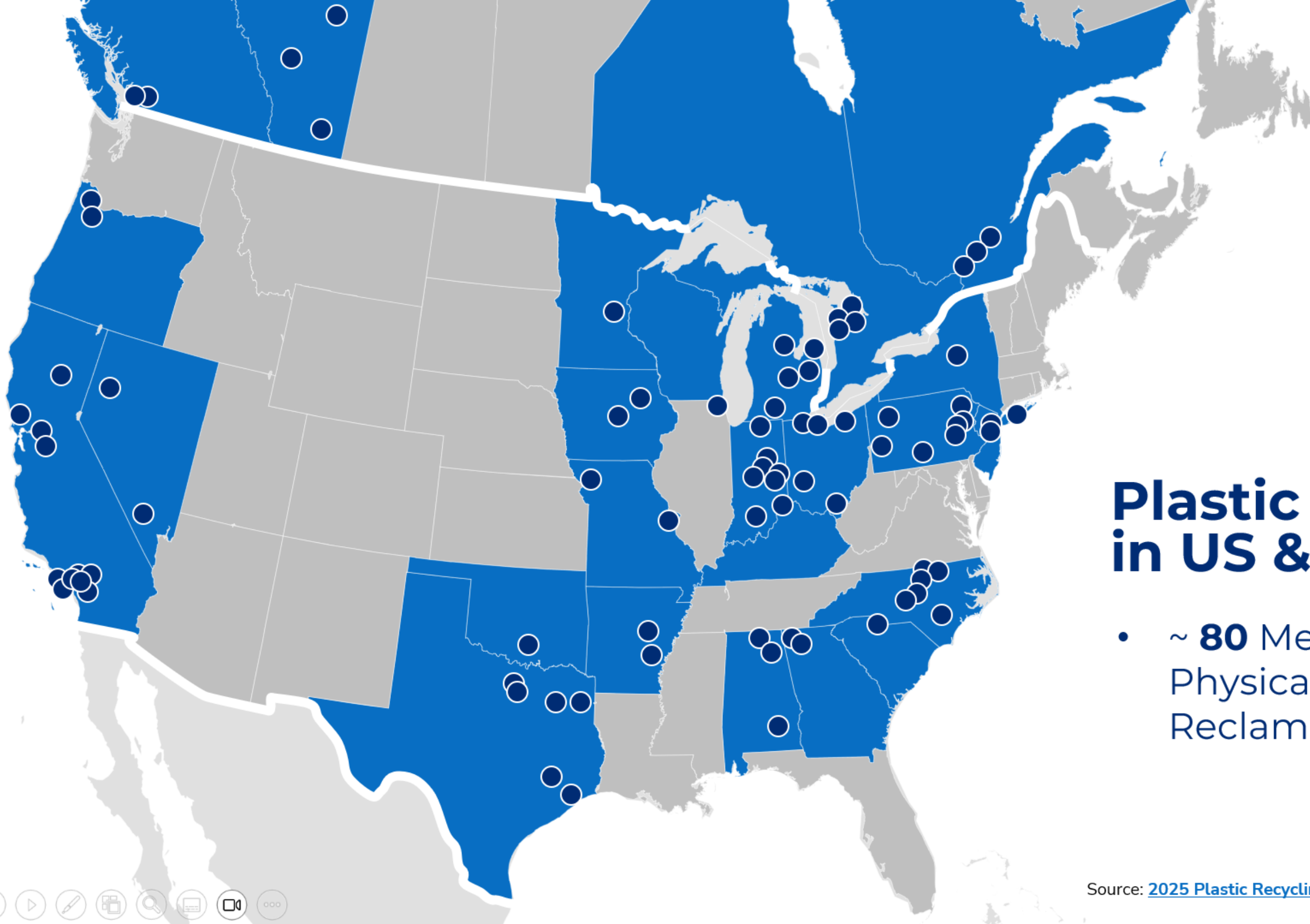
**Reclaimers** sort, grind, wash, and process plastics into pellets, flakes, or sheet.

**Reclaimers (recyclers) are the core of APR**

## Manufacturing



**Converters** use recycled plastics to make new packaging and products.



## Plastic Recyclers in US & Canada:

- ~ **80** Mechanical and Physical Reclamation Sites

Source: [2025 Plastic Recycling Capacity in the US and Canada](#)

# PLASTICS RECYCLING WORKS EVERY DAY



**5 Billion Pounds**  
Of Plastic Was Recycled in North America in 2022

Source: 2022 Post Consumer Plastic Recycling Report



**340**  
Trucks A Day Of Plastic Saved From Landfills

Source: Maximum weight restriction of 40K lbs per truckload



**1 Million Homes**  
Could Be Powered by the Energy Savings

Source: EPA Warm Tool



**681,000**

jobs supported by all recycling & reuse activities in the US (not just plastics)

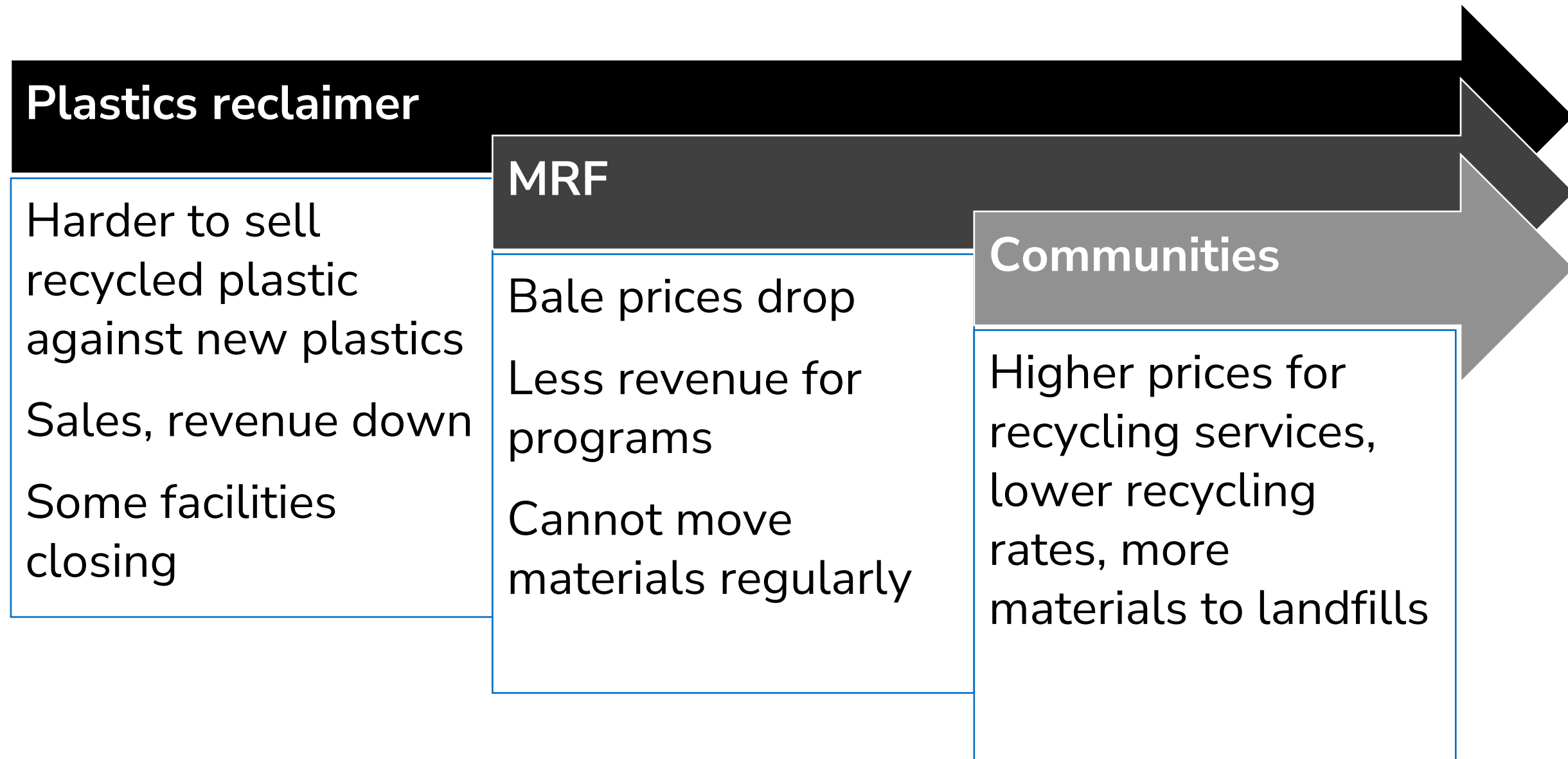
Source: EPA, 2020



# MARKET CHALLENGES

# WHY PLASTICS MARKET CONDITION MATTER

## TRICKLE DOWN IMPACTS



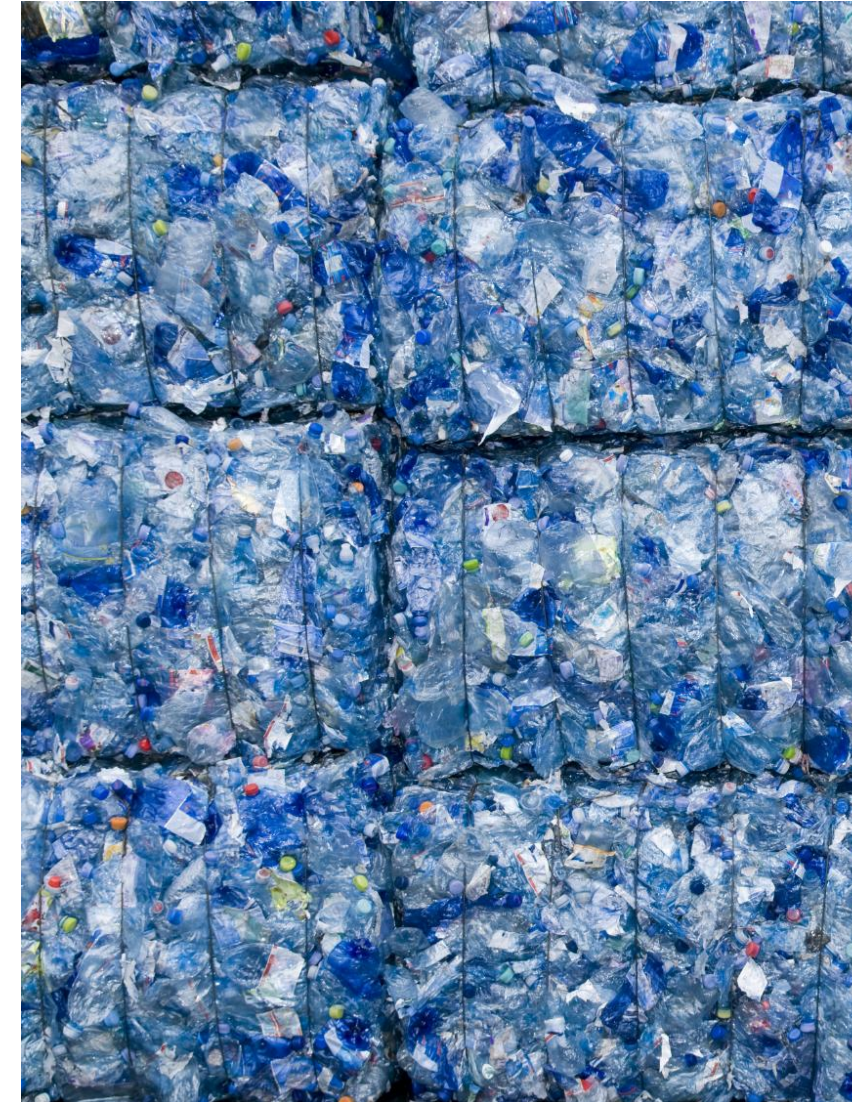
# FOCUS ON PET PLASTICS

- PET plastics bottles are most recyclable plastics
- 30% US recycling rate
- 1.9 billion pounds collected each year
- Over 93% of plastics collected in US are processed in North America
- Making recycled PET uses 75% less energy compared to new plastic
- More bottles made back into bottles than any other products
- Dependable source of revenue for MRFs
- Collected in Wisconsin for decades



# SO WHY ARE PET RECYCLING MARKETS SO BAD?

- Bale prices paid to MRFs for PET bales average ~**13 cents/lb** (10-year average)
- Spring is strong season for PET prices because of summer beverage sales.
- Yet in March 2026, bale prices were **just 1.74 cents/lb**, near record lows.
- US programs **were losing \$10M per month in lost revenue** compared to average prices.
- Some MRFs couldn't find a buyer for several weeks. Some had to pay to recycle PET; some had to export it.



# WHY → HISTORIC LOSS OF US RECYCLING PLANTS

- Plastic reclaimers have been struggling to sell recycled PET to make new products.
- In just 18 months, **6 plants closed** or shut down their wash lines, out of 32 plants.
- **20% loss in US processing capacity** for PET bottles and containers.
- Over 500 million pounds of processing capacity lost and over 500 jobs.

Company	Location	Estimated annual input capacity (lbs.)	Jobs lost
<u>Alpek</u>	Reading, PA	80 million	<u>100</u>
<u>Alpek / Clear Path</u>	Fayetteville, NC	150 million	<u>90*</u>
Evergreen	Riverside, CA	90 million	<u>57</u>
Evergreen	Clyde, OH; Albany, NY	115 million	<u>247</u>
Phoenix Technologies	Bowling Green, OH	100 million	<u>7</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>535 million lbs</b>	<b>501 jobs</b>



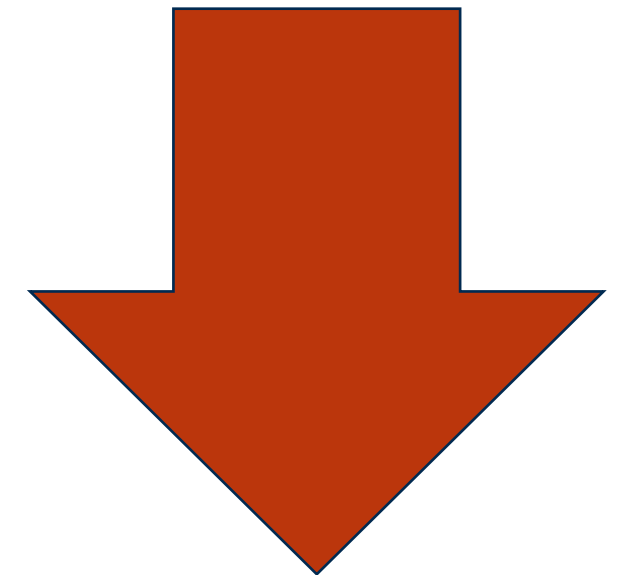
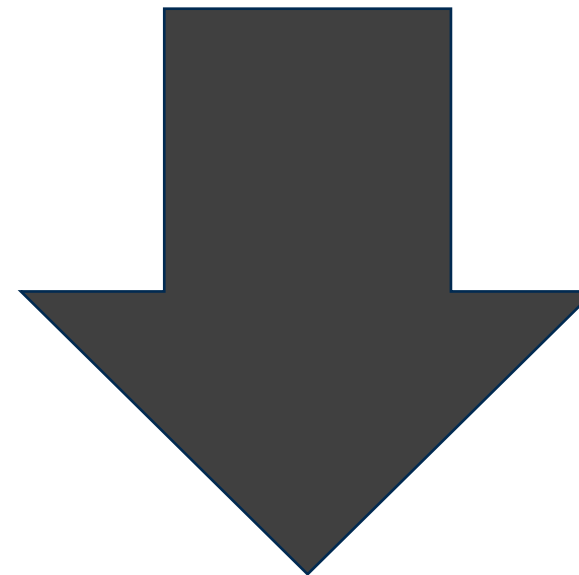
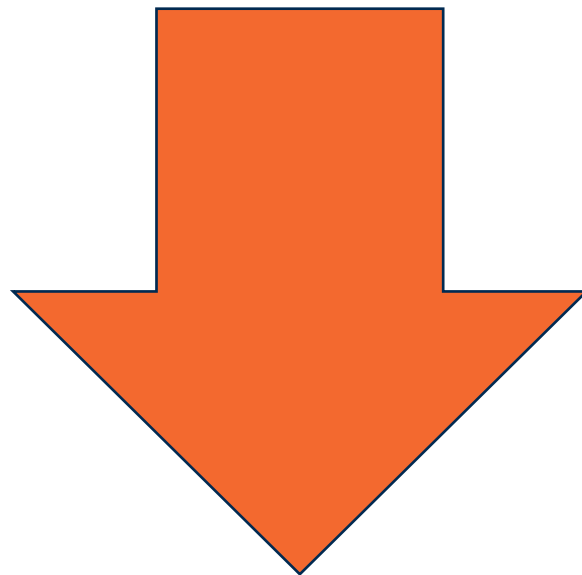
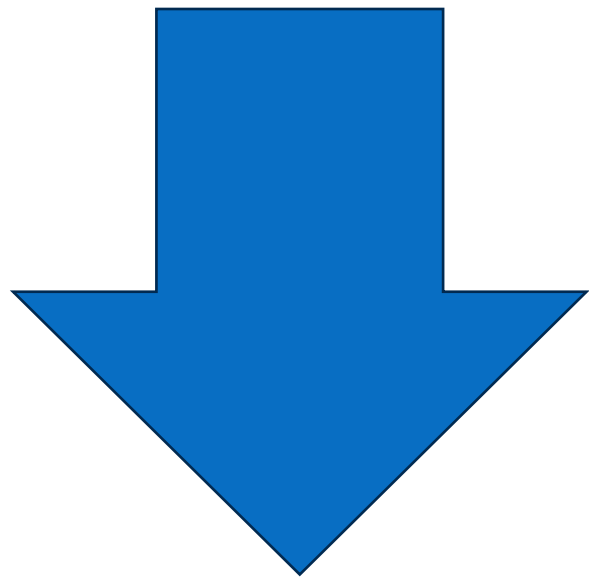
# FOUR PROBLEMS UNDERMINING PET PLASTICS RECYCLING

1. More and  
more new  
plastic

2. Low price  
of new  
plastic

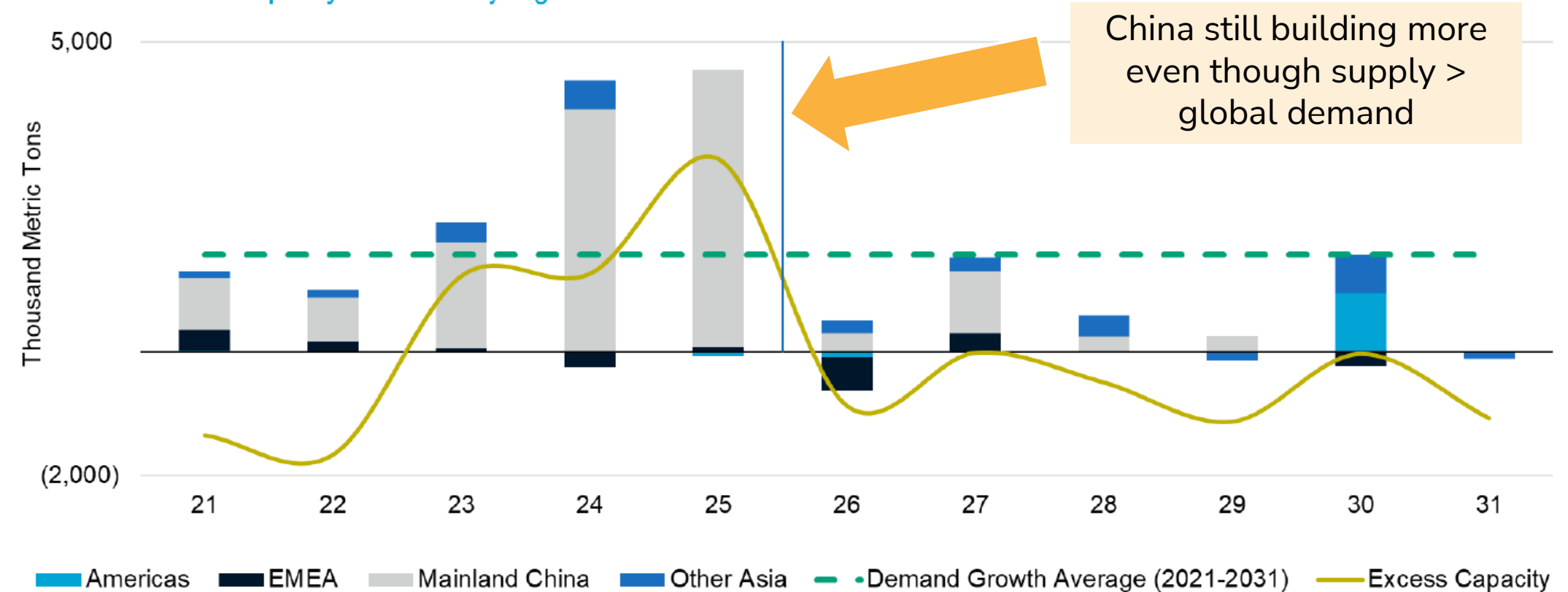
3. Brands  
back off  
sustainability  
targets

4. Influx of  
imported  
recycled  
plastics



# Massive growth in new PET plastic production in China

World: PET Resin capacity additions by region



Source: Chemical Market Analytics by OPIS

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- PET production growth in China is **greater than global market demand**.
- Too much supply drives down prices, makes new plastic cheaper.
- US launched trade investigations into **China manipulating the global market and undercutting US industries**.

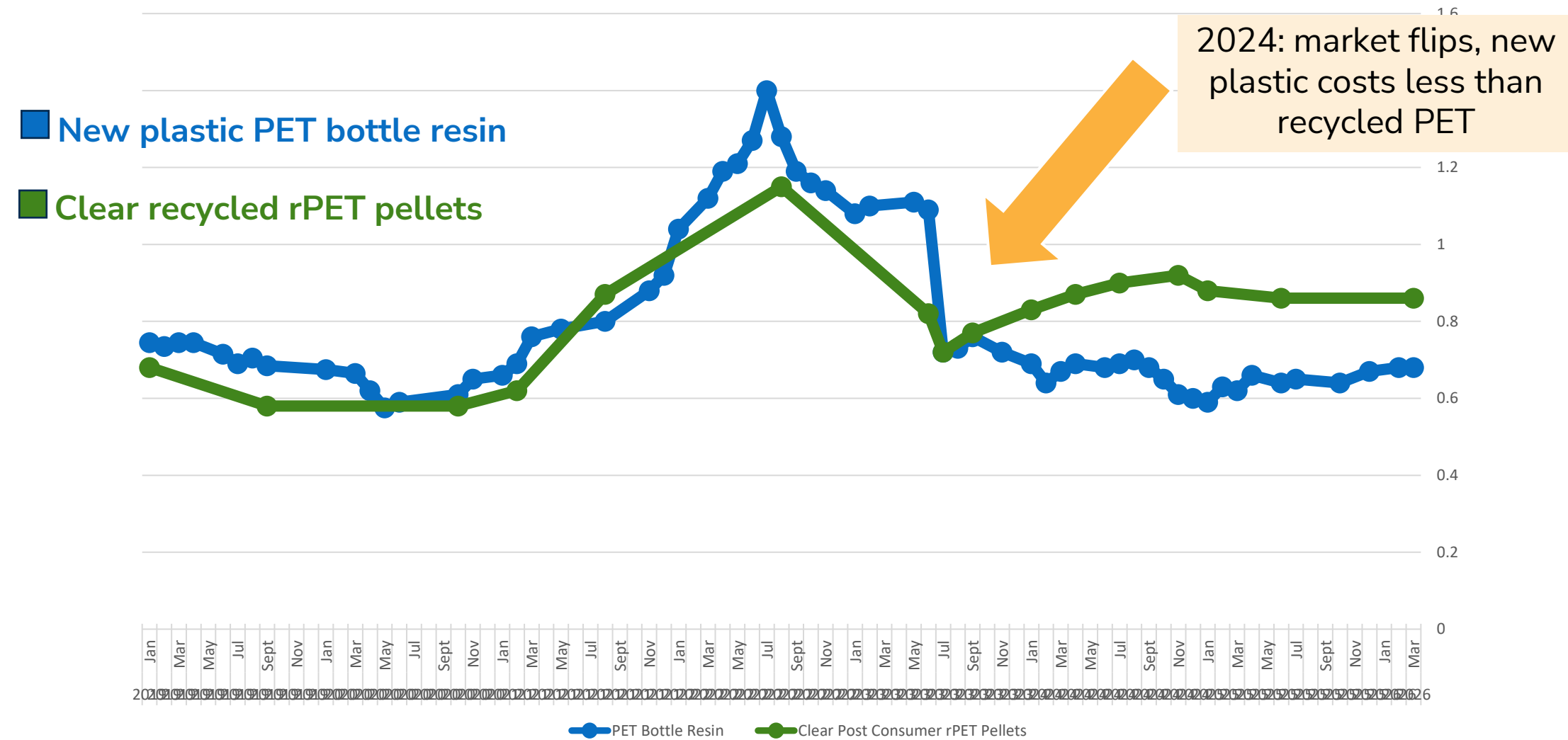
Source: Chemical Market Analytics by OPIS, Plastics Recycling Conference, Feb. 2026

1. CHINA IS MAKING MORE & MORE NEW PET PLASTIC

## 2. NEW PLASTIC IS GETTING CHEAPER

Virgin PET was cheaper in March 2026 than it was in March 2019

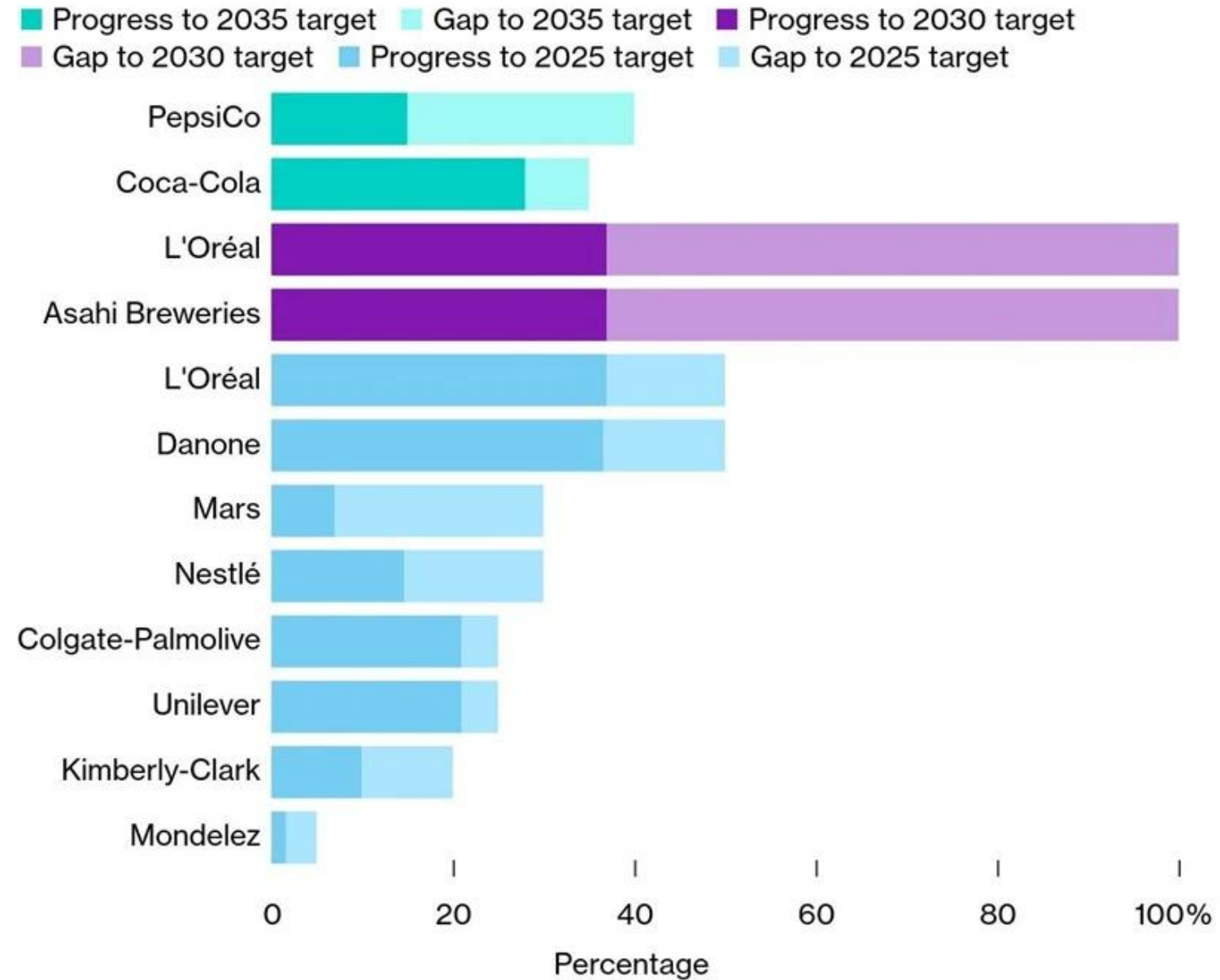
### Price comparison, virgin PET to recycled PET, 2019 – 2026 (\$/lb)



- Virgin PET was cheaper in March 2026 than in March 2019. Yet nearly everything else in economy increased nearly 25% over that time.
- Since 2024, new plastic is cheaper than recycled PET.

### 3. MOST COMPANIES MISS, BACK OFF GOALS TO BUY MORE RECYCLED PLASTIC

#### Selected brand owners' progress on recycled or bio-based content targets



Source: BloombergNEF, company reports.

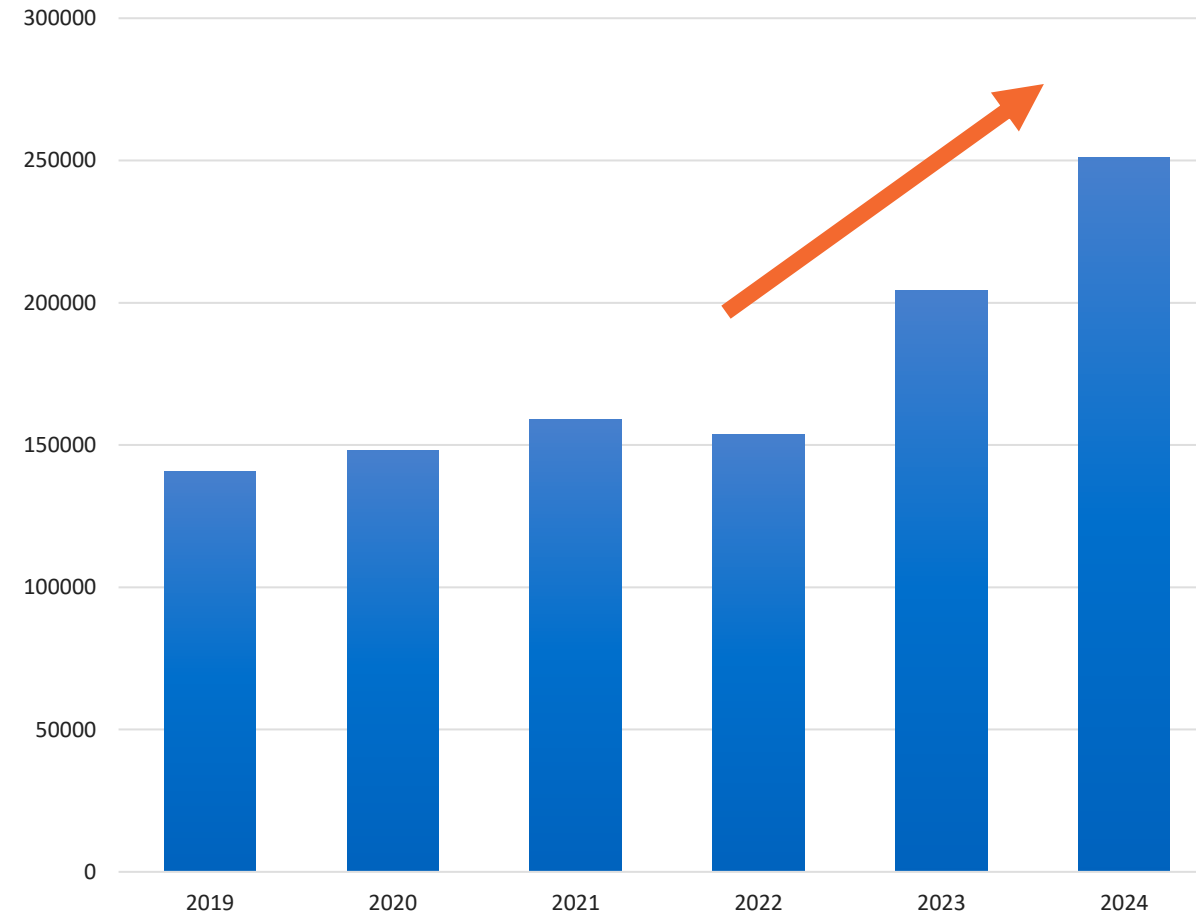
Note: Darker shade refers to the share of recycled or bio-based plastics in the brand owner's total packaging use in 2024. The lighter segment indicates the remainder of the company's target.

BloombergNEF

## 4. COMPANIES BUY MORE RECYCLED PET FROM OVERSEAS, LESS FROM US PROGRAMS

**25% of recycled PET now comes from imported materials**

### Imported US PET Scrap



*Data source: ICIS*

- Leading imported sources: Taiwan, South Korea, Mexico, India, China, Singapore, Turkey, Vietnam
- Imported recycled PET significantly cheaper because of lower labor costs, lower env./social standards
- Companies are importing recycled PET to comply with US state PCR laws that were meant to support US recycling programs

Sources: <https://plasticsrecycling.org/record-plastic-production-imports-jeopardize-pet-recycling/>



These plant closures are **NOT** a failure of plastics recycling.

It's a **failure of companies & manufacturers to stop buying new plastic** despite overwhelming public support to reduce plastic waste.



# SOLUTIONS



# HOW YOU CAN HELP



Adopt minimum recycled content requirements for all plastic products and packaging. Five US states have laws; WI has outdated law on rigid plastics.



Set procurement goals for high-volume recycled content plastics: roll carts, trash bags, trash bins, drainage pipe, pallets, etc. Require content from North America.



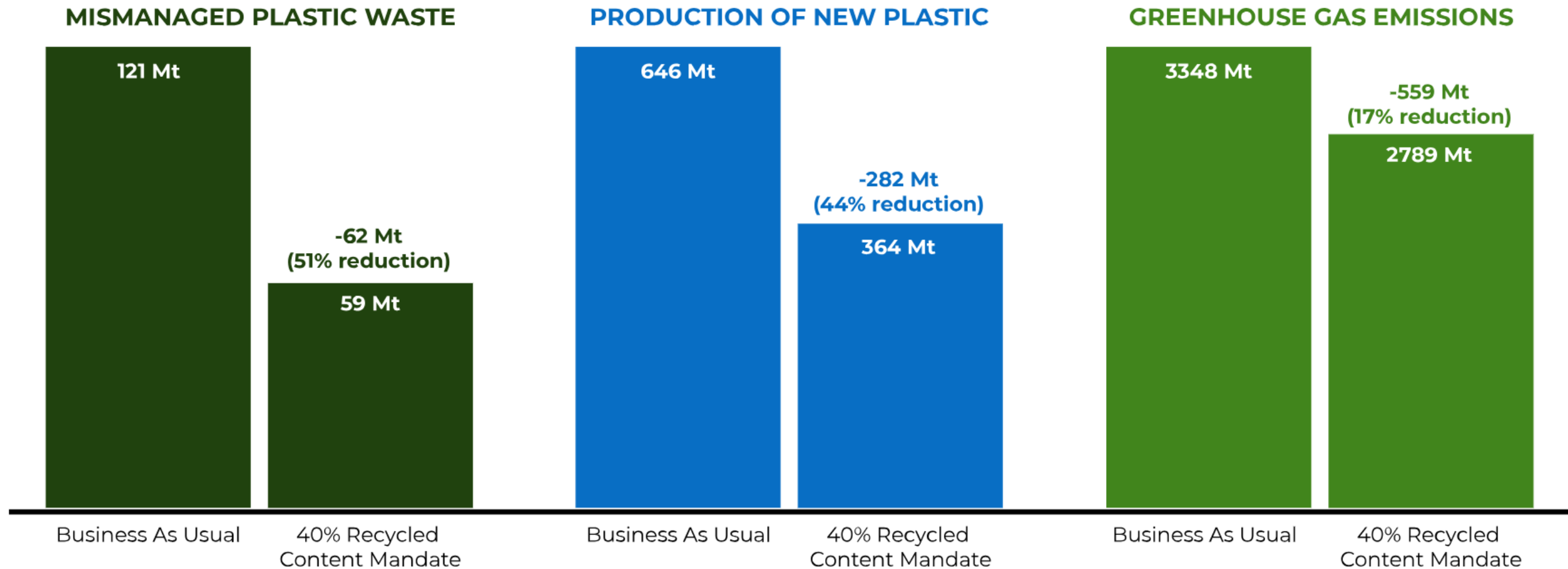
Support federal tax credit bill (CIRCLE Act) to invest in domestic recycling infrastructure.



Include recycled content goals and strong end market development in packaging EPR laws.

# RECYCLED CONTENT = GOOD FOR RECYCLING MARKETS & GOOD FOR ENVIRONMENT

## BENEFITS OF 40% RECYCLED CONTENT MANDATE



Source: <https://plasticsrecycling.org/resources/using-more-recycled-plastic-is-the-best-strategy-to-reduce-global-plastic-waste-and-the-production-of-more-new-plastic/>



# KEY TAKEAWAYS



Plastics recycling works today and can work better with state and federal policies.



Recycled content laws and government procurement are needed to support stronger plastics recycling markets.



More recycling provides environmental and economic benefits.



Imported recycled plastics undermine US programs. Prioritize North American sources.

Learn more about the problems and solutions:

<https://plasticsrecycling.org/record-plastic-production-imports-jeopardize-pet-recycling/>.





ASSOCIATION OF PLASTIC  
**RECYCLERS**

LISTEN



# Discussion & thank you!

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