

## **Squeezed but not forgotten**

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### **What's small but lasts forever?**

*By Martha Young*

There are billions of them. They are everywhere. Thousands are produced every single day. And they never go away. Ever.

I'm talking about squeeze packets. Squeeze packets are those small packets of condiments that are on the counters at fast food outlets. You see them filled with Dijon mustard, ketchup, pickles, salad dressing and nut butters. They are frequently filled with shampoo and body lotion for travel or as samples. Squeeze packets are used for dozens of different products, but they have one serious problem. They have a life cycle in excess of 1,000 years. That's right, more than seven generations, more than 10 generations, more than 100 generations.

Earlier this month, **Justin's Nut Butter**, based in Boulder, Colorado, hosted a day and a half Sustainable Squeeze Packet Summit. The list of attendees included some of the largest names in packaging: NatureWorks, LLC (a subsidiary of Cargill), Label Technology, Flextec, Mirel Plastics, G-P Flex Pack, Packaging Solutions and several others.

Members of the buying community at Whole Foods and Kroger/King Soopers/City Market were there. Users of squeeze packets were also in attendance including Nestle, GU Energy, Artisana, Madhava Honey and roughly a dozen other manufacturers.

All these people came together to talk about squeeze packets, the impact they have on the environment, and to brainstorm how to fix the problem. What we came away with was a clearer understanding of the magnitude of the squeeze packet issue. We learned the definitions of compostable versus biodegradable. (Compostable breaks down to humus-like material that enriches the soil and returns nutrients to the earth. Biodegradable breaks down to smaller and smaller components, but can still clog the environmental chain with tiny bits of whatever.) We learned the challenges manufacturers face in needing packaging that is strong enough to hold varying degrees of viscous product, but thin enough to decompose within 90 days of disposal.

What we didn't get was a solution. But that is okay. The seeds have been planted with the packaging companies that sustainable packaging is in high demand. The Summit sowed the fact that this isn't just Justin's concern, but the concern of a wide variety of entities including manufacturers and retail outlets. Seeds were sown that there is a very large market for sustainable squeeze packaging solutions.

Solving the sustainable squeeze packaging challenge is not the sole responsibility of the packaging industry. All of us have a role we can play in addressing the problem. First, click over to [TheLeastYouCanDo.Org](http://TheLeastYouCanDo.Org) and take a little action. At a minimum, simply click on like and add the information to your Facebook page. There are other steps readily available from this site including electronically signing a petition and sending emails to some of the largest manufacturers who use petroleum-based squeeze packets for their products.

Next, be aware of your use of squeeze packets and aim to reduce your demand for them. Do you really need a packet of soy sauce or ketchup with your take-out as you head home to chill in front of the flat screen, when you already have these items in the pantry? Don't take them out of the store.

You don't have to take on the sustainable squeeze packet challenge as a personal issue. Justin Gold and his Summit have done this for us. We need to support his efforts by taking a little bit of action via [TheLeastYouCanDo.org](http://TheLeastYouCanDo.org) site. Go ahead and click through. It's good to be an armchair activist.