

# business



Michelle Mogavero/Staff

## Paper, plastic or cloth?

Grocery shoppers are adding environmental consciousness to their buggies

Greenville Journal 8/29/08  
BY TAYLOR SMITH  
staff writer

The question used to be paper or plastic in the supermarket checkout line.

Now it's paper, plastic or recycled?

Stores are pushing the use of recycled bags and in some cases offering discounts or contributions to charity for those who do.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates 380 billion plastic bags are used every year.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, said reusable bags help the environment through saved energy costs in the long term.

"I think the programs are good for all the discussions we are having and it is also good for our pocketbooks," he said.

Earth Fare sells small reusable bags for \$1.99 and a larger bag for \$6.99. When a customer comes into the store with one of their bags or any other bag they are reusing, 10 cents for each bag is donated to a local charity picked for the month.

In July, the EarthFare on Pelham Road donated \$700 to the Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue League, said Cazzie Carter,

**REUSE:** According to the Environmental Protection Agency, over 380 billion plastic bags, sacks and wraps are consumed in the United States each year.

See BAGS, PAGE 40



Michelle Mogavero/Staff

**ON THE MARKET:** Most grocery outlets sell their reusable grocery bags for 99 cents.

**BAGS CONTINUED FROM 39...**

assistant store manager. More than \$100,000 was donated from reusable bags at the chain's 16 stores last year, she said.

"I am getting more and more excited to see other people realize this needs to happen," Carter said about Earth Fare's sale of reusable bags, which started more than 15 years ago. "It is just about getting

the word out there, not always about competition."

Bi-Lo stores have been selling their green reusable bags for 99 cents for about three months and they give a 5-cent rebate on any bag brought into the store. The company also offers a reusable freezer bag for \$2.99.

Phil Alley, store manager of the North Pleasantburg Drive location, said the store frequently sees customers bringing

in bags to take advantage of the refund. It is not uncommon, he said, for shoppers to bring competitor's bags to save the maximum amount of money.

The rebates will help shoppers save money, Wyche said, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are learning to reuse.

"It depends on the amount of the incentive and probably in this case you have to basically be motivated to do it," Wyche said. "I am not sure a nickel or dime will totally change someone's mind."

Bloom and Publix stores sell reusable bags for 99 cents and encourage shoppers to use them, but they don't offer a rebate.

Without a rebate, it is impossible to track the number of bags being reused in Publix stores, said Brenda Reid, a company spokeswoman, but they have seen "them fly off the shelves in recent months."

The company started selling a cloth bag about a decade ago, but their popularity waned as they got dirty or ripped, Reid said. The new Publix reusable cloth bag is stronger and has become so popular, she said, charities have asked the company to donate some.

"Momentum is picking up for customers who are interested in saving the environment," Reid said. "We didn't necessarily have many customers last year say they were interested in green issues, but this year we have a lot of new customers say they are interested in this."

One barrier to reusing bags may not be the availability of finding a reusable bag, but forgetting to bring the bag back in the store.

Publix has been giving away window stickers with their bags that say: "Don't forget your bag," Reid said.

Carter said she attributes the success of their reusable bag program to Earth Fare's community involvement and mission to promote healthy lifestyles.

"To just see this start to explode is exciting," Carter said.

But 7,000 bags in July does not account for all the bags that left the store, so Carter said she is realistic about how the percentage of reusable bags appearing at Earth Fare checkout lanes need to grow.

"I am just waiting on this trend to pick at the mall," Carter said. "It is usually something impromptu like trying to find that snazzy new dress; the last thing you are thinking about is 'Oh, I have bags in the car.'"

To increase reduction, reuse and recycling by consumers, Wyche said it will take a combination of incentives from the private sector like rebates on reusable bags but also pressure/support from the public sector like tax breaks on reusable buildings.

"I have been so excited and inspired with what is happening with so much more interest in the environment," Wyche said. "And it is about time, because the planet is in serious trouble."

Contact Taylor Smith at 679-1267 or [taylorsmith@greenvillejournal.com](mailto:taylorsmith@greenvillejournal.com).