



## Corporate Responsibility: Which 2 Fast-Food Chains Just Earned Top Environmental Marks?

Brian Stoffel | Feb. 15, 2015



These days, corporate responsibility means helping the environment as much as it does helping others. Original photo: [AYP0721424](#), via Flickr.

When it comes to fast-food restaurants, winning the vote in the court of public opinion hasn't come easy. Perhaps starting with the documentary *Super Size Me* in 2004, the effects of eating fast food and a lack of corporate responsibility have soured the public's view of the industry.

But a recent report published by the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and **As You Sow** (AYS) highlights companies that have taken impressive steps toward cutting down waste within their stores. Increasingly, helping the environment has become a cause not just for eco-minded folks, but for investors concerned about the bottom line of their businesses as well.

As the report states, "Recyclable postconsumer packaging with an estimated market value of \$11.4 billion is wasted annually." That's a lot of money. But two polar-opposite companies stand above the rest for their efforts to cut

down on this waste -- and they are reaping the economic benefits from doing so.

### The first should be no surprise

I'll admit, when I think of "fast-food" companies, Starbucks (NASDAQ: SBUX ) does not first come to mind. But for their report, the organizations lumped all quick-service restaurants, or QSRs, together -- so this coffee giant was thrown in with more typical industry names.

While some loathe Starbucks' ubiquity, there's no denying the company's commitment to sustainability. Starbucks earned high grades from the NRDC and AYS for a number of initiatives. The chain has committed to using reusable mugs as often as possible, uses recycled material for its containers -- which is vital in that it creates a market for such products -- and is the only major national QSR with a dedicated area in every store for recycling.



Simple recycling centers like this, located in almost all Starbucks locations, can make a big difference. Photo: [Bit Boy](#), via Wikimedia Commons.

Combined with Starbucks' commitment to the welfare of all stakeholders, this should come as no surprise. The company has already established education centers in coffee-producing countries to make sure suppliers use sustainable practices. And it famously refused to cut healthcare benefits to employees even during the Great Recession, to the chagrin of many on Wall Street.



Most sandwich containers now have a high percentage of postconsumer recycled materials.  
Original photo: [Renzelle Mae Abasolo](#), via Flickr.

### **But second place might surprise you**

The second company lauded in the report was none other than McDonald's (NYSE: MCD ). While some begrudge the health effects of the company's fare, the Golden Arches is an industry leader when it comes to reducing waste.

A full 33% of McDonald's customer food packaging is made of postconsumer recycled material. That appears to be the highest percentage in the QSR industry (for comparison, Starbucks clocks in at 10%). The company has eliminated the use of Styrofoam coffee cups, which act as major polluters. And McDonald's has reduced the amount of material used in 10 different packages -- some by as much as 48% -- in the past three years alone.

Of course, investors would probably be even happier if the company could reverse its recent market swoon, which led to the replacement of CEO Don Thompson. But they can rest assured McDonald's isn't wasting any money -- or materials -- on packaging.

Those with positions in Burger King (NYSE: BKW ), Domino's (NYSE: DPZ ), Papa John's (NASDAQ: PZZA ), Wendy's (NASDAQ: WEN ), and Jack in the Box (NASDAQ: JACK ), on the other hand, might want to dig into the sustainability practices of their holdings. The NRDC/AYS report called out all the companies as having few explicit environmental goals and minimal disclosures.

### **\$19 trillion industry could destroy the internet**

One bleeding-edge technology is about to put the World-Wide-Web to bed. It could make early investors wildly rich. Experts are calling it the single largest business opportunity in the history of capitalism... The Economist is calling it "transformative"... But you'll probably just call it "how I made my millions." Don't be too late to the party— [click here for 1 stock to own when the web goes dark.](#)