

Depackaging Plastics

Anaerobic Digestion (“AD”) has increased in popularity as a means of dealing with food waste that arises from the industrial and retail supply chain. Much of this material is in the form of packaged goods in trays, bags, tubs, tins etc. Plastic packaging may be any of a number of common polymers such as PET, PP, HDPE or HIPS. AD companies have become necessarily adept at removing this packaging, installing specialist equipment that will separate the plastics from the food. The organic content is then digested at the facility to recover the valuable biogas for combustion. The contaminated packaging, on the other hand, represents a problem - partly because of the food residues but also because of the mix of polymers.

One AD company sought assistance from the GREAT Project to identify what options existed for their plastics. The output of this support was a comprehensive report identifying key options. One such option was Refuse Derived Fuel (“RDF”), whereby the plastics could be turned into a fuel source for appropriate waste to energy facilities in the UK and abroad. However, a number of other possible alternatives were identified including available technologies for reducing the amount of contamination and improving the yield of the overall process.

Given the mixed and dirty nature of the material, there are no easy routes into high-value recycling markets. Nonetheless, the report gave the company plenty of food for thought.

Case Study



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