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# Shopping at Weaver Street Market?

## Better bring or prepare to buy your grocery bags

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BY TAMMY GRUBB, APRIL 18, 2019 09:24 AM

*The News and Observer*

Weaver Street Market will celebrate Earth Day on Monday by ending single-use paper and plastic bags at the checkout.

The cooperative grocer, with stores in Carrboro, Chapel Hill and Hillsborough, is the first North Carolina grocery chain to phase out single-use bags, company officials said in a news release.

Kroger announced last year that its grocery chain will phase out plastic bags by 2025.

A typical Weaver Street customer uses about 150 single-use bags each year, company officials said. Starting Monday, customers will have to bring their own bags or choose from among three reusable options for sale.

“This is an opportunity for us to make a meaningful difference in our community through collective action,” general manager Ruffin Slater said. “We recognize that bold steps are needed to address climate change, and this is one way we can work together with our customers to make a real impact and reduce the pollution caused by single-use bags.”

The grocer’s bag policy also will apply to a new store opening in June on Hargett Street in Raleigh.

Reusable bags cost 99 cents or \$1.99 for an insulated bag, Weaver Street officials said.

Customers also can choose the new “Bring it Back Sack” made of recycled plastic. The sacks cost 15 cents each and can be used up to 125 times. The idea is that used sacks would be returned to bins in the stores and made available for free to other customers.

The market’s next goal, Ruffin said in an email Wednesday, is switching from plastic produce bags to affordable and reusable options.

“Currently our produce and bulk bags are made from 100% recycled material and can be recycled at recycling centers that accept plastic film,” he said.

Most customers asked about Weaver Street’s new policy this week said they already bring their own bags to shop.

It’s about time the store made the switch, said longtime shopper Hunter Levinsohn.

“I just keep being so impressed by how many things in our lives are imbued with plastic, and how hard it is not to use plastic, not to use things that you can’t reuse, and I think it’s an incredibly important step,” she said.. “I am really, really in favor of it.”

Last year, Weaver Street reported its customers used 601,000 plastic bags, 509,000 paper bags, and 390,000 reusable bags. The Center for Biological Diversity notes that the average American shopper uses a plastic bag for about 12 minutes, taking home nearly 1,500 bags a year. Waste Management reports that only 1 percent of those bags are recycled, the nonprofit group said.

That means millions of bags end up in the landfill, where they take hundreds of years to break down, creating microplastics that also pollute the environment, or gradually end up in the world’s waterways and oceans, where they threaten marine animals and wildlife, experts say.

Paper bags are not a sustainable option, experts also say, because they take four times the energy to manufacture than a plastic bag requires and take up more space in landfills, where they break down just as slowly as plastic. They also generate more air and water pollutants, experts said.

Removing all single-use bags from the landfill is an easy and cost-effective step toward a sustainable world, said Blair Pollock, Orange County solid waste planner and a Weaver Street member for more than 30 years.

“Orange County Solid Waste Management recognizes that reducing and reusing are the most cost-effective and environmentally sound strategies to reduce solid waste,” Pollock said. “Single-use plastics, like checkout bags, can often be readily replaced or eliminated, especially when complemented by the kinds of strategic initiatives in which Weaver Street Market is leading the way in our community.”

The bag initiative is among several programs that Weaver Street Market has implemented since opening in 1988. The co-op, owned by 20,000 consumer-owners and 200 worker-owners, also sources food and products from over 100 local and independent producers, works to reduce the energy use in its stores, sources products packaged in reusable or recyclable materials, and provides recyclable utensils and packaging to food bar customers.

Richard Brandon said he shops almost daily at the Weaver Street Market in Hillsborough and keeps reusable bags in his car. But as he carried a paper sack from the store Wednesday, Brandon admitted he doesn’t always remember to take them into the store.

“I don’t mind someone forcing me to do what I think I should be doing anyway,” Brandon said. “If I thought it wasn’t a big deal using bags, I probably would resent that move in a way, but since I think that we probably all should be using less plastic and disposables anyway, it’s a good idea.”