

Fresh & Easy promotes reusable bags over plastic, paper

By Erick Galindo Staff Writer

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Never has "paper or plastic?" been such a daunting question for Californians.

A vote earlier this month by state lawmakers that rejected a statewide ban on plastic grocery bags has fueled debate over whether grocery stores should be allowed to provide the bags, which can be environmental hazards.

Fresh & Easy, California's leading environmentally friendly grocery chain, announced Monday that it is giving away more canvas bags to help promote reusable bags as a leading alternative.

Plastic grocery bags have fueled the ire of environmentalists because they are non-recyclable, take decades to decompose and typically wind up harming marine and plant life.

Fresh & Easy, which currently operates 163 stores in California, Nevada and Arizona, wants its customers to know reusable bags are the way to go.

"We firmly believe canvas bags are the best way to bag groceries in an environmentally safe manner," company spokesman Brendan Wonnacott said.

Since the opening of its first store in 2007, Fresh & Easy has given away 600,000 reusable canvas bags. For the current promotion, customers can visit the company's Facebook page to print out a coupon for a free bag. Fresh & Easy will also be distributing fliers in local neighborhoods with the coupon printed on them.

"We are pushing to raise awareness and to provide customers the choices they are looking for to be more environmentally conscious," Wonnacott added.

Fresh & Easy has always touted its environmentally friendly stance. Its stores operate with 30 percent less energy than the average grocery store, its food transportation trailers are hybrids and each store is equipped with LED lights, which are more efficient and longer lasting.

However, some customers feel Fresh & Easy hasn't done enough for the environment.

"If Fresh & Easy is so conscious about the planet why are they only offering plastic bags at the checkout stands?" said Aimee Clugston, a Whittier resident. "Plastic bags kill hundreds of thousands of sea animals, pollutes our oceans and clutters the landfills."

Fresh & Easy does not currently offer paper bags as an alternative.

But Wonnacott noted that the plastic bag issue is up to state and local officials to decide and that Fresh & Easy is doing its part to make sure customers have better options than paper or plastic, which both require large amounts of natural resources to make.

Roberto Munoz, Fresh & Easy's neighborhood affairs director, noted that more customers are switching to reusable bags.

"We've always believed the best option is a reusable bag and we're excited to see more and more customers use them," he said. "We're working to raise awareness and get as many bags in customers' hands as possible through contests, in-store promotions and giveaways."

The company sells reusable bags in three different options: a large organic bag for \$2.99, a bottle bag for \$1.99 and a logo canvas bag for 99 cents.

Fresh & Easy has also added signage in stores reminding customers to use their bags, merchandised reusable bags closer to checkouts and given away magnets to customers, reminding them to not forget their reusable bags at home.

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