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Making Compostability Work: Aligning Biodegradable and Compostable Plastics with EU Policy Goals”

Abstract

Biodegradable and compostable plastics have the potential to contribute to reaching environmental policy goals, especially in the context of broader efforts to reduce microplastic pollution at its source. However, their deployment must be strategic, evidence-based, and supported by clear regulatory guidance and appropriate incentive structures.

This presentation examines viable use cases for biodegradable plastics across multiple sectors, including certified compostable packaging within the PPWR and applications in agriculture and forestry where plastics are at risk of environmental leakage and long-term persistence.

In addition, the talk analyses current regulatory frameworks in Germany and the EU and identifies key challenges, such as hurdles for market access and penetration, fragmented infrastructure for organic recycling, and lack of harmonised EU-wide criteria for biodegradability in open environments. It also proposes policy instruments that could support a responsible and targeted deployment of biodegradable plastics, including specific requirements regarding the biodegradability of nature-based plastic applications, eco-modulation of EPR fees, integration into public procurement criteria, and research funding focused on real-world degradation performance and risk assessment.

By aligning innovation in biodegradable materials with coherent policy action, it becomes possible to harness their potential in reducing persistent plastic pollution and contributing to the EU’s circular economy and zero pollution goals.