

## Even at their peak, curbside recycling programs offered only a partial solution to the US's waste problem.

While consumers may feel they are making a real difference, increasing access to curbside recycling has had only marginal impacts on the percentage of glass, aluminum, and plastic containers that are actually recycled. Meanwhile, some of plastics collected in many curbside recycling programs (especially single-stream recycling, where paper, cans, bottles, and all other materials are collected together) are no longer considered food grade, so typically cannot directly be used in bottle-to-bottle recycling, while mixed crushed glass is costly to process into new glass bottles, resulting in a dearth of quality materials needed to meet producer recycled content commitments. The Wall Street Journal reports a shortage of recycled PET plastic<sup>24</sup>, but **the challenge is one of logistics: we need a better means of collecting a large volume of quality recycled materials.**

Deposit return systems offer an opportunity to divert critical materials from final disposal and litter streams, to ease the financial pressure on curbside recycling, waste disposal and litter abatement programs, and to ensure that valuable commodities end up where we need them: reused or reborn as new containers. Furthermore, reforming DRSs presents an economic development promise: stimulating investment in recycling infrastructure and building local, more resilient economies, with jobs that cannot be outsourced. Modern, high-performing DRSs can more quickly advance circular economy principles and practices in ways that curbside recycling, even if enhanced, cannot.

