



# Empowering Consumers to Waste Less, Earn More

## The Startup Lab at GS1 Connect

GS1 Connect® is the annual user conference and exhibition hosted by GS1 US® that highlights the use of GS1 Standards to help drive innovation and business opportunities. Since 2019, The Startup Lab at GS1 Connect has been showcasing emerging technologies that provide GS1 US members with new ideas and solutions.

### The Challenge

Containers using recycled plastic and aluminum use 90% less carbon than those made from new material. Yet 72% of plastic and 54% of aluminum bottles and cans end up in landfills or our oceans. That's because the U.S. has two main recycling systems—curbside and returns—and neither is working optimally. The U.S. still landfills 137 billion bottles and cans a year.

The curbside recycling system is highly convenient for consumers, but involves mixing all recyclables in a single bin. Those contents are then placed in the back of a garbage truck, where it all gets contaminated with food waste and unrecyclable items.

The returns recycling system—invented long before smartphones—gives consumers money back for recycling but is not convenient. It also creates some liability for brands and retailers, requiring dedicated return space and resources for counting bottles and issuing refunds. A recent study has

shown that if the return system were operating at full scale across the nation, we would only landfill 20 billion bottles and cans a year.

### The Innovation

The team behind MeCycle asked: What if there were a way to modernize the return system to make it the “poster child” for the circular economy? What if we turned a liability into a fantastic opportunity? MeCycle is seizing that opportunity by developing a modern returns recycling solution.

MeCycle consumers get a bag or bin with a personalized code and have a mobile app to scan their return items at home. They register items and schedule a pickup at their convenience, eliminating the need to return bottles to retailers and distributors. The app also captures a wealth of data for providing a new, unique stream of insights to brands and retailers.



Third-Place Winner

The MeCycle app logo, featuring the word "mecycle" in white lowercase letters with a circular arrow icon around the 'c', set against a dark blue background with faint icons of various recyclable items like bottles and cans.

mecycle

MeCycle is the easy way to recycle right. With the MeCycle app, consumers can be sure they are correctly recycling by scanning plastic, aluminum, glass, or food containers while getting detailed recycling information and claiming recycling incentives in the form of bottle deposits. When consumers place and register items in their personalized MeCycle bins, they can track their impact and convert their incentives into cash for themselves or donations for charity.

MeCycle was selected as the third-place winner of the 2021 Startup Lab Pitch Competition based on product originality, usability, societal impact, and other criteria. It emerged as the third-place winner among a field of eight startups.

#### Technology Focus

IoT

#### Industry Application

Retail Grocery

#### Business Processes Impacted

Resource Management  
Sustainability/Circular Economy

MeCycle overcomes the challenges of both recycling systems. It makes it easy for consumers to recycle the right items and be rewarded for their efforts. The app even guides consumers in determining the best way to recycle their other food and beverage packaging. All they need to do is scan an item's Global Trade Item Number® (GTIN®). The MeCycle app then provides instructions on whether to MeCycle the package (and get a return deposit), recycle it in a regular bin (because there is no deposit), or just throw it out (because there is no effective way to recycle).

With MeCycle, consumers have assurance that their recyclables get to the right place to be reborn. MeCycle also shows consumers how much carbon they are reducing and how much material they are diverting from landfills and oceans.

"A walk by the beach—looking at washed-up plastic bottles—prompted a closer look at why they were there. After a year of research on recycling, we grew confident that the best ideas from around the world could help build a better system. The result is MeCycle—a modern recycling system that really works."

**Mark Manley,**  
*MeCycle, CEO & Founder*

## MeCycle's Market

MeCycle is initially focused on consumers who lack convenient recycling options (for example, those living in multifamily housing and on college campuses) and who can access recycling incentives (that is, in one of 10 states with container deposit laws, or CDL). This represents a large market, with 7.2 million multifamily residential units in the 10 CDL states, 50,000+ unique GTINs for items with deposits, and 40+ billion containers used annually across CDL households.

## The Power of Partnerships

MeCycle is seeking three types of partners. The startup would like to partner to build the nation's most comprehensive recycling database to drive consumer satisfaction in the GTIN lookup experience (the scan). The second type of partner would offer solutions for easily capturing customer purchase data to eliminate the possibility of fraud with the MeCycle platform. Organizations willing to provide logistics support (either leveraging current logistics or reverse logistics) to keep the cost of collection low represent a third type of partner.

"Given the data the MeCycle platform could provide, we believe we could work with brands to provide access to targeted consumption data and ultimately offer direct replenishment services," says Mark Manley, CEO and Co-Founder, MeCycle.

## GS1 US's Role

MeCycle is leveraging GTIN barcodes within its mobile app to educate and empower consumers. Doing so also makes it possible to capture data about consumers' purchase and usage patterns—valuable insights for brands and retailers.

"Innovators like MeCycle demonstrate how GS1 Standards can play a vital role in the circular economy," says Melanie Nuce, Senior Vice President, GS1 US. "MeCycle is bringing a fresh and modern approach that leverages two established ideas: recycling and barcodes. We are excited about their prospects of expanding their geographic reach and how—with the support of GS1 Standards—they can bring value to consumers, brands and retailers, and the environment."

### Innovate with Us

[Learn more](#) about innovation at GS1 US.

## About MeCycle

MeCycle is the easy way to recycle right. With the MeCycle app, consumers can be sure they are recycling right by scanning plastic, aluminum, or glass containers while getting detailed recycling information and claiming recycling incentives. When consumers place and register their items in the convenient MeCycle bins, they can track their impact and convert their incentives into cash using convenient digital payments.

To learn more, visit [www.me-cycle.com](http://www.me-cycle.com).

## About GS1 US

GS1 US is a neutral, not-for-profit information standards organization that drives industry collaboration through the use of GS1 Standards—the most widely used supply chain standards in the world. The U.P.C.\* barcode, the most recognizable example of a GS1 Standard used to power commerce, is scanned more than six billion times per day globally. More than 25 industries rely on GS1 US to uniquely identify products, places, and other assets, and GS1 Standards to create a foundation for emerging technologies that improve security, visibility, interoperability, and trust in the supply chain. Unique identification makes it possible to take advantage of the technologies of the future—connecting consumers, patients, businesses, and products.

For more information, contact [innovation@gs1us.org](mailto:innovation@gs1us.org) or visit [www.gs1us.org](http://www.gs1us.org).

\*In this publication, the letters "U.P.C." are used solely as an abbreviation for the "Universal Product Code," which is a product identification system. They do not refer to the UPC, which is a federally registered certification mark of the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) to certify compliance with a Uniform Plumbing Code as authorized by IAPMO.

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