Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Food Data Transparency Partnership Eco working group minutes

Date	16 May 2023
Time	09:00-10:00
Venue	Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Co-Chairs:

Judith Batchelar	Food sector expert and Environment Agency Deputy Chair
Karen Lepper	Deputy Director Food Data, Standards and Sustainability, Defra

Eighteen Eco working group members in attendance

Julie Pierce, co-chair of Data working group and Director of Information and Science, FSA

FDTP team

The Eco working group is a stakeholder engagement group that provides input on policy development as part of an open policy design process. These discussions do not reflect agreed government policy.

1. Welcome, recap on progress and meeting purpose

Karen Lepper (KL) opened the meeting, explained some changes to attendees and recapped Chatham house rules and key points coming out of the last meeting.

KL recapped on the key points coming out of the last meeting:

- The group agreed to the approach set out in the reporting mechanism paper i.e., that mandating is necessary, but it is preferable to wait for ISSB.

- The group agreed that the GHG protocol should be the minimum standard for reporting but that we need to be careful how we frame it in the protocols because compliance will not help us achieve our objectives (open to interpretation)
- The group highlighted fragmentation risks to having country specific guidance and suggested we look to influence internationally.
- Group members agreed that incentivizing the collection of good quality primary data is the key to improving food scope 3 data reporting.

KL set out the agenda and purpose of this meeting:

- To identify and prioritise key data related issues preventing consistent scope 3 reporting (at a company level)
- To identify possible solutions to the key issues.

2. Brainstorm of key issues preventing consistent scope 3 GHG reporting

The FDTP team talked through slides 3-7 providing a revision of key definitions for ‘activity data’ and ‘emissions factor data’, reflecting on the spectrum of secondary to primary data and potential issues with availability and quality of data. The FDTP team summarised the content on the conceptboard provided by group members ahead of the meeting.

The group reviewed the board and added some further post-it notes.

3. Issue prioritisation and joint working between eco and data WGs

- For activity data, the group identified obtaining and verifying farm data as a key issue. The group discussed learning from the Bord Bia work in Ireland. Bord Bia auditors do the bulk of the work and make it as easy as possible for farmers to provide the data by asking only essential questions (try and obtain data from other sources first). They also have a help desk to help farmers complete their audits.
- The group also identified data sharing as a key issue. One participant highlighted the potential for PACT (Partnership for Carbon Transparency) to provide the data sharing standard but warned that multiple GHG reporting standards can be used within it and this results in variability.
- Julie Pierce (JP): data sharing standards will likely be the responsibility of the data WG. The data WG will consider the breadth of technical, sharing and governance standards (overlaps/contradictions/alignment/gaps).
- The group agreed that different types of farms would have different data challenges and varying availability of data and solutions may need to be tailored accordingly.
- For emission factor data, the group identified variability of emission factors, and quality of existing data (often based on old studies, not technology representative, not granular enough for different countries/regions) as key issues.

4. Break-out group discussions on solutions

Group 1 - Activity data

- The group focused initially on potential solutions to getting more data from farmers. The group reiterated the need to tailor the approach to specific farm and species types, and to make it as easy as possible for farmers. One member highlighted the need to constantly review the questions asked at farm level to improve data quality.
- The group highlighted various risks associated with having numerous carbon tools on the market: (1) variability and lack of confidence in the outputs, (2) commercial entities creating barriers to progress as they compete to sell services/tools to individual players in the supply chain, (3) smaller farmers not able to choose and optimise a tool in the same way as larger corporations.
- The group agreed that there is a need to reduce variability in carbon calculators to improve consistency and confidence in outputs and standardise data between different actors in the supply chain. Various solutions were discussed including a single government backed calculator, a Bord Bia audit approach or a rigorous standard underpinning all calculators.
- One member highlighted the difficulty with data flows and companies not having a direct relationship with the farm and so relying on mid chain suppliers. Also need to ensure consistent questions for suppliers and a better level of understanding so people understand what they need to gather.
- Judith Batchelar stressed the need to model the work on processes that the F&D industry is used to following. (1) Global Food Safety Initiative. Providers sign up, which means their solution is harmonized with the global standard and they can add value on other elements e.g., organic or regenerative, but the core element is the same. (2) Nutrition labelling. If a company wants to make a claim about their product, e.g., reduced fat, then the nutritional content is measured and analysed according to a standard, otherwise typical values are used (keeps the costs down).

Group 1 - Emission factors data

- One member suggested that we need more localized and specific emission factor data to reflect different farming practices and enable more sustainable practices to be recognised and rewarded.
- Several members agreed that there is also a role for large companies to drive and share more primary research and that this should be focused on the biggest priorities e.g., feed, areas where there is a lack of studies and should be industry wide and comparable.

Group 2 - Activity data

- One member suggested that the level of specificity of the data should be determined by the function/use of the data e.g., for the inventory where we want to show reduction of emissions, we need physical quantity not spend data.
- The group agreed that we should learn from where data collection has worked well (e.g., Bord Bia) and tackle the proliferation of carbon audit tools as a priority. Many agreed that

one tool would be preferable because it breeds familiarisation, better data, validation and verification. If one tool it will need to include varied and sophisticated emissions factors to reflect huge variations in farming practices.

- The group agreed that to improve availability of farm data there needs to be incentivisation coupled with support/training for farmers to complete audits or a third party to conduct the audit. Possible options include Government, Red Tractor, AHDB, certification schemes such as ACS. Auditors should make use of existing data sets e.g., farm accounts, private or industry databases and map the front runners.
- One member highlighted the importance of downstream prediction and refinement to improve datasets. Others highlighted the need for data to be comparable across tools/data used to estimate downstream emissions and the importance of only asking for data once.
- Members agreed that there needs to be investment in research to improve the data and this should be focused on areas where we have less data and hotspots (e.g., imports). This should be kept up data and benchmarked with existing data.

Group 2 - Emissions factors

- To improve data quality of emissions factors we need to incentivise farms to provide good quality data beyond just activity data. We also need to tackle how data flows through the supply chain and for that we need a data protocol for data sharing. There must be assurance and verification and for that we need to fund and upskill auditors to assess inventories.
- The group discussed the Partnership for Carbon Transparency (PACT). PACT is working to enable companies to accelerate product-level emission data calculation and exchange. Published the Pathfinder Framework that is industry-agnostic product-level guidance for emissions accounting and data exchange across value chains. This brings harmonization of existing frameworks to ensure consistent standards. Also established the foundations of the Pathfinder Network, a network for confidential peer-to-peer exchange of data across technology solutions and platforms. The network is based on a set of principles and tech. specifications (i.e. API) that solution providers can adopt to be “compliant” and be part of the network.

5. Feedback, next steps, AOB

Summary of solutions from group 1:

- Focus on how best to obtain farm data and reduce burden on farmers by breaking down by sector, refining asks over time and using other available data sets (like Bord Bia)
- Education for suppliers to improve confidence in reporting.
- Reduce variability of carbon calculators either by government backed or soft standard for calculators.
- Need more localised and specific emission factor data to reward good behaviour – this needs more primary data collection – large businesses may have a role but need to prioritise topics.

Summary of solutions from group 2.

- Model on /learn from Bord Bia and AHDB Environbench.
- Reduce fragmentation and tackle proliferation of tools – one tool preferable.
- Need to incentivise as well as upskill if farmers to do their own audits.
- New data received by downstream tools needs to be validated and benchmarked against existing values.
- Role for verified certification schemes, assurance process and audits.

KL set out the plan for the next few meetings:

- **16 May** – discussion on data: hierarchy rules, sources/databases, quality assessment.
- **12 June** – discussion on product level protocols and associated data hierarchy rules. Meeting will be hybrid with an option to attend in person. Please let us know if you would like to be in the room.
- **24 July** – consolidation of discussions on company level reporting and decisions on consultation proposals. Discussion on trade risks associated with food eco-labelling.
- **4 September** – consider and discuss IGD recommendations for food eco-labelling and questions to take forward in the Defra consultation.

Judith Batchelar gave her closing reflections on solutions.

- We should base our work on established ways of working /principles that the sector (farm to retail) is used to, such as modelling our work on global harmonised standards such as the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI).
- Focus efforts on places that matter (material commercial benefits) e.g., in nutrition you must produce primary data (get your food tested in a lab) if you want to make a specific nutritional claim.
- Data sharing can improve the quality and cost effectiveness of collecting data e.g., a retailer she knew shared data with a local authority and they both had access to a data set twice the size.
- Virtuous cycle of data, not only do we reward collection and sharing of data but also incentivise it.