Food Data Transparency Partnership Eco Working Group minutes

Date	25 September 2023
Time	13:30-15:00
Venue	Oxford Martin School / 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

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 and introductions**

- Karen Lepper (KL) welcomed new members, including Gill Higgins from Dawn Meats and Angela GIbson from Vittera.
- KL provided a recap:
    - At the last meeting we ran out of time in our discussion on eco labelling and IGD's emerging recommendations, so we had additional Q&A session with IGD.
    - At the next meeting we can share feedback from our Design Partnership Group and the Food and Drink Sector Council (FDSC).
    - As a reminder, the proposals and recommendations from this group will be subject to Ministerial decisions before anything discussed as adopted as government policy.

2. **Updates from Defra:**

- A Defra official gave an update on farm measurement harmonisation at Defra:
    - Commissioned research from ADAS on how farm calculators diverge. Defra will be facilitating a meeting, bringing organisations providing calculators together, to consider conclusions of the research and possible approach to harmonisation.

- An update on the new eco data sources task & finish group: the first introductory meeting will be on 28th September and recommendations will be shared with Defra and brought to Eco WG, likely in November.
- The gov.uk website will be online soon. (Live now: https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/food-data-transparency-partnership)

3. **Presentation by Joseph Poore**

Joseph Poore (JP): presented the case to move towards outcome-based environment management in agri-food. His presentation was based on the following three points:

1) Outcome-based environmental management in food is preferable to standards-based approaches.

2) Outcome-based management in food is scientifically robust and supports behaviour change.

3) The digital infrastructure for outcome-based management requires some centralisation.

- Joseph's slides include unpublished data – please do not share beyond the group.
- As set out in the accompanying paper, Joseph outlined the 12 components for quantifying environmental impacts in agri-food systems and which components may benefit from centralisation to ensure data consistency and thus comparability between products and organisations. Joseph argued that the most important part to centralise is the data format that needs to be descriptive enough to allow for the diversity of agricultural sector to create consistency and prevent different interpretations of the data. One example of a framework for a centralised data framework is the Hestia project at Oxford University.

4. **Discussion / Q&A with Joseph Poore**

The discussion is summarised thematically rather than chronologically.

Outcome based standards:
- Judith Batchelar (JB): Set out her opinion in support of outcome based environmental management, highlighting the standards-based approach of the last 30 years (assurance and certification schemes) have not provided the solutions promised. There was general agreement in the room that outcome-based standards would be desirable, but that some practise-based standards would still be required.

Metrics:
- One member asked if the group was trying to answer all metrics at once or prioritise and have a phased approach.
- JB confirmed that the aim was to start with carbon to show a way of working.
- Another member agreed it would be best to leave other metrics until later, as it is not yet clear what would need measuring – the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and Science Based Targets for Nature are in early development or deployment.

Consistent data format:
- One member asked whether "data format" is how it is written in a system and how it is stored, or more of a visible display format? Activity data or GHG data – what level of granularity?
- JP responded that fridge/freezer and electrical appliance sector have used outcome-based approach for 30 years. Double glazed windows 40 years. Behind it is standardised data format. However, it will be more difficult for agriculture – more diverse and more complicated. Data format has to cover activity data (either a farm or an experimental farm)

– important as if you change model in 5 years, you have to go back to the data to remodel (or go back to farm to do again) – doesn't have to be public but has to be represented in a standard way. Store metrics (e.g. LCA) too. Could have data in supply chain – not tied to one tool or one provider.

- One member suggested looking at what the car industry has done – was also challenging due to lots of materials and lots of different methods.

Farm calculator harmonisation:
- Members agreed that farmers would want to use the same packaged models, that also use the same shareable format. However, it was acknowledged that there is still disagreement on how centralised the data should be.
- One member highlighted that in France, if you can't get supply-chain level data it may become mandatory to fill gaps with the government's central database, "Agribalyse".
- A couple of members mentioned the Mondra Coalition Farm Data Done Better – it has convened a group of farm calculator tools to discuss harmonisation – the response from the farm calculator tools was broadly positive. While they do not want to lose their IP, they acknowledge the importance of centralisation/standardisation. However, there was no conclusion on who would be best placed to perform the centralised role.
- Another member said it may require a mandate or concerted effort to bring farm calculator organisations on board.
- A Defra official noted that the findings from the Defra commissioned ADAS work will inform next steps and different approaches considered by Defra to harmonise farm calculators.

IPCC methodology:
- One member raised concerns about the idea of ignoring IPCC's existing methodology, especially as they are progressing towards use of farm-level data. They said IPCC would likely be happy to improve their methodology if we share evidence and work with them.
- A member replied that IPPC is still only focused on country-specific data. People are then inappropriately using their country-specific models / frameworks on individual farms. However, definitely do not want to scrap/ignore IPCC.

Primary and secondary data:
- One member said the move from secondary data to farm-level data will likely be faster than 25 years, as farmers want to see better data. They raised the example of the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme in Northern Ireland – voluntary but farms must join to receive other payments. 200,000 hectares of farm already in the scheme – expected to be all of Northern Ireland within two years.
- The member said it will be vital to reward farmers who are pioneering early improvements – this will be more difficult if average data is used.
- One member suggested a look at the biofuel sector. Lots of secondary data on regional basis – can then move towards primary data later. Highlighted AHDB's work on a digital passport for transferring data on grain.
- There was discussion and broad agreement that secondary average data would need to be used initially but the desire would be to transition towards primary data whenever feasible. Need to develop a system that does not rule out improving data later down the line.
- One member raised that, in terms of the scope, it is not binary between primary or secondary. However, we would need to understand the steps to take from secondary data / models towards primary.
- Another member said more work was needed to identify sectors with simpler supply chains – test there to get data flow going and then apply towards more complicated supply chains.

Several areas where it's going to be extremely difficult to get away from background datasets. For example, animal feed: in near-term almost impossible to ask producer to get data from farm. Also, difficult to get data for small ingredients (e.g. vanilla) – tiny impact on overall figure.

- One member suggested milk supply chains as a good test case – has a high prevalence of data collection already, but still has some challenges with standardising approach.
- Another member agreed on difficulty of small ingredients – companies will source from two or three origins to manage contingency (e.g. weather events).

Current data requests:

- JB asked how much sustainability data members are being asked for by customers.
- One member representing a food processor said requests currently vary – some requests are for product-level carbon footprints. Therefore, they are working on a model for product's farm gate to factory gate footprint, which includes using farm-specific data.
- Another member representing a food retailer said product-level carbon footprint data sometimes requested to plug into scope 3 accounting. Recently, more granular data has been requested to drive management decisions.

Centralising and sharing data:

- JB asked the group who should take the lead on centralising some of the aspects covered in Joseph's presentation.
- Members agreed they would need to be independent and trusted by industry. Companies / organisations need to be able to give their input and support to the independent centralising organisation.
- One member asked if the data would need to be in one single database, and how the sharing of data would fit with Manufacture 2030.
- JP responded that the consistent data format would for multiple systems to store the data, which would be essential for driving up competition. Allow a farmer to share data they own to different systems.
- There was agreement amongst members that interoperability was key for all future systems.
- There was also discussion around transferring data within the supply chain. The sharing of antibiotic data in the pig meat sector was given as an example where data sharing has been achieved successfully, with AHDB acting as the 'honest broker' in consolidating this data.

Model performance assessment:

- One member asked how model performance assessment would be achieved in a scalable way.
- Another member suggested you could test farms in various geographies in order to measure multiple emission use resources accurately. Alternatively, you could develop models at emission level (e.g. nitrates, then NOx, etc) to predict each emission.

5. **Close and next steps**

- KL thanked Joseph Poore for hosting the meeting.
- The next meeting will be on October 23rd. Location and agenda to be confirmed in the coming weeks.