



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Food Data Transparency Partnership Eco working group minutes

Date 11 December 2023
Time 15:30-17:30
Venue 2 Marsham Street / 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

Twenty 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

- Judith Batchelar (JB) recapped Chatham House rules and SharePoint access.
- JB set out the agenda:
 - Update by Defra FDTP on ambitions for short term future of the programme and scene setting on the following eco-labelling discussion.
 - Presentations by Foundation Earth (FE) and My Emissions (ME) on their eco-labelling methodology and guiding principles, comparing a multi-metric approach to carbon only. This was followed by an update from IGD on the findings of their research before discussion.
 - Finally, next steps and a forward look to meetings in the new year.
- JB noted FDTP work has been in the press recently, with some accurate and inaccurate reporting. JB urged members to ensure their own organisations are well informed, and to share incorrect information with the FDTP or try to correct it yourselves. We hope to publish the roadmap in the new year which will clearly demonstrate the upcoming plan.

2. Update on Roadmap and 2024 priorities

FDTP officials updated on the FDTP roadmap publication and the upcoming priorities for the eco strand of the FDTP in the coming year.

- Roadmap feedback at previous meeting has been taken onboard, resulting in tweaked language and more care when discussing the role of agriculture and in value chain mitigation work. There is also greater emphasis on international alignment and comparisons.
- 2024s priorities focus on a common approach to communication, consistent accessible environmental quantification, and capacity building
 - One member noted the importance of ensuring data is collected and shared.

3. Update from Defra on Eco-labelling

FDTP officials began the meetings discussions by summarising eco-labelling policy to date since the government food strategy has been published.

- Defra officials have engaged in extensive engagement with stakeholders to support scoping of the issue, including the impact of our work on eco-labelling providers.
- Standardisation of eco-labelling through a mandatory methodology aims to reduce the potential for misleading claims and level the playing field to enable more effective competition on the grounds of sustainability. We do not intend to introduce a government label nor endorse any one scheme. Our program does not aim to make eco-labelling mandatory, but to design a long-term system that anyone is able to join
- We will look to ensure our mandatory methodology allows differentiation between providers, and are preparing to consult in 2024 pending ministerial approval. Topics covered by the consultation include what should be covered by the mandatory methodology, choice of metrics, exemptions, and international alignment.
- This meeting's discussion is focussed on carbon only approaches and multi-metric approaches to eco-labelling. We've heard a preference from the food chain for multi-metric, but carbon only has merits, and we believe there is room for both. Specifically, we'd like to hear what you feel is the priority for sustainability data both for eco-labelling and more broadly, and how do we make this work for different metrics beyond carbon.
- The next steps for the eco-labelling workstream are to develop a consultation with a view to launch in spring 2024 pending ministerial approval and general election timings. Additionally, we'll be commissioning work to develop a product level accounting methodology as part of Defra-funded research project 'Improving the quality of environmental impact data for food: supporting Food Data Transparency Partnership and development of company reporting and eco-labelling' - to be launched in March 2024.

4. Presentation from Foundation Earth

Nicola Organ presented FE to the group covering the eco-label, governance, and metric choice, before passing to Cliona Howie for summary and Q&A.

- Foundation Earth is a mission led nonprofit founded in spring 2021 eco-labelling provider. As a science led organisation, they governance consists of an independent scientific committee with individual voting rights, and an industry advisory group.
- Their methodology is open source, developed through several workshops and an independent peer review, and there will be another review in 2024. Their farm to fork

approach is 'PEF friendly' as despite some concerns they feel there is not strong enough cause to deviate from PEF and they anticipate PEF will form the basis of future EU legislation but looking to develop further.

- Their label has an 8-point grading system with traffic lights, informed by industry feedback and ongoing consumer research, using a functional unit of 1kg of consumed food. While labelling is important to consumer behaviour, the process of undertaking LCAs and hereby identifying hotspots is where businesses are most empowered to make improvements.
- Emphasis on harmonisation being key to eco-labelling success, especially across countries for MNCs. In 2024 FE are embarking on a partnership with Fujitsu to enable organisations to hold and store their data in same place, enabling the sharing of eco data without sharing raw data or aspects they wish to keep private. They are also looking to work on an LCA certification academy.
- FE flagged EOIs will shortly be sent to review their work with a view on ensuring harmonisation is catered for.

Q&A

- Members asked for insights on the shortcomings of PEF, and the extent to which this has impacted product scoring during live testing. FE acknowledge PEF shortcomings, and strive to be 'PEF friendly' instead. Research project underway in France, and open-source testing has highlighted where improvements are needed. FE believe the solution to PEF's weaknesses is continual improvement. FE have conducted many tests, and have hundreds of products that have been assessed but not applying their label. The governing scientific committee may reconsider and change the number of categories from the current 16 in light of new research, but it may prefer to remain with PEFs categories.
- A member asked about FE's scale and whether they were solely focused on Europe. FE have scored nearly 1000 products, with about 400 carrying the eco-label on shelves, with others looking to improve internally without labelling products. They have received interest from Japan and the Brazilian government, where food baskets are significantly different from already varied EU baskets. While eco-labelling was not a topic at COP, food systems transformation was and the links to our work are clear.

5. Presentation from My Emissions

Matthew Isaacs introduced ME, then discussed why they focused their label on carbon, key methodology decisions, and some data insights and case studies.

- ME have worked with over 100 companies, providing over 15,000 assessments. Their focus on carbon is informed by national strategies and mandates for carbon reporting requirements, and the affordability and speed of implementation. They note that there is not a requirement for company level reporting on metrics other than carbon, and that this could be a first step to improving the data on other metrics.
- ME use an A-E rating scale, where A is aligned with a sustainable carbon budget diet based on the EAT-Lancet Commission's report, and C is the average diet. Their LCA is upstream from the retailer perspective - from farm to store - which they argue covers most of the emissions in most products, is intuitive, and reduces assumptions.
- ME have completed around 15,000 product assessments. They are working with Just Eat to test the impact of carbon labelling, which has shown a small positive trend towards low carbon dishes. They intend to publish data from this trial in early

2024. A project with the University of Massachusetts has recorded a 5.95% reduction in emissions per dinner.

Q&A

- A member asked about the difference in cost between carbon only and multi-metric assessments, and if the underlying data for other indicators is similar to that for carbon. ME have conducted multi-metric assessments, and say that a carbon only assessment can cost <£1000 for 5 products, however this could be £3-4000 if including wider metrics such as water and land use. In terms of data, the issue is more around infrastructure and availability, especially for SMEs. Additionally, with respect to labelling, there is debate over how to weight different metrics in one label.
- A member asked if all businesses use their labels, for ME around 20-30% don't label. ME gave an example of a company that never labels, but completes an assessment for each new product launched, and another where a restaurant changes their menus, including the ordering, as a result of their assessments.
- A member asked about the risk of food system trade-offs by focussing on carbon. ME's clients have found wider LCAs to be too expensive to complete regularly and often felt unsure what to do with the wider information, so didn't see the value. This is exacerbating by supply chain issues and inflation at the moment.
- Both FE and ME were asked if including multiple metrics changes the grade for a product, with concerns this would cause issues for consumer understanding if multi-metric was added in later. ME could not recall the extent to which widening the labels for inclusion could impact label ratings, but had not seen changes of several grades. FE have seen some diversity in ratings, and suspect this could be significant in companies where the main drivers are land use or pesticide use.

6. Update by IGD

Sarah Haynes and Naomi Kissman provided an update on IGD's work following the publication of their report December 6.

- IGD began by reminding members of the context of their work. Industry came to IGD in 2021 to investigate a consistent approach to eco-labelling, which is currently confusing for consumers and adds cost and complexity for businesses.
- IGD aim to help consumers make more sustainable choices, and to help businesses make decisions around sourcing and supply chain efficiencies.
- Their Steering Group and Consult Group informed the design of their draft methodology for multi-metric eco-labels, as well as extensive consumer research, all guided by scientific principles for a pragmatic solution.
- Their research led them to a label based on 4 categories: Water use, Water Quality, Land Use and Carbon emissions. They have recently conducted a data stress test, aiming to identify when data is good enough to put in front of consumers. They found representative average data can be workable for labelling, and recommend any database is open-source and at ingredient level rather than complex product level.
- In 2024, IGD intend to shift their focus from policy recommendations to developing a toolkit of guidance to support businesses to approach environmental labelling in a consistent way. They will also support WRAP and Mondra in improving the development of data and tech.

7. Discussion

- On the issue of carbon vs multi-metric labelling, the group agreed that most primary data is carbon. If there were to be multi-metric labelling, this would likely need to be in a two tier system. It was posited that while water and land use may be closer to carbon, beyond these metrics there is unusable data and large amounts of work would be required to catch up.
- There needs to be a better understanding of the correlation between carbon and other metrics, to identify the extent to which multi-metric labelling could produce differing results.
- At product level, there needs to be literacy on multi metrics to ensure there are not changing goalposts.
- The group has recognised the dependency on data, and that it can feel chicken vs egg when discussing eco-labelling. The data won't improve if there isn't the signal it is needed, and there can't be good eco-labels without sufficient data. We need to encourage better data gathering to fill this gap.

8. Next steps and close

- The next meeting will be held in early 2024, which will be a joint session between the data and eco working groups, looking at data infrastructure.
- In 2024, we'll have less frequent meetings, but making them longer with the hope of greater in person attendance. A forward look will be discussed at the next meeting.