



# **Communicating environmental performance along the food chain**

Prepared by the European Food SCP Round Table Working Group 2 on  
“Environmental Information Tools”

**Part A - Assessment**

**Part B - Recommendations**

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## **Disclaimer**

**The views and policy recommendations expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views nor prejudge policy positions of the European Commission.**

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## **Glossary**

**B2B:** Business-to-Business, describes commercial transactions between businesses, e.g. between a manufacturer and a wholesaler, or between a wholesaler and a retailer.

**B2C:** Business-to-Consumer, describes the activities of businesses providing end-consumers with products and/or services.

**Carbon footprint:** A carbon footprint is "the total set of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused by an organisation, event, product or person." Greenhouse gases can be emitted through transport, land clearance and the production and consumption of food, fuels, manufactured goods, materials, wood, roads, buildings and services. For simplicity of reporting, it is often expressed in terms of the amount of carbon dioxide equivalent per functional unit.

**Claims:** Any text, symbol, piece of advertising or image on e.g. food packaging that tells the consumer something about the product, service or company's characteristics.

**Disproportionate burden:** An action carried out by a food chain partner that has a cost which is out of proportion to the added-value generated. The specific nature of SMEs makes them particularly vulnerable to this.

**EMAS:** The EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is a management tool for companies and other organisations to evaluate, report and improve their environmental performance.

**Environmental claims:** Environmental claims, also termed "green claims", are assertions made by firms about the environmentally beneficial qualities or characteristics of their goods and services. They can refer to the manner in which

products are produced, packaged, distributed, consumed and/or disposed of. (Referring to international standards on self-declared environmental claims (ISO14021), the UK codes for non-broadcast advertising, sales promotion and direct marketing, and broadcast advertising).

**EPD:** Environmental Product Declaration is a standardised (ISO 14025/TR) and life cycle analysis (LCA)-based tool for communicating the environmental performance of a product or system, and is applicable worldwide for all interested companies and organisations. A declaration is based on an LCA. It includes information about the environmental impacts associated with a product or service, such as raw material acquisition, energy use and efficiency, content of materials and chemical substances, air, soil and water emissions and waste generation. It also includes product and company information.

**Functional Unit:** quantified performance of a product system for use as a reference unit (according to the ISO 14040 and ISO 14044)

**Food chain partners:** Any business involved in the food chain from suppliers to consumers and end-of-life. This includes suppliers, agriculture, trade, the food and drink industry, packaging, retail, catering and food service, transport and waste.

**ISO:** The International Organization for Standardization is an international standard-setting body which promulgates worldwide proprietary industrial and commercial.

**Labelling:** A tool that gives information about the exact nature and characteristics of the product (e.g. origin, owner, contents, use, or destination) typically put on the packaging that enables the consumer to make an informed choice

- **Environmental labelling:** Environmental labelling provides an indication of the environmental impact-related characteristics of a product, typically on the package containing the product, by private or public institutions.
- **Food labelling:** Under food law, labelling means any words, particulars, trade marks, brand name, pictorial matter or symbol relating to a food and placed

on any packaging, document, notice, label, ring or collar accompanying or referring to such food (EU law on food information to consumers as adopted in autumn 2011)

- **Feed labelling:** Under feed law, labelling is the attribution of any words, particulars, trademarks, brand names, pictorial matter or symbols to a feedstuff by placing this information on any medium referring to or accompanying such feed, such as the packaging, container, notice, label, document, ring, collar or the Internet, including for advertising purposes (Regulation (EC) No 767/2009).

**LCA:** A life cycle assessment (also known as life cycle analysis, eco-balance and cradle-to-grave analysis) is a technique to assess each and every impact associated with all the stages of a process from cradle-to-grave (i.e. from raw materials through to processing, manufacture, distribution, use, repair and maintenance, and disposal or recycling).

**POS:** Point of Sale is the location where a transaction, for example the purchase of a product, takes place.

**Rebound effect:** The rebound effect is an increase in consumption which can occur as an unintended side-effect of technology or policy instruments being introduced aimed at improving environmental efficiency, in particular when new technology brings reduced costs.

**SME:** Small and medium-sized enterprise(s), a synonym for small and medium-sized business(es) (SMB)

## **Setting the context**

### **Introduction**

The consumption of goods and services in the European Union is one of the major drivers of global resource use – and associated environmental impacts. Besides production, household consumption plays a key role in the sustainability challenges that we face, as consumers' behaviour including purchasing decisions have a significant impact on the environment.<sup>1</sup>

Research outcomes identify the following three areas of consumption as having the greatest environmental impact in Europe, based on a life cycle analysis: housing, food and drink, and private transport. Together they are responsible for 70 to 80% of the environmental impact of consumption.<sup>2</sup>

Life cycle analyses help to understand the environmental impacts of individual products on carbon, water, eutrophication etc. across all the stages of the value chain: from the production of agricultural inputs, farming, processing, transport and storage on the production side; to shopping, cleaning, cooking, home storage and recycling behaviour on the consumer side.

By considering the life cycle, we know that the actual environmental impacts of products, as well as their significance and distribution within the value chain depend largely on the type of product, the production methods and consumer behaviour:

- What the product is and how it was produced: i.e. product type (products of animal origin, vegetables, wine, cereals, etc.), the composition (unprocessed or processed food, fresh food, ready meal), situational circumstances (traditional production), production methods and farming systems and supply chains (local, regional and global).
- When and where the product was produced: the place and type of production (climatic conditions), the size (small or large) of production sites, the production system (e.g. conventional, integrated, organic farming) as well as the period of production and consumption (e.g. out-of-season produce).
- Behavioural aspects: whether consumers prefer smaller or bigger unit sizes, how often they go shopping, which transport they use, how they clean, cook and store products, how well they sort products; to what extent consumers distinguish between “best before” and “use by” dates.

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<sup>1</sup> EEA (European Environment Agency). 2005a. European Environment Outlook, Copenhagen; EEA (European Environment Agency). 2010. The European Environment State and Outlook 2010 – Consumption and the Environment. Copenhagen, Denmark.

<sup>2</sup> JRC/IPTS 2006. Environmental impacts of products (EIPRO). Analysis of the life cycle environmental impacts related to the total final consumption of the EU-25. Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, Sevilla. [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ipp/pdf/eipro\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ipp/pdf/eipro_report.pdf).

Another important influence on our understanding of environmental impacts based on the product's life cycle is the methodological approach chosen. Depending on the boundaries and scope of the assessment as well as the source of data used, even identical products can produce different values as regards their environmental impact. There is at present no commonly applied methodology for assessing and communicating environmental information along the food chain, including to consumers, which allows operators in the food chain as well as consumers to better understand the environmental impacts of food and drink products, enabling them to make informed choices.

For example, meat and dairy products have much higher carbon emissions and impacts on water resources per kilogram than vegetables, cereal products, potatoes or in-season fruit<sup>3</sup>. However, consumers generally do not buy or consume butter or cheese by the kilogram, whereas fruit and vegetables are frequently purchased in kilograms. Furthermore, if the comparison were based on the nutritional value of food and drink products, e.g. the amount of product needed to meet the guideline daily amount for protein intake, the comparison might look entirely different.

There is a risk that the overall environmental pressures from food and drink consumption may further increase in the future due to changes in society, such as increasing wealth and population growth<sup>4</sup>, resulting in higher food demand, more stress on natural resources, even more globalised supply chains, shifting dietary patterns worldwide, changing shopping behaviour and increased food waste. The latter is of particular concern as it has a two-fold impact on the environment, from both the impact of food production and the collection and treatment of food waste.<sup>5</sup>

However, consumers might not be aware of these challenges. They may not fully understand the environmental impact of different products and product categories, nor be fully aware of the significance of food waste. In addition, consumers might not always be conscious of the links between environmental and other aspects of food production and consumption. Therefore, conveying environmental information relating to products should form part of an integrated approach towards sustainable consumption, i.e. part of a holistic message guiding consumer behaviour towards tangible environmental benefits. This is of particular importance given the risk of information overload<sup>6</sup> and the fact that in most cases, consumers are under time-

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<sup>3</sup> EEA (European Environment Agency). 2010. The European Environment State and Outlook 2010 – Consumption and the Environment. Copenhagen, Denmark.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, 2009, [World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/popnews/Newsltr_87.pdf). [Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/popnews/Newsltr_87.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Bio Intelligence Service. 2010. Preparatory Study on Food Waste across EU 27 – Final report. [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/pdf/bio\\_foodwaste\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/pdf/bio_foodwaste_report.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Behavioural researchers have found that consumers adopt relatively simple "rules of thumb" to make decisions in complex situations such as, for instance, when judging the environmental impacts of different food and drink products.

pressure when making their purchase decisions. Also societal (e. g. culture, tradition) or economic reasons influence the extent to which consumers take environmental aspects into account when making purchase decisions. Overall, research indicates that price, quality, safety and convenience are the key factors for consumers when making purchase decisions for food and drink products, although many find 'sustainability' aspects important, and if presented in a meaningful way, there is willingness to take them into account<sup>7</sup>.

An increasing number of operators as well as public authorities have already recognised environmental sustainability as being an important issue to address and have introduced a wide range of voluntary initiatives to help improve the environmental performance of products/services and to inform consumers. These information tools include, e.g. labels, statements or product declarations addressing different environmental aspects or impacts of a product. In this respect, marketing can also play an important role in leveraging the company's sustainability credentials to build brand equity.<sup>8</sup> The use of brands, certification schemes or similar devices to ensure constant dialogue throughout the food supply chain, including to consumers, could be a useful tool in communicating strong environmental performance and thereby encouraging food chain partners and consumers to choose and use products more efficiently<sup>9</sup>.

However, with an increasing number of initiatives, labels or other information tools on the market, which are highly diverse in terms of the scope and methodology used, there is a high risk that consumers may become more confused as to what information is really important and reliable, and consequently they may be unable to draw conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

The European Food SCP Round Table aims to address these issues and to provide aligned guidance for the European food chain on methodological and communication issues based on common principles.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Which?, Making sustainable food choices easier, 2010 (<http://www.which.co.uk/documents/pdf/making-sustainable-food-choices-easier-231317.pdf>)

<sup>8</sup> Retail Forum for sustainability. 2010. Marketing and Effective Communication, Issue Paper No 3; Retail Forum for Sustainability, Issue Paper № 7 on Labelling June 2011: ([http://ec.europa.eu/environment/industry/retail/issue\\_papers.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/industry/retail/issue_papers.htm))

<sup>9</sup> WBCSD, Sustainable consumption facts and trends, from a business perspective, 2008

<sup>10</sup> Consumer Focus, Green expectations, 2009

<sup>11</sup> European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production Round Table (2010): Guiding Principles. See annex or online: [http://www.food-scp.eu/files/Guiding\\_Principles.pdf](http://www.food-scp.eu/files/Guiding_Principles.pdf)

**Box 1: The European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Round Table**

The European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Round Table was launched in 2009 in order to establish the food chain as a major contributor to sustainable consumption and production. The initiative is co-chaired by the European Commission and food chain partners and is supported by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the European Environment Agency. Its aims are to:

- Establish scientifically reliable and uniform environmental assessment methodologies for food and drink on a voluntary basis;
- Identify suitable tools and guidance for the voluntary provision of environmental information to consumers and other stakeholders;
- Promote continuous environmental improvement measures along the entire food supply chain.

The Round Table's lead principle states that "environmental information communicated along the food chain, including to consumers, shall be scientifically reliable and consistent, understandable and not misleading, so as to support informed choice". As an important initial step, ten Guiding Principles were adopted by the SCP Round Table on 13 July 2010 (see annex). Among these, three principles address the voluntary provision of environmental information:

- Provide information in an easily understandable and comparable way so as to enable informed choices to be made;
- Ensure clarity regarding the scope and meaning of environmental information;
- Ensure transparency of information and in underlying methodologies and assumptions.

Further information can be found at <http://www.food-scp.eu>.

## **The role of environmental awareness-raising and consumer education**

Whilst the Food SCP RT acknowledges that education and awareness-raising are very important, the present report does not address the subject in detail. That said, a brief presentation is provided in the text box below.

### **Box 2: Environmental education and awareness-raising**

Environmental education and awareness-raising are amongst the social instruments which complement legal and economic instruments. They address both cognitive and affective issues and enable the individual to become competent and self-reliant in their ability to change their actions or behaviour.

Nowadays, environmental education has become education on sustainable development, which better addresses the issue of sustainable production and consumption and its complex, global and interconnected nature with other sustainability issues e.g. climate change, biodiversity, poverty reduction and water management.

Key considerations:

- Environmental education, as a way of establishing the food chain as a major contributor to sustainable consumption and production, can have a positive influence on the behaviour of consumers and business partners alike.
- Raising awareness of environmental issues is key to moving towards more environmentally-friendly behaviour, including the way purchase decisions are made.
- Environmental education should address information on the production, consumption and post-consumption phases.
- The ability of recipients to understand messages regarding environmental performance depends on their level of formal and informal education, but also on traditions and culture.
- The high literacy rate in Europe means consumers can respond to written environmental information and potentially make use of information technology, e.g. for digital education.
- Food and drink products are purchased by consumers of all ages, gender and economic circumstances, making it necessary to differentiate messages depending on the target group.
- Consumers spend little time considering the purchase of convenience foods, thus limiting the time for their uptake of environmental information.
- Environmental education starts in early childhood and should be part of the formal education, but not limited to it. Therefore life-long learning and active involvement (“learning by doing”) is a key element of environmental sustainability.

## **Purpose**

This paper drafted by the Food SCP RT Working Group on Environmental Communication aims to identify suitable tools for communicating the environmental performance of food and drink products and other relevant environmental information (e.g. on appropriate product handling during use and end-of-life) not only in Business-to-Consumer (B2C) relations, but also in Business-to-Business (B2B) relations. Sound communication between food chain partners is of particular importance as it is a prerequisite for good communication with consumers.

## **Approach**

The paper assesses the major tools and channels for communicating with consumers and other stakeholders. The Food SCP RT has identified the strengths and challenges of the different communication tools, as well as recommendations on how to use them. While 'online shopping' is not assessed in this paper, some of the insights and recommendations could also be relevant to this form of sales. Specific groups of consumers are not addressed in this paper, therefore the outcome of the assessment is targeted to the consumer in general.

Following a two-month public consultation and adoption by the Food SCP RT plenary, this report is now publicly available.

## PART A

### Assessment of communication tools for conveying environmental information on food and drink products

#### 1. Communication objectives for environmental information

The ultimate objective of environmental communication should be to help consumers and supply chain partners make more informed choices and improve their behaviour in order to proactively safeguard the environment for both present and future generations, by providing information that is scientifically reliable and consistent, understandable and not misleading.

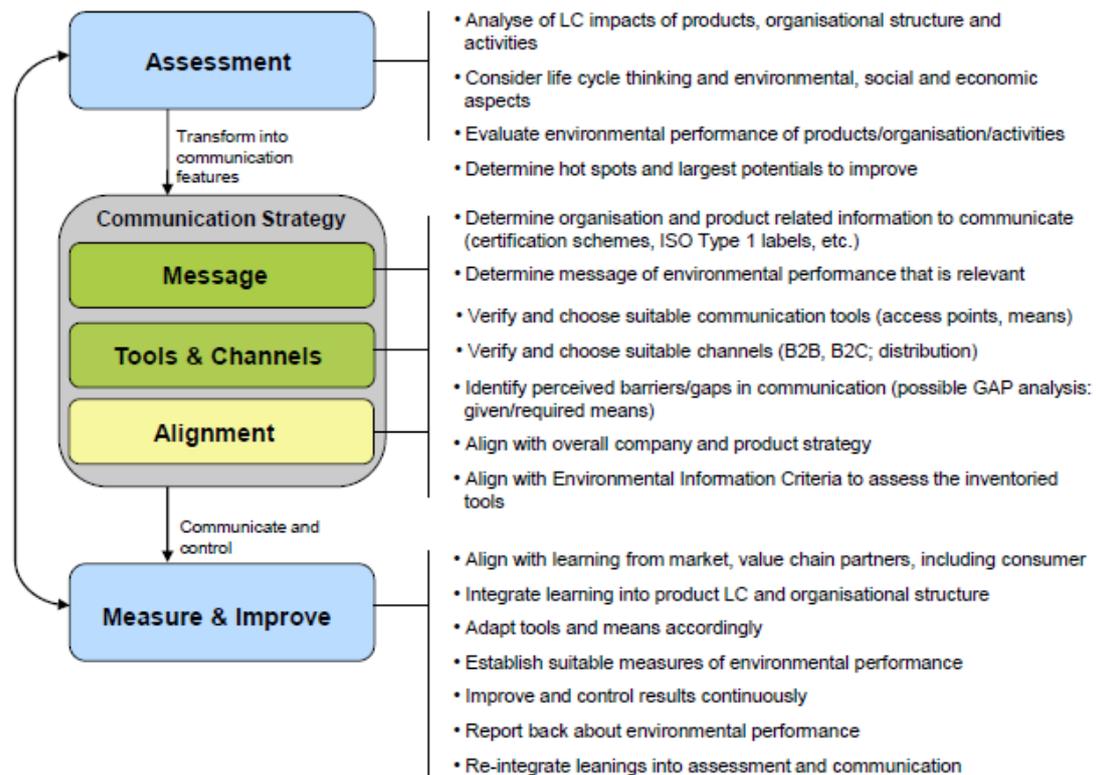


Figure 1: Strategic approach to communicating environmental performance

## 2. Business-to-Business Communication (B2B)

Businesses convey a significant amount of information to one another, either voluntarily or as part of their legal obligations. In accordance with the remit of the Food SCP Roundtable, this report does not deal with other types of B2B communication beyond voluntary communication of environmental information. B2B environmental communication is aimed at helping partners across the food chain make informed choices by providing them with accurate and understandable information. In general terms, the Guiding Principles for voluntary transmission of environmental information (principles 5 to 10)<sup>12</sup>, as agreed by the European Food SCP Roundtable, apply to B2B communication.<sup>13</sup>

When conveying environmental information between businesses, the following are considered prerequisites for adequate B2B communication:

- The information provided should be understandable and comparable (principle 5), as well as clear with regard to its scope and meaning (principle 6).
- The business that receives the information should be able to understand the underlying methodologies and assumptions (principle 7) so as to be in a position to assess the possible limitations of the data communicated.

In addition, guidance principle 8 states that it should be possible for all food chain actors to apply environmental communication tools without bearing a disproportionate burden. This principle applies to both the assessment methodology and the communication tools, and therefore, whatever the methodology and the communication tools implemented between businesses, the latter should not impose a disproportionate burden on operators but be as cost-effective as possible. In the context of B2B communication, cost-effectiveness can be evaluated for a given product, by comparing how much effort would be required along the chain to achieve a certain degree of accuracy and frequency of measurements, with how useful the data obtained would be. In this context, it is also important to explore the potential of new environmental data management tools which are interoperable with existing information systems.

The type of tool chosen for communicating with consumers (B2C) can be important when evaluating the type and amount of information that can reasonably be required from other operators along the food chain (B2B). For example, communication tools based on providing the end consumer with exact measurements (e.g. 253g CO<sub>2</sub>), may require considerable effort and very precise and regular data from all operators

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<sup>12</sup> European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production Round Table (2010): Guiding Principles. See annex or online: [http://www.food-scp.eu/files/Guiding\\_Principles.pdf](http://www.food-scp.eu/files/Guiding_Principles.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> No specific tools for B2B communication are discussed in this report. For example, Environmental Product Declarations (EPD), also known as ISO-type III environmental declarations (ISO 14025:2006), are primarily intended for use in business-to-business communication although their use in business-to-consumer communication under certain conditions is not precluded.

along the food chain. Given the high degree of uncertainty/variability in particular types of input data this may prove challenging for food chain partners.

Finally, B2B environmental communication tools and systems should not create new trade or technical barriers and unnecessary additional hurdles for chain actors thereby impeding the functioning of the Single Market or discouraging international trade (guiding principle 10).

While B2B is not covered in detail in this report, many of the insights and recommendations in the B2C chapter could also be relevant for B2B communication.

### **3. Business-to-Consumer Communication (B2C)**

#### **3.1 Categorisation of environmental communication (what to communicate)**

This chapter discusses the different formats for environmental information that companies or organisations can use to inform consumers about their products. Communication can take several different formats.

##### **3.1.1. Information concerning the consumption and post-consumption phase**

Consumers not only buy products, but they also make decisions during consumption and post-consumption which have an impact on products' environmental performance. As consumption behaviour often varies from consumer to consumer, eliciting the desired behaviour during this stage may benefit the overall environmental impact of the product, particularly when the assessment indicates that the consumption phase is a hotspot of the product's life cycle. Use-phase advice or tips for consumers, in particular if the actions are relatively easy to do for the consumer (e.g. conservation and sorting advice), can therefore play a significant role in improving the environmental performance of a product.

Messages can be grouped according to the uniformity of their content, for example:

- Messages applicable to all food chain partners: e.g. on shopping behaviour, food waste, sorting and recycling;
- Messages applicable to particular product groups: e.g. on cooking, cooling, washing, sorting and recycling including composting;
- Company/food format specific messages: e.g. storage instructions, sorting and recycling.
- Consumer advice and tips on how to improve the environmental performance of a product at the consumption phase can be provided by various actors including public authorities, NGOs and private bodies. These actors should work together to develop aligned and common messages to strengthen communication and avoid confusing consumers.

In particular, communication linked to the consumption and post-consumption phase should aim to engage the consumer on environmental issues in order to enhance environmental knowledge and drive consumer behavioural decisions that will improve the environmental performance at the use and post-use phase.

##### **3.1.2. Product-related information**

Product-related information can play an important role in enabling consumers to make informed choices by providing an insight into the environmental opportunities

and challenges of products and the effort being invested to improve environmental performance.

The main types of product-related information that may be communicated are described below including the strengths and challenges.

#### **a. Certification schemes**

Certification schemes consist of (a) certification standard(s) and third party verification system for products or processes that enable stakeholders involved in the food chain to claim that predefined requirements have been fulfilled. Schemes often use a logo or label, especially in B2C communication. Their purpose is to reassure consumers and other stakeholders that certain characteristics or attributes of the product or its production method or system, laid down in publicly available specifications, have been observed.

Examples: Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Fairtrade, Utz Certified, Marine Stewardship Council, organic farming certification (e.g. Demeter)

##### **Strengths:**

- Increased consumer acceptance of environmental claims that have been independently verified by a credible source
- High levels of consumer recognition for certain schemes leading to faster identification of the message and therefore more efficient communication
- Improved brand/ corporate image
- Incentives for improvement are provided (if there is a commitment to internal improvement within the scheme)
- Based on multi-stakeholder governance of criteria and awarding

##### **Challenges:**

- Scope:
  - Most of the certification schemes do not aim to cover the full life cycle (e.g. mostly sourcing is covered)
  - It is not always easy for the consumer to understand the true meaning of the information
- Proliferation:
  - Current proliferation of certification schemes is leading to consumer confusion

- Proliferation implies a multiplication of requirements and metrics that lead to additional costs for operators without benefitting the environment
- Comparability:
  - It is difficult to compare products covered by different certification schemes
  - It is impossible to compare the environmental performance of certified products with that of non-certified products
- For small-scale producers certification schemes can cause a disproportionate burden

## b. ISO Type I labels

ISO type I labels are voluntary, multiple-criteria-based third party programmes that award a licence which authorises the use of environmental labels on products which indicate the overall environmental preferability of a product within a particular product category, based on life cycle considerations” (ISO 14024:1999, type I environmental labelling).

Examples: EU Eco-label<sup>14</sup>, Nordic Swan<sup>15</sup>, Milieukeur<sup>16</sup>

### **Strengths:**

- Can be easily identified by the consumer
- Provides incentives to improve product performance by stimulating competition for inclusion in the best-in-class category
- Aims at indicating overall multi-criteria environmental performance of products, based on a life-cycle approach
- Simplifies the complexities related to the environmental impacts of products to the consumer
- Is third party verified
- Is based on multi-stakeholder governance of criteria

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<sup>14</sup> A feasibility study on extension to food and drink has been finalised in October 2011 and is available on [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/about\\_ecolabel/ecolabel\\_and\\_food\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/about_ecolabel/ecolabel_and_food_en.htm). The European Commission is expected to take a decision regarding the inclusion of food, feed and drink in 2012 based on the outcomes of the feasibility study and the decision of the EU Ecolabeling board.

<sup>15</sup> criteria development launched for bakery products in 2011

<sup>16</sup> started with food in 1996

**Challenges:**

- Uncertainty as to whether and how overall multiple environmental-criteria can be applied to food and drink products on a credible and scientific basis. For example, one difficulty is how to weigh environmental impacts one against each other
- Does not make the complexities related to the environmental impacts of products (depending e.g. on the supply chain, seasonality) visible to the consumer
- Limited life-cycle assessment as consumption and retail phases are difficult to account for within the framework (cradle to gate)
- Consumers cannot assess the different environmental impacts of the product (e.g. if the main impact is on water consumption or on energy, etc.)
- Defining clusters of similar products and product categories is difficult because of the variability and characteristics of food and drink
- The constantly changing and diverse supply chain can lead to complex accounting and information becoming quickly outdated
- Does not encourage improvements to be made to those products that are unlikely to achieve best-in-class status
- The basis of the 'excellence' can be unclear (all food and drink products; all products in same category; all products from a certain category at a particular POS; only products which apply for the label?)
- "Winner takes all" – benefits of continuous improvement are not rewarded for those who do not have the ISO-type I label
- Possible consumer and industry confusion between ISO Type I labels and existing product-related environmental information schemes

**c. Environmental footprint information (displaying figures with or without context)**

Environmental footprint information provides quantitative data on certain environmental impacts or aspects of a product, preferably based on an environmental life cycle analysis, given in absolute figures.

Environmental footprint information is intended to provide product-specific information to enhance environmental literacy and knowledge, life cycle thinking provide an insight into the environmental impact and support other types of environmental communication. Footprint information can address a single criterion or be based on multiple criteria (water, carbon etc.). It requires a harmonised methodology (e.g. scope and boundaries of accounting and functional unit) and a highly precise data set to ensure comparability is possible.

To avoid misleading consumers, footprint information should be provided in context, as defined by the Round Table guiding principles, limiting the ways in which information can be conveyed.

### **c.1 Footprint information without context**

Footprint information without context is where absolute figures are presented without additional contextual information.

#### **Strengths:**

- Information displayed in a simpler way
- Can help enhance consumer environmental awareness amongst customers
- For single criterion footprint information consumers can compare products if they have been assessed using well defined and identical system boundaries, accounting methodologies and secondary data sources
- Little space needed on the product /shelf

#### **Challenges:**

- The margin of error for footprints can be greater than the observable difference between the products themselves
- External factors (e.g. weather conditions) lead to considerable variation in the environmental impact which can be difficult to be properly reflect the footprint information
- Resource intensive: there is a lack of freely available open sources and good quality data that making footprint assessments time consuming and expensive, particularly for SMEs
- As long as footprint information does not inform consumers of all major aspects/impacts or life stages, conveying the wrong impression of a product's overall environmental performance will continue to be a possibility
- In general, the consumer does not have the background knowledge to interpret the figures
- Loses its validity over time as footprint figures change

## c.2 Footprint information with context

Footprint information with context is where absolute figures are presented alongside additional contextual information, e.g. qualitative descriptions, rated scales, benchmarks, etc.

### **Strengths:**

- Information displayed in a simpler way providing additional guidance through the provision of context
- Can be a useful tool to communicate what parts of the lifecycle are important for a product or a product category
- Can help enhance consumers' environmental awareness - benchmarking enables consumers to judge the relative performance of a specific product
- Consumers can compare different products (within a harmonised methodology)

### **Challenges:**

- The margin of error for footprints can be greater than the observable difference between the products themselves
- External factors (e.g. weather conditions) lead to considerable variation in the environmental impact which can be difficult to properly reflect in the footprint information
- Resource intensive: There is a lack of freely available open sources and good quality data making foot print assessments time consuming and expensive, particularly for SMEs
- As long as practices of footprint communication to consumers do not include all major aspects/impacts or life stages, conveying the wrong impression of a product's overall environmental performance will continue to be a possibility
- Specific to rated scales:
  - The reference value for the rating has to be clear and defined (e.g. against all products/ all tested products / all products in this category)
  - Defining clusters of similar products and product categories is difficult, because of the variability and characteristics of food and drink.
  - Do not provide an insight into stages of a product's life cycle
  - There are no uniform values for establishing acceptable and non-acceptable levels

- of environmental parameters therefore making it arbitrary today to set a benchmark
- Environmental impacts largely differ depending on the production and use of products (e.g. the geographical location of production and use; seasonality). It is very challenging to address this properly in a rating system

#### **d. ISO Type II labels (Self-declared environmental claims)<sup>17</sup>**

ISO type II labels provide environmental claims made by manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or anyone else likely to benefit from such a claim, without independent third party certification.

Example: “Made from 65% recycled material”, “Manufactured from 100% renewable energy”

##### **Strengths:**

- Encourages companies to seek out innovative solutions and performance improvements on certain environmental aspects
- Can help enhance consumer’s environmental awareness (if claims are specific and unambiguous)
- Allows for flexibility in communication
- Not resource intensive and therefore less burdensome for small-scale producers

##### **Challenges:**

- Self-declared labels lack credibility, if they are not justified or backed up by evidence
- Vague environmental claims undermine the efforts of companies investing in real environmental improvement measures
- Scope:
  - Most claims do not cover the entire life cycle
  - It is not always easy for the consumer understand the true scope and meaning of the information
- Proliferation:
  - Current proliferation of environmental claims leads to consumer confusion and may

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<sup>17</sup> ISO 14021 Self-declared environmental claims (Type II Environmental labeling)

lead to a loss of trust in all types of environmental message

- Comparability:
  - Difficult to compare products with different claims
  - Impossible to compare environmental performance with products without claims

#### **e. Commitments to improve environmental performance**

Communication that demonstrates a commitment from one or more companies/organisations to reduce certain environmental impacts of their products.

Example: Carbon Reduction Label (by the Carbon Trust)

##### **Strengths:**

- Possibility of setting ambitious targets
- Promotes continued improvement of environmental performance
- Builds on market and brand dynamics

##### **Challenges:**

- Can be less suited to product related information and may limit the ability to compare products
- Mostly single issue commitments, not taking into account all environmental impacts
- Not always covering all life cycle stages
- May mislead consumers if there is no publicly available plan or strategy to provide details about the intended actions to achieve the target
- Without third-party certification, independence and credibility may be questioned
- Not easily applicable to products without brands (i.e. fruit and vegetables)

#### **f. Impact compensation information**

Information on compensation for environmental aspects/impacts along the supply chain demonstrating that investment has been made to reduce and 'off-set' the environmental impact of a product.

Example: CarbonNeutral company

**Strengths:**

- Can help to engage consumers
- Communicates action on dealing with environmental impacts that cannot be addressed directly

**Challenges:**

- Possibility of misleading information: impacts seem to be neutralised as long as the company/organisation pays enough to compensate for them
- May result in not doing all possible efforts on own products/processing/sites, unless the schemes require additional efforts to reduce the environmental impact
- Not easily understood by consumers
- Difficult to make comparisons
- Gives the impression that the environmental impacts can be undone

**g. Cause-related marketing (CRM)**

A marketing approach in which a product or service builds an association (typically long-term) with a non-profit cause to help build awareness, funding and/or volunteer support. Often – but not always – support includes the donation of a sales percentage to the non-profit organisation.

Examples: Reforestation campaigns conducted by non-forest companies

**Strengths:**

- Can help encourage consumers to engage with particular issues
- If properly aligned to the brand and its values, the cause programme can contribute to brand reputation
- Can help raise awareness of environmental issues and non-profit organisations
- Offers companies a way to do 'good' and distinguish themselves from competitors
- A fast growing segment in marketing and advertising

**Challenges:**

- Not based on lifecycle thinking but on single issues

- Effect and benefits for supported projects cannot be directly verified by consumers.
- Typically based on a marketing campaign and not always sustained beyond a few weeks.

### **3.1.3. Organisation-related information**

Environmental information related to the organisation is where environmental performance and commitments are communicated corporate level (corporate communication) and is generally not linked to a specific product or brand. Organisation-related information can play an important role in enabling consumers to make informed choices by providing an insight into what companies and organisations are doing to address the environmental opportunities and challenges of their products as well as the efforts they are making to improve environmental performance.

#### **a. Company-specific commitments and activities to improve environmental performance**

This is where companies / organisations make voluntary commitments addressing the environmental, economic and social opportunities and challenges of their production and related activities (e.g. distribution, storage etc) and inform consumers and wider stakeholder groups about the effort being made to improve performance in these areas.

Examples: Corporate sustainability reports, company-specific environmental sustainability strategies and plans, company websites

#### **Strengths:**

- Comprehensive information is provided on the challenges and opportunities facing an companies / organisation from a holistic sustainability perspective
- Creates peer pressure, encourages companies / organisations to set ambitious targets, helps to communicate on activities and encourage continuous improvement of environmental performance
- Can build a broad sense of trust between consumers and companies / organisations and their products
- Clear globally defined guidelines through the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) with reports graded and verified by independent third parties

**Challenges:**

- Not easily accessible to consumers given its detailed and often technical nature
- Only complete if all three pillars of sustainability are addressed
- Credibility of the report has to be ensured through transparent, reliable and accurate information (e.g. traceability of results and future objectives) and third party verification
- Embedding all levels of management – normative, strategic and operative– must be assured
- Often only the company/organisation gets credit for the effort made towards improving sustainability without necessarily giving credit to its suppliers

**b. Sustainability partnerships**

Sustainability partnerships are where companies and organisations agree on a joint voluntary commitment to address certain environmental challenges. The purpose is to leverage individual company actions and to transform business practice in the wider industry and not just that of individual organisations. Joint commitments can be taken by major users of a particular resource (e.g. of timber or palm oil) or by a particular sector or on a particular environmental issue (e.g. Carbon, F-gases).

Partnerships can be cross-sectoral existing between organisations which represent different interests, e.g. between profit-oriented organisations with NGOs or international organisations for the promotion of certain issues or to advance towards a defined common goal.

Examples: Sustainable Palm Oil Roundtable, Sustainable Sugar Cane Initiative, FSC, Consumer Goods Forum, Sustainable Agriculture Network; Climate Savers

**Strengths:**

- Can drive a company's leadership on a relevant environmental issue (water or climate) with concrete action
- Helps the exchange and development of expertise and knowledge
- Can introduce more sustainable business practices on a large scale in a relatively short period of time
- Includes end-users and their supply chain
- Helps tackle specific imminent sustainability issues
- Helps to set sustainability above competitive advantages (creates a level playing field)
- Builds consumer trust that certain sustainability issues are being addressed and

improved without the consumers themselves having to understand the technical details

**Challenges:**

- Is not always related to particular products
- Does not involve or require direct consumer action
- Is not based on life cycle thinking
- May not be linked to the most significant environmental impact of an organisation

**c. Value-chain communication (link to B2B communication)**

Communication across a product's value chain by combining the brand strength of the manufacturer with the credibility of the suppliers or other value chain partners helps to reassure consumers of the performance of products or to encourage certain behavioural changes.

Examples: cross-recommendation of products, influencing the supply chain; partnering for consumer behaviour (partnering of washing powder producers with washing machine producers on the 30 degree campaign)

**Strengths:**

- Involves an organisation and its supply chain
- Allows for an holistic approach to tackle environmental issues along the life cycle
- Is based on dialogue and common understanding and therefore reduces friction and losses
- Encourages continuous environmental improvement in the supply chain
- Combines the strength of several organisations
- Raises awareness and involvement with consumers

**Challenges:**

- Is not applicable for all products
- Is based on single issues, rather than being life cycle based
- Is mainly linked to marketing interests

### 3.2 Where and how to communicate?

The chapter gives an insight into the main means and channels of communication according to three different access points where environmental information can be communicated to the consumer. These are at the point of sale, close to the point of sale and beyond the point of sale.

The table provides an overview of the main access points and tools that have been identified as prime candidates for the communication of environmental information. In addition, an explanation of each tool is given and their strengths and challenges are identified.

	<b>Access points</b>	<b>Means &amp; Channels</b>
A.	At the Point of Sale	On-pack
		On-shelf (with price label)
		Price terminal (with bar code), 2 D code/tag+ decoding device, bar code or 2D code/tag reading with a mobile phone (smart phone)
B.	Close to the Point of Sale	Leaflet
		Receipt
		Representative in shops
		In-store signs and advertising
C.	Beyond the Point of Sale	Public Relations
		Marketing Campaigns
		Advertising
		Internet / Social Media

## A. At the Point of Sale

Due to space constraints and the lack of flexibility in its use, the packaging of food and drink products is less suitable for communicating environmental information:

- that requires a large amount of contextual information to ensure scientific reliability and avoid misleading the consumer;
- that needs to be changed frequently/regularly due to various factors (e.g, seasonality, change in suppliers etc.);
- whose relevance may differ depending on the place of purchase/consumption.

However, product packaging may be useful for voluntarily communicating environmental information where the message is relatively easy to understand and the scope of the message is clear to the consumer. In any case, the consumer should be provided with an option to learn more – e.g. via web URL printed on the pack or via a code that can be scanned. In most cases, context and substantiation is required and this can often be accomplished through digital content.

### A.1 On-pack

All the information that is provided on the packaging.

#### Strengths:

- Visible when purchasing
- Available after purchase (not limited to the purchaser)
- Allows consumers to glance across category purchase options and make an informed choice, subject to comparable on-pack environmental data

#### Challenges:

- Technical and space constraints
  - particularly for multi-market, multilingual products
  - difficult to provide complex information in a small amount of space
- Costs for the set-up, updating and changing of the pack<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Lead time for the updates of the packs between validation of the information and the placing on shelves: between 1 and 3 years for food products, at least between 3 and 4 months for a new product.

- Several products are sold without packaging
- Constraint of colour-compatibility with graphic charts<sup>19</sup>
- Risks of invalid environmental information for multi-supply or multi-destinations products: the illustration is the same, but transport-related impacts are inevitably not the same
- Packaging may be overcrowded with other information that can distract and confuse consumers

### **Opportunities**

- Feature a simple message and a web URL on-pack so that consumers can visit a brand website if they are interested in learning more about the environmental aspects of a product.
- Feature QR/2-dimensional code that takes consumers to app or website to learn more about the environmental aspects of the product.

### **A.2 On-shelf (with price label)**

This concerns any information provided on the shelf where the product is displayed.

On-shelf communication faces a number of challenges especially in terms of the amount of space available for communication. In combination with the fact that the information is not available after purchase, it is very difficult for consumers to seek additional information and this means that the range of environmental information that may be communicated through on-shelf information is very limited. However, it may be useful for products that are sold without packaging e.g. fresh fruit and vegetables.

#### **Strengths:**

- Available when purchasing
- Works for unpackaged products
- Price and environmental impacts visible at the same time

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<sup>19</sup> Tolerance needed in the colour codes: some packs have less than 4 colours, consequently adding a colour will require adding an image and thus an additional graphic element for a small printed area.

**Challenges:**

- Problems of updates (slightly less as compared to on-pack information)
- Requires the responsibilities of manufacturers and retailers in terms of updating data to be clearly indicated
- The link between the product and the label should be straightforward
- Information not available after purchase

**A.3 Price terminal (with bar code) , 2D code/tag + decoding device, bar code or 2D code/tag reading with a mobile phone (smart phone)**

A great deal of how usable price terminal is for environmental information depends on technological development. This has a significant influence on the amount and the quality of information that can be presented.

In general, if the amount and the quality of information presented are relatively low-quality, the tool is not recommended for communicating environmental information. If quality is high and is closer to the capabilities of smart phones in terms of presenting complex information, then it may be used for certain types of information. Smart phones as communication tools make it possible to provide relatively large amounts of environmental information at the point of sale. This allows for a large selection of environmental information to be provided in a scientifically reliable way and also supports informed choices. Using smart phones allows for communicating to consumers both at the point of sale and beyond the point of sale.

**Strengths:**

- Accessible when purchasing
- Space savings on the pack
- The consumer would have an overview of his trolley and could "judge" it. This also encourages and enhances environmental literacy
- Additional digital space to provide more appropriate and suitable communication/information
- Depending on the level of technology of the scanning machine, it can transfer a large amount of detailed information

**Challenges:**

- Does not necessarily reach the entire population ( not all segments of society)
- Shops would need to obtain decoding devices so that the system is accessible to everyone, or/and there would need to be a sufficient number of consumers using their own portable devices (smart phones, etc.)
- Not immediately visible to the consumer (unless there is a specific or on-pack indication)
- Requires the development of a dedicated device or to have a base which diverts to a website (Internet access)
- Information may not be available after purchasing if the code tag or the scanner are only available in the point of sale

**B. Close to the point of sale****B.1 Leaflets**

A publicity or information document which is distributed or is available to the consumer in-store (e.g. handed out, available in dispenser near the product, at the check-out or in the consumer services area).

**Strengths:**

- Likely to be able to carry a more detailed and larger amount of information than in store signs
- Available for consumers in store
- Detailed explanations in a language which can be adapted to the audience for better comprehension (different materials can be created depending on the delivery location)

**Challenges:**

- Impossible to have a leaflet available for all products at all times
- Ensuring information is always up-to-date

## **B.2 Receipt**

This gives the opportunity to provide information to purchasers on the till receipt as they purchase the product.

### **Strengths:**

- Receipts could offer information on featured products (as with the coupon application – purchased by manufacturers as additional advertising content)
- Accessible to all purchasers
- No modification of the pack is required

### **Challenges:**

- Accessible only after purchase, so too late to influence current choice
- Amount of information is very limited
- Provision and regular updating of the information
- Level of consumer attention and involvement is very limited

## **B.3 Representative at the point of sale**

Using representatives at the point of sale (store-employed resource or brand representative in-store during a promotion) is a unique way of communicating as it uses personal communication. Although, in principle this may allow for conveying long messages, its actual capacity largely depends on the training/skills of the representative and how much information the consumer is willing and able to take in.

### **Strengths:**

- Personal dialogue with the customer
- Can provide specific information
- Provides immediate answers to consumers

### **Challenges:**

- Cost intensive for retailers and/or manufacturers

- Not feasible for small shops
- Availability of the person can be limited according to the shop's size and number of consumers
- Contradicts the self-service principle
- Training is needed

#### **B.4 In-store signs and advertising**

Includes, but is not limited to, brand or retail-generated and managed end-aisle display units including backer cards, display cartons, posters, floor decals and ceiling hangers.

##### **Strengths:**

- Information can be given directly at the shopping venue

##### **Challenges:**

- Overload of information could weaken impact

### **C. Beyond the Point of Sale**

#### **C.1 Public Relations**

PR is a field which deals with maintaining a public image for organisations. It focuses on work with stakeholder groups such as common interest associations, public authorities, non-profit organisations and the media. Marketing campaigns including advertising and public relations can cover a wide range of activities and combinations thereof.

##### **Strengths:**

- Credible third parties can help to inform and shape a company's sustainability strategies by offering different perspectives and information. Such input can be valuable to organisations, particularly as the environmental landscape is broad, diverse and evolving
- Third parties can offer an additional channel for spreading information and they can offer consumers an objective or alternative view of an organisation and its sustainability efforts – e.g. an interview with a journalist and the subsequent article

**Challenges:**

- All parties have differing agendas. It takes dedicated effort and a long-term commitment to integrate and benefit from third party stakeholder involvement and public relations efforts
- Members of the food chain can control the message / information they give to third parties but they cannot control how that third party will use the information or present it to others

**C.2. Media****Strengths:**

- Credible third parties can help to inform and shape a company's sustainability strategies by offering different perspectives and information. Such input can be valuable to organisations, particularly as the environmental landscape is broad, diverse and evolving
- Third parties can offer operators of the food supply chain an additional channel for spreading information and they offer consumers an objective or alternative view of an organisation and its sustainability efforts – e.g. an interview with a journalist and the resulting article

**Challenges:**

- All parties have differing agendas. It takes dedicated effort and a long-term commitment to integrate and benefit from third party stakeholder involvement and public relations efforts
- Operators of the food supply chain can control the message/information they give to third parties but they cannot control how that third party will use the information or present it to others

**C.3 Marketing campaigns**

Marketing campaigns are specific activities designed to promote a product, service or business. They consist of a coordinated series of steps that can include promotion of a product using different media (television, radio, print, online) and different types of advertisements. Marketing campaigns do not have to rely solely on advertising. They can also include demonstrations, word of mouth and other interactive techniques. Loyalty schemes can be part of marketing campaigns to incentivise more

environmentally conscious purchase decisions but with limited possibilities to communicate comprehensive environmental information to consumers.

**Strengths:**

- The nature of campaigns is such that they are an intensive period of communication across a variety of consumer touch-points. This aids awareness-building of an issue and/or actions consumers can take

**Challenges:**

- In their eagerness to communicate their environmental actions, operators of the food supply chain must ensure that they avoid green-washing and over-hyping, as these mislead consumers about the extent of environmental improvements and impacts. Such behaviour only discredits efforts made by other operators of the food supply chain and contributes to lower levels of consumer trust

#### **C.4 Advertising**

The purchase of advertising time / space for a company or brand using a variety of media channels (e.g. print, outdoor, cinema, television, radio, etc.)

**Strengths:**

- Can reach many people in an efficient way, raising awareness and influencing behaviour
- Space/time usually allows for a reasonable length of message to communicate a prime environmental initiative

**Challenges:**

- Depending on the media outlet, advertising purchases can be expensive
- Good advertising is usually limited to one prime message. It does not lend itself to explaining multiple, complex environmental dimensions. Advertising is ideally supplemented with detailed information found on a website or mobile application
- Current lack of control. Good company messages can lose credibility because a bad message can confuse consumers and make them lose trust

## **C.5 Internet/new media**

The Internet is a worldwide system of transmitting information that allows consumers to obtain and exchange environmental information through social networks, blogs, company websites, etc.

The flexibility of websites should make it possible to communicate any type of environmental information through it. The Internet is capable of delivering both short key messages and longer contextual information. It may be used as a primary communication tool but it may also be used as a complementary tool in combination with other means, such as on-pack information, when it is important that a certain amount of information remains with the product.

It is acknowledged that consumers will increasingly be able to access, collect, share and apprehend data via mobile applications ('apps') in ways that are fundamentally different to the current traditional and more 'static' access to information via the internet. The strengths as well as the challenges attached to these new media are difficult to assess at this stage of their evolution. They deserve nevertheless careful attention in view of future revisions of these guidelines. The following strengths and challenges were identified having in mind the current traditional use of internet tools.

### **Strengths:**

- Provides more space for information helping consumers to gain a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability
- Avoids simplification
- Allows targeted information, depending on the consumer's need for details
- More active form of communication (pull not push)
- Lead-time very short between the validation of the information and its communication
- Low costs for setting up and updating the information

### **Challenges:**

- This type of communication demands a continuous interaction with the consumer which may be time-consuming.
- Access to the Internet is not universal, for the moment.

## **PART B**

### **Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

Communicating environmental information remains complex and often cannot be distilled to simple claims or visual icons. In most cases sharing environmental information requires appropriate space for specific, contextual information and substantiation. That said, the members of the Food SCP RT want to help consumers as far as possible to make informed choices (with a focus on at shelf / in-store information) linked to the environmental impact of the products they buy in order to enable sustainable consumption, as well as to optimise environmental communication at B2B level. This requires a good understanding of what information can reasonably be made available through the various communication tools. Below is a guide and examples for effective communication.

#### **Criteria for recommendations and requirements**

The criteria for the recommendations and requirements were developed from the Guiding Principles of the Round Table. Four main groups of criteria in the Guiding Principles have been identified <sup>20</sup>:

1. Scientific reliability
2. Supporting informed choice
3. Avoiding disproportionate burden
4. Motivating environmental improvement along the food chain

#### **Horizontal recommendations for all types of communication tools**

While requirements related to the effectiveness and suitability to provide informed choice and to avoid disproportionate burden largely depend on the particular communication tools, members of the Round Table have identified a number of requirements for the scientific reliability of such tools which are applicable in each case, regardless of the type of communication tool chosen:

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<sup>20</sup> See annex

- The methodology, scope, limitations and uncertainties are clearly explained and stated.
- Communication is relevant and valid for multi-supply and multi-destination products, including any post-consumption phase information e.g. on how to dispose of the used packaging.
- Vague or non-specific terms such as "green", "environmentally friendly", "sustainable", "ecological", "eco", "nature's friend" "non-polluting", "environmentally safe" etc. are avoided. Here, European and national guidance documents on environmental claims should be followed<sup>21</sup>.
- Negative trade-offs between environmental impacts are not hidden.
- Reliable, easy-to-understand and comparable environmental information that is clear in scope and meaning is provided to enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions.

## **Recommendations depending on the access point of information**

### **A. Recommendations for *point of sale* communication**

#### **A.1 On pack:**

##### **General comments**

Due to space constraints and the lack of flexibility in its use, the packaging of food and drink products is less suitable for communicating environmental information that:

- needs a large amount of contextual information to ensure scientific reliability and avoid misleading the consumer
- needs to be changed frequently/regularly due to various factors (e.g. seasonality, change in suppliers etc.)
- may change its relevance depending on the place of shopping/consumption.

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<sup>21</sup> For further guidance on the use of environmental claims, see following reference documents:

- ISO 14021 (1999).

- European Commission Guidelines for Making and Assessing Environmental Claims (2000)

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons\\_safe/news/green/guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_safe/news/green/guidelines_en.pdf)

- 2009 Guidance on the implementation/application of directive 2005/29/EC on unfair commercial practices, Chapter 2.5 Misleading environmental claims

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/rights/docs/Guidance\\_UCP\\_Directive\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/rights/docs/Guidance_UCP_Directive_en.pdf)

- Green Claims Guidance, United Kingdom (2011)

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/06/03/pb13453-green-claims-guidance/>

However, product packaging may be useful for voluntarily communicating environmental information where the message is relatively easy to understand and the scope of the message is clear to the consumer. In any case, the consumer should be provided with an option to learn more – e.g. via web URLs printed on-pack or a scannable code. In most cases, context and substantiation is needed and this can often be accomplished by directing the consumer to web-based content.

Although, on-pack information is listed here as a point-of-sale communication tool, it may actually play a role in communication before and/or beyond the point of sale.

**Recommended for on-pack communication <sup>22</sup>:**

- Information concerning consumption and post-consumption phase
- Certification schemes
- ISO type II labels that are clear, accurate and substantiated
- Cause-related marketing

**Conditions to support informed choice:**

- The consumer does not need a large amount of information to understand the meaning of the message or label.
- The type of environmental information can be easily understood by consumers.
- The scope and meaning of the information is transparent and clear to the consumer even if only limited information is presented on-pack.

**Conditions to avoid disproportionate burden:**

- The regularity with which environmental information is updated must be in line with the producers' ability to change their packaging.
- The amount of information needed to be in line with the Guiding Principles does not require disproportionate space on the packaging.

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<sup>22</sup> While the majority of European Food Sustainable and Consumption Round Table members agreed with this conclusion, some members wanted to see 'ISO type 1 labels' and 'environmental footprints with context' recommended on pack given the strengths identified earlier in this report. As several studies and initiatives are on-going at the moment, the Round Table members pledged to review their recommendations on ISO Type 1 labels and on environmental footprints when more information is available.

## **A.2 On-shelf**

### **General comments**

On-shelf communication faces a number of challenges especially in terms of the amount of space available for communication. This in combination with the fact that the information is not available after purchase, makes it very difficult for consumers to seek additional information and means that range of environmental information that may be communicated through on-shelf is very limited. However, it may be useful to provide information on products that are sold without packaging e.g. fresh fruit and vegetables.

### **Recommended for communication on-shelf:**

- Certification schemes

### **Conditions to support informed choice:**

- The link between the product and the label is clear.
- The message communicated using on-shelf labels is easily identifiable for the consumers.
- The type of environmental information can be easily understood by consumers

### **Conditions to avoid disproportionate burden:**

- The use of labels is flexible enough to provide and update the information without disproportionate costs.

## **A.3 Price terminal with barcode/2 D code/tag+ decoding device**

### **General comments**

Much of the usability of the price terminals for environmental information depends on their technological development. It has a significant effect on the amount and the quality of information that can be presented.

This tool is only recommended to communicate environmental information with relatively higher quality of devices (closer to the capabilities of smart phones) in terms of presenting complex information.

**Recommended for communication by this communication tool:**

- Certification schemes

**Conditions to support informed choice:**

- The information is presented in a way that respects the limited time in which consumers have to make decisions, while larger amounts of information of contextual information is also easily accessible.
- The information contributes to improving consumers' environmental literacy.
- Infrastructure is provided.
- Consumers are made aware that the information is available for them through these devices.

**Conditions to avoid disproportionate burden:**

- The code system used is harmonised and does not require disproportionate burden in order for it to be implemented. For example, by using the existing bar code system.
- The system provides flexibility in its use and allows for future improvement.
- Food chain partners work together towards a standardised set of data to be used.
- Potential cost of providing and updating information is not disproportionate.

**A.4 Bar code or 2D code/tag reading with cell phone (smart phone)**

**General comments**

Smart phones as communication tools make it possible to provide relatively large amounts of environmental information at the point of sale. This allows for the communication of a large selection of environmental information in a scientifically

reliable way which also supports informed choice. Using smart phones enables communication to consumers both at the point of sale and beyond the point of sale.

### **Recommended for communication using this tool:**

Since there are virtually no technical barriers to conveying information using smart phones, all types of environmental information of this document may be recommended as long as they meet the requirements set out in this document.

### **Conditions to support informed choice:**

- The information is presented in a way that respects the limited time consumers have to make decisions while larger amounts of information contextual information are also easily accessible.
- The information contributes to improving consumers' environmental literacy.
- Smart phones need to be an available and accepted tool for most consumers in order to be used effectively. If this is not guaranteed, then they can be used in combination with a "price terminal (with bar code)" and "2D code/tag + decoding device" or a website reference. Therefore, it is important that the code system is harmonised.
- Information is also available on the Internet for consumers without access to smart phones.

### **Conditions to avoid disproportionate burden:**

- The code system used is harmonised and its implementation does not lead to disproportionate burden, for example: using the existing bar code system.
- The system provides flexibility in its use and allows for future improvement.

## **B. Recommendations for close to point of sale communication**

### **B.1 Leaflets**

#### **General comments**

Leaflets have different, mostly marketing-related objectives, but most often in an ad hoc manner. Due to their limitations and continued pressure from various stakeholders to reduce the amount of leaflets produced due to environmental reasons, the Round Table recommends a limited and targeted use of this tool to communicate environmental information.

The printing of the leaflets should be done with the lowest environmental impact possible.

## **B.2 Front of Receipts**

### **General comments**

Following the evaluation of the characteristics of receipts, members of the European Food SCP Round Table agreed that receipts – although they have some strengths - are unlikely to be a suitable method for communicating environmental information.

## **B.3 Representatives in shops**

### **General comments:**

Using representatives in shops is a unique way of communicating in that it uses personal communication. Although in principle this may allow for conveying long messages, its actual capacity largely depends on the training/skills of the representative and how much information the consumer is willing and able to take in. This channel is most often used for sales purposes and will most likely remain as an ad-hoc tool with limited use for environmental information.

The Round Table also suggests following the Guiding Principles and the horizontal recommendations set out earlier in this document when using this tool.

## **C. Beyond the point of sale**

### **C.1 Marketing campaigns/advertising/public relations**

#### **General comments**

Marketing campaigns including advertising and public relations can cover a wide range of activities and their combinations. It is out of the scope of this document to cover all solutions under this heading, especially since in most cases these tools will not be used on a permanent basis for product communication but used as

complementary tools to other communication methods which are more directly linked to individual products.

Therefore, at this stage the Round Table does not have specific recommendations for these tools other than to say that stakeholders communicating environmental information should always follow the Guiding Principles of the Round Table and the horizontal recommendations set out earlier in this document.

## **C.2 Internet/Social media**

### **General comments**

The flexibility of websites should make it possible to communicate any type of environmental information. It is capable of delivering both short key messages and longer contextual information. Therefore, whether it meets the criteria set out by the Guiding Principles depends more on issues such as the infrastructure for Internet access in a given Member State, the communicator's resources and skills and the characteristics of the target audience.

The Internet may be used as a primary communication tool but it may also be used as a complementary tool in combination with other means, such as on-pack information, etc., for example when it is important that some information remains with the product.

### **Recommendations**

Since there are virtually no technical barriers in conveying information on the Internet, all types of environmental information may be recommended as long as they meet the requirements set out in this document.

#### **Conditions to support informed choice:**

- Information should be structured in a way that addresses the needs of the target audience and the aim of the information.
- The Internet may be a good choice for communication as long as that the target audience has the necessary access to the internet and that it can be expected to be widely used as a communication source.

#### **Conditions to avoid disproportionate burden:**

- It is in standard practice of the company to use the Internet for communication and setting up the necessary website does not require disproportionate costs.

## Conclusions

Communicating environmental information remains a relatively new and complex area. Providing such information to the consumer on the basis of a product-specific lifecycle approach in the food and drink sector is particularly challenging as it requires a high degree of precision on how this information is generated and how the results need to be interpreted to avoid product discrimination, misleading the consumer and market distortions.

Accommodating the particular characteristics of the food and drink sector in environmental assessment methodologies is a challenge. We need only think of the multitude of products, the multi-supply and multi-destination nature of the sector, and supply chains which change depending on the season and availability. The Food SCP Round Table believes that methodological questions of environmental footprinting and lifecycle assessments should be addressed in order to fully assess the best means of environmental communication to the consumer. The European Food SCP Round Table is working on a harmonised approach and its results will be critical for informing future discussions.

Within this context, the Food SCP Round Table assessed those communication methods and tools which are best placed for environmental communication to the consumer; supporting informed choices but not placing a disproportionate burden on food chain partners, particularly SMEs. Although, this report outlines good practices and key tools that can be used, it is clear that communicating environmental information is best done by using a multi-pronged approach. This means that companies/brands should consider a mix of communication devices and should not rely on a single or limited set of communication tools. Each communication tool lends itself to a different level and nature of information (e.g. ranging from limited on-pack information to more detailed on-line explanations). These tools are best used in combination which helps:

- To raise awareness amongst consumers and food chain partners to environmental aspects of products and services.
- To increase their familiarity and understanding of environmental performance.
- To help inform their purchase decisions and support more sustainable choices.

However, a critical lack of practical evidence on consumer understanding of and reaction to environmental communication on food & drink products was found throughout the European Union. Members of the Food SCP Round Table believe that it is critical to build solid consumer research specifically for food and drink products,

as consumers need to be able to make informed choices several times a day. The Round Table calls for a targeted effort from public bodies at EU and Member State level, as well as from research institutes and the different links of the food chain. This would help to lead practical consumer research across several European countries and would enable the member of the Food SCP Round Table to better understand consumer perception, understanding and action in terms of environmental product information. Specific guidance needs to be further developed on communicating the environmental performance of products in order to achieve a harmonised approach and to be most effective in supporting more sustainable consumer choices.

The European Food SCP Round Table recommends that the question of third party use of environmental information (e.g. other stakeholders using information developed by producers for their own communication purposes) will be further analysed. This work may result in a code of conduct and/or quality standards on the use of third party information, which may ensure product information is accurate and factual at all times while limiting excessive administrative and data collection burdens on food chain partners.

Finally, the Food SCP Round Table also found it essential that environmental product information is framed by a broader public education strategy, led by national governments and civil society, in order to raise awareness on the need to preserve the environment, why this is relevant to the consumer and what concrete actions the consumer can take to help reduce society's impact. Public education and incentives are relevant for all products and services in the marketplace, but they could also be expanded to the food & drink sector, where it is shown that individual action can bring tangible environmental benefits, for example through increasing waste sorting for recovery or recycling (e.g. packaging waste), and reducing food waste. We believe that only against a solid backdrop of broader awareness and understanding of environmental issues there will be a good chance that consumers will be able to act on more complex product-specific information and make informed choices. The Round Table believes that food chain partners have an important role to play here and proposes further strengthening cooperation at European level. Members of the Round Table understand that this document can only examine the current situation as regards communication technology, methodological development and understanding of consumer behaviour. In addition to this, internet shopping for food & drink is an emerging area, which has not been specifically taken into account in this report. Therefore, the document will need to be revised along with developments in these areas. The governance system ensures that future revisions will be developed and approved by the Steering Committee of the Round Table, based on suggestions from the Working Groups.

## **Annex with Guiding Principles**

### **Guiding Principles for Voluntary environmental assessment and communication of environmental information along the food chain, including to consumers**

#### **The lead principle:**

Environmental information communicated along the food chain, including to consumers, shall be scientifically reliable and consistent, understandable and not misleading, so as to support informed choice.

#### **I. Principles for the voluntary environmental assessment of food and drink products**

Principle 1: Identify and analyse the environmental aspects at all life-cycle stages

Principle 2: Assess the significant potential environmental impacts along the life-cycle

Principle 3: Apply recognised scientific methodologies

Principle 4: Periodically review and update the environmental assessment

#### **II. Principles for the voluntary communication of environmental information**

Principle 5: Provide information in an easily understandable and comparable way so as to support informed choice

Principle 6: Ensure clarity regarding the scope and meaning of environmental information

#### **III. Principles for both voluntary environmental assessment and communication**

Principle 7: Ensure transparency of information and underlying methodologies and assumptions

Principle 8: Ensure that all food chain actors can apply the assessment methodology and communication tools without disproportionate burden

Principle 9: Support innovation

Principle 10: Safeguard the Single Market and international trade