



## **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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## **Glossary**

**B2B:** Business-to-Business, describes commerce transactions between businesses, such as between a manufacturer and a wholesaler, or between a wholesaler and a retailer.

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

**Carbon footprint:** A carbon footprint is "the total set of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused by an organization, 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, or its equivalent of other GHGs, emitted.

**Claims:** Any text, symbols, piece of advertising or graphics for example on food packaging that tell the consumer something about the product, services or companies characteristics.

**Disproportionate burden:** An action carried out by a food chain partner that has a cost more than proportional to its added value generated. The specific nature of SMEs is particularly vulnerable to these.

**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.

(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).

**Environmental Labeling:** 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.

**EPD:** Environmental Product Declaration is a standardized (ISO 14025/TR) and life cycle analysis(LCA) based tool to communicate the environmental performance of a product or system, and is applicable worldwide for all interested companies and organizations. A declaration is based on a 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, emissions to air, soil and water and waste generation. It also includes product and company information.

**Feed labeling:** In the feed law labeling means the attribution of any words, particulars, trade marks, brand name, pictorial matter or symbol to a feed by placing this information on any medium referring to or accompanying such feed, such as packaging, container, notice, label, document, ring, collar or the Internet, including for advertising purposes (Regulation (EC) No 767/2009);

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

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

**Labeling:** A tool that gives information about the exact nature and characteristics of the product (origin, owner, contents, use, or destination) typically put on the packaging that enables the consumer to make a choice in full knowledge of the facts.

**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 materials processing, manufacture, distribution, use, repair and maintenance, and disposal or recycling).

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

**Rebound effect:** The rebound effect is an increase in consumption, which can occur as an unintended side-effect of the introduction of technology and policy instruments aimed at environmental efficiency improvements, in particular where gains bring reduced costs.

**SME:** Small and medium enterprises, a synonym for Small and Medium-sized Business(es) (SMB)

**Water footprint:** The water footprint is defined as the total volume of freshwater used by an organization, event, product throughout the life cycle. The water footprint is measured in water volume consumed (evaporated) and/or polluted.

**Comment [A1]:** A water footprint should represent both volume/impact and quality (and depends on where the water has come from). Although perhaps not the best definition yet, the draft definition by ISO is : *life cycle impact category indicator result(s) that assess(es) the contribution of the system under study to water impact*

Suggest the wording needs to be changed to reflect the wider impact

## **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 thinking helps to explain the environmental impacts of individual products for carbon, water, eutrophication etc. including all stages along the value chain: from the production of agricultural inputs, agricultural production, processing, transport and storage on the production side; to shopping, cleaning, cooking, home storage and recycling behaviour on the consumer side.

Based on this life cycle thinking, we know that the actual environmental impacts of products, their significance and distribution within the value chain depend largely on the type of product, production practices and consumer behaviour:

- Which product and how produced: i.e. product type (products of animal origin, vegetables, wine, cereals etc), the composition (un- or processed food, fresh foods, ready meals), 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 circumstances, small or large production site (e.g. conventional, integrated, organic farming) as well as the period of production and consumption (i.e. non-seasonality of agricultural produce like strawberries in the winter)
- 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 the products; how well they sort;; to which extent can consumers distinguish between “best before” and “use by” labels

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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 lifecycle 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 come out with different values on their environmental impacts. There is at present no commonly applied methodology to assess and communicate environmental information along the food chain, including to consumers, which would allow operators in the food chain as well as consumers to better understand the environmental impacts of food and drink products and to enable them to make informed choices.

For example, meat and dairy products have much higher carbon and water footprints than vegetables, cereal products, potatoes or fruits in season on a per kilogram basis<sup>3</sup>. However, consumers generally do not buy and consume butter or cheese per kilogram, whereas fruit and vegetables are frequently purchased by the kilo. Also, if the comparison was based on the nutritional value that food and drink products deliver e.g. the amount of product needed to meet the guideline daily amounts of 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 societal evolutions 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 double cost in terms of environmental impacts, combining the impacts due to the production of food and those caused by 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 be always conscious about the links between environmental and other aspects of food production and consumption. Therefore the communication of environmental information of products should be part of an integrated approach towards sustainable consumption, i.e. part of a holistic message guiding consumer behaviour toward tangible environmental benefits. This is of special importance with regards to the risk of an information overload<sup>6</sup> as consumers in most cases make their purchase

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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](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.



decisions under high time-pressure. Overall, research indicates that price, quality, safety and convenience are the key factors for consumers when making buying 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 sustainability as an important issue to address and have introduced a wide range of voluntary initiatives to support improvement in environmental performance of products/services and to inform consumers. These information tools include for example labels, statements, 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 allowing for a constant dialogue through 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 become more confused about what information is really important and reliable, and consequently are 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>

**Comment [A2]:** The link doesn't seem work below.

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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 No 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. Online: [http://www.foodscp.eu/files/Guiding\\_Principles.pdf](http://www.foodscp.eu/files/Guiding_Principles.pdf)

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

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

- Establish on a voluntary basis scientifically reliable and uniform environmental assessment methodologies for food and drinks
- Identify suitable tools and guidance for voluntary environmental communication 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 a first important step forward ten Guiding Principles were adopted by the SCP Round Table on July 13, 2010 (see annex). Among these, three principles address the voluntary communication of environmental information:

- Provide information in an easily understandable and comparable way so as to support informed choices
- Ensure clarity regarding the scope and meaning of environmental information
- Ensure transparency of information and 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, this report does not address the subject in detail. That said, the following text box provides some elements.

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

Environmental education and awareness raising are part of the social instruments which complement juridical and economic instruments. They address both cognitive and affective issues and gives competences and self-reliance for action and behavioural change.

Nowadays environmental education is developed into education for sustainable development which better address the issues of sustainable production and consumption in its complex, global and interconnectivity nature with other sustainability issues as e.g. climate change, biodiversity, poverty reduction and water management.

Key considerations:

- In order to establish the food chain as a major contributor towards sustainable consumption and production, environmental education can positively influence behaviour of consumers and business partners.
- Raising awareness of environmental issues is key to move towards a more environmentally friendly behaviour, including the purchase choice.
- Environmental education should address information on production, consumption and post-consumption phases.
- The ability of recipients to understand messages regarding environmental performance depend on their level of formal and informal education, but also on tradition and culture.
- The high level of alphabetisation in Europe allows consumers to receive written environmental information and potentially to make use of information technology.
- 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 groups.
- Consumers spend little time considering the purchase of convenience foods, thus limiting the time for environmental information uptake.
- Environmental education starts in early childhood, therefore life-long learning is a key in regard to 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 for Business-to-Consumer (B2C), but also for Business-to-Business (B2B) communication. A sound communication between partners of the food chain is of particular importance as it serves as a precondition for communicating to consumers.

**Approach**

The paper assesses the major means and channels of communicating to consumers and other stakeholders. Based on the experience of the Food SCP RT strengths and challenges of the different communication tools have been identified alongside recommendations for use. While 'online shopping' is not assessed in this paper, some of the insights and recommendations could be also relevant in this context.

Following a 2 month public consultation and adoption in the Food SCP RT plenary this report is made publicly available.

## PART A

### Assessment of communication tools for environmental information of 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 better informed decisions and improve behaviour to proactively safeguard the environment today and that of future generations by providing information that is scientifically reliable and consistent, understandable and not misleading.

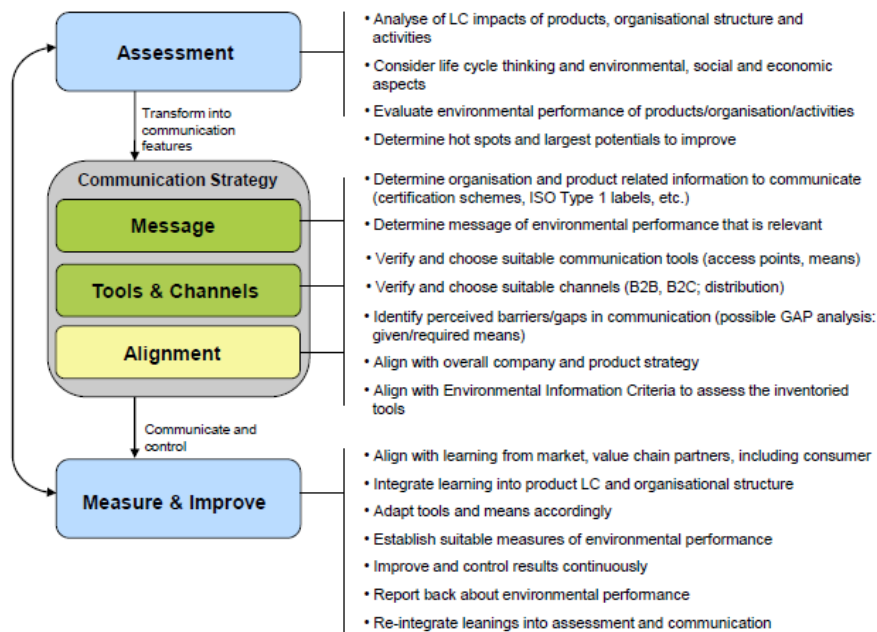


Figure 1: Strategic approach to communicate environmental performance

## 2. Business to Business Communication (B2B)

Businesses communicate significant amounts of information to other businesses, either voluntarily or due to legal obligations. In accordance with the remit of the Food SCP Roundtable, this report does not deal with other types of B2B communication beyond the voluntary communication of environmental information. B2B environmental communication is aimed at helping partners along the food chain to make informed choices by providing them with accurate and understandable information. In general terms, the Guiding principles for the voluntary communication of environmental information (Principles 5 to 10) as agreed by the European Food SCP Roundtable are applicable, to B2B communication.

When communicating environmental information between businesses, the following appear as pre-conditions for adequate B2B communication:

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

Moreover, Guidance Principle 8 establishes that all food chain actors should be able to apply the environmental communication tools without 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 pose disproportionate burdens on operators and be as cost-effective as possible. In the context of B2B communication, cost effectiveness can be evaluated, for a given product, by comparing the amount of effort required along the chain to achieve a certain level of accuracy and frequency of measurements versus the expected usefulness of the obtained data.

The type of communication tool chosen to communicate with consumers (B2C) can be relevant in order to evaluate what type and amount of information can be reasonably required from other operators along the food chain (B2B). For example, communication tools based on providing the final consumer with exact figures (e.g. 253g CO<sub>2</sub>), may require significant efforts and very precise and regular measurements from all operators along the food chain., Given the high degree of

**Comment [A3]:** It would be useful to have a box here outlining all the principles for easy reference.

uncertainty/variability in certain input data this may cause a challenge for the 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 resulting in a less well functioning 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 of environmental information that a company or organisation may use to communicate about its products to the consumer. These can take a number of formats.

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

Consumers not only buy products, but they make decisions during consumption and post-consumption which impact the products' environmental performance. As consumption behaviour often varies from consumer to consumer, eliciting the desired behaviour during this stage may benefit the total 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 to consumers 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 for all food chain partners: e.g. on shopping behaviour, food waste, sorting and recycling
- Messages applicable for 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 the communication and avoid consumer confusion.

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-phase.

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

Product-related information can play an important role in enabling consumers make informed choices by providing insight into the environmental opportunities and challenges of products and what efforts are being undertaken 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**

A scheme consisting of (a) certification standard(s) and third party verification system related to products or processes, that enables stakeholders involved in the food chain to claim that predefined requirements are fulfilled. The scheme often uses a logo or label, especially when used for B2C communication. Its 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.

Example: Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Fairtrade, Utz Certified, Marine Stewardship Council, Demeter.

#### **Strengths:**

- Increased consumer acceptance of environmental claims that have been independently verified by a credible source
- High recognition levels by consumers of some schemes leading to faster identification of the message and therefore more efficient communication
- Improved brand/ corporate image



- Provides incentives to improve (if there is internal improvement commitment within the scheme)
- Is based on multi-stakeholder governance for criteria and awarding

**Challenges:**

- Scope:
  - Most of the certification schemes do not aim to cover the full life cycle (e.g. mostly sourcing)
  - It is not always easy for the consumer to understand the true meaning of the information
- Proliferation:
  - Current proliferation of certification schemes leads to consumer confusion
  - Proliferation implies a multiplication of requirements and metrics that lead to additional costs for operators without environmental benefit
- Comparability:
  - Difficult to compare products with different certification schemes
  - Impossible to compare environmental performance from certified products with non-certified products

**b. ISO Type I labels**

Voluntary, multiple-criteria-based third party programme that awards a licence which authorizes the use of environmental labels on products indicating overall environmental preferability of a product within a particular product category based on life cycle considerations" (ISO 14024:1999, type I environmental labeling).

Examples: EU Eco-label, Nordic Swan, Blue Angel, Milieukeur

**Strengths:**

- Can be easily identified by the consumer.
- Provides incentives to improve product performance by creating competition to be included 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 a multi-stakeholder governance on criteria setting

**Challenges:**

- Uncertainty if and how overall multi environmental-criteria can be applied to food and drink products on a credible and scientific basis
- Does not provide visibility of the complexities related to the environmental impacts of products (depending e.g. on the supply chain, seasonality) to the consumer.
- Could lead to non-transparent, arbitrary decisions on the importance of environmental impacts by weighing them against each other.
- Limited life-cycle evaluation as consumer 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 lies on water consumption or on energy etc.).
- Defining the clusters of similar products and product categories is difficult, because of the variability and characteristics of food and drink
- Constantly changing and diverse supply chain can lead to complex accounting and quickly outdated information..
- Does not motivate improvements in those products that will unlikely achieve best in class status.
- The basis of the 'excellence' can be unclear (all food and drink products; all products in same category; all available products in this category at this POS; only products which applied for the label?)
- "The winner takes it all" – benefits of continuous improvement are not rewarded for those that do not have the ISO-type I label
- Possible consumer and industry confusion between ISO Type I labels and the scheme for organic farming.

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

Communication of measured quantitative information regarding certain environmental impacts or aspects of a product, preferably based on an environmental life cycle analysis, represented as absolute figures.

The environmental footprint information is intended to provide product specific information to enhance environmental literacy and knowledge, understanding life cycle thinking and environmental impacts and support other types of environmental communication. Footprint information can address a single criteria or be multi-criteria (water, carbon etc.). It requires a harmonized methodology (e.g. scope and boundaries of accounting and functional unit) and a set of highly precise data to allow comparability.

In order not to mislead consumers, footprint information should be provided in context, as defined by the Round Table guiding principles, which limits the ways in which it can be communicated

**c.1 Footprint information without context**

Footprint information is presented in absolute figures without additional contextual information.

**Strengths:**

- Simplified display of information
- Can help enhance consumer environmental awareness
- For single criteria footprint consumers can compare products if the products 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

**Comment [A4]:** It seems the methodology working group is about providing environmental footprint information – so more guidance would be helpful on how to use it

between the products themselves.

- External factors (e.g. weather conditions) lead to great variation of environmental impacts that are difficult to be properly reflected in the footprint.
- Resource intensive: There is a lack of freely available open sources and good quality data that makes foot print assessments time consuming and expensive, particularly for SMEs.
- If practices of footprint communication to consumers do not include all major aspects/impacts or life stages, they possibly create the wrong impression of reflecting the product's overall environmental performance.
- The average consumer does not have the background knowledge to interpret the figures.
- Loses its validity over time as the footprint figures change.

Deleted: As long as

### c.2 Footprint information with context

The presentation of absolute figures is supplemented by additional contextual information, e.g. qualitative description, rated scales, benchmarks, etc.

#### **Strengths:**

- Simplified display of information providing additional guidance by providing context.
- Can be useful tool to communicate what parts of the lifecycle are important for a product or a product category.
- Can help enhance consumer environmental understanding - benchmarking enables consumers to judge the relative performance of a specific product.
- Consumers can compare different products (within a harmonized 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 great variation of environmental impacts that are difficult to be properly reflected in the footprint.

- Resource intensive: There is a lack of freely available open source and good quality data that makes footprint 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, they possibly create the wrong impression of reflecting the product's overall environmental performance.
- Specific to rated scales:
  - The reference value for the rating has to be clear and defined (e.g. against all products/ all products tested/ all products in this category).
  - Defining the clusters of similar products and product categories is difficult, because of the variability and characteristics of food and drink.
  - Do not give insights into life cycle stages of a product.
  - There are no uniform values for the 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 geographic location of production and use; seasonality). This is very challenging to be properly addressed in a rating system.

#### **d. ISO Type II labels (Self declared environmental claims)<sup>12</sup>**

Environmental claim that is made, without independent third party certification, by manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or anyone else likely to benefit from such a claim.

Example: "From 65% recycled materials", "Manufactured with 100% renewable energy"

#### **Strengths:**

- Encourages companies to drive innovative solutions and performance improvements on certain environmental aspects

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<sup>12</sup> ISO 14021 Self-declared environmental claims (Type II Environmental labeling)

- Can help enhance consumer environmental awareness (if claims are specific and unambiguous)
- Allows for flexibility in communication
- Not resource intensive

**Challenges:**

- Self-declared labels **may** lack credibility, if they are not justified or can not be proved by evidence
- Vague environmental claims undermine the efforts of companies with real environmental improvement measures
- Scope:
  - Most of the claims do not cover the full life cycle
  - It is not always easy for the consumer to easily understand the true scope and meaning of the information
- Proliferation:
  - Current proliferation of environmental claims leads to consumer confusion and may lead to a loss of trust in all types of environmental messages
- Comparability:
  - Difficult to compare products with different claims
  - Impossible to compare environmental performance **to** products without claims

Deleted: with

**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 Carbon Trust)

**Strengths:**

- Possibility to set ambitious targets

- Promotes continued environmental performance improvement
- Builds on market and brand dynamics

**Challenges:**

- Can be less suited to product related information and there may be limits for product comparisons.
- Mostly single issue commitments, not taking into account all environmental impacts.
- Not always LCA based.
- 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, independency and credibility may be challenged.
- Not easily applicable to products without brands (i.e. fruits and vegetables).

**f. Impact compensation information**

Information on compensation for environmental aspects/impacts made during the production of a product demonstrating that investments are undertaken to 'off-set' the environmental impacts of a product.

Example: CarbonNeutral company

**Strengths:**

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

**Challenges:**

- Possibility of misleading information: impacts seem to be neutralised as long as the company/organisation pays enough for compensation.
- May lead not to do all possible efforts on own products/processing/sites.
- Not easily understood by consumers.

**Comment [A5]:** Most schemes require organisations to reduce impacts as much as possible before offsetting – so I am not sure this is a fair description

**Comment [A6]:** Should recognise that some schemes do require that all other possible actions are taken first.

- Difficult to make comparisons.
- Gives the impression that you can undo environmental impacts.

### **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 a percentage of sales to the non-profit organization.

Examples: Reforestation campaigns conducted by non-forest companies

#### **Strengths:**

- Can help engage consumers on particular issues.
- If properly aligned to the brand and its values, the cause program can contribute to brand reputation.
- Can help raise awareness of environmental issues and non-profit organizations.
- It offers companies a way to do 'good' and differentiate from competitors.
- A fast growing segment in marketing and advertising.

#### **Challenges:**

- Not based on lifecycle thinking but on single issues.
- Effect and benefit of supported projects is not directly verifiable by consumers.
- Typically based on a marketing campaign and may not be sustained beyond a few weeks.

### **3.1.3. Organization-related information**

Environmental information related to the organisation is communicating environmental performance and commitments on corporate level (corporate communication) and is generally not linked to a specific product or brand. Organizational-related information can play an important role in enabling consumers to make informed choices by providing insight into what companies and organizations are doing to address the environmental opportunities and challenges of their products and what efforts are being undertaken to improve environmental performance.



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

Companies and organizations take voluntary commitments to address the environmental, economic and social opportunities and challenges of their production and related activities (eg. distribution, storage etc) and communicate to consumers and broader stakeholder groups what efforts are being undertaken to improve performance in these areas.

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

**Strengths:**

- Comprehensive information on the challenges and opportunities facing an organization from a holistic sustainability perspective.
- Creates peer pressure, encourages organizations to set ambitious targets, helps to communicate activities and encourage continuous environmental performance improvement.
- Can build broad consumer trust in organizations 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 needs to be ensured by using transparent, reliable and accurate information (e.g. traceability of results and future objectives) and third party verification.
- Embedment of all management levels – normative, strategic and operative– must be assured.
- Often it is only the company that gets the credit for the efforts towards sustainability and not always credit is given to its suppliers.

## **b. Sustainability partnerships**

Companies and organizations agree on a joint voluntary commitment to address certain environmental challenges. The purpose is to leverage individual company actions and to transform business practice of the wider industry, not only individual organizations. 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-sectorial occurring between organizations of different interests, e.g. for-profit organizations with NGOs or international organizations to promote 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 trust in consumers that certain sustainability issues are addressed and improved without having to understand all the technical details

### **Challenges:**

- Is not always related to particular products
- Does not involve or require direct consumer action
- Is not based on lifecycle thinking
- Might not be linked to the most important environmental impact of an organization

**c. Value-Chain Communication (link to B-2-B communication)**

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

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

**Strengths:**

- Involves an organization and its supply chain
- Allows for an holistic approach to tackle environmental issues along the lifecycle
- Is based on dialogue and common understanding, so reduces friction and losses
- Encourages continuous environmental improvement in supply chain
- Leverages the strength of several organizations
- Raises awareness and engagement with consumers

**Challenges:**

- Is not applicable for all products
- Is based on single issues, not lifecycle 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 point of sale, close to the point of sale and beyond the point of sale.

The table provides an overview of 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 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 cell phone (smartphone)
B.	Close to Point of Sale	Leaflet
		Receipt
		Representative in shops
		In-store signage 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 to communicate 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 (eg, seasonality, change in suppliers etc.);
- relevance may differ depending on the place of shopping/consumption.

However, the packaging of the product may be useful to voluntarily communicate 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-pack or a code that can be scanned. In most cases, context and substantiation is needed and this can often be accomplished via digital content.

### A.1 On-pack

All the information that is given 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
- Costs for the set-up, updating and change of pack<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</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.

- Difficult to provide complex information on small amount of space..
- Several products are sold without packaging
- Constraint of colour-compatibility with graphic charts<sup>14</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
- On-pack may be overcrowded with 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 environmental aspects of the product.

Further consumers' education is needed for recognizing meaning and be able to compare or check if the information is right for other alternatives.

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

All information that is provided at the shelf where the product is situated.

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, which makes it very difficult for consumers to seek additional information, means that range of environmental information that may be communicated through on-shelf is very limited. However, it may be useful to communicate on products that are sold without packaging e.g. fresh fruits and vegetables.

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<sup>14</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.

Strengths:

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

Challenges:

- Problems of updates (slightly reduced compared to on pack information)
- Requires the need to clearly indicate responsibilities between manufacturers and retailers to update data
- 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 cell phone (smart phone)**

Much of the usability of the price terminals for environmental information depends on their technological development. It 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 to communicate environmental information. In case, it is relatively higher quality and 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 amount of environmental information at the point of sale. This allows for communicating a large selection of environmental information in a scientifically reliable way that also supports informed choice. Using smartphones allows for communicating to consumers both at the point of sale and beyond point of sale

Strengths:

- Accessible when purchasing

- Space savings on the pack
- The consumer would have an overview of his cart and could "judge"; encourages and enhances environmental literacy
- Additional digital space to provide more appropriate and informed communication/information
- Depending on technology level of scanning machine, it can transfer large amount of detailed information

Challenges:

- Does not necessarily reach the entire population ( not all segments of society)
- Shops would need to get decoding devices so that the system is accessible to everyone, or there needs to be a sufficient level of use of consumer owned portable devices (smart phones, etc.) among the population.
- Not immediately visible to the consumer (unless there is a specific or on-pack indication)
- Requires to develop a dedicated device or to have a base diverting to an Internet Website (Internet access)
- Information may not be available after purchasing if the code tag or the scanner are only available in shop

## **B. Close to point of sale**

### **B.1 Leaflet**

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

Strengths:

- Likely to be able to carry detailed and larger amount of information than in



store signage

- Available for consumer in-store
- Deep explanation in a language which can be adapted to the audience for better comprehension (you can create different materials depending on delivering places)

Challenges:

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

## **B.2 Receipt**

Opportunity to provide information to purchasers on the till receipt as they purchase the product.

Strengths:

- Receipts could offer information on featured products (like coupon application – purchased by manufacturers as additional advertising content)
- Accessible to all purchasers
- No modification of the packs 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 engagement 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 unique way of communicating compared to the others in the sense 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.

**Strengths:**

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

**Challenges:**

- Cost intensive for retailers and/or manufacturer
- Not feasible for small shops
- Availability of the person can be limited according to shop's size and consumers
- Contradicts the self-service principle
- Extensive training needed

**B.4 In-store- signage 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 the impact

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

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

PR is a field concerned with maintaining a public image for organizations with focus on engaging with stakeholder groups such as common interest associations, public authorities, non-profit organizations and the media. Marketing campaigns including advertising and public relations can cover a wide range of activities and their combinations.

#### **Strengths:**

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

#### **Challenges:**

- All parties have differing agendas. It takes dedicated effort and a long-term commitment to integrate and benefit from 3<sup>rd</sup> party stakeholder engagement and public relations efforts.
- Members of the food chain can control the message / information they give to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties but they cannot control how that 3<sup>rd</sup> party will use the information or represent it to others.

### **C.2. Media**

#### **Strengths:**

- Credible 3<sup>rd</sup> parties can help inform and shape a company's sustainability strategies by offering different perspectives and information. Such input can be valuable to organizations, particularly as the environmental landscape is broad, diverse and evolving.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> parties can offer manufacturers an additional channel to get their information out, and they offer consumers an objective or alternative view of an organization and their sustainability efforts – e.g. interview with journalist and resulting article

Challenges:

- All parties have differing agendas. It takes dedicated effort and a long-term commitment to integrate and benefit from 3<sup>rd</sup> party stakeholder engagement and public relations efforts.
- Manufacturers can control the message/information they give to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties but they cannot control how that 3<sup>rd</sup> party will use the information or represent it to others.

### C.3 Marketing campaigns

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 through different media (television, radio, print, online) using different types of advertisements. Marketing campaigns don't have to rely solely on advertising, and can also include demonstrations, word of mouth and other interactive techniques.

Strengths:

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

Challenges:

- In their enthusiasm to communicate their environmental actions, manufacturers must work to avoid green-washing and over-hyping, misleading consumers on the extent of environmental improvements and impacts. To do so will discredit the good efforts of other manufactures and contribute to lower levels of consumer trust across the industry or sector.

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

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

##### **Strengths:**

- Can reach a lot of 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 purchase 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.
- Lack of control currently. Good company messages can lose credibility because bad ones can confuse consumers and make them not trust anymore in no one

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

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 internet websites should make it possible to communicate any type of environmental information through it. The internet is equally capable of delivering short key messages and longer contextual information. 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, when it is important that some information remains with the product.

Strengths:

- Provides more space for information supporting the ability for 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 to its communication
- Low costs to set up and update the information

Challenges:

- More active form of communication
- Internet use has a cost as well as environmental impacts (e.g. energy)
- Access to 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 inform their purchase decision (with a focus on at shelf / in-store) about the environmental impacts of the products they buy to the best of their capabilities 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 on-pack, at shelf and what requires more robust 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. Working Group 2 identified four main groups of criteria in the Guiding Principles<sup>15</sup>:

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

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

While the 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 scientific reliability of such tools that are applicable in each case, regardless of the type of communication tool chosen:

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<sup>15</sup> See annex

- The methodology, scope, limitations and uncertainties are clearly explained and stated.
- Communication is relevant and valid in respect of multi-supply and multi-destination products, including any post-consumption phase information e.g. how to dispose of the packaging.
- Vague or non-specific terms such as "green", "environmentally friendly", "sustainable", "ecological", "eco", "nature's friend" "non-polluting", "environmentally safe" etc. are avoided. In this respect European and national guidance documents on environmental claims should be followed<sup>16</sup>. Negative trade-offs between environmental impacts are not hidden.
- Reliable, easily understandable and comparable environmental information that is clear in scope and meaning is provided to enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions.

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<sup>16</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/>



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

**Comment [A7]:** As stated above, guidance on how to communicate environmental footprint information is key here. Suggest this needs to be added to this section.

### **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 to communicate 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.);
- relevance may differ depending on the place of shopping/consumption.

However, the packaging of the product may be useful to voluntarily communicate 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-pack or a scanable code. In most cases, context and substantiation is needed and this can often be accomplished by directing the consumer to web-based content.

Even though, on-pack 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 communication on-pack:**

1. Information concerning consumption and post-consumption phase
2. Certification schemes
3. ISO type II labels that are clear, accurate and substantiated
4. 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 well-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 of updating environmental information is in line with the producers' ability to change their packaging.
- The amount of information needed to be communicated in line with the Guiding Principles does not require disproportionate space on the packaging.

## **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, means that range of environmental information that may be communicated through on-shelf is very limited. However, it may be useful to communicate on products that are sold without packaging e.g. fresh fruits and vegetables.

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

1. Certification schemes

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

- The link between the product and the label is clear;
- The message communicated through on-shelf labels is easily identifiable for the consumers.
- The type of environmental information can be well-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 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 to communicate environmental information. In case it is relatively higher quality and closer to the capabilities of smart phones in terms of presenting complex information then it may be used for the types of information and with the recommendations set out below.

**Comment [A8]:** Suggest that you wouldn't recommend ANY type of communication in this case.

So either delete – or describe what you mean by 'low quality' in relation to smartphones.

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

1. Certification schemes

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

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

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

1. The code system used is harmonized and does not require disproportionate burden to be implemented; for example, by using the existing bar code system.
2. The system provides flexibility in its use and allows for future improvement.
3. Food chain partners work together towards a standardized set of data to be used.
4. 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**

Smartphones as communication tools make it possible to provide relatively large amount of environmental information at the point of sale. This allows for communicating a large selection of environmental information in a scientifically reliable way that also supports informed choice. Using smartphones allows for communicating to consumers both at the point of sale and beyond point of sale.

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

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

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

1. The information is presented in a way that respects the limited time consumers have to make decisions while larger amount of information contextual information is also easily accessible.
2. The information contributes to improving the consumers' environmental literacy.
3. Smartphones need to be an available and accepted tool to most consumer groups in order to be used effectively. In case this is not guaranteed, it can be used in combination with "Price terminal (with bar code)" and "2D code/tag + decoding device" or a website reference. Therefore, it is important that the code system is harmonized among these tools.
4. Information is also available on the internet for consumers without access to smartphones.

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

1. The code system used is harmonized and its implementation does not lead to disproportionate burden, for example: using the existing bar code system.
2. 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 are used with 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 in a way with lowest environmental impact

### **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 containing some strengths - are not likely to be a suitable method to communicate environmental information.

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

#### **General comments:**

Using representatives in shops is a unique way of communicating compared to the others in the sense 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 tool is most often used for sales purposes and most likely will 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 tools more directly linked to individual products.

Therefore, at this stage the Round Table does not have specific recommendations for these tools other than 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 internet websites should make it possible to communicate any type of environmental information through it. The internet is equally capable of delivering short key messages and longer contextual information. Therefore, whether it meets the criteria set out by the Guiding Principles depends more on issues like 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, 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 through the internet, all types of environmental information may be recommended provided they meet the requirements set out in this document.

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

- Information should be structured in a way that addresses the need of the target audience and the aim of the information.
- The internet may be a good choice for communication provided 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 the 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 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, consumer misguidance and market distortions.

Accommodating the particular characteristics of the food and drink sector, for example the multitude of products, the multi-supply and multi-destination nature and changing supply chains with seasonality and availability in environmental assessment methodologies is a challenge. The Roundtable Working Group 2 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 to inform the further discussion.

Within this context, Working Group 2 assessed which means and tools of communication are best placed for environmental communication to the consumer to support informed choice whilst not putting disproportionate burdens on food chain partners in particular SMEs. While this report outlines good practices and key tools that can be used, it is clear that communicating environmental information is best approached via 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. limited information on-pack to more detailed explanation on-line). These tools are best used in a combination with the combined effect helping:

- To **sensitize** 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 to support more sustainable choices.

Comment [A9]: Inform?



However, Working Group 2 also found a critical lack of practical evidence on consumer understanding of and reaction to environmental communication on food & drink products throughout European Union. Members of the Food SCP Round Table believe it is critical to build solid consumer research specifically for food and drink products as consumers need to be enabled to make informed choices several times a day. The Round Table calls for a targeted effort by public bodies at EU level and Member States' level, research institutes, and the different partners of the food chain - to lead a practical consumer research across several European countries to better understand consumer perception, understanding and action on 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 Working Group 2 recommends that the question of third party use of environmental information (e.g. other stakeholders using the information developed by producers to consumers 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 Working Group 2 also found it essential that environmental product-information must be framed within a broader public education strategy, led by national governments and civil society, to raise awareness on the need to preserve the environment, why this is relevant to the consumer and which concrete actions he can take to help reduce society's impacts. Public education and incentives are relevant for all product 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 about tangible environmental benefits, for example through increasing waste sorting for recovery or recycling (e.g. packaging), and reducing food waste. We believe that only against a solid backdrop of broader awareness and understanding of environmental issues, there will be good chance that consumers will be able to act on more complex product-specific information and to make informed choices. The Round Table believes that partners of the food chain have an important role to play in this regard and proposes to further strengthen the cooperation at European level. Members of the Round Table understand that this document can only reflect on the current situation as regards to the state-of-the-art of communication technology,

**Comment [A10]:** Is this a role for EU SCP food roundtable? Would seem like the right kind of body...

methodological development and understanding of consumer behaviour. Also, internet shopping for food & drink is an emerging area, which has not been taken into account specifically in this report. Therefore, the document will need to be revised along with developments in these areas. The actual governance system that ensures 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