



UNEP/WUPPERTAL INSTITUTE COLLABORATING
CENTRE ON SUSTAINABLE
CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Consultation of the Food SCP Round Table

Contribution by the CSCP

15 September 2011

Contribution to the open consultation on “Communicating environmental performance along the food chain”

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Comments

The following comments are a contribution of the UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Production and Consumption (CSCP) to the open consultation of the draft report “Communicating environmental performance along the food chain”.

· Do you have any comments on the “Setting the context”?

Labeling and information needs to be planned long-term and needs to stay consistent. The point made in the report

“Environmental education starts in early childhood, therefore life-long learning is a key in regard to environmental sustainability.” (p11)

shows that it is a long-term effort. A campaign that lasts only for a short while is expected to not have too much effect. The EU organic label for example is trusted by consumers due to its long-term nature/strategy, it’s consistent message and reliability.

· Do you have any comments on the “Business-to-Consumer” chapter?

In “3.1.1. Information concerning consumption and post-consumption phase” it should also be noted, that being more environmentally friendly should be easy to do. E.g. the packaging of food should highlight good and practical information on how to conserve certain types of food thus increasing the time it can be consumed and reducing spoilt and thrown away food. However, this is sometimes obviously constrained by the space available on the product packaging. Relevant information on the Point-of-Sale can therefore be of support (e.g. by informing on how to best store salads or easily spoilable food).

For consumers it can be confusing that most labels have a yes/no-structure. Thus, most labels only bring out the positive aspects of a product without giving the respective context. Most likely there are other hidden “hot spots” (negative environmental and/or social impacts) of a product that might go unnoticed. Taking the example of organic and FairTrade T-Shirts, it might go unnoticed to consumers that the production of the textile (not the cotton) can be done in a conventional way, thus using toxic chemicals and heavy metals. In the food sector, this could be exemplified by the organic label being a reliable label for reducing pesticide and chemical use and thus for reducing the negative impact on agriculture, but that it does not include information about the amount of water consumed.

As noted rightly in the report, a simple label also does not support a continuous improvement approach for businesses and thus gives companies no further incentive to improve their products and reduce their environmental impacts of the products once they have received a label.

Comparing this to the energy label of the EU, refrigerators have improved significantly since the label’s introduction. Whereas it was still usual to have a “B” rating (ranging from A to G where A represents the best rating) when the label was introduced, now the EU has introduced A+, A++ and even A+++, each step improving the energy efficiency by about 20%. Thus “B” rated refrigerators are practically non-existent, and soon the “A”-label will not even be allowed to be introduced into the market anymore starting by middle of 2012.



It might therefore be an incentive for companies to improve their performance if a label is developed which includes the different levels of sustainability – showing consumers how far a company already is or how much it still needs to do.

The development of a label that includes an internal regular revision of the criteria, thus improving the label quality continuously (leaning a bit towards the Top Runner programme which was implemented in Japan) could be another option.

Furthermore, it might be useful for consumers if one label is used on different product groups. The CSCP – in cooperation with the German retailer REWE Group and scientific partners – has developed a label that is used on different products. From food to textiles to home improvement products (e.g. paint). The idea is to give consumers exposure to the label in different product categories, which can generate more trust.

· Do you have any comments on the “Business-to-Business” chapter?

n/a

· Do you have any comments on the recommendations?

n/a

· Do you agree/disagree with the given terminology in the glossary?

Labelling: *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.*

should be changed to cover also weaker or even non-descriptive labels. In this glossary labelling is assumed to be always informative and helpful.

· Can you provide examples of best practices in different chapters?

The CSCP together with the REWE Group – a German retailer – and 2 scientific partners have developed the Pro Planet label which is a multi-criteria (in both environmental and social aspects) life-cycle oriented label which is currently being used on over 80 products, ranging from food (e.g. tomatoes, fish, bread), paper products (e.g. toilet paper) or home improvement products (e.g. paint).

· Do you have any other comments?

n/a



About the CSCP

The CSCP – Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production – was established in 2005 as a not-for-profit think-tank and "do-tank" to enable enhanced collaboration between two institutions: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Wuppertal Institute (WI).

The Centre provides scientific support to activities undertaken by UNEP and other organisations in the field of SCP. This support includes the development, testing, implementation and monitoring of concrete projects, which enables these countries to leapfrog to sustainable consumption and production patterns using life cycle thinking and regional perspectives as guiding principles.

In this respect the Centre supports the integration of environmental, social and cultural concerns into decision making at the level of national governments, regional and local authorities, the private sector, and consumer groups. The Centre works on the exchange of experiences with partners in both developing and developed countries, with support for capacity building and training approaches as an integral part of its programmes.

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