

CODEx ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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Organization

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Agenda Item 12

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEx COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING

Forty-seventh Session

Gatineau, Canada

15 – 19 May 2023

Discussion paper on sustainability labelling claims

Comments from OECD

OECD

Information on new OECD work on measuring and communicating environmental impacts in food systems

Introduction

Over the period 2023-24 the Agro-Food Trade and Markets Division of the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate will be undertaking new research on “**Measuring and communicating environmental impacts in food systems**”. The research will be completed by the end of 2024 and published in early 2025.

Given the linkages between this research and [CX/FL 23/47/12](#), *Discussion paper on Sustainability Labelling Claims, prepared by New Zealand and the European Union* the OECD plans to work closely with contacts from the Codex Secretariat, inviting Codex Secretariat experts to meetings of the [OECD Food Chain Analysis Network](#), as well as asking for their comments on draft versions of the research.

Codex Members who are also OECD Member countries will have the opportunity to contribute to this research and provide comments on drafts presented at OECD meetings.

The OECD can also provide an update on the work to the 2024 meeting of the CCFL, subject to the interest of Codex Members.

Background

The OECD work on “**Measuring and communicating the environmental impacts in food systems**” in 2023 will build on research the OECD undertook on “**Simplified Nutritional Food Labelling Schemes**” over the period 2021-22. This work was inspired by the rapid proliferation of such government endorsed schemes across countries - a trend which raised several questions around policy processes (how should stakeholders and consumers be involved in the schemes’ development, governance and implementation?), and evidence needs (What are the good practices that facilitate the collection of information on actual consumer behaviour and the healthfulness of the food environment?).

The work on simplified nutrition labelling schemes was implemented in collaboration with thirteen volunteer countries through an extensive questionnaire and virtual national consultations with food systems stakeholders. In addition, volunteer countries designated policy experts who joined the OECD Food Chain Analysis Network, the OECD network of experts in agro-food system analysis. The OECD Food Chain Analysis Network met twice in

[June 2021](#) and [January 2022](#) to discuss national experiences and to draw lessons from the information collected by the OECD Secretariat.

This process resulted in an analytical report drawing lessons around policy processes and evidence needs. The report will be published in May 2023 as part of the [OECD Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Papers Series](#).

A key insight from the OECD research on simplified nutritional food labelling schemes is that the policy *development phase* is crucial. Labelling schemes' characteristics and implementation methods and timeline are determined in this early phase, and a successful development phase leads to a smoother governance and implementation of such schemes.

Given this key lesson and as simplified environmental impact labels are at an earlier stage of development than simplified nutrition labels, the proposed OECD work on **“Measuring and communicating environmental impacts in food systems”** is timely, allowing peer learning and best practices to be incorporated from the beginning.

Purpose and scope of the OECD research on “Measuring and communicating environmental impacts in food systems”

In recent years, there has been a strong growth in initiatives to measure and communicate environmental impacts in food systems. Environmental impact measurement initiatives can aim to provide farmers with detailed information related to the effect of their production decisions. Other measurement initiatives focus on firm-level reporting by food supply chain actors who have made commitments (i.e. reduction targets for Scope 3 GHG emissions). Product-level environmental impacts calculated using a life-cycle approach can be used by companies for their Scope 3 reporting. Labelling food products with their environmental impacts is meant to help consumers make more informed food choices by providing easily understandable information on the front-of-pack.

The OECD intends to consider both the measurement and communication aspects of environmental impact schemes. Initiatives to communicate (to other supply chain actors and consumers) environmental impacts inevitably generate questions about measurement, requiring solid measurement frameworks, harmonization of methods and claims, and potentially data exchange.

Particular attention will be paid with to efforts being made by governments to ensure sustainability-related labelling is verifiable and does not mislead, is not deceptive nor creates an erroneous impression. Focus will be paid to how sustainability-related labelling is being substantiated and on the efforts being made by governments to ensure that labels are comparable and harmonised. To ensure a manageable scope, work on measurement will focus on GHG emissions (“carbon footprint” measurement) while work on communication will focus on simplified environmental impact labelling schemes. These schemes may cover a wider range of environmental impacts but insights on the measurement of GHG emissions may also be relevant for measurement of other environmental impacts which could be explored in future work.

The overarching goals of the OECD project would be to:

- highlight the potential impacts of these measurement and communication initiatives on consumers, producers, and other supply chain actors, as well as the potential synergies and trade-offs with other policies;
- provide insights on the process of developing and implementing measurement and/or communication initiatives, including evaluation, role of government, involvement of stakeholders, and accompanying measures as well as on possibilities for harmonisation across schemes in order to amplify impacts;
- address existing evidence gaps on consumers' food choices and environmental concerns, and how these might affect the effectiveness of environmental impact labels.

For both measurement and communication, the OECD project would start with an *inventory* of existing (public and private) initiatives in OECD countries. Using the OECD Food Chain Analysis Network, the OECD Secretariat will then work closely with experts from volunteer countries to study the following policy questions:

- **Measurement** What are the different methods currently used? How are measures substantiated? Are they reliable? How do they compare? What efforts are being made by governments to ensure that labels are comparable and harmonised? Is there a risk of fragmentation, or are some approaches emerging as de facto measurement standards? Are there ways of reducing transaction costs, while still maintaining sufficient granularity to capture the heterogeneity of agricultural production?
- **Communication:** What are the aims of such labels? Which environmental outcomes do they cover? How do these labelling initiatives connect with the measurement initiatives at the firm level for food supply chain actors, in particular with respect to greenhouse gas emissions? What efforts are being made by governments to ensure that labels are verifiable and do not mislead, are not deceptive nor create an erroneous impression? Are these labels effective in changing consumer behaviour? Can they contribute to incentivizing changes in food production methods? Is there a risk of a proliferation of schemes by food systems stakeholders confusing consumers? What is the role of public entities in the development and the endorsement of simplified environmental impact labels? How can food systems stakeholders, consumers, and scientists be involved in the development and governance of these labels? And what are the possible trade implications of such schemes?

Timeline for the OECD research on “Measuring and communicating environmental impacts in food systems”

The proposed timeline for this research on Measuring and communicating the environmental impacts in food systems is as follows:

- **14-15 March 2023:** A scoping paper about the research was presented at the OECD Working Party on Agriculture Policies and Markets (APM). At this meeting OECD countries actively developing and/or implementing environmental impact measurement or communication schemes were requested to signal their interest in being involved in the project and to nominate experts for the Secretariat to contact.

Should Codex CCFL delegates from OECD Member countries wish to establish contact with their country's delegate attending the OECD APM meeting to be part of this research please email celine.giner@oecd.org who can assist in making these connections.

- **22-23 June 2023:** A first meeting of the OECD Food Chain Analysis Network will set the scene for this work, through exchanges of country experiences and talks by invited experts (*including experts from the Codex Secretariat*).
- **28-29 November 2023:** At the APM meeting the OECD Secretariat will provide an oral update on progress made on the research.
- **March 2024:** A second meeting of the OECD Food Chain Analysis Network will be organised to discuss the main lessons from the information gathering exercise in terms of policy process and evaluation (*experts from the Codex Secretariat will be invited to participate*).
- **15-17 May 2024:** A first draft report will be presented at the APM, OECD Members will have the chance to provide detailed comments on this draft (*which will have already been circulated to experts in the Codex Secretariat for their comments*).
- **27-29 November 2024:** A revised draft report will be presented at the APM for declassification.

OECD Contact

For further information about this research please email celine.giner@oecd.org