

Towards a consistent use of Food Metrics: scoping user needs and convening retailers to standardise what good food looks like

Overarching purpose

There is a plethora of initiatives, both existing and in development, that aim to measure the impact of food on the environment, climate and nature. Whilst it is essential that we better understand these impacts to enable good decisions regarding the production and consumption of food, these initiatives would be more effective if they worked together to align and harmonise the methodologies used, the sources of data drawn on and the openness and availability of outputs responsive to different user's needs. This would enable actors to best understand and navigate the trade-offs and deliver effective and consistent solutions and actions.

WWF's vision is of a harmonised system for measuring the impact of food on the environment, using robust metrics, responding to user needs, and with consensus across actors for a go-to framework for informing decisions about sustainable food production and consumption.

As a first stage, WWF-UK wishes to commission a short study to understand the different user needs (food companies, financiers and government) and map these against existing initiatives. As a second stage, and using the insights from the broader user analysis, WWF-UK wishes to convene major UK food retailers to explore pathways towards a standardised use of food metrics and rating of products according to their environmental impact.

Background

WWF recognises the food system as a key driver of biodiversity loss and climate change in the UK and globally. To be transformational in terms of reducing emissions and restoring nature at scale, an integrated policy approach to land use and the food system is needed that considers the interrelationships between food production, consumption and sustainable landscapes. 2021 is a crucial year to drive the transformation of our food systems, with Part 2 of the National Food Strategy and the UN Food Systems Summit Dialogues providing key moments to collaborate and create food systems that work for people and planet.

The food system is inherently complex with numerous actors and impacts along the value chain. Reflecting this complexity, a plethora of frameworks, initiatives and methods for defining, quantifying and managing various environmental impacts have been developed. Different stakeholders consider different aspects of sustainability and rarely, if ever, consider all the dimensions in one study, assessment, or initiative.

Also, whilst the underlying concept of what is, or is not, sustainable may be the same for different users, each may require a different set of metrics to inform their decision-making. Tools, reports and other efforts to inform users may be well-suited for one actor but may not translate well to others.

There are currently separate sets of metrics for different stakeholders which can be conflicting (for example, metrics for meat producers are different to those for retailers). Furthermore, there can be unintended consequences resulting from the choice of indicators and metrics. For example, individual indicators can be misleading if they don't take into consideration the wider system. Focussing on a single impact – such as carbon – could result in certain food

products being mischaracterised as other impacts such as soil and water quality or biodiversity are overlooked.

Ideally all metrics need to be aligned and conflicting signals identified. Users need clarity and certainty on how to measure their impact on the environment, thereby enabling them to make effective decisions and avoid trade-offs. More dialogue is needed to enable aligned decision making.

As a key user of food metrics and source of this information for consumers, the retail sector is a critical space in which to begin these dialogues. Assessing the overall environmental impact of individual products coming from global food systems is a complex task for retailers, with individual food products varying widely in their impact depending on how and where they are produced. Companies that want to improve their environmental performance or products face numerous obstacles, including access to trustworthy environmental information and condensing this to enable clear communication to consumers. Dialogues among retailers could level the playing field and lead to a standardised approach to measuring and communicating the environmental impact of food.

Objectives

- 1) Undertake a user insight analysis. Through a quick but focused process of surveys and interviews establish clarity on what users need to understand and analyse their risk and impact to enable them to make better decisions on food sustainability, as well as their current approach to analysing their risk and impact. The focus should be on key end users starting with food companies (to include manufacturers, food processors and retailers), financiers (focused on private investors and banks) and key departments within UK government.
- 2) Map these user needs to existing methods. Using existing analysis¹ of initiatives and methods for measuring the impact of food on the environment, map user needs against these to identify the best tools and gaps and produce an initial user metrics framework.
- 3) Convene major UK retailers (including WWF's key partners in the retail sector) to discuss common challenges and approaches to measuring the environmental impact of food, with a view to:
 - a. Helping retailers develop an evidence-based, consistent and standardised approach to measure and score the environmental sustainability of food products across UK grocery retail;
 - b. Providing an easy and secure way for food producers/manufactures to share sustainability related supply chain data to enable a more representative score for their products;
 - c. Driving data collection that can be harmonised and imputed to produce a more complete understanding of environmental impacts across all food groups and footprints; and
 - d. Providing official feedback through the Summit Dialogues and agreeing on an industry-wide call to action ahead of the Food System Summit.

¹ JNCC's Linking Environment and Trade (LET) Guide 2020 is one such analysis of over 250 initiatives linking consumption to environmental impact. Available here: <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/daa8e792-a36e-436b-98d7-e2f38e860650>

Outputs

- 1) A brief report of approach, method, key findings and recommendations for next steps.
- 2) A meta-map of user needs against best available initiatives for measurement of food risk and impact on the environment.
- 3) An initial framework for users, with any gaps highlighted and next steps identified.
- 4) A series of roundtable meetings with major UK retailers to explore, debate and shape pathways towards a standardised use of food metrics and rating of products according to their environmental impact, including an exploration of the initial user framework.

Budget

- Outputs 1-3 (user insight analysis): £25-30k inclusive of VAT
- Output 4 (convening retailers): £15,800 inclusive of VAT

Delivery timeline

- Outputs 1-3 (user insight analysis): March - April 2021
- Output 4 (convening retailers): May – June 2021

Submission of Proposal

Proposals should be maximum 5 pages in length and include:

- Your approach and proposed method to address the Project Objectives and Outputs.
- Consideration of available data and collection methods.
- A project plan detailing proposed scope and timeframes.
- Details of relevant experience.
- A fee proposal including total days and day rates for each member of staff who will work on the project, and any non-staff/travel/ancillary costs.
- Names and CVs of all staff who will work on the project, and proposed roles (can be beyond the 5 pages).

Proposals will be assessed using a selection of criteria, likely including fit to brief, previous experience of consultancy, how quickly the work can be completed, value for money and credible proposed methodology.

WWF would prefer to contract this activity using the WWF Standard Terms and Conditions. Should you wish to propose alternative terms then please include this information in your response.

Deadline for submission of proposals: 19 February 2021

Commissioned by: WWF-UK, Living Planet Centre, Brewery Road, Woking, GU21 4LL

Date: 5 February 2021

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