



Vegan Australia
301/49 York Street, Sydney 2000
Email: info@veganaustralia.org.au

Web: veganaustralia.org.au

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Inquiry into long-term sustainability of the NSW dairy industry

Hearing 4 November 2020

Additional Information

In the discussion on food labelling I mentioned a proposal that displays in a concise way a lot of information on a number of measures important to consumers. The proposal I was thinking of is described in the article "We label fridges to show their environmental impact - why not food?" by Joseph Poore[1] and the paper which supports its effectiveness is "Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers"[2] as well as "Sustainability labels on food products: Consumer motivation, understanding and use"[3].

Note that in answer to this question at the hearing I mistakenly remembered the four quadrants as covering areas such as environment, animal use, health and fair trade. In fact, the original proposal concerns the environment only and covers water, emissions, pesticides and biodiversity as shown in the image below. My suggestion would be to display the following in the quadrants:

Environment: using a summary of Poore's proposal above

Animal use: using vegan certification as well as amount of embodied animal suffering

Health: similar to the overall traffic light system[4, 5]

Fair trade: based on adherence to labour laws and fair trade certification

This would be displayed on the front of the pack, with detailed information on the back.

I would also like to respond to the chair's question of why the consumer doesn't do their own research rather than rely on labelling. One of my jobs as a volunteer with Vegan Australia is to help process requests for products to be certified vegan. Some applications for certification take weeks of research to determine if the products are suitable. Once we have completed this investigation, the product maker can summarise this by simply putting a small Vegan Australia Certified logo on their packaging. This is just one example of why it is impracticable for consumers to "do their own research". Another example is the energy star rating on appliances. The information summarised in this label would be completely out of reach of consumers if not available in this way.

Greg McFarlane

Vegan Australia

References

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/10/we-label-fridges-to-show-their-environmental-impact-why-not-food>
2. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6392/987.full>
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306919213001796>
4. <https://heas.health.vic.gov.au/healthy-choices/guidelines/traffic-light-system>
5. https://www.cancercouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/foodlabelling_frontofpack_surveyreport.pdf

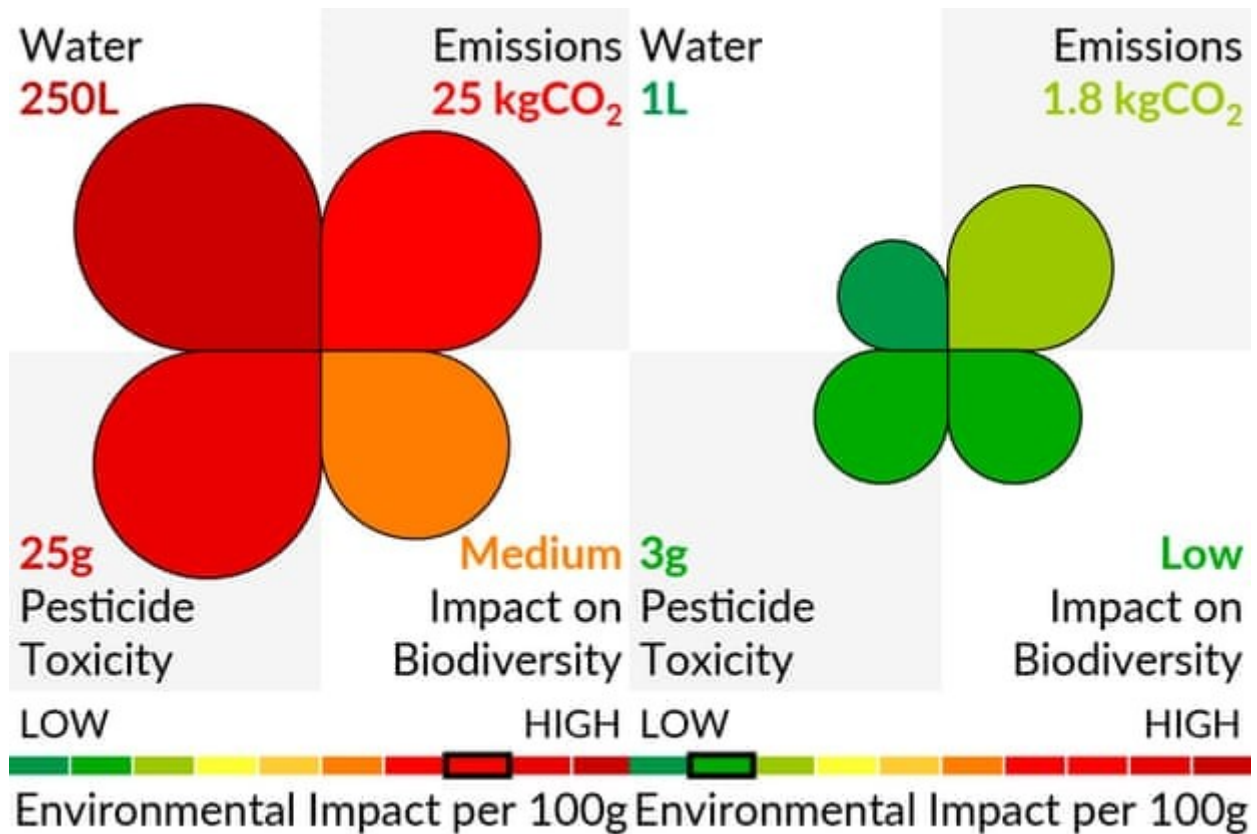


Image from "We label fridges to show their environmental impact - why not food?" by Joseph Poore[1]