

Feeding Us Greenwash

An analysis of misleading claims in the food sector



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The analysis in this report was done by the Changing Markets Foundation. The report got input from Carbon Market Watch, Compassion in World Farming, Eating Better, Foodwatch Germany and Greenpeace Denmark.



Executive summary and key findings

Numerous studies have shown that greenwashing is rampant across sectors¹ and that it has become a major business risk, especially for investors.² Public authorities around the world are preparing for an unprecedented clamp down on greenwashing, with several key regulations coming up in the EU, UK and US, alongside commitments to increase enforcement and impose stricter penalties.

This comes in the context of growing consumer concern about the environment, which translates into actual purchasing decisions and a growing market for ethical products.³ Recent YouGov polling across the UK and Germany, commissioned by the Changing Markets Foundation, showed that almost half (49%) of people surveyed regularly (always, most of the time, often) choose food products with environmental sustainability labels or certifications. These consumers are interested in sustainable purchasing options, and one in three (35%) are willing to pay more for climate and animal welfare labels. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of concern on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being “Not concerned at all” and 10 being “Very concerned”. 59% gave a concern score of at least 6 for corporate greenwashing, and this is in line with the particularly low levels of trust in sustainability claims about meat and dairy products (on average around 15% across different sources). So how good are these labels and green claims in reality?

Over the past year, Changing Markets conducted market research to assess how reliable green claims on food products are, with a particular emphasis on meat and dairy, as the climate impacts of these products dwarfs those of any other food.⁴ This resulted in the addition of over 50 examples of products, projects and advertisements to our greenwash.com website, where we track corporate greenwashing. In this briefing, we summarise the key trends identified through this analysis and present the findings of the YouGov polling that we commissioned in the UK and Germany. The polling was designed to explore whether the most common green claims in the food sector are impacting consumer choices.



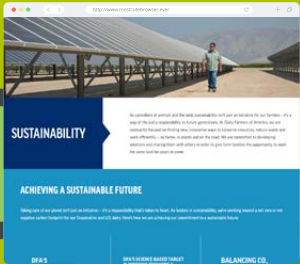
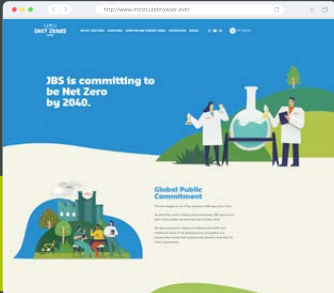
Credits: Eduardo Soares
Unsplash

Key findings:

- Greenwashing in the food sector is rampant: our investigation discovered an array of claims that are being placed on even the most carbon-intensive food products, such as beef. Particularly prevalent were climate claims such as 'carbon neutral', 'climate positive' and 'net zero', as well as specific claims about low methane. We also discovered more subtle level of greenwashing, such as images of grazing cows or small family farms with happy animals.
- Meat and dairy companies responsible for outsized greenhouse gas emissions (JBS, Marfrig, Nestlé, Danish Crown, Arla, Danone, Saputo and Fonterra) are making misleading green claims on their products or in their other marketing materials. JBS, the biggest meat producer and one of the biggest climate and methane polluters, has recently been reprimanded for its net zero claim which lacked a credible emissions reduction plan.⁵ Nestlé has been making questionable carbon neutral claims on its well-known brands Nespresso and KitKat, while Danish Crown is currently facing a lawsuit for labelling its pork products as 'climate controlled'. Saputo and Arla, our analysis found, regularly utilise a more subtle greenwashing with representations of grazing cows for their dairy products.
- Amazon was found to be one of the worst offenders, as its 'Climate Pledge Friendly' range included several meat and dairy products. This included beef jerky, which scientific assessments have shown to be the most carbon-intensive food product, but which was included in the climate-friendly category because some air had been removed from its packaging.⁶
- Significant greenwashing was discovered on dairy products, including 'carbon neutral' claims that referred only to packaging, ignoring the emissions-intensive contents. We also discovered many dairy products with vague claims, such as 'planet-friendly' and 'sustainable future', along with images suggesting that cows are permanently grazing in the fields - claims which in most cases were not proven.
- People are influenced by the most common claims found through our research. In the UK, 42% of consumers were more likely to buy a product with a 'carbon neutral' label and 29% were willing to pay slightly or much more for those products. In Germany the picture is much the same, with 35% of consumers more likely to buy a meat or dairy product labelled 'carbon neutral' and 36% more likely to buy meat or dairy labelled 'climate positive', with 32% and 36% willing to pay more for these labels, respectively.

This confirms that there is a clear opportunity for businesses to capitalise on people's environmental concerns through greenwashing, without taking genuine positive action for the environment. Therefore, it is urgent that regulators start taking a closer look at food products and companies, regulate green claims, and ensure rules are properly enforced across different markets. At the same time, it is clear that the climate emergency is already affecting food production everywhere. Scientists predict that more than a third of existing areas for crop and livestock production will become unsuitable by the end of the century if there is 'unhalted growth' of greenhouse gas emissions (SSP5-8.5 in IPCC scenarios).⁷ Tackling greenwashing alone will not solve this, as such governments must also enact climate legislation and fiscal policies to drive the necessary transformation of the food system, including an urgent reduction in the overconsumption of meat and dairy products.

Big meat and dairy climate pledges and greenwashing

COMPANY <i>in alphabetical order</i>	ESTIMATED EMISSIONS FROM MEAT AND DAIRY OPERATIONS/TOTAL EMISSION*	NET-ZERO PLEDGE**	YEAR	GREENWASHING CASES
 Arla	18.9M ^a	✔ YES	2050	Carbon neutral milk, vague claims like ‘building a sustainable future’   
 Cargill	86.3M ^b	⊘ N/A	N/A	Beef Up Sustainability strategy  
 DFA Dairy Farmers of America	45.9M ^c	✔ YES	2050	Nerd Herd campaign
 Danish Crown	14.4M ^d	✔ YES	2050	Climate-controlled pork 
 DANONE	11.2M ^e /25M ^f	✔ YES	2050	Actimel - Carbon neutral 
 Fonterra	30.9M ^g	✔ YES	2050	Simply Milk New Zealand's First Carbon Zero Milk 
 FrieslandCampina	16.3M ^h	✔ YES	no later than 2050	On Way to Planet Proof Certification, Essential Start Carbon Neutral infant formula  
 JBS	287.9M ⁱ	✔ YES	2040	Net-zero pledge 
 Marfrig	102.5M ^j	⊘ N/A	N/A	Viva brand - Carbon neutral beef 
 Nestlé	18.8M ^k /116.5M ^l	✔ YES	2050	KitKat - Carbon neutral by 2025 Nespresso – Carbon Neutral by 2022  
 Saputo	18.1M ^m	⊘ N/A	2050	Cathedral City ‘Make it Better Cheddar’  
 Tyson	83.8M ⁿ	✔ YES	2050	Farm projects to meet their net-zero target 
 Yili	22.2M ^o	✔ YES	2050	Carbon neutral yogurt 
 萬洲國際 WH GROUP	23.9M ^p	⊘ N/A	2050	Good Is What We Do pledge 

* Referenced at the end of report.

** Companies have set these targets, though they are not always substantiated or robust.

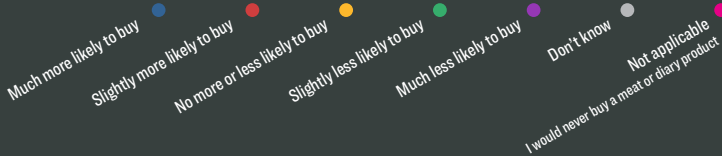
POLLING RESULTS: HOW MUCH MORE LIKELY CONSUMERS ARE TO BUY CERTAIN PRODUCTS DEPENDING ON THE LABELS

GERMANY



PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD CHANGED BY LABEL-GRID

To what extent, if at all, would you be more or less likely to buy a meat or dairy product that had each of the following labels on it, compared to the same products without the label?



Carbon Neutral



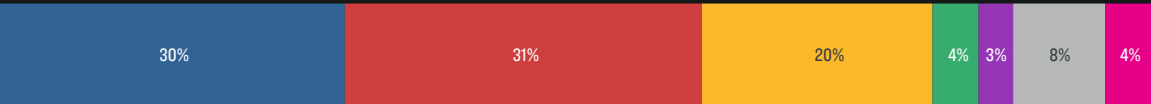
Low methane



Climate Positive



German origin



Level 3 or 4 (of 4)
in Animal husbandry



UNITED KINGDOM



PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD CHANGED BY LABEL-GRID

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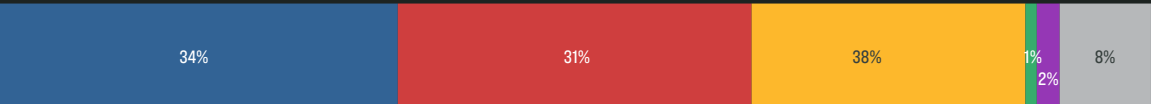
Low methane



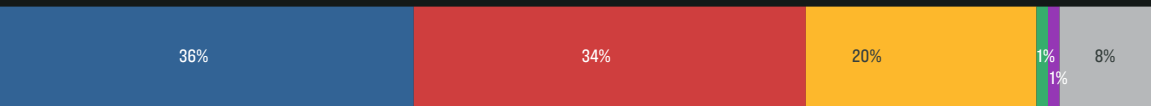
Climate Positive



British Origin



Respect animal wealfare



PURCHASE PRICE CHANGED BY LABEL - GRID

To what extent, if at all, would you be willing to pay more for a meat or dairy product that had each of the following labels on it , compared to the same product without the label?



Carbon neutral



Low methane



Climate positive



German origin



Level 3or 4 (of4)
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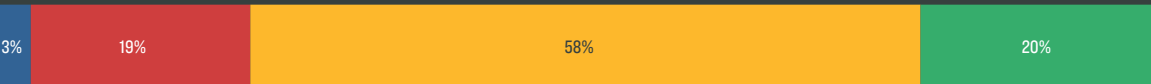
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Carbon Neutral



Low methane



Climate Positive



British origin



Respects animal welfare



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h. GHG emissions GWP100 basis, in tonnes CO₂e. IATP and Changing Markets Foundation (2022) Emissions Impossible: How big meat and dairy are heating up the planet, Methane Edition.

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