

PRESS RELEASE

## GREEN CLAIMS: ORGANICS EUROPE HIGHLIGHTS PRODUCT ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT METHOD'S SHORTCOMINGS FOR AGRI-FOOD

BRUSSELS, 23 JANUARY 2024 – As compromise amendment negotiations on the Green Claims Directive proposal are taking place within the European Parliament, the organic movement warns MEPs of negative consequences for the agri-food sector if the wrong methodology is chosen as a basis to assess green claims on food products.

Speaking at an online press conference this morning, Eric Gall, Deputy Director of IFOAM Organics Europe, commented: "MEPs should avoid including as a reference to assess green claims an indicator like the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) that points to the wrong direction for agriculture and which is irrelevant for farming. While the PEF may work well for manufactured goods, it is ill-suited to assess the environmental impact of agri-food products. By design the PEF calculation method disregards the impacts of different production methods on biodiversity and promotes intensive agriculture, not a transition of the current food system towards agroecological practices."

He added that "The Commission's proposal itself acknowledges that the PEF methodology has limitations when it comes to assessing the impact of food products, and **it would be difficult to understand that the Parliament would open the door to greenwashing by calling for the use PEF category rules also for food products**".

Quentin Chancé, CNRS, Coordinator of CESIAe, the Scientific Expert Group on Sustainability Labelling, said: "The report published by CESIAe in November 2023 demonstrates that the PEF's life cycle analysis method, though useful in some contexts, is **fundamentally unsuited for agri-food products**. Its reductionist approach fails to capture the complex interactions in agriculture, leading to skewed environmental assessments. **It is not a question of fixing or patching the PEF for farming**: there is a clear need for other metrics. We highlight the need for more comprehensive and systemic methodologies that accurately reflect the unique challenges and impacts of the agricultural sector, recognising **the need for a diverse array of assessment tools** to truly reflect and drive environmental sustainability."

Sabine Bonnot, Member of the scientific council at ITAB (French technical Institute of organic agriculture) and president of the Planet-score, highlighted the background: "PEF methodology is not science, as the [2021 IDDRi report](#), the [2023 CESIAe report](#), but also [the Commission's JRC 2018 report](#) stated:

*"As any weighting scheme [in multicriteria approaches], PEF is **not mainly natural science based** but inherently involves **value choices** that will depend on policy, cultural and other preferences, and value systems. No "consensus" on weighting seems to be achievable."*

In March 2023, when releasing the Green Claims proposal, [the Commission declared before the press](#) that it had learnt from the lessons of developing the PEF over ten years. And that considering its structural flaws, especially for the food, fish, and textile sectors, it was not adequate to take this approach as a unique or central reference. Instead, the Commission established a list of conditions (article 8) to be respected by independent methodologies to ensure reliability, transparency, and affordability for SMEs. PEF-compliance is not on the list."

Sabine Bonnot added: "[Planet-score is currently developing along these lines](#) for the food sector, with obvious real-life relevance for more than 300 companies currently assessing their products in 12 countries. PEF is a minor part of the holistic ecological assessment. And the French government itself is currently developing a method which is not PEF-compliant. Surveys reveal that in many European countries, consumers do not trust companies,

nor public authorities, on ecological topics. **To build trust, there is a strong need for methodologies which are relevant, independent, and endorsed by civil society (scientists, consumer associations, NGOs).** The draft Green Claims directive makes this framework a reality. This is a huge step towards innovative and cooperative ways to make transition happen.”

She also warned: “PEF is the ultimate reductionist tool: **thinking primarily in terms of efficiency is suitable for nuts and bolts factories, not for farming systems.** Unless we really want to believe that caged hens are the best egg-producing system, ecology-wise. This would be questionable value choices.”

“The value choices behind the PEF are wrong for farming, as they promote (according to all the afore-mentioned reports) still more intensification, more pressure on farming practices, on nature, on animals and on farmers revenues, more of the same story that has been crushing farmers and pushing them into desperate actions. **PEF is not a consumer transparency nor an eco-design tool for food products. It is unable to fight against greenwashing, and to reflect farmers’ and producers’ efforts.**”

The press conference concluded with a call to MEPs to avoid promoting greenwashing in the agri-food sector through the PEF, and to leave the door open for methodologies that better reflect the complexities and environmental impacts of agriculture production methods and that are sensitive to the systemic aspects of agri-food products.

*Ends.*

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## Background information

### Useful links

- [IFOAM Organics Europe's position paper on sustainability labelling](#)
- [The technical briefing highlighting the limitations of the PEF's methodology](#)
- Recordings of the press conference will be available on [Organics Europe's YouTube account](#)
- [An open letter by civil society, farmers, of retailers and processors criticising the PEF methodology applied to food products](#)
- [Our work on food policies](#) (scroll down and expand 'Food labelling: Sustainability and nutritional labelling')
- [Rapport du CESIAe sur l'affichage environnemental](#) (en français)





IFOAM Organics Europe is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. With almost 200 members in 34 European countries, our work spans the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders, and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies.