

Ensuring credibility against greenwashing in the Green Claims Directive: Input from the European organic sector

Brussels, 22 April 2025

Dear Commissioner Roswall,
Dear Minister of Climate and Environment Hennig-Kloska,
Dear MEP Burkhardt,
Dear MEP Gozi,

Cc: Environment ministers and shadow rapporteurs involved in the Green Claims dossier

On behalf of the European organic sector, we would like to commend the European institutions for their work on the Green Claims Directive and welcome the initiative to address the growing issue of greenwashing. With retail sales reaching over €50 billion in Europe, organic is not only a thriving sector but also one of the most trusted and recognised approaches to sustainable production and consumption.

As the only EU-recognised and legally defined environmental scheme for agri-food production, organic holds a unique position in the sustainability landscape. Yet, its integrity and credibility are increasingly challenged by the proliferation of vague or unsubstantiated sustainability-related claims. **We therefore see it as essential that the Green Claims Directive provides robust safeguards against misleading claims, while also ensuring clarity and recognition for schemes that meet high and verifiable standards.**

Some sustainability labels on food products can be misleading to consumers as they might believe that a given label offers similar environmental benefits to organic, despite this not being the case. Similarly, in the textiles and cosmetics sector, the term “organic” is not legally protected at EU level, allowing products to carry “organic” or “natural” claims without being certified under a credible or relevant scheme – further contributing to consumer confusion and greenwashing.

Such claims must be made only following a robust certification process.

In this context, we would like to share our views and raise some concerns that should be considered in the current trilogue negotiations to ensure the directive achieves its intended goals without unintended consequences for credible and trusted sustainability labels such as organic.

We will address the four points below:

- The limitations of PEF for agri-food products;
- The need for a clearly defined simplified procedure with a limited scope;
- Considerations regarding private schemes that provide an added value;
- The need for a prolonged implementation period.

We remain at your disposal for any questions you may have.

With kind regards,

Eduardo Cuoco

The limitations of PEF for agri-food products: no recommended use of PEF

While the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) works well to assess the environmental impact of products and services in many sectors, it is ill-suited to assess the environmental impact of agri-food products given its inability

to adequately consider the impact of externalities. Specifically, the PEF can differentiate the environmental impact between food product categories but does a poor job in distinguishing the environmental impact within food product categories. When it comes to textiles, natural fibres score significantly worse compared to synthetic fibres. Applied to food products, the PEF leads to absurd and untrue results where all fruits and vegetables score A, irrespective of the farming practice used, seasonality, or transport time. Similarly, according to the PEF a wool sweater produced in Europe scores E, while a polyester sweater produced in China scores A.

We welcome that the limitations of PEF to assess food and textiles have been recognised in the Commission's proposal, and we urge you to ensure that the final law maintains this approach. The French government is currently undergoing a comprehensive testing phase of the PEF for food products, which shows that this methodology still has major shortcomings and should be reviewed before being used as a regulatory tool. As such, **the final text should at least state that the use of the PEF methodology in the context of agri-food products is not recommended.**

A clearly defined simplified procedure with a limited scope

While we welcome the introduction of a simplified procedure for substantiating certain environmental claims as a way to reduce the administrative burden, we caution that this must not come at the expense of integrity. If the scope of such procedures is too broad or poorly defined, it could inadvertently enable greenwashing, erode consumer trust, and create legal uncertainty for businesses acting in good faith.

To preserve the directive's credibility and effectiveness, the simplified procedure should be carefully framed and accompanied by clear guidance and periodic review. **We urge policymakers to involve all relevant actors—including certification bodies, industry representatives, and consumer organisations—within the consultation forum to ensure that the criteria for simplified substantiation are both robust and fit for purpose.** Not all claims that appear simple are truly straightforward to verify, and the context and potential trade-offs of each claim must be considered through a risk-based approach. For instance, a claim such as "palm oil free" which suggests that the product in question is free from deforestation might seem simple, but if palm oil is replaced with soy oil the claim becomes misleading as soy oil is also responsible for deforestation.

As such, **we urge the institutions to clearly define and limit the scope of the simplified procedure.** This should be guided by cumulative criteria, including: the claim refers to a single environmental characteristic, does not require a full life-cycle assessment, involves no trade-offs between different environmental impacts, and does not result in the shifting of environmental impacts to other stages of the product's life cycle. **Such a simplified procedure should also guarantee a balanced approach between the use of *ex ante* and *ex post* claim verifications, with the aim of providing robust safeguards against misleading claims.**

Private schemes and labels that provide an added value

Existing recognised schemes or labels that go beyond the requirements and environmental benefits of the EU organic regulation – exempt from the Green Claims Directive – should be eligible for the simplified procedure to avoid unnecessary administrative burden.

More generally, if private schemes or labels provide a demonstrated added value that is not provided under EU and/or national schemes, such private labels must still be allowed under the Green Claims Directive, also including those private labels that use an aggregated score, if the condition mentioned before is fulfilled.

A prolonged implementation period

We also wish to express our concern regarding the proposed six-month period for Member States to apply the necessary laws, regulations, and administrative provisions following the transposition of the Directive. Given the complexity of the framework and the adjustments required at national level we urge that this implementation period be extended to allow for proper preparation and effective application.