

Carbon footprinting UK products

Background

At Tesco, we have a world-leading climate change strategy. We are working towards becoming a zero-carbon business by 2050 and have set challenging interim targets, including to reduce emissions of products in our supply chain by 30% by 2020 compared to 2008.

To achieve this target, we need to know the major emissions sources for each product. This is no easy feat given the complexities of measuring carbon emissions multiplied by the 70,000 diverse products we sell every day. But we have succeeded in developing an innovative solution to measure, and therefore to manage, the full life-cycle carbon footprint of our UK products.

Our approach

Over six months, we worked with the leading carbon footprinting consultancy Best Foot Forward, to rapidly configure and deploy their web-based "Footprinter" carbon measurement system. The resulting "Portfolio Footprint" enables us to report, analyse and track the carbon performance of our products. The system combines real physical product volumes, using our latest sales data and product specifications, with the best available carbon data from multiple sources, including directly measured emissions, bespoke product footprints, secondary supply chain footprints and national consumer meta-data. We also brought in carbon data from branded suppliers (e.g. Unilever's product footprints) and the Carbon Trust are reviewing the system for compliance with the GHG Product Protocol Standard.

We've used the system to measure the life-cycle carbon footprints of all the products sold by Tesco in the UK in 2011/12. But more important than the absolute number is the insight the Portfolio Footprint gives us. We've found ways to structure the data in



a manageable framework that gives us rigorous results with full transparency. This gives us clarity on our products' carbon impacts, and helps colleagues across the business understand their product's impact.

Results

This has confirmed some existing areas of focus for our carbon reduction activities, but has also challenged us to prioritise where we can have the greatest impact, especially influencing on-farm practices and customers' behaviours. For instance, agricultural inputs and customer use are the dominant life-cycle stages (38% and 35% of product emissions respectively); while five Commercial Categories generate half the emissions. Drilling down, 139 high impact products and customer behaviours make up nearly 2/3rds of emissions, particularly laundry goods, meat and dairy.

The portfolio footprint equips us to drive action – underpinning a much better informed, fact-driven discussion about what really matters, engaging suppliers to target particular hotspots or supply chain activities. We are sharing these product insights with suppliers on the Knowledge Hub (our online supplier collaboration platform for carbon reduction), and we're supporting industry efforts to improve product sustainability by sharing with the Consumer Goods Forum, The Sustainability Consortium and WRAP's Product Sustainability Forum.