

Consumer Response to ECO-LABELS

Food sustainability labels and related tools have multiplied in recent years. Over 450 ecolabels globally cover a range of sustainability related concerns, such as organic production, animal welfare and farmer income. New labels may address health or social impacts, carbon or water footprints, or any number of attributes of food products (Ecolabel Index 2021). A critical question is how consumers respond to the information provided by labels.



Eco-labelling is not a silver bullet but should be seen as part of a package of communication methods.

RESPONSES TO ECO-LABELS VARY WIDELY

Consumer responses to eco-labels vary across different food categories, sustainability attributes and consumer demographics. On average, younger, female, better-educated, urban-resident, and middle to high-income groups are more responsive to labels.



CHALLENGES FOR ECO-LABELS

- Consumer awareness of and trust in labels may not align with their actual behaviour.
- Eco-labels have limited influence on some consumers, even if they understand the label.
- Labels may be ignored or misinterpreted, for example, consumers may make assumptions about the sustainability of ingredients based on materials used for packaging, or attribute nutritional benefits to foods on the basis of sustainability labels that focus on production impacts.

CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS MATTER

In addition to demographic and socio-economic variables, consumers' responses to labels depends on their pre-existing knowledge, attitudes towards sustainability and trust in particular labels.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECO-LABEL

- Labels have a measurable and positive influence on consumer choice of sustainable food.
- Eco-labels and guidelines increase consumers' accuracy in selecting environmentally friendly foods.
- Successful labelling is positively correlated with knowledge and awareness of a label and its visibility.
- Well-designed labels convey something meaningful to consumers and can be understood quickly.
- Consumers say they are willing to pay more for labelled products than for conventional foods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Labels must be visible/accessible, easy to understand, reliable, credible, holistic rather than single-issue, and comparable across different products and diets.
- Labels must be based on science but supporting communications should build positive consumer sentiment through associations with popular brands or individuals, by offering micro-incentives, leveraging social norms or loss aversion.
- Labels and businesses should collaborate to identify which labels, messages and media are most effective for encouraging sustainable food choices by different consumer groups.

