

RED MEAT PEF – Trends towards a greener future

October 2016 - The PEF (Product Environmental Footprint) meat project presented by the European Livestock and Meat Trades Union (UECBV) was selected by the European Commission to lead the process of developing specific PEF Category Rules (CRs). Following to press and consequently consumers complaints concerning the environmental burden of a wide range of products, UECBV, DG Environment, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre <http://ies.jrc.ec.europa.eu/> and other EC services, have worked towards the development of a harmonized methodology for the calculation of the environmental footprint of the products meat. The purpose of the PEF (Product Environmental Footprint) is to provide the institutions and the consumers a tool to assess through a reliable scientific platform, based on the Life Cycle Assessment approach (LCA), the environmental footprint of a wide range of products

Project proponents

The MEAT project is driven by major actors of the MEAT sector in the EU (including Bord BIA - IE, Céline - FR, COV – NL, Danish Agriculture and Food Council, Danish Crown Group, Dawn Meats - IE, Dunbia Ltd. - UK, EBLEX – UK, VanDrie) and internationally (Beef + Lamb New Zealand Ltd, Meat & Livestock Australia). Also the European Feed industry association FEFAC is cooperating while the LCA consultant is Blonk Consultants and the project coordination is assured by the UECBV secretariat.

How is it designed?

The real strength of that study is to take into account three different meat species (pork, beef and lamb) and the data become both from direct observation (primary data) than from reliable scientific database (secondary data).

The data quality

The high level of primary data set in this PEF will reduce the risk of greenwashing. By having a high standard of data quality this PEFCR will serve as a driver for a better environmental footprint for the industry and a way forward to a better use of finite resources.

Project features

Not all the cuts of an animal are composed by the same percentages of fats, proteins, bones. etc. It means that not all the animal cuts can be treated in the same way. That's why the red meat Pilot has adopted two different environmental footprint allocation approaches: the biophysical and the mass. In the biophysical allocation the energy needs of the meat is assessed for specific components content, while in the mass allocation the energy needed to grow an animal is shared equally among the whole weight of the animal.

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The challenge of the manure

The PEFCR has raised new important questions even for our sector. For example, the correct environmental footprint interpretation of the role of manure does not produce any direct and relevant economic value, but on the environmental point of view it does, In most cases indeed manure will be considered a substitute of fertilizer (it means that animal manure contributes to reduce CO2 emissions belonging to the fertilizers industry).

Ongoing phase of the project

The PEF exercise is now in the communication phase. The Commission has asked us to test various methods of communicating the data we have collected. We will test two different kind of communication, one B2B and the other B2C The Commission is most interested in testing communication to consumers. We suppose that the Commission has in mind that environmental labelling on the meat can help the consumer decide (and thereby drive the market to be more sustainable). We will try to show that the PEF-labelling will be very hard for the consumer to be understood and its final use will be more expert oriented. The Technical Secretariat of the red meat pilot, composed by the sustainability representative of different European and not European groups, prefer to communicate to the retailers by leaving them the duty to communicate with the final consumer about the issue.

Project objectives

The PEF will become a common language for all the European institutions and enterprises influencing and supporting decisional processes such as: public procurement, taxation policies, EU funding, CAP, etc....The real use of the PEF by EC and EU MS will be probably declared between 2018 and 2019.