

## Communicating the environmental impact of meat production: challenges in the development of a Swedish meat guide

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### Abstract

Environmental impacts from food consumption are dominated by the consumption of livestock products. Changes in consumption patterns are necessary to reduce these impacts. Information is a policy instrument that can influence consumers to make more sustainable choices, as well as increasing awareness of the problem and hence creating acceptance for financial policy instruments, e.g. taxes. Environmental studies of livestock often focus on greenhouse gas emissions. Although the carbon footprint of meat correlates with several other impact categories, there is a risk of conflicts with categories such as biodiversity loss, pesticide use and animal welfare. In an interdisciplinary project, a consumer guide was developed to assist Swedish consumers and food professionals at retail level in making less environmentally harmful meat choices and to act as a communication tool, raising awareness of the different environmental aspects of meat production and potential conflicts with animal welfare. A series of design requirements were established for the guide as regards communication and environmental assessment from a life cycle perspective. Following these, four indicators (carbon footprint, biodiversity, use of pesticides and animal welfare) were chosen to represent the impact on the environment and animal welfare from different choices of meat and other protein sources. For each indicator, criteria were developed that placed the products included in the meat guide in one of three different groups, represented by the well-known traffic light system of red/yellow/green. This first attempt to develop a meat guide for the Swedish market has several limitations, but should provide valuable guidance to consumers and can act as a basis for discussion in the important task of decreasing meat consumption and choosing better meat alternatives.

### Keywords

Consumer guide; Meat; Livestock production; Consumers; Animal welfare; Biodiversity; Carbon footprint