



# Survival of the most sustainable

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Making the food consumed in  
the Netherlands sustainable  
with The Sustainability Consortium



**WAGENINGEN**  
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

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# Making Dutch food sustainable

The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) has developed a globally harmonised measurement and reporting system through which companies can map the sustainability of consumer product supply chains. Over the past three years the TSC system has been used in the CIS agricultural project to measure the sustainability of food consumed in the Netherlands and make it more sustainable together with the partners in the supply chain. In this brochure you will find the results of the project as well as ideas about how TSC can make your company and supply chain more sustainable.

**2/3**

of tropical forest loss due to agriculture.



**80%**

of water withdrawals linked to consumer goods.



**60%**

of greenhouse gas emissions linked to consumer goods.



## Why is sustainability important?

The global production and use of consumer goods accounts for more than 60% of all greenhouse gas emissions and 80% of water use.

Food production has an important share in this and is responsible for two thirds of the worldwide loss of tropical forest. Now that 2.5 billion more people are expected to join the consumer class in the coming decades, we must make the production and (re)use of these goods significantly more sustainable.



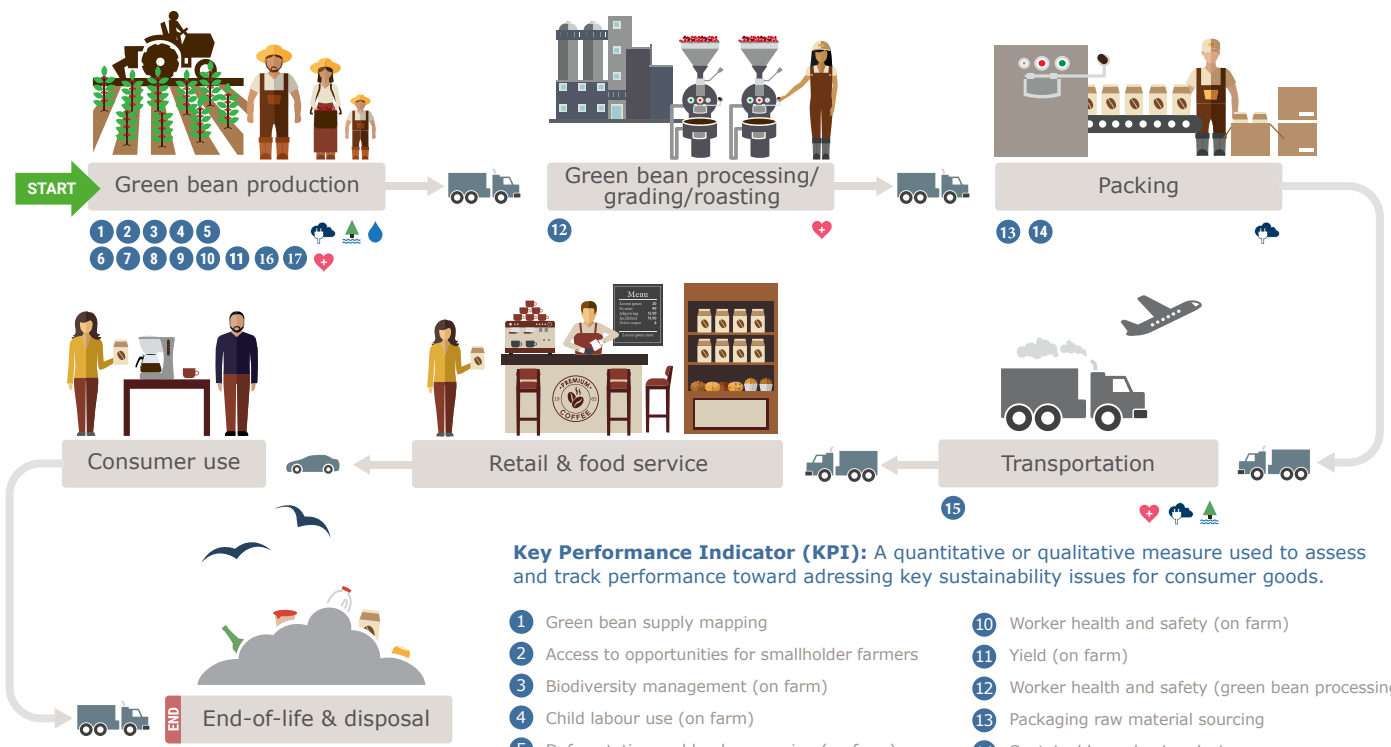
# All in all, not ideal

Due to the limitations stated above, various customers have started sending out their own questionnaires to gain more insight into the sustainability of their suppliers. Suppliers with multiple customers are then confronted with many different questionnaires, which can be quite the administrative burden. Moreover, it is not very stimulating to score better on a certain indicator when said indicator is only measured and valued by one of many customers. All in all, although buyers can play a crucial role in the sustainability process due to their size, it is not easy for them to find an integrated, consistent and efficient way of working with all their supply chain partners in order to make their range more sustainable.

# It could be better and clearer

That is why The Sustainability Consortium has developed and implemented a globally harmonised monitoring system for the sustainability measurement of products. With the TSC system, companies can work in a consistent way on continuous improvement of their products. The system is constantly being refined based on worldwide application in a large number of companies.

▼ The structure of the coffee supply chains and accompanying sustainability hotspots



- Sustainability Topics:**
- Climate & energy
  - Land & ecosystems
  - Water use
  - Health, safety & rights

- Key Performance Indicator (KPI):** A quantitative or qualitative measure used to assess and track performance toward addressing key sustainability issues for consumer goods.
- 1 Green bean supply mapping
  - 2 Access to opportunities for smallholder farmers
  - 3 Biodiversity management (on farm)
  - 4 Child labour use (on farm)
  - 5 Deforestation and land conversion (on farm)
  - 6 Fertiliser application (on farm)
  - 7 Greenhouse gas emissions intensity (on farm)
  - 8 Irrigation water use intensity (on farm)
  - 9 Labour rights (on farm)
  - 10 Worker health and safety (on farm)
  - 11 Yield (on farm)
  - 12 Worker health and safety (green bean processing)
  - 13 Packaging raw material sourcing
  - 14 Sustainable packaging design
  - 15 Transportation to retailers
  - 16 Living wage (on farm)
  - 17 Pesticide application (on farm)



◀ Eight-step process that WUR and participating firms went through together

## Sustainability in the Netherlands

In the three-year project 'Continuous Improvement of Sustainability of all agricultural products' the TSC toolkits were successfully implemented in the supply chains of food consumed in the Netherlands. In addition to further refining the indicators and the instructions of the questionnaires for use in the Netherlands,\* describing links with relevant Dutch sustainability initiatives, and implementing them in companies, Wageningen University & Research also made a detailed inventory of relevant improvement options for the product categories.

Superunie, Aldi Nederland, Sligro Food Group and Albron all sent out questionnaires to their suppliers over one or more years. In addition, the Confectioner's Union (Vereniging van Bakkerij en Zoetwaren (VBZ)) and the Dutch Baker's Union (Nederlandse Vereniging voor de

Bakker NVB) and a number of their members, as well as Dr Oetker, PepsiCo and Peijnenburg participated in a pilot study to draw up a questionnaire for grain products.

A total of 56 suppliers out of 13 product categories were asked to complete the questionnaires and almost everyone (98%) did so. Many large companies also participated in the project which meant that for various product categories more than half (in some cases even up to 90%) of total Dutch consumption was represented.

\* Global standardisation is important because it allows for a worldwide comparison of data. We remained close to the global standard in the questionnaires, but in some cases an additional answer option ensured that the document conformed better to the Dutch situation. It then not only corresponds with global initiatives, but also with Dutch ones.







# Albron and CSM cooperating in tackling chain sustainability with TSC toolkits

**You cannot be a sustainable company all by yourself; you will need the cooperation of other companies in the chain. Possible improvements such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions from products cannot be understood and tackled if you have to do it alone. You will need to cooperate. Using the TSC toolkits, Albron enthusiastically took this up, setting out to cooperate with chain partners. CSM saw this as a good opportunity to highlight the most important sustainability aspects. 'Our customers find sustainability increasingly important.'**

As one of the largest caterers in the Netherlands, Albron is committed to sustainability; not only in their own work but also for the chain they operate in. The company wants to chart the scores on the most important sustainability themes (such as the greenhouse gas emissions) of all products, and for this purpose, Albron published questionnaires for seven product categories in 2017 and 2018. CSM Bakery Solutions is one of the companies in the chain, producing a wide range of bakery products and bakery ingredients for professional bakers. The originally Dutch company (CSM stands for Centrale Suiker Maatschappij) now has its headquarters in Atlanta (USA) and sells in more than a hundred countries. CSM is Albron's supplier of all kinds of pre-baked rolls, for example those at Center Parcs.

## Get the right information

After consultation it was decided that CSM would fill out the questionnaire for Waldkorn Oergranen bread rolls. The spelt used in these rolls comes from Hungary and Austria and is processed with other ingredients (like flour) into rolls in Poland. Then the products are transported to the Netherlands. With the data from their own database, CSM was not able to answer most sustainability questions, and therefore contacted suppliers. 'It took us a lot of time to get all the right information, but we also gained a lot from the process,' reports Dax Lira, Head of Foodservice Benelux at CSM. 'Our

customers find sustainability increasingly important and the questionnaire was a good reason for us to sharpen the most important sustainability aspects.'

*TSCs method helps us to quickly gain insight into the main issues, which allows discussions on improvements to take place more efficiently.*

CSM also uses sustainability certificates, but the TSC method works better. Kris van den Wijngaert, Market Excellence manager food services and retail at CSM: 'The approach whereby you work with your customers on continuous improvement in a flexible manner ultimately yields more sustainability benefits at lower costs.' Ineke Snijders, Sustainability Manager at Albron, adds: 'TSC's method helps us to quickly gain insight into the main issues, which allows discussions on improvements to take place more efficiently. CSM did a great job arranging that.'


## Further focus on sustainability

Although Albron did not ask for it, CSM will now also complete the questionnaire for other products.

Lira: 'It is a good instrument to map out sustainability and identify areas for improvement. With the results, we have already implemented some improvements in the organisation. For example, we have set up a European sustainability task force that includes two employees from our Antwerp office, where we coordinate the delivery to Albron.' The European task force will be mandated to obtain appropriate information from all parts of the company and suppliers, and prioritise the process based on this information. It is primarily a process improvement. The task force makes capacity available, and the mandate ensures that other departments also make it a priority at an earlier stage.

Part of the project is that the customer (Albron) and supplier (CSM) discuss the results on the questionnaires together. WUR prepares these discussions, facilitates them and monitors the follow-up. The discussions with Albron also covered topics such as the phasing out of palm oil or full RSPO segregation if there is no suitable substitute available. Other focal points were to gain a better insight into the farms where the ancient grains are produced, to provide insight into greenhouse gas emissions (using an efficient and specific WUR model) and to make packaging more sustainable. Follow-up appointments have even been made to exchange information about health improvements to sandwiches, even though this was outside the scope of the project.





*'It is the most powerful instrument promoting sustainability that I have ever seen.'*

**Koen Boone**

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## Results in a nutshell

Almost all parties in the supply chain agreed on the TSC's scientifically substantiated list of hotspots and indicators, which allowed the parties to focus during the conversations on the possible improvements instead of having long discussions on the importance of the various topics and the correct method of measurement. Almost all parties found the conversations between the chain partners very instructive and useful.

Nearly all suppliers saw the short, harmonised questionnaires as an efficient way to work on sustainability in the supply chain. Flexibility in implementing improvements so that they fit well with their own priorities and possibilities was also greatly appreciated.

By working on the basis of product category instead of all variants of a product, an important part of Dutch food consumption was dealt with efficiently. The mutual comparison of the scores of suppliers led to new insights whereby best practices could be copied. For product categories in long supply chains with primary production outside the Netherlands, many companies were unable to answer questions about the impact at farm level or could not because of how long it took to acquire the information.

### Want to participate?

In the coming years we will be working on different food categories with the same and new companies. The specific expertise in all sub-areas within Wageningen will again play an important role in this project. There are also follow-up processes to investigate whether the results can be used for communication with the consumer (via the Question Mark app), and for the purchase of sustainable catering services by the government and in the financial sector (more sustainable companies run fewer risks and could receive more favourable financial conditions).

Also interested?

Contact Koen Boone or Birgit de Vos



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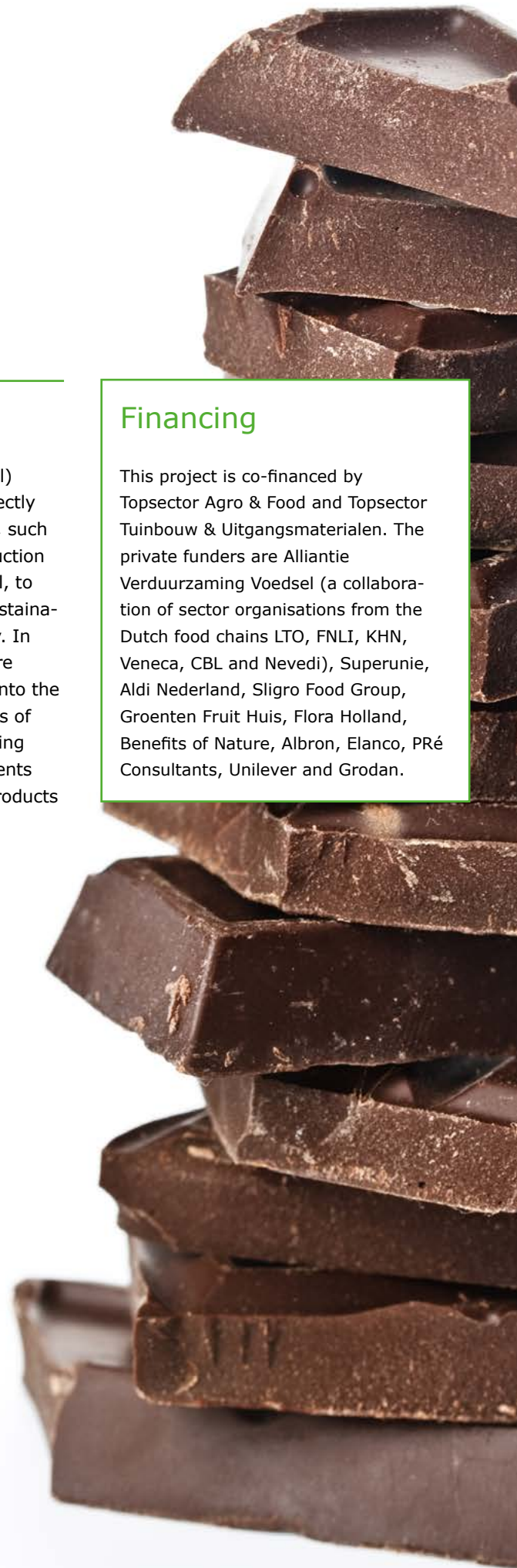
## Sustainability Improvements

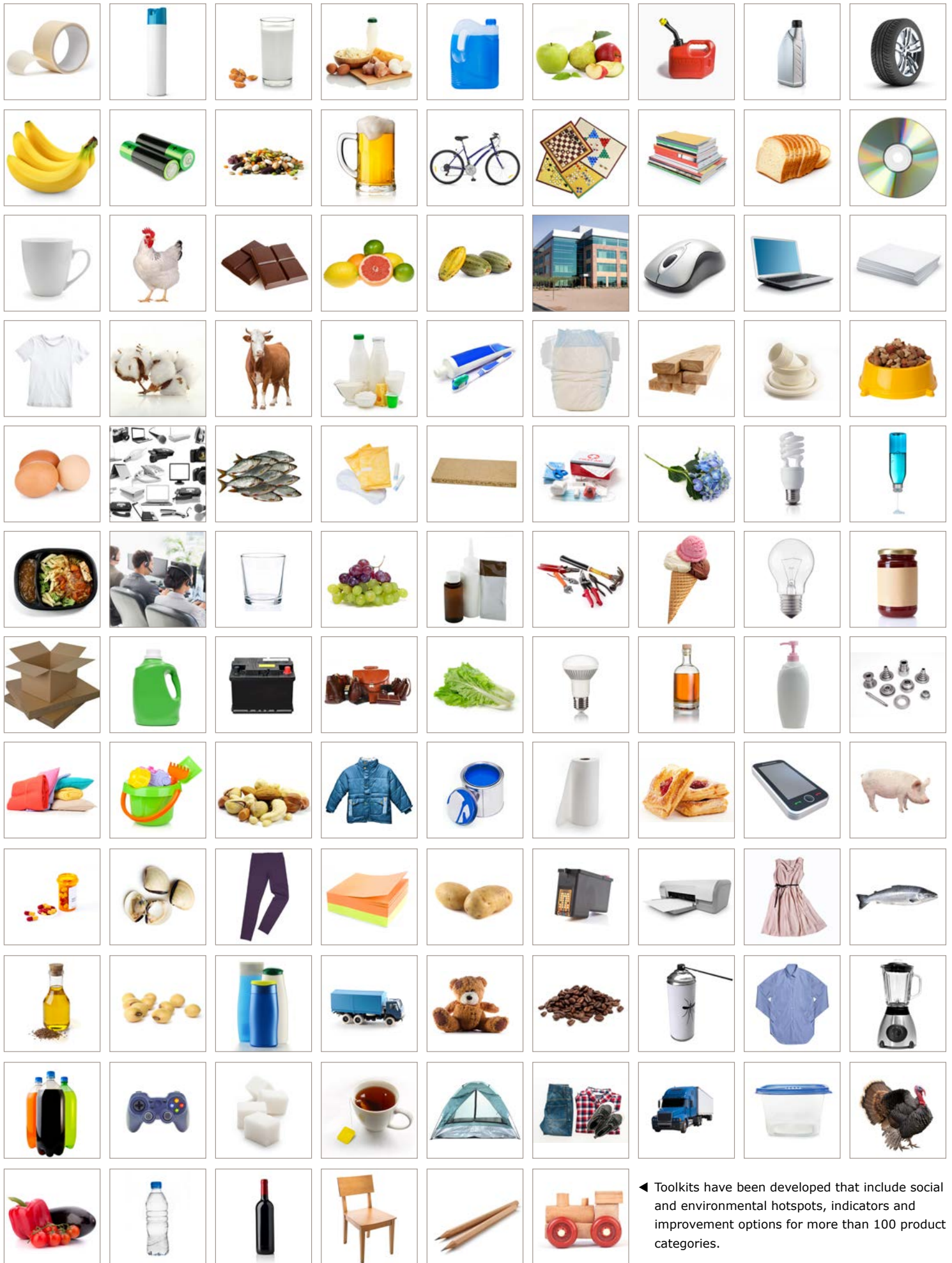
The participating companies have taken a large number of (technical) sustainability measures in the short term, a portion of which are directly the result of this project. These measures range from very concrete, such as the use of trucks with a reduced energy consumption, the introduction of a sustainability certificate and the reduction of packaging material, to more process-based improvements such as the appointment of a sustainability coordinator and the implementation of a sustainability strategy. In addition, the sustainability of agricultural products has been put more prominently on the agenda, partly because they have more insight into the sustainability scores of the products and more insight into the wishes of customers. Internal and external alignment and coordination regarding sustainability have also been improved. These processual developments are also expected to have a positive effect on the sustainability of products in the long term.

## Financing

This project is co-financed by Topsector Agro & Food and Topsector Tuinbouw & Uitgangsmaterialen. The private funders are Alliantie Verduurzaming Voedsel (a collaboration of sector organisations from the Dutch food chains LTO, FNLI, KHN, Veneca, CBL and Nevedi), Superunie, Aldi Nederland, Sligro Food Group, Groenten Fruit Huis, Flora Holland, Benefits of Nature, Albron, Elanco, PRÉ Consultants, Unilever and Grodan.

Insight  
leads to  
attention  
and  
action







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## What is The Sustainability Consortium?

The Sustainability Consortium is a worldwide non-profit collaboration among more than 100 firms, NGOs, governmental agencies and universities, including multinationals such as Walmart, Bayer, Unilever, Pepsico, Marks & Spencer and BASF. The coordination is managed by three universities: Arizona State University, University of Arkansas and Wageningen University & Research, with Wageningen Economic Research coordinating the European activities of TSC. Together with the members, TSC prepared guidelines for assessing and improving the sustainability of the products. The consortium links sustainability information directly to the demand from business buyers via the TSC measurement and reporting system. In order to be able to measure the sustainability of the consumer products, toolkits have been developed, which include social and environmental hotspots, indicators and improvement options for more than 100 product categories.\*



The consortium translates the complexity of sustainability into simple tools for customers and their suppliers. The system is scientifically substantiated and assessed by stakeholders for practical feasibility. With hotspots, performance indicators and improvement options for different types of products, supply chain members gain insight into the sustainability of their products. They also see which steps they can take together with suppliers and buyers in order to become more efficient and effective. In this way, supply chain members can compete with each other in a 'survival of the most sustainable' the same way they are currently competing in terms of quality and price.

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## Smart Development

The first versions of the toolkits for various product groups were made public in 2013 and 2014. Since 2016 we have had toolkits for all product categories. These are bulky background documents of 30 to 40 pages, with extensive literature references. We think it is important to be transparent about the choices made when developing the toolkits. Through the specifically developed web-based software, however, users see only the questions and, where necessary, an explanation, so that they can get started quickly and efficiently.

Existing sustainability initiatives are used as much as possible as a foundation so that no duplication of effort is made. In total, reference is made to 430 other initiatives. There are now 2,500 companies in the databases, with a combined turnover of 200 billion euros. For comparison: the total retail turnover in the Netherlands is 40 billion euros annually – it is therefore about five times this turnover. This indicates a vast amount of comparison material.

\* To make it manageable, we have chosen to work with product categories. This makes things clear, relatively simple and less detailed. A score always applies to a product category and is not broken down for all variants of products within the category. That would make implementation by retailers impossible because they would soon have to deal with 40,000 different products. A maximum of 15 questions have been formulated for each product category that relate to the hotspots.

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The mission of Wageningen University & Research is 'To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life'. Within Wageningen University & Research (WUR), Wageningen University and specialised research institutes of the Wageningen Research Foundation are joining forces to contribute to the solution of important questions in the field of healthy food and living environment. With around 30 branches, 5,000 employees and 10,000 students, Wageningen University & Research is one of the leading knowledge institutions in its field worldwide. The integral approach to the issues and the cooperation between different disciplines form the heart of the unique Wageningen approach.