



Open-Bio

Opening bio-based markets via standards, labelling and procurement

Work package 7
Labelling

Deliverable N° 7.5:

EU bio-based label description and strategy

Public summary

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1 Public summary

Work Package 7 of Open-Bio deals with the question, whether it is possible to create a combined eco- and bio-based label, and if yes, how. The objective was to assess the suitability of ecolabel criteria for bio-based products, or in other words, to find out whether the existing criteria of ecolabels can be applied to bio-based products, whether there are conflicts of harmonization and whether additional criteria can or have to be added in order to adequately label bio-based products. The task concluded that yes, indeed, it was possible to design the criteria of a multi-issue ecolabel in a way that they give credit to the advantages of bio-based products and provide them in an advantage (see D7.3). It was decided not to design a completely new label, but to suggest changes to the existing EU Ecolabel.

Consequently, a selected a group of bio-based products for further analysis was studied and a concept presented for integrating or adding a “bio-based” criterion to the EU Ecolabel for these selected product groups (see Deliverable D7.2 and D7.3). During the analysis of the different product groups, several issues also arose that pertained to all or at least several of the evaluated product groups. They can be summarised as the general topics that frame the question whether an ecolabel can be expanded to cover also bio-based products and which should be clear to the community of policy makers, label experts and bio-based producers. These issues are presented in Deliverable D7.4.

The objective of this report is to describe a strategy for implementation of the combined eco- and bio-based label. Due to the decision at the beginning of the project to only work on an existing label which is already implemented, the focus of this report is not on the implementation of the label in general, but on how the newly developed criteria ideas can be taken forward after the end of the project. Several aspects play a role which are further elaborated on in this document, such as:

- Acceptance factors
 - Evidence of environmental advantages of bio-based products
 - Additional costs for producers
- Implementation strategy
 - Who is in charge?
 - Who is interested?
 - Further research needs and next steps

Main acceptance factors are proven environmental advantages of bio-based products as well as a level playing field for producers of bio-based products compared to conventional products for a label.

In discussions with the label authorities of the EU Ecolabelling Board (EUEB) during a meeting in June 2016 and subsequent encounters in project workshops, it was repeatedly made clear by the authorities that LCA evidence will be required if acceptance of bio-based products shall be enhanced in the framework of the EU Ecolabel. This is due to the fact that the

EU Ecolabel Directive as legal basis of the scheme requires LCA evidence. The lack of peer reviewed LCAs in this field therefore constitutes a barrier to the uptake of the recommended criteria (see Open-Bio Deliverable D7.3). More research should be undertaken to provide more knowledge and missing LCA evidence.

One especially interesting approach in this discussion is also the identification of bio-based products in product groups which inherently end up in the environment at their end of life (e.g. fishing gear) or for which collecting, separation, recycling or incineration is not feasible for one or several reasons (e.g. agricultural mulch films, catering equipment, etc.). For these groups, the property of being in-situ biodegradable or compostable can constitute significant advantages and should be promoted through an ecolabel. Deliverable D7.3 shows some recommendations for mulch films and disposables for food.

Regarding the level playing field between producers of bio-based products vs. conventional products it was discussed with several stakeholders that the obligatory sustainability certification of some bio-based feedstocks compared to the indiscriminate use of fossil feedstocks is an unfair burden to the bio-based products since it makes obtaining the label more expensive.

Whether the research results will be used further and taken forward was found to be mostly dependent on the interest by the involved stakeholders. Solid LCA evidence is required that bio-based solutions are advantageous in terms of environmental impact in order for them to be promoted in the frame of the EU Ecolabel scheme. **More research effort should be dedicated to fill the knowledge gaps on LCA and biodegradability. Strong commitment is needed from the industry if these initiatives were to be successful, as well as from policy makers at the governing bodies.** As was shown with the palm oil example, the requirement of the additional burden of providing sustainability certification can have the adverse effect of creating a barrier-to-entry that is too high to cross for the industry. It is important for policy-makers to at least be aware of this, and preferably for them to take actions to either: (1) lower this barrier, or (2) support the industry to make it easier to cross this barrier, or (3) create a barrier at the same level for traditional (fossil) products. Different stakeholders clearly have different ideas on what would be the best way to organize this, so it would be useful to take these ideas on board in the creation of new legislation and support schemes that are related to the bio-based (or circular) economy.

Some of the recommendations for the labelling are closely related to recommendations on legislation as a whole. In order to promote eco-friendly bio-based innovation, it is necessary to reduce regulatory and administrative burdens, simplify policy and level the playing field between sectors. This pertains to current agricultural, energy and waste policies which need to be re-designed based on the results of accurate regulatory analysis in order to make the transition to a vibrant bioeconomy.

More information about the Open-Bio project can be found at www.open-bio.eu