

Promoting sustainable consumer behaviour with sustainable food labelling

Informational Governance



WAGENINGEN UR
For quality of life



This project explores Informational Governance in the domain of private and public sustainable food standards. The project focuses on the regulation and effectiveness of sustainability labelling from the perspective of influencing consumer behaviour into consuming sustainable.

Project

Consumer consumption choices may have adverse environmental, social, and health impacts. Government policies have the potential to promote sustainable food consumption. Traditional regulation, i.e. command-and-control techniques, have been criticized as being a too narrow and incomplete policy framework to accomplish sustainable development goals. Influencing consumers to consume sustainable food products is an alternative to traditional regulation. Sustainability food labels, being public or private food standards, are one way of promoting consumers to consume sustainable food products. It is not clear, however, how far companies, governments, and NGOs can go in creating fair and effective sustainable food labelling.

Highlights project

- An overview of types of regulations for sustainability labels in use
- Consumer comprehension, appreciation and trust in sustainability labels
- Sustainability label regulation confronted with competition law, contract law, and international trade regulation
- Possibilities for future sustainability labelling requirements based on legal and consumer demands



Background

The last two decades an emergence of concern for sustainability of (the production of) food products have emerged. At the same time, development of sustainability labels emerged to inform consumers about whether a food product is sustainable. Without adequate information consumers cannot distinguish between sustainable and non-sustainable food products. Consumers therefore need to trust, know, and understand sustainability labels in order for sustainability labels to influence consumer consumption behaviour. These sustainability labels however also gives rise to regulatory challenges, especially since sustainability labels can be governed by three major actors: states, NGOs and/or firms (Abbott and Snidal 2009). This project aims to give suggestion for effective regulatory approaches for the emerging field of sustainability labels based on current practice and insights from consumer behaviour.

Content

This project will give an overview of different sustainability labels and will classify the sustainability labels according to being government regulation, co-regulation, or self-regulation, and whether the sustainability labels are national or transnational. Based on the most relevant and controversial standards consumer opinions on these sustainability labels and the institutional embedding of these sustainability labels will be examined, where the impact of institutional trust and the comprehension and appreciation of these sustainability labels will be related. These sustainability labels will then be analysed from



Figure 1. The Governance Triangle. (Source: Abbott and Snidal 2009)

the perspective of national and international law, e.g. contract law, competition law and WTO law. Finally a functional assessment will be made of the most effective way of regulating sustainability labels taking account of consumer perceptions of the labels and legal possibilities to regulate those.



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