

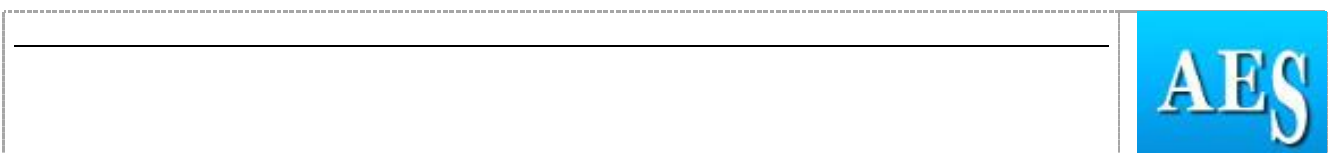
## Extended Abstract

<b>Paper/Poster Title</b>	<p>Facilitating pro-environmental preferences in a context of coexisting, overlapping and contradicting environment-related information</p> <p><i>Evidence from a discrete choice experiment on vegetable consumption in Belgium</i></p>
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**Abstract prepared for presentation at the 96<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Agricultural Economics Society, K U Leuven, Belgium**

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>200 words max</b>
<p>In light of a European harmonized Front-of-Package (FOP) labelling system, an integrated “Eco-score” should overcome the multitude of sustainability labels on food. However, several remaining elements, like organic or local claims, are as well considered pro-environmental by consumers. Moreover, there is a growing demand for alternative approaches, on top of awareness-increasing approaches, to strengthen consumers’ pro-environmental preferences. This study evaluated Belgian consumers’ (N = 300) preferences for vegetable bundles through a discrete choice experiment (DCE) with attributes on seasonality, localness, organic label, Eco-score and a monthly price. A 2 x 2 between-subjects manipulation of (non-)sustainable self-views evoked with (un)certainty, was carried out prior to the experiment. Overall, preferences for Eco-scores were found equally important as for price and localness, while organic was found least important. In addition, in situations of conflicting Eco-scores and origins (i.e. local with poor Eco-scores and vice versa), more importance was attached to the most beneficial attribute. For imported vegetables, the importance of good Eco-scores increased. With poor Eco-scores, local preferences strengthened. Furthermore, strong aversions towards longer term commitments to seasonal vegetable consumption were observed. Lastly, evoking an uncertain sustainable self-view stimulated preferences for seasonal vegetables and good Eco-Scores at the expense of organic preferences. Evoking a non-sustainable self-view strengthened seasonal and organic preferences at the expense of preferences for good Eco-Scores. The challenges and opportunities revealed by these insights should guide future policymaking for a more effective labelling system.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b>	FOP-labelling – consumer communication – food preferences - persuasion – sustainability
<b>JEL Code</b>	<b>D91</b> Role and Effects of Psychological, Emotional, Social, and Cognitive Factors on Decision Making
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>100 – 250 words</b>
<p>Although consumers’ willingness to account for the environmental impact of their food has increased throughout recent years, this is still only moderately reflected in food choices. Even when willing to prioritize environmental considerations in food choices, consumers are faced with a confusing multitude of environmental labels and</p>	



claims. In light of a European harmonized Front-of-Package (FOP) labelling system, an integrated “Eco-score” should overcome the multitude of sustainability labels. However, several remaining elements, like organic or local claims, are as well considered pro-environmental by consumers. Moreover, there is a growing demand for alternative approaches, on top of awareness-increasing approaches, to strengthen consumers’ pro-environmental preferences. The aim of this study was twofold. On the one hand, the aim was to evaluate consumers’ preferences for coexisting environment-related attributes of vegetable supplies. More precisely, we aimed to study preferences for (and trade-offs between) seasonality, localness, organic label and an aggregated Eco-Score. On the other hand, the aim was to test how altered activations of different sustainable self-views would affect preferences for existing and emerging environment-related attributes.

**Methodology**

100 – 250 words

This study evaluated Belgian consumers’ (N = 300) preferences for vegetable bundles through an online discrete choice experiment (DCE) with attributes on seasonality, localness, organic label, Eco-score and a monthly price. Respondents were asked to *“think about the store where you usually buy vegetables. Imagine the management is planning to revise their vegetable supply for at least one year, but they would like to hear your opinion first.”*. Subsequently, repeated choices between two hypothetical vegetables baskets for the next year were made, with the possibility to opt-out. This long-term commitment was emphasised to account for the persistence of preferences. A Bayesian D-optimal design with prior estimates was used, including 30 choice cards, each with two alternative vegetable bundles and an opt-out option. These 30 choice cards were split into 3 blocks of 10 cards. Orthogonal to this blocking factor, a 2x2 between-subject manipulation with a control condition was added. The aim was to (1) evoke a sustainable vs. unsustainable self-view which (2) was held with confidence vs. doubt. To manipulate these two dimensions, a thought-direction manipulation and ease-of-retrieval procedure were applied respectively. The statistical analysis included the estimation of random parameter logit models, calculation of attribute importance and eventually calculations of the shares of positive/negative preferences per treatment.

**Results**

100 – 250 words

Overall, preferences for Eco-scores were found equally important as for price and localness, while organic was found least important. In addition, in situations of conflicting Eco-scores and origins (i.e. local with poor Eco-scores and vice versa), more importance was attached to the most beneficial attribute. For imported vegetables, the importance of good Eco-scores increased. With poor Eco-scores, local preferences strengthened. Furthermore, strong aversions towards longer term commitments to seasonal vegetable consumption were observed. Lastly, evoking an uncertain sustainable self-view stimulated preferences for seasonal vegetables and good Eco-Scores at the expense of organic preferences. Evoking a non-sustainable self-view strengthened seasonal and organic preferences at the expense of preferences for good Eco-Scores.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

100 – 250 words



This study provides relevant insights in the functioning and interplay of consumers' preferences for various environment-related attributes of vegetable bundles and how to influence those by activating different self-views. The results demonstrate a large market opportunity for Eco-Score to induce a demand driven transition towards more environmentally friendly food choices. Good Eco-Scores are considered 3 times more important than organic labels. Furthermore, consumers tend to trade-off a good/bad Eco-Score with imported/local products in order to keep their utility maximized, demonstrating the need to make consumers more knowledgeable on the difference between local and environmentally friendly. Consumers strongly disliked vegetable bundles consisting solely of seasonal vegetables on the long run, indicating that if the supply of seasonal vegetables would be increased, some of these products might remain at the shelves. Finally, we have identified several ways to influence preferences by activating both sustainable and sustainable self-views. They provide an answer to different political discourses. If one wants consumers to rely more on PEF based Eco-Scores (and less on organic certificates), these results provide a way to steer demand accordingly. However, if one wants consumers to prefer organic food products even more, this study also provides a way to steer demand accordingly.