FOUNDATION EARTH

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS THROUGH ECOLABELLING

An overview of our mission, vision and values

"Together we stand close to delivering real change that will build a more sustainable food and drink industry and help tackle the climate crisis"
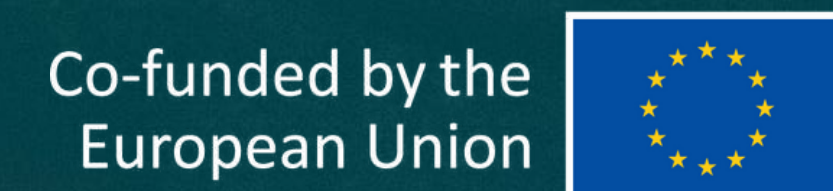
Cliona Howie
Foundation Earth

FOREWORD

Cliona Howie
CEO, Foundation Earth

What an exciting year it has been for Foundation Earth, and more generally for the world of food ecolabelling. From the start, we've been inundated with requests from businesses wanting to be part of our mission, and to join us on our journey to build a harmonised, credible and impactful approach to ecolabelling in the food sector. Over the last year we have dedicated ourselves to developing a systemic solution to better measure and communicate the environmental impact of the food and drink we produce and consume.

And now, Foundation Earth has scored over 350 products from countries around the world, built partnerships with leading experts in this area and contributed to new thought leadership by testing and capturing learnings across the value chain. Over the next year we will do so much more, but one thing is for sure: we could not achieve what we have without our committed partners. We can all be proud of the advancements we have made, and look forward to learning and doing more in the year to come.

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Supported by:

eit Food

Co-funded by the European Union

Foundation Earth is an independent, non-profit organisation issuing front-of-pack environmental scores on food products. We are registered in Spain and the UK, with staff across Europe.

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ECOLABELS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE

Our global food system is responsible for one third of greenhouse gas emissions, 70% of freshwater consumption, over 80% biodiversity loss and 90% global deforestation. With population growing across the globe, food demand is expected to increase by more than 70% in the next 30 years, putting immense pressure on our planet's resources.
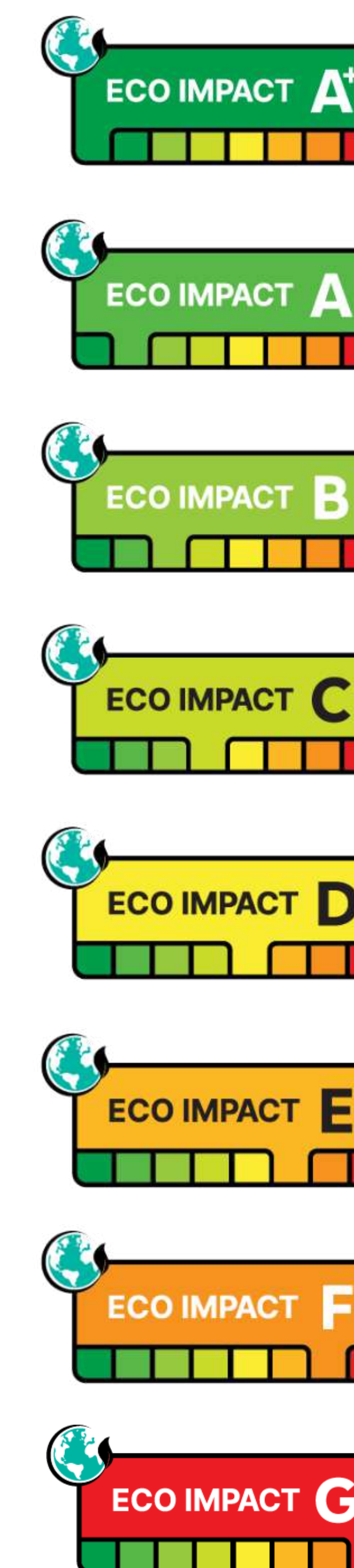
At the same time, our food systems are very complex. If we want to truly change the way we produce and consume food, we need to take a systemic approach and involve all actors from business to academia, tech players, policy makers and citizens.

Together, we can build a more sustainable food industry.

WHY ECOLABELS?

Ecolabels placed on products aim to show consumers just how much an item costs the environment in an easy, accessible way. This trend isn't new: 84% of consumers believe it's important for each person to contribute to sustainability, and many companies are starting to respond to the demand for transparency - from fashion, to beauty, electronics and of course food.

At present there are close to 500 environmental labels out there: a lot of them focus on carbon footprint (CO_2 emissions), some will tell you if a product is organic or not, and others try to look at a broader range of indicators that impact the planet such as water use, water pollution and biodiversity. Some even encompass other ethical indicators such as working conditions or animal welfare. The scopes are large and diverse, there is no "one size fits all", and we don't have a consistent, harmonised approach to evaluating the environmental footprint of products.

ECO IMPACT A⁺
ECO IMPACT A
ECO IMPACT B
ECO IMPACT C
ECO IMPACT D
ECO IMPACT E
ECO IMPACT F
ECO IMPACT G

Foundation Earth has developed a single robust, data-driven environmental scoring system for food products, helping businesses innovate in a more sustainable way and transforming food systems for the better. The result is a front-of-pack ecolabel from A+ to G that provides consumers with the clear and credible information they need to make more sustainable buying choices.

13 STRATEGIC PARTNERS

From scientists to tech players and academics, we are bringing together the experts needed to build a robust, scalable and harmonised label.

36 BUSINESSES ENGAGED

We are working with businesses large and small to look into their eco impact and identify ways for improvement along the value chain.

350+ PRODUCTS SCORED

The more we score, the more we can inform consumers and compare products. One day we hope ecolabelling will be the new normal.

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A HARMONISED METHOD FOR THE EU

To make a fair comparison between the environmental impact of food products, consistent footprinting calculations are necessary. Over the last year Foundation Earth has been running pilots with food industry partners to test different ecolabelling methods, identifying what works and where we might fall short.

Ultimately, we know that we need to land on a single system to avoid confusion with citizens and businesses alike. With many labels out there it becomes hard to know who to trust, which one is the most accurate, or even who is behind them. As an independant, non-profit organisation, we believe driving harmonisation is the best way to achieve the impact we all aim for.

A SINGLE SYSTEM AND METHOD

Foundation Earth's main mission is to achieve consensus around a harmonised Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology that builds on the European Union's Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) framework.

A lot of choices must be made when setting up an LCA model: environmental indicators prioritisation, use of primary and background data, approach for data gaps, data quality, modelling of packaging materials with recycled content, and returnable packaging – to name a few.

Although PEF already gives some guidance on several LCA modelling issues, category rules (PEFCR) have not been developed for all products categories. On top of that, the methodology used for the different PEFCRs can sometimes be conflicting, which leads to an unfair comparison of products.

THE 16 PEF INDICATORS

1 Climate change
2 Ozone depletion
3 Human toxicity (cancer)
4 Human toxicity (non-cancer)
5 Particulate matter
6 Ionising radiation
7 Photochemical ozone formation
8 Acidification
9 Eutrophication (terrestrial)
10 Eutrophication (freshwater)
11 Ecotoxicity (freshwater)
12 Eutrophication (marine)
13 Land use
14 Water use
15 Resource use (minerals, metals)
16 Resource use (fossils)

WORKING WITH EIT FOOD TO DRIVE HARMONISATION

Building a single system for the EU requires a lot of collaboration, testing and of course: reaching agreements. That's why, with the support of EIT Food, we have built stakeholder groups to prompt active discussions and debates around food ecolabelling, driving consensus on how to develop a harmonised method that all can get on board with. And what better way to do that than with Europe's leading food innovation initiative?

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EMPOWERING CONSUMER CHOICE

A consumer generally takes a few seconds to make a purchasing decision – especially consumables that are part of our everyday shop. At the same time, 49% of consumers now consider sustainability when buying food. We know that communicating environmental impact data can be complex, making it hard to choose products sustainably: that's why we aim to make our ecolabel as accessible as possible, all the while providing transparent data.

To make our scores within reach of the average consumer, we are undertaking constant research on consumer behaviour to test reactions to our label, collect and integrate feedback to make it easier for everyone to understand our scoring system clearly and accurately.

INFORMATION IS POWER

Ecolabels are a tool to inform consumers, not put the responsibility on them. But their choices have a ripple effect that can then trigger the systemic change needed to transform the food industry.

There is a lot of confusing information out there when it comes to the footprint of food products, and people who want to take action often find it hard to do so. How do you accurately assess the environmental impact of a product? Where is the data coming from and how robust is it? Who is driving the score? A third-party, independent verification process is essential to provide credible score to consumers, giving them the confidence that the information is trustworthy.

Our ECO IMPACT scores don't end with labels.

With every label we deliver there is a link back to our website, showing consumers the environmental impacts of a product at every stage and across different indicators.
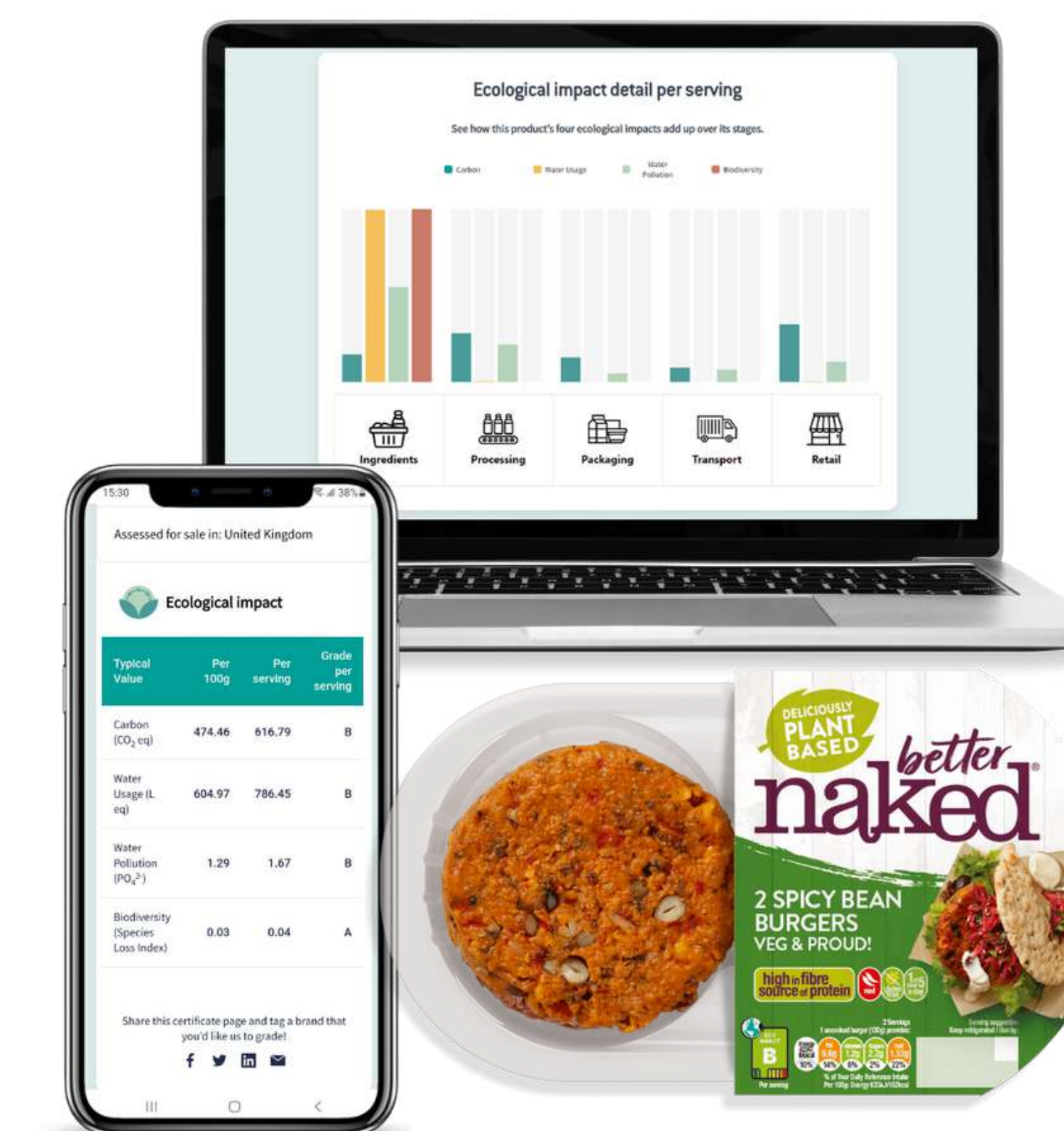
COMMUNICATING IMPACT TO CONSUMERS WITH ABEL & COLE

Abel & Cole, an organic e-commerce store based in the UK, is showing its commitment to environmental impact transpanrency by scoring over 80 food products - the first business to label such high volumes with Foundation Earth. Our ECO IMPACT labels are now displayed on their online shop, providing their consumers with tangible data behind their sustainability initiatives.

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TRANSFORMING ENTIRE VALUE CHAINS

Brands are starting to place more and more emphasis on their sustainability efforts – but what does this mean for the other actors of the supply chain? The label is sitting on the front-of-pack, but how does that help the farmer, processor or other actors further down the value chain to demonstrate their sustainability efforts?

For now, it doesn't really. All nodes of the chain have contributed to that final score (either negatively or positively), so why do they miss out on the acknowledgement? At Foundation Earth we believe there is a real gap here, because to transform entire food systems we need to recognise those already taking sustainability on board and incentivise others to join the movement. Because every effort counts.

MORE THAN A B2C TOOL

Ecolabels provide the intelligence needed to drive change.

The environmental impact of a food product takes place over the whole course of its life cycle: from farming the ingredients all the way down to how we discard the packaging. That means that the information we collect is not only useful to the brand itself, but to all those contributing to building that final food product.

We are launching new pilots that aim to deliver a standardised, scalable product footprinting system not only for brands but also producers and retailers, that will connect entire value chains and give recognition where it is due. This will in turn unlock commercial value for businesses and support all actors in achieving their net-zero goals.

THE BENEFITS FOR BUSINESSES:

Increased environmental performance with tangible results

Potential point of difference and a competitive advantage

Powerful opportunity to enter new markets

Makes commercial sense, can lower operational costs

Ecological impact detail

See how this product's four ecological impacts add up over its stages.

Carbon · Water Usage · Water Pollution · Biodiversity

Ingredients · Processing · Packaging · Transport · Retail

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USING TECHNOLOGY TO OUR ADVANTAGE

One of our founding principles is that we need accurate, high-quality data to truly assess the environmental footprint of a product. For now, most ecolabelling methods use industry average data points, which don't always reflect the impact of an individual product.

The scale of footprinting the food industry is a huge challenge, and we need a model that is both socially democratic and commercially accessible. We are working with tech partners to develop tools that can capture, analyse and evaluate high-quality data in an efficient, cost-effective and resource-light way, increasing the uptake of food ecolabelling and helping us grow globally under a single, harmonised approach.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DATA

We cannot manage what we don't measure: high-quality data is the bedrock of achieving sustainable food systems.

Calculating aggregated impacts based on secondary data is easier, quicker and cheaper to obtain, but without accurate information on a product-by-product basis, environmental impacts cannot be meaningfully managed and the climate crisis will exacerbate. And without an accurate per-product understanding of where environmental impacts are most prevalent in a supply chain, food producers are not incentivised to grow, manufacture, transport or sell their products more sustainably.

Here's the thing: ecolabels don't only help consumers choose a product – when the assessments are done accurately and in-depth, using methods such as LCAs for example, they can also help food producers reduce the environmental impacts of their production and produce in a better way. They act as a key source of information to help industry players pinpoint where their highest impacts are, and what can be done to improve them. That's when ecolabels also become a powerful data-driven tool to build more sustainable food systems.

TESTING AUTOMATION FOR LCA WITH FUJISTU AND SUSTAINED

At present, environmental impact assessments are generally done manually – which takes a lot of time, requires human resources and comes with a high cost. This means that very few products are accurately assessed. We are working with tech players to explore the world of automation - from data mapping to automated LCA - allowing ecolabels to be delivered at scale and supporting our mission to make food ecolabelling the new normal.

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OUR COMMITMENT TO RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

We know that to provide the best scoring system means growing with the science and consistently integrating new learnings. That's why we are engaged in Research & Development activities that draw the best elements of different methodologies to produce a scientifically robust and widely accepted method that accounts for the true environmental impact of food production.

Our R&D initiatives are undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders including our LCA providers, engaged businesses and other strategic partners, to ensure we adopt a holistic approach to the ecolabelling of food and drinks products. We are also engaging with other labelling schemes and governments to align methodologies, contributing to our mission for a harmonised system in the EU.

KEEP ON LEARNING

Design, test, learn, repeat.

Hundreds of research studies are being carried out every year on the environmental impact of food, and practioners are constantly innovating to provide solutions that meet some of the biggest challenges we face. What we understood about measuring impacts like biodiversity or water pollution just a year ago has already evolved.

That means that a good and credible ecolabel must develop over time, taking into account intelligence from the diverse range of studies undertaken on the matter. For that reason we have build a community of actors that feed in new findings and provide us with a solid basis for future developments of our food ecolabel.

OUR ADVISORS

Our Scientific Committee ensures scientific accuracy of the systems used within Foundation Earth, providing recommendations and assisting with the development of an optimum environmental labelling system.

FOUNDATION EARTH BOARD

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

INDUSTRY ADVISORY GROUP
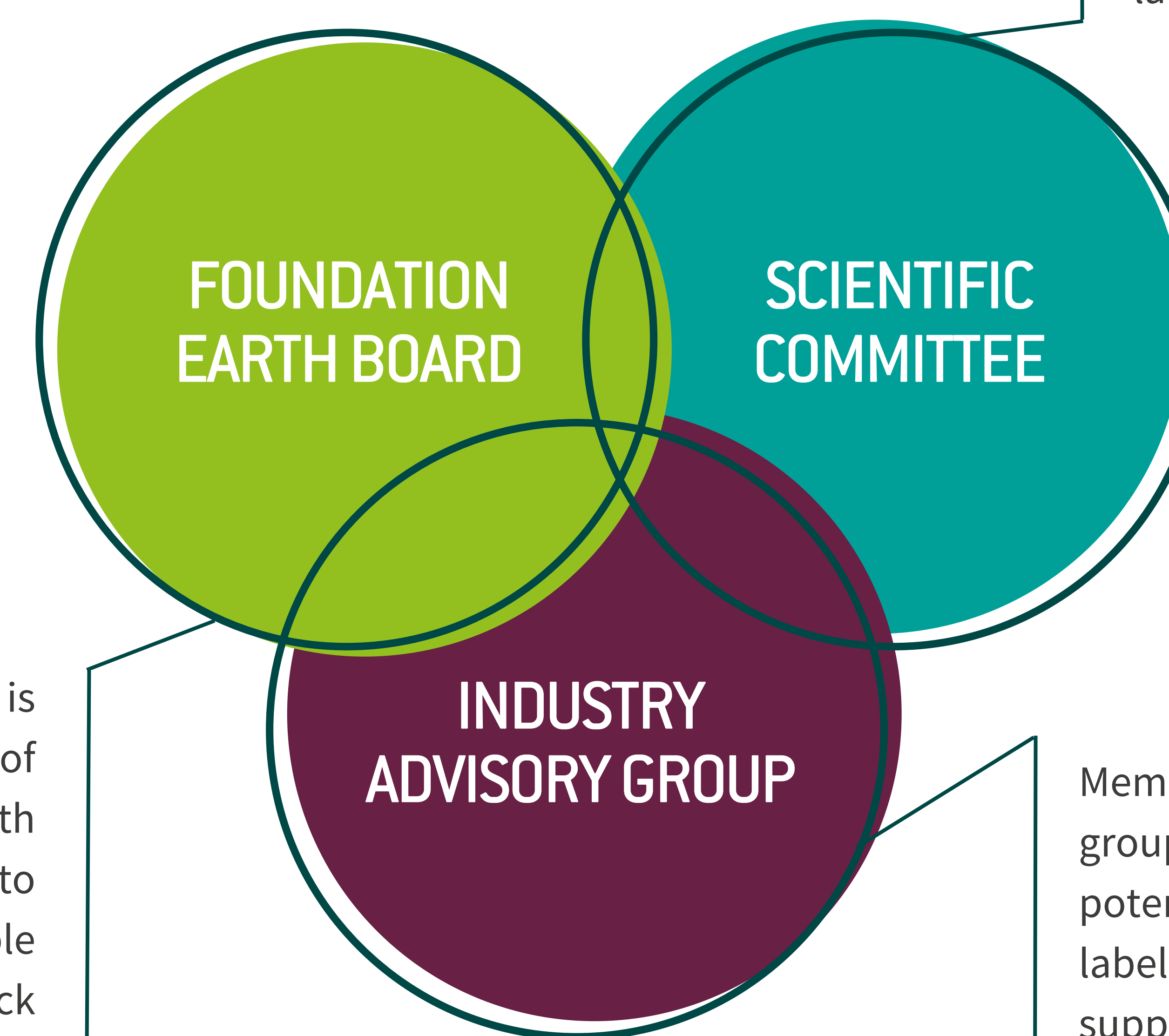
Foundation Earth is managed by a Board of Directors, entrusted with ensuring we continue to provide clear, credible front-of-pack environmental scores.

Members of the Industry Advisory group agree to explore the potential for environmental labelling on food products and support Foundation Earth's ambition to help build a more sustainable food industry.

"The sustainability challenge is not going away. So there is no better time than to start now."

Declan Ferguson
Finnebrogue Artisan

OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

SCIENTIFIC PARTNERS

Blonk · DIL · DSM · Foodsteps · mondra

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST · WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH · KU LEUVEN · eufic food facts for healthy choices

BUSINESS PARTNERS

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CRANSWICK plc Great British Taste · DANONE · EROSKI · Fane Valley Growing Better Together · Artisan Finnebrogue · Greencore

JACK & BRY · Jimmy's · LIDL · M&S EST. 1884 · MASH DIRECT Cooked fresh on our Farm · MEATLESS FARM

MIGHTY · Morrisons Since 1899 · NATCO · Mondelēz International SNACKING MADE RIGHT · Nestlē · Nomad Foods

Ombar · PEPSICO · Unilever · Rankin selection · Sainsbury's · Starbucks · TESCO

The GOOD LITTLE COMPANY · Tyson · VeeTee · VFC · Waitrose · White's TIME-HONOURED OATS SINCE 1841

OTHER STRATEGIC PARTNERS

eit Food EIT Food is supported by the EIT a body of the European Union · FUJITSU · SUSTAINED · UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

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