M-Check: 100% transparent

Sustainable shopping made easy

How sustainable is a product really? The answer isn't always completely straightforward. While much is already great, nobody talks about the rest. We thought that things could be done better. We have therefore taken M-Check to the next level. Step by step, we are introducing a sustainability scale for all our 250 own brands and labels. This assesses the various aspects of sustainability, such as animal welfare and the climate, assigning a star rating on a five-point scale. Contradictions between individual aspects are also shown clearly. That makes M-Check 100% transparent.

Overview of M-Check

Simply click on the tiles to find out how the evaluation is undertaken.

Animal welfare

What is assessed and how?

Our independent partner, the Berne University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), assesses ten different criteria. These are predefined and tailored to the individual animal species. Between one and five points can be awarded in each category. A final value is then calculated on the basis of these ten values. This is rounded mathematically to give a rating of one to five stars.

The following criteria are evaluated:

1. Free movement: Do the animals have regular opportunities to move about and can they go out to pasture whenever possible?
2. Housing: Do the pens meet the animals’ needs?
3. Food and water: Are there enough feeding places for the animals and is the fodder and water of good quality?
4. Controls: At what intervals are checks carried out (annually, every two years, etc.) and are the controlling bodies certified as well as independent?
5. Air quality, surroundings, etc.: Are pens sufficiently ventilated? Are there possibilities for animals to cool down? And what are the lighting conditions like?
6. Drugs: Are the requirements on the use of drugs complied with? And are antibiotics used only on a limited basis?
7. Animal integrity: Do the animals receive regular hoof care and dehorning? Are weaning rings used? Are beaks trimmed and tails docked?
8. Flow of goods: Does the labelling guarantee end-to-end traceability?

9. Husbandry: Were the animals reared in the presence of their mother? Are the animals kept in groups and do they also enjoy soft flooring with ample bedding?

10. Transportation: Are the Animal Welfare Ordinance, SAP guidelines, Bio Suisse guidelines and EU animal transportation regulation complied with?

The M-Check evaluation of animal welfare is performed on the basis of available documents such as national animal welfare requirements and the guidelines of label programmes. If no such documentation exists, one point is awarded.

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**Climate compatibility**

What is assessed and how?

Together with the life-cycle-assessment company treeze and the consulting firm Intep, we have calculated the carbon footprints of our products. This calculation takes account of the product's entire life cycle, from cultivation and the use of water and fertilisers to the feed provided to the animals, transportation and product packaging.

However, it is not possible to assess each product individually. Products were therefore divided into groups. For example, an average rating for apples was used for all apples in our product range.

Stars are awarded depending on CO$_2$ emissions:

*****
0-0.9kg CO$_2$eq/kg: 5% of products with the lowest emissions factor. If you primarily purchase products in this category, you can reduce your carbon footprint greatly.

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1-1.9kg CO$_2$eq/kg: 5% of products with the second lowest emissions factor. If you primarily purchase products in this category, you can reduce your carbon footprint considerably.

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2-4.7kg CO$_2$eq/kg: 15% of products with the third-lowest emissions factor. This is still in the best quarter of the product range.

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4.8-9.9kg CO$_2$eq/kg: These products are in the better half of the product range with respect to emissions.

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>10kg CO$_2$eq/kg: These are the 50% of products with the highest emissions factor. If you consume these products, do so consciously and only in small amounts.
General questions and answers on M-Check

How many products carry the improved M-Check?
Our goal is for M-Check to be included on all Migros own brands and labels. This currently constitutes about 250 brands and labels and accounts for 80% of the product range. To avoid destroying any packaging, we are starting with about 100 products and will proceed step-by-step.

Why is Migros only introducing M-Check for its own brands?
Own-brand products make up about 80% of our product range. We can therefore conduct sustainability evaluations such as M-Check across all product groups. However, in the interests of complete transparency, we would prefer it if other manufacturers also conducted such product rating regarding sustainability.

Who evaluates the products?
Every aspect of sustainability was determined together with an external partner. The evaluation system and its criteria are therefore based on basic scientific principles. The climate dimension was evaluated by the life-cycle-assessment firm treeze. The evaluation was also reviewed by the myclimate foundation. With regard to animal welfare, the Berne University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL) analysed all the animal species and husbandry systems according to different comprehensive criteria and then undertook the classification.

How is a star rating assigned?
Products are assigned between one and five stars based on the transparent evaluation principles of our partners.

Climate
For climate, stars are awarded as follows:
- Five stars: 5% of the product range (0-0.9kg CO₂ eq/kg)
- Four stars: 5% of the product range (1-1.9kg CO₂ eq/kg)
- Three stars: 15% of the product range (2-4.7kg CO₂ eq/kg)
- Two stars: 25% of the product range (4.8-9.9kg CO₂ eq/kg)
- One star: 50% of the product range (>10kg CO₂ eq/kg)
In short: everything above 10kg of CO₂ eq per kilogramme of product is assigned to the worst climate category. We have also discussed and validated this classification with our external partners treeze, myclimate and WWF.

Animal welfare
For animal welfare, ten different areas are evaluated. Between one and five points are available in each area. A final value is then calculated on the basis of these ten values. This is rounded mathematically to give a rating of one to five stars. However, the ten areas do not have an equal weighting in the evaluation. Each area is weighted according to the needs of the relevant species. For example, controls have a high weighting for all species because effective verification is crucial for enforcing the respective production guidelines. Unfortunately, due to a lack of controls, abuses in animal production in particular are discovered too late.

**What do the stars on M-Check mean?**
It's simple: the five stars are like a hotel rating. If a product receives a five-star rating, it is deemed to be excellent with regard to sustainability. However, if it is awarded just one star, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

**Why does Migros only evaluate climate aspects and animal welfare?**
In March 2021, we will start with the two areas of climate and animal welfare because our customers consider these to be the most relevant when making purchasing decisions. Further areas will be added on an ongoing basis.

**Is M-Check a new label?**
M-Check is not a label. Rather, its supplementary sustainability evaluations of products serve to ensure greater clarity when making purchasing decisions. Existing label certifications will remain in place. M-Check is a sustainability scale that classifies all our own brands and labels for customers in a simplified manner and provides complete transparency for non-certified products. Independent third-party partners such as the life-cycle assessment firm treeze for climate and the Berne University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL) for animal welfare vouch for the evaluations.

**When will the changeover take place and which products will be affected?**
The first products will be provided with the new M-Check in CW 12 2021. The packaging will be switched thereafter on an ongoing basis. Products with an existing M-Check stating the current added value will also be switched to a star rating on a rolling basis. In the medium term, all our own brands and labels will bear the new M-Check product rating.

We will start with meat-related products as well as dairy products. After this, all packaging will be adapted on an ongoing basis. We are adopting a consistent approach of not destroying any packaging.
Questions and answers on animal welfare.

What specifically is assessed with regard to animal welfare?
Ten different aspects of animal welfare are evaluated. Between one and five points are available in each area. A final value is then calculated on the basis of these ten values. This is rounded mathematically to give a rating of one to five stars.

1. Free movement: Do the animals have regular opportunities to move about and can they go out to pasture whenever possible?
2. Housing: Do the pens meet the animals' needs?
3. Food and water: Are there enough feeding places for the animals and is the fodder and water of good quality?
4. Controls: At what intervals are checks carried out (annually, every two years, etc.) and are the controlling bodies certified as well as independent?
5. Air quality, surroundings, etc.: Are pens sufficiently ventilated? Are there possibilities for animals to cool down? And what are the lighting conditions like?
6. Drugs: Are the requirements on the use of drugs complied with? And are antibiotics used only on a limited basis?
7. Animal integrity: Do the animals receive regular hoof care and dehorning? Are weaning rings used? Are beaks trimmed and tails docked?
8. Flow of goods: Does the labelling guarantee end-to-end traceability?
9. Husbandry: Were the animals reared in the presence of their mother? Are the animals kept in groups and do they also enjoy soft flooring with ample bedding?
10. Transportation: Are the Animal Welfare Ordinance, SAP guidelines, Bio Suisse guidelines and EU animal transportation regulation complied with?

The M-Check evaluation of animal welfare is performed on the basis of available documents such as national animal welfare requirements and the guidelines of label programmes. If no such documentation exists, one point is awarded.
How is slaughter incorporated into the rating?
Slaughter is not taken into account in the current M-Check for animal welfare. However, the assessment criteria are constantly being reviewed and expanded. As a consequence, slaughter could also be included in the evaluation in the future.

Do the same standards apply to foreign products?
Yes. The same standards are applied to both Swiss and foreign products. The decisive factors in terms of animal welfare are the relevant areas and criteria for each species. In Switzerland, the production process is generally well documented (via animal protection requirements, guidelines, etc.). Sound assessments can therefore be made there. Outside Switzerland, there is sometimes a lack of transparency and thus also documentation. In this case, a single star is awarded. We are working with our suppliers to ensure greater transparency regarding foreign production processes. Their products will only be re-evaluated once this transparency is available.

How does Migros evaluate products containing many animal ingredients?
All Migros-sold products containing at least 20% animal-based raw materials (by weight) or whose animal-based raw materials determine the product's character (i.e. the raw material is stated in the product name or on the packaging) are evaluated using M-Check.

For example, a sausage and cheese salad involves different meat (sausage) and dairy production systems (cheese). The raw material with the worst rating determines the final rating.
Questions and answers on the climate rating

Why is the climate comparison made across the entire product range?
Our market research has found that product-range-specific scales aren't comprehensible for customers. Three stars for milk would then mean something different to three stars on a cucumber.

A product-range-specific scale would also mean that, for example, meat products would get a five-star climate rating. We would thus be implying that meat is environmentally friendly. With M-Check, our goal is to promote sustainable consumption through transparency and point out high-emission products through the star rating.

Milk is considered to be climate-damaging: Why then does it get four stars?
This may indeed seem counter-intuitive at first glance. Switzerland's dairy industry is effectively one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector. However, people easily overlook the fact that milk mainly consists of water. The emissions per litre of milk (1.3kg CO₂ eq per kilogramme of milk) are therefore relatively low. The situation is different for dairy products such as cheese: Up to 10 litres of milk are required to make a kilogramme of cheese. The milk is "concentrated," so to speak. These products thus have a correspondingly worse climate footprint.

Why is plant milk only one star better than cow's milk?
This may indeed seem counter-intuitive at first glance. Switzerland's dairy industry is effectively one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector. However, people easily overlook the fact that milk mainly consists of water. The emissions per litre of milk (1.3kg CO₂ eq per kilogramme of milk) are therefore relatively low. The difference to plant milk (approx. 0.6kg CO₂ eq per kg of milk) is therefore not so great.

Why does beef only ever have one star?
The climate scale is not product category-specific, but applies across the entire product range. Because beef has a greater impact on climate than a cucumber, it is assigned to the worst category. In the case of beef, it is primarily the husbandry and feed that are climate-intensive, while transportation (with the exception of transportation by air) plays only a secondary role. Although there are differences between the climate footprint of meat produced abroad and that from Switzerland, both exceed 10kg CO₂ eq, as a result of which they are both given a one-star rating.

Why is Optigal chicken awarded three stars for its climate rating?
Chicken always gets a better rating than beef because cattle rearing generates far more CO₂ than poultry farming. This is unrelated to the Optigal brand. Nevertheless, we aim for resource-efficient production at Optigal. The climate-friendly design of our operations is now affecting the star rating. This enables us to differentiate our chicken from that of other producers.
The relatively good three-star rating is primarily due to the fact that Migros procures its soya - an important component of chicken feed - from northern Italy rather than South America. The certified European soya used by Optigal has a significantly better climate footprint than soya from South America.

**How exactly are the climate-related calculations undertaken?**

This calculation takes account of the product's entire life cycle, from cultivation and the use of water and fertilisers to the feed provided to the animals, transportation and product packaging. The initial classification of the climate dimension was conducted for us by the life-cycle-assessment firm treeze. This was then also validated by the myclimate foundation. In essence, all product categories were assigned emission values from internationally recognised databases. For climate-relevant areas such as meat, we went even further, creating specific life cycle assessments for individual products. This enables the value-added chain to be mapped in detail.

These values were then used to assign the product range a star rating on the five-point climate scale. 50% of Migros products receive one star for climate. Only 5% of products are awarded five stars:

- Five stars: 5% of the product range
- Four stars: 5% of the product range
- Three stars: 15% of the product range
- Two stars: 25% of the product range
- One star: 50% of the product range

In short: everything above 10kg CO$_2$eq per kilogramme of product is assigned to the worst climate category.

We have also discussed and validated this classification with our external partners treeze, myclimate and WWF.
Why do some products have two climate ratings?
For reasons of seasonality, some products are flown in. This has an enormous impact on a product's climate footprint. Because this can change from one batch to another, we show both values transparently. The products in the store show in each case whether or not the batch was flown in (with the declaration "By air" either directly on the product or on the display cabinet).

What role does transportation play in the climate rating?
Unless a product is transported by air, transportation plays a secondary role with regard to a product's climate footprint. The decisive factors are agricultural production and the use of fertilisers and pesticides, as well as the husbandry and feed employed in the case of animal-based products. These production methods are often the same abroad as they are in Switzerland, so the differences in the climate footprint are minor. If the same product is produced both in Switzerland and abroad, its climate footprint is therefore rated the same.

What role does packaging play in the climate rating?
Packaging plays a secondary role in climate footprints. The decisive factors are agricultural production and the use of fertilisers and pesticides, as well as the husbandry and feed employed in the case of animal-based products. Packaging thus makes very little difference to a product's climate footprint and therefore doesn't change its star rating either. A product in plastic packaging is assigned just as many stars as a product sold in a glass.