

Transcript

Sustainability Day - 28 October 2020

What you need to know about carbon footprints (Q & A) – Jo Hand, Giki

Lucy: So, has anybody got any questions for Jo. I know that Robin had a question. So Robin's question was, does the 9 tonnes per person average UK carbon footprint include government services and other non-household activities and emissions embedded in the imports? The average footprint for the Climate Assembly was that 13 tonnes per person last year.

Jo: Thank you Robin, that's a very good point. Ours is consumption-based, so it does include emissions embedded in imports, but it doesn't include government services. The reason for that is that we wanted to include things that we have direct control over. So clearly we can decide what we buy, but we can't decide on things like the NHS, defence etc, we don't cover any of them. But our full methodology is on our website and I'm happy to put that in the link as well where we put not only how we've constructed each of the footprints, but also the data sources that we've used as well.

Our approach was very much bottom up in terms of constructing the footprint. So for example, for diet we looked at the average UK diet and all of the components that make up an average UK diet, and that was how we have got the average diet that is the default. Then you can go in and personalise it so that it is relevant to what you actually eat rather than what the average UK diet is.

Lucy: Thanks Jo, hopefully that answers your question Robin. Alison you've got your hand up.
Alison: Thank you for that, it was really great making it so accessible and everything that talk. While you were talking I was looking at your website and sort of going through some of it, and some of the questions on there, they're like either Yes or No answers. Whereas you might do it a bit. So, there was no, Yes I do it sometimes type thing. I know that's really hard to estimate, I suppose. But I felt like because I don't do some of the things 100% so I put No.

Jo: Was that things like in the diet whether you buy organic or local or seasonal, that kind of thing?
Alison: Yes.

Jo: I think that's a good point and the reason why we haven't got that sort of sliding scale is it would make it quite difficult for us because I guess Yes and No is binary. Sometimes is very subjective in terms of is it 10% of the time, 20% of the time. So that's the reason that we just haven't, to be honest from a data perspective, really been able to get to that level of granularity yet in terms of the questions eliciting sufficient detail so that we could give you something meaningful, if that makes sense. So with Yes/No we can. With Sometimes that's so subjective that we actually felt it was just better to go with the Yes/No. But I think that if you want to get more detail then the best thing would be for the diet component actually to go in and put in everything that you eat. It definitely shows commitment to data input if you do it, I'll be impressed. But that's definitely the best way to get as accurate as you can.

Alison: Okay, thank you. Yes I do understand that. Thank you for that.

Lucy: We have a question from James in the chat as well. James says would the calculator include Tier 2 and Tier 3 footprint impacts or not as they are significantly harder to track?

Jo: That's interesting. So James are you meaning Scope 2 and Scope 3? Great, so Scopes 2 and 3 tend to be used in terms of organisational footprints. But we actually have done a lot of thinking around how a personal footprint can be relevant to that. So in short yes we do. So in a corporate or

organisational footprint Scope 1 is basically fossil fuels burned, Scope 2 is electricity purchased, and Scope 3 is everything else. Where we've been able to we have associated that same approach with what we've done.

So Scope 1 is largely your gas or oil that you use in your house and then fuel that you put in the car. Scope 2 would be the electricity you use at home and then Scope 3 would be everything else, so goods, services, travel, that kind of thing, although travel excluding petrol or diesel for the car. But it's a really interesting point that actually the measurement system for organisational footprints can be translated quite effectively to our own footprint because it's generated by the same sources, albeit we consume in a different way to an organisation. Does that answer your question?

James: I think so, it's probably a question that requires a bit more time because it's quite broad so I appreciate your time.

Sam: I know from an Open University point of view we're looking at it, obviously Scope 1 and Scope 2 are relatively straightforward for us to measure, and it is Scope 3 where we struggle to measure it and to record it and to look at the changes and things, but as a lot of organisations do. But like you've said Jo, this calculator is a really good way of doing that on a personal basis and then perhaps we can even build that up to use that across as a method for some of the Scope 3 stuff that we've not really in the past.

We do travel surveys, for example. But we could use this potentially as a way of showing what is happening across the OU once we get a significant number signed up. So I think it's a good tool to perhaps help us start doing some of that.

Jo: Yes because that's the hardest bit to measure usually the Scope 3 for an organisation. I think for us as individuals it's actually a bit easier because we're the purchaser of all of those components. We decide which holidays we're going to book. We decide which services we're going to buy. So it is actually a bit more straightforward in that we have full overview and oversight of that as individuals. But it's about making sure that the data that sits underneath it is as accurate as it possibly can be.

Lucy: Great. I think we've got a question from Sarah.

Sarah: It's a bit of a contentious question. This may not be everybody's cup of tea, but the majority of red meat that comes into our house is wild game that we source ourselves. We're lucky enough in that we have that source. But is that deemed to be as bad as red meat that has been farmed?

Jo: So like venison, pheasant that kind of thing?

Sarah: Yes, venison, pheasant, duck, goose.

Jo: Yes, we would love to be able to get more data on that end of the spectrum in terms of grass fed beef particularly and venison which I assume would be wild venison which I am sure would have a different footprint to farmed venison. I guess there are 2 answers to that. Our general approach is what's available for everybody, which as you say most people wouldn't be able to access those kind of supplies. I think if we find data sources that would give us that level of granularity, genuinely well sourced data around the footprint of grass fed cattle or wild venison, we'd really like to include that. I think that for us the limitations generally are does the data exist.

I think, this is not data based this is purely my assumption, I would have thought that venison that are running around the countryside foraging rather than being fed with additional grain and all sorts of things that have had to have used land where the grain has been grown, I would have thought they're much more likely to have a lower carbon footprint. I think the methane emissions in terms of the belching and the farting are probably not dramatically different, although there are some really interesting experiments and studies being developed at the moment in terms of what you feed

particularly cattle, and can that reduce the methane emissions that they produce. I think that some of the initial findings are that yes it can.

So there's quite a lot of work going into that at the moment in terms of actually changing some of the feed stocks to reduce the carbon emissions through farmed animals. It's a good question, I'm sure that the footprint is lower, but we haven't actually got any data that would substantiate that. But if you come across any please do send it to us because we are always trying to enhance our models.

Lucy: James has put something in the chat Jo, saying that Arla have been doing some work around carbon footprinting of milk and Yeo Valley similarly. So there might be something in there, not on meat per se, but on methane.

Jo: Yes, that's really useful. Thank you. That whole area is really expanding now in terms of dairy-free cheese, but not your sort of old school vegan cheese I think people sometimes turn their nose up at, but there's all sorts of innovation in terms of creating new types of foods that are much lower carbon impact and much better substitutes.

Lucy: Yes really interesting. So I don't know if you can Jo but obviously you've talked about there's over 100 steps on Giki and things that we can do. What are some of the ones that are quite quick wins that people might not necessarily have thought of? Because when I went through and did it myself, there was quite a few on there that I thought I'd never even thought about that, but that would be such an easy thing for me to do. So I don't know if you just want to say a bit about that.

Jo: I think one that was a particular favourite at the beginning, which is not a planet saver, but it's kind of obvious when you say it, is put the lids on the saucepan when you're cooking. That's one that I have to say until we wrote the step I wasn't particularly good at.

Firstly obviously it needs less energy because the lid contains the heat that's coming up from underneath and also it costs a bit less. If you do that every time your bills are probably going to be marginally reduced. The thermostat one I touched on that but turning your thermostat down by 1°.

So in the 70s we used to heat our houses to about 12° in the winter on average. I remember my house being very, very cold. Now we heat to about 20° or 21°. But the general consensus is that if you're reasonably active, 18° is ample. If you just notch it down by a degree that can really make quite a difference and put an extra jumper on or whatever.

The renewable energy one I mentioned, that is definitely one that's a really good one. Then some easier dietary ones are if you're making a stew just reduce the amount of meat if you're a meat eater, throw in a few more veg or a few pulses or something, just change it up a bit.

Another one which was actually the most popular step during lockdown not surprisingly, was food waste. Just getting used to always thinking through what you've got in the cupboard. Simple things like pulling the stuff to the front that's a bit older and having a quick skim through the fridge every week and thinking how you are going to make sure these don't end up in the bin.

That kind of thing is just a habit that once you get used to it, it actually just becomes part of what you do and great for saving money as well. Wendy, my goodness, you've got no central heating and it's definitely turtleneck season time.

But I think definitely for this time of year those are good ones that really spring to mind. If you really want to go radical the banking one is a good one to look at. But I think that's probably not the first step to try. Another good one is boiling the kettle, making sure you only put the right amount in the kettle.

Lucy: The saucepan one particularly I never even thought about it until I saw the step on there. I was like, 'Why don't I use these, I paid money for the lids as well as the pans, this is ridiculous' and

actually I do it now without even thinking about it. It's such an easy step but obviously every little bit makes a difference. I just wondered, you talked a little bit at the beginning about tree planting and that restorative element. Do you want to expand a little bit on that?

Jo: So our view, and we align our view with the UN's view, is that we need to avoid and reduce. So avoiding is like I was going to take that flight but I'm not going to take it anymore. Reducing is as in reducing carbon emissions. I'm going to use the same amount of electricity, but I'm going to get it from a renewable supplier rather than a fossil fuel supplier. Then restoration is the last bit which if you can't avoid or reduce, then either planting trees which if you're lucky to have a place you can plant fantastic, most of us don't. But there are quite a few good initiatives. I'll talk a bit more about this in a second. But we recommend Treesisters which also has a female empowerment component which is really good.

I think the Woodland Trust have just started doing some work as well about tree planting in the UK. Then forest preservation so the World Land Trust is really good and they try to protect vast swathes of forest in endangered parts of the world where there's a lot of felling of virgin forest and both of those components actually can have a really big effect in terms of absorbing carbon and what's called carbon sequestration.

I think that although it's not permanent in the same way as I'm not going to take this flight is, actually the role of trees in absorbing carbon they are by far the most efficient technology that exists at the moment for that, and I think that it's a really good step. I think what we need to be mindful of is that it's not the only part of the solution.

So it's an important part of the solution but if we don't also change the way that we make decisions about how we behave and how we spend our money, tree planting alone and offsetting is not going to fix the problem. But there's definitely a lot of really proper scientific evidence that suggests that tree planting and forests generally are going to play a really important role in getting us to where we need to get to in terms of carbon emissions in the next 10, 20, 30 years.

Lucy: I know that there was one colleague who asked me about some organisations that do tree planting because his family lives in America so he said he can't never see his family. So obviously it was a trade-off for him of 'Okay, well I'll do some restorative work instead by tree planting'. One of the academics actually that works in biodiversity has commented to say that trees are not the only answer. Grasslands and wetlands also outperform trees in carbon sequestration. So that's really interesting.

Jo: That's really fascinating, I'd love to discuss that more actually. I might see if we can connect offline because I think, yes the role of nature in getting us through some of the challenges that we have and helping people understand that better, I think is really important.

Lucy: Yes, definitely. I don't know if this is one for you then Jo, it might actually be one for David. But Grace has asked what about general garden planting. Do you know some good examples of plants or planting behaviours, other than trees that can act as good carbon sinks? That might be one for David, if you don't know off the top of your head then we might have to put Grace in touch with David as well.

Jo: Yes, I would say no is the short answer. I mean trees are definitely where we've focused our attention. As an enthusiastic gardener I'd say there are definitely a lot of plants that are loved by insects that can play a much broader role in terms of biodiversity and making sure that you plant out in terms of what's going to provide the sort of support structure for wildlife to be in the garden. But that's a bit different from the role of carbon sequestration.

Sam: Jen has just said that there's a brilliant film called Kiss The Ground about the potential of soil and not just trees and things like that so that might be one that we can put on the Yammer group to share as well.

Jo: There's been some really interesting research recently into how organic farming and the soil from organic farms is much better at sequestering carbon because the soil isn't as degraded and the better the soil, the more it's able to absorb carbon.

Sam: Following on from that really in that the tree side of things or the preservation of existing forests and things like that, is quite a good way as well isn't it of increasing your Giki score when you've done obviously other measures. I'm obviously looking at ways of how I can beat Lucy at the top of the leader board. That is obviously the most important thing to come out of today. So once everyone gets on board with this, and you've done a lot of measures, it is quite interesting to see that that does have a reasonable impact.

With Christmas coming up, I know we touched on Christmas earlier, if you're stuck for gifts I looked up, and I was expecting it to be a lot more money to help preserve an acre of rainforest or an acre of old woodland or whatever. It wasn't huge money, we're talking kind of £100 ish. So with Christmas coming up it's just something to bear in mind and if you've got any other things on Christmas or gift ideas, there's some stuff on that on Giki as well I know. So I just recommend everyone to get involved with it really.

Jo: Yes, so much of it's about getting the information at the time that you're ready for it, isn't it? Because actually thinking about lower impact presents when nobody's birthday is coming up and it's the middle of summer. It's kind of 'Yeah, well, I'll think about that in the future'. Then of course you forget about it. So it is about coming to it at a time that you're thinking about making a particular decision.

We definitely find that behaviour change and changing our habits is something that tends to happen quite gradually. So there might be some sort of external trigger like David Attenborough programmes or something like that recently that make us think, 'Right, okay, I've got to do something. I need to find something that I can do because this has concerned me so much'. Or it might be a conversation like Jen was saying earlier about your family might trigger something that starts you thinking about it. Your kid learns about it at school and comes back.

I think it's about seeing this as very much a long term gain, a long term path. We're not going to suddenly wake up one morning and have a sustainable lifestyle. It's something that happens gradually. There'll be some times that certain steps are going to be okay, or great or inspiring and other times it'll be like, 'No way, that one just doesn't work for me at the moment' and it is about just embracing that I think and being cool about that. We can't do everything immediately and some of the time some of them are always going to be like 'No that one just doesn't work for me. I can't do that one'.

Lucy: Yes I love that. I think this is one of the reasons why I love Jen's mantra of sustainable(ish) and one of the reasons why I love Giki because there is that kind of feeling that you don't have to wake up perfect one day, you can chip away at it slowly in manageable chunks until you know you think, 'Oh, well I'm much more sustainable now than I was 3 months ago or a year ago'. I think that's what's really important here, it's that progress not perfection. As we were saying earlier you can't be perfect, then it all falls to pieces in a week's time.

It's better to chip away at it and keep making positive steps. So thank you very much, Jo, I think we'll probably draw this session to a close now. Just so everybody knows, on the Go Green Yammer which I'll pop a link to in the meeting chat in a second, we have pinned the post at the top about Giki. There's also the Giki link up in the chat for this meeting as well. So hopefully you can find that. I've also just made a thread on the Go Green Yammer group because there's loads of really brilliant ideas coming out of today's sessions.

So hopefully that means that we've got somewhere if everyone just wants to jump on there and pop them on and then anybody that thinks that there was a brilliant recommendation for, I don't know, plastic free loo roll or whatever, hopefully it'll be on that thread. So thank you very much for joining us Jo. Our next session is Fast Fashion with OU Professor Claudia Eckert. So we've got about 7 minutes so everyone can grab another cup of tea or a glass of water and we'll start back at 11.