

CONSUMER CHOICES AND THE PURSUIT OF CARBON NEUTRALITY – HOUSING, TRANSPORT, FOOD AND CARBON OFFSETS

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This report gives an overview of the pursuit of carbon neutrality from a consumer's point of view. A consumer can approach carbon neutrality by first assessing and analysing the GHG emissions produced by personal consumption. Then, the emissions are reduced as much as possible and finally the remaining emissions are compensated through carbon offsets. Housing, transport, and food cause the majority of GHG emissions stemming from household consumption. This report focuses on possibilities to reduce emissions in these three sectors.

Today, an ordinary Finnish person can easily find ways to reduce the GHG emissions produced by personal consumption. This can be done either by changing consumer habits or by adopting technology to produce fewer emissions especially with regard to housing and transport. Housing is generally the biggest source of emissions, but there are considerable differences between consumers. Also, to what degree personal choices can reduce emissions depends on the form of dwelling. In general, technology would appear to have more potential to reduce emissions than changing consumer behaviour. It would be financially profitable to implement several emission reduction technologies immediately. Their implementation is delayed by ignorance and unwillingness to invest in operations that require initial investments – even if the repayment period was reasonable.

The bulk of an average consumer's carbon footprint can be attributed to travel by private vehicle. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce the distances travelled by private vehicle and to reduce the emissions per driving kilometre. Today, a consumer may halve the amount of emissions per kilometre when choosing a new car. There are many possibilities to efficiently reduce emissions in transport but people's growing desire to move around unhindered presents a challenge.

By adjusting the daily diet to match the newest nutrition recommendations, everyone can control his/her carbon footprint. According to a Danish estimate, this could reduce emissions by up to 25 percent. Minimising the amount of food waste and avoiding overconsumption of food are easy methods for reducing emissions on the individual level. Moreover, these actions do not put a financial strain on the consumer. In fact, they may even save money.

Compensating for personal emissions becomes relevant when an individual can no longer reduce his/her emissions but wants to offset the rest of his/her emissions. Emission Reduction Units, which entitle to carbon offsets, must now be acquired from carbon markets outside Finland. The carbon offset possibilities are not very well-known in Finland. In the future, it could be possible to increase their popularity if emission reduction possibilities were located in Finland. This way, emissions could be reduced in a new way within the country and the growth of low-emission business and demand would advance. However, from a consumer's perspective, this requires a system where the consumer knows what s/he is buying on the offset market and also knows a marketplace where such transactions can be made.

A conservative estimate would suggest that an average consumer could halve his/her GHG emissions through slight adjustments in housing, transport and food without any dramatic change in lifestyle. Hence, the choices consumers make have great potential to reduce GHG emissions in Finland, particularly in the non-emissions trading sector.