UNILEVER’S POSITION ON GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IN CONSUMER USE

Background

Greenhouse gases (GHGs) trap energy in the atmosphere causing it to warm. This process is natural and necessary to support life. However, over the past century, human activities have released large amounts of carbon dioxide and other GHGs into the atmosphere. The majority of GHGs come from burning fossil fuels, although deforestation, industrial processes and some agricultural practices also emit GHGs.

This build-up of GHGs is changing our climate, impacting society and ecosystems in a number of ways. For example, it can increase or decrease rainfall, influence agricultural crop yields, affect human health, cause changes to forests and other ecosystems, and even impact energy supplies.

Context

The international scientific consensus is that rising greenhouse gas emissions pose serious threats to the long-term viability of human civilisation and that urgent action must be taken if catastrophic impacts on human well-being are to be avoided or reduced.

Unilever’s position

We are committed to halving the environmental footprint of our products by 2020.

As nearly 70% of the GHG footprint of our products occurs when consumers use them to wash clothes, take a shower or make a cup of tea, for example, we are committed to better understanding how these impacts can be reduced, and to working with consumers, other businesses, non-governmental organisations and governments to achieve this.

Our primary role is to help change consumer behaviour into more sustainable practices. If small changes are made each time a product is used, the result can be significant.
At the same time, we are developing products that have less impact during use, such as laundry detergents that work better at lower temperatures.

However, we believe that more transformational solutions are needed, such as higher eco-efficiency standards for appliances that heat and deliver hot water, wash clothes and cook food, and the increasing decarbonisation of the energy sources used to power them.

As such, we support calls for government leadership at international, regional and national levels to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy.

We also support better public information, resource metering and pricing that reflects environmental impacts and incentivises the efficient use of energy.

We recognise the challenges faced by political leaders in setting out ambitious frameworks for action on climate change. That is why we are members of a number of progressive advocacy groups such as the Corporate Leaders Group on Climate Change.

We are also taking action to address the proportion of our products’ carbon footprint associated with our formulations, packaging and logistics, through innovation, raw material and supplier choice, and industry partnerships.