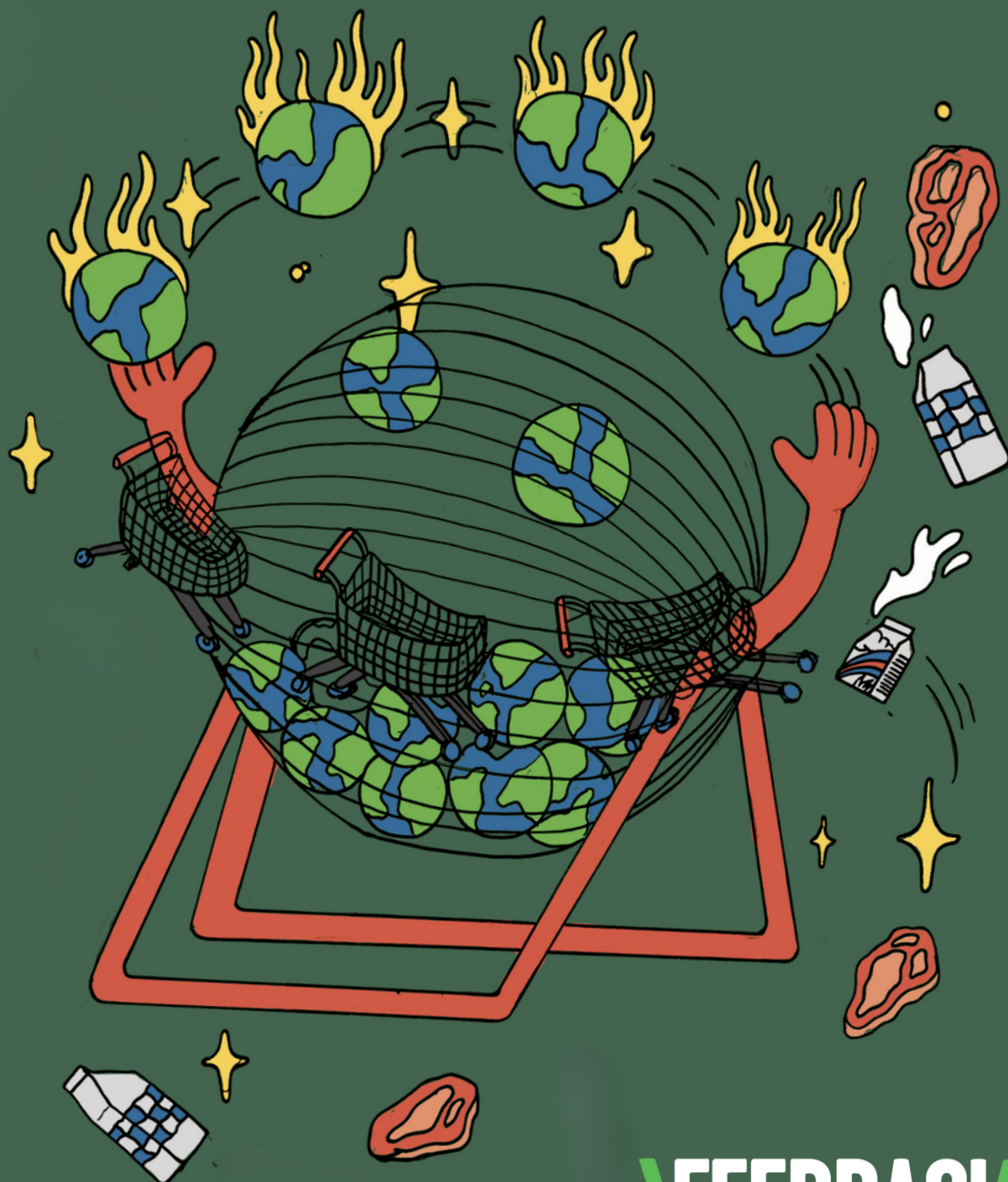


# ENGLISH SUMMARY OF 'Valse BINGO'

Supermarkets hide their true climate impact of meat and dairy sales through greenwashing



# INTRODUCTION

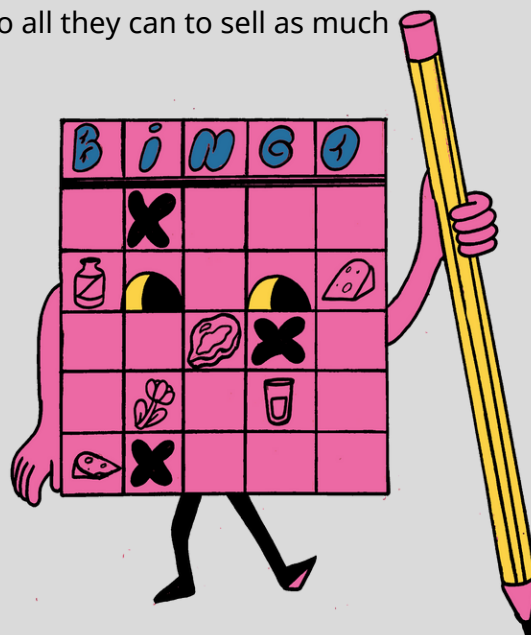
A new report from Feedback EU reveals how Dutch supermarkets, like the fossil industry, are using greenwashing tactics to hide their true climate impact. While retailers flaunt their 'climate credentials', they are not acting to reduce meat and dairy sales. Only one supermarket is willing to disclose that almost half of their global emissions are caused by sales of animal products. Reducing sales of meat and dairy products could deliver real climate progress for supermarkets, but they continue to focus on green initiatives with far less impact, and to avoid real action.

Our recent report reveals how supermarkets are using 'greenlighting' and 'greenshifting', the same greenwashing tactics used by the fossil industry. 'Greenlighting' is when companies present themselves as 'green' by emphasising small steps towards sustainability. A typical example of this is celebrating a shift to reduced plastic packaging for meat products. While this is a small improvement, it distracts from the fact that the meat itself has a much greater climate impact. 'Greenshifting' is when supermarkets shift blame and responsibility to consumers. They feed the existing narrative that the customer decides what is on the shelves. This displaces attention from the influence supermarkets have on the food environment and on shoppers' choices. It is crucial that supermarkets take a major role in helping customers eat sustainably, healthily and more plant-based.

## A FUN BINGO NIGHT? NOT SO MUCH!

In our report we have played greenwash bingo with the six biggest supermarkets in the Netherlands, to assess their use of greenwash tactics. The three categories of our bingo card are: ignore, distract and profit. The first highlights that supermarkets hide their emissions by not publishing them. The second showcases how supermarkets use various communications to distract customers from their climate impact. And the last category shows how, even though we are in a climate crisis, supermarkets do all they can to sell as much meat and dairy possible.

The three biggest supermarkets in the Netherlands have now reported their total emissions, revealing that between 94 and 97% of their emissions are created in their value chain. In 2021, total greenhouse gas emissions in Albert Heijn's supply chain were as high as 14.4 megatons, 97% of which is attributable to purchased



products. 48% of these emissions came from sales of animal products such as meat, fish, dairy and eggs. Albert Heijn has set an ambitious climate target by the end of 2022 to emit 45% less greenhouse gases by 2030 compared to 2020. A quick way, and perhaps the only way, to reach this goal is to sell less meat and dairy.

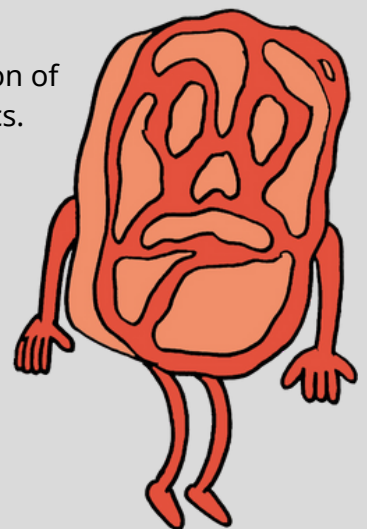
Transparency is not everything, that is clear when you take a better look at the communications around sustainability. Supermarkets focus mainly on the small percentages of emissions caused in their direct operations (i.e. scope 1 and 2). They flaunt slogans like "climate-neutral operations in 2030" and proudly display their energy-efficient distribution centres on their websites. They promote receipts made from recycled paper, or reduced plastic in packaging. But what they don't like highlight is the fact that of all the products they offer, meat and dairy produce the most emissions.

While many supermarkets claim to help customers by focusing on alternatives to meat and dairy, simply adding more substitutes does not automatically lead to a decrease in meat and dairy sales. Moreover, it is essential to reduce not only the CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions per product or kilo, but also the absolute emissions. Unfortunately, supermarkets and large companies like Friesland Campina and VION mainly focus on reducing CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions per unit of product. But a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions per litre of milk or kilo of pork does not automatically mean lower emissions in absolute terms, as this depends on the total milk and meat production.

## WHAT CAN SUPERMARKETS DO?

It is time that supermarkets give up their greenwashing tactics and actually take responsibility for their climate impact. They should stop turning a blind eye and focus on the biggest source of emissions: the products they sell, and start reducing their meat and dairy sales. Supermarkets have the power and influence to help customers make more sustainable choices to have a positive impact on the climate. The time to turn words into action is now.

- Stop advertising, promotions and multibuys of animal products;
- Report emissions in scope 3 and the share of these caused by the sale of animal products;
- Stop exaggerated communication about minimum reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions through changes in operations and logistics. Acknowledge all emissions and act accordingly;
- Reduce meat and dairy sales.



## WHAT CAN THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT DO?

- Ensure mandatory reporting on meat and dairy sales and protein ratio are complied with;
- Use laws and regulations to stop the advertisements, promotions and multibuys of animal products;
- Use laws and regulations to stop the purchase and sale of agricultural products such as meat and dairy, below cost price;
- Increase the price of meat and dairy products and reduce the price of vegetables fruits, nuts and pulses by adjusting VAT or other price incentives;
- Support the 'Green Claim Directive' at EU level and draft similar legislation in the Netherlands to tackle greenwashing.

And this isn't just a problem for Dutch supermarkets, but for supermarkets everywhere. That is why we work with partners in Europe. Similar research will be published about supermarkets in the United Kingdom and Spain later this year.





Illustrations by Elzeline Kooy