

Trialling carbon labelling as a sustainability legacy of
The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.



West Midlands
Combined Authority

WEST MIDLANDS
Greener Together



CASE STUDY

The aim of this case study is to share our combined learnings **and to support other catering and event companies with their sustainability practices.**

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games made the pledge to be ‘the most sustainable yet’ and to leave a carbon neutral legacy.

To support this ambition, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) received funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) to deliver a behaviour change activity, which is relevant to the Games and carbon reduction.

The WMCA and the Games sustainability team worked closely together to decide on a carbon labelling trial. Working with carbon labelling company Foodsteps, Freemans Event Partners conducted a carbon labelling trial during the Games.

Foodsteps have combined their expertise in food systems and environmental sciences to create a tool which helps food businesses track and improve the environmental impact of their food. **Through their platform, businesses can quickly and accurately measure the carbon footprint of food, and display carbon labels on-pack or menu.**

Showcasing carbon labels empowers consumers to make more informed decisions about what they eat, in the context of carbon. Our labels help to nudge consumers towards “lower carbon” options and stick within Foodsteps’ carbon budget.

Freemans Event Partners have opted to display stickers which highlight the carbon footprint per serving of each food item from farm to waste. This is calculated on our platform using our industry-leading database, which compiles thousands of ingredient Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) studies from over 100 different regions.

The traffic light colour correlates with our A to E rating system, which is based on the carbon intensity (or carbon footprint per kilogram) of the food item. This is allocated according to the EAT-Lancet global food carbon budget of 5 gigatonnes of CO₂e per year, within which all A-rated items fall.



Foodsteps

Freemans Event Partners (FEP) was contracted to provide the Food, Beverages, Technology, Logistics and Marketing at the Commonwealth Games across 11 venues. **FEP has proven expertise delivering a diverse food & drink offering in high volume environments.**

FEP has recently appointed a Sustainability Manager to drive innovation in sustainability in the event industry. Carbon footprint and labelling is one of several areas the business was keen to investigate and trial with customers.

The aim was threefold: to identify internal areas of improvement for scope 3 carbon footprint but also to research customer behaviours and contribute to the wider reach of the Games.

“As a leading provider of event solutions, supporting our clients’ sustainability missions is a key priority for our business. When the opportunity arose to help fulfil the Commonwealth Games ambition, we were keen to do something innovative and understand its impact on consumer behaviours. Adding carbon labels to our menus was a first for FEP and the trial has been a catalyst for working with our supply chain to reduce our food miles.”



Stephen Freeman

CEO of Freemans
Event Partners

CASE STUDY

Deployment of the carbon labelling meant developing integrated process through the supply-chain, menu design and delivery process. FEP has held an AA grade BRCGS accreditation for the last 7 years. This requires rigorous paperwork to be kept on the supply chain of our stock and was crucial in providing relevant information to calculate the carbon footprint with Foodsteps.

The labels were calculated from serving sizes, ingredient breakdown, ingredient origin, cooking instructions and industry averages provided by Foodsteps.

Freemans Event Partners support 400+ UK and European events per year with menu boards being reused and adapted from event to event.

The most sustainable option to avoid reprinting menus was to deploy the RAG rated footprint stickers alongside QR code stickers for customers to find out more information about the methodology behind the carbon footprint rating (see image 1). The final stickers were deployed on the Gourmet Sausage (hot dog) unit (see image 2) as

this offered the full RAG rating which allows customers to choose an option with a lower carbon footprint. The stickers were added on the second week of the Games to allow for products sales to be tracked and to see if the stickers influenced higher sales of the lower carbon options.

Our sales data was provided to an impartial University of Birmingham researcher who concluded that there was no impact from the labels on product sales, although this was limited by the small trial size. The interaction with the QR code was also minimal.



Image 1: RAG rating of menu items. Items are labelled from A (low carbon) and E (high carbon).

Below are the challenges we faced and solutions for consideration:

- **Short time frame for delivery resulting in fewer units with labels: this could be integrated into normal operations rather than ad-hoc trials.**
- **Quick service delivery with customers spending minimal time interacting with the information: customers require more exposure to understand the detail.**
- **QR code relied on for information due to short timescale: operator training to deliver information with the meal item.**
- **Last minute operational changes caused menu changes which could not be amended in the labels quickly: ingredient breakdown for standard menu items so the labels can be quickly made up.**

We did this at another event to understand whether the crowd type was linked to interaction and found that it was a similar outcome as at the Commonwealth Games.

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We have used the trial as a catalyst to look at our supply chain and have already made some changes to reduce the carbon footprint associated with our menu, we are aligning our partnerships and products with companies that do better for their environment with further plans to integrate this into our tender process.

Foodsteps have set out tips on how to maximise carbon labelling:

- Place your lowest carbon items at the top of the menu – or wherever your customers will look first so they don't have to spend time searching for information.
- Empower your service team with climate knowledge they can share with customers at the point of sale.
- Ensure customers know what the labels mean through posters, table talkers, or other appropriate signposting. If possible, try distributing this information before the event!
- Make low carbon items sound appealing – “veggie burger” might immediately turn some customers off, but using enticing descriptors can make a big difference.

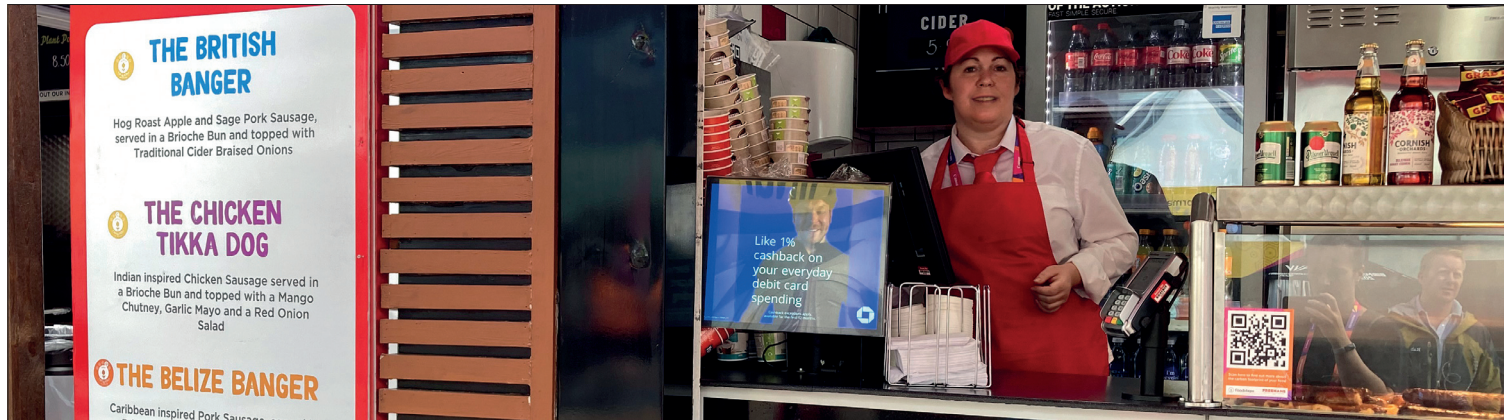


Image 2: Carbon footprint alongside the menu items on the hotdog unit. The QR code can be seen to the right of the staff member pictured.



Foodsteps

Foodsteps is a food sustainability start-up with a mission to help food businesses measure, reduce and communicate their environmental impact.

foodsteps.earth



Freemans Event Partners is a family-owned business established in 1975 who provide a multi-service offering bespoke to each event and venue. Information in this paper was provided by Freemans Event Partners' © Sustainability Manager, to find out more please use the contact us link on our website.

freemanseventpartners.co.uk



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The WMCA declared a climate emergency in 2019 set a target for the West Midlands to be Net Zero by 2041. The WMCA have a hugely ambitious plan to meet these targets and you can read the #WM2041 vision for the region on our website.

wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-and-energy

