## Pictorial representations for sustainability scoring

To show scores balancing several factors, it is possible to represent the scores on a radiating scale. 0 is at the centre of the circle, with graded scores going outwards along the spokes. In the diagram shown on the right, seven spokes represent seven sustainability issues on which a company or product could be scored.

When scores have been calculated for each issue, the overall picture of the scores can be represented in a diagram called a 'rose'. In the rose diagrams below, the product or company has scored relatively well for water and fair trade, but less well for the other factors. The two diagram variants are simply different ways of portraying the information – one as graded spokes (left), the other as a spider's web. A full score for all factors would result in a perfect polyhedron (in this case a seven-sided heptagon).
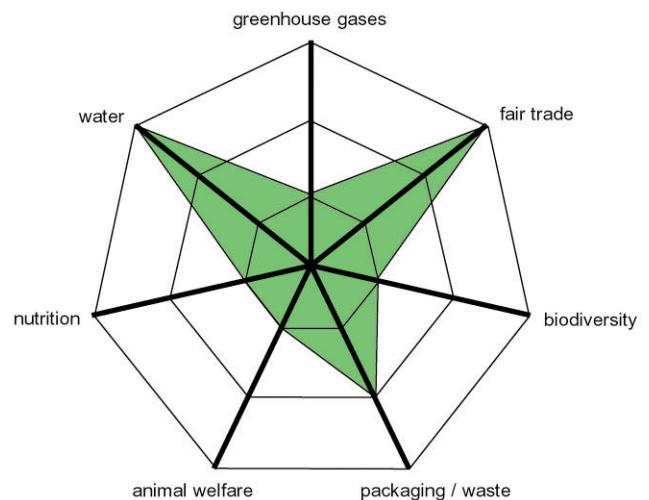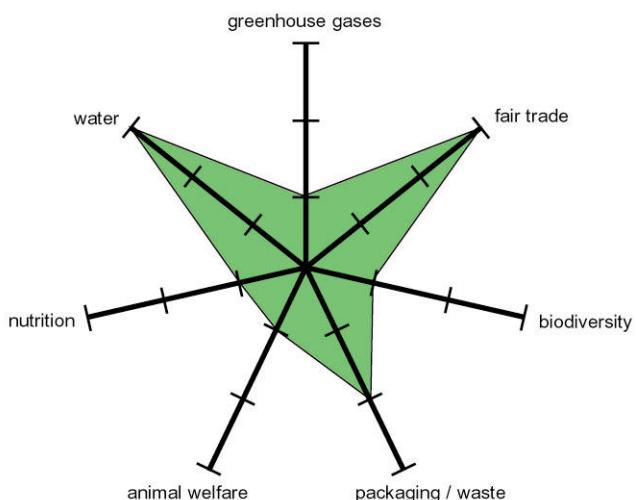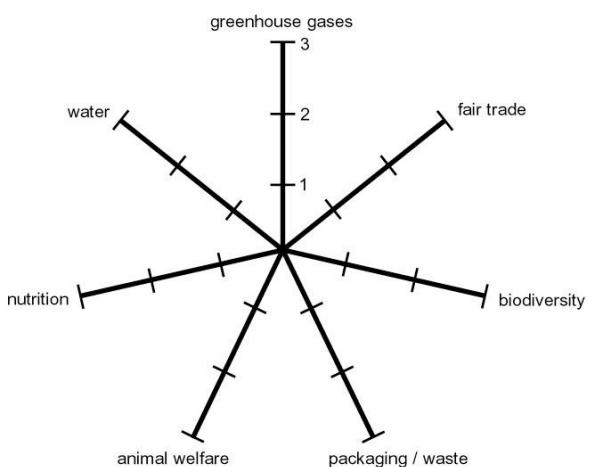
These representations are useful to score and balance several factors. However, they are not necessarily very attractive or engaging, especially for communication to customers. Below, we suggest one way that this information could be represented, combining traffic-light colour-coding (based on the scoring system above) and a flower design.

In the flower diagram on the right, green petals represent a top score; red petals represent a poor score, and amber petals demonstrate the company or product is making progress but has not yet achieved a top score. Having to display red petals gives a company an incentive to improve. Green petals reward the company for good work.
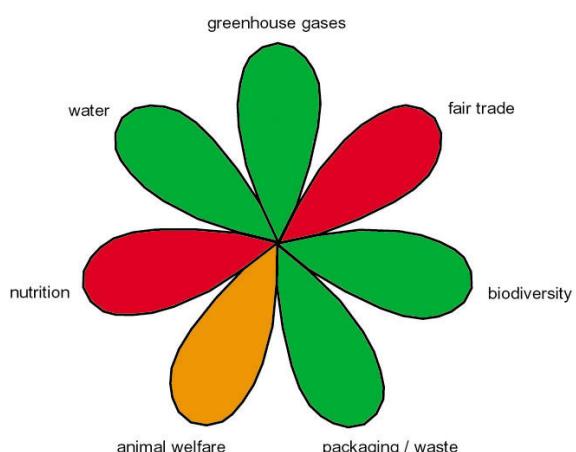
It might be that a company would like to emphasise one factor on which the product performs especially well, such as Fairtrade (through Fairtrade certification) or sustainable fish (through Marine Stewardship Council certification). This could be emphasised in the flower (see diagrams below), although without losing the detail of the full range of factors.
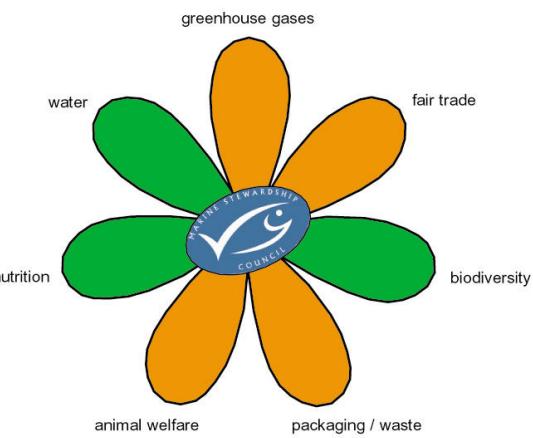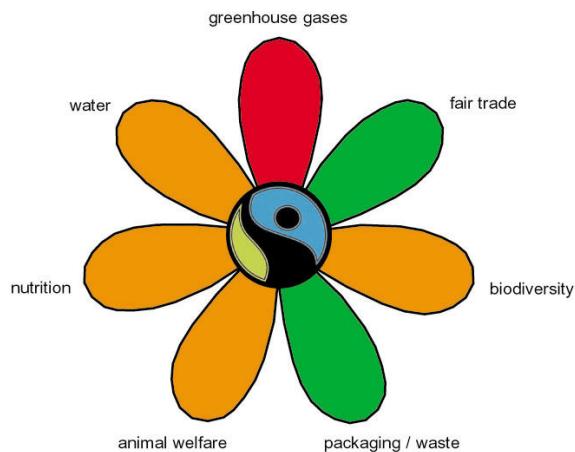

Visually, the traffic-light colour-coding helps consumers to make a rapid assessment of a product for its sustainability credentials. The colours are easy to read, as has been shown by traffic-light nutrition labeling. Another way to represent this information is to design the label to represent scores both by colour and relative sizes of the petals. This may help consumers to understand at a glance that green petals represent a full score, and that red petals represent a poor score – there is room for improvement.

Petals could also be represented by other visual short-hand such as ecological footprints (see below).
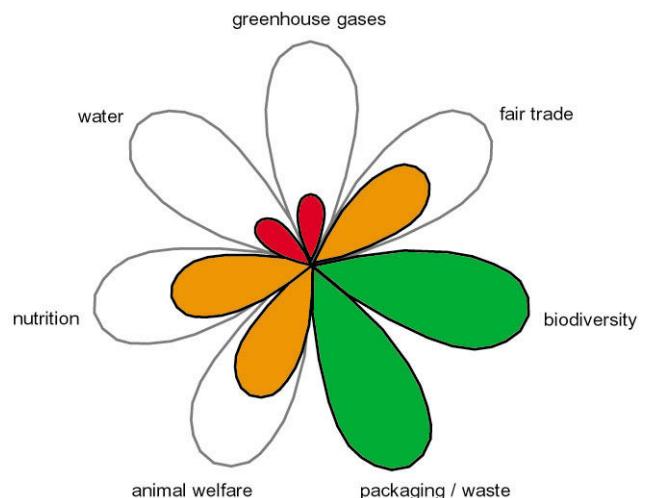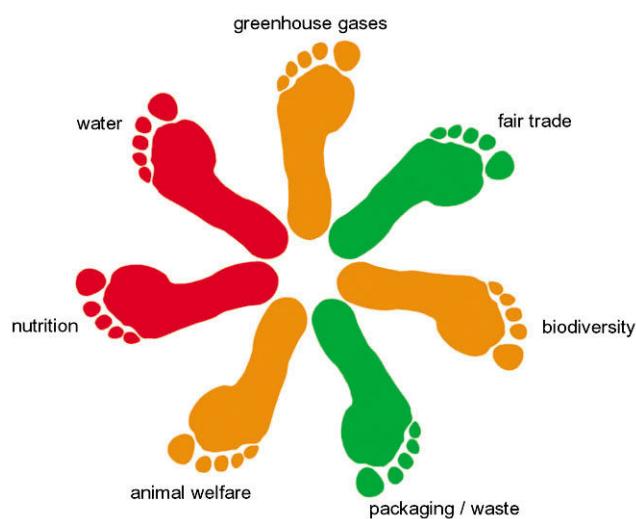

All of the above variants are based on seven sustainability factors. The following page shows how the same method could be applied to a wider range of sustainability factors.

Rose diagrams showing scoring for nine sustainability factors. The two diagram variants are simply different ways of portraying the information – one as graded spokes (left), the other as a spider's web. A full score for all factors would result in a perfect polyhedron (in this case a nine-sided nonagon).
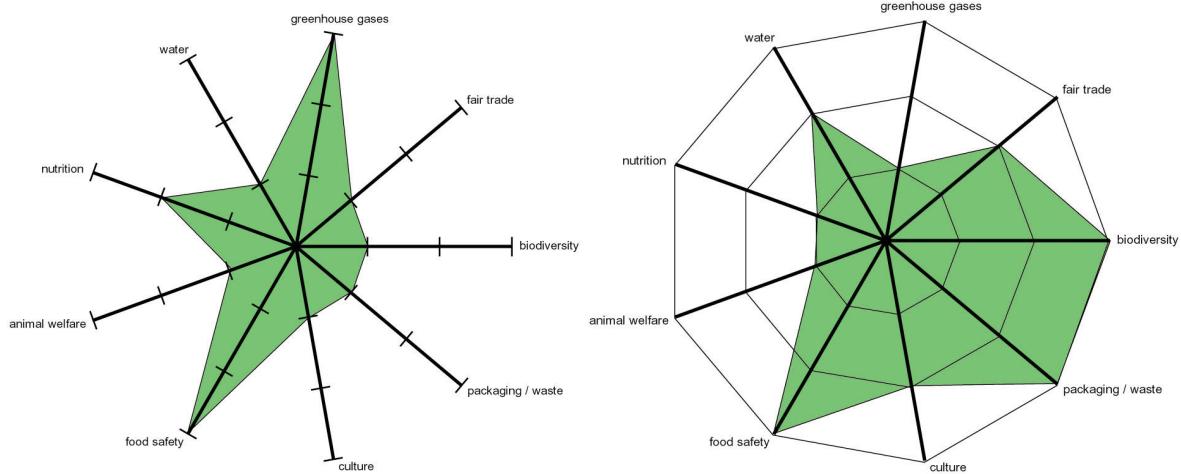
Again, such numerical information can be interpreted and represented in a traffic-light colour-coded flower, each petal representing one aspect of sustainability (see right).
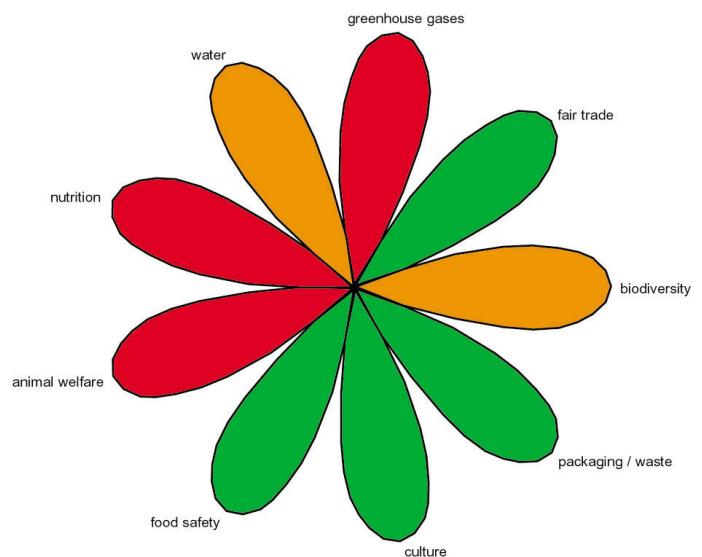
The scores can also be represented with a combination of colour-coding and relative size. This representation has the advantage that it emphasises success (full green petals) and highlights where progress has still to be made (partial red petals).