The Value of Plants Merchandising Guide 2024: Evidencing Environmental Claims

Plants with Environmentally-Friendly Attributes Appeal to Consumers

HTA research shows that plants with environmentally-friendly attributes are likely to appeal to consumers; and in the context of the rising cost of doing business, promoting these features ***provides an opportunity to add additional 'value' for customers and offset the impact of price increases on purchase volumes****. Our research suggests that featuring environmental credentials clearly on plant labelling, point of sale and in marketing messages could* ***reduce drop offs in the number of individual plants bought when prices are raised.***

This guide aims to provide you with a bank of sources as referenced in 'From Nursery to Nature: The Value of Plants', that you can use in your marketing or communications to ***make substantiated claims about the environmental benefits of plants*** *and to recap the importance of evidencing these in order to comply with the Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer protection law.*

The HTA has produced a full guide: Complying with Regulations on Environmental Claims in Marketing and our Checklist for Making Environmental Claims in Marketing which can be downloaded here: https://hta.org.uk/sustainabilityresources; and we recap the key points in Section 2 of this guide.

Claim 1

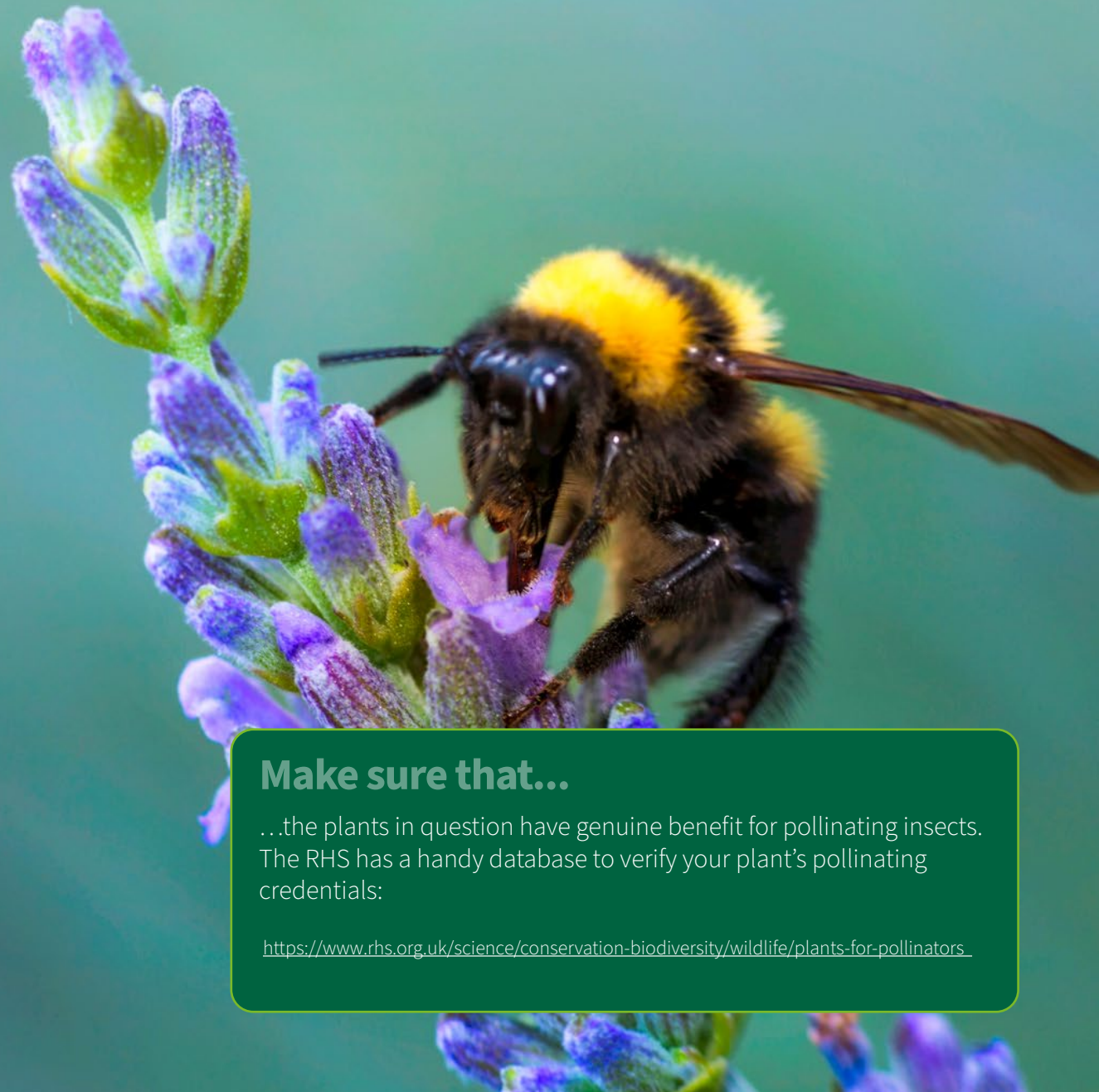
Plants in garden spaces, such as domestic and allotments are vital for providing pollen and nectar for pollinators

Studies have found that more bee and hoverfly flower visits are recorded in allotments and domestic gardens than other land uses.

Source
The role of 'nativeness' in urban greening to support animal biodiversity. Landscape and Urban Planning, Volume 205. (Katherine Berthon, Freya Thomas, Sarah Bekessy, 2021)

Bumblebee nests are most likely to be found in domestic gardens, where there is an abundance of diverse plant species and plants in differing flowering stages.

Source
Opportunities and threats for pollinator conservation in global towns and cities. Current Opinion in Insect Science, Volume 38, (Katherine CR Baldock, 2020)



Make sure that...

…the plants in question have genuine benefit for pollinating insects. The RHS has a handy database to verify your plant's pollinating credentials:

https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators

Evidence Bank to Support your Environmental Claims about Plants

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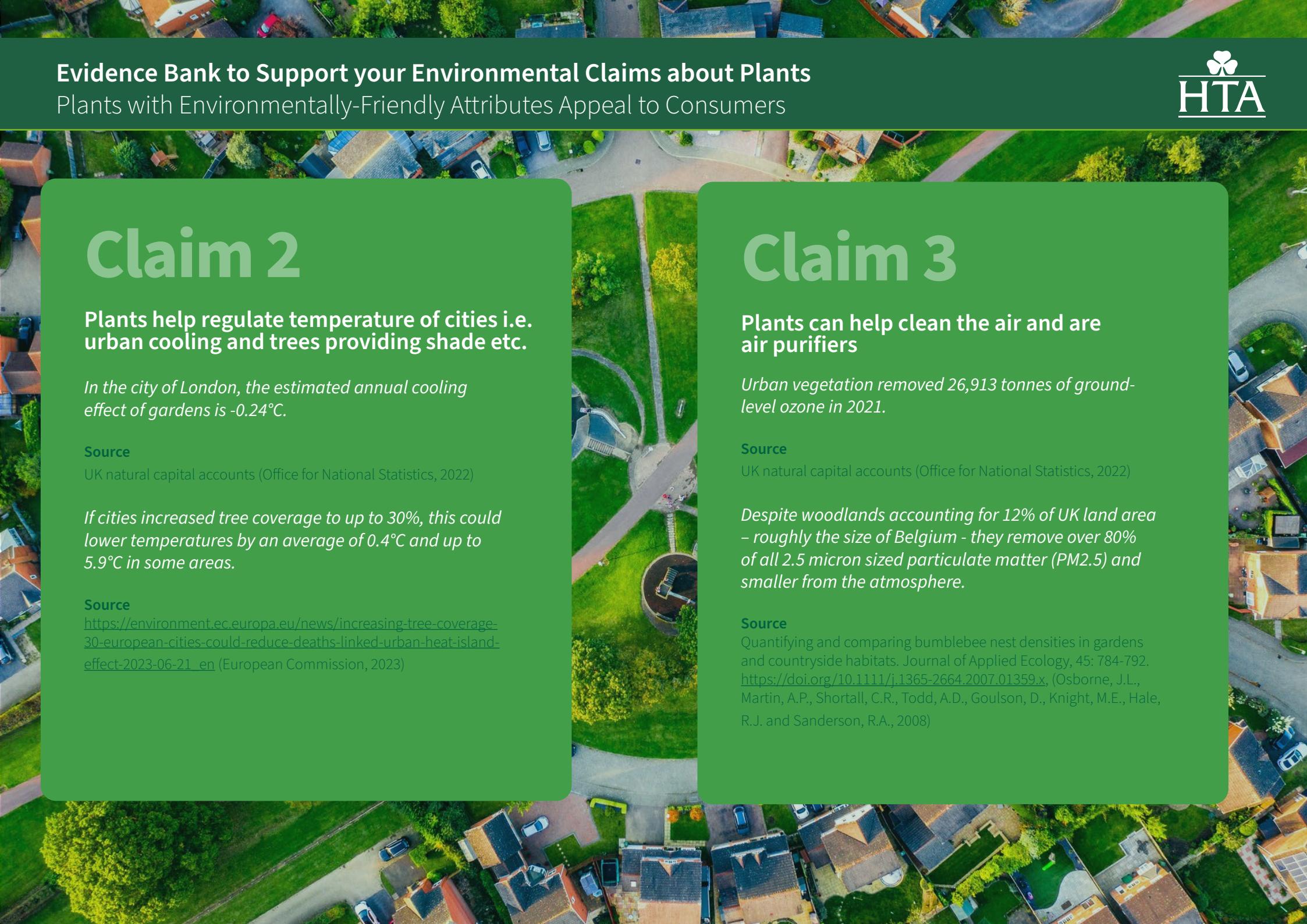

Claim 2

Plants help regulate temperature of cities i.e. urban cooling and trees providing shade etc.

In the city of London, the estimated annual cooling effect of gardens is -0.24°C.

Source

UK natural capital accounts (Office for National Statistics, 2022)

If cities increased tree coverage to up to 30%, this could lower temperatures by an average of 0.4°C and up to 5.9°C in some areas.

Source

https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/increasing-tree-coverage-30-european-cities-could-reduce-deaths-linked-urban-heat-island-effect-2023-06-21_en (European Commission, 2023)

Claim 3

Plants can help clean the air and are air purifiers

Urban vegetation removed 26,913 tonnes of ground-level ozone in 2021.

Source

UK natural capital accounts (Office for National Statistics, 2022)

Despite woodlands accounting for 12% of UK land area – roughly the size of Belgium - they remove over 80% of all 2.5 micron sized particulate matter (PM2.5) and smaller from the atmosphere.

Source

Quantifying and comparing bumblebee nest densities in gardens and countryside habitats. Journal of Applied Ecology, 45: 784-792. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2664.2007.01359.x, (Osborne, J.L., Martin, A.P., Shortall, C.R., Todd, A.D., Goulson, D., Knight, M.E., Hale, R.J. and Sanderson, R.A., 2008)

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Claim 4

Plants and trees are beneficial for water management

Trees and hedging around fields slow the runoff of water from irrigation or rainfall and reduce the risk of flash flooding. This is in addition to carbon capture capabilities and other environmental benefits.

Source

A nature-based gamble: Hedging our bets or betting on hedges? pp. 335-350 in Planetary Health and Bioethics, (Alexander R. Waller and Darryl R. J. Macer, 2023)

Claim 5

Trees are carbon sinks that store carbon in their trunks and leaves

All trees across Great Britain currently sequester around 16 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2e) per year. For context, one tonne of CO2e is equivalent to the average emissions of one passenger on a return flight from Paris to New York.

Source

Carbon storage and sequestration rates of trees inside and outside forests in Great Britain. Environmental Research Letters, (Florian Zellweger et al 2022)

Total carbon storage by trees in Great Britain (both above and below ground) is just over 980 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2e).

Source

System of Environmental Economic Accounting, https://seea.un.org/content/natural-capital-and-ecosystem-services-faq#:~:text=%E2%80%9CNatural%20capital%20is%20another%20term,flow%20of%20benefits%20to%20people.%22 (United Nations, Accessed on: 24th August 2023)Zellweger et al 2022)

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Claim 6

Plants can be used as physical barriers to pollution in areas such as schools

Planting of a hedge barrier around schools has been shown to reduce particulate matter, nitrous oxide, ozone and other atmospheric toxins by up to 77%.

Source

Interventions for improving indoor and outdoor air quality in and around schools. Science of The Total Environment, Volume 858, Part 2 (Nidhi Rawat and Prashant Kumar, 2023)

Claim 7

Plants within domestic gardens and urban spaces help boost biodiversity

Research shows that native plants are the biggest factor in increasing animal biodiversity. This can be done by increasing richness, cover or density of native plants in urban green spaces.

Source

The role of 'nativeness' in urban greening to support animal bio-diversity. Landscape and Urban Planning, Volume 205. (Katherine Berthon, Freya Thomas, Sarah Bekessy, 2021)

Make sure that...

...the plants genuinely are native to the UK. The RHS have handy guides for fact-checking, including this one on native trees & shrubs: https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/types/trees/native-tree-shrubs

Why do I Need to Evidence Environmental Claims about Plants?

At the end of 2021, the Competition and Market's Authorities (CMA) updated their guidance to help businesses comply with consumer protection law when making environmental claims and protect consumers from misleading information when making a purchase.

An environmental claim could suggest: a product, service, process, brand or business is better for the environment than a competitor; or that a product has a positive impact or no impact on the environment. And these claims could appear in advertisements, marketing material, branding, on packaging or in other information provided to consumers.

To follow the CMA guidance, businesses must ensure that environmental claims:

- Are truthful and accurate;
- Are clear and unambiguous;
- Do not omit or hide important information;
- Compare goods or services in a fair and meaningful way;
- Are substantiated;
- Consider the full life cycle of the product or service.

If a business does not comply with consumer protection law, the CMA and other bodies, such as Trading Standards Services, can bring court proceedings.

You can download the HTA's full guide: Complying with Regulations on Environmental Claims in Marketing and our Checklist for Making Environmental Claims in Marketing here:

https://hta.org.uk/sustainabilityresources

If you have any questions, please contact: marketinfo@hta.org.uk

Appendix
Background to the HTA research

HTA consumer research (described in more detail in Nursery to Nature: The Value of Plants) used a methodology called Conjoint to present respondents with a series of trade-offs between two plants with different attributes and different price points. The research design means that neither choice is optimal, forcing the respondents to make a subconscious trade-off before statistical modelling then identifies feature preferences.

We focused on shrubs and bedding plants, setting the respondent in the context of their last purchase of a shrub or bedding plant. We then asked if the same plant was available but with different features and at new price points, would they have bought them instead and how many.

The environmental features we tested were:

- Pollinator-friendly
- Eco rating (A, C or E)
- Peat-free

And the price increase levels ranged from +5% to +30% on top of what the respondent stated they had paid previously.

Using the +5% price increase level as a baseline, pollinator-friendly credentials had the greatest impact, reducing purchase volume drop offs by 5.9% compared with a plant without the label. An Eco label rated A reduced volume drop offs by 4.1%, peat free by 3.3%, and eco rating C by 2.6% compared to a 'no label' plant (as shown in the Figure above).

Interestingly, when the Eco rating E label was applied, volumes actually decreased by 0.4% compared to a no label plant; **suggesting that consumers would be likely to penalise plants shown or perceived to have a negative environmental impact.**