

## Ethical Screening

Unit 21, 41 Old Birley Street, Manchester, M15 5RF

| Tel: 0161 2262929 |

www.ethicalconsumer.org

**Ethical Screening of: The Coca-Cola Company**

For: [REDACTED]

Date: 31 March 2025

**Highlighted Ethical Risks**

*This screening is based on risk searches related to the Coca-Cola brand and its owner The Coca-Cola Company. The company owned other brands, some of which have continued trading under their own name. It was outside of the scope of this screening to conduct risk searches on all brand names associated with the company.*

**BDS boycott campaign** – The company is subject to a boycott call by the BDS Movement and Friends of Al Aqsa, a UK-based non-profit NGO, because it "profit[s] from the occupation" of Palestine (see **Company Ethos** in **Ethical Consumer Database records**).

**Large corporation with an extremely high profile** – The colossal operational size and profile of the company increases the likelihood that incidences of malpractice and unethical behaviour will receive regulatory and media attention, thus presenting greater reputational risk. The incidences of public criticism and fines highlighted in this report underline this point (see **Stories falling outside of Ethical Consumer's rating system** and **Ethical Consumer database records**).

**Lack of product specific and supply chain policies** – The company sold physical products but its policies to protect workers' rights in its supply chain were rudimentary and it did not meet many of Ethical Consumer's requirements. Moreover its product specific policies relating to Animals lacked commitments to source ethically certified animal goods, therefore failing to ensure higher animal welfare standards (see **Ethical Consumer database records**).

**Synonymous with plastic pollution** – A significant amount of criticism relating to The Coca-Cola Company's plastic pollution was found. A number of campaigns that worked to highlight the problem of plastic pollution focussed on the company, such as Surfers Against Sewage and Greenpeace. It was widely regarded as the world's worst plastic polluter, with Greenpeace labelling it a "global plastic menace" (see **Stories falling outside of Ethical Consumer's rating system** and **Ethical Consumer database records**).

**Recent revision of ethical targets met with criticism** – In December 2024, The Coca-Cola Company published a revision of several of its key environmental targets, spanning carbon emissions, agricultural practices, water use and packaging. These changes were widely regarded as watering down or delaying the company's commitments (see **Ethical Consumer database records**).

**Operations in tax havens** – Ethical Consumer noted the presence of subsidiaries in jurisdictions considered to be tax havens, with no public country by country reporting explaining the company's presence in these jurisdictions (see **Ethical Consumer database records**).

**Company Details**

Ownership:

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The Coca-Cola Company is publicly listed on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>1</sup> It has a number of minority shareholders but none that own more than 10% of the company. Its largest minority shareholders at the time of writing were Berkshire Hathaway and Vanguard Fiduciary Trust Co. which owned 9.3% and 8.7% respectively.<sup>2</sup>

The discovery of a corporate shareholder owning more than 25% of The Coca-Cola Company could have affected the ethical ratings given to the company. However, as no significant corporate shareholders were found, it was rated as an independent company.

## Size:

**Turnover:** £36.8bn (The Coca-Cola Company)<sup>3</sup>

**Employee numbers:** 79,100 (The Coca-Cola Company)<sup>4</sup>

**Geography of operations:** global with “products sold in more than 200 countries and territories” (The Coca-Cola Company)<sup>5</sup>

## Contact details:

**Website:** [www.coca-colacompany.com/](http://www.coca-colacompany.com/)

**Telephone:** (+1) (0)404 676 2121

**Email:** [gbmedia@coca-cola.com](mailto:gbmedia@coca-cola.com)

**Address:** 1 Coca-Cola Plaza North West, Atlanta, Georgia, GA30313, USA

## Company overview:

The Coca-Cola Company operates in the beverage sector and is one of the world’s largest and most recognisable companies. It ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in terms of net sales globally.<sup>6</sup> It owns “more than 200 brands and thousands of beverages around the world”,<sup>7</sup> including:

- Soft drinks: Coca-Cola; Fanta; innocent; Minute Maid; Powerade; Sprite; and smartwater.
- Alcoholic drinks: Topo Chico; Lemon-Dou; and Jack Daniel’s & Coca-Cola.
- Coffee and tea: Costa Coffee; fuzetea; Georgia; and Peace Tea.<sup>8</sup>

The company was rated against Ethical Consumer’s core ratings for its action and reporting on Climate, Workers, Tax Conduct, Company Ethos and Animals.

As a non-alcoholic drinks company that manufactured and/or retailed physical goods, it was also rated for its approach to Agriculture and Packaging.

## Risk Searches

“Company” + “criticism” OR “court” OR “penalty” OR “death” OR “fine” OR “controversy” OR “scandal” OR “corruption”:

On 21 February 2025, Ethical Consumer conducted an Internet search of the terms “The Coca-Cola

1 [finance.yahoo.com/quote/KO/](http://finance.yahoo.com/quote/KO/)

2 [uk.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/THE-COCA-COLA-COMPANY-4819/company/](http://uk.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/THE-COCA-COLA-COMPANY-4819/company/)

3 [app.dnbhoovers.com/company/39a4f25c-cccc-308b-a221-4c7f3c95db87#report/company\\_summary](http://app.dnbhoovers.com/company/39a4f25c-cccc-308b-a221-4c7f3c95db87#report/company_summary)

4 [finance.yahoo.com/quote/KO/](http://finance.yahoo.com/quote/KO/)

5 [investors.coca-colacompany.com/about](http://investors.coca-colacompany.com/about)

6 [www.statista.com/statistics/307963/leading-beverage-companies-worldwide-based-on-net-sales/](http://www.statista.com/statistics/307963/leading-beverage-companies-worldwide-based-on-net-sales/)

7 [www.coca-colacompany.com/about-us](http://www.coca-colacompany.com/about-us)

8 [www.coca-colacompany.com/brands#tabs-55f8785686-item-b4a5364ed2-tab](http://www.coca-colacompany.com/brands#tabs-55f8785686-item-b4a5364ed2-tab)

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Company" + "criticism" OR "court" OR "penalty" OR "death" OR "fine" OR "controversy" OR "scandal" OR "corruption". Ethical Consumer searched these results for secondary criticisms and evidence of malpractice. Ethical Consumer also conducted a search of news outlets for other incidences of criticism. Stories of significance that were dated within five years and related to at least one of Ethical Consumer's rating categories were included in the Ethical Consumer database records below. Other results that do not meet the above requirements but were of interest are included at the end of this report.

## Ratings and Criticisms

### Ethical Consumer rating summary:

The Coca-Cola Company receives an Ethiscore of **1 out of 100** on Ethical Consumer's database.

It was rated in the following categories:

- Climate: 10/100
- Animals: 0/100
- Workers: 0/100
- Tax Conduct: 0/100
- Company Ethos: 0/100
- Agriculture: 0/100
- Packaging: 0/100

Ethiscores show overall performance against Ethical Consumer's bespoke ethical rating system. Generally, scores from above 60 are considered good, between 25 and 60 average, and below 25 poor. Please follow [this link](#) for more information about Ethical Consumer's rating system. However, the score should be considered alongside other information presented in this report.

The Coca-Cola Company operated in the non-alcoholic drinks sector, and achieves a low score. It had the lowest Ethiscore of the soft drinks companies rated for ██████████ in March 2025, which received Ethiscores between 1 and 57.

Ethical Consumer has produced an in-depth shopping guide to the ethical issues surrounding this sector which can be found [here](#). This shopping guide included a number of The Coca-Cola Company's brands but was last updated in December 2020 using Ethical Consumer's old rating system, and therefore a direct score comparison is not possible.

## Ethical Consumer database records

### Climate: 10/100 (22 January 2025)

On 22 January 2025, Ethical Consumer viewed the website of The Coca-Cola Company looking for information on what the company was doing to tackle climate change. Its Sustainability webpages, CDP 2023 report, December 2024 environmental targets update 'The Coca-Cola Company Evolves Voluntary Environmental Goals', 'Proposed carbon reduction pathway 2040' and 2023 Environmental Update were viewed.

Ethical Consumer was looking for the company to satisfy the following criteria:

1. A credible, detailed discussion of how it has made emissions cuts in the past and how it will make them in the future.

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2. Does full annual public reporting of its emissions – all three scopes.
3. Has a future target for all Scopes that is either approved by the SBTi or at least the equivalent to 3.6% cuts/year in scope one and two emissions, and 2.5% cuts/year in scope 3.
4. Does not work in developing new extraction fossil fuel projects, building new fossil fired power stations or in doing anything with coal.
5. Is not engaging in highly misleading public messaging on climate change.
6. Has not been subject to credible secondary criticism on what it is doing on the climate.
  - 1a. The company had credible discussion of past action to cut emissions in its main areas of impact. The company discussed:
    - engaging with suppliers and increasing renewable energy for its manufacturing operations, stating that renewable electricity usage in its systems increased from 21% in 2022 to 24% in 2023, however these figures were not assured by a third-party. It was noted that in a previous report it had stated that in 2021, 12% of its system's electricity demand was met with renewable sources, a decrease from 17% in 2020.
    - past actions for packaging, ingredients, energy efficiency and renewable energy in manufacturing, distribution and refrigeration.
    - the fact that as of 2023 it had reduced its scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions by 8% from a 2015 baseline.
    - its supply chain emissions, highlighting its Renewable Energy Implementation Handbook and stating that it had worked with bottling partners to increase the number of renewable energy projects; publishing cooler guidelines; placing HFC-free and data-driven coolers (in 2022, 88% of all new coolers placed were HFC-free); and working with suppliers towards setting and meeting science-based targets. (10 points)
  - 1b. The company had some discussion of future action to cut emissions in its main areas of impact but this was not deemed to be credible as it did not cover a significant proportion of the business's activities in detail.
    - in its 2023 CDP report the company stated that it was working to updated its targets to "consider emissions from land use change in our supply chain as part of our overall GHG footprint and would consider carbon sequestration from land-based projects we implement in our supply chain". It was unclear if its December 2024 target update included its land use emissions or not.
    - regarding its future plans to reduce the impacts of its bottling plants the company stated that, "Approximately 20 bottling partners and 13 concentrate plants have developed 2023–2025 renewable energy plans. As the number and scope of these projects expands, we will look for opportunities to collaborate and share best practices."
    - Its 'Proposed carbon reduction pathway 2040' included other commitments such as sourcing 100% renewable electricity in Europe by 2025 and in all other plants by 2030. But many of its statements were vague and without a specific timeline or plan, such as "increase use of trains' and 'sustainable agriculture'. (0 points)
  - 1c. The company's discussion of actions to cut emissions in its main areas of impact was detailed. Its reporting offered significant depth and provided detailed analysis of its emissions across its own operations and that of its suppliers, including those further upstream such as its agricultural suppliers. (10 points)
    2. The company reported its annual full scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions in tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e for the year 2023 to be:
      - Scope 1: 292,106
      - Scope 2: 844,848

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Scope 3: 4,484,403

The Scope 2 reporting appeared to be location based and the Scope 3 reporting appeared comprehensive. (30 points)

3. The company's website stated that its target was: to reduce Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions in line with a 1.5°C trajectory by 2035, using 2019 as a baseline.

The above target represented a change from its previous target to "reduce absolute scope 1, 2, and 3 GHG emissions 25% by 2030 from a 2015 base-year," which had been approved by SBTi as aligning with a 2°C warming scenario.

The revised target delayed the company's deadline from 2030 to 2035, and Coca-Cola also noted that "the company's acquired businesses will be excluded from this goal, including BODYARMOR, CHI, Costa, dogadan, fairlife and innocent. The company expects to prepare these businesses for integration into its 1.5°C trajectory over time."

No evidence was found that SBTi had approved The Coca-Cola Company's new emissions target and as it lacked a specific percentage reduction and did not incorporate all of the company's subsidiaries it was considered inadequate. (0 points)

4. The company was not found to work in developing new fossil fuel projects, nor was it involved in coal in any way. (0 points deducted)

5. The company did not appear to be engaged in prominent misleading messaging. (10 points)

6. The company was subject to a significant and reputable third-party criticism related to its climate impacts.

Source: Carbon Credits

Title: The Bottled Truth: Coca-Cola's New 2035 Environmental Goals Face Sustainability Backlash

Date: 5 Dec 2024

Summary: "The updated 2035 goal, however, no longer includes an absolute emissions reduction target. Instead, Coca-Cola aims to reduce Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions in line with a 1.5°C trajectory, using 2019 as a baseline."

Source: Greenpeace USA

Title: The Climate Emergency Unpacked: How Consumer Goods Companies are Fueling Big Oil's Plastic Expansion

Date: 13 September 2021

Summary: The Coca-Cola Company was accused by Greenpeace USA alongside other large companies of "playing a key role in driving the demand for plastic and therefore fossil fuels." The report discussed the carbon intensity of PET plastic bottles and the failure of companies to reduce their use of PET or significantly increase the amount of recycled content used. Coca-Cola reportedly emitted the largest amount of CO<sub>2</sub> as a result of its packaging production. (-50 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, The Coca-Cola Company scored 10/100 for Climate. (ref: 1)

## Workers: 0/100 (18 February 2025)

On 18 February 2025, Ethical Consumer viewed the Coca-Cola Company, The website for information on the treatment of workers in its supply chain. The following documents were consulted: Supplier Guiding Principles, Human Rights webpage, and Principles for Sustainable Agriculture (PSA).

Ethical Consumer was looking for the company to have a supplier code of conduct that met the

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following criteria:

- 1) No use of forced labour.
- 2) Freedom of association.
- 3) Payment of a living wage (eg 'basic needs and some discretionary income').
- 4) Working week limited to 48 hours and 12 hours overtime (ETI exemption 6.5 applies).
- 5) Eliminations of child labour (under 15 years old, or under 14 if country has ILO exemption).
- 6) No discrimination by race, sex etc.
- 7) A safe and healthy working environment.
- 8) Regular employment is offered.

The company's supplier code of conduct met 4 out of 8 criteria. 3, 4, 5 and 8 were not met.

The company had adequate policies on forced labour, discrimination, safe working environment, and freedom of association. A strong policy would also include the following commitments: payment of a living wage, the restriction of working hours to 48 hours plus 12 overtime (without exception), regular employment, and no use of child labour (under 15 or 14 if ILO exempt).

The company's Supplier Guiding Principles stated "If the eight Core Conventions of the International Labor Organization establish higher standards than local law, the ILO standards need to be met by the supplier." While it stated that suppliers should comply with ILO conventions, it did not explicitly state what was expected of suppliers, such as "child labour" signifying anyone under 15 years old, or 14 if the country had ILO exemption, or how many hours was acceptable for overtime. Moreover, no mention of regular employment or living wages was found. (0 points)

The company did not state that its supplier code of conduct applied beyond its tier 1 suppliers. It only stated that, "The principles outlined below reflect the values we uphold in our own policies, and we expect our direct suppliers to follow the spirit and intent of these guiding principles to ensure respect for all human rights." (0 points)

The company was not seen to support worker-driven monitoring in its supply chain. (0 points)

The company had a published list of Tier 1 suppliers, "representing the top 80% of global spend for our 4 top priority ingredients by volume, being sugar (sugar cane and sugar beet), corn (high-fructose corn syrup) and orange juice." (10 points)

The company did not state that it had chosen to manufacture all its products in a country / countries with more robust labour rights legislation. (0 points)

The company did not appear to manufacture any of its products in house. (0 points)

The company was not seen to have taken significant steps to ensure good purchasing practices. For example, to avoid aggressive price negotiation, inaccurate forecasting, late orders, short lead times and last minute changes. No evidence was found of a clear commitment to long term relationships with suppliers to encourage compliance with supply chain policies. (0 points)

The company was not seen to have taken adequate steps to address the issue of living wages in its supply chain. (0 points)

No evidence could be found that the company actively supported and worked with trade unions to uphold workers' rights. It did state that it had ongoing engagement with the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF), and stated that it met twice annually with the organisation. A link titled "Read our updated joint statement" led to a document dated 2010. A visit to the IUF website did not provide any updates on engagement between the company and the union. It however featured several articles stating that The Coca-Cola Company was violating the rights of workers in various countries. (0 points)

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Several significant and reputable third-party criticisms (dated in the past 5 years) were found relating to workers' rights:

Source: Highlights in Business, Economics and Management

Title: Analysis of Coca-Cola Company Violation of Employees' Rights Case

Date: 2023

Summary: "As a privately held firm, the Coca-Cola firm seeks to maximize profits by lowering labour expenses. Many Coca-Cola employees were fired as a result of the decreasing labour cost, and the working conditions for those who remained at the firm deteriorated. All of the aforementioned claims demonstrated that the rights of the employees had been disregarded."

Source: Know the Chain

Title: 2022-2023 Benchmark

Date: 2023

Summary: "The Coca-Cola Company (Coca-Cola), the world's largest soft drink company, ranks 13 out of 60 companies" and had a score of 29/100. (-50 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, the company scored 0/100 for Workers. (ref: 2)

## **Tax Conduct: 0/100 (22 January 2025)**

On 22 January 2025, Ethical Consumer viewed records for Coca-Cola Company, The, looking for indications that it might be using tax havens for tax avoidance purposes. The following were viewed: D&B Hoovers corporate database and The Coca-Cola Company –Tax Policy.

Ethical Consumer was looking for the company to satisfy the following criteria:

1. That it had no subsidiaries on our list of tax havens, or had the Fair Tax Mark accreditation;
2. That it had not been subject to credible secondary criticism for tax avoidance.

If it did have subsidiaries in tax havens but did not have the Fair Tax Mark, Ethical Consumer was looking for evidence that these were clearly not for purposes of tax avoidance. Such evidence might include:

1. A clear public tax statement confirming that it is company policy not to engage in tax avoidance activity and a narrative explanation for what each subsidiary located in a tax haven is for, and how it was not being used for purposes of tax minimisation
2. Public country-by-country reporting of sales made and tax paid in each jurisdiction that does not show likely avoidance activities.

The Coca-Cola Company was not Fair Tax accredited.

The Coca-Cola Company was found to have two or more subsidiaries based in jurisdictions on Ethical Consumer's tax havens list which were of a type which are high risk for likely use of tax avoidance strategies. The subsidiaries did not appear to serve the local population, and no public country by country reporting or adequate policy statement and narrative explanation was found. The subsidiaries included:

Wave Insurance Co., Ltd (The) based in Bermuda

HINDUSTAN COCA-COLA OVERSEAS HOLDINGS PTE LTD based in Singapore

Coca-Cola Schweiz GmbH in Switzerland (0 points)

Two significant and reputable third-party criticisms related to tax avoidance was found.

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Source: Just Drinks

Title: The Coca-Cola Co. to appeal \$6bn US tax dispute

Date: 2 Aug 2024

Summary: Coca-Cola is set to appeal a US court decision that supported a government bid to claim circa \$6bn in taxes. In September 2015, the Sprite and Fanta brands owner first received a notice from the IRS seeking additional federal income tax for years 2007 through 2009. The decision reflects a liability of approximately \$2.7bn. This is expected to rise to around \$6bn when accounting for interest, according to Coca-Cola.

Source: tpcases.com

Title: Coca-Cola in \$174 million tax dispute with the ATO

Date: December 2023

Summary: According to the Australian Tax Office, Coca-Cola licensed intangibles (trademarks, branding etc.) to Coca-Cola Amatil Australia, but misclassified payments made under this agreement as being for soft drink-concentrate only in order to avoid paying withholding tax on royalties. Coca-Cola shifted around \$435 million in profits overseas and is liable for \$174 million in diverted profits tax. (-50 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, the company scored 0/100 for Tax Conduct. (ref: 3)

## Company Ethos: 0/100 (22 January 2025)

On 22 January 2025, Ethical Consumer looked for information on Coca-Cola Company, The in order to assess its company ethos. Ethical Consumer was looking at a number of factors, including: director pay, lobbying, involvement in controversial sectors (arms/military supply, nuclear power/weapons, fossil fuels) and whether it was subject to any progressive boycott calls.

Ethical Consumer was also looking for more democratic company structures and group wide policies:

- Co-operative or mutually owned.
- Part employee-owned.
- Not-for-profit.
- All products environmental or social alternatives.
- Registered social enterprise.
- B-Corp.
- Living Wage certified.

The company was not found to be any of the following: co-op, mutual, not-for-profit, charity, registered social enterprise, employee owned, or a B Corp. (0 points)

The company was not considered to be providing a social or environmental alternative. (0 points)

The company did not appear to have positive approach to pay ratios. (0 points)

The highest paid director was paid \$24,742,908 in 2023. Any remuneration over £10m was considered very excessive. (-20 points)

The company did not appear to be Living Wage certified. (0 points)

The company was found to be in two or more lobby groups considered problematic by Ethical Consumer. These were: AmCham EU, World Economic Forum, Bilderberg Group, US Council for International Business and Business Roundtable. (-20 points)

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The company was not involved in any sectors considered by Ethical Consumer to be highly controversial: arms/military supply, fossil fuels, mining, nuclear power/weapons. (20 points)

The company was found to be subject to a significant boycott of the whole company: The BDS Movement called a boycott of The Coca-Cola Company in November 2024; and Friends of Al Aqsa, a UK-based non-profit NGO, called on consumers to boycott Coca-Cola because it "profit[s] from the occupation." (-20 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, Coca-Cola Company, The scored 0/100 for Company Ethos. (ref: 4)

## Animals: 0/100

On 21 February 2025, Ethical Consumer viewed the website of The Coca-Cola Company, looking for information about its approach to animal products. Its Animal Health and Welfare Guiding Principles webpage and product ingredient lists were viewed.

For animal-based products to score the highest points, we were looking for organic certified and Pasture For Life certified to ensure a certain level of animal welfare standards were met. A lesser number of points were available for companies with some organic products and welfare policies.

The Coca-Cola UK website stated that the following drinks contained animal derivatives:

Lilt

Lilt Zero

Kia-Ora Orange Squash No Added Sugar

Schweppes Indian Tonic Water

Schweppes Orange Squash

Honest (Lemon and Honey)

Glaceau Vitaminwater Zero Sunshine and Multi V

Costa Coffee Ready-to-Drink Caramel Latte

Costa Coffee Ready-to-Drink Latte

Costa Coffee Ready-to-Drink Americano

The above drinks contained fish gelatine; honey; vitamin D sourced from lanolin in sheep's wool; or milk.

Company subsidiary Costa Limited was also found to serve food products containing meat, fish and dairy.

It was noted that the company's most popular brand, its Coca-Cola soft drink, was explicitly stated to be suitable for vegans. However, as shown above, many of its other products contained animal goods.

The brand was found to have no adequate, or partial policies. The Coca-Cola Company group had minimal policies regarding animal products. Its animal welfare policy webpage included the following commitments:

- a zero-tolerance policy for wilful acts of animal abuse and neglect

- a detailed "Global Area of Focus" on dairy, claiming to be "driving continuous improvement" in the following areas: Painful procedures (including debudding, castration and dehorning); Tail docking; Physical cattle branding (hot or freeze iron); Antibiotic / Hormone use; Accommodation / Housing; Transportation Practice; Health management and longevity.

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These policies were not adequate to meet Ethical Consumer's requirements. (0 points)

Two or more significant and reputable third-party criticisms (dated within the past 5 years) related to animal rights or welfare were found.

Source: Food Dive

Title: Coca-Cola and others agree to \$21M settlement for Fairlife animal abuse lawsuits

Date: 3 May 2022

Summary: Coca-Cola and other parties agreed to pay \$21 million to settle lawsuits for falsely advertising their Fairlife ultra-filtered milk came from humanely treated cows. The settlement received preliminary approval by an Illinois federal judge on April 27.

Source: Viva

Title: The True Costa Dairy

Date: 18 January 2023

Summary: Viva!'s 'The True Costa Dairy' campaign was launched in early 2023 after an investigation revealed that Home Farm – a dairy farm with links to Costa Coffee – was keeping cows in cramped, dirty conditions, with multiple violations to their health. The campaign included media coverage, events, web copy and social media. (-50 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, the brand(s) scored 0/100 for Animal Products. (ref: 7)

**Agriculture: 0/100 (23 January 2025)**

On 23 January 2025, Ethical Consumer viewed the website of Coca-Cola Company, The for details of its agricultural practices. Its Principles of Sustainable Agriculture (PSA), 2023 CDP Water Response and 2023 CDP Forest Response were viewed.

We were looking for evidence of organic standards, or that the company prohibited GM ingredients or animal feed, or was reducing chemicals used in agriculture.

We also looked for any: policy on biodiversity and ecosystems; evidence of reducing pollution, especially from animal farming; policy on reducing water use/waste in agriculture; and policy on food waste.

The company had no, or nearly no, organic options. (0 points)

The Coca-Cola Company was not organic, but it stated that it did not use any GM ingredients in its own-brand products. It stated "No, we don't use any genetically modified ingredients in our drinks." The company did not appear to rule out the use of GMO ingredients across all of its products.

It was also noted that in its Principles of Sustainable Agriculture it stated that it expected farms to be "able to evidence their GMO/GMO-free status. Where GMOs are used, this is in line with regulations. Natural genetic diversity is conserved." (0 points)

The company did not appear to have an adequate policy on pesticides. It stated, "All products used to protect crops from pest pressures, including, but not limited to, insects, weeds and diseases, are clearly documented and are part of an Integrated Pest Management System." However this did not express an aim to reduce the use of pesticides. (0 points)

The company had a statement acknowledging biodiversity/ecosystems and had a stated aim to reduce agricultural impact. It stated, "Conservation of Natural Habitats, Biodiversity and Ecosystems: Identify and help protect natural habitats from conversion. Natural ecosystems are not altered or burned for conversion to new production. Promote and protect natural habitats, protected areas and biodiversity, including natural pollinators, through the protection, and where possible, restoration of

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ecosystem services through approaches that build resilience to shocks and longer-term climate stressors. Farms take special measures to protect threatened or endangered species."

The company had also published its 2023 CDP Forest Response which included information about its commitments to reducing deforestation. It stated, "We have a specific principle on Conservation of Forests which asks suppliers to promote sustainable forest management and help protect woodlands from deforestation and illegal harvesting. New production areas are not established in natural habitats/ ecosystems including forests or high-value conservation areas and do not cut through wildlife corridors or routes used for migration. Forests are not cut or burned for conversion to new production. There is no deliberate use of fire for land clearance." (10 points).

The company did not appear to demonstrate ways it was preventing or reducing agricultural pollution / run-off for its main products. Its 2023 CDP Water Response did state that, "Our Supplier Guiding Principles (SGPs) and Principles for Sustainable Agriculture (PSAs) set out the requirements The Coca-Cola Company expects all suppliers to comply with, including requirements on water management (including pollutants), and minimizing water quality impacts from wastewater discharges and erosion, and nutrient/agrochemical runoff." However these documents lacked demonstrable ways it was preventing or reducing agricultural pollution / run-off. (0 points)

The company had published information regarding water use reduction throughout its agricultural supply chain. Its PSA document stated that suppliers should, "Ensure long-term sustainability of water resources in balance with community and ecosystem needs by measuring their water use and quality where crops are irrigated, maximizing water use efficiency and minimizing water quality impacts from wastewater discharges, erosion and nutrient/agrochemical runoff. Farms located in water-stressed areas actively manage their source water to highest standards (e.g. using Alliance for Water Stewardship) and build resilience to climate change by managing for uncertainty, extremes and gradual change. Farms avoid converting important water-related areas (e.g. wetlands)."

The company's 2023 CDP Water Response stated, "The 2024 target is 70% replenishment aggregated globally across all leadership locations. The performance indicator is linked to progress on the company's three key water goals. The first goal is to achieve 100% regenerative water use across 175 of our facilities identified as facing high levels of water stress by 2030, and the performance indicator is part of how "regenerative water use" is calculated, in addition to water reduction, reuse, and recycling. The second goal is to improve the health of 60 watersheds identified as most critical for our operations and agricultural supply chain by 2030, and the performance indicator includes improving the availability and quality of water in these priority watersheds. The third goal is to return a total of 2 trillion liters of water to nature and communities globally between 2021 and 2030 and the performance indicator includes replenish project volumetric benefits that will contribute to the total for this goal." (10 points)

The company provided no, or only brief, information about how it avoided food waste. (0 points)

More than one significant and reputable third-party criticism (dated within the past 5 years) related to agriculture/biodiversity was found.

Source: Carbon Credits

Title: The Bottled Truth: Coca-Cola's New 2035 Environmental Goals Face Sustainability Backlash

Date: 5 Dec 2024

Summary: "Coca-Cola has removed its goal to source 100% of its priority agricultural ingredients according to its Principles for Sustainable Agriculture."

Source: The Guardian

Title: 'It's plunder': Mexico desperate for water while drinks companies use billions of litres

Date: 28 July 2022

Summary: "More than half of Mexico is suffering from drought, and the national water authority,

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Conagua, declared a state of emergency in four northern states." "But the drought has not halted the water use of companies including Coca-Cola and Heineken use private wells to continue extracting groundwater for their production lines." (-50 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, Coca-Cola Company, The scored 0/100 for Agriculture. (ref: 5)

## **Packaging: 0/100**

On 21 February 2025, Ethical Consumer viewed the website of The Coca-Cola Company for details of what it was doing to reduce packaging, especially plastic packaging. Its Packaging webpage and 2023 Environmental Update were viewed.

No evidence could be found that the company had reduced packaging in its own operations (ie tertiary packaging, which does not go to consumers). (0 points)

No evidence could be found that the company had reduced packaging in its supply chain (for example, saying that it was working with suppliers to reduce packaging). (0 points)

The company had taken some steps to reduce its packaging for the goods it supplies to consumers, but these steps were considered relatively minimal. It stated a goal to, "Have at least 25% of our beverages worldwide by volume sold in refillable/returnable glass or plastic bottles or in fountain dispensers with reusable packaging by 2030". It had achieved 14% by 2023. (10 points)

The company also had a variety of other packaging-related goals and programmes which did not related to the criteria laid out above. Such as:

- Increase the percentage of recycled goods used in its packaging: It aimed to use 35% - 40% recycled materials by 2030 in its plastic, glass and aluminium packaging.

- Increasing the percentage of its packaging that can be recycled: It aimed to have 100% of its packaging recyclable by 2025. It was on 90% in 2023.

Two or more significant and reputable third-party criticisms (dated within the past 5 years) related to packaging were found.

Source: The Guardian

Title: Survey finds that 60 firms are responsible for half of world's plastic pollution

Date: 24 April 2024

Summary: "Fewer than 60 multinationals are responsible for more than half of the world's plastic pollution, with six responsible for a quarter of that, based on the findings of a piece of research published on Wednesday." The Coca-Cola Company was listed as the top plastic polluter.

Source: Earth Island Institute

Title: Ending Coke's Greenwashing

Date: 4 September 2024

Summary: "Earth Island Institute filed a lawsuit against the Coca-Cola Company, the American multinational beverage corporation, for its false and deceptive portrayal as a sustainable and environmentally friendly company while in reality generating more plastic pollution than any other company in the world."

In September 2024 the Washington D.C. "appeals court holds that environmental nonprofit [Earth Island Institute] can challenge beverage giant's sustainability claims."

Source: Greenpeace

Title: Unbottling the truth: Coca Cola's role in plastic pollution

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Date: 26 September 2023

Summary: The report lists the world's worst plastic polluters, putting Coca-Cola at the top and states that that company is "a global plastic menace". (-50 points)

Final scores are capped at either 0 or 100. Overall, Coca-Cola Company, The scored 0/100 for Packaging. (ref: 6)

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Communications: [www.coca-colacompany.com/media-center/the-coca-cola-company-evolves-voluntary-environmental-goals](http://www.coca-colacompany.com/media-center/the-coca-cola-company-evolves-voluntary-environmental-goals) (December 2024)

2 - Coca-Cola Company, The Corporate Communications: Principles for Sustainable Agriculture (4 August 2021)

3 - Just Drinks: <https://www.just-drinks.com/news/the-coca-cola-co-to-appeal-6bn-us-tax-dispute/> (2 August 2024)

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5 - Coca-Cola Company, The Corporate Communications: GDP Forest response (2023)

6 - Coca-Cola Company, The Corporate Communications: Environmental Update (2023)

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## Stories falling outside of Ethical Consumer's rating system:

The operational size and high media profile of The Coca-Cola Company meant it was not possible for Ethical Consumer to review and include every criticism lodged against it. Below are a representative selection of recent criticisms lodged against the company that fall outside of Ethical Consumer's rating system:

**Fines totalling \$265bn issued since 2000:** The Violation Tracker website which monitors penalties lodged against companies listed \$265bn worth of fines against The Coca-Cola Company. The largest by some margin was a \$192bn fine dated 2001 relating to employment discrimination. The most recent significant fine was dated 2022 and related to a consumer protection violation. The violations recorded spanned employment discrimination charges, workers' rights issues, financial offences and environmental violations.<sup>9</sup>

**Land grab court case:** There is an on-going class-action court case against the Thai sugar producer supplier Mitr Phol following accusations of forced land grabs in Cambodia. "The legal complaint was filed in a Thai civil court by two plaintiffs representing a class of approximately 3000 people who were violently displaced and dispossessed of their land and livelihoods in five remote villages in northwestern Cambodia to clear the way for a Mitr Pohl sugarcane plantation between 2008 and 2009." Mitr Pohl was said to be the fourth largest sugar supplier in the world, and sold sugar to global brands including Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Nestle and Mars.

"The suit alleges that Mitr Phol's operation in Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province resulted in violent forced evictions, burning of homes, looting of crops and livestock and the seizure of land that was legally held by local farmers. Forests inside the company's land concessions that local communities relied upon for their livelihoods were illegally logged. Those who resisted were threatened, arrested and imprisoned...[T]he National Human Rights Commission of Thailand found Mitr Phol directly responsible for human rights violations committed in conjunction with its operations in Cambodia...Mitr

<sup>9</sup> violationtracker.goodjobsfirst.org/?parent=coca-cola-co&order=penalty&sort=desc

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Phol told the commission that it would compensate affected people in accordance with international standards but has failed to do so."<sup>10</sup>

An article titled 'Cambodian Land Disputants Head to Thai Court, Coca-Cola Documents in Hand' and dated 3 November 2023 on the Camboja News website stated that the case had gone to trial.<sup>11</sup> No outcome of the case was found and it appeared to still be ongoing.

**Stance on the atrocities being committed by China against the Uyghur:** An article on the Guardian website dated 13th December 2020 and titled 'The Guardian view on China's treatment of the Uighurs: from unthinkable to irrefutable' reported that "the New York Times has reported that companies including Nike and Coca-Cola have pressed the US Congress to water down the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act. Lobbyists say that, while they oppose human rights abuses, they fear the stringent legislation could cause unforeseen problems, in part because of the opacity of Chinese supply chains."<sup>12</sup>

Another article dated 2nd January 2022 and titled 'Tory peer to lead boycott of Coca-Cola over role in Beijing Winter Olympics' reported that a "Tory peer has vowed to lead a boycott of Coca-Cola products over the company's sponsorship of the 2022 Beijing Olympics, saying its bid to profit from an event organised by the Chinese government was shameless."<sup>13</sup>

**Carbon emissions:** In September 2024 it was reported that the top UK food firms, including The Coca-Cola Company, were urged to do more to cut 'staggering' emissions, with their total footprint worldwide in 2022 running to 477m tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions.<sup>14</sup>

**Plastic pollution:** In June 2024 it was reported that new research from the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) "details the widespread burdens that plastic pollution places on US cities and states, and argues that plastic producers may be breaking public-nuisance, product-liability and consumer-protection laws." The CIEL state that, "Petrochemical producers such as ExxonMobil Chemical and Shell Polymers, and disposable plastic goods producers like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Unilever, should be held responsible."<sup>15</sup>

In June 2022, The Guardian published an article that listed Coca-Cola among brands greenwashing over packaging. "Coca-Cola, the report says, has spent millions promoting an innovation which says that its bottles are 25% marine plastic, but does not mention that the company is the world's biggest plastic polluter."<sup>16</sup>

In December 2024, The Guardian published an article titled 'Coca-Cola accused of quietly dropping its 25% reusable packaging target'. "Coca-Cola has been accused of quietly abandoning a pledge to achieve a 25% reusable packaging target by 2030 in what campaigners call a 'masterclass in greenwashing'. The company has been previously found by researchers to be among the world's most polluting brands when it comes to plastic waste."<sup>17</sup>

In February 2025 Coca-Cola stated that it was considering increasing its use of PET plastic packaging for its products sold in the US after Donald Trump's recently announced 25% tariff on imported steel and aluminium.<sup>18</sup>

10 [www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/cambodia-thailand-thai-ministry-of-justice-award-a-company-for-human-rights-compliance-while-facing-trial-of-forced-displacement/](http://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/cambodia-thailand-thai-ministry-of-justice-award-a-company-for-human-rights-compliance-while-facing-trial-of-forced-displacement/)

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**Drink alleged to contain toxic levels of PFAs:** The Guardian published an article titled "All-natural' Simply Tropical juice has high toxic PFAS levels, lawsuit alleges' on 25 January 2023. It reported that a class action lawsuit was filed against Coca-Cola and Simply Tropical fruit juice for deceiving customers with claims of an "all-natural, healthy product when the juice has been found to be contaminated with toxic PFAS at levels 'hundreds of times' above federal advisory limits for drinking water. PFAS are a class of about 12,000 chemicals typically used to make thousands of consumer products resist water, stains and heat. They are called "forever chemicals" because they do not naturally break down, and they are linked to cancer, fetal complications, liver disease, kidney disease, autoimmune disorders and other serious health issues".<sup>19</sup>

**Coca-Cola recall due to high levels of chlorate:** In January 2025 it was reported that Coca-Cola had recalled some of its drinks brands in certain European countries because "higher levels" of a chemicals called chlorate had been found. "Chlorate's effects on humans when taken in excess include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, and limiting the blood's ability to absorb oxygen." A spokesperson for the company stated that "Independent expert analysis concludes that any associated risk for consumers is very low".<sup>20</sup>

**Misleading advert banned:** The Advertising Standards Authority banned an Innocent advert for making it appear that drinking Innocent Smoothies would have a positive impact on the environment.

It stated: "The brand, which is known for its "wackaging" and is majority owned by Coca-Cola, has been making an effort to improve its climate credentials among consumers. Complainants, including the activist group Plastics Rebellion, argued that the ad implied that drinking smoothies from a disposable plastic bottle was good for the environment."

Its also reported that: "The ASA said: 'Although we acknowledged that Innocent were undertaking various actions which were aimed at reducing the environmental impact of their products, that did not demonstrate that their products had a net positive environmental impact over their full life cycles. We also noted that their drinks bottles included non-recycled plastic and that the extraction of raw materials and subsequent processing of those materials in order to produce the bottle would have a negative impact on the environment.'"<sup>21</sup>

**Offices leased from Myanmar military:** The Justice for Myanmar website published an article dated 16 April 2021, and titled 'Shangri-La financing crimes against humanity'. The article stated that The Coca-Cola Company was a tenant in office complex leased off Myanmar army by hotel brand Shangri-La, and believed to be on land acquired through military land grabbing.<sup>22</sup> In May 2021 other news outlets reported that the company had "quit office block with military ties".<sup>23</sup>

**Coca-Cola Company support corporate attempts to limit liability for alleged abuses abroad:** In July 2020 Reuters reported that 'U.S. Supreme Court takes up Nestle, Cargill appeals over human rights claims'.

It stated that "The U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether American corporations can be sued for

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alleged human rights abuses occurring abroad under a 1789 law, agreeing on Thursday to hear appeals by two companies - Cargill Inc and a Nestle SA subsidiary - accused of knowingly helping perpetuate slavery at Ivory Coast cocoa farms. The two companies are asking the nine justices to reverse a lower court ruling that allowed the lawsuit, filed on behalf of former child slaves from Mali who worked on the farms, against the companies filed under the Alien Tort Statute to proceed.”

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Coca-Cola Company and Chevron Corp all filed briefs asking the court to hear the Nestle and Cargill appeals.”<sup>24</sup>

In June 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favour of Nestle and Cargill “seemingly [bringing] an end to a 15-year lawsuit brought against Nestlé and Cargill by Malian citizens who claim to have been enslaved as children on cocoa plantations located in the Ivory Coast.”<sup>25</sup>

**Sponsorship of 2022 Qatar World Cup:** Human rights groups, including Amnesty International, pressured The Coca-Cola Company to advocate for human rights to be respected after the drinks company was announced as a sponsor of the 2022 Qatar World Cup.<sup>26</sup> Amnesty reported a positive response from the company.<sup>27</sup>

**Criticised for greenwashing:** The company has a long history of criticism of greenwashing, most recently relating to its sponsorship of the COP27 climate conference<sup>28</sup> and its ethical packaging claims.<sup>29</sup>

**Political donations:** In May 2017 Coca-Cola Israel was criticised for donating money to Israeli right-wing group Im Tirtzu;<sup>30</sup> It also made \$782k in political contributions and spend £3.2m on lobbying in 2024 according to the website OpenSecrets.<sup>31</sup>

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