



What is ECOSALT?



Courtesy: Necton S.A.

Ecosalt is an **ecolabel for solar salt** that aims to supply the consumers with more information about the environmental issues related with salt production.

The environmental impacts of salt production are typically disregarded in studies, since it seems a benign product which is only consumed in small amounts. However, salt is an essential part of almost any diet, and therefore it has an importance far greater than it seems at first sight.

ECOSALT – Eco-labelling of Traditional Sea Salt and “Flor de Sal” is a project that intends to study and optimize the production of traditional sea salt, and also its by-product, “flor de sal”, which is produced in solar saltworks. To achieve this goal, a norm for environmentally sustainable salt production was written. Parties certified by this norm may use an eco-label in their products. This label confirms that their salt was produced according to the best available techniques. It also reports the impacts caused or avoided by that type of production. The calculations of these impacts are done according to the method developed in ECOSALT.

*The project also contemplates a **communication plan**, which intends to supply consumers with more information about environmental-oriented purchases, in order to better inform them and influence their consumption patterns. This communication plan aims, for example, to generalize the diffusion of concepts like the ecological footprint, life cycle of products and environmental impacts.*

ECOSALT is the first example of an eco-label developed using the concept of Ecological Footprint.



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ECOSALT – Eco-labelling of Traditional Sea Salt and “Flor de Sal” is a project that intends to **study and optimize the production of traditional sea salt, and also its by-product, “flor de sal”**, which is produced in solar saltworks. The Project was born from a **partnership between Necton S.A, Instituto Superior Técnico and Sativa**. Necton S.A is a salt production company from the Algarve region in Portugal. Instituto Superior Técnico is a Portuguese university that lectures degrees in Engineering. As for Sativa, it is an audit and certification company.



Figure 15 – Necton’s saltworks in the Algarve region.



Figure 16 – Marnoto harvesting “Flor de Sal”.



ECOSALT consists on the **development of a type II eco-label, based on Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and using the concept of the Ecological Footprint**. The use of the eco-label will imply the adoption of an Environmental Sustainability Standard also developed during the project. The eco-label will then be the subject of a marketing and communication plan, which intends to inform consumers of the environmental impact of products, and how their consumption decisions may be environmentally-oriented.

According to the International Standards Organization (ISO), **the goal of any eco-label is to increase the demand and offer of products that harm the environment less during their life cycle**, by communicating accurate, trustworthy and certifiable information to consumers. In this respect, they are different from other Standards usually applied to companies, which aim at communicating their performance to other economic partners and not final consumers. The **ECOSALT label is also focused on consumers**.

At the foreign level, there are some examples of eco-labels, such as the Der Blau Engel (Germany), Nordic Swan (Scandinavian countries), Bra Mijöval (Sweden), NF Environment (France), Green Seal (USA) and Eco-Mark (Japan). **The only large scope label is the European Ecological Label**, which is open to any product or service produced within the European Union or imported from abroad.

To our knowledge, there is no other eco-label in the world in the agri-food sector that uses the concept of the Ecological Footprint to communicate. This concept, developed by Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees, expresses environmental impacts as an area. Its underlying philosophy is the contraposition of productive area requirements for a given country and the available productive area, or biocapacity. **In ECOSALT we apply this concept to two products, traditional sea salt and “flor de sal”**. However, we do not merely calculate direct impacts in salt production. We assess the whole product chain or life cycle, including indirect impacts.

ECOSALT's results are supported by extensive research and development. The work was carried out in four main stages:

1. Scenario definition;
2. Environmental Assessment;
3. Design of an Environmental Sustainability Standard;
4. Communication plan.

Scenario definition

Step one of the project consisted on the characterization of salt production systems. All inputs required for the production had to be quantified, as for example machinery, labor and energy consumed. In the end, we were able to define the productive system as a flux scheme.



Figure 17 – Necton's Sea Salt Production

Environmental assessment

In step two, the information assembled was used to calculate all the impacts of salt production. We used an LCA approach to calculate both direct and indirect impacts. We used software SimaPro 7.0, and methods Ecoindicator 95 and Ecoindicator 99. The results obtained via this process were then used to calculate the Ecological Footprint indicator.

Design of an Environmental Sustainability Standard

Step three was the design of an Environmental Sustainability Standard which sums up the results of the two previous steps. This Standard sets guidelines and targets for traditional solar salt production. It was defined according to the best practices and techniques available, and its final goal is the minimization of all environmental impacts during the production process. This standard may be used by other companies who wish to adopt environmentally-friendly techniques of salt production.

Communication plan

The fourth and final step is communication of results. In this step consumers are informed of the environmental impacts of salt products. The ecological label in Necton's products is ECOSALT's flagship. It is the end of the line result of all work carried out and it provides consumers with some results of the environmental assessment of salt products, and directs those most interested to places where they can look up more information.



Figure 18 – ECOSALT's flagship.



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For more on the European Ecological Label, see:

Regulation CEE 880/92 of 23 March 1992 revised by Regulation (CE) No 1980/2000 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 July 2000

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