



food facts for
healthy choices

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Challenges and perspectives of sustainable food communication to consumers

Shaping consumer demand for sustainable food:
how can we market and communicate effectively?

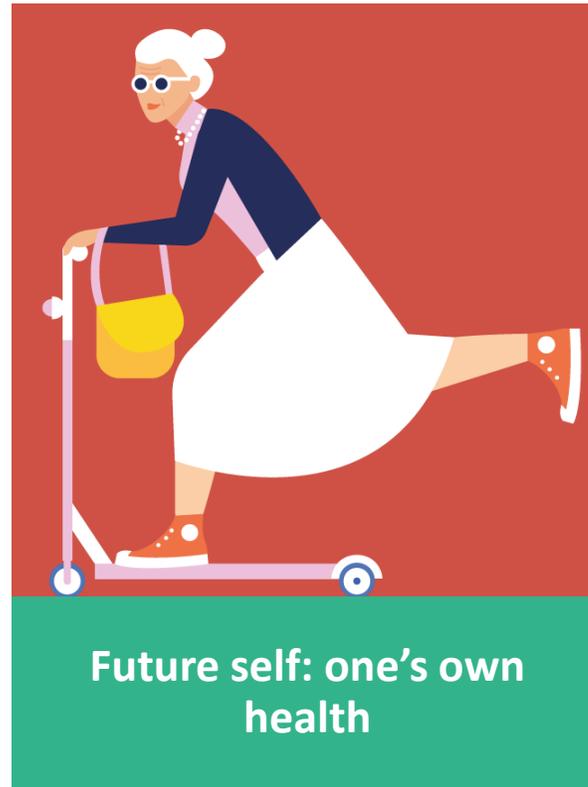
Dr Betty Chang
EFFoST Seminar series on Sustainable Food Systems
June 24, 2022



Challenge 1: Sustainability is long term, but food choices often are not

Sustainable development is “development that **meets the needs of the present** without compromising the ability of **future generations** to meet their own needs”

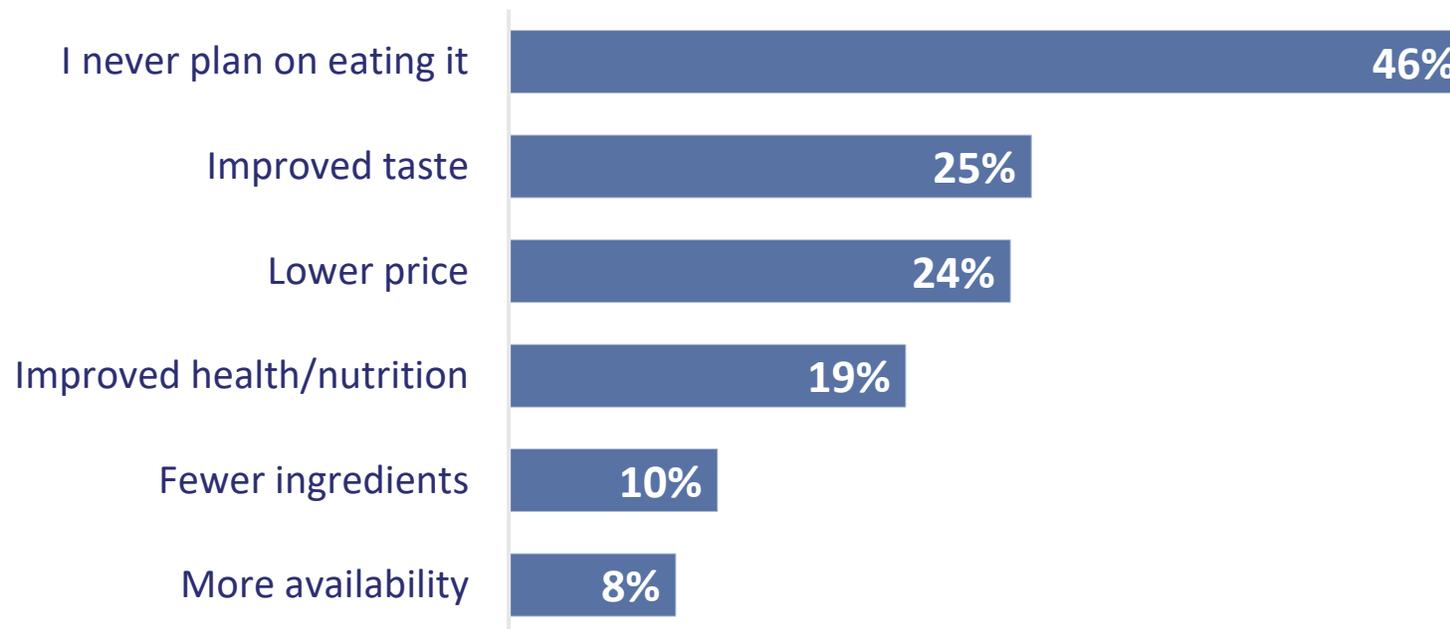
UN's 1987 Bruntland Commission Report



Solution: align with other priorities

Price, taste and health influence food choice more than sustainability (van Bussel et al., 2022)

U.S., German, and British consumers: factors that would lead to interest in trying plant-based meat (August 2020)



Emphasising health outcomes of reduced meat options makes them more acceptable

People more likely to make more sustainable choices when told that replacing beef with chicken is healthier vs. more sustainable



People willing to pay more for meat when labelled with a low fat rather than low carbon footprint



stock.adobe.com



medium.com

Low Carbon

But people are less willing to pay for a product if they know it contains less meat



Challenge 2: Different consumer segments have different priorities

'Green' consumers:

- Higher socioeconomic
- Younger
- Female



Lower socioeconomic:

Make sustainability affordable, convenient, tasty



Older:

Involve familiar ingredients/dishes

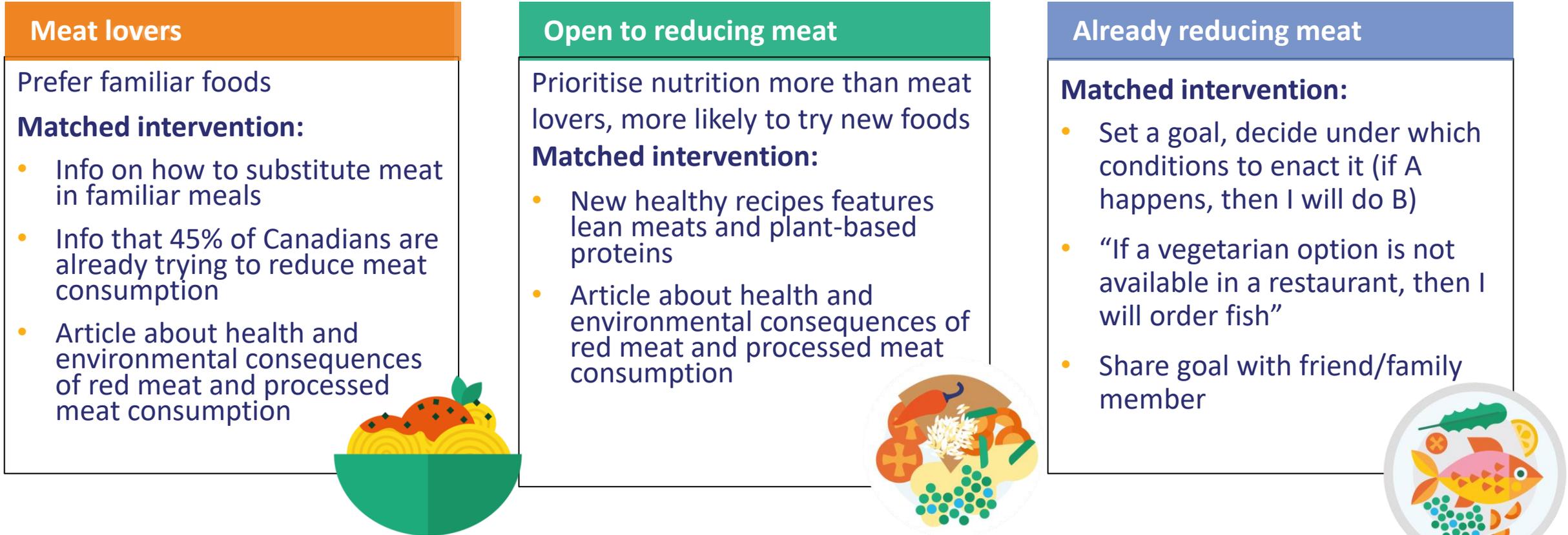


Male:

Affirm masculinity or present sustainability as "manly".
Make climate change arguments centred on science and business (vs. ethics and environmental justice)



Solution: Different strokes for different folks



Outcome measured: Food diaries of meat and plant-based protein consumption

Random intervention: reduced 20g of CO2 emissions/day: replacing chicken with pork once per week

Matched intervention: reduced 40g of CO2 emissions/day: replacing chicken with plants once per week ✓

Challenge 3: Sustainability is multidimensional



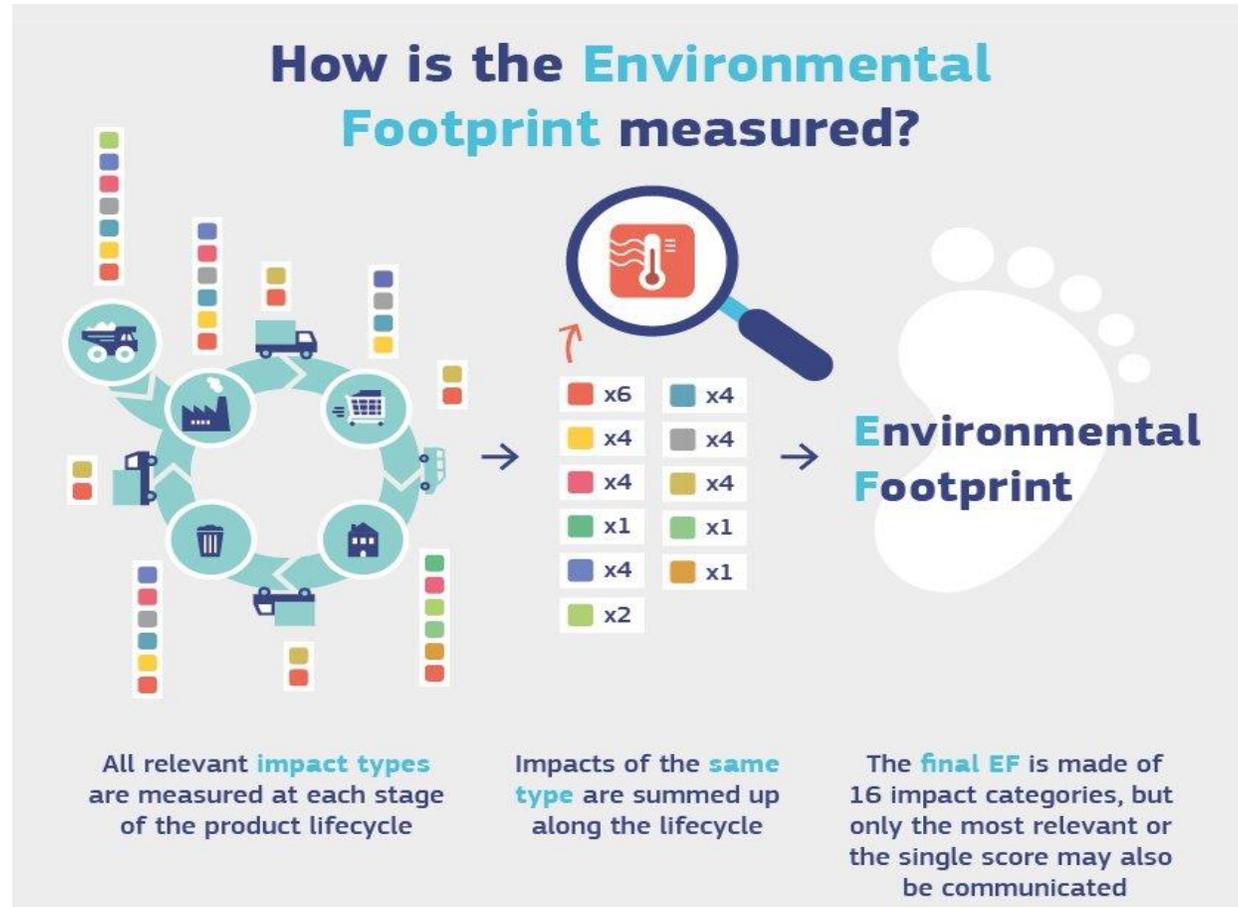
“MOSES brought ten commandments down from Mount Sinai. If only the UN’s proposed list of Sustainable Development Goals were as concise.”

The Economist, 2015

Leads to proliferation of standards...creates confusion



Solution: standardise



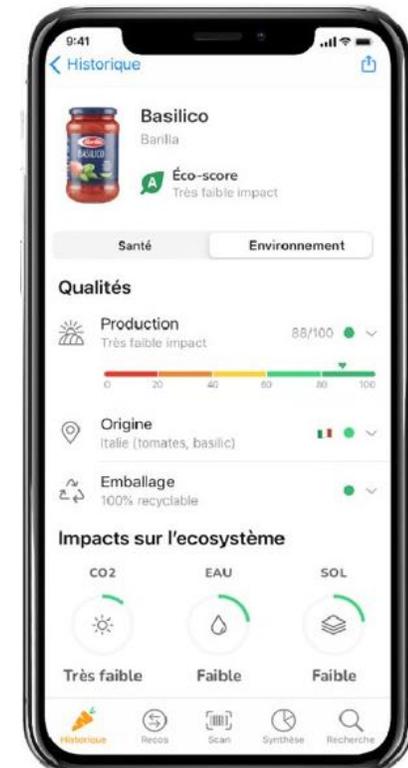
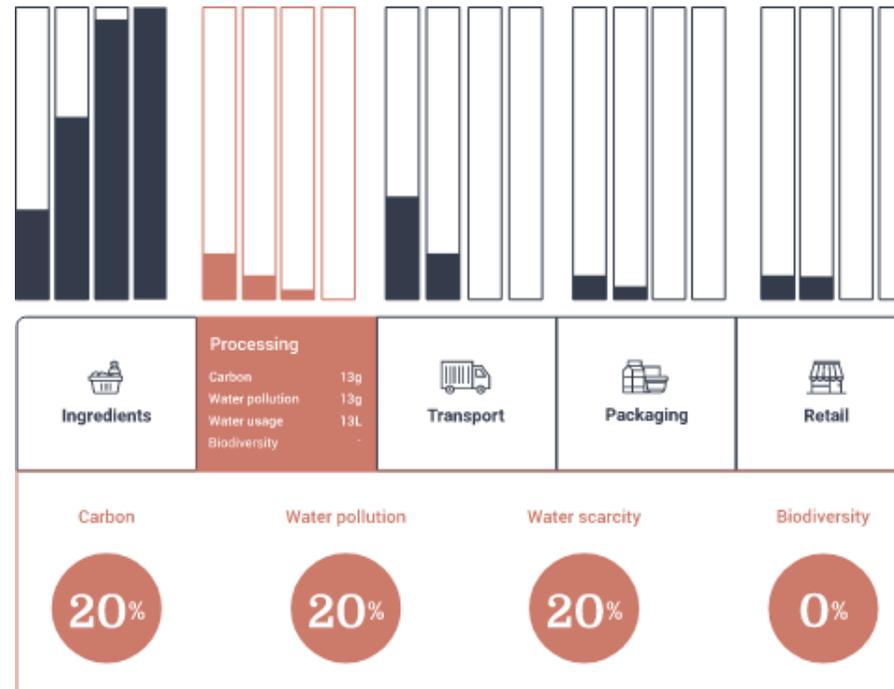
Europeans want a standardised environmental impact label on food products

Simplify for easy identification



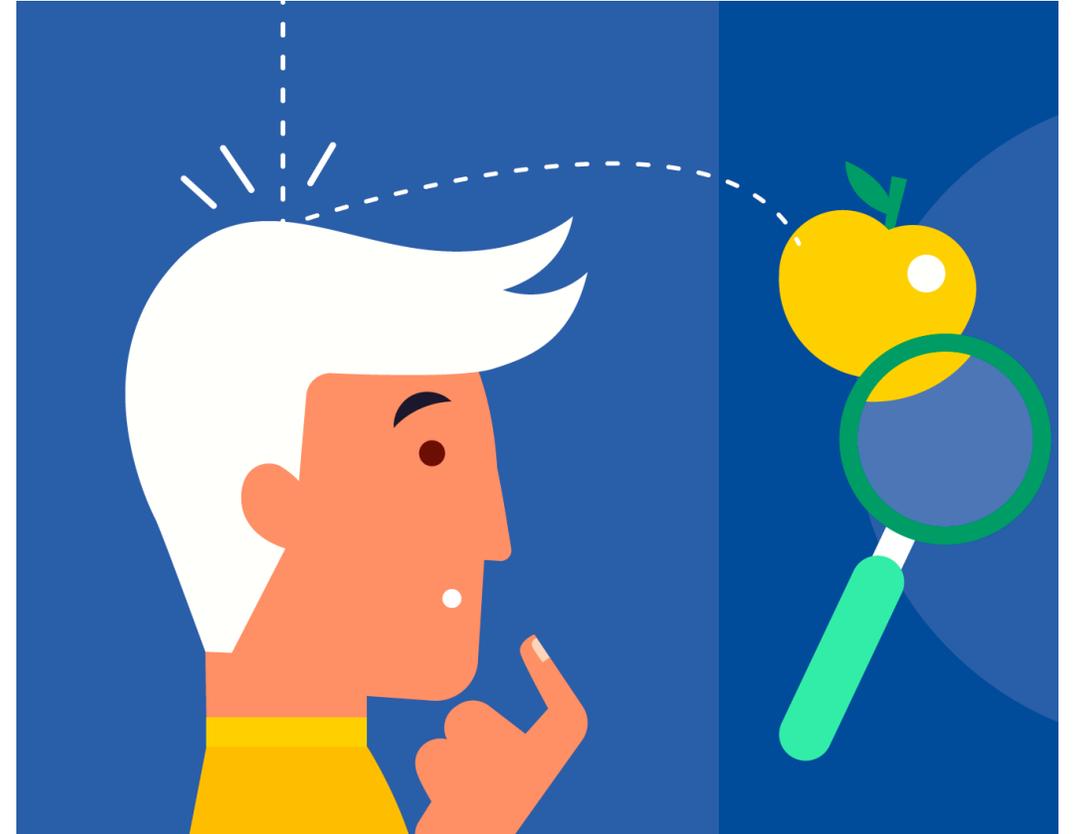
But also provide more detailed information to:

- educate about various sources of environmental impact
- help make environmental impact more concrete



Challenge 4: Sustainability is abstract

- The benefits of sustainable behaviors are psychologically distant, abstract, uncertain, and difficult for consumers to grasp
- Can feel less urgent
- Can feel more difficult to act sustainably



Solution: Make sustainability more concrete

Framing impact in relatable terms may increase sustainability of food choices.



Carbon impact = 2127 light bulb minutes per serving



Concrete representations of what products will become after recycling can increase recycling.

Recycle at your tailgate,
Help the *environment*



Recycle cans & bottles in the **Blue Bag**

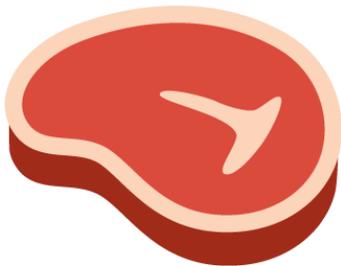
Recycle at your tailgate,
Give *new life* to products



Recycle cans & bottles in the **Blue Bag**... They'll be transformed into new products!

Make sustainable behaviour tips more concrete

Specific guidelines about meat consumption ($\leq 100\text{g}$ meat/day, $\leq 60\text{g}$ red meat/day) leads to **more sustainable food choice** than general guidelines (“eat more plant-based food”) or nutrition & eco-label.



Recipes on how to substitute chicken for beef leads to more sustainable food choices than providing information about the health/sustainability consequences of doing so.

This only worked when substitution was framed in terms of ‘healthy’ (but not ‘sustainable’) eating.



Challenge 5: Individuals feel like their actions have little effect on sustainability

- Problem too overwhelming
- Tackling sustainability depends on collective effort



Solution: frame actions within a larger scale

- Communicate about cumulative, collective efforts
- Show people the consequences of their actions



Use a storytelling approach

- “...character-based narration of a character’s struggles to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal” (Haven 2007)
- Leads to more pro-social/environmental behaviour than informational approach (Barraza et al., 2015; Morris et al. 2019)



How to communicate about sustainability

Examples

Find goal alignment

Integrate with familiar foods, emphasise health implications

Make sustainable food easy to identify: standardise & simplify

Through standardised, simplified labelling with extra follow-up info

Make sustainability concrete

Frame in relatable terms, providing specific information about how to be sustainable and tangible outcomes (recycled products, clean water)

Communicate about cumulative, collective efforts

Emphasise small, regular changes (e.g. recipes, food choices); highlight social norms (e.g. “45% of Canadians are already trying to reduce meat consumption”)

Tell a story

About your production processes, about the implications of sustainable choices

Thank you!

Questions?

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