



Eating Better in the Nations
A policy review - Executive Summary

Executive summary

This resource provides an overview of food policy across the four nations, mapping progress against actions from the Eating Better Better by Half roadmap, while offering an initial view of cross-nation opportunities and action areas

The implementation of healthy and sustainable diets across the four nations of the UK needs to be underpinned by joined-up national policy which supports our farmers, protects our environment and ensures equal and fair access to healthy and sustainable food.

Food and farming is largely a devolved matter in the UK, but until recently, this was not a hugely active area for the four nations. Following the UK's exit from the European Union, food and farming policy across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales has seen areas of both substantial divergence and continuity as devolved governments develop and enact policy in the absence of EU legislation. This devolved governance presents an opportunity for national governments to lay-out and enact far reaching policy which capitalises on the opportunities, and addresses the challenges, within each national food system.

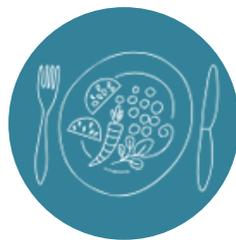
The Better by Half roadmap outlines the way to less and better meat and dairy, providing 24 actions to be taken across 5 sectors to create an enabling environment to drive the necessary transformation in eating habits. This resource has been developed for those working on food policy in the UK; it maps each of the four nations by way of six key government action areas within Eating Better's Better by Half roadmap.



Roadmap actions assessed



Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy



Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development



Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement



Mainstream progress in school food



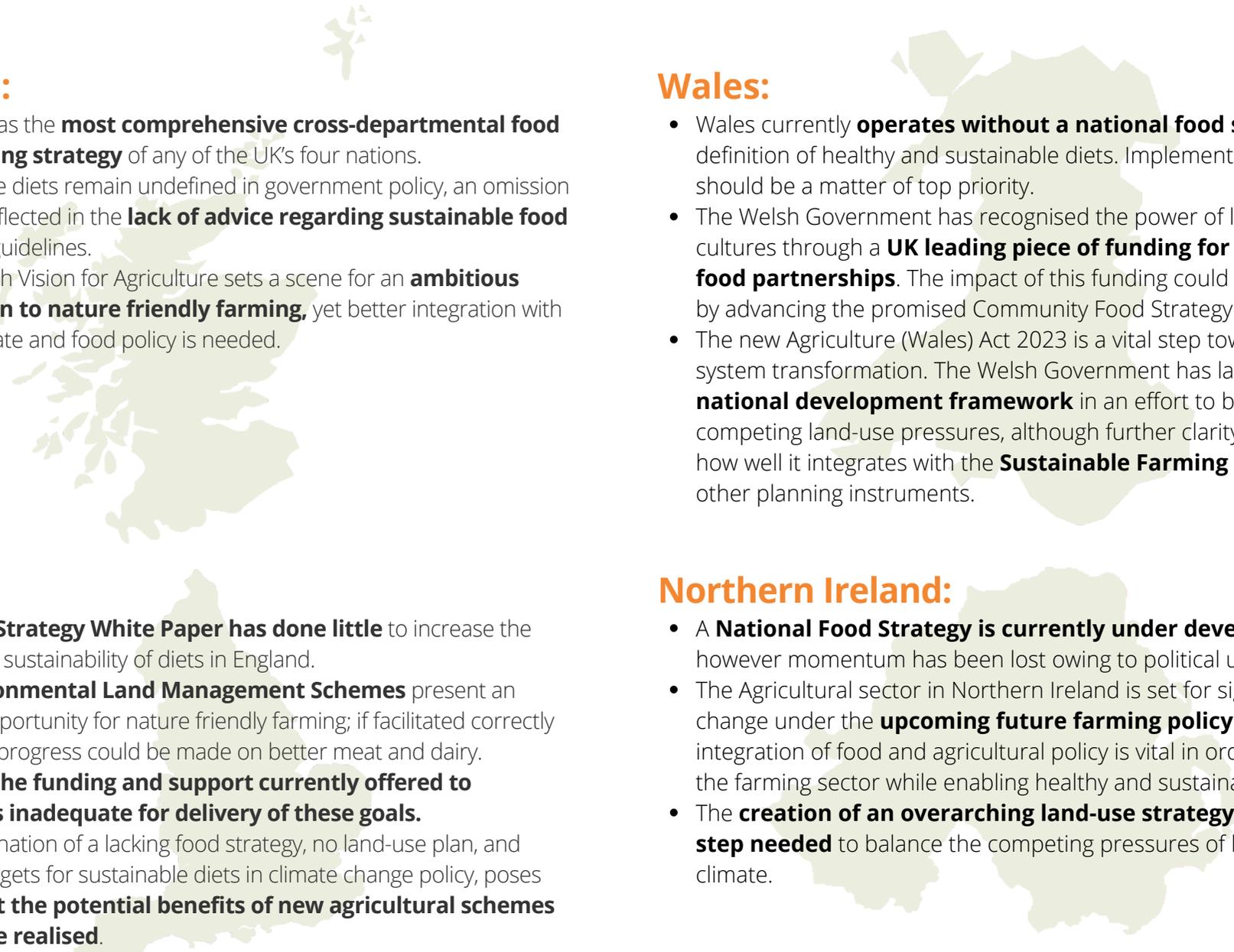
Rebalance agricultural policy towards plant production and better meat and dairy



Develop an integrated land-use plan

Roadmap action	Indicator	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	England
 Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy	National Food strategy	Implemented	No	Under development	In-part
	Local food strategy	Under development	Under development	No	No
 Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development	Sustainable diet definition	No definition in government strategy	No definition in government strategy	Defined	No definition in government strategy
	Maximum daily red meat recommendation	90g	90g	90g	90g
 Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement	Public procurement strategy for domestic supply	No set target, loose commitments	No set target, loose commitments	No set target, loose commitments	Target for 50% of food procurement from local sources
 Mainstream progress in school food	Universal free school meals	First five years of Primary school	All primary school	No	First three years of Primary school
	Primary school red meat requirements	Max 175g per week	Served at least twice a week	Served at least twice a week, maximum three times	Served at least three times a week, no maximum
 Rebalance agricultural policy towards plant production and better meat and dairy	Agriculture act	Under development	Implemented	Under development	Implemented
 Develop an integrated land-use plan	Land use strategy	Implemented	No	No	No

Headlines across the nations



Scotland:

- Scotland has the **most comprehensive cross-departmental food and farming strategy** of any of the UK's four nations.
- Sustainable diets remain undefined in government policy, an omission which is reflected in the **lack of advice regarding sustainable food** in dietary guidelines.
- The Scottish Vision for Agriculture sets a scene for an **ambitious conversion to nature friendly farming**, yet better integration with wider climate and food policy is needed.

Wales:

- Wales currently **operates without a national food strategy**, or a definition of healthy and sustainable diets. Implementing both should be a matter of top priority.
- The Welsh Government has recognised the power of local food cultures through a **UK leading piece of funding for cross-sector food partnerships**. The impact of this funding could be enhanced by advancing the promised Community Food Strategy.
- The new Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 is a vital step towards food system transformation. The Welsh Government has launched a **national development framework** in an effort to balance competing land-use pressures, although further clarity is needed on how well it integrates with the **Sustainable Farming Scheme** and other planning instruments.

England:

- The **Food Strategy White Paper has done little** to increase the health and sustainability of diets in England.
- The **Environmental Land Management Schemes** present an exciting opportunity for nature friendly farming; if facilitated correctly significant progress could be made on better meat and dairy. However, **the funding and support currently offered to farmers is inadequate for delivery of these goals**.
- The combination of a lacking food strategy, no land-use plan, and missing targets for sustainable diets in climate change policy, poses **a risk that the potential benefits of new agricultural schemes will not be realised**.

Northern Ireland:

- A **National Food Strategy is currently under development**, however momentum has been lost owing to political uncertainty.
- The Agricultural sector in Northern Ireland is set for significant change under the **upcoming future farming policy**. As such, integration of food and agricultural policy is vital in order to support the farming sector while enabling healthy and sustainable diets.
- The **creation of an overarching land-use strategy is a vital step needed** to balance the competing pressures of land, food and climate.

Key messages



Devolution is the key to unlocking UK food system reform

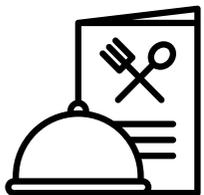
Each of the four nations have their own unique food history and cultures, with bottom-up and unique examples demonstrating that change is possible. Devolution has meant that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have the capabilities to enact ambitious food policy reforms to mainstream healthy and sustainable diets. Devolved food policy can therefore be unique to each nation, whilst at the same time driving a race to the top within the UK in food policy reform. In order for the four nations of the UK to realise this potential, all Governments must individually align agricultural, climate, land-use, and food policy, while coordinating with the UK government, local authorities and grassroots actors.

Healthy and sustainable diets are out of sync in the nations, and policy is doing little to help



Poor diets are endemic across the nations and obesity levels are high. In all four nations, policy to rectify this focuses almost exclusively on health, failing to incorporate sustainability goals into dietary guidelines. Whilst there is progress in some aspects of policy across the different governments of the UK, overall there is still a lot more to be done to achieve 20% reduction in meat and dairy consumption by 2030 as recommended by the Climate Change Committee, and for a transition to 'better' meat and dairy. Given the widespread use of the Eatwell Guide, there is an opportunity for a coordinated, UK wide approach to aligning dietary guidelines and school food standards to meet both sustainability and health goals.

Food Strategies are needed to realign all aspects of the food system



Scotland has the Good Food Nation Act, and Wales has made some progress and ambition on addressing critical food-related challenges. Meanwhile action in Northern Ireland and England has stalled or been found wanting. Comprehensive strategies for integrating new agricultural schemes and climate targets into food policy are needed across the board. Our farmers and crofters need funding and support to transition toward nature and climate friendly farming methods, while joined-up food policy can help us improve the health and sustainability of household diets, public food procurement and food in schools. Government policy should support and amplify grassroots food system reform, whilst combining with local level policy development where applicable. This is an area where exchange of best practice between devolved governments could progress grassroots action UK wide.

Next steps

Eating Better, through this report, aims to provide a springboard for further engagement with food and farming organisations across the four nations of the UK to catalyse efforts in bringing about more ambitious changes to reforming our diets. By assessing against our roadmap, the Eating Better alliance and wider stakeholders can celebrate progress and identify areas of improvement across the UK. There is real momentum at a grassroots level in delivering real, tangible change to the types of food we are producing and eating in the UK. If done correctly, government policy, through the roadmap actions assessed in this report, has the potential to play a vital role in supporting those efforts and creating a coordinated effort at governmental level.



Eating Better

Eating Better is a movement for change of sixty organisations working to accelerate the transition from producing and eating too much meat and dairy to a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system that is better for animal welfare and for nature.

The power of our alliance comes from our breadth, diversity and expertise. From environmental and animal welfare charities to public health and social justice, we're working together to create a fair and sustainable food environment, where everyone has access to healthy, affordable and nutritious food.