# National Food Strategy - Response from Eating Better

Eating Better is an alliance of [over 60 civil society organisations](https://www.eating-better.org/who-we-are/who-we-work-with.html)[[1]](#footnote-1) working to catalyse shifts towards healthy and sustainable food and farming. We bring together expertise on public health, sustainable farming, food waste, social justice, animal welfare, environment and conservation.

We welcome the development of a National Food Strategy at this crucial time, and recognise that the transition to a sustainable food system that helps avert dangerous climate change, restore nature and improve public health requires leadership from government. With a range of policy measures at its disposal, from procurement to farm policy, the Government can transform the environment where we make food choices, setting the stage to make healthier, more sustainable food choices the norm.

We are calling for a 50% reduction from current levels of meat and dairy consumption in the UK by 2030, and for a transition to ‘better’ meat and dairy as standard. It is an achievable target for the UK[[2]](#footnote-2), sitting between business as usual and more ambitious reductions[[3]](#footnote-3) which might be necessary in the future to stay within environmental limits[[4]](#footnote-4). Modelling shows a 50% decrease in meat, dairy and eggs consumption in the EU would mean a 25-40% reduction of GHG emissions, 23% less cropland for food production per capita and a 40% reduction in reactive nitrogen emissions[[5]](#footnote-5). Shifting to more plant-based diets will also have significant public health benefits, moving us closer to the official Eatwell Guide, which recommends at least 76% of our food comes from plants.

We are calling for a reduction in all types of meat and dairy. A transition towards ‘better’ livestock farming for the remaining 50% offers a great opportunity to protect nature in the UK, benefit farm animal welfare, reduce dependence on grain for feeding animals and support soil quality for the production of more plant foods for human consumption, including vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, fruit and pulses. [‘Better’ production systems](https://www.eating-better.org/why-eat-less-better/what-is-better-meat-dairy.html)[[6]](#footnote-6) focus on farming in tune with the land with fewer inputs and animals and deliver public goods alongside food products, such as high nature value (HNV) farming.

There is evidence that public attitudes to sustainable diets are changing. A 2019 YouGov Survey commissioned by Eating Better showed that understanding of livestock’s environmental impact had grown by 23% since 2017. The 2019 survey also found that [48% of people in the UK](https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2019/YouGov%20survey%20analysis%20PDF%20for%20web.pdf)[[7]](#footnote-7) are willing or already committed to cutting down or cutting out meat. Animal welfare and health remain the principal reasons for people reducing meat. Retailers are responding to this change in attitudes by selling more plant-based options.

People can only make healthy and sustainable food choices where they are available, so providing the right food environment will be essential. The Eating Better alliance has reached consensus on a way forward, set out in *Better by half: A roadmap to less and better meat and dairy.* The roadmap identifies [24 levers for government, food service, retailers, food producers and investors](http://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf)[[8]](#footnote-8), outlines where change needs to happen and by who, and shows examples of best practice already happening.

First and foremost is the critical need for Government to **deliver an ambitious cross-departmental food and farming strategy**, ensuring that policies that impact food and farming are connected across government and contain an explicit commitment to healthy and sustainable diets. A better food environment needs a holistic approach to policy making, one that brings together departments with shared interests and embeds a requirement for promoting sustainable production and consumption across government. Strategic mandatory targets should be set on key issues, including climate change, obesity, nutrition-related non-communicable diseases, food security, biodiversity, pollution control and land use change, and require departments to report on performance.

Alliance consensus is that the following present the biggest opportunities for government to drive progress within a comprehensive food and farming strategy:

**Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement**

Public procurement of food for hospitals, schools, military, government buildings and prisons should reflect dietary guidelines and normalise diets that include more plant proteins and less and better meat. With both the School Food Standards and Government Buying Standards currently under review, a key opportunity is setting targets for meat and dairy reduction and for increasing the plant-protein (nuts, seeds and pulses) offer. Public settings should also be encouraged to use the cost saving from switching to plant-protein to ‘trade up’ to better meat for other meals, benefitting sustainable UK livestock farmers.

[Procurement Across London (PAL)](https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf#2-2)[[9]](#footnote-9) is a collaborative project across London local authorities that has allowed them to increase supply chain standards and the nutritional quality of meals. Boroughs have access to a procurement framework for catering contracts, to add volume and spend with other boroughs and increase the affordability of sustainable food. The Royal Borough of Greenwich’s catering provider supplies 25,000 meals daily. Working through PAL, it has received the Good Egg Award, Good Chicken Award and Good Dairy Commendation, it sources only Outdoor Bred Pork and runs Meat Free Mondays. The borough is at the top of the league table for having the healthiest and most sustainable food in London.

**Rebalance agricultural policy towards plant production and better meat and dairy**

The RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission has called for a 10 Year Transition to Agroecology. This will involve a shift towards less meat and dairy and include increasing the production for human consumption of vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, fruit and pulses that grow well in the UK. It also means driving a transition to ‘[better](https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2018/better_meat_report_FINAL.pdf)’[[10]](#footnote-10) livestock farming and moving away from intensive, unsustainable modes of production for plant and animal foods.

Producers need the right incentives and enabling environment from government to move towards producing healthy, sustainable, affordable food. Specifically, this will include implementing a system of payments for public goods that rewards increasing biodiversity and tree cover, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, water and air pollution. Comprehensive advice should be available to ensure the profitability of sustainable farms and uptake of agri-environment schemes. Encouraging farmers to transition to mixed farming systems, agroecology and agroforestry, will be key.

**Require retailers to** **label origin and method of production for all meat and dairy**

For people to make informed food choices transparency, through clearly identifiable information on the packaging or at the point of sale, is essential. Recognisable labels from credible certification schemes work well, but currently cover only premium products. Retailers should be required to provide clear information on origin and method of production that covers all animal products, including ingredients.

To ensure labelling coherence across the sector, the government should introduce mandatory, standardised method of production labelling. In Germany, all main supermarkets use [a unified ‘method of production’ labelling scheme](https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf#0-1)[[11]](#footnote-11) that identifies how the animals were reared. The labels display a simple, descriptive message to help people make a more informed purchasing decision about the product. In the UK, [Lidl](https://www.lidl.co.uk/en/Method-of-Production-Labelling-19886.htm)[[12]](#footnote-12) is introducing a similar system for chicken products.

**Make vegetables and better meat affordable**

Price and affordability are key obstacles limiting access to a healthy sustainable diet, rich in vegetables, whole grains and plant proteins with less and better meat.

Consumption-based food subsidies are needed to promote better access, and would support the development of the market for local produce. The existing scheme, Healthy Start, is hampered by its limited scope and could be greatly improved and extended. [Rose Vouchers](https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf#7-2)[[13]](#footnote-13) double the value of Healthy Start to help families buy a good variety of fresh fruit and vegetables. The vouchers can be redeemed at local markets. Participants report a [95% increase in fruit and vegetable consumption](https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/impact)[[14]](#footnote-14).

For the greatest impact, schemes should aim towards universal provision and be tied to supporting sustainable, local or regional producers.

**Eating Better is an alliance of the following organisations:**

Action on Salt

Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics

Behaviour Change

Biodynamic association

Changing Markets

Community Supported Agriculture

Compassion in World Farming

European Public Health Alliance

Faculty of Public Health

Farms Not Factories

Feedback

First Steps Nutrition Trust

Food Climate Research Network

Food Ethics Council

Food Research Collaboration

FoodCycle

Forum for the Future

Four Paws

Friends of the Earth

Greenpeace International

Greenpeace UK

Hubbub

Humane Society International UK

Keep Britain Tidy

Landworkers Alliance

LEAF

Meat Free Monday

Medact

Nature Friendly Farming Network

Network of Wellbeing

New Economics Foundation

Nourish Scotland

National Union of Students

Oxfam GB

Part-Time Carnivore

Pasture-fed Livestock Association

People and Planet

ProVeg

Royal Academy of Culinary Arts

Royal Society for Public Health

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

RSPCA

RSPCA Assured

Send A Cow

ShareAction

Slow Food UK

The Soil Association

Sustain

Sustainable Food Cities Network

Sustainable Restaurant Association

The British Dietetic Association

The Food Foundation

UK Food Group

Vegetarian for Life

Vegetarian Society

Whole Health Agriculture

World Animal Protection

World Resources Institute

WRAP

WWF-UK

1. The full list of Eating Better organisations can be found at the bottom of this response. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Westhoek, H. et al. (2014). *Food choices, health and environment.* Global Environmental Change 26 (pages 196-205) Online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.02.004> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sutton, M.A. et al. (2013). *Our Nutrient World: the challenge to produce more food and energy with less pollution.* Edinburgh, NERC/Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. Online: <http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/id/eprint/500700/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Springmann, M. et al. (2018). *Options for keeping the food system within environmental limits.* Nature562 (pages 519–525) Online: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-018-0594-0> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Westhoek, H. et al. (2014). *Food choices, health and environment.* Global Environmental Change 26 (pages 196-205) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.02.004> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Eating Better (2018) *Principles for Eating meat and dairy more sustainably.* Online: <https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2018/better_meat_report_FINAL.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Eating Better (2019) *YouGov Survey Quick Analysis.* Online: <https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2019/YouGov%20survey%20analysis%20PDF%20for%20web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Eating Better (2019) *Better by Half: A roadmap to less and better meat and dairy*. Online resource: <https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Eating Better (2019) Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement: leadership in action, in *Better by Half: A roadmap to less and better meat and dairy.* Online: <https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf#2-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Eating Better (2018) *Principles for eating meat and dairy more sustainably.* Online: <https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2018/better_meat_report_FINAL.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Eating Better (2019) Label origin and method of production for all meat and dairy: Leadership in Action, in *Better by Half: A roadmap to less and better meat and dairy.* Online: <https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf#0-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Lidl (2019) *Method of production labelling*. Accessed on 17th October 2019. Online: <https://corporate.lidl.co.uk/sustainability/animal-welfare/mop-labelling> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Eating Better (2019) Make vegetables and better meat affordable: Leadership in Action, in *Better by Half: A roadmap to less and better meat and dairy.* Online: <https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf#7-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Alexandra Rose Charity (2019) *Impact*. Accessed on 17th October 2019. Online: <https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/impact> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)