

National Food Strategy - Response from Eating Better

Eating Better is an alliance of [over 60 civil society organisations](#) 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 UK¹, sitting between business as usual and more ambitious reductions² which might be necessary in the future to stay within environmental limits³. 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 emissions⁴. 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.

¹ 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>

² 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. <http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/id/eprint/500700/>

³ Springmann, M. et al. (2018). *Options for keeping the food system within environmental limits*. Nature 562 (pages 519–525) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-018-0594-0>

⁴ 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>

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](#) 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](#) 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](#), 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 \(PAL\)](#) 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](#)' 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](#) 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](#) 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](#) 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.

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