

Policy options for promoting healthy sustainable diets in the UK

This briefing outlines the policy recommendations of the Eating Better alliance for the UK Government, Devolved Administrations and EU. It has been produced in consultation with our 47 supporting organisations & partner networks (see overleaf).

Eating Better is calling for action by governments, the food industry and all those who can make a difference to encourage people to eat a greater variety of plant-based foods and less meat; and to support farming that produces meat in ways that benefit the environment, and animal welfare. This 'less and better' approach to meat eating can be fairer, greener and healthier for people and the planet.

Eating Better

encourages a culture where we place greater value on the food we eat, the animals that provide it and the people who produce it. Eating Better supports farmers who produce meat in a sustainable way. Reducing our meat consumption – whether red, white or processed meats – while also choosing 'better' meat that is naturally-fed, has a known provenance and is produced to high animal welfare, environmental and quality standards can help support farmers without being more expensive for consumers.

Why it matters?

Feeding a growing and more affluent global population healthily, fairly and sustainably simply isn't possible unless we make some changes. Reducing food waste and producing food with less harmful impact on the environment are both essential but not sufficient. Modifying our eating patterns must be a priority too. One vital, simple step is for people in high consuming countries like the UK to eat less meat and a greater variety of plant-based foods as part of healthy and sustainable eating patterns.¹

The benefits of Eating Better's 'less and better' approach to meat eating include:



FAIRER: for farm animal welfare, for the hundreds of millions of people who lack sufficient food and for farmers who struggle to earn a sustainable living.

Increased production of meat has led to increasingly intensive production methods, particularly for pigs and poultry. Less intensive meat production can help ensure more people in the world have enough to eat. With 97% of soymeal and over a third of the global grain harvest fed to animals, halving world consumption of grain-fed meat could feed 2 billion more people.² An eating better approach encourages consumers and companies to support fairer returns for UK farmers producing 'better' meat.



GREENER: The food we eat carries a huge environmental footprint and meat is a 'hotspot' for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, water use, pollution, land use change and biodiversity loss

- with livestock production the single largest driver.³

A third of GHG emissions are due to the food system with meat typically the most GHG intensive part of our diet accounting for at least 14.5 per cent of global GHG emissions⁴ - as significant as emissions from transport. Without radical shifts in global meat consumption it is unlikely that temperature rises can be kept below 2°C - the international community's stated aim to support a reduction in the impacts of climate change.⁵



HEALTHIER: Shifting to more plant-based diets, with moderate amounts of meat in high meat consuming countries, such as the UK, will help reduce heart disease, obesity and cancers.

If people in the UK ate meat no more than three times a week, 45,000 early deaths a year could be prevented and the NHS could save £1.2bn a year.⁶ Eating less meat can also save money, helping people make healthier choices.

The World Cancer Research Fund⁷ recommends choosing fresh, unprocessed meat for the meat we do eat, limiting red meat (pork, beef & lamb) to no more than 500g (cooked) a week and eating processed meats (including bacon, ham and salami) as little as possible due to the link between these meats and bowel cancer.⁸ Meat that has been produced to higher environmental and animal welfare standards can have health benefits over factory-farmed meat. For example, beef from grassfed cattle has nutritional advantages over grain-fed options. Intensively produced farm animals are more likely to be treated with routine antibiotics - stopping overuse of antibiotics in farming is essential to save their vital role for human health.

¹ The Principles of Healthy & Sustainable Eating Patterns, 2015.

² Cassidy et al. (2013) Redefining agricultural yields: from tonnes to people nourished per hectare Environ. Res. Lett.

³ Machovina et al. (2015) Biodiversity conservation: The key is reducing meat consumption Science of the Total Environment.

⁴ UNFAO. (2013) Tackling climate change through livestock: A global assessment of emissions and mitigation.

⁵ Wellesley et al. (2015) Changing Climate: Changing Diets, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

⁶ Scarborough et al. (2010) Modelling the health impacts of the diets described in 'Eating the Planet' published by Friends of the Earth and Compassion in World Farming British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group.

⁷ Red and processed meat and cancer prevention, WCRF.

⁸ Carcinogenicity of consumption of red and processed meat, The Lancet Oncology, 2015.

What's needed?

The positive responses we've received to the launch of Eating Better show that the time is right for governments to take action to help people move towards eating less and better meat, as part of a shift towards eating that is better for our health as well as the planet. As our YouGov survey results show (see box) the public are increasingly interested in eating less and better meat. Furthermore there are business opportunities for food companies and farmers.

Governments should:

- ✓ **develop integrated sustainable food and farming policies and practices to support a transition to less and better meat consumption including those that recognise that dietary changes are essential to preventing dangerous climate change.** This should ensure that the role of food and agriculture in mitigating climate change is included in strategies to meet national and international climate change agreements and sustainable development goals.
- ✓ **Update the UK's official dietary guidance - the eatwell plate - to integrate sustainability.** This would ensure health professionals, educators, food businesses and the public are provided with integrated advice on healthy, sustainable diets.
- ✓ **Introduce clear and mandatory procurement standards for caterers** to ensure that meals paid for by taxpayers in schools, hospitals, prisons, care homes and all government departments are healthy & sustainable.

Less meat on menus provides cost savings & enables greater support for higher welfare UK farmers.

- ✓ **Support and encourage farming that produces meat in ways that benefit the environment, human health and animal welfare and provides a fair return for farmers.** This means enabling farms to shift to more sustainable production, supporting agricultural research and dissemination to facilitate this and also improving transparency and providing clearer information to help people connect with where their food comes from and make well informed choices.
- ✓ **Align UK business growth policy for food and farming with the 'eating less and better meat' goal** by supporting innovation and growth of a more diverse and desirable range of plant-based protein options for consumers, and boosting capability of UK food industry to benefit from this market growth.
- ✓ **End the unnecessary and dangerous routine overuse of antibiotics in farming** to help maintain their effectiveness for protecting human and livestock health. Action to reduce antibiotic use will require a move away from the most intensive farming systems particularly for pigs, poultry and dairy cows to reduce the incidence of disease in the first place. This will have benefits for animal welfare as well as human health.
- ✓ **Work with EU institutions and Member States to support Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform** to deliver a European Healthy Sustainable Food and Farming Policy.

Public support for less & better meat eating

A YouGov survey for Eating Better published in December 2014 found one-in-three people (35%) willing to consider eating less meat, with one in five (20%) saying they had already cut back on the amount of meat they eat over the past year. 2015 research by Which? and the Government's Office for Science also found strong public support for eating less meat as the most effective and achievable step that consumers could take to reduce the impacts of their diet on the climate.

Public surveys for Chatham House report, *Changing Climate, Changing Diets*, found that once aware of the link between meat and climate change, consumers accept the need for government action. Even unpopular interventions to make meat more expensive, for example through a carbon tax, would face diminishing resistance as people come to understand the rationale behind intervention, the researchers conclude.

Eating Better's *Let's Talk About Meat* report has identified ten ways to motivate behaviour change towards more plant-based diets and less and better meat eating.

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Supporting organisations

Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)
Behaviour Change
British Dietetic Association
Compassion in World Farming
Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH)
Fairfood International
Farms Not Factories
Feedback
First Steps Nutrition Trust
Food Ethics Council
Food for Life Partnership

Foodcycle
Forum for the Future
Friends of the Earth
Greenpeace
Humane Society International
LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)
Medact
Oxfam
Part-time Carnivore
People & Planet
Progressio
RSPB
Send a Cow

Slow Food UK
Soil Association
Sustainable Restaurant Association
The Food Assembly
The Pig Idea
UK Health Forum
Vegetarian for Life
Vegetarian Society
Waste Watch (part of Keep Britain Tidy)
World Animal Protection
WWF-UK

Partner Networks

Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics
European Public Health Alliance
Food Climate Research Network
Food Research Collaboration
Food Trade
Love Food Hate Waste
Meat Free Monday
Network of Wellbeing
Nourish Scotland
Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming
Sustainable Food Cities Network
UK Food Group