



Briefing: Dietary change and emissions targets

The importance of dietary change as a means of reaching Net Zero is widely supported in scientific literature and among expert bodies:

- The [Climate Change Committee](#) calls for a 20% reduction in average meat consumption in Scotland by 2035 (compared to 2019 levels) and a 26% reduction in cattle and sheep numbers (compared to 2023 levels).
- The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change's [policy recommendations for the UK](#) include: "Develop and implement policies that promote healthy diets, high in plant-based foods, with an emphasis on significantly reduced consumption of red and processed meat and dairy products."
- The independent [National Food Strategy](#) of 2021 stated: "We simply cannot reduce methane emissions to a safe level, nor free up the land we need for sequestering carbon, without reducing the amount of meat we eat."
- A 2024 report by [Natural England and the RSPB](#) concluded: "A decline in food production is unavoidable under [UK] climate change mitigation scenarios. Ambitious combinations of measures including ... using arable land to grow crops for direct human consumption rather than livestock feed (and thus implying a dietary change) ... could fully mitigate expected reductions in food production."
- According to the global [EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health](#): "We should eat more fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and whole grains ... Many in wealthier countries should also eat less red meat and dairy."
- Research by the [Oxford Martin School](#) found that a global switch to diets that rely less on meat, and more on fruit and vegetables, could save up to 8 million lives by 2050 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by two thirds.

Solutions

Increasing the uptake of plant-based diets can be achieved by integrated policy approaches and modest investment, generating a more "plant-based friendly" environment. Solutions do not have to involve dictating behaviour to people or limiting their choices. The Danish Government – with cross-party support - has already implemented an [Action Plan on Plant-based Foods](#) which, among other actions, supports innovation, training, marketing and coordination across the sector. The [EU Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture](#) has called for a similar cross-EU strategy. Other governments, such as [South Korea](#), are already implementing policies to promote plant-based foods.

Policy options

- Addressing consumer obstacles, such as cost and availability, working with supermarkets to creating cost parity between comparable plant and livestock-based products, as [Lidl has done](#) in the EU, and legislating to require plant-based options on all public sector menus.
- Behaviour “nudge” actions, such as sustainability product labelling, and menu options in the public sector that are plant-based by default. Eleven hospitals in New York have [implemented this approach](#), with 90% patient satisfaction, substantial savings in cost per meal, and reduced climate emissions.
- Promoting plant-based foods and diets as healthy and sustainable options, through public health campaigns, in-store marketing and aligning official dietary guidance with health and sustainability goals.
- Enhancing and investing in the development and path to market of safe and healthy plant-based proteins, which offers significant potential benefits in terms of green growth. 2023 [Green Alliance research](#) concluded that the UK alternative proteins industry “could be worth up to £6.8 billion annually and create 25,000 jobs by 2035.”
- Utilising public procurement for catering to prioritise sustainable plant-based foods, and to help normalise the consumption of plant-based foods. A plants-based principle will accelerate progress in meeting the government’s aim to ensure 50% of procured food is sustainable or locally sourced.
- Supporting farmers to transition away from high emission livestock-based farming and towards horticulture, crops for human consumption and other sustainable forms of land use, such as rewilding. Mechanisms include subsidies, training, support with supply chain issues and marketing.

Further information on policy options: The Vegan Society’s [Manifesto for a Sustainable Plant-Based Transition](#)

Further information on global policies to combat climate change: The Vegan Society’s [COP 27 Briefing](#).

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