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Sustainable eating: our position

For our own health and the sake of the environment we need to eat and farm less and better meat and dairy: Friends of the Earth's position.

Summary

The way we eat in richer countries like the UK is not sustainable. A typical UK diet contains unhealthy levels of meat and dairy products – as well as processed food high in sugar, fats and salt. This kind of diet causes illness, including heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Dietary demands have resulted in intensive meat and dairy production that is one of the leading causes of the climate crisis, is wasteful, pollutes the environment and trashes nature here and abroad.

We need to embrace healthier and sustainable diets and cut the amount of meat and dairy eaten and produced in the UK in half by 2030. The rest should be produced in ways that are better for the environment, animal welfare and our health.

Our changing diets

Our diets have changed considerably in the past 50 years. Food is essential, it gives us much pleasure, but the way it is being produced is having a [massive environmental impact](#).

Demand for meat, dairy and processed foods has increased, fuelled by aggressive marketing by powerful food companies and availability of cut price, poor quality produce. We're [wasting](#) far more food at every point along the food chain: about a third of the food produced is never eaten.

Intensive meat and dairy production is a hotspot

The production of meat and dairy, particularly in intensive systems, causes 14.5% of global climate changing emissions.

Cattle ranching and the production of animal feed in South America is driving massive biodiversity loss as forests and Cerrado are cleared for soy plantations.

Vast amounts of soy feed are imported into the UK and EU to prop up industrial livestock production – particularly chicken and pork.

Eating too much meat, especially red and processed, is linked to certain cancers, heart disease and stroke.

We need to eat and produce much less - and better - meat and dairy

Friends of the Earth, along with the [Eating Better alliance](#), is calling for a 50% reduction in the amount of meat produced and eaten in the UK by 2030 – and for the remainder to be 'better'. This means produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards. Diets lower in animal products are also better for our health.

The Committee on Climate Change in its balanced pathway in its [6th Carbon budget report](#) has recommended a reduction of all meat consumption of 20% by 2030 and 35% by 2050. 3 out of 5 of their other scenarios contained a 50% reduction target by 2050.

Initiatives like Veganuary can help change eating habits

There is already a willingness by people to reduce the amount of meat they eat, and the popularity of plant-based alternatives is growing rapidly. But habits can be hard to break and different approaches are needed to help people access healthy, sustainable diets with less and better meat and dairy. This includes action by the government and food businesses to make these diets more appealing and affordable.

Friends of the Earth is supporting Veganuary because research shows that by cutting out animal products for a month, people are likely to reduce meat and dairy in their diets in the long term through exploring foods and dishes they may never have thought to try before.

To reach the meat reduction targets needed to stabilise the climate and protect nature we need many more people to eat less (and better) meat, which includes a mix of vegans, vegetarians and meat-reducers.

Friends of the Earth has launched a scheme, called [Kale Yeah!](#) which helps caterers reduce the amount of meat and dairy on their menus and boost veg and plant proteins while still serving up delicious dishes.

Sustainable livestock production has an ongoing role

Friends of the Earth supports sustainable livestock production at appropriate levels as a key part of planet-friendly food systems. Our [principles for land use](#) set out what this should look like in the UK.

We recognise that farming is being significantly impacted by the Brexit transition and possibility of no deal, and that is having severe consequences for many livestock farmers.

We are calling on farmers and the public to switch to [better meat and dairy](#), to deliver a host of environmental benefits that should be rewarded through the new system of farm payments following the UK's exit from the EU. This includes rewarding UK farmers that adopt [100% pasture-based systems](#), and mixed farming systems which reduce inputs and waste.

What else needs to happen?

The food industry is responding to customer demand, offering more vegan and vegetarian options than ever before. However, the government is lagging behind, politicians wary of interfering in what people eat. [Strong leadership is essential](#), and clear policies are urgently needed to enable many

more people to access affordable, sustainable and healthy diets.

Friends of the Earth supports the Eating Better alliance's [Better by Half roadmap](#) which sets out 24 actions for government, the food industry, farmers and investors to halve meat and dairy in the UK by 2030.