



FACULTY OF
PUBLIC HEALTH



UK HEALTH
ALLIANCE ON
CLIMATE CHANGE



Eating Better



Health professionals and sustainable diets

Policy and understanding

Contents

Why are sustainable diets important?	3
Key findings	4
Next steps	5
Acknowledgements	6
References	7



Why are sustainable diets important?

The food system is a key contributor to climate change, land-system change, chemical pollution of air and water, biodiversity loss, freshwater use, and influence on nitrogen and phosphorus cycles^{1,2}. In particular, meat and dairy products are major¹ contributors to climate change and high consumption of these foods, as in Western diets, have significant health impacts linked to obesity, and non-communicable diseases^{3,4}.

While adaptation and improvements to farming methods can reduce these impacts, without changes in dietary patterns, improved farming methods on their own are not enough to create a sustainable food system⁵. Mitigation techniques on-farm have potential to reduce GHG emissions by approximately 10% by 2050, while a shift of dietary patterns could reduce GHG emissions by up to 80%³. In the UK, replacing half of meat and dairy consumption with fruit, vegetables and cereals would result in a 19% reduction in agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, while also avoiding or delaying 37,000 deaths a year from coronary heart disease, stroke and diet-related cancer⁶.

To encourage public diets to shift away from meat and dairy and encourage greater consumption of fruit and vegetables, there needs to be strong support from trusted public-facing organisations. In the UK, doctors and civil society organisations, along with police are regularly rated the top three most trusted groups⁷. It would therefore be ideal for messaging on the critical importance of sustainable diets to come from health professionals and organisations that represent health professionals.



Key findings

The Faculty of Public Health's Food Special Interest Group and Eating Better partnered to research and report on the current positions on sustainable diet policy across health organisations within the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC).

Individuals from 24 health organisations were surveyed to gain insights into existing sustainable diet policies, understanding of what constitutes a sustainable diet, and perceptions around barriers to policy development and implementation. The majority of responses are from individuals in leadership or management positions.

- Most of the organisations ($\frac{2}{3}$) surveyed did not have policies in place relating to sustainable diets
- There is no clear consensus or understanding of what a sustainable diet is - some organisations referenced the EAT-Lancet plate.
- Existing sustainable diet policies focus on increased consumption of plant foods and sourcing more locally and from less intensive production practices. 'Less and better' consumption of animal foods was recommended less often, despite a strong evidence base highlighting how important this is as part of a sustainable diet.
- There is strong internal support for advocating for sustainable diets - 71% said they would be willing to advocate for sustainable diets. However there is a perceived lack of support from leadership within the organisations.
- There is a lack of sufficient training and education resources related to sustainable diets in most of the organisations surveyed.



Next steps

- Produce guidance on what is a sustainable diet for health organisations and provide access to existing educational content and resources
- Produce policy recommendations for health organisations, including a system for monitoring progress
- Facilitate a panel discussion with UKHACC members on the findings of this survey and proposed recommendations to develop support and identify further opportunities.
- Work with the leaders of UKHACC member organisations to position sustainable diets as a priority for their organisations.



Acknowledgements

Thanks to

This research was led by Kristin Bash MPH FFPH, Chair of the Food SIG at the Faculty of Public Health and supported by Vibhuti Patel, PhD Food SIG member at the Faculty of Public Health, and Lachlan McKessar, Researcher at Eating Better. It benefitted from contributions from Jane Landon, Chair at Eating Better, Simon Billing, Executive Director at Eating Better, and Elaine Mulcahy, Director at UKHACC.

About the partners



UK HEALTH
ALLIANCE ON
CLIMATE CHANGE

The [UK Health Alliance on Climate Change \(UKHACC\)](#) brings together health professionals to advocate for just responses to the climate and ecological crisis, promote the health benefits that flow from those responses, and empower members and health professionals to make changes in their professional and personal lives to respond to the crisis.



FACULTY OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

The [Faculty of Public Health](#) is a registered charity and membership organisation of nearly 4,000 public health professionals across the UK and globally, with the purpose of improving health and wellbeing of local communities and national populations.



Eating Better

[Eating Better](#) is a movement for change of sixty organisations working to accelerate the transition from producing and eating too much meat and dairy to a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system that is better the environment, our health, for land use, animal welfare and social justice.

References

1. Poore J, T. N. Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science* 2018;360:987-92.
2. Crippa M, Solazzo E, Guizzardi D, et al. Air pollutant emissions from global food systems are responsible for environmental impacts, crop losses and mortality. *Nature Food* 2022;3(11):942-56. doi: 10.1038/s43016-022-00615-7
3. Willett W, Rockström J, Loken B, et al. Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet* 2019;393(10170):447-92. Doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(18)31788-4
4. Springmann M, Spajic L, Clark MA, et al. The healthiness and sustainability of national and global food based dietary guidelines: modelling study. *BMJ* 2020;370:m2322. Doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2322 [published Online First: 2020/07/17]
5. Bajželj B, Richards KS, Allwood JM, et al. Importance of food-demand management for climate mitigation. *Nature Climate Change* 2014;4(10):924-29. doi: 10.1038/nclimate2353
6. A healthy future – tackling climate change mitigation and human health together. London: The Academy of Medical Sciences, 2021.
7. Wales CCfEa. Public trust in charities and trustees UK Government; 2021 [Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-trust-in-charities-and-trustees-experience-of-their-role/public-trust-in-charities-2021-web-version>].