

Healthier Diets

Poor diets cost the UK dearly – through pressures on the NHS, lost productivity and poor quality of life. Shifting towards healthy diets is a win-win that cuts emissions, saves public money, and helps improve people's quality of life and workforce productivity.

The Vision

Healthy and sustainable eating will be easy, accessible and desirable. Most UK citizens will routinely meet nutritional guidelines, with food environments actively supporting healthy choices as the default. Ultra-processed foods high in fat, salt and sugar will occupy a diminished role as consumption shifts towards whole foods, including more fruits, vegetables and wholegrains. This dietary shift will drive and be reinforced by changes in domestic agriculture, creating a virtuous cycle where what we grow aligns with what we need for improved health.

Co-benefits

The economic case for dietary transformation is compelling: providing the Eatwell diet would cost £57 billion annually versus the £268 billion currently lost to diet-related illness and reduced productivity.¹ A population meeting nutritional guidelines would dramatically reduce cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers,² easing pressure on the NHS while creating a more productive workforce. Shifting towards plant-rich diets strengthens food security by reducing the large proportion of UK cereals currently fed to livestock, freeing land to produce food for direct human consumption and reducing dependence on imported animal feed. Ensuring affordable access to nutritious, sustainable food for all income groups breaks the cycle of diet-related ill health that disproportionately affects lower-income communities.

Priority Actions

Under 1% of people in the UK fully meet dietary guidelines. Poor diet is the UK's leading cause of ill health, with staggering economic costs, while healthy food remains unaffordable for millions. The following actions can reshape food environments:

Financial and transition support:

- Implement targeted subsidies and vouchers for healthy foods, so that lower-income households can afford nutritious diets.
- Regulate food manufacturers and retailers to support reformulation, diversification into healthier options, and sustainable supply chains.
- Extend financial incentives beyond soft drinks to make healthy foods more competitive, building on the successful Soft Drinks Industry Levy model.

Policy and market mechanisms:

- Require major food businesses to publish transition plans aligned with climate and health objectives, building on measures in the NHS *Fit for the Future* plan.
- Transform food environments through stronger advertising restrictions on high fat, salt and sugar foods, and mandatory front-of-pack labelling.
- Reform public procurement to increase plant-based options and reduce processed meat, leveraging public sector buying power.

Knowledge and innovation:

- Embed food system education across all school levels, using kitchens as learning labs to build food literacy.
- Accelerate research into plant-based alternatives that meet taste, texture and cultural preferences.
- Develop robust monitoring of dietary patterns and health outcomes to track progress and enable evidence-based policy adjustments.

These interventions can create food environments where healthy options become the easy options.

1 Jackson, T. (2024) *The False Economy of Big Food*. Exeter: Food, Farming & Countryside Commission, p.24. UK dietary guidelines (the Eatwell Guide) outline the government's recommendations for healthy eating. The Guide is a tool for framing public health policy and is used widely by national and local government, the NHS, healthcare professionals (including nutritionists and dietitians) and industry.

2 Kim, H. et al. (2019) Plant-based diets are associated with a lower risk of incident cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular disease mortality, and all-cause mortality in a general population of middle-aged adults. *Journal of the American Heart Association* 8(16); Hemler, E., and Hu, F. (2018) Plant-based diets for personal, population, and planetary health. *Advances in Nutrition* 10, S275–S283; Aune, D. et al. (2016) Fruit and vegetable intake and the risk of cardiovascular disease, total cancer and all-cause mortality. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 46(3), 1029–1056.

UK FOOD PLAN FOR 2050

3 essential transformations

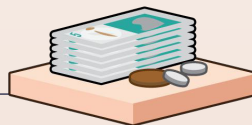
Healthier diets made easier

2025



UNHEALTHY IS THE DEFAULT

Foods high in fat, sugar and salt dominate our diets, with heavy marketing of unhealthy ultra-processed foods



HEALTH INEQUALITY

A healthy diet is unaffordable for the poorest in society



OVER-RELIANCE ON MEAT

85% of land supports animal agriculture, rather than diverse human diets

**proactive planning
& coordinated action**



2050



ACCESSIBLE HEALTHY FOODS

Fruit & vegetables, wholegrains and other plant-based options are accessible and affordable



BALANCED CHOICES

Some meat and dairy but more plant-based and less unhealthy foods



FOOD SECURITY

Thriving domestic food production, with large-scale expansion of UK fruit and vegetable production and consumption

A sustainable, prosperous and secure UK