Total average weekly meat consumption in Switzerland compared to the Planetary Health Diet recommendation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Average weekly consumption in Switzerland</th>
<th>Planetary Health Diet recommendation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>steak</td>
<td>200 g (beef)</td>
<td>204 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pork chops</td>
<td>150 g (pork)</td>
<td>49 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chicken breast</td>
<td>150 g (poultry)</td>
<td>49 g</td>
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</table>

This graph depicts the total weekly average meat consumption per person in Switzerland for 2022 using popular food items of respective animal sources that are iconic in Switzerland\(^a\): cutlet (pork chops) for pork, chicken breast for chicken, and steak for all other meat types (incl. beef, horse, rabbit, goat, sheep, wild, and organs); and compares it with the weekly Planetary Health Diet recommendation of total meat consumption per animal protein source\(^b\).

\(^a\) Meat weight was considered only, and ingredients such as water, egg, flour, and spices were excluded from the calculation.

\(^b\) The Planetary Health Diet recommends a maximum consumption of 49 g of beef, 49 g of pork and 204 g of chicken per week. The average Swiss consumption in 2022 was 908 g of meat per week - 387 g of pork, 217 g of chicken and 305 g of other types of meat (including beef, horse, rabbit, goat, sheep, game and organs of various species).


Global Alert!

2nd May marks Switzerland’s Meat Exhaustion Day 2024.

FOUR PAWS follows up on the year 2023’s Meat Exhaustion Report: When meat is eating up the planet, with a focus on consumption in individual countries. FOUR PAWS’ analysis shows that World Meat Exhaustion Day will be reached on the 24th of June this year\(^c\). However, it is the countries of the Global North (high-income countries) that should primarily reduce their meat consumption.

Global meat production and consumption are unsustainable for the planet and human health.

The Planetary Health Diet guideline recommends eating a maximum of 301 g of meat per week\(^1\).
Switzerland needs to reduce its meat consumption by 67% to get in line with the Planetary Health Diet.

**What is Meat Exhaustion Day?**

Meat Exhaustion Day determines the day on which the maximum recommended meat consumption per year has been reached, with respect to the Earth’s limit (planetary boundaries) and considering human health requirements (health boundary). It is comparable to Earth Overshoot Day, also known as Ecological Debt Day.

The date is calculated by comparing a country’s actual average consumption of meat per person per year with the recommendations of the Planetary Health Diet which provides a scientific framework for determining a diet that is both healthy for humans and the planet. The diet recommended by the EAT-Lancet Commission can be adopted on the country level (e.g. Denmark) as well as on the retail level (e.g. LIDL Germany).

Switzerland’s meat consumption needs to drastically decline to fit within planetary and health boundaries.

By the fifth month of the year, Switzerland has already consumed 100% of what the country should ideally consume within twelve months. The average Swiss eats up to 47.3 kg of meat per year, according to 2022 data published by the Switzerland’s Federal Statistical Office (FSO). This is three times the recommended amount for what is healthy or sustainable for our planet.

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Note that FOUR PAWS used final meat consumption published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Meanwhile, Proviande and Federal Office for Agriculture calculated an estimate of 50.8 kg, in retail weight. The retail weight is not exactly equivalent to the final consumption.
On average a person in Switzerland consumes nearly 1 kg of meat per week, the equivalent of 12.5 pieces of cervelat per week. According to the Planetary Health Diet recommendation no more than 4 pieces of cervelat should be consumed per week.

Overall, in Switzerland, meat consumption is significantly higher (by 43%) than the average total global meat intake of 33 kg per person per year.

Pork remains the most consumed meat in Switzerland but has been decreasing over the years while chicken meat consumption is increasing.

Meat consumption has a high impact on human health. For the year 2020, the burden of disease of Switzerland’s dietary patterns that sustain high levels of meat consumption cost Switzerland around 19 000 US dollars (or around 17 000 CHF) in productivity losses per person due to diseases like obesity and non-communicable diseases. This makes up 84% of the total hidden costs of its agrifood system. According to a report mandated by FSVO (Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office), “there is large evidence, though based on observational studies, that a high consumption of red and processed meat increases the risk of CVD [Cardiovascular disease], colorectal cancer and T2D [Type 2 diabetes].”

The Swiss Society for Nutrition (SSN) recommends consuming alternately 2 to 3 portions of protein sources per week of up to 100-120 grams each - reaching up to an average of 276 grams and a maximum of 360g per week. The Swiss Society for Nutrition effectively mentions plant-based alternatives in the protein options, such as seitan and tofu, and warns against eating processed meat such as sausages and limiting that to 1 portion per week. Finally, the Swiss Society for Nutrition recommendations are close to matching the science-based recommendations from the EAT-Lancets’ Planetary Health Diet that advises consuming a total of 301 grams of meat per week with no more than 98 grams of red meat and a maximum of 203 grams of poultry meat.

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1 Cervelat = 72.8 grams of meat out of 100 grams of product

This graph uses cervelat to represent the total meat consumption using a typical meat product of Switzerland.

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*Only meat weight was considered, other ingredients were excluded from the calculation.*
Mass meat consumption causes severe animal suffering and harms the environment.

Intensive farming has become a basis for our current food production system that harms animals and applies cruel practices\(^\text{11}\). Many farm animals that end up being slaughtered live in intensive husbandry systems that subject them to stress and diseases.

- Around 84 million animals were slaughtered in Switzerland in 2022\(^\text{1}\)! This includes around 406 000 cattle, 2.5 million pigs, 234 000 sheep, 48 000 goats, 1 000 horses, 372 000 rabbits and a staggering 80 million chickens. In addition, there are 111 000 animals considered to be „game“ (e.g. deer and wild boar)\(^\text{1}\).
- In 2016, only 12% of animals in Switzerland had outdoor access during their lifetime\(^\text{16}\).

As long as animals are kept in intensive farms, farming in Switzerland will not be sustainable for the climate and the planet.

Land occupied to produce feed for farmed animals makes up more than two-thirds of arable lands in Switzerland\(^\text{16}\). In addition, Switzerland indirectly contributes to global agriculture-induced deforestation, by increasing the global soy demand for animal feed\(^\text{17}\).

Excess nitrogen concentration levels have stagnated at too high a level since the end of the 1990s\(^\text{16}\):

- 70% of nitrogen air pollution, which is harmful to human health and biodiversity, comes from agriculture\(^\text{18}\). Two-thirds of this share is emitted by the animal husbandry system in the form of ammonia\(^\text{18}\).
- Two-thirds of sensitive ecosystems and their biodiversity are threatened by the excess nitrogen levels that are contained in soils and water\(^\text{19}\).

Switzerland’s emissions from agriculture\(^\text{18}\)

- 1 % Liming
- 22 % Nitrogen fertilisation
- 16 % Manure management
- 61 % Enteric fermentation
Agriculture was responsible for 14% of Switzerland’s CO2 emissions in 2022.20

- Agriculture emitted 6 million tons CO2 eq out of the total 42 million tons of CO2 eq of Switzerland20.b.
- More than 8% of Switzerland’s emissions are caused by enteric fermentation, primarily from cattle; that makes more than half (61.4%) of Switzerland’s agricultural emissions20.
- Agricultural activities are responsible for 86% of methane emissions and 66% of nitrous oxide emissions in Switzerland20.

Switzerland emits an average of 1 837 kg of CO2 eq per person per year from food. Individual food choices impact climatic emissions as was shown by a 2015 study by ESU-services commissioned by WWF. The less meat a person eats, the lower their personal contribution to GHG emissions is.

- A heavy meat eater emits 2 350 kg CO2 eq21.
- A flexitarian emits 1 495 kg CO2 eq21.
- A vegan emits 1 124 kg CO2 eq per year21.

According to the Federal Council’s Climate Strategy for Agriculture and Nutrition 2050, reducing agricultural emissions is necessary and can only be done through reducing emissions from food and therefore tackling consumer diets22.

- According to the report, the current nutrition-related greenhouse gas emissions of Swiss citizens is 1.9 tons per person per year, which is close to the WWF estimate mentioned above22.
- Also according to the report, the needed reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for nutrition is between 61 to 74%22.
- The Federal Council’s report mentions it is theoretically possible to reduce food-related GHG emissions by three quarter by 2050 if diets are changed and food losses are reduced to a strict minimum22.
- The goal was set for one third of the Swiss population to eat according to the Swiss food pyramid by 203022.

Switzerland’s meat consumption has been relatively stable for the past decade. Meanwhile, meat consumption needs to be reduced threefold to be within the recommended amount of the Planetary Health Diet as well as the Swiss Society for Nutrition to fit within planetary and health boundaries. FOUR PAWS is convinced that such a change is feasible, by consequently applying the 3Rs principle to nutrition [Reduce, Refine, Replace] on both individual and societal levels.

b “CO2 equivalent” or “CO2 eq” is a unit for comparing greenhouse gases with different warming potentials.
The global picture from the 2023 report: Over-consumption of meat is a particular problem of the Global North.

Global meat production and consumption are unsustainable for the planet and human health.

Global Meat Exhaustion Day is reached this year in June. This date is close to Earth Overshoot Day 2023. To stay within health and planetary boundaries, global meat consumption should be reduced by at least 50%. However, since not everyone on the planet consumes the same amount of meat (because of cultural, societal or economic reasons or lack of just access), regional and country-specific data help better determine where meat reduction should occur.

In the Global North (high-income countries), meat intake needs to be reduced by more than 70%!

Our dietary options as well as our food system must change to counter the harmful effects of animal-based foods. The problem lies in the whole current food system that supplies immense quantities of cheap meat through factory farming, which treats animals as mere objects and a commodity, and carries hidden costs that exceed its contribution to global prosperity.

FOUR PAWS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments should end factory / intensive farming, and instead promote diverse production systems, agroecological systems, and plant-based food production systems. Governments should catalyse the food system transition by setting clear targets across the food chain to reduce meat and dairy production and consumption in line with the EAT-Lancet Commission and within planetary limits (with indicators and monitoring). Producers should be supported by providing access to the resources necessary for this transition (financial and training).

- Government-led policy change can increase the share of plant-based options in public procurement, whilst simultaneously reducing animal-sourced foods. Policymakers should define minimum standards that respect high animal welfare criteria and that specify the serving of a certain portion of plant-based protein per week.

- Retailers and other food actors should be engaged to reduce, refine and replace meat options at the retail level. Check out the FOUR PAWS food industry rankings on animal protein reduction in English.

- Consumers can reduce meat consumption, especially cheap and highly processed meat; and replace animal-based food with legumes and other plant-based options. Consumers can support the needed change in farming with their daily decisions about their diet and demand retailers, restaurants, and others to engage with cruelty-free suppliers. To do so, FOUR PAWS recommends the 3Rs principle.
References


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