Average meat consumption in Austria per week\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current consumption in Austria</th>
<th>Planetary Health Diet recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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This graph depicts the total weekly average meat consumption per capita in Austria in 2022 using popular food items\textsuperscript{*} that are emblematic of respective animal sources (veal beef schnitzel, roast pork, and fried chicken) compared with the Planetary Health Diet recommendation of total meat consumption per animal protein source.\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a} The Bundesanstalt Statistik Österreich publishes a supply balance sheet about animal-based food every year. The data for 2022 was retrieved from: https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/user_upload/SB_1-26_tier_2022.pdf The consumption per capita (Pro Kopf Menschlicher Verzehr) – which consists of consumable meat excluding bones and offal – allows for a comparison to the recommendations of the EAT-Lancet reference diet.

\textsuperscript{b} The Planetary Health Diet recommends consuming 7 grams of beef, 7 grams of pork, and 29 grams of poultry per day. For this comparison, we calculated the total average meat consumption per week to its weight in a single portion of schnitzel. The total weekly consumption of the average Austrian is 1.13 kilos – 233 grams of beef [incl. sheep, goat, and horse], 644 grams of pork, and 250 grams of poultry meat [incl. Chicken and turkey] per year.

\textsuperscript{*}Weight of meat was considered only, and ingredients such as egg or flour were excluded from the calculation.
Austria’s production and high consumption of meat is bad for human health, animals, and the planet.

Austria has a high meat and especially red meat consumption compared to other European countries, and compared to a list of major developed countries, putting Austrians at high risk of negative health impacts such as colon and bladder cancer and other associated chronic diseases of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, type 2 diabetes. The average Austrian consumed 60% more meat than the ÖGE (Austrian Agency for Nutrition) recommendation of 450 grams per week and 73% more than the EAT-Lancet recommendation of 301 grams per week.

Animal welfare is threatened by our current production system that applies cruel practices. Many animals that end up being slaughtered live in bad conditions in factory farms that subject them to stress and diseases.

Austria requires to reduce its meat consumption by up to 73% to fit within planetary and health boundaries. Austria has already reached its Meat Exhaustion Day on 7 April 2024.

This means that by the first quarter of the year, Austrians have already consumed 100% of what they should ideally consume within 12 months! The average Austrian eats at least 58.6 kilograms of meat per year, almost four times the recommended amount for what is healthy or sustainable for our planet.

- On average a person in Austria consumes 1.13 kilograms of meat per week, the equivalent of more than 7 schnitzels a week. Meanwhile, the PHD’s recommended amount of 301 grams per week equals to no more than 2 schnitzels.
- Overall, the Austrian meat consumption (58.6 kg per capita per year) is almost twice the average total global meat intake of 33 kg per capita per year.

Average consumption of meat per week per Austrian compared to the Planetary Health Diet recommendation:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Current consumption in Austria</th>
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<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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</table>

one schnitzel = 150 grams of meat

This graph uses a schnitzel as a typical Austrian food product to represent the total meat consumption.

*Weight of meat was considered only, and ingredients such as egg or flour were excluded from the calculation.
As long as animals are kept in factory farms, Austria will cause high environmental and climate impacts.

- In 2020, a total of 108.1 million animals were kept for the production of food, using up a total of 2.5 million hectares of farmland. Almost half is used as grassland while the other half is arable land used for feed production\(^1\).
- The food system in Austria is responsible for 27.5% (20.2 million tons CO\(_2\)e) of the country’s total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 73.3 million tons CO\(_2\)e. The vast majority of those food-related emissions – roughly 67% – are associated with the production of animal-based foods\(^2\).

Meat is the biggest contributor (with 43%) among animal products’ GHG emissions\(^3\). Austria’s agriculture sector uses water intensively, mostly for fodder production\(^4\). A study from 2013 showed that animal agriculture accounted for 87% of the total food production water footprint in Austria, in addition to fodder production and animal husbandry causing high rates of nitrate and phosphorous pollution\(^5\). According to a 2022 report, water quality has slightly improved, while groundwater pollution hotspots are still concentrated in agriculture-intensive regions\(^6\).

Reducing meat consumption and production would by default reduce the number of animals kept in factory farms in addition to allowing the remaining farm animals to live in good welfare conditions. A study conducted by FOUR PAWS in 2020 showed that reducing meat intake up to the ÖGE recommended level (450 grams per week) would reduce the number of animals kept from 108.1 million to 64.2 million (59%), increase land availability by 139.962 ha and would decrease CO\(_2\) emissions by 28%\(^7\).

Further reduction of meat consumption that fits within the PHD will therefore lead to even fewer animals kept in bad living conditions in farms and make more room for forest restoration and regeneration as well as fewer CO\(_2\) emissions.

What is Meat Exhaustion Day?\(^8\)

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 the 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\(^9\). A diet recommended by the EAT-Lancet commission that can be adopted on the country level as was done by Denmark, as well as on the retail level as was done by LIDL Germany\(^10,11\).

Global meat production and consumption are unsustainable for the planet and human health. In the Global North, meat intake needs to be reduced by more than 70%! 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, and that carries hidden costs that exceed its contribution to global prosperity\(^12,13\). For more information on the impacts on animal welfare, human health and the environment, see the 2023 report and our 2024 USA-focused fact sheet. A food system change towards a diverse ecological farming system that prioritises plant-based production and maintains low farm animal densities, while changing to diets that reduce animal-based products, will essentially adopt higher animal welfare, while protecting planetary and human health\(^14\).

FOUR PAWS recommendations

Governments should work towards phasing out factory farming and intensive production, and instead subsidise diverse production systems and plant-based food production systems. Set clear targets through indicators and monitoring across the food chain to reduce meat and dairy production and consumption in line with the EAT-Lancet Commission’s recommended diet.

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\(^15\).

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 and German.

Individuals can reduce meat consumption, especially cheap and highly processed meat, and replace animal-based food with legumes and other plant-based options. Consumers can also refine choice of retailers, restaurants and products and economically engage with cruelty-free suppliers.

FOUR PAWS Austria has a dedicated page and petition to ban animal export, for more information see: Animal Transport: Import and Export of Animal Suffering

This year is an important year in fight against animal transport. Call on the government to advocate strongly for animals on transports in this crucial year!

Learn more about the impact of meat reduction in Austria.

\(^{a}\) For further details on the calculation see p25-p28 of the Meat Exhaustion Day: How Meat is Eating up the Planet of 2023.
References


