Average meat consumption in France per person per week

This graph depicts the weekly total average meat consumption in France per person using popular food items that are emblematic of respective animal protein sources – steak pieces for beef, jambon slices for pork, and roasted chicken thigh for poultry – and compares it with the Planetary Health Diet recommendation of total meat consumption per animal protein source.

France meat consumption data was retrieved from FranceAgriMer 2023 report titled “Evolution of the average annual per capita consumption of meat in France from 1970 to 2022, by kind of meat (in kilograms)” using Statista. The initial report can be found here: [BIL-VIA-LAI-Bilan2022-Perspectives2023.pdf](https://franceagrimer.fr)

The Planetary Health Diet guideline recommends eating a maximum of 301g of meat per week.

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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 countries. The USA already reached its meat consumption day on 8 March 2024.

11 April marks France’s Meat Exhaustion Day 2024.

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

The Planetary Health Diet guideline recommends eating a maximum of 301g of meat per week.

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b The Planetary Health Diet recommends consuming a maximum of 49 grams of beef, 49 grams of pork, and 204 grams of poultry per week. The total weekly consumption of the average person in France as of 2022 is 294 grams of beef (including cattle, sheep, cowl 448 grams of pig meat and 401 grams of poultry.)
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. 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 grocery store chain, LIDL Germany.

For further details on the calculation, see p. 25 – p. 28 of the report Meat Exhaustion Day: How Meat is Eating up the Planet of 2023.
French consumers need to reduce their meat consumption by **74%** to fit within the planetary and health boundaries and get in line with the Planetary Health Diet\(^1\).

**France already reaches its Meat Exhaustion Day on 11 April 2024.**

This means by the first quarter of the year 2024, the French already reached 100% of the annual meat consumption recommended by the Planetary Health Diet! And by the end of the year 2024, France would have on average consumed almost four times the amount that is healthy or sustainable for our planet.

- A person in France consumes on average 1.14 kg of meat per week. This is the equivalent of 9.5 pieces of steak slices per week weighing 120 grams each.
- The recommended amount of 301 grams per week equates to no more than 2.5 pieces of steak a week.

**Average consumption per week of meat per person in France compared to the Planetary Health Diet recommendation.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average consumption of steak per capita</th>
<th>PHD recommendation</th>
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<td>9.5</td>
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1 steak slice = 120 grams of meat

This graph represents, based on a portion of minced steak (120 grams), a popular product of French cuisine, the total meat consumption per capita per week in France.
France’s consumption of meat has not decreased over time.

Meat consumption in France has more than doubled from the 1970s until 2021\(^1\). Contrary to common belief, meat consumption per capita has shown a slight increase over the past ten years: it increased by a little more than 2% between 2013 and 2022\(^2\). \textbf{Today, the quantity of meat consumed per capita in France is up to 59.5 kg per year – nearly twice the world average of 33 kg per capita per year}\(^3\).

France’s trend in meat intake has changed into one that can be judged to be less healthy.

- Between 2009 and 2018, there has been a 5% decrease in unprocessed cuts like butcher meats and whole poultry and a 6% increase in total available meat\(^4\).
- Processed meats and pre-made meat products and dishes intake (such as nuggets, pizzas, cordon bleu, Bolognese sauce, etc.) has noticeably increased, in addition to more people eating meat at restaurants\(^5\). Studies conclude that less meat is purchased to be cooked at home\(^6\).
Factory farming sustains a high amount of meat consumption.

To supply the needed amounts of meat for consumption, hundreds of millions of animals are slaughtered in France every year.

- In 2022, animals slaughtered in France for meat consumption amounted to around 4.1 million cattle, 23.3 million pigs, 983,000 goats, 5.5 million sheep; and more than 800 million birds and rabbits, including around 689 million of broiler chickens, 30 million turkeys, 33 million ducks, and almost 16 million rabbits.

- 60% of animals are kept in 3% of the country’s farms.

- There are 3,010 factory farms in France according to Greenpeace. Almost 70% of factory farms are concentrated in two regions: in Bretagne and the Pays de la Loire. This concentrated land exploitation causes immense local environmental pressures.

Despite these staggering numbers, the number of cattle kept have actually fallen by 11% between 2014 and 2022, but this decrease has mainly been observed in farms that adopt extensive methods and is due to the socio-economic difficulties faced by farmers.

In intensive farming systems, as many animals as possible are bred in a minimum of time, in a minimum space, and at the lowest cost. These systems apply cruel practices that cause mass suffering: animals are crammed together at high densities, even confined in cages, and mutilated to prevent them from inflicting injuries on themselves as a result of stress and frustration. These systems also favour the genetic selection of animals to increase their yields at the expense of their health, even further increasing the suffering of animals.

In France, 80% of animals are raised in intensive breeding systems.

Scandals about gruesome living conditions in intensive farms are many. As recently as March 2024, the NGO L214 shared footage of young pigs dying in their manure while dozens of corpses were left abandoned in the four rooms of the farm they filmed in, with sows living alongside their dead piglets.

Finally, despite the declared political will to ensure France’s food sovereignty, France imports large amounts of high-end produce to meet the food demand of the French population. In addition, a large part of animals slaughtered in France – 30% of the pork and 42% of the broiler poultry – are processed to be exported as low-quality meat to developing countries.
As long as animals are kept in factory farms, farming in France will not be sustainable for the climate, the planet and human health.

Livestock farming has a major impact on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

- The overall food system represents 22% of the French carbon footprint.\(^{15}\)
- Livestock farming alone is responsible for 59% of agricultural emissions (46 Mt eqCO\(_2\)), a sector which itself accounted for 18% of France’s greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 (77 Mt eqCO\(_2\)).\(^{15}\)
- Cattle farming is the main source of direct emissions from livestock farming (83%).\(^{15}\)

In addition to impacting the climate, meat production is threatening biodiversity, causing air, water, and soil pollution, and fueling deforestation.

- Factory farming dominates agricultural lands as 60% of France’s agricultural land is occupied to produce animal feed.\(^{16}\)
- France is importing almost 1/4 of the vegetable proteins it needs to feed its cattle population, and almost half of the protein-rich materials, mainly in the form of soybeans, are from third countries, thus fuelling deforestation there. This situation is affecting the resilience and sustainability of French agriculture.\(^{17}\)
- Nitrate pollution from factory farms is a major public health risk: 25% of dietary exposure to nitrates in France comes from water consumption, contributing to increasing risk of colorectal cancer.\(^{18}\) Nitrate pollution also contributes to the algae blooms in surface water, which has led to a series of accidents resulting in human and animal deaths.\(^{19}\)

Finally, high meat consumption leads to major human health impacts.

- Over-consumption of meat and dairy products can lead to many health problems, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes.\(^{20}\)
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified processed meats (which, according to I4CE, include charcuterie, nuggets, cordon bleu, etc.) as carcinogenic and red meat as a probable human carcinogen.\(^{21}\)

France’s National Nutrition and Health Programme (PNNS) recommends a weekly consumption of up to 500 grams of meat (equivalent to 3–4 steaks), excluding poultry.\(^{22}\) The PNNS’s maximum meat consumption recommendations are especially high when considering human health and environmental impacts, in addition to them being high compared to the recommendations of neighboring countries.\(^{23}\)
It is urgent to change the current trajectory.

Reducing meat consumption is a prerequisite to reducing the number of animals kept in factory farms according to the Haut Conseil pour le Climat (HCC). To reduce agricultural emissions by half by 2050, the HCC recommends reducing the consumption of all animal products by at least 30%\(^f\). However, according to L’Institut de l’Économie pour le Climat l4CE, at the current consumption rate in France, none of the carbon reduction targets for sustainable meat consumption are likely to be achieved by 2050\(^2\).

The government should not ignore the need for a reduction of meat consumption to halt the climate crisis. It is necessary to articulate the transition away from intensive farming to the evolution of diets, towards less meat but also of better food system, respectful of animal welfare, and produced in France. For that, we are asking:

- To set clear targets for the reduction of consumption of animal products by 2030 in the upcoming National Food, Nutrition, and Climate Strategy. Efforts to reduce meat consumption cannot only come from consumers, but public policies should also shape food environments (for example, by applying stricter marketing standards and rules defining promotion policies, with criteria to ensure public money is only spent on promoting foods associated with sustainable diets)\(^2\).
- To review the nutritional recommendations of the National Nutrition Health Programme to integrate climate issues, as recommended by the Climate Action Network and the French Society of Nutrition\(^2\).
- To expand the offer of plant proteins, further the development of plant-based alternatives and ensure their financial accessibility.

\(^f\) The l4CE states that any greenhouse gas emissions reduction scenario includes reducing per capita meat consumption by at least 20% (as per the National Low Carbon Strategy [SNBC] and up to 70% (as per ADEME scenario 1) by 2050.
Conclusions of 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 Exhuastion Day is reached this year in the month of 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 (due to cultural, social or economic reasons), regional and country-specific data help better determine where meat reduction should occur.

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, which treats animals as mere objects and a commodity and that carries hidden costs that exceed its contribution to global prosperity.

FOUR PAWS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments should end factory farming and intensive production, 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 global limits (with indicators and monitoring). Farmers should be supported by giving them access to the resources necessary for the 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.
- Consumers can reduce their meat consumption, especially cheap and highly processed meat, and replace animal-based foods with legumes and other plant-based options. Consumers can support the needed change in farming with their daily decisions about their diet and demand that retailers, restaurants, and others engage with cruelty-free suppliers.
References


3 Bewusste Ernährung - Lidl Deutschland. [accessed 2023 Apr 4]. https://unternehmen.lidl.de/verantwortung/gut-fuer-die-menschen/gesundheit-foerdernde-handlungsfelder/bewusste-ernaehrung


For more background on climate and factory farming by FOUR PAWS France: [Climat et bien-être animal - QUATRE PATTES en France - Organisation mondiale de protection des animaux (quatre-pattes.org)](quatre-pattes.org)

FOUR PAWS has a chance in June to raise the voice of animals and their welfare and food system change demands, during the time of European elections: [Élections européennes 2024 - QUATRE PATTES en France - Organisation mondiale de protection des animaux (quatre-pattes.org)](quatre-pattes.org)