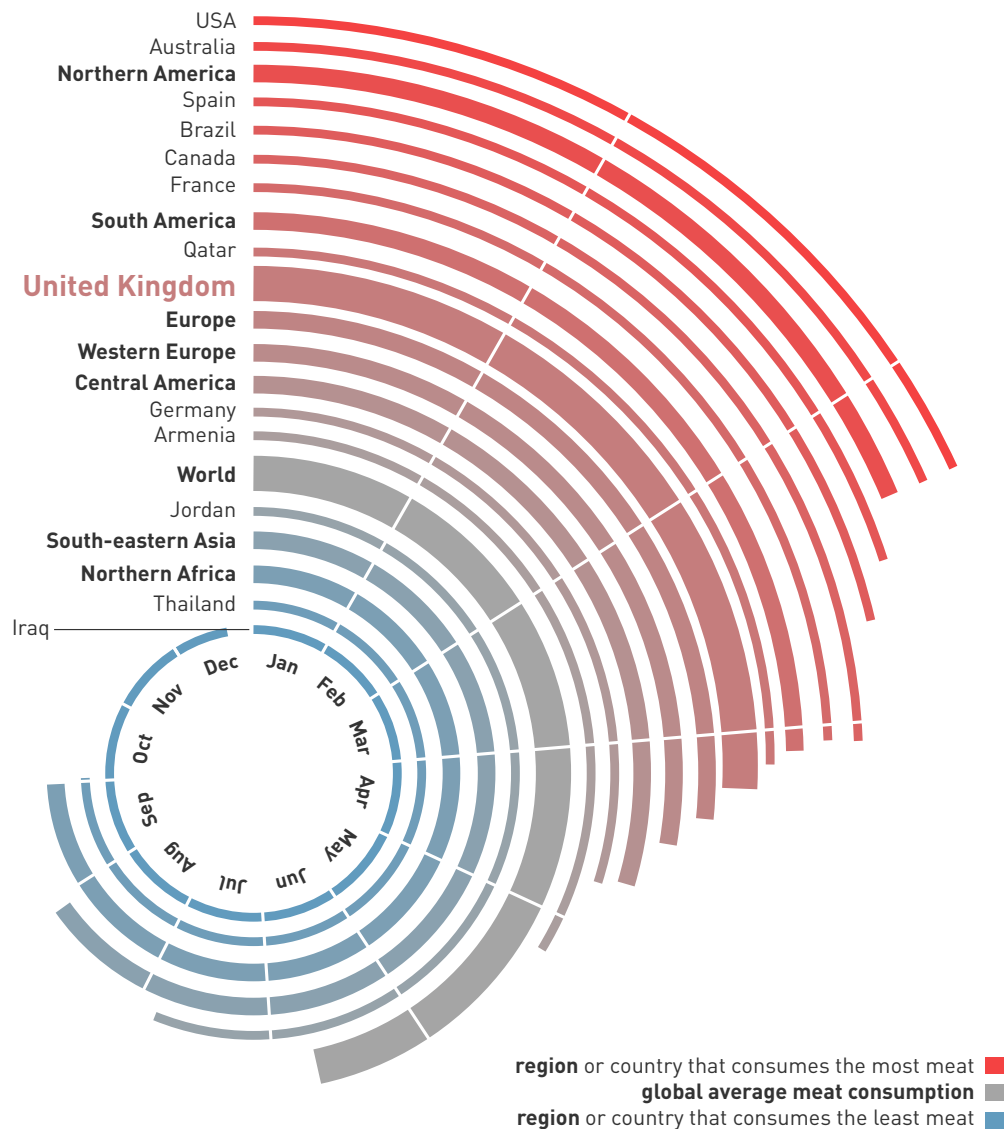


Meat Exhaustion Day

How meat is eating up the planet
2025 spotlight on the UK

Meat exhaustion calendar: the time of the year when we exhaust our meat allowance



Global Alert!

19 April
marks the
UK's Meat
Exhaustion
for 2025

FOUR PAWS follows up on the [Meat Exhaustion Report: When meat is eating up the planet](#), with a focus on consumption and impacts in a selection of countries.

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

The Planetary Health Diet guideline recommends eating a **maximum of 301.8g of meat per week.**

What is Meat Exhaustion Day?^a

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 meat exhaustion date is calculated by comparing a country's actual consumption of meat per capita in a year, with the maximum yearly amount of meat intake that is recommended by the Planetary Health Diet (PHD) and published by the EAT-Lancet Commission¹. This diet limits meat consumption to no more than **15.7 Kg per person per year** and scientifically considers how meat can be consumed without negatively impacting individual health or the health of the planet (health boundaries and the 9 Planetary Boundaries that include: climate, water and soil pollution and more). This recommendation should be adopted in policies by public and private sector like two sectors have already done: for example, on the country level Denmark adopted the PHD as its national dietary guideline; and in retail, it has been adopted by the grocery store chain LIDL Germany^{2,3}.



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^a 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*. The data for different countries and regions and the world date was taken from the latest (2023) FAO food balance sheet (2010-). The data source for calculating Australia's date was extracted from ABARES's latest release on meat in the *Agricultural Commodity Statistics 2023-2024*.

The UK needs to reduce its meat consumption by up to 70% to get in line with the Planetary Health Diet¹.

The UK reached its Meat Exhaustion Day on 19 April 2025.

This means that on average a person in the UK has consumed 100% of their maximum recommended yearly meat intake during the first quarter of the year. By the end of the year, a person in the UK will have consumed more than 3 times the amount of meat than what is considered healthy or sustainable for our planet.

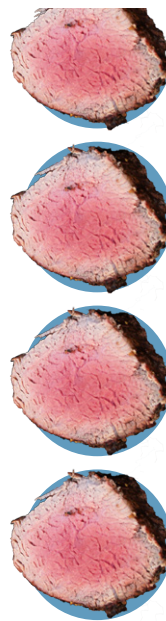
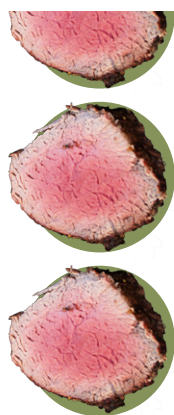
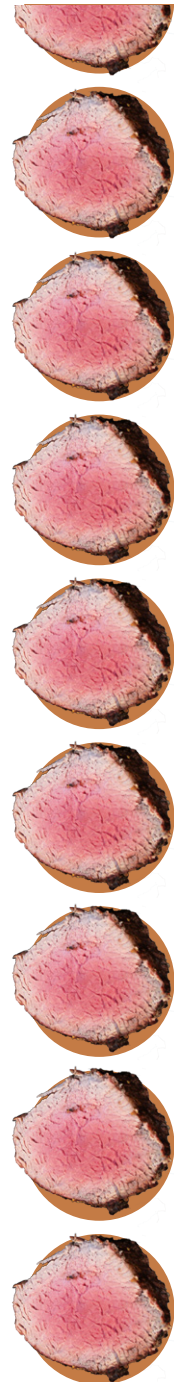
On average a person in the UK consumes more than 1 Kilo of meat per week. This is the equivalent of 5 meals of roast beef, pork or chicken, containing 200 grams of meat in each meal.

Meanwhile the recommended amount of 301.8 grams per week equates to not more than 1.5 meals of roast meat.

The National recommendation for meat consumption of 490 grams of red and processed meat per week should ideally be reduced to meet the planetary health diet⁴.

Overall, the consumption of meat in the UK as of 2023 is 52.7 kg per capita per year which is very high compared to other countries. **UK's meat intake is 1.5x higher than the average global intake of meat:** 33.8 kg per capita per year^{5,6}.

Meat consumption distribution by type for 2023 was: 50% poultry, 28% pork, 18% beef, and 4% lamb.



Planetary Health Diet Recommendation
301.8 grams

National Dietary Recommendation
455 grams

Actual Average Meat Consumption
1,013 grams

one piece of roast meat (beef) = 120 grams

Meat production and consumption are bad for animals, humans and the planet.

Factory farming sustains a high amount of meat consumption.

To meet the demand for meat consumption, hundreds of millions of animals are slaughtered in the UK each year. **A total of 1.211.753.000 (around 1.2 billion) animals have been slaughtered for food in the UK in the year 2024^{7,8}.**

Animals in factory farms across the UK endure immense suffering. Confined in cramped cages and overcrowded sheds, they are denied the space to move freely or express their natural instincts. They endure painful mutilations such as tail docking, teeth clipping, and disbudding, without any pain relief. These sentient beings, each capable of feeling fear, pain, and sorrow, are treated as mere commodities. Cows, sheep, chickens, and pigs live and die in a system that disregards their suffering, reducing their lives to a cycle of cruelty from birth to slaughter.



Slaughtered animals in the UK⁹ Numbers from UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA, 2025)

Health impacts

Meat consumption leads to high impacts on human health in the UK. Meat is a known carcinogen according to the WHO¹⁰, in addition meat intake can lead to ischaemic heart disease, pneumonia, diverticular disease, and diabetes, according to a study of almost

475,000 UK adults that were monitored for 25 major causes of non-cancerous hospital admissions¹¹.

Reducing meat consumption is necessary to maintain good health. Every 70g increase in red or processed meat intake daily, raises ischaemic heart disease risk by 15% and diabetes risk by 30%. Similarly, higher poultry intake increases the risk of conditions like gastro-oesophageal reflux disease and diabetes, with each 30g daily increase raising the risk of reflux disease by 17% and diabetes by 14%.

- ➔ **Current meat consumption is 52% higher than the maximum suggested by the National Guidelines of 490g/week (that recommends reducing daily meat portion and replacing them with alternatives), and 70% more than the EAT-Lancet recommendation (301.8 g/week).**



Environmental impacts

As long as animals are kept in intensive farms, farming in the UK will not be sustainable for the climate and the planet. The environmental effects of meat production in the UK are detrimental for biodiversity which is being lost at alarming rates

- ➔ According to the State of Nature report (2019) wildlife abundance has dropped by 41% since 1970 across the country. In fact, the Farmland Bird Indicator shrunk by 54% over the same period, while the abundance of butterflies in the UK has significantly decreased because of the expansion of animal agriculture and modern farming practices¹².
- ➔ Around 13 million hectares or 76% of the UK's agricultural land surface is used for livestock grazing and the cultivation of animal feed¹³.
- ➔ Freshwater has been polluted by farming practices. Poultry farms especially have been so notorious that in recent years, 10 rivers were declared at risk of becoming 'dead zones' due to chicken farm pollution¹⁴.



- ➔ An investigation by the Guardian has shown that in regions like the River Wye and River Severn, industrial poultry units hold on average between 40,000 to more than 600,000 birds at a time, while the largest industries can hold more than a million birds in one unit. In the entire region of the river valleys of the Severn and Wye more than 51 million chickens are being industrially farmed, the equivalent of 79 chickens for every person in the region¹⁵.
- ➔ Agriculture, and most importantly livestock, is responsible for over 60% of the pollution in England's rivers. Nutrients from animal manure and fertilizers run off into watercourses, promoting algal blooms that reduce oxygen levels and harm aquatic species¹⁶.

- ➔ Agriculture in the UK accounts for 11% of its overall GHG emissions, contributing 71% of total nitrous oxide emissions and 49% of total methane emissions¹⁷.

Reducing meat intake is not only beneficial for the health of humans but can also reduce environmental emissions on the planet.

- ➔ Reducing meat intake reduces climate emissions. According to a dietary analysis done with more than 55,000 participants in the UK, consuming below 50 grams of meat per day had a 42% reduced GHG impact (4.21kg CO₂e) compared to consuming more than 100g/day (7.28kg CO₂e). Meanwhile following a vegan diet releases only 2.16kg CO₂e¹⁸.

Meat Exhaustion Day: A Global Perspective

Global meat production and consumption are **unsustainable** for the planet and human health. Global North countries need to take responsibility and act to apply policies and behavioural changes to **reduce current meat consumption patterns 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

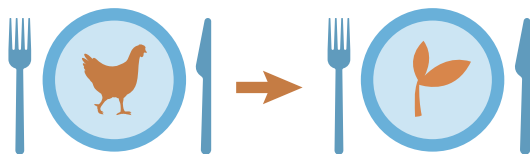
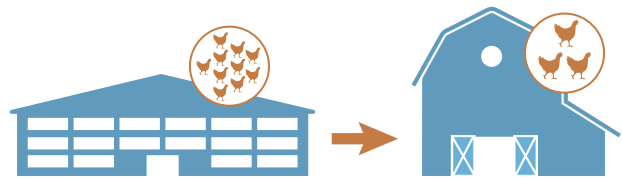
global prosperity^{19–21}. For more information on the impacts on animal welfare, human health and the environment, see the [2023 Meat Exhaustion Day Report](#).

The current food system needs to change towards a diverse ecological farming system that prioritises plant-based production and maintains low farm animal densities. **Diets need to change** towards reduced consumption of animal-based products and to prioritise higher animal welfare, as well as better awareness and safeguarding of planetary and human health²².

FOUR PAWS Recommendations

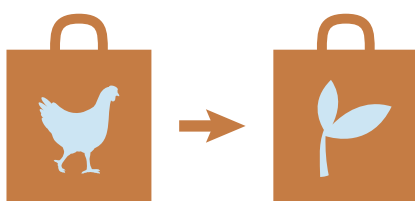
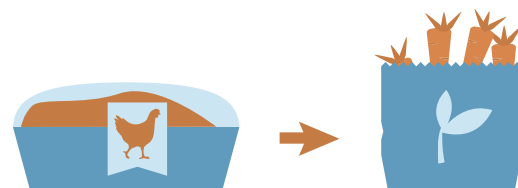
Creating a More Sustainable and Humane Food System

Governments must phase out factory farming and shift subsidies away from industrial animal agriculture. Instead, they should support sustainable farming, including smaller-scale, regenerative and plant-based food systems. Clear targets must be set to reduce meat and dairy production and consumption in line with planetary limits and global dietary recommendations. Farmers need financial and training support to transition to more humane, sustainable practices.



Governments should set policies to increase plant-based options in public institutions like hospitals and schools while setting higher animal welfare standards. Policymakers should define minimum standards that respect high animal welfare criteria and that specify the serving of a portion of plant-based protein per week, ideally to follow the Planetary Health Diet of 301.8 grams.

Supermarkets and food businesses must reduce meat products, replace them with plant-based options, and ensure the highest welfare standards for any remaining animal products.



Consumers have the power to drive change by choosing fewer animal products—especially cheap, highly processed meat—and replacing them with plant-based foods like legumes. Every meal is an opportunity to demand cruelty-free options from retailers, restaurants, and policymakers. FOUR PAWS calls on everyone to follow the **3Rs principle—Reduce, Refine, Replace**—to create a more humane and sustainable food system.

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