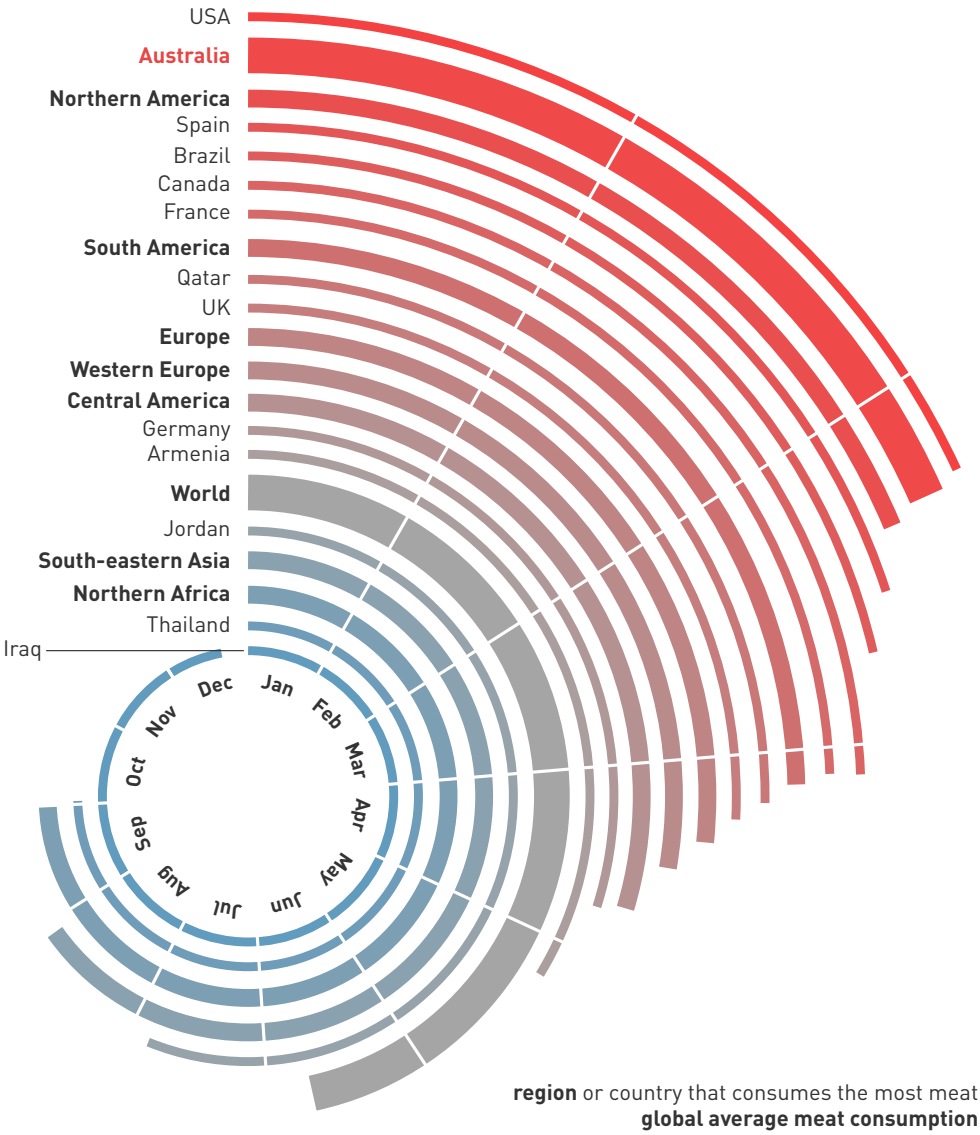
Meat Exhaustion Day

How meat is eating up the planet

2025 spotlight on Australia

Animal Welfare. Worldwide.

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



Global Alert!

20 March marks Australia's Meat Exhaustion Day 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-Lancer Commission[1]. This diet limits meat consumption to no more than 15 kilos and 695 grams per person per year (301.8 grams per person per week) 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 actors, as two actors have already done: 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[4,5].

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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.

Australia needs to reduce its meat consumption by up to 79% to get in line with the Planetary Health Diet[1].

Australia has already reached its Meat Exhaustion Day on 20 March 2025.

This means that the average Australian has consumed 100% of their maximum recommended yearly meat intake before the first quarter of the year has even ended! By the end of the year, Australia will have consumed around five times more meat than what is considered healthy or sustainable for our planet. **On average, a person in Australia consumes almost 1.5 kg of meat per week. This is the equivalent of almost 12 burger patties containing 120 grams of meat each.**

Meanwhile, the recommended amount of 301.8 grams per week equates to no more than 2.5 burger patties.

Overall, the consumption of meat in Australia as of 2023 is 73 kg per capita per year which is very high compared to other countries. **Australia's meat intake is more than twice the yearly average global intake of 33 kg per capita[2,3].**

Meat consumption distribution by type for 2024 was: 52% poultry, 26% pork, 17% beef and veal, and 5% sheep.

Planetary Health Diet Recommendation
301.8 grams

National Dietary Recommendation
455 grams

Actual Average Meat Consumption
1,412 grams

one hamburger = 120 grams

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

A survey conducted in 2019 in Sydney revealed a lack of general awareness about the negative implications of high meat consumption on human well-being and the environment[6].

Factory farming sustains a high amount of meat consumption.

- To meet the demand for meat consumption, hundreds of millions of animals are slaughtered in Australia each year.
- In 2024, animals slaughtered for consumption in Australia amounted to around 8 million cattle, 27 million lambs, 10.4 million sheep, 5.8 million pigs and 734 million chickens[7].

Animals in Australian factory farms 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 dehorning, 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.

The suffering of Australian farmed animals goes beyond Australia's land boundaries with the massive market of long-distance live export.

- In 2023, Australia exported more than 1.3 million live animals[8].

Health impacts

The health impact of meat consumption is reflected by the high rate of bowel cancer in Australia, with one study finding that 17.8% of bowel cancers diagnosed were attributable to the consumption of red and processed meat[9]. Australians' diets consisting of high amounts of red and processed meat contribute to the country's burden of disease from diabetes, obesity, and bowel and colorectal cancer[10].

- Current meat consumption is 68% higher than the maximum suggested by the National Guidelines of 455g (that recommends consuming lean and unprocessed meat), and 79% more than the EAT-Lancet recommendation (301.8g).

Environmental impacts

As long as animals are kept in intensive farms, farming in Australia will not be sustainable for the climate and the planet. The environmental effects of meat production in Australia are detrimental to habitats and biodiversity.

- 90% of bushland destruction is caused by land clearing for the development of livestock pastures across Queensland and New South Wales (NSW) (assessment period of 5 years: 2016/17 to 2020/21), causing the displacement, harm and death of 100 million animals[11].
- Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinction in the world, driven by habitat loss due to deforestation[12].

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

One study showed that following a heart-healthy diet in Australia can lead to 23.8% lower CO_2 emissions per day (2.16 kg CO_2e per day) compared to the traditional meat-rich diet (2.83 kg CO_2e per day)[13]. Another study showed that abiding by the Australian dietary guidelines leads to a 42% lower climate footprint[14]. Meanwhile, a further decrease that fits the Planetary Health Diet would result in further GHG reductions and environmental benefits.

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%!**

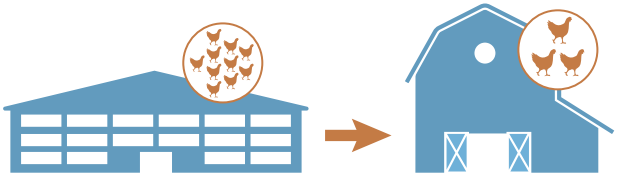
Our food system must change to counter the harmful effects of animal-based foods. **The problem lies in the whole current food system** that supplies immense quantities of cheap meat through factory farming and that carries hidden costs that exceed its contribution to global prosperity[15–17]. For more information on the impacts on animal welfare, human health and the environment, see the 2023 Meat Exhaustion Day Report.

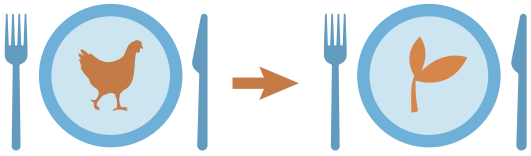
The current food system needs to change towards a diverse ecological farming system that prioritises plant-based production and maintains low farm animal densities. Diets need to change towards reduced consumption of animal-based products and to prioritise higher animal welfare, as well as better awareness and safeguarding of planetary and human health[18].

FOUR PAWS Recommendations

Creating a More Sustainable and Humane Food System

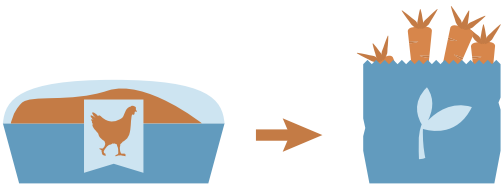
Governments must phase out factory farming and shift subsidies away from industrial animal agriculture. Instead, they should support sustainable farming, including smaller-scale, regenerative and plant-based food systems. Clear targets must be set to reduce meat and dairy production and consumption in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

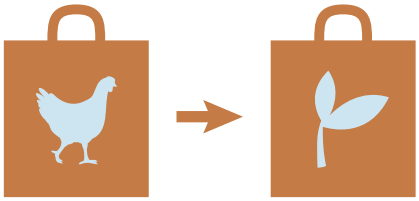




Governments should set policies to increase plant-based options in public institutions like hospitals and schools while setting higher animal welfare standards. Policymakers should define minimum standards that respect high animal welfare criteria and that specify the serving of a portion of plant-based 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.

FOUR PAWS submitted its input to the Australian government's Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan, which can be found here.

FOUR PAWS leads campaigns to ban long-distance transport and live animal exports. See here: Petition to stop cruel live animal transport in Australia and timely news about live exports in Australia.

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