# UK meat consumption remains high despite rising environmental awareness and plant-based shifts



The United Kingdom's average meat consumption significantly exceeds the global benchmark, alarmingly placing both public health and environmental sustainability at risk. The Food Foundation's recent report underscores that British adults consume approximately 83 kg of meat annually—almost double the worldwide average of 44 kg. Notably, the demographic consuming the most meat consists of young adults aged 19-40, with chicken and turkey comprising 42% of total meat intake, while red and processed meats account for 29% each.

The report highlights a curious dissonance: despite this trend, younger demographics, particularly those aged 19-40, are often engaged in discussions around sustainable eating. The report observes that even though they are more receptive to the idea of reducing meat in their diets, entrenched cultural norms position meat—especially chicken—as a primary protein source, reinforcing its consumption as a convenient option. The documented 13% decline in meat purchases between 2018-19 and 2022-23 has given rise to speculation about whether the UK has reached "peak meat." However, the Food Foundation emphasises that this reduction may be a temporary response to rising living costs rather than the onset of a lasting dietary shift.

As the data reveals, public awareness of the environmental detriments associated with meat consumption has grown; the percentage of people acknowledging the risks increased from 31% in 2013 to 41% in 2024. Despite this, behavioural change remains elusive, indicating a substantial action-intention gap. While nearly half of British adults express an inclination to reduce meat and dairy for environmental benefits, only 27% are actively decreasing their animal protein intake. This is particularly stark among young men, who, despite recognising livestock's environmental impact, report the lowest percentage of reduced meat consumption.

The Meat Foundation's findings further illustrate demographic disparities: young men consume 20% more processed meats than women, with significant portions of their intake comprising carcinogenic processed options. Alarmingly, one-third of the meat consumed by children falls into this category, exacerbating health risks amongst the younger population. The report also identifies that the ubiquity of processed meat dishes in fast-food outlets compounds the issue.

To mitigate these pressing health crises, experts advocate for a pronounced shift towards plant-based diets, particularly through the consumption of whole foods like beans, which are both nutritious and sustainable. The report posits that nearly two-thirds of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions stem from livestock production, underlining the urgent need for dietary change. It calls on stakeholders—businesses and policymakers alike—to prioritise plant-rich diets by promoting whole food sources and reducing the marketing of processed meats.

Promisingly, there is evidence suggesting a shift towards whole-food innovation in the UK's food landscape. Tesco reported a 46% increase in meals made from vegetables, beans, and legumes, outpacing the 34% growth of meat alternatives. In parallel, a report indicates that two-thirds of consumers are open to trying foods produced through precision fermentation, indicating a growing appetite for innovative food technologies.

Given these insights, the Food Foundation is urging immediate action from businesses and the government. Prominent recommendations include adjusting retail strategies to favour plant-based options, revising government procurement rules to favour plant-rich menus in institutional setting, and increasing public campaigns to make beans and other legumes more appealing. The charity's assertion that promotional efforts should shift towards nutritious plant foods reflects a broader recognition that convenience does not have to come at the expense of health or sustainability.

Ultimately, the UK faces an opportunity to reshape its dietary landscape by embracing plant-based innovations and moving towards a healthier, more sustainable food system.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/uk-meat-consumption-plant-based-whole-foods-beans-food-foundation/), [[4]](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/reducing-meat-consumption-could-help-reverse-decline-500-endangered-uk-species)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/uk-meat-consumption-plant-based-whole-foods-beans-food-foundation/), [[2]](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-report-shows-clear-environmental-and-health-benefits-eating-whole-plant-foods), [[5]](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-report-shows-clear-environmental-and-health-benefits-eating-whole-plant-foods)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/24/uk-meat-consumption-lowest-level-since-record-began-data-reveal), [[6]](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/reducing-meat-consumption-could-help-reverse-decline-500-endangered-uk-species)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/uk-meat-consumption-plant-based-whole-foods-beans-food-foundation/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-report-shows-clear-environmental-and-health-benefits-eating-whole-plant-foods> - A report by The Food Foundation highlights the environmental and health advantages of consuming whole plant foods over meat and processed meat alternatives. The study found that all plant-based meat alternative categories significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and water usage compared to meat. Additionally, less processed alternatives like beans and grains offer the best health and environmental benefits, being lower in saturated fat and calories, higher in fibre, and more affordable. The report underscores the need for increased promotion of plant-based diets to support sustainability and public health.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/24/uk-meat-consumption-lowest-level-since-record-began-data-reveal> - Data reveals that UK meat consumption has reached its lowest level since records began in the 1970s. In the year to March 2022, the average person consumed 854g of meat per week, marking a 14% decrease since 2012. This decline is attributed to factors such as the cost of living crisis, the impact of Covid-19, and broader lifestyle changes. The reduction includes a 26% drop in beef, pork, and lamb consumption, and an 11% decrease in chicken and other meat products over the past decade.
4. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/reducing-meat-consumption-could-help-reverse-decline-500-endangered-uk-species> - Research by The Food Foundation indicates that increasing fruit and vegetable intake to five portions daily and reducing meat consumption by approximately a third could help reverse the decline of over 500 endangered UK species. This dietary shift would free up land currently used for livestock grazing, allowing for the planting of hedgerows and trees essential for biodiversity. The study suggests that such changes could increase habitable land for vulnerable species by more than 10%, benefiting both wildlife and the environment.
5. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-report-shows-clear-environmental-and-health-benefits-eating-whole-plant-foods> - A report by The Food Foundation highlights the environmental and health advantages of consuming whole plant foods over meat and processed meat alternatives. The study found that all plant-based meat alternative categories significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and water usage compared to meat. Additionally, less processed alternatives like beans and grains offer the best health and environmental benefits, being lower in saturated fat and calories, higher in fibre, and more affordable. The report underscores the need for increased promotion of plant-based diets to support sustainability and public health.
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7. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/reducing-meat-consumption-could-help-reverse-decline-500-endangered-uk-species> - Research by The Food Foundation indicates that increasing fruit and vegetable intake to five portions daily and reducing meat consumption by approximately a third could help reverse the decline of over 500 endangered UK species. This dietary shift would free up land currently used for livestock grazing, allowing for the planting of hedgerows and trees essential for biodiversity. The study suggests that such changes could increase habitable land for vulnerable species by more than 10%, benefiting both wildlife and the environment.