

WWF-UK - WRITTEN EVIDENCE (FDO0138)

WHO WE ARE

WWF is the world's leading independent conservation organisation. Our mission is to create a world where people and wildlife can thrive together.

Reason for submitting evidence

In the UK and around the world, food production's reliance on intensive practices is unnecessarily destroying habitats, decimating species and accelerating climate change. As a food system, it is also failing on its own terms, it is both volatile and vulnerable to shocks, like the invasion of Ukraine, and focused on producing more food than we need but still failing to feed us.

We must act now if we're going to fix the food system and provide sustainable, healthy, affordable food for everyone. We need to reform our food system, to halt nature loss and ensure the UK leads a global transformation to sustainable food production and consumption. WWF is working towards a food system that is more diversified and diverse and relies less on feed and fertilizer, so it is more sustainable and resilient.

Question 7: The cost and availability of a) UPF and b) HFSS foods and their impact on health outcomes.

The health of the planet is intimately connected with our own. Alongside the climate and nature crises, we are experiencing a public health crisis here in the UK with rising levels of obesity, food insecurity and poor diets that lack key nutrients. All of this comes at an economic cost as well as a cost for people and planet.

To enable diet shift at scale, healthy, sustainable products and meals need to be the most available, affordable, accessible and appealing options. Consumers expect businesses to encourage the adoption of healthier, more sustainable diets by increasing the availability of plant-rich foods and ensuring they are available, affordable, and accessible in supermarkets, restaurants and canteens.

UK retailers, catering companies, restaurants and public canteen operators can accelerate adoption of healthy, sustainable diets by:

- Focusing product or meal development and innovation on plant-based wholefoods such as beans and lentils.

- Focusing advertising and promotions on plant-rich options, and ensuring they are cheaper (or no more expensive) than meat and dairy options.
- Including a greater proportion of plant-rich options than meat and dairy options in supermarkets and on menus.
- Placing plant-rich options in prominent positions in supermarkets, on menus and in canteens, and making them the default option where possible

Everyone should be able to eat good food. Public procurement presents an opportunity for government to support those who need it most, and improve the quality of food served in schools, hospitals, care homes, government buildings and other public institutions. Ambitious action on public procurement will also set an example for private procurement.

The food choices that make up diets are deeply influenced by what's available, affordable and accessible, and how it's marketed. These factors are determined by government and businesses. They have a vital role to play in enabling and encouraging a shift to healthy, sustainable diets, especially during the current cost-of-living crisis when many are struggling to feed their families.

In England, 64% of the adult population is overweight or obese¹, while almost 10% face hunger². Diet-related ill health comes at a financial cost. In the UK, the NHS currently spends over £6 billion annually on diet-related illness and obesity, a figure which is predicted to rise to almost £10 billion by 2050.

Increases in housing, energy and transport costs have put pressure on household budgets, meaning people have less money to spend on food. This is especially the case for those from lower income households. In 2022, vegetable consumption decreased by 7.5%, with children from the poorest fifth of households consuming less fruit, vegetables and oily fish than those from the richest fifth.³ This is because healthy, sustainable food costs more per calorie than unhealthy, unsustainable food, and is less available.

Polling shows that citizens want to adopt healthier, more sustainable diets.^{4 5 6 7} ^{8 9}all of the UK government's healthy diets guidance, and

¹ WHO, (n.d.), Obesity and overweight. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

² House of Commons Library, (2021), Obesity. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9049/CBP-9049.pdf>

³ Office for National Statistics, (2022), Energy prices and their effect on households. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/energypricesandtheireffectonhouseholds/2022-02-01>

⁴ Food Standards Agency, (2021), Healthy and Sustainable Diets: Consumer Poll.

only 31% meet five out of the nine recommendations.¹⁰¹¹ largely beyond their direct control that make it challenging for them to eat better, including cost, limited choice, convenience, and confusion over what makes up a sustainable diet.¹²

Diets are not just a question of personal preference: food choices are deeply influenced by what is available, affordable, and accessible, and how it's marketed. Healthy, sustainable food should be available, affordable, and accessible for everyone, both now and in the future. Consumers expect businesses to encourage the adoption of healthier, more sustainable diets by increasing the availability of plant-rich foods and ensuring they are available, affordable and accessible in supermarkets, restaurants, and canteens.¹³

The government's confirmed delay on the implementation of regulations aimed at prohibiting multibuy promotions on food and beverages high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) until October 2025 ensures consumers can continue purchasing these items during a time of global economic challenges.¹⁴ This delay poses a significant setback for public health targets and efforts to reduce obesity in the country. Obesity is a major public health concern in the UK as it increases your risk of chronic diseases like cancer in turn costing the NHS billions of pounds each year.

Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/wider-consumer-interests/healthy-and-sustainable-diets-consumer-poll>

⁵ Culliford, A. and Bradbury, J. A., (2020), Cross-sectional survey of the readiness of consumers to adopt an environmentally sustainable diet. In: Nutrition Journal, 19, 138 Available at: <https://nutritionj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12937-020-00644-7>

⁶ GlobeScan, (2022), Healthy & Sustainable Living 2022 Highlights Report. Available at: https://globescan.wpenginepowered.com/wpcontent/uploads/2022/11/GlobeScan_Healthy_and_Sustainable_Living_Highlights_Report_2022.pdf

⁸ Scheelbeek, P. et al, (2020), Health impacts and environmental footprints of diets that meet the Eatwell Guide recommendations: analyses of multiple UK studies. In: BMJ Open, 10, 037554. Available at: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/8/e037554>

¹² Food Standards Agency, (2021), Healthy and Sustainable Diets: Consumer Poll. Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/wider-consumer-interests/healthy-and-sustainable-diets-consumer-poll>

¹³ WWF-UK Eating for Net Zero Report: https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/Eating_For_Net_Zero_Full_Report.pdf

¹⁴ [PM backs public's right to choose with delay to BOGOF restrictions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-backs-publics-right-to-choose-with-delay-to-bogof-restrictions)

By allowing continued access to these promotions, the government risks undermining efforts to tackle obesity and improve public health.

Government and business have a clear mandate to act. Citizens want and expect them to encourage healthier, more sustainable diets, including by increasing the availability of plant rich foods and ensuring they are available, affordable, and accessible in schools, supermarkets, restaurants and canteens. This should be an urgent priority between now and 2030. ¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷

It is essential for the government to prioritise the availability, access and affordability of food that has higher nutritional value which is healthy for them and overall better to produce keeping in mind biodiversity and environment. This involves assessing access to healthy and sustainable diets, understanding the links between production, trade, and consumption, and ensuring the stability and resilience of food systems in the face of shocks and stressors. By adopting a focus on food that is nutritionally secure, policymakers can empower consumers to make informed choices that benefit both their health and the planet

Question 12: Policy tools that could prove effective in preventing obesity amongst the general population, including those focussed on the role of the food and drink industry in tackling obesity.

The food service sector plays a crucial role in promoting healthier and more sustainable diets. Collaborations with suppliers and innovative policy approaches such as contractual terms, pricing mechanisms, and sustainability criteria, they can align with evolving sustainability goals and promote and support positive changes in consumer behaviour. Government & Policy makers can support retailers in prioritizing plant-based offerings and advocating for policies conducive to healthier, sustainable diets. Effective policy interventions can drive systemic changes towards healthier and more sustainable food consumption patterns. Our

definition of healthy sustainable diets encompasses a diverse range of foods. These diets prioritise plant-based ingredients such as fruits,

¹⁵ Spoon Guru, (2021), Healthy Planet, Healthy People: New survey shows a shift towards sustainable diets in the UK & USA. Available at: <https://www.spoon.guru/resources/education/healthy-planet-healthy-people-feb2021>

¹⁶ GlobeScan, (2022), Healthy & Sustainable Living. Engaging APAC Consumers in Sustainability. Asia-Pacific Highlights Report November 2022. Available at: https://globescan.wpenginpowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GlobeScan_HealthySustainable-Living-2022_Asia-Pacific-Highlights-Report.pdf

¹⁷ WWF, (2021), Press Release. Largest ever UK analysis reveals public's top options for tackling the climate crisis. Available at: <https://www.wwf.org.uk/press-release/demos-climate-calculator-results>

vegetables, legumes, and whole grains while incorporating moderate quantities of meat, dairy, eggs, and sustainably sourced seafood with a low ecological footprint. They also limit intake of high-fat, high-salt, and high-sugar products.

The food service sector therefore has a critical role to play to influence the shift to healthy, sustainable diets in many parts of the world.

We do not endorse a universal adoption of vegan diets among all citizens. Instead, we acknowledge the importance of embracing dietary diversity, which can be abundant in a wide array of plant-based foods like fruits and vegetables. This approach holds promise for enhancing overall public health outcomes. Plant-rich diets are characterized by lower energy density and higher fibre content, which contribute to prolonged satiety. Consequently, individuals following plant-rich dietary patterns tend to experience reduced rates of obesity.¹⁸

Our research indicates that there is a widespread expectation among citizens for both government and retailers to enhance the availability and accessibility of healthy food options. However, while there is merit in addressing this demand-side perspective and prioritizing citizen-centric approaches, we must recognise that this alone is insufficient to address the challenges within our food system.

We advocate for policy interventions aimed at transforming the food system. Our goal extends beyond simply influencing individual behaviours; instead, we seek to enact systemic reforms that guarantee the availability of affordable, nutritionally dense foods throughout the entire food supply chain. By aligning our efforts with this objective, we aim to promote the health and well-being of both our citizens and the planet.

Food organisations, such as retailers and food service companies, can and must position themselves at the heart of the solution to the triple challenge of producing the nutritious food that people need to live healthy lives, while tackling the climate and nature crises.

WWF-UK's Levers Report, 2024 shows the food service sector serves millions of meals in the UK every day and so has a key role to play in influencing the shift and driving the transition to healthy, sustainable diets.

The report highlights the following enablers:

¹⁸ [A plant-based diet for the prevention and treatment of type 2 diabetes - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

Terms of delivery can be included in contracts so that the parameters for the food that is served are set at a contractual level. These could include maximum serving sizes of animal-sourced foods, minimum serving sizes of vegetables and pulses, minimum numbers of plant-based and plant-forward dishes per day, as well as minimum sourcing standards including sustainable seafood or verified deforestation- and conversion-free products, and sustainable or nature-friendly farming certification where they exist. This could also include non-food terms of delivery such as energy use (type of energy used as well as commitments to reduce energy use) as well as the use of tools and solutions, for example, to reduce food waste or report on greenhouse gas emissions from food served.

In addition to the terms of delivery, an opportunity exists to include pricing mechanisms that incentivize the shift to healthy, sustainable diets. Where there are opportunities for subsidized offerings, it could be beneficial to explore where subsidies could focus on more sustainable options or to cover the expense of potential new equipment that may be needed to transition towards a healthier and sustainable food offer.

Food costs are a key financial factor for food service providers and, a shift to healthier and more sustainable food choices can reduce food costs, where less meat and dairy and more vegetables and pulses are used.

Commercial arrangements that consider potential impacts on cost (positive and negative) through healthy and sustainable diets should be a key priority to reinforce the organizational case for food service providers, clients, and their customers. This can include reinvesting any cost savings into procurement of food produced to higher environmental standards.

Contracts can be designed to include specific sustainability criteria, for example, targets relating to: The number of dishes or the percentage of the menu that is plant-based, plant-forward, and vegetarian.

Financial incentives should also be applied for meeting contractual requirements and, where appropriate, subsidies should be applied to help lower the price and incentivize sustainable meal choices. This can either be for specific dishes (for example, a subsidy allocated to plant-based or plant-forward dishes) or to specific products (for example, a subsidy to reduce any cost burden for certified sustainable seafood). Where there are existing standards, for example, in public sector environments such as schools, food service providers and clients should explore how to go beyond these and, where relevant, how to engage with the appropriate policymakers to improve those standards.

Benefits:

Including terms of delivery that go beyond net zero will help to integrate broader sustainability commitments around biodiversity and water sustainability, in addition to human rights issues and nutrition and health.

The food service sector must therefore engage with their suppliers to improve the sustainability of production practices in their supply chains as well as improving the nutritional profile of ingredients and some animal product alternatives.

Collaborative work is needed to improve traceability and on-farm data, allowing for much more accurate input into procurement decisions, menu design, and communication with staff and customers.

How This Can Be Implemented:

Supplier engagement programs should be implemented to understand what suppliers are currently doing, and what scope there is for improvement. Partnerships with experts and NGOs, as well as sector collaborations and joint initiatives with other sectors such as wholesalers (who often supply the same products to multiple food service organizations, food retailers, and food manufacturers) can make this more manageable, especially where there are suppliers that are common across food service providers and the wider sector. A growing body of evidence indicates that the language used to describe food influences consumer purchasing choices, and even opinions on how enjoyable food is when consumed. ^{19,20,21}

Recipe naming has the potential to be a highly impactful, low-cost, scalable strategy for supporting shifts in diner consumption habits towards healthy sustainable meals. How a dish is named on menus and promotion material can evoke powerful images and ideas of taste and texture with customers, increasing or decreasing their preference for different options available. For example, despite growing consumer demand for healthy options, names showcasing healthiness have been

¹⁹ 8 Raghunathan, R., Naylor, R. W., & Hoyer, W. D. (2006). The Unhealthy = Tasty Intuition and Its Effects on Taste Inferences, Enjoyment, and Choice of Food Products. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4), 170–184. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkg.70.4.170>

²⁰ Ann Kronrod, Mary E. Hammar, JongSoo Lee, Herpreet K. Thind & Kelsey M. Mangano (2021) Linguistic Delight Promotes Eating Right: Figurative Language Increases Perceived Enjoyment and Encourages Healthier Food Choices, *Health Communication*, 36:14, 1898-1908, Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10410236.2020.1805231>

²¹ Turnwald, B.P, Boles, D.Z, Crum, AJ. (2017) Association Between Indulgent Descriptions and Vegetable Consumption: Twisted Carrots and Dynamite Beets. *JAMA Intern Med.* 177(8):1216–1218. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5818791/>

found to lead to foods being perceived as less flavourful and enjoyable.²² Conversely, recipe names that highlight positive attributes of food, such as taste and feel, can make consumers more likely to select dishes.²³

There are several evidence-supported strategies for naming recipes that should be implemented to increase the appeal of sustainable meals to customers. These strategies include:

1. Using positive language that highlights the attributes of dishes such as their flavour, look, and texture (e.g., "Rich", "Crispy", "Smoky")
2. Making connections with traditional dishes using familiar cooking styles and techniques
3. Highlighting the protein content of high-protein plant-based dishes (to help convince customers that plant-based meals can provide adequate amounts)

Benefits: There are nutritional benefits provided by sustainable meals which contain more plants such as vegetables, pulses and wholegrains. Customers trying new dishes when they are eating out of home may make changes in their consumption patterns beyond food service environments, helping to shift their diets to become healthier and more sustainable.

Furthermore, in the quest for a sustainable future, retailers play a crucial role in promoting plant-based offerings and advocating for policies supporting healthy, sustainable diets. They should prioritize making healthy wholefood products and plant-rich ready meals more appealing and cost-effective than animal-based products. Retailers can achieve this through product development, promotions, and strategic consumer environment design. It's imperative for retailers to align with recommendations from initiatives like the National Food Strategy and the Climate Change Committee.²⁴

WWF encourages participation in advocacy efforts and suggests incorporating these recommendations into government guidance. The recently published WWF Eating for Net Zero report suggests reviewing and refining diet targets for 2024 to align with the latest evidence and

²² Raghunathan, R., Naylor, R. W., & Hoyer, W. D. (2006). The Unhealthy = Tasty Intuition and Its Effects on Taste Inferences, Enjoyment, and Choice of Food Products. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4), 170–184. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkg.70.4.170>

²³ Turnwald, B.P, Boles, D.Z, Crum, AJ. (2017) Association Between Indulgent Descriptions and Vegetable Consumption: Twisted Carrots and Dynamite Beets. *JAMA Intern Med.* 177(8):1216–1218. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5818791>

²⁴ [What's in Store for the Planet 2023 \(wwf.org.uk\)](https://www.wwf.org.uk/what-is-in-store-for-the-planet-2023)

guidance on healthier, sustainable diets. This holistic approach is crucial in addressing the interconnected challenges of food and nutrition security, climate change, and biodiversity loss.

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