

PRESS RELEASE

For release: 00.01am Thursday 9 March 2017

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Healthy eating advice must be healthy for the planet too, say public health and environmental campaigners.

Medact and Eating Better are calling on governments and health professionals to step up to the plate and do more to drive change towards more sustainable – as well as healthier – eating. In a [new briefing](#) published today, public health charity Medact and Eating Better (a 50 organisation-strong alliance for healthy, sustainable diets) are calling for more to be done to promote the key health and sustainability message to reduce meat and dairy consumption and eat more plant-based foods.

The call comes as new Government-funded [research](#) [1] shows that two thirds (66%) of adults in a UK wide survey who agree that human behaviour is causing climate change, also agree that we could significantly reduce the impact of climate change if we all made changes to our diets. Furthermore 65% of all adults surveyed also said they would like to receive more information on climate change and the food system.

Yet in an analysis of national dietary guidelines, Medact and Eating Better found that a number of other countries, including Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany, have gone further than the UK's [Eatwell Guide](#) in promoting sustainability messaging in their national dietary guidelines.

“For the health community, food is no longer simply an issue of healthy diets. It is also a public health issue concerned with climate change and environmental health”. says Professor David McCoy, Director of Medact. *“The food on our plates not only impacts our individual health, but also has significant implications for the health of the planet upon which human health is reliant, and for our ability to feed current and future generations equitably.”*

The briefing paper highlights that:

- Our food system contributes significantly to climate change through greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; and impacts negatively on ecosystems, including through deforestation, water use, overfishing, pollution and biodiversity loss;
- Meat and dairy foods carry a particularly high environmental footprint as livestock production accounts for [14.5%](#) of global GHG emissions;
- Shifting towards predominantly plant-based diets needs to be a priority among high-consuming countries like the UK in order to meet the international [Paris agreement on climate change](#) to keep global temperature rise below 2°C.

“It is vital that steps are taken to shift eating patterns towards ones that are healthier for both people and the planet,” says Sue Dibb of Eating Better. “The government needs to go beyond its current focus on reducing sugar, and do more to work with supermarkets and food companies to ensure our diets are not only healthier but also more sustainable.”

Medact and Eating Better are calling for:

1. DEFRA and other relevant government departments (including the devolved administrations) to endorse the Eatwell Guide recently updated by Public Health England, and ensure that it informs the future development of food, farming, fishery and climate change policies, including public and private food procurement standards.
2. Public Health England and other relevant government departments to develop strategies to enable behaviour change towards healthy and sustainable eating patterns.
3. Clearer messaging about the links between diets, health and sustainability to be included in the Eatwell Guide and its associated advice. This should enable the general public, health professionals, consumer organisations and those working in the food sector to understand and pay due consideration to the impact of our food choices on the environment.
4. Public Health England to develop a broader, more rigorous and regular dietary guidelines review process (e.g. on a five-year cycle) to ensure guidance is updated on the basis of the latest information available.

Notes for editors:

Briefing:

A Healthy and Sustainable Food Future: Policy recommendation to embed sustainability in the Eatwell Guide and wider UK food policy

[http://eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/A%20Healthy%20Sustainable%20Food%20Future%20\(1\).pdf](http://eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/A%20Healthy%20Sustainable%20Food%20Future%20(1).pdf)

Medact www.medact.org is a global health charity whose goal is to inspire and enable health professionals to act on the social, political, ecological and economic determinants of health and health inequality. Through education, research, analysis and advocacy we aim to harness the expertise, mandate and social standing of health professionals to act as progressive social change agents. Medact works across four broad and inter-connected programme areas: Peace & Security, Economic Justice, Climate & Environment, Human Rights.

Eating Better www.eating-better.org is a broad UK-based civil society alliance that brings together over 50 national organisations with climate, environment, public health, international development, animal welfare, responsible producer, professional and faith interests. We are calling for action by governments, the food industry and all those who can make a difference to help people eat a greater variety of plant-based foods and less meat, and for the meat they do eat to be better; produced in ways that benefit health, the environment, global food security and animal welfare.

[1] Global Food Security & ComRes, *Public attitudes to climatic shocks and their interaction with the food system*, February 2017. <http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/assets/pdfs/public-attitudes-climatic-shocks-interaction-food-system.pdf>