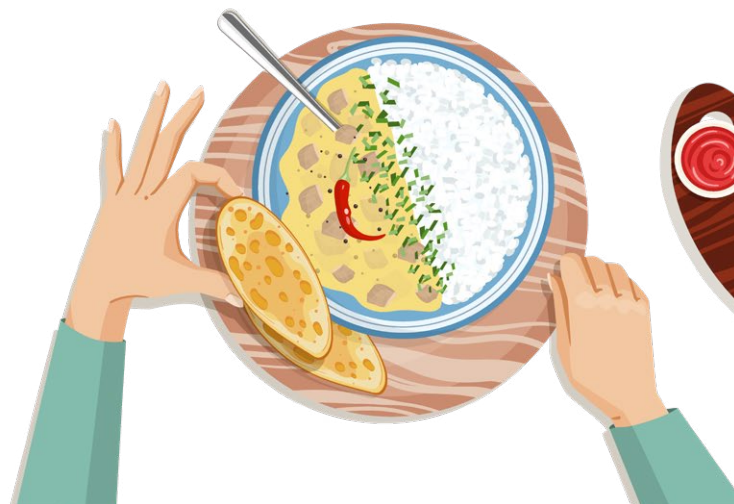




Public Attitudes Survey 2026

Understanding how the UK
public thinks about food,
meat and dairy



Eating Better (2026) Public Attitudes Survey. Available at: <https://eating-better.org/projects/public-attitudes-survey/>

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Context

Every year since 2014, Eating Better has run a Public Attitudes Survey to understand how the UK public thinks about food, meat and dairy. This year, we partnered with two of our alliance members, the leading animal welfare charities [RSPCA](#) and [FOUR PAWS UK](#), and for the first time worked with YouGov to collect the survey data.

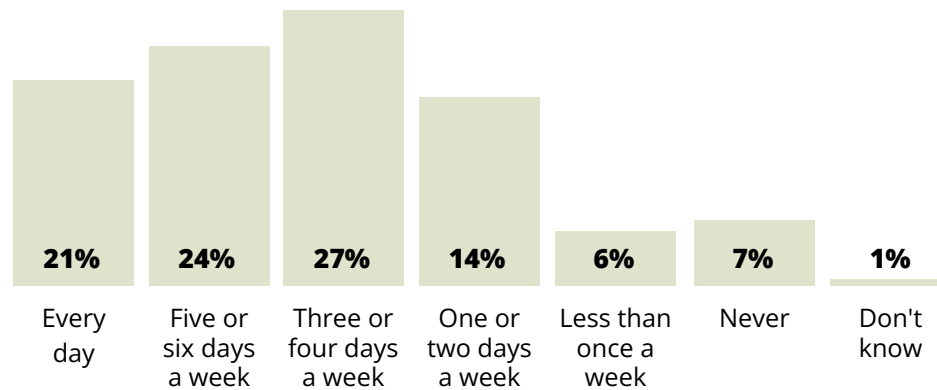
Whilst there has been progress against the objectives of Eating Better's [Better by Half Roadmap](#), 2026 has been a challenging year for the food system, with rising food inflation making headlines, geopolitical impacts on supply chains and climate change leading to the [worst harvest in the UK](#). This year's results show how these pressures are being felt by the public, and how they are shaping attitudes to food, meat and dairy.



Summary of findings

MEAT CONSUMPTION

The majority of the public follow a **flexitarian diet**, with **54% eating meat less than 5 times a week**:

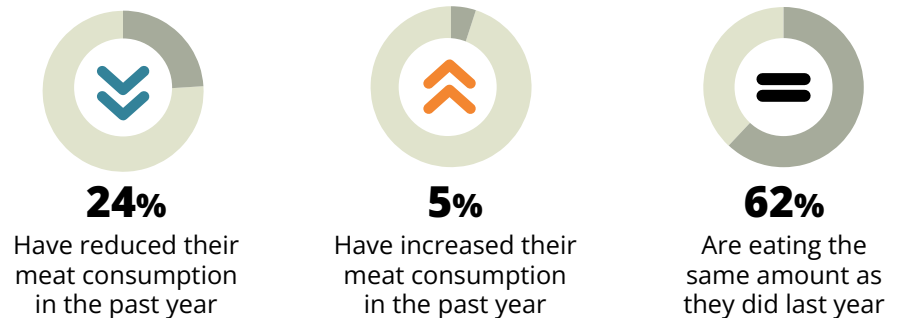


White meat remains the UK's most frequently consumed meat¹:

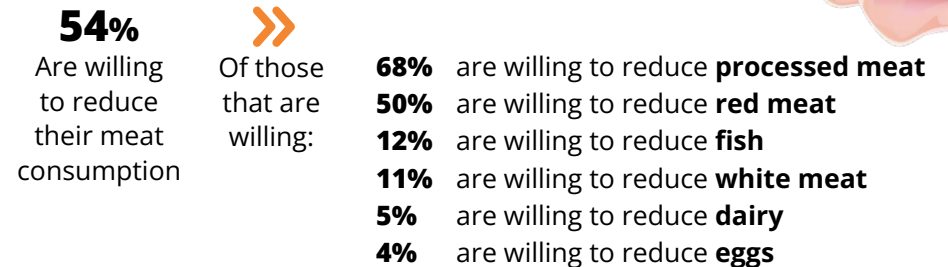


MEAT REDUCTION

Almost a **quarter** of the UK public have **reduced their meat consumption** in the past year:



Over **half** are willing to cut back on meat, with **processed meat** first in line²:



¹ White meat refers to cuts of chicken, turkey, game meats etc. Asked only to those who eat meat.

² Asked only to those who currently eat meat.

Summary of findings (continued)

People in the UK remain willing to cut back on their consumption of meat and dairy products, with 54% responding they are open to reducing how much they eat.³ Among 2024 Labour voters, the figure rises to 66%, a strong signal for the current government and food policy.

When it comes to people's views on the food system and reducing their meat and dairy intake, three clear themes have emerged from this year's survey.



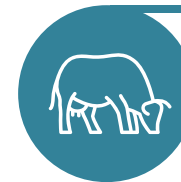
The dominance of affordability

Affordability proves to be the main motivator for people when they consider what food to buy. When asked who is most responsible for ensuring people have access to affordable food, more than three in four named either supermarkets (41%) or the Government (36%).



Concern about climate change, nature loss and high support for farmers

There is a growing awareness that climate change and nature loss impacts food production and the wider food system. The public increasingly recognises the strain that the UK farming sector is under, and believes that our farmers should be supported through these pressures.



Better animal welfare is a strong motivator for the public, but barriers remain

Better animal welfare remains a consistent motivator for people when they consider reducing their meat and dairy intake, but affordability and accessibility remain barriers to reduction in practice.

>> These themes will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

³ For this year's Public Attitudes Survey, we have switched surveyor to YouGov from Savanta. For the first time, we offered a wide set of options for people to choose from, ranging from "very/fairly willing", "not very/not at all willing" and "don't know". Because of these changes, 2026 results are not directly comparable with previous years.



The dominance of affordability

41%

**SWAPPED TO BUY
MORE AFFORDABLE**
versions of the same
items (e.g own brand)

35%

**CHANGED THE TYPE
OF FOOD THEY BUY**
to make their shopping
more affordable

28%

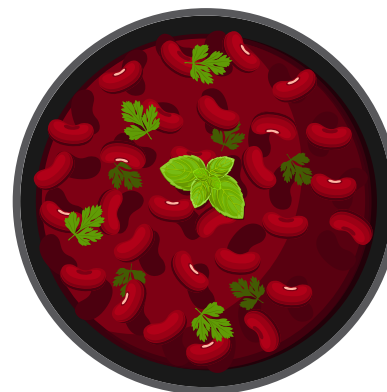
RELIED ON OFFERS
to afford their typical
food shop

19%

REDUCED THE AMOUNT
of meat they eat to save
money

Rising food prices are changing what the UK public buys: **41% swapped to more affordable versions of the same items and 35% changed the type of food they buy in order to make their shopping more affordable.** The Food and Drink Federation have **forecast** that food and non-alcoholic inflation will reach **3.9% by the end of 2026**, reaching **5.5% in 2027** and peaking at **6.4% in July 2027**. This is a trend that has increased since 2019, and as demonstrated by the **Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit**, whilst food prices rise rapidly due to shocks, they take much longer to come down in price. Food prices can therefore be said to “food prices shoot up like rockets but drift down like feathers”.

Reducing meat and dairy consumption is seen as both a push and a brake when it comes to affordability: **24% said saving money would be their main reason for eating less meat**, yet **15% said the price of meat-free alternatives is a barrier to reduction.**



15% said the price of
MEAT-FREE ALTERNATIVES
is a barrier to reduction

Households under the largest financial pressure proved to be the most price-sensitive on both counts:

	Higher earners ⁴	Lower earners	Full-time employed	Part-time employed	Unemployed	Home owners (no mortgage)	Home owners (mortgage)	Renters
Motivated to eat less meat in order to save money	23%	29%	23%	30%	30%	17%	27%	30%
Experience price as a barrier to buying meat-free options	13%	20%	14%	17%	16%	10%	16%	22%

The public see cost as both a reason to eat less meat, and a barrier to doing so. This suggests cutting down isn't one shift but several, and price likely shapes which route people take. Those willing to cut meat to save money may swap or substitute with more affordable plant proteins such as beans and pulses, while plant-based meat alternatives, often priced above the cheapest meat, stay out of reach.

Despite the fact that almost a quarter of people would cut down on the amount of meat they eat to save money, households under the largest financial strain remain less willing, and likely less able, to reduce their meat consumption than those with more financial flexibility:

Willing to reduce their meat consumption...

- » **59%** of people with a **household income of £50,000+** are willing to reduce their meat consumption compared to **49%** with a **household income under £30,000**.
- » **62%** of those with **higher educational attainment** were willing to reduce their meat consumption compared to **45%** of those with a **lower educational attainment**.⁵
- » **53%** of people in **full time employment** are willing to reduce their meat consumption compared to **43%** of those who are **currently unemployed**.
- » **60%** of people from a **higher socio-economic background** were willing to reduce their meat consumption, dropping to **48%** of those from a **routine socio-economic background**.⁶



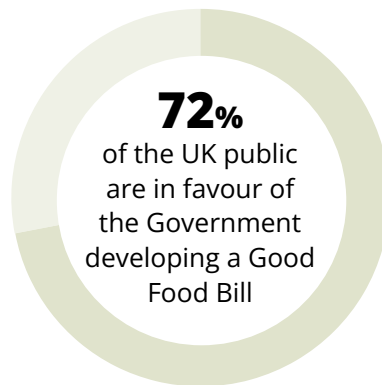
⁴ Higher earners: £50,000+ annual salary. Lower earners: Below £30,000 annual salary.

⁵ Higher education refers to teaching/nursing qualifications or university and above. Lower education refers to those who have completed secondary school/college, trade apprenticeship or equivalent, or less.

⁶ Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC) takes into account occupation, employment status, and job responsibilities. Higher socio-economic classification refers to lower or higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations. Intermediate refers to intermediate occupations, small employers and own account workers. Routine refers to lower supervisory and technical occupations, semi-routine occupations, and routine occupations.

The results suggest that people are in very different positions when it comes to changing what they buy: some can choose to change; some are forced to by cost; and some are priced out of healthy or sustainable options.

Encouragingly, the public sees a clear role for supermarkets and government in making food affordable. Asked who is most responsible for ensuring people have access to affordable food, **41%** said supermarkets and **36%** said the government.



To complement this, recent polling by The Food Foundation shows that 72% of the UK public are in favour of the Government developing a Good Food Bill. Policymakers have long been wary that intervening on food will alienate the public, but these results suggest people expect both government and industry to act to make affordable food the norm.





Concern about climate change, nature loss and high support for farmers

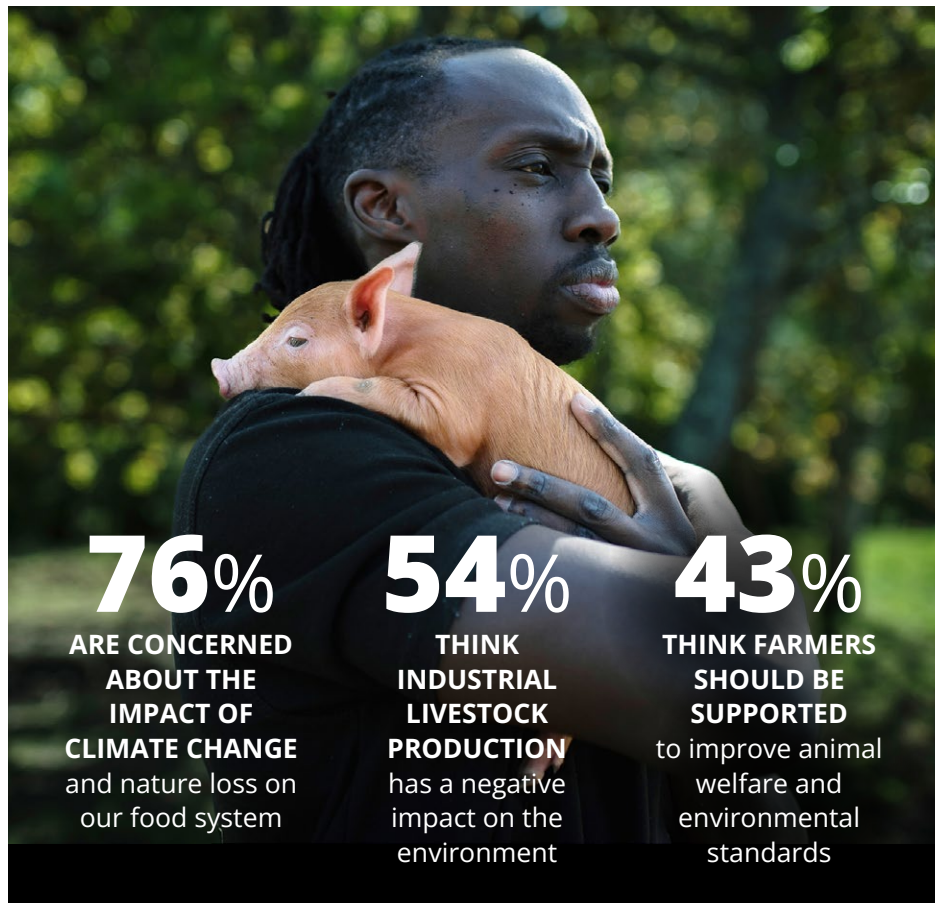


Photo Credit: Tynefield Farm. Photographed by Phoebe Davies for Culture Roots Collective, 2026

This year's survey found that 76% of people are concerned about the impact of climate change and loss of nature on our food system. This concern is not limited to people already reducing their meat consumption; 60% of those not willing to reduce their meat consumption were concerned about climate change and nature loss. Younger adults (18-24 years old) are the most concerned group, at 88%.

Farmers have been hit hard by this year's record-breaking heatwaves, and the public wants to see them supported.

Actions the public would like to see from Government:

- » Direct support for farmers to improve animal welfare and environmental standards – **supported by 43%**
- » Stronger rules to stop food policy being overly influenced by the interests of food companies – **supported by 37%**
- » Future trade deals should have assessments on the impact on UK farming, health, animal welfare and the environment – **supported by 35%**

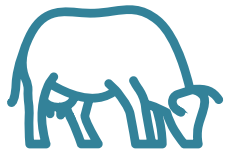


“The UK does not have enough land to feed its population and rear livestock: a wholesale change in consumer diets would be required.”

National security assessment on global ecosystems

Polymakers, businesses and the public increasingly recognise that climate change and nature loss affect not only our food supply, but also the cost of food. The UK Government has acknowledged this in its [National security assessment on global ecosystems](#), which concludes that the “UK does not have enough land to feed its population and rear livestock: a wholesale change in consumer diets would be required.”

The UK's food system is highly globalised. **We [import 40% of our food](#), with more than a quarter coming from Europe, which leaves us highly vulnerable to supply chain instability.** The National Audit Office's latest report, [Resilience of the food supply chain to disruptions](#), highlights the many short- and long-term effects that disruption to our food system can have. As Tim Lang, Natalie Neumann and Antony So argue in their [report for the National Preparedness Commission](#), these shocks show why our food system needs to become more resilient.



Better animal welfare is a strong motivator for the public, but barriers remain



59% think that **INDUSTRIAL LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION** is negative for animal welfare

40% **THINK THAT THE GOVERNMENT** has the most responsibility to ensure the public have access to products with high animal welfare

33% said that animal welfare is a **TOP 3 PRIORITY** when deciding what to buy

62% **FIND IT DIFFICULT** to identify high animal welfare products

Animal welfare matters to the public; it's an important consideration for people when they think about how their food is produced and what they consume. **59% of respondents said that industrial livestock production has a negative impact on animal welfare and 30% identified the conditions in which animals are raised as their primary motivation for giving up meat.**

However, recognising the problem does not necessarily translate into being able to act on it: **61% said they find it difficult to identify higher-welfare products when shopping.** Equally, **33% said animal welfare was important to them when making these purchases, but this was outweighed by other considerations, particularly price (63%), freshness (52%) and taste (36%).** Retailers should not count on people being willing to pay more for higher-welfare products, and these options should not be priced out of reach for people on low budgets.

Greater availability, clearer information, and measures that make **higher-welfare, sustainable options affordable and appealing for everyone** are vital.

Actions the public would like to see from Government:

- » Direct support for farmers to improve animal welfare and environmental standards – **supported by 43%**
- » Future trade deals should have assessments on the impact on UK farming, health, animal welfare and the environment – **supported by 35%**
- » Setting standards to improve the welfare of meat and dairy production – **supported by 28%**

As we set out in our report **‘We need to talk about industrial livestock production’**, poor animal welfare is widespread in the UK food system. The industrial production of billions of animals every year, **‘the vast majority in low-welfare conditions’**, is the biggest animal welfare crisis of our time, with over **‘one billion land animals and around 77 million fish’** farmed in the UK every year.

Overall, the findings suggest that this is not a niche concern and that the majority of people across the UK are aware of the impact that industrial livestock production has on the environment and animals in our food system, and want this to change.



The industrial production of billions of animals every year, the vast majority in low-welfare conditions, is the biggest animal welfare crisis of our time

Next steps for governments and food businesses

This year's survey findings show strong public support for governments across the UK to be bold on food policy, and a clear expectation take over deliver affordable, healthy, animal-friendly and sustainable food.

>> For the UK Government

As our [Better by Half Roadmap](#) sets out, effective government policy is the foundation for fixing our food system. Eating Better and our members want a joined-up food strategy that is protected from vested industry interests, draws formally on the expertise of civil society, and is backed by a [Good Food Bill](#) that enshrines good food for all in law. This is particularly important with the recent shift from a 'Good Food Cycle' to 'Food Nation 2040'. For further information on our asks for the UK Government, see our [recommendations](#) developed with our partners in the Food Strategy Alliances.

The UK Government should also deliver its Animal Welfare Strategy for England, including phasing out cages for laying hens and farrowing sows. It should go further by introducing [mandatory method of production labelling](#), so that the public can see how food has been produced, and by protecting core welfare standards in future trade deals.

>> For the devolved governments

Our four-nation policy review, [Eating Better in the Nations: An overview of UK food policy 2026](#), published in July 2026, shows where progress is being made and where policy can go further to make healthy, affordable and sustainable diets available to everyone.



>> For retailers

Retailers should adopt Eating Better's [priority asks](#) for food businesses, including measuring sales and setting targets for the balance of animal and plant protein they sell, in line with the [Plant Rich UK](#) call to action.

As some of the most influential businesses in the food system, retailers should also be open about the influence they hold, both in their commercial decisions and in policy-making processes, and use it responsibly to help deliver a healthy and sustainable food system. We hope to see this approach in action when the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) convenes industry as part of the [Food Nation 2040](#) process.

ANNEX: Eating Better's Better By Half Roadmap

Across the food system

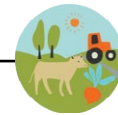
The public wants a food system in which healthy, sustainable food is affordable and easy to choose. Our Better by Half Roadmap sets out the action areas that can make this happen.



Governments

- UK Government
- Devolved nations
- Local authorities

- Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy ● ●
- Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development ● ●
- Make sustainable diets the norm through public procurement ● ● ●
- Every child has access to a hot, nutritious school meal ● ●
- Develop and implement a strategy to facilitate a just transition for agriculture ● ●
- Rebalance agricultural policy towards 'better' meat, better dairy and better plants ● ●
- Develop an integrated land-use plan ● ●
- Local authorities improve access to fruit, vegetables and pulses ●
- Make vegetables and 'better' meat and dairy affordable ● ● ●
- Assess future trade deals to improve their impact on human health, animal welfare and the environment ●



Producers

- Harness opportunities for more plants produced for human consumption
- Switch to better meat and dairy production
- Work with nature to boost business resilience and profitability



Retail and manufacturers

- Label origin and method of production for all meat and dairy
- Encourage sales of plant foods
- Set targets for more plants in the basket and evaluate progress
- Embed a sustainable diet strategy across the business
- Develop a sourcing policy that delivers 'better' meat and dairy



Food services

- Put more plants on plates and menus
- Make plant dishes more appealing
- Set targets and evaluate progress towards less and better meat and dairy alongside more plants
- Provide exciting plant-based training and development for chefs
- Develop a sourcing policy that delivers 'better' meat and dairy



Financial institutions and investors

- Evaluate company risks and opportunities related to meat and dairy production and sales
- Engage to promote healthy and sustainable production

Methodology

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov plc. Total sample size was 2,078 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th - 24th August 2026. The survey was carried out online and quoted to 800 adults in England, 500 in Scotland, 500 in Wales, and 200 in Northern Ireland. The figures have been weighted and are representative of adults in the UK.

Questions

🔗 [Full data breakdown and questions asked are available on the YouGov website.](#)

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