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# Supporting evidence document for Low hanging fruit: A policy pathway for boosting uptake of plant-rich diets

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Our [policy pathway document](#) sets out policies to increase the production and consumption of healthy and sustainable food in the UK that should be included in the Government's forthcoming food strategy. This document presents the supporting research and evidence underpinning each of the policy asks.

## Citizens' attitudes

There is good evidence that citizens are willing to change their diets to include more plant-rich foods. Consumption of plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy is becoming more commonplace, with around a quarter of all households now buying these foods on a regular basis (GFI Europe, 2024a), and in 2025, 38% of UK adults reported that they intend to consume more plant-based food. This is higher for working-age adults, including 54% of under-35s intending to shift towards more plant-based foods (GFI Europe et al, 2025).

But positive intent doesn't always lead to action, and our food system rarely makes the healthy and sustainable choice the easy one. Concerns around appeal, affordability and availability of plant-based options continue to exist. For example, only half (48%) of adults say that there is good availability of plant-based foods, compared to 84% for meat and dairy (GFI Europe et al, 2025).

### 1. Grow demand and unlock efficiencies to make it easier for everyone to access healthier and more sustainable food

- ❖ ***Unlock business action by introducing mandatory public reporting by large food businesses on a range of health and sustainability metrics*** to de-risk investment in more healthy and sustainable food offerings, building on the [Food Data Transparency Partnership](#) and the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) standards. Having sector-wide data also allows for more informed policy decisions – Government would be able to more accurately evaluate the likely impacts of current and new policies on food supply and track progress towards population-level health and sustainability goals. Mandatory reporting should include standardised disclosure on scope 3 emissions, the proportion of sales coming from healthier foods, and the proportion of protein sales coming from animal versus plant proteins. Leadership is already emerging among businesses (albeit slowly in the absence of government incentives).
  - Good data drives good decision making. Consistent reporting by food corporations is crucial for identifying areas for improvement and identifying leaders and laggards and stimulating competition. Mandatory reporting can assist policymakers in accelerating change.
  - Mandatory reporting would also create a level playing field to de-risk business investment into healthier and more sustainable sales, help businesses identify improved business models and enable investors to better align their investments with responsible stewardship objectives.
  - Progress in setting targets to increase sales of healthy and sustainable food and disclosing data remains limited to the retail sector, with minimal commitments from within the Out of Home sector (The Food Foundation, 2024a).

- Inconsistencies in the methodologies used have resulted in discrepancies in the data reported which makes it hard for investors and policymakers to accurately assess where and how progress is being made.
- Though voluntary approaches may seem attractive given the lower burden they place on businesses, a 2015 study of 161 voluntary schemes in the UK, EU and worldwide found that such schemes were undermined by a lack of industry engagement and the consequent lack of a 'level playing field' between those businesses that genuinely seek to make progress and those that do not (McCarthy & Morling, 2015).
- Evidence shows that mandatory action works and leads to the sector making the desired changes and responding with innovation. For example the plastic bag tax, cage free eggs, the Soft Drinks Industry Levy and the Plastic Packaging Tax are all mandatory measures which have been successful (Eating Better, 2025).
- Despite initiatives such as the creation of the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP), progress on reporting has been slow. Data inconsistencies from reporting against voluntary frameworks and delayed implementation of standards have hindered progress on strengthening the sector's accountability.
- Currently, Lidl GB and Compass Group UK & I are the only major UK food businesses disclosing data and with targets to increase sales of plant-based protein in proportion to animal-based protein. By setting these targets the companies are both driving efforts to shift diets while also reducing their Scope 3 emissions (The Food Foundation, 2024a).
- According to analysis by The Food Foundation which assesses 36 major UK operating food businesses (including retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and the Out of Home sector), only nine (28%) businesses have a sales-based target and disclose data for sales of healthy foods vs. less healthy (HFSS). Just four (11%) of these food businesses (all of which are retailers) have a sales-based target and disclose data for fruit and vegetable sales (The Food Foundation, 2024a).
- To address these challenges, the Government needs to improve transparency by introducing mandatory public reporting by food businesses against a range of health and sustainability metrics (delivering the promises of FDTP).

Further information from our briefing on mandatory reporting is [available here](#). The 2022 [Government food strategy white paper](#) committed to launching a transformational and mandatory Food Data Transparency Partnership.

See terms of reference for FDTP [Health Working group](#); [Eco Working group](#).

- ❖ **Reform advertising.** *Adopt the recommendations of the House Of Lords Committee on Food, Diets and Obesity and restrict advertising for foods high in fat, salt and sugar*

(HFSS) across all physical platforms, including outdoor advertising and as part of sports sponsorship.

- ❖ **Invest in advertising for British plant and plant-rich foods**, particularly fruit, vegetables and pulses, to drive aspiration and to normalise consumption, building on the work of initiatives like Veg Power.
  - Urgent action is needed to break the junk food cycle, as overconsumption of junk food adversely affects health, impacts the NHS, reduces economic productivity, and excludes people from the workforce.
  - According to [The Broken Plate 2025](#), over a third (36%) of food and non-alcoholic drink advertising spend is on confectionery, snacks, desserts and soft drinks. In comparison, investment in advertising for fruits and vegetables is negligible at 2% of total advertising spend on food and drink.
  - Advertising significantly contributes to normalising unhealthy foods in society. People are often unaware of how advertising affects their decision-making and the industry's influence on their freedom of choice. Concerningly, children are particularly vulnerable to these marketing techniques, with scientific evidence showing that advertising can consistently and reliably influence children's food preferences and purchasing habits, driving up their calorie consumption (UK Government 2022; Nanchahal et al., 2021). Moreover, people from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to be exposed to this advertising than those from higher socio-economic groups (Yau et al., 2021).
  - Despite acknowledging the impact of advertising and multibuy offers on dietary patterns, especially in children, the UK Government has delayed implementing restrictions on unhealthy food advertisements on TV and online, and volume promotion restrictions on less healthy food until October 2025.
  - Outdoor advertising of HFSS food remains a loophole in current advertising regulations, and is currently permitted, highlighting the need for comprehensive and timely policy actions.
  - [Research](#) focused on bus shelter ads in South Teesside revealed that nearly half of them (49%) were promoting food and drinks. Of those promoting food and drinks, 35% were classified as 'less healthy' according to the UK Nutrient Profiling Model (The Food Foundation 2024d).
  - Advertising could be an opportunity to promote healthy foods - acknowledging the power that advertising has in shaping food preferences, the Government should invest in promoting healthy and sustainable foods, particularly, fruit, vegetables and pulses.
  - "[Eat Them to Defeat Them](#)" is a perfect example of a big bold advertising idea to increase healthy food consumption among children. In 2018, ITV and [Veg Power](#) joined forces to develop a strategy to encourage kids to eat more vegetables. Coming into its seventh year in 2025 the campaign has been supported by £20m

of TV advertising with over 1.7m different children taking part in over 5,000 primary and special schools. The evaluation data confirms that repeated involvement in the campaign leads to increased veg consumption over the long term and population scale improvement in veg consumption.

- The most recent stats show that in 2023, 51% of families in the UK are familiar with this ad. Among those families, parents report that 45% of the kids and 31% of parents themselves are eating more vegetables as a direct result of the advert. That equates to 1.36 million children eating more vegetables from the TV advertising campaign.
- The Government should establish an approach for advertising and supporting the horticulture sector, now it is no longer part of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB).

Veg Power's 5 year impact evaluation is [available here](#).

Further information on breaking the junk food cycle [available here](#).

❖ **Update the Eatwell Guide** (which was last updated in 2016) to take into account the latest evidence on the climate and nature footprint of different foods. This will help inform decisions about what a more sustainable, healthy diet looks like and bring it in line with the progress being made by other countries. The Government should be mandated to review —and if needed, update —the Eatwell Guide at least once every five years to reflect the latest health and sustainable diet evidence.

- Dietary guidelines set out government recommendations on what a healthy, balanced diet looks like, and are a key nutrition policy tool. The UK's national dietary guidelines, known as the [Eatwell Guide](#), are used by the NHS and healthcare professionals as well as by food businesses, local authorities, charities and schools.
- Government can maximise the potential of dietary guidelines to deliver for health, climate and nature by: developing implementation guides for food businesses, local authorities and public health practitioners; ensuring public-facing guidance and recommendations reflect the modelled diet, providing more detail on appropriate consumption of high-impact foods such as meat and dairy; integrating environmental indicators into the modelling that informs public facing recommendations (WWF, 2023).
- The UK Eatwell Guide is currently focussed on health considerations, and needs updating to factor in sustainability – particularly to be aligned with the UK's net zero goals and the CCC's recommendations around dietary shifts.
- Since the Eatwell Guide was last updated in 2016, many other countries have recognised this potential and updated their guidelines, providing additional advice and guidance (Brazil, Denmark, Spain) or including environmental indicators in their modelling (France, Italy) (WWF, 2023).

- These generally require significant reductions in animal-product consumption (particularly red and processed meat) and increases in plant protein consumption, such as pulses.
  - Denmark’s updated dietary guidelines are informed by the [EAT-Lancet diet](#), and recommend that meat consumption is limited to 350g per week and consumption of pulses be increased to 100g per day. Germany’s updated guidelines also recommend no more than 300g of meat per week. Spain’s updated dietary guidelines, which are informed by the Mediterranean Diet, now recommend 0-3 portions of meat per week and 3 servings of fish per week. Austria’s updated dietary guidelines recommend only 1-2 portions of meat and 1-2 portions of fish per week – and explicitly recommend 3 portions per week of pulses. Switzerland’s updated dietary guidelines recommend a maximum of 2-3 portions of meat per week, equivalent at most 360g per week (Feedback, 2024).
  - Currently, on average UK adults eat 93g of meat each day, equivalent to 651g a week (Public Health England, 2020).
- ❖ ***Close the loophole which means that processed meat products that are high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) are currently excluded from the government’s forthcoming restrictions on HFSS multibuy deals, due to be implemented in October 2025. This is a notable omission given the large proportion of multibuy deals on processed meat.***
  - In July 2020, the Government [announced](#) it would legislate to end the promotion of HFSS products in England. This would apply to promotions by volume and location, both online and in store. However, the [Government’s definition of HFSS foods](#) for these new regulations used a narrower definition than the Government’s widely used [nutrient profiling model](#). Meat with an Nutrition Profile Model (NPM) score of 4 or more is included within the HFSS definition in the NPM, but excluded from the HFSS regulation definition. This means that red and processed meat that is HFSS can continue to be promoted in multibuy deals and at checkouts. The Government should remove this loophole and bring forward the restriction on HFSS multibuys which was postponed to 2025 earlier this year (The Food Foundation, 2023a).
  - Promotions on meat and dairy far outweigh the proportion of multibuy and price promotion deals on fruit and vegetables. Data from March 2024 from six major retailers (Aldi, Asda, Iceland, Morrisons, Sainsbury’s and Tesco) finds that over 1 in 10 (13%) of store-wide price promotions are on meat and dairy products, of which 4.6% of offers were on processed meat products. This compares to 7.4% of promotions going towards fruit and vegetables. The picture is worse for multibuy deals. 18% of multibuy deals are on meat and dairy products, with 10.6% of all deals on processed meat, compared to just 5.3% of deals on fruit and vegetables (The Food Foundation, 2024a).

- Looking at multibuy offers available across three of the largest UK supermarkets (Asda, Morrisons, and Tesco) in July 2023, The Food Foundation found that over a fifth (21.5%) of deals offered were on meat and dairy foods. This compared to just 4.5% of deals on fruit and vegetables. Of the offers on meat, 7.75% were on red meat. Just 2.2% of offers were on plant-based alternatives to meat, fish and dairy, with 80% of these products categorised as non-HFSS (The Food Foundation, 2023a).
  - These findings tally with a 2021 study which found that four of the UK's largest supermarket chains (Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Morrisons) use multibuy or price reductions to sell greater volumes of meat (Eating Better, 2022). This is despite all four having Net Zero commitments and pledging their support to combat the climate crisis (The Food Foundation, 2023a).
- ❖ **Strengthen government procurement rules for public institutions where food is served**, including School Food Standards, by making health, sustainability<sup>1</sup> and environmental standards legally-binding for the [£5 billion](#) annual spend on public sector catering, and extend the standards to local government catering. Additionally, requirements for high-emissions foods to be served should be removed —such as the current requirement for schools to serve meat three days a week— and sourcing more British produced food should be prioritised wherever possible.
- An [independent review](#) conducted by Will Quince MP - published in 2024 - highlighted that the UK Government spends £5 billion annually on public sector food procurement.
  - The Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services (GBSF) set standards for sustainability, nutrition, animal welfare and resource efficiency. However, the GBSF are only mandatory in certain settings (including hospitals) and do not apply in schools, where roughly 60% of all public sector spending on food procurement takes place.
  - The 2021 [National Food Strategy](#) (NFS) recommended the GBSF should be re-designed and properly enforced, to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on food that is both healthy and sustainable. It advised they should use the updated Reference Diet, discussed in Recommendation 14 of the NFS, to raise these standards and they should be made mandatory for all public sector organisations and properly enforced.
  - The NFS also recommended The DfE should update the School Food Standards. It advised the standards need to align with the Reference Diet, so that school menus are both healthy and sustainable, and the requirement to serve meat three times a week should be removed.
  - Shifts to sustainable healthy diets have been shown to save public institutions money directly on food procurement costs. For example, in 2022 11 New York Hospitals switched to offering plant-based meals as the default option, resulting in

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<sup>1</sup> Including animal welfare standards

average cost savings of 59 cents (46 pence) per plant-based meal over the year 2023, with plant-based meals resulting in consistent savings compared to meat dishes. The NHS serves approximately 199 million meals per year – assuming 55% of patients choose a plant-based option (in line with New York Hospital case study), this would equate to about 119.4 million meals, which assuming savings of 46p per meal would result in approximately £54.9 million in potential savings to the NHS per year (Feedback, 2025).

- A peer-reviewed study estimated that the EAT-Lancet diet would be 17% cheaper than the UK's current average diet in 2017 – when also factoring in savings to health and climate change costs, and assuming food waste is halved, it would be 35% cheaper (Feedback, 2025).
- Polling from 2021 found that 68% of the public agreed that public sector food should provide a healthy and sustainable diet and 80% said public canteens should help people minimise their impact on the environment and limit climate change (Feedback, 2025).
- School Food Matters have worked with many schools to introduce 'plant-based' days, where menus are entirely plant-based for at least one day per week. By offering more plant proteins, schools can use the cost savings to offset the increased price of serving higher welfare, unprocessed meat during the rest of the week. They've found that plant-powered meals:
  - Are often cheaper and quicker for the school to source and cook - meaning increased capacity to create better quality and more exciting meals for students
  - Support sustainability and reduce the school's carbon footprint
  - Promote better health outcomes in students. These meals are rich in fibre, lower in saturated fat and lower the risks of different chronic diseases
  - Open a student's world and palette to different vegetables and meals
  - Cater well for different religions and cultures that embrace plant-based meals such as the Ethiopian, Eritrean, Rastafarian and Israeli communities, as well as those who do not eat certain types of meat or meat for religious reasons e.g. pork. This further promotes fairness and inclusivity.

❖ ***Expand eligibility, improve uptake, and increase the value of Healthy Start payments in line with inflation to ensure that low-income families with young children and babies can afford the fruit, vegetables and pulses the scheme entitles them to. The value of the scheme should be indexed to inflation to protect against future food price shocks. The definition of milk within the scope of the scheme should also be widened to include fortified and unsweetened plant-based milk alternative drinks to reduce the barriers for low-income families in accessing sustainable foods.***

- Nutrition in a child's early years is crucial for development, laying the foundations for lifelong well-being. However, almost a quarter (23.6%) of UK households with



pre-school children under 4 experience food insecurity (in January 2024) (The Food Foundation, 2024c).

- Disparities in consumption of healthy and sustainable foods are worsening. 57.2% of households experiencing food insecurity are cutting back on purchasing fruit, while 41.6% are cutting back on vegetables (The Food Foundation, 2025).
- Swift action is required to break down the barriers hindering families from providing adequate nutrition to their children. This involves improving the effectiveness of the [Healthy Start](#) Scheme to guarantee the basic nutritional needs of infants born into low-income families.
- The value of the Healthy Start scheme has not risen since April 2021 when its weekly payments rose to £4.25 for pregnant women and children aged 1-4, up from £3.10, and £8.50 for mothers with babies aged 0-12 months. Since then, food price inflation has risen by 2.4% (ONS, April 2021 & February 2025). In Scotland, where the value of the [Best Start Food](#) scheme has increased in line with inflation, families now receive monthly payments of £21.20 (£5.30 a week) during pregnancy, £42.40 (£10.60 a week) for children aged under 1 and £21.20 for children aged 1-3. This is about 25% more than families in England, Wales and Northern Ireland receive.
- Plant-based drinks should be included within scope of the scheme. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)'s 2024 [draft report](#) on plant based drinks finds that, for children aged 1 year and over and for adults, fortified, unsweetened (without free sugars) soya, almond or oat drinks are an acceptable alternative to cows' milk (SACN & COT 2024).
- Currently, plant-based milks cost on average 67% more than dairy milk (GFI Europe, 2024a). This price premium may put many plant-based options out of reach for those on lower incomes, with research already suggesting that in the UK high income households are more likely to purchase plant-based alternatives than those on a lower income (Alae-Carew et al., 2022).

Further information [available here](#).

- ❖ ***Review the potential of using VAT rates to incentivise healthier and plant-rich meals in the out of home sector.*** *Adjusting VAT rates on meals based on their health and environmental impacts could deliver benefits for public health and the environment in addition to generating government revenues. Further research and modelling in this area should be commissioned.*
  - Price is a key driver in determining food choice. The ability to afford a healthy and sustainable diet is not only affected by food prices, but also by a family's or individual's income, and the costs of other essentials. For many people, a healthy and sustainable diet is simply out of reach financially; even for people on slightly higher incomes, it can be less appealing because it's the more expensive option (The Food Foundation, 2023b).

- Fiscal incentives, such as VAT rates, can be a powerful lever to drive healthy and sustainable choices (Springmann et al., 2025).

Some existing research in this area can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

## 2. Expand production of healthy and more sustainable foods

- ❖ ***Deliver an ambitious edible horticulture growth plan*** for British farmers and growers across all of the devolved nations for an expanded, vibrant, and thriving horticulture sector. This would support the production and increased consumption of plant foods, such as fruit, vegetables and beans and legumes that can be grown in the UK and ensure the UK is not unsustainably reliant on imports. The horticulture industry is currently worth over £5 billion a year and employs over 50,000 people yet is often overlooked and offers opportunity for growth (UK Parliament: Committees, 2024).
  - The UK currently produces just 35% of our total fruit and vegetable supply. If we were to increase fruit and vegetable consumption to 7 portions a day, total supply would need to increase by 86% (SHEFS, 2020).
  - Green Alliance estimates expanding domestic horticultural production across the UK to meet this demand would add £2.3 billion to the UK economy, create 23,520 jobs and boost farm profits by three per cent across the country (Green Alliance, 2025b). This profitable activity would need less land than the area currently growing inefficient bioenergy crops, which are subsidised by the government (ibid.).
  - To realise this opportunity, the government should publish a horticultural strategy identifying routes to increase demand and supply across the UK. This would provide opportunities for policy win-wins, growing the economy and bringing benefits to our health, the environment, employment opportunities, and our food security.
  - This strategy must address barriers faced by UK producers of high energy prices, unfairness in supply chains and a system where retailers disproportionately profit from selling unhealthy food. In England, this should work alongside the Land Use Framework to identify where horticultural production could be expanded while at the same time preventing further pressure on lowland peat (ibid.).
  - Between 2021 and 2023 the volume of domestic production of vegetables decreased by 13% to 2.2 million tonnes. Over this period the price of vegetables increased. Between 2022 and 2023, fruit production fell by 12% to 663 thousand tonnes (Defra, 2024).
  - Current supply chains are vulnerable to climate shocks, as demonstrated by recent shortages in supermarkets. However, the UK itself has relatively stable weather, allowing for significant expansion of our horticulture sector. A growing proportion of the UK's fruit and veg supply is dependent on climate-vulnerable

countries. In 2013, 32% of UK fruit and vegetable imports were from areas defined as climate vulnerable, a 60% increase since 1987 (SHEFS, 2020).

- 40% of all UK fruit and vegetables are produced on lowland peat, a vital natural resource for carbon sequestration but one that currently emits the highest amount of CO<sub>2</sub> of any land use type in the UK (WWF, 2023a). A sustainable transition for the horticulture sector is crucial to achieve greater levels of domestic production without further setting back progress toward climate targets.

Further information [available here](#) and here.

❖ ***Finance a new £30 million UKRI plant-based innovation fund, in partnership with Defra, focused on taste, affordability, convenience and nutrition, and developing domestic supply chains and on-farm production models for plant-based foods. This funding should be deployed through collaborative R&D projects and grant funding for food producers, startups and scientists. The UK must be able to rival countries like Canada and Denmark which are investing heavily in plant-based innovation.***

- Plant-based meat and dairy are a promising way to help consumers eat more sustainably without sacrificing on familiarity or convenience. However, affordability and taste have limited the uptake of plant-based alternatives to date (GFI Europe, 2024a). Evidence shows that price premiums for plant-based meat in UK supermarkets can be 73% more expensive per 100g than the equivalent meat category which could limit uptake, particularly amongst lower-income households (The Food Foundation, 2024b).
- A recent systematic review suggests that plant-based foods offer many health and nutrition benefits (Espinosa et al., 2024; Springmann, 2024), such as higher fibre and lower saturated fat when compared to animal-based equivalents. However, there are areas where the nutritional profile of some plant-based foods, including plant-based meat and dairy, could be improved, such as reducing sodium content and increasing the presence and bioavailability of some micronutrients.
- It is also important that plant-based foods contribute to food security. Many crops like peas, fava beans and oats can be grown in the UK and are utilised in producing plant-based meat and dairy products. However, due to the affordability of crops like soy, which is produced cheaply overseas due to the vast demand for animal feed (WWF, 2025), the supply chain for plant-based foods has not been optimised to benefit British farmers and growers. There has also been little research into designing and optimising on-farm production systems for plant-based products, which could support farmers to diversify their business models.
- Between 2020 and May 2024, the UK invested an estimated £21 million in research and innovation for plant-based meat and dairy (GFI Europe, 2024b). Additionally, the new UKRI-funded [National Alternative Protein Innovation Centre](#) will focus on innovation for plant-based foods, alongside fermentation and cultivated meat technologies. Whilst this is positive, it is only a small fraction of

what is needed to address the innovation and supply chain challenges outlined above.

- There are also opportunities to support investment and innovation into bean and pulse rich products. Despite being low carbon foods with a positive health and nutrient profile, there are currently no coordinated efforts to link supply and demand of bean, legume and pulse production in the UK, and there is a lack of essential processing facilities in the UK which acts as a barrier to change (3keel, 2023). For example, there is no infrastructure to 'fraction' peas into a plant protein source in the UK, limiting opportunities for farmers.
  - Other countries are investing heavily in plant-based innovation. In 2022 Denmark became the first country to develop a cohesive strategy for offering subsidies to producers of plant-based proteins specifically. The country will pay 580 million kroner (£66.5 million) over five years to Danish farmers that grow protein-rich crops for human consumption, increasing the domestic supply and export capacity of the Danish market and incentivizing a shift to crops that are often better for the environment, soil health, and local ecosystems. In 2023 Denmark announced the world's first National Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods, including increased funding for research and development. The first round of applications for the country's previously-announced \$195 (£147) million plant-based fund, Plant Foundation, received "overwhelming" interest with over 100 applications from industry, startups, and research centers in the fund's first year (GFI, 2023).
  - Canada has invested hundreds of millions of Canadian dollars in its domestic industry through Protein Industries Canada (PIC), a supercluster of companies, research institutions, and nonprofits working on every aspect of plant-based proteins from crop development to product marketing. In early 2023 the federal government renewed PIC's funding for the next five years with an additional \$150million (£81 million), bringing the country's total committed funding to CAD \$353 million (£191 million) from 2018 to 2028 (GFI, 2023).
- ❖ ***Implement a Land Use Framework that identifies the areas of England where land use or management must change to meet our climate and nature targets, including through habitat creation and increased horticulture production. Spend from the farming budget must be aligned to these areas and activities to support farms to increase the sustainability of our overall food production system.***
- Per year, about 2.5% of farmed land needs to be converted to agroecologically managed farmland or habitat to achieve legally binding commitments to halt nature's decline by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050, at least cost (Green Alliance, 2023a).
  - At present, there is no strategic approach to where the farming budget is spent each year. This is leading to a mismatch between where the budget is being invested, and where land use most needs to change. In particular, upland areas

are losing out. The Land Use Framework must connect to the farming budget and provide a spatial approach to how it is spent (Green Alliance, 2023b).

- Approximately 40% of UK fruit and veg production is on lowland peat (WWF, 2023a). A Land Use Framework must identify areas of the UK where horticulture production could be expanded to relieve pressure on lowland peat.

Further information [available here](#).

❖ ***Support sustainable production by strengthening regulation in supply chains to give farmers fairer prices and contracts that enable investment in more sustainable practices. The Groceries Code Adjudicator must have more power to make retailers adopt fairer practices, and its remit must be expanded to cover the intermediary companies that are more commonly buying from farms than retailers.***

- Farmers have been struggling with poor profitability in recent years as a result of extreme weather, rising input costs and receiving low prices for their food. Farm business income for cereal farms fell by almost three quarters in 2023/4 when compared with the previous year (Defra, 2025). Farmers supplying supermarkets are often left with less than 1p of profits on a range of common items, despite shouldering most of the risks (Sustain, 2022).
- There is evidence to suggest retailer practices have improved since the Grocery Code Adjudicator (GCA) was established in 2013 (Sustain, 2017). But these improvements have been limited to a small part of the supply chain as the Grocery Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP) only applies to direct suppliers of supermarkets with a turnover of more than £1 billion. Indirect suppliers, including small farmers and producers, are left unprotected. The code also does not cover other key players such as food service and manufacturers, which supply half of UK food (NFU, 2023).
- The Government is attempting to address these concerns by introducing [Fair Dealing Obligations](#), a set of rules relating to the issuing of contracts that would apply to any businesses purchasing agricultural products directly from farmers. However, these have been slow to come in and are not yet planned for sectors beyond dairy, eggs, pork and fresh produce. This approach also risks leaving gaps in the regulatory framework, as some businesses will neither be covered by the GSCOP or the new regulations (Sustain, 2024b).
- There are concerns that the GCA's lack of resource further limits its effectiveness, as the cost of a single investigation costs more than its annual budget (Sustain, 2024c). There were only two [investigations](#) between 2015 and 2022. The GCA has just seven staff, according to the [National Audit Office](#).

❖ ***Invest in the farming support budgets across the UK so that farmers wanting to make production more sustainable are able to do so. For England, £3.1 billion per year is***

needed to offer fair farm incomes whilst delivering our environmental targets (Wildlife Trusts, 2024).

- Climate change and biodiversity loss are among the biggest threats to UK food security (Defra, 2021). So investing in farms to restore nature to mitigate, and adapt to, climate change through the farming budget is essential (Green Alliance, 2025a).
  - The ELM schemes are the primary driver to support farmers to shift to nature-friendly farming and undertake habitat restoration needed to meet climate and nature targets. But the agricultural budget has not increased since 2007, representing a real terms cut due to inflation (Wildlife Trusts, 2024).
  - RSPB's [Scale of Need](#) report estimated the overall costs of meeting environmental land management priorities in England to be £3.1 billion per year, over the next ten years.
  - YouGov polling shows that the public supports investment in sustainable farming, with the majority of people of the opinion that increased spending on nature-friendly farming would have a positive impact on wildlife (73%), as well as food security (51%) and rural communities (57%) (Sustain, 2025).
- ❖ **Protect UK trade standards** by enshrining a set of core environmental and animal welfare standards in law for all agri-food imports, setting a minimum threshold in domestic regulation that imports must meet to access the UK market. This would ensure that policy interventions supporting people to eat more healthily and sustainably don't mean inadvertently leaving a backdoor open to cheap imports which would force our farmers to compete with lower standard products from abroad, and make sure the food and meat we eat does not rely on harming nature elsewhere (NFU, 2024).
- UK consumers already know and trust accreditation schemes and kitemarks, such as the Fairtrade Mark, RSPCA Assured label and MSC seafood ecolabel. They help consumers seek out higher quality goods and incentivise producers to take part in ethical and sustainability schemes. We must remain free to promote and protect such schemes and not allow fake or copy-cat goods with lower ethical values (Sustain, 2024a).
  - Trade deals should help achieve, not undermine, the UK's national priorities on things like reducing antibiotic use in medicine and farming, promoting healthier children's food and baby food, and reducing diet-related conditions such as heart disease and diabetes (Sustain, 2024a).
  - Trade deals should abide by the UK's existing sustainable international development commitments and UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as International Labour Organisation conventions (Sustain, 2024a).

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