

Response ID ANON-5W8B-HHMOV-S

Submitted to School Food Standards: updating the legislative framework
Submitted on 2026-06-11 17:45:31

Introduction

This consultation:

About you

1 Do you consent to the data and information you provide being held in accordance with UK GDPR as covered in the Department for Education's personal information charter?

Yes

2 Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

3 In processing your data and meeting legal duties, the government may be expected to share information about your consultation response. In line with the privacy notice, would you like your response to be kept confidential?

No

4 As the government analyses the consultation findings, we may identify direct quotes to include in the published government response, in an anonymised way – may we use your feedback in this way?

Yes

5 What area in England are you based in?

London

6 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

About you - organisation

8 What type of organisation are you responding on behalf of?

School food organisation/charitable organisation

Other, please tell us the type of organisation you are responding on behalf of:

9 What is your organisation's name?

What is your organisation's name?:

Foodrise

The current School Food Standards

Proposed updates - breakfast standards

10 To what extent do you agree with the new rules about which foods and drinks can be offered at breakfast clubs before the school day begins?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We generally agree with the government's proposed rules about which foods and drinks can be offered at breakfast clubs before the school day begins.

We agree with the government's proposed requirements that plain soya or oat drinks served at breakfasts must be unsweetened or no sugar and fortified with each of these micronutrients: calcium, iodine, vitamin D, riboflavin, vitamin B12. This is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance, which states that fortified and unsweetened plant-based drinks are an acceptable alternative to cow's milk for children over five and adults. [1]

However, we recommend that the government's allowed plant-based drinks should be extended from plain soya and oat (at primary) – and soya, oat and rice (at secondary) – to also include pea milks, which have high protein content. This will provide greater options and variety for both caterers and students, increasing the likelihood of uptake. Multiple studies have found that plant-based milks have lower greenhouse gas emissions, land use and water use than animal milk, [2, 3] as well as favourable health profiles. [3]

Preference should be given to soya drinks over oat or rice drinks, due to its higher protein content and good provision of all nine essential amino acids – this is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance.[1] Oat and rice drinks can be higher in carbohydrate content – though they can be good alternatives for children with soya allergies.

REFERENCES:

[1] Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 'SACN and COT Assessment of the Health Benefits and Risks of Consuming Plant-Based Drinks: Summary', GOV.UK, 16 July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plant-based-drinks-health-benefits-and-risks/sacn-and-cot-assessment-of-the-health-benefits-and-risks-of-consuming-plant-based-drinks>

[2] Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek, 'Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts through Producers and Consumers', *Science* 360, no. 6392 (2018): 987–92, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag0216>;

[3] Marco Springmann, 'A Multicriteria Analysis of Meat and Milk Alternatives from Nutritional, Health, Environmental, and Cost Perspectives', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121, no. 50 (2024): e2319010121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2319010121>.

11 Do you think processed meat should be permitted to be served at breakfast?

Do you think processed meat should be permitted to be served at breakfast?:

No. We strongly agree with the government's proposals for no processed meat to be served at breakfasts. There is strong evidence linking processed meat to an increased risk of developing bowel cancer, [1] cardiovascular disease (CVD), [2] ischaemic heart disease, [3] breast cancer, [4] bladder cancer, [5] gastric cancer, [6] other cancers, [7] type 2 diabetes, [8] as well as death from cardiovascular disease, [9] dementia, [10] and all-cause mortality. [11]

REFERENCES:

[1] WHO ARC, IARC Monographs Evaluate Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat (World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2015), https://www.iarc.who.int/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/pr240_E.pdf; Katie Patrick, 'How Does Processed Meat Cause Cancer and How Much Matters?', *Cancer Research UK - Cancer News*, 17 March 2021, <https://news.cancerresearchuk.org/2021/03/17/bacon-salami-and-sausages-how-does-processed-meat-cause-cancer-and-how-much-matters/>.

[2] C. S. C. Yip et al., 'A Summary of Meat Intakes and Health Burdens', *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 72, no. 1 (2018): 18–29, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ejcn.2017.117>.

[3] Keren Papier et al., 'Meat Consumption and Risk of Ischemic Heart Disease: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition* 63, no. 3 (2023): 426–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2021.1949575>.

[4] Maryam S. Farvid et al., 'Consumption of Red and Processed Meat and Breast Cancer Incidence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies', *International Journal of Cancer* 143, no. 11 (2018): 2787–99, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijc.31848>.

[5] Alessio Crippa et al., 'Red and Processed Meat Consumption and Risk of Bladder Cancer: A Dose-Response Meta-Analysis of Epidemiological Studies', *European Journal of Nutrition* 57, no. 2 (2018): 689–701, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00394-016-1356-0>.

[6] Seong Rae Kim et al., 'Effect of Red, Processed, and White Meat Consumption on the Risk of Gastric Cancer: An Overall and Dose-Response Meta-Analysis', *Nutrients* 11, no. 4 (2019): 4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11040826>.

[7] Maryam S. Farvid et al., 'Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat and Cancer Incidence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies', *European Journal of Epidemiology* 36, no. 9 (2021): 937–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-021-00741-9>; Yin Huang et al., 'Red and Processed Meat Consumption and Cancer Outcomes: Umbrella Review', *Food Chemistry* 356 (September 2021): 129697, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodchem.2021.129697>.

[8] Lukas Schwingshackl et al., 'Food Groups and Risk of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies', *European Journal of Epidemiology* 32, no. 5 (2017): 363–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-017-0246-y>.

[9] Yan Zheng et al., 'Association of Changes in Red Meat Consumption with Total and Cause Specific Mortality among US Women and Men: Two Prospective Cohort Studies', *Research, BMJ* 365 (June 2019): l2110, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l2110>.

[10] Huifeng Zhang et al., 'Meat Consumption and Risk of Incident Dementia: Cohort Study of 493,888 UK Biobank Participants', *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 114, no. 1 (2021): 175–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqab028>.

[11] Lukas Schwingshackl et al., 'Food Groups and Risk of All-Cause Mortality: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies^{1,2}', *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 105, no. 6 (2017): 1462–73, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.117.153148>.

12 To what extent do you agree that honey should not be permitted?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We agree that honey should not be permitted, because honey is extremely high in sugar content –and sugars in honey count as “free sugars”, which should be limited according to the Eatwell Guide due to negative health impacts and tooth decay. [1]

[1] NHS, 'Sugar: The Facts', Nhs.Uk, 3 March 2022, <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/>

13 To what extent do you agree with the proposed change to the structure of the standards with separate standards for the whole of the school day?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

Proposed updates - whole school day standards (excluding breakfast/before school day)

14 To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes to the fibre requirements for starchy foods?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We agree with the requirement for at least 50% of pasta and rice served to be brown, wholegrain or white varieties with added fibre – however, we recommend clarity on the meaning of this 50% target, to ensure against loopholes, and we would also encourage the government to be more ambitious with a target higher than 50% if possible. The majority of UK children currently consume inadequate fibre – so boosting intake is vital.

We agree with the introduction of a requirement for all bread to be a source of fibre – however, a higher threshold is required of 4.2-4.7g or fibre per 100g, which would be in line with a 50/50 white/wholemeal threshold. The currently suggested 3g fibre per 100g threshold is too low, and would still allow some white breads to be served.

We strongly agree with the requirement that starchy foods that are cooked using fat or oil (including during manufacture) may be served on no more than two meal occasions each week and only when they form part of a meal.

Fruit and vegetables

15 To what extent do you agree with the requirement to serve a portion of vegetables and/or salad with all grab and go main meals?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We welcome the requirement to serve vegetables and/or salad with all grab-and-go main meals. However, we recommend increased ambition for both regular and grab-and-go main meal options. We propose instead that the Standards should require at least two portions of vegetables in every main meal option, every day – as an accompaniment or as part of the main meal. The inclusion of two portions of vegetables and/or pulses in every meal is a key recommendation of the joint-policy briefing 'Serving Up', endorsed by 25 health and sustainability organisations. [1] The current definition of "vegetables" should explicitly include pulses and legumes, so that these high-protein vegetables can be encouraged as part of the protein part of the meal or grab-and-go meal such as in a sandwich filling. The majority of UK children currently fail to meet the '5 a day' recommendation – so boosting intake is vital.

[1] Foodrise and Sustain, Serving Up: Aligning Public Procurement of Food for UK Public Institutions with Healthy Sustainable Diets (Foodrise and Sustain, 2025), <https://feedbackglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Feedback-2024-Serving-Up-public-procurement-briefing.pdf>.

16 To what extent do you agree to the changes so that primary schools should have at least one day a week where fruit is the only dessert option?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

The majority of UK children currently fail to meet the '5 a day' recommendation – so boosting intake is vital. The Nourish programme has found that fruit-only desserts are well-received when introduced gradually with student involvement.

Reducing sugar in the School Food Standards

17 To what extent do you agree to the proposed list of permitted drinks in primary schools?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We generally agree with the proposed list of permitted drinks in primary schools. We agree with the government's proposed requirements that plain soya or oat drinks served at breakfasts must be unsweetened or no sugar and fortified with each of these micronutrients: calcium, iodine, vitamin D, riboflavin, vitamin B12. This is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance, which states that fortified and unsweetened plant-based drinks are an acceptable alternative to cow's milk for children over five and adults. [1]

Preference should be given to soya drinks over oat or rice drinks, due to its higher protein content and good provision of all nine essential amino acids – this is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance. [1] Oat and rice drinks can be higher in carbohydrate content – though they can be good alternatives for children with soya allergies.

We also recommend that the government's allowed plant-based drinks should be extended from plain soya and oat (at primary) – and soya, oat and rice

(at secondary) – to also include pea milks, which have high protein content, provided these are also unsweetened and fortified. This will provide greater options and variety for both caterers and students, increasing the likelihood of uptake. Multiple studies have found that plant-based milks have lower greenhouse gas emissions, land use and water use than animal milk, [2,3] as well as favourable health profiles. [3]

REFERENCES:

- [1] Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 'SACN and COT Assessment of the Health Benefits and Risks of Consuming Plant-Based Drinks: Summary', GOV.UK, 16 July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plant-based-drinks-health-benefits-and-risks/sacn-and-cot-assessment-of-the-health-benefits-and-risks-of-consuming-plant-based-drinks>
- [2] Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek, 'Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts through Producers and Consumers', Science 360, no. 6392 (2018): 987–92, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag0216>;
- [3] Marco Springmann, 'A Multicriteria Analysis of Meat and Milk Alternatives from Nutritional, Health, Environmental, and Cost Perspectives', Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 121, no. 50 (2024): e2319010121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2319010121>.

18 To what extent do you agree to the proposed list of permitted drinks in secondary schools?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We generally agree with the proposed list of permitted drinks in secondary schools. We agree with the government's proposed requirements that plain soya or oat drinks served at breakfasts must be unsweetened or no sugar and fortified with each of these micronutrients: calcium, iodine, vitamin D, riboflavin, vitamin B12. This is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance, which states that fortified and unsweetened plant-based drinks are an acceptable alternative to cow's milk for children over five and adults. [1]

Preference should be given to soya drinks over oat or rice drinks, due to its higher protein content and good provision of all nine essential amino acids – this is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance. [1] Oat and rice drinks can be higher in carbohydrate content – though they can be good alternatives for children with soya allergies.

We also recommend that the government's allowed plant-based drinks should be extended from plain soya and oat (at primary) – and soya, oat and rice (at secondary) – to also include pea milks, which have high protein content, provided these are also unsweetened and fortified. This will provide greater options and variety for both caterers and students, increasing the likelihood of uptake. Multiple studies have found that plant-based milks have lower greenhouse gas emissions, land use and water use than animal milk, [2,3] as well as favourable health profiles. [3]

REFERENCES:

- [1] Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 'SACN and COT Assessment of the Health Benefits and Risks of Consuming Plant-Based Drinks: Summary', GOV.UK, 16 July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plant-based-drinks-health-benefits-and-risks/sacn-and-cot-assessment-of-the-health-benefits-and-risks-of-consuming-plant-based-drinks>
- [2] Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek, 'Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts through Producers and Consumers', Science 360, no. 6392 (2018): 987–92, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag0216>;
- [3] Marco Springmann, 'A Multicriteria Analysis of Meat and Milk Alternatives from Nutritional, Health, Environmental, and Cost Perspectives', Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 121, no. 50 (2024): e2319010121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2319010121>.

19 To what extent do you agree with the approach to introduce healthier drinks in secondary schools in stages?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

20 Do you have any views on whether drinks standards for secondary schools should be the same as, or different from, those for primary schools?

Do you have any views on whether drinks standards for secondary schools should be the same as, or different from, those for primary schools?:

We recommend that secondary school drinks standards should ultimately align with primary standards, with a clear timeline for alignment. The nutritional rationale for restricting sugary and sweetener-containing drinks does not weaken with age, and maintaining a more permissive secondary list creates an unjustifiable distinction that is hard to defend on public health grounds.

Dairy and plant-based options

21 To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes to the dairy and plant-based requirements?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We agree with the government's proposals to remove fruit juice and fruit juice-based combination drinks from the list of permitted drinks – due to the concerns around high-sugar content raised.

We agree with the government's proposed requirements that plain soya or oat drinks, must be unsweetened or no sugar and fortified with each of these micronutrients: calcium, iodine, vitamin D, riboflavin, vitamin B12. This is in keeping with SACN and COT guidance, which states that fortified and

unsweetened plant-based drinks are an acceptable alternative to cow's milk for children over five and adults.

School Food Standards currently require that: "Lower fat milk and lactose reduced milk (sub-group D1) must be made available on every school day at a time during school hours." We recommend that plant-based alternatives to milk (such as plain soya or oat drinks) should also be "made available on every school day at a time during school hours", as is currently the case for animal milk – subject to the requirements on sugar and fortification mentioned above.

Providing plant-based dairy alternatives is important to accommodate the cultural, religious, and special dietary needs of diverse local communities – including lactose intolerance (which affects 8% of the UK population [2]), religious dietary observances around certain animal products, vegan and vegetarian and diets (estimated as 7% of the UK population [3]) and flexitarian diets (an estimated 13% of UK population [3]).

We also agree with the proposed reduction in sugar thresholds for yogurt products.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 'SACN and COT Assessment of the Health Benefits and Risks of Consuming Plant-Based Drinks'.
- [2] Augusto Anguita-Ruiz et al., 'Genetics of Lactose Intolerance: An Updated Review and Online Interactive World Maps of Phenotype and Genotype Frequencies', *Nutrients* 12, no. 9 (2020): 2689, <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12092689>.
- [3] YouGov, 'Dietary Choices of Brits (e.g. Vegetarian, Flexitarian, Meat-Eater Etc)?', YouGov, 2024, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/trackers/dietary-choices-of-brits-eg-vegetarian-flexitarian-meat-eater-etc>.

Reducing foods higher in fat, sugar and salt

22 To what extent do you agree with the new rules restricting foods high in fat, sugar, and salt?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way :

We strongly agree with the proposed limits that processed meat, meat and poultry products cannot be served more than once per week. There is strong evidence linking processed meat to an increased risk of developing bowel cancer, [1] cardiovascular disease (CVD), [2] ischaemic heart disease, [3] breast cancer, [4] bladder cancer, [5] gastric cancer, [6] other cancers, [7] type 2 diabetes, [8] as well as death from cardiovascular disease, [9] dementia, [10] and all-cause mortality. [11]

Processed meat is not part of the UK Eatwell Guide. The guide recommends eating less red and processed meat. Thus, it is not necessary to have processed meat on school meals at all, and the inclusion of processed meat is incongruous when other unhealthy food (such as deep fried foods) are fully restricted. There is no logical rationale for the inclusion of processed meat in school meals. Setting a limit on the amount of processed meat served was a key recommendation of the joint-policy briefing 'Serving Up', endorsed by 25 health and sustainability organisations. [12]

We would therefore recommend a tighter restriction on processed meats of no more than 50g per week – equivalent to a half portion (e.g. one sausage), or one burger / two sausages which are blended meat and plant-based products. Such a restriction would actively encourage and normalise healthier blended products. Blended products which are a mix of meat and mycoprotein are already being served in NHS hospitals.[13]

We recommend that the Standards provide a clear list of foods that are considered 'processed' to avoid confusion.

We would recommend a one-year implementation period for secondary schools for these standards – as extended voluntary timelines have been shown to limit impact.

REFERENCES:

- [1] WHO ARC, IARC Monographs Evaluate Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat (World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2015), https://www.iarc.who.int/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/pr240_E.pdf; Katie Patrick, 'How Does Processed Meat Cause Cancer and How Much Matters?', *Cancer Research UK - Cancer News*, 17 March 2021, <https://news.cancerresearchuk.org/2021/03/17/bacon-salami-and-sausages-how-does-processed-meat-cause-cancer-and-how-much-matters/>.
- [2] C. S. C. Yip et al., 'A Summary of Meat Intakes and Health Burdens', *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 72, no. 1 (2018): 18–29, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ejcn.2017.117>.
- [3] Keren Papier et al., 'Meat Consumption and Risk of Ischemic Heart Disease: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition* 63, no. 3 (2023): 426–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2021.1949575>.
- [4] Maryam S. Farvid et al., 'Consumption of Red and Processed Meat and Breast Cancer Incidence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies', *International Journal of Cancer* 143, no. 11 (2018): 2787–99, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijc.31848>.
- [5] Alessio Crippa et al., 'Red and Processed Meat Consumption and Risk of Bladder Cancer: A Dose-Response Meta-Analysis of Epidemiological Studies', *European Journal of Nutrition* 57, no. 2 (2018): 689–701, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00394-016-1356-0>.
- [6] Seong Rae Kim et al., 'Effect of Red, Processed, and White Meat Consumption on the Risk of Gastric Cancer: An Overall and Dose-Response Meta-Analysis', *Nutrients* 11, no. 4 (2019): 4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11040826>.
- [7] Maryam S. Farvid et al., 'Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat and Cancer Incidence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies', *European Journal of Epidemiology* 36, no. 9 (2021): 937–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-021-00741-9>; Yin Huang et al., 'Red and Processed Meat Consumption and Cancer Outcomes: Umbrella Review', *Food Chemistry* 356 (September 2021): 129697, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodchem.2021.129697>.
- [8] Lukas Schwingshackl et al., 'Food Groups and Risk of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies', *European Journal of Epidemiology* 32, no. 5 (2017): 363–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-017-0246-y>.
- [9] Yan Zheng et al., 'Association of Changes in Red Meat Consumption with Total and Cause Specific Mortality among US Women and Men: Two

Prospective Cohort Studies', Research, BMJ 365 (June 2019): l2110, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l2110>.

[10] Huifeng Zhang et al., 'Meat Consumption and Risk of Incident Dementia: Cohort Study of 493,888 UK Biobank Participants', The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 114, no. 1 (2021): 175–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqab028>.

[11] Lukas Schwingshackl et al., 'Food Groups and Risk of All-Cause Mortality: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies^{1,2}', The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 105, no. 6 (2017): 1462–73, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.117.153148>.

[12] Foodrise and Sustain, Serving Up: Aligning Public Procurement of Food for UK Public Institutions with Healthy Sustainable Diets (Foodrise and Sustain, 2025), <https://feedbackglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Feedback-2024-Serving-Up-public-procurement-briefing.pdf>. Acknowledging positions via Serving Up briefing

[13] Quorn, 'Quorn & NHS Partner on the Let's Meat Halfway Initiative', Quorn Pro, October 2024, <https://www.quornpro.com/en-gb/news/quornpro-nhs-lets-meat-halfway-initiative>.

23 To what extent do you agree with the new rules restricting the serving of cheese?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We strongly agree with proposals that cheese (including plant-based versions) can only be used as a main ingredient in meals on up to two days per week. According to the UK Eatwell Guide, most cheeses contain between 20g and 40g of fat per 100g, which qualifies them as high fat foods (over 17.5g of fat per 100g), some are high in saturated fat, and many cheeses are also high in salt (more than 1.5g salt per 100g). [1] Restricting cheese is therefore consistent with the government's aims of reducing children's consumption of foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

Cheese causes a very high environmental impact per 100g protein – an average of 11kgCO₂eq of greenhouse gas emissions per 100g protein (higher than both pork and chicken, over 5 times higher than tofu and 13 times higher than pulses, on average). [2] In its assessment of healthy diets within planetary boundaries, the authoritative Planetary Health Diet therefore recommends no more than around 25-30g of hard cheese per day, for those who choose to eat dairy. [3] The government's proposals feel consistent with this.

REFERENCES:

[1] NHS, 'Dairy and Alternatives in Your Diet', Nhs.Uk, 23 February 2022, <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/milk-and-dairy-nutrition/>.

[2] Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek, 'Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts through Producers and Consumers', Science 360, no. 6392 (2018): 987–92, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag0216>

[3] BDA, 'The EAT-Lancet Commission 2.0 on Healthy, Sustainable and Just Food Systems: A Commission by The Lancet', British Association of Dieticians, 2025, <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/the-eat-lancet-commission-2-0-on-healthy-sustainable-and-just-food-systems-a-commission-by-the-lancet.html>.

24 To what extent do you agree with the plan to restrict the serving of cheese as a main protein option in secondary schools, in stages?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way :

25 To what extent do you agree with the plan to reduce desserts in primary schools?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

26 To what extent do you agree with the plan to reduce desserts in secondary schools?

Strongly agree

Please explain why you answered in this way :

27 To what extent do you agree with the plan to reduce desserts in secondary schools in stages?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

28 To what extent do you agree with the plan to set what can and can't be included in a school meal deal?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way :

We welcome the requirement that a meal deal must include at least one portion of vegetables and/or salad and at least one portion of fruit – this is an important step forward to ensuring that children eat their '5 a day'.

Protein

29 To what extent do you agree with the changes being suggested for pulses being included alongside main menu items at least once every week?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way:

We agree with the requirement for pulses being included alongside main menu items at least once every week – however, the government can and should be more ambitious, to benefit human and planetary health. We thus recommend a requirement for pulses to be included in meals at least three times per week – ideally as the main ingredient, or alongside main menu items. This could include incorporating pulses as a blended ingredient, a side dish, as a dip or sandwich filling. ProVeg's School Plates initiative provides many examples of recipes which incorporate blended meals such as pulses served blended into a bolognese containing mince (either meat or plant-based). [1] We also recommend a complementary requirement for at least two portions of vegetables in every meal – with a portion of pulses counting as a portion of vegetables.

Pulses contain high fibre, protein and micronutrients (such as iron and potassium) – and are associated with many health benefits, such as reduced obesity and cancer-risk.[2] This is why many European dietary guidelines recommend higher consumption of legumes, [3] such as Spain which recommends eating at least 4 servings a week and ideally daily consumption, [4] and Greece which recommends at least 3 servings a week.[3] Legumes are also good for soil health: they fix nitrogen in soils – reducing reliance on synthetic fertilisers – sequester carbon, and facilitate the circulation of soil nutrients and water retention.[5] Replacing meat with legumes can result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions: on average, beef (from beef rather than dairy herds) causes 62 times more emissions compared with pulses, per 100g protein. [6] Research suggests that even beef from dairy herds using some of the lowest emissions production methods causes over 11 times more emissions than pulses per 100g protein. [6] Pork has on average over 9 times higher emissions than pulses per 100g protein. [6]

REFERENCES:

[1] ProVeg UK, 'School Plates - The Recipes', ProVeg UK, 2025, <https://proveg.org/uk/school-plates/the-recipes/>.

[2] Chelsea Diding and Henry J. Thompson, 'The Role of Pulses in Improving Human Health: A Review', *Legume Science* 4, no. 4 (2022): e147, <https://doi.org/10.1002/leg3.147>.

[3] European Commission, 'Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Knowledge Gateway: Food-Based Dietary Guidelines Recommendations for Legumes', Knowledge for Policy, 2025, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/health-promotion-knowledge-gateway/food-based-dietary-guidelines-europe-table-6_en.

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30 To what extent do you agree with the plan to increase pluses in secondary schools in stages?

Agree

31 To what extent do you agree with the changes being suggested for protein in school menus?

Agree

Please explain why you answered in this way :

Public services should make it easy for the public to choose healthy sustainable meals if they want to. Therefore, we recommend an explicit requirement that "a portion of plant-based protein must be provided every day". This could also be phrased as a requirement to serve at least one vegetarian (ideally vegan) meal option daily. Ensuring a healthy plant-based meal option is always available in school meals is a key recommendation of the joint-policy briefing 'Serving Up', endorsed by 25 health and sustainability organisations. [1] To enable this, plant-based proteins should be given their own food category, to be required every day. This will ensure there is always a nutritious option available for those that want to choose a plant-based protein or have a dietary preference to do so. We recommend that this category should include pulses, other legumes, tofu, tempeh, seitan, mycoprotein, soya (or pea-based) mince, chunks or pieces, and other plant-based meat alternatives.

Priority should be given to whole foods such as nuts, pulses and beans since these provide the highest health benefits. We therefore agree with the requirement that on at least three days a week, vegetarian meals must use pulses (such as chickpeas and lentils) as the protein source.

Standards should also ensure these plant-based meals are at least as affordable as the meat option, filling, and nutritionally balanced. A survey by Bite Back 2030, from 2021, found that students often found the vegetarian and vegan options quite limited, unfilling, and poorly stocked so that students at the back the queue might miss out.[2] Expanding the range and quality of plant-based meals would help improve inclusivity, as well as uptake of these dishes.

We recommend that a limit also be set on how much red meat can be served per week. Setting a limit on the amount of red meat served per week in school meals was a key recommendation of the joint-policy briefing 'Serving Up', endorsed by 25 health and sustainability organisations. [1] The UK Eatwell Guide recommends reducing consumption of red and processed meat. Red meat has particularly high emissions and land use impacts (especially beef and lamb), [3] and has been linked to greater risk of breast cancer, endometrial cancer, colorectal cancer, colon cancer, rectal cancer, lung cancer and hepatocellular carcinoma. [4] Scotland's Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 require that "No more than a total of 175g of red and red processed meat (cooked weight) can be provided in school lunches over the course of the school week, of which no

more than 100g (cooked weight) can be red processed meat". [5] We recommend that a lower limit be applied for school meals to serve no more than one portion of red meat per week (equivalent to about 100g in secondary schools, or 50-80g in primary schools) – in line with the Planetary Health Diet [6] – of which no more than 50g can be red processed meat. Two smaller half portions (equal to 50g each) of red meat could also be permitted if used in blended products (half meat, half plant-based) or as part of a meal mixed with other plant-based proteins like pulses, other legumes, mycoprotein or soya mince, chunks or pieces. Denmark's 2021 Budget Guide provides a good template – which stipulates that the government's canteen suppliers must provide beef or lamb on no more than one day per week.[7]

Under the current School Food Standards, schools are already required to provide a portion of "Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein" every day. Within this category of protein required every day, we recommend that greater emphasis is placed on the variety of plant-based foods which fall within this category: including pulses, other legumes, mycoprotein and soya mince, chunks or pieces.

The above requirement to serve a portion of protein every day is sufficient to ensure daily protein. We therefore recommend that the requirement to serve certain protein sources (meat, poultry and now pulses) at least three times per week be removed completely, rather than just expanding this category to include pulses. Requiring certain types of protein three times per week is unnecessarily prescriptive, and in this case counter-productive given that this category currently includes red meat, which has particularly high environmental impacts and is associated with negative health outcomes (see below). Removing the School Food Standards (SFS) requirement for meat to be served three days a week, was a key recommendation of the joint-policy briefing 'Serving Up', endorsed by 25 health and sustainability organisations. [1]

However, if the government does decide to continue requiring certain protein-sources three times per week, we would recommend:

1) Further broadening this category beyond meat, poultry, or pulses, as currently proposed, to include a greater variety of plant-based foods options. We recommend at the very least expanding this category to include healthy plant-based proteins such as mycoprotein, tofu, tempeh, seitan, and soya mince, chunks or pieces, pea-based mince, chunks or pieces, and other high-protein legumes such as soybeans. Providing a greater choice of plant-based options will encourage new product innovation, increase the range of options available to caterers, and the likelihood of meals receiving a high uptake and satisfaction-rate from students, as they can be tailored to their tastes.

2) We also recommend removing the category of red meat from the three days per week requirement. As outlined above, red meat has particularly high emissions and land use impacts (especially beef and lamb), [3] and is linked to numerous health risks. [4] It is therefore particularly inappropriate for the School Food Standards to include red meat in the category of foods which are required to be served three days per week.

We disagree with the requirement for no more than two portions a week of vegetarian or plant-based products which are marketed as meat alternatives (manufactured or homemade). Whilst we welcome that this restriction does not extend to cover plain mycoprotein, tofu and soya mince, chunks or pieces – this still unnecessarily restricts the provision of a broad range of plant-based meat and dairy alternatives, which often have favourable health profiles compared to meat. Processed plant-based meat and dairy alternatives have been found not to increase risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes, [8] so need to be distinguished from more harmful Ultra-Processed Foods. A recent peer-reviewed study found that "processed plant-based products" such as veggie burgers "still offered substantial environmental, health, and nutritional benefits compared to animal products" – offering benefits such as higher fibre, lower cholesterol, and higher PolyUnsaturated Fatty Acids (PUFAs). [9] A peer-reviewed study from 2025 found that even without fortification "plant-based meat is equally nutrient dense as animal meat and legumes" – depending on the food type, acting as a source of alpha-linolenic acid, vitamins B1, B2, B3, folate, E, K, calcium, magnesium, manganese, copper, iron, potassium, phosphorus, selenium and zinc.[10] Although there are some nutrients found less in plant-based meat alternatives than in meat, these can be compensated for with fortification. A 2026 study found that when plant-based alternatives to meat "are fortified, they generally match their animal-based counterparts in contributing to the delivery of the recommended daily allowance of key micronutrients such as Fe, Ca and vitamins B12, B2 and D". [11] Preference should be given by schools for plant-based meat alternatives that have additional fortification with micronutrients like iron, calcium, and vitamins B12, B2 and D. Some plant-based meat alternatives can currently be higher in salt and saturated fats. We therefore recommend that plant-based meat alternatives should comply with limits of no more than 1.5g of salt per 100g, and no more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g, in line with NHS Food labels guidelines to ensure no products high in salt or saturated fats are served.[12]

We disagree that the category pulses shouldn't include baked beans, so long as only low-salt and low-sugar varieties are permitted. Baked beans are highly nutritious, and are also widely familiar to children which may improve the uptake of pulses. However, we agree that baked beans should only be included as a main ingredient in vegetarian meals a maximum of once per week, to ensure that it does not become the main option and a diversity of pulses are served.

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Maintained nursery schools and nursery units within primary schools

32 To what extent do you agree with maintained nursery schools and nursery units within primary schools having to comply with the EYFS nutrition guidance only?

Agree

The School Food Standards overall

33 To what extent do you think the proposed changes will improve the nutritional quality of school meals?

To a great extent

Practical considerations

34 What practical challenges, if any, do you think schools might encounter when implementing the new School Food Standards?

What practical challenges, if any, do you think schools might encounter when implementing the new School Food Standards?, :

Providing quality food meals within limited budgets is an ongoing challenge for schools. We recommend that the government provides greater funding per school meal to help maximise school food quality and uptake (see response to Q38). However, greater quality can also be achieved through switching to more plant-based options – such as substituting more meat for pulses – which supports the shift to healthy sustainable diets whilst also saving money (see response to Q37), which can then be invested in higher quality ingredients. Savings can also be invested in helping schools meet requirements for 50% of food to be sustainable or local, under potential reforms to the Government Buying Standard for food and catering services.

Compliance with the School Food Standards

35 To what extent do you agree that schools having a governor with responsibility for school food would help ensure schools follow the School Food Standards?

Strongly agree

36 To what extent do you agree that schools publishing their school food policy on their website would help ensure they meet the School Food Standards?

Strongly agree

37 What practical methods do you think schools could take to help ensure they meet the School Food Standards?

What practical methods do you think schools could take to help ensure they meet the School Food Standards?:

Schools can help meet the School Food Standards within budget by taking advantage of the relative cost-savings provided by substituting meat for pulses in more meals. Pulses are already on average considerably cheaper than meat in the UK – and the trend is towards more expensive meat as climate change affects global supply chains. For instance, the price gap between shelf stable beans and beef has increased from £6.78 in 2020 to £10.54 per kg in 2025. [1] A Food Foundation study from 2024 found that beans cost on average 2.6 times less per 100g than meat. [2] A good template is New York's public hospitals, which saved considerable money through serving more plant-based meals (see below).

There are numerous positive examples of schools achieving cost savings as a result of a shift to more plant-based foods. For instance, councils

participating in the London Food Purchasing Commitment found that cutting the carbon footprint of public meals in local schools reduced costs by up to 7% - largely by swapping out high carbon ingredients such as beef – and that delivering menu and procurement changes at scale was ambitious but achievable, with councils developing innovative approaches despite budgetary and contractual constraints. [3] ProVeg UK's plant-based recipes are on average 59p per primary school portion [4] – significantly less than the average meat-based school meal. For instance, ProVeg found that a plant-based spaghetti bolognese (made with lentils and soya mince) cost approximately 43% less than a spaghetti bolognese made with beef mince – 41 pence per meal compared to 72 pence per meal. [5] They similarly found that a plant-based Sri Lankan coconut curry was 24% cheaper than a chicken-based equivalent (56 pence per meal compared to 74 pence per meal). This results in significant savings for schools they have partnered with. For instance, one UK academy trust which worked with ProVeg UK, which looks after 5,000 children across 7 schools in the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire area, estimated it saved 20% on purchasing costs by boosting plant-rich options on its menus – whilst also achieving around a 26% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. [5] A catering manager at a private school who worked with ProVeg UK also said that using more pulses in their main meals had helped with reducing costs. [4] Likewise, a study of catering at UK universities found that plant-based meals were on average 30% cheaper than meat-based meals. [6]

There is also clear evidence that schools can increase provision of healthy school meals without negatively affecting uptake. For instance, the UK academy trust which worked with ProVeg UK mentioned above, saw overall meal uptake rise by about 20%, in tandem with boosting plant-rich options on its menus.[5] Moreover, councils participating in the London Food Purchasing Commitment found that improving sustainability and nutrition went “hand in hand” and was well received by staff, parents and children.[3] School Food Matters found that shifts to healthier food as part of its Nourish programme did not result in resistance from students.[7]

Schools should be encouraged to co-design menus and meals with communities and nutritionists to ensure they have the buy-in of the community, are culturally appropriate and cater to diverse needs. This should be integrated into existing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategies.

Schools should also be incentivised to experiment and use different options to incentivise healthy sustainable diets – some options to enable this include:

1. Make plant-based meals the default choice (see New York Hospitals case study) and include them in daily specials, meal deals and loyalty card schemes
2. Introduce plant-based days when all the dishes served are plant-based only – building on the successes of the Meat Free Mondays campaign
3. Reduce the amount of meat in a dish, replacing some meat with protein-rich chickpeas, lentils, beans and pulses
4. Increase the proportion of plant-rich or plant-based dishes on offer
5. Introduce plant-rich versions of popular meat dishes
6. Celebrate cuisines from places with traditionally more sustainable and plant-based diets than the UK
7. Price dishes fairly so lower emissions dishes are attractively priced for diners
8. Increase the variety, flavour, texture or appearance of plant-rich dishes on offer

A good template for both co-designing menus with communities, and successfully improving uptake of plant-based foods, are New York City's public hospitals. In 2022, all 11 New York City public hospitals rolled out a programme of making plant-based meals the default option for patients, [8] which has been hugely successful – with 50-60% of patients choosing the plant-based options since the shift. This contributed to approximately 783,000 plant-based meals being served in 2023, with over 90% saying they were satisfied with their choice. [9] The scheme has resulted in a rapid 36% reduction in emissions from the hospitals' food procurement, with cost savings of 59 cents per meal. [9] Meat-based options are still available on request, preserving choice if people choose to switch. The plant-based options are culturally diverse – with Latin, Asian and other cuisines available [8] – and the scheme emphasises inclusivity benefits for those with lactose intolerance, which especially affects BIPOC communities. [10] The scheme is led by a partnership between NYC Health + Hospitals and Better Food Foundation's Greener by Default initiative. [11] The contract partner is Sodexo, and meals are made from scratch at the health system's Culinary Center – which pilots meals and gathers patient feedback, only allowing meals to enter menu rotation if they achieve 80% patient satisfaction or above. [9] At least two plant-based defaults are offered to maximise likelihood the patient will like one of the dishes. Patients who are discharged from the hospital receive a booklet of plant-based recipes to take home. [9] The plant-based meals include Black Bean Burger, Black-Eyed Pea Casserole, Jackfruit and Lentil Jambalaya, Mushroom Stroganoff, Penne Pasta with Pea Pesto, and Red Curry Vegetables with Roasted Tofu. [9]

A similar scheme has already been trialled in 35 UK hospitals, where Sodexo and Nuffield Health partnered to reduce food emissions by 22% through simple shifts such as increasing the proportion of plant-based menu items. [12]

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38 What practical methods do you think government could take to help ensure schools meet the School Food Standards?

What practical methods do you think government could take to help ensure schools meet the School Food Standards?:

We recommend that the government funds support for the training of school kitchen professionals to cook more tasty, filling and nutritious plant-based meals. There is currently uneven knowledge across institutions and catering companies, and enhancing quality is key to boosting uptake. Denmark's Greener Public Food Agreement (part of its broader Plant-Based Action Plan) provides a good template for this: it includes provision of free courses for kitchen professionals in public institutions to learn skills in preparing tasty, nutritious plant-based meals, alongside higher sustainability standards in procurement and catering for public institutions. [1]

There are numerous initiatives that such a scheme could build on – such as ProVeg UK's School Plates initiative, and London's Food Purchasing Commitment. Providing examples of affordable, nutritious and tasty plant-based recipes in a recipe bank would also be helpful – for instance, ProVeg UK can provide many recipe templates, already used by many UK schools. [2]

To ensure that healthy sustainable food is provided, alongside the expansion of services such as free school meals, central government must ensure funding for local authorities is increased to reverse over a decade of eroded budgets under austerity measures. This can partly be funded by the cost savings achieved both through the lower procurement costs of plant-based foods, and savings to the NHS through healthier diets (see response to Q41).

To support the right to food in the UK, we support the roll out of universal free school meals to all school children, with expansion of access to school breakfast clubs and fruit and veg schemes. [3] In particular, we join the over 200 civil society groups who have called for Free School Meals to be rolled out to all primary school children. [4] An estimated 29% of UK children (4.2 million) were in poverty in 2021/22 – and this costs the UK £39.5 billion a year. [5] Providing free school meals would improve health and educational outcomes, reduce costs to the NHS, reduce the stigma of free school meals and thus improve uptake among children in poverty – and could be achieved at an estimated cost of £880 million. [4] Sadiq Kahn's policy of extending free school meals to all primary school children in London is a welcome example of this policy in action. London boroughs issuing free school meals experienced an 8% increase in uptake among students already entitled to free meals, and a 5-11% reduction in student obesity. [6]

In addition to setting standards, we recommend that the UK government creates a monitoring and enforcement regime, which could be delivered through the Food Standards Agency, to create a culture of compliance and ensure a level playing field for companies bidding for contracts. This could include audits and inspections, to complement self-reporting through a standardised self-reporting compliance tool, and is vital to ensure the effectiveness of the updated Standards – for instance, a recent study covering 36 secondary schools found that there was very low compliance with current School Food Standards limiting confectionery, chocolate, cakes, biscuits, deep-fried foods and breadcrumb foods. [7] Based on experience from the Nourish programme, School Food Matters and ICF have also found that it is vital to train school staff to monitor standards, as well as to provide accessible guidance for schools – such as menu audits, simple templates and clear guidance on packed lunches.[8]

The switch to more legumes and pulses is an opportunity to support growth in the horticulture industry in the UK, which would increase the availability of these products and make sourcing easier. The Bridging the Gap project has demonstrated how, with support, organic fruit, vegetables and pulses can be incorporated into school menus. [9] Such a transition requires initial investment, and we recommend the government uses farm innovation grants and other agricultural funding to support farmers to diversify into legume production, invest in processing and supply chains intended for schools, and unlock UK supply chains for these foods. This could be an exciting growth area for UK farming businesses, but requires investment.

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Culture, equality and diversity

39 What concerns, if any, do you have about the potential impact of these proposals on all individuals with protected characteristics?

Positive

Please explain why you answered in this way :

Providing a greater variety of plant-based meal options is important to accommodate the cultural, religious, and special dietary needs of diverse local communities – including lactose intolerance (which affects 8% of the UK population [1]), religious dietary observances around certain animal products, vegan and vegetarian and diets (estimated as 7% of the UK population [2]) and flexitarian diets (an estimated 13% of UK population [2]).

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Environmental principles

40 Do you think the new School Food Standards could have any positive and/or negative effects on the environment?

Do you think the new School Food Standards could have any positive and/or negative effects on the environment?:

If the School Food Standards incentivise plant-rich diets, with lower consumption of meat and dairy, this is likely to have significant positive environmental impacts. A recent study found that if high-income nations aligned their diets with the Planetary Health Diet (which is plant-rich and involves reductions in meat and dairy) this would reduce annual agricultural production emissions associated with their diets by 61% - and additionally result in enough spared land to sequester as much as 98.3 GtCO₂eq. [1] A recent study of UK diets found that low-meat diets have approximately half the emissions and land use of high meat diets, whilst vegan diets have around a quarter of the emissions and land use as a high meat diet. [2] A meta-study of the impact of serving plant-based meals as the default option, found that the policy reduced meat consumption by between 53-87%. [3] Eco-Schools and Keep Britain Tidy's report 'Count Your Carbon', based on data from over 2,000 schools, estimated that approximately 16% of UK schools' total carbon footprint is from food procurement – and in primary schools, food is the single largest contributor to school emissions.[4] Keep Britain Tidy also found that schools serving at least one fully plant-based meal per week recorded average food-related emissions around 10 tCO₂e lower than those that did not.

Measures such as increasing inclusion of pulses in meals and restricting the amount of processed meat should help move school menus in the right direction for our climate and nature goals. However, to maximise benefits and avoid falling short, the government can and should go further. In our responses to previous questions, we have set out how the government can be more ambitious – such as by setting limits on the amount of red meat served. In addition to these measures, we would recommend the following policies:

To ensure greenhouse gas emissions reduction from school meals, we recommend that the School Food Standards set a binding target for average emissions per meal – with the method of achieving this left up to public institutions in consultation with their local communities, but through a common reporting mechanism. Targeting average emissions per meal provides flexibility, since some meals can exceed this limit providing other meals offset this to bring the average down. We recommend that this limit be set in line with the Planetary Health Diet's daily average dietary emissions of 2.13 kgCO₂eq per person in emissions, [5] which equates to 0.64 kgCO₂eq per 750kcal meal for lunch and dinner (assuming 30% of daily dietary emissions each for lunch and dinner – plus 20% for breakfast, 20% for snacks). This limit could be phased in gradually, with higher limits set initially. Large food businesses should be required to report publicly on their emissions, for example through the Food Data Transparency Partnership. This is a key recommendation of the joint-policy briefing 'Serving Up', endorsed by 25 health and sustainability organisations. [6]

There are already positive examples of per meal emissions targets in action. In 2023, four Labour councils – Hackney, Hounslow, Lambeth and Newham – signed up to the London Food Purchasing Commitment (LFPC) [6], which includes a target that by 2030, local school menus must have an average greenhouse gas emissions of no greater than 1.04kgCO₂eq per 1000 kcal meal, in line with the UK's Paris Agreement pathway (around a 38% cut by 2030 for many councils). [7] Sustain estimate can be achieved through one or two meat-free days, one fish day, and by being careful about meat on the other days. The LFPC also has targets to halve avoidable food waste by 2030, and measure and report local/sustainable sourcing, with an optional goal to spend 30% of the food budget on local and sustainable produce by 2030. In 2025, Sustain examined how the first four London councils to adopt the LFPC implemented its standards, and what impacts they experienced on cost, meal quality, emissions and procurement processes. They found that if all

London free school meals met LFPC emissions targets, over 11,000 tonnes of GHG emissions could be avoided annually. [8]

We also recommend that it should be made mandatory for all schools to comply with Government Buying Standard for food and catering services – and that the Department for Education should work closely with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to ensure these standards are sufficiently ambitious to meet Labour's manifesto commitment. The Labour Party pledged in its 2024 Manifesto to “set a target for half of all food purchased across the public sector to be locally produced or certified to higher environmental standards” [9] – for that manifesto commitment to be met, it is vital that the Government Buying Standard for food and catering services is mandatory for all public institutions, including schools. These revised Government Buying Standards should also ensure that the food served contributes to a radical reduction in GHG emissions, supports sustainable farmers in the UK and overseas, and does not exacerbate species loss and deforestation through imported deforestation-risk foods. Any development of requirements for sourcing more local and sustainable food should go hand in hand with developing the UK's domestic horticultural production, to help reduce barriers to schools sourcing more British produce – for instance, participating councils in the London Food Purchasing Commitment expressed strong interest in sourcing local and sustainable produce, but significant supply chain barriers currently limited access to local, ethical options.[10]

Additionally, we recommend that caterers should be required to report on a set of transparent criteria around reducing their environmental harm and social sustainability.

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Closing question

41 Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us?

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Measures to align school meals – and broader public procurement – with healthy sustainable diets have strong public support. YouGov polling of over 2,000 members of the UK public from Dec 2025 found that 69% of respondents either strongly or somewhat supported a policy to “make schools serve a higher proportion of plant-based food”, with only 10% strongly or somewhat opposing this policy – one of the policies examined with the highest public support. [1] This includes 54-83% support and only 4-20% opposition from every demographic studied – including every age group and economic background, and voters for every major political party in the 2024 election.[1] The same YouGov poll found strong support for making hospitals serve a higher proportion of plant-based food (63% supportive, 10% opposed).[1] A separate YouGov poll commissioned by ProVeg in 2025 found that parents were twice as likely to support an increase in plant-based meals served in schools, than to oppose.[2] 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. [3]

Healthy eating will help improve health outcomes, reducing NHS costs – for instance, an Oxford University study found that reducing average meat consumption in the UK to two to three servings per person per week could prevent 45,000 premature deaths and reduce NHS costs by £1.2 billion per year. [4] 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.[5]

The School Food Standards represent an ambitious plan to improve children's health. We urge that this approach be adopted more widely across the

public sector, and encourage the DfE to work with other departments to do so. Children will receive healthy meals in schools, but risk being served food that doesn't meet these standards if they are in hospital, the care system, or youth detention. This is inconsistent and could risk the health of some of the most vulnerable children. We therefore recommend that the government launches a complementary set of NHS Food Standards – modelled on the School Food Standards but applied to NHS hospitals and trusts – and other such standards for the care system and prisons.

The Healthy Food Standard, as proposed in the government's 10 Year Health Plan, will introduce mandatory data reporting and health targets for large food businesses – we wish to highlight that meeting School Food Standards will be complementary with large catering businesses in contracts with schools meeting these standards.

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