



# **DELIVERING ON THE WWF BASKET DIETS TARGET**

**Q&A GUIDANCE FOR RETAILERS**

**MARCH 2023**



**GLOBALLY, AGRICULTURE AND LAND USE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALMOST 60% OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS AND 30% OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS – MAKING THE FOOD SYSTEM ONE OF THE BIGGEST THREATS TO OUR ENVIRONMENT.**

**Action is needed across the food system to meet the triple challenge of tackling climate change, halting and reversing nature loss, and continuing to produce the food we need to feed a growing population.**

The WWF Basket tracks retailers' progress toward halving the environmental impact of the UK shopping basket by 2030.

Achieving this target will only be possible if we shift to healthier, more sustainable diets in the UK, as well as transforming how food is produced.

At WWF, we are monitoring industry progress on rebalancing animal and plant protein sales toward a 50:50 split between now and 2030.

To support Basket signatories with their data monitoring and collection, we have created this Q&A guidance to respond to key questions on the diets target and its measurement.





## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE 50:50 DIETS TARGET IN HALVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE UK SHOPPING BASKET?

Tackling the climate and nature impacts of our diets is an essential step to halve the environmental impact of UK shopping baskets.

Delivering against the diets target in the WWF Basket is critical to the delivery of a range of associated WWF Basket outcomes including agriculture, climate, and deforestation and conversion.

### For example:

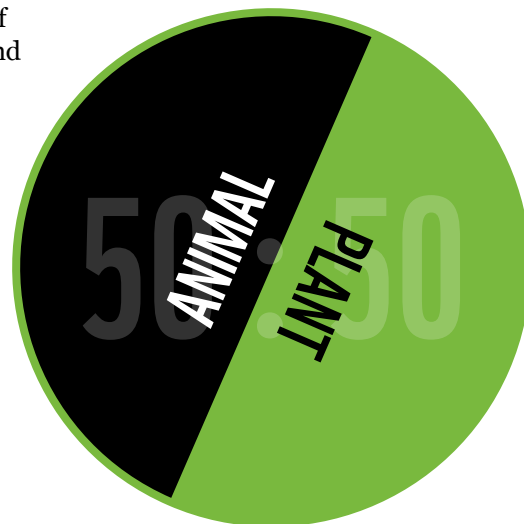
- Rebalancing UK diets with a 50:50 protein split between animal and plants supports a shift to more nature-friendly farming without increasing pressure on land-use or requiring the conversion of additional land for agriculture.
- Reduced animal protein consumption will reduce demand for animal feed - which currently accounts for 90% of our soy imports - reducing reliance on this deforestation risk commodity<sup>i</sup>.
- Reduced animal consumption would free up land for the production of food for direct human consumption to fuel a growing population. Currently, 36% of the world's harvest is fed to animals rather than humans – it's estimated the same harvest could provide around six times as many calories if it was eaten directly by humans<sup>ii</sup>.
- Shifting towards a 50:50 protein split, without driving up protein consumption overall, will drive down greenhouse gas emissions associated with current levels of meat production.

## HOW DOES WWF EXPECT RETAILERS TO MEET THE 50:50 TARGET BY 2030 GIVEN WHERE CURRENT SALES ARE AGAINST THIS TARGET?

There is no one size fits all approach when it comes to delivering against the Basket outcome for diets. However, research suggests key pathways can drive progress towards the 50:50 split, such as combining a 'less and better' approach to meat, with increases in whole plant foods and meat and dairy alternatives. We anticipate that retailers could take measures across numerous pathways towards the 50:50 protein target.

Government interventions to support the shift is also expected to be important in driving change at pace. This includes sufficient and targeted investment in nature-friendly farming, including supporting the production of "better" meat products alongside rewarding farmers for climate and environmental actions.

Policies that support the normalisation of healthy sustainable diets will also accelerate action, for example through new standards for public procurement, whilst an enabling environment for businesses can be created through the terms of mandatory Transition Plans and standardised methods for environmental impact and food sales reporting.



## IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE PROGRESS TOWARDS A 50:50 SPLIT IN THE CONTEXT OF A COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS?

Affordability is a priority for people across the country and no doubt will continue to be across 2023 and beyond. Continuing to ensure customers can access affordable, healthy food is vital.

There is an opportunity for the retail sector to accelerate progress on the Diets target by supporting a shift to plant-based proteins, which have lower environmental impacts. Emerging evidence from Oxford University<sup>iii</sup> shows in high-income countries such as the UK, flexitarian diets (diets that include small amounts of meat and dairy) can reduce food costs by 14% - suggesting meat reduced diets could help pave the way to better outcomes for people and nature during the cost-of-living crisis and beyond.

Basing a diet around more plants and less meat is also consistent with the Eatwell guide recommended by the UK government (see below) which demonstrates the triple benefit moderating meat consumption could provide for people's budgets, the environment, and improved health outcomes.

In the context of the cost-of-living crisis, suitable meat-replacement choices could include tinned and frozen plants and plant proteins which have a short cooking time (and are therefore less energy intensive to prepare) such as peas, beans, and legumes. For those more resistant to these changes, approaches that make meat go further, for example replacing part of the meat in a dish with affordable plant proteins (chickpeas, lentils, beans) are likely to resonate with consumers who are looking to save money while still enjoying their favourite meals, although this needs further testing.



## HOW CAN WE LEVERAGE THE SUPPORT OF OUR NUTRITION TEAMS ON THE 50:50 BASKET TARGET?

Demonstrating how the WWF Basket target aligns with the delivery of healthy diets could help you gain support of your nutrition teams. Nutrition departments and functions often use UK dietary guidance – EatWell – as the reference for their work on healthy diets. This is aligned with the WWF Basket Diets target for a number of reasons.

Firstly, UK consumers are overconsuming protein by ~40-50% (~20-30g more per day) according to the recommended intake by EatWell guide designed by Public Health England<sup>iv</sup>. On average current protein intake comes primarily from meat and meat products<sup>v</sup>.

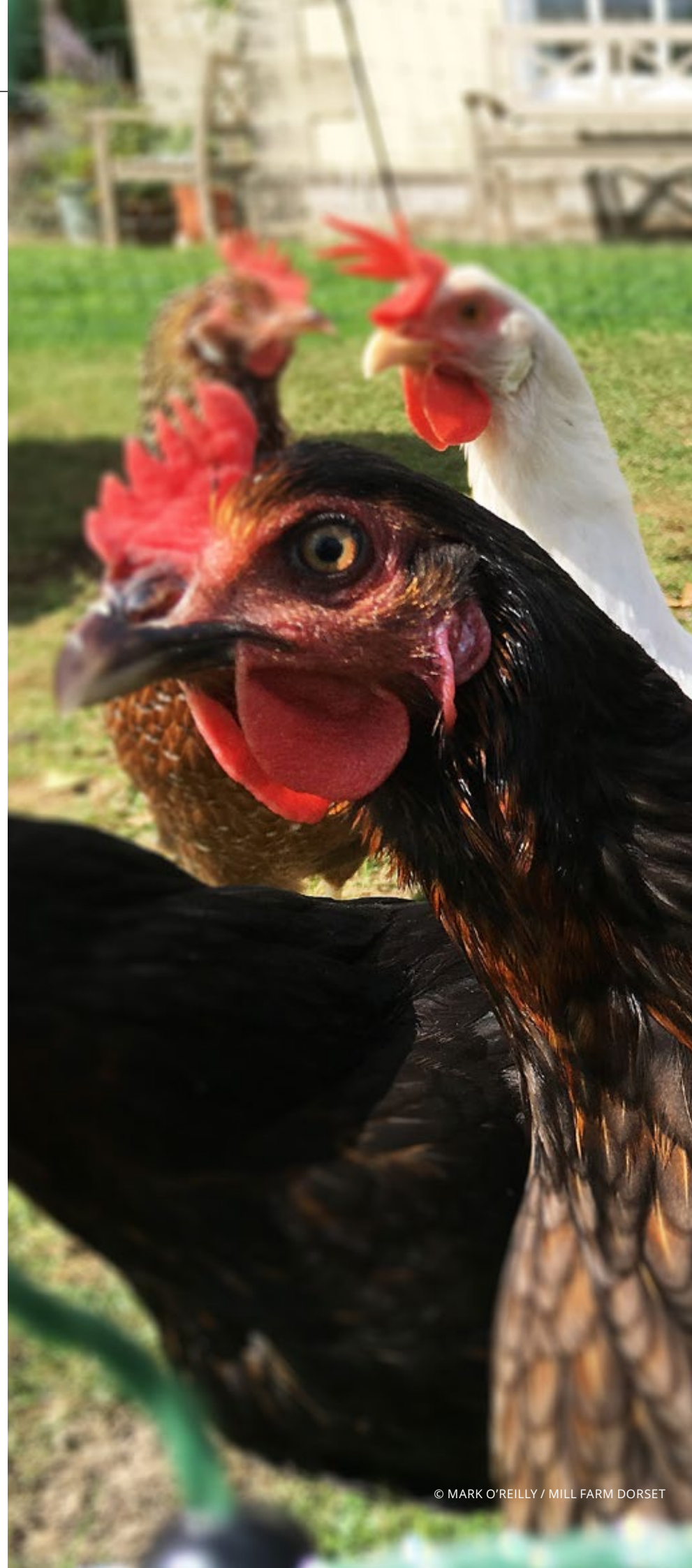
If the Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI) recommendation for daily protein intake of 0.75g protein per kg body weight per day was to be followed an adequate intake would be close to 56g/day and 45g/day for men and women, respectively<sup>vi</sup>. However, the current average daily intakes are 88g/day and 64g/day for men and women aged 19-64 years, respectively<sup>vii</sup>. Reducing sales of animal-based protein is in line with UK dietary guidance.

Secondly, UK government dietary guidance – EatWell - recommends a diet rich in fruit and vegetables. Most of the UK public are not currently eating enough fruit and vegetables. Dietary guidance recommends these foods should make up just over a third of the food we eat each day (or at least 5 portions)<sup>viii</sup>. Sustainable proteins – beans and legumes – are included in EatWell as one portion of vegetables per day. Encouraging higher purchasing of fruit and vegetables (including beans and legumes) in place of animal sourced proteins is aligned with the UK government guidance.

Finally, EatWell also recognises a key role for starchy foods – suggesting these foods should make up just over a third of the food we eat<sup>ix</sup>. This is because starchy foods are a good source of energy and the main source of a range of nutrients in our diet. The NHS recommends the starchy foods component of EatWell is made up of higher fibre or wholegrain foods, such as wholewheat pasta and brown rice, or skin on potatoes. Working with your nutrition teams to promote healthy starchy foods in replace of some animal sourced proteins, in line with the EatWell guide, is another way to reduce your volume of animal source foods (reflected in the Basket goal) and support wider nutrition goals.

Rebalancing the UK's average dinner plate substantially in favour of plants, beans and legumes, and starchy carbohydrates is in line with EatWell. This approach can infer a reduction in all meat to make more room on people's plates for these foods. By taking animal proteins out of people's shopping Baskets and replacing them with the other food groups recommended by EatWell means the total volume sales of animal proteins will reduce, which will be recorded in WWF Basket reporting and reflected in year-on-year WWF Basket results.

WWF-UK's research on healthy, sustainable diets demonstrates that it is possible to achieve a healthy, sustainable diet for the UK population without deviating too drastically from current diets and while meeting nutritional requirements<sup>x</sup>. This involves eating more vegetables, plant proteins and wholegrains and less animal protein and foods high in fat, salt and sugar, which is aligned with the Diets Metric.



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## OUR OFFERING ON PLANT RANGES IS GROWING, IS THIS NOT ENOUGH?

Expanding plant ranges is potentially a useful tool in delivering against the 50:50 split on protein, but increased sales of plant-based products must be at least matched by decreased sale of meat and poultry and dairy, otherwise the net effect will be increased protein sales overall.

Given on average the population of the UK overconsumes protein, further expansion in overall protein consumption to achieve the 50:50 split would not be compatible with nutritional guidance, or the ambition to halve the environmental impact of UK shopping baskets.

## IN THE PLANT FOODS CATEGORY, MANY OF THE PRODUCT OFFERINGS DO NOT INCLUDE PROTEIN AS A MACRONUTRIENT. HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN THE WWF BASKET?

Within the WWF Basket, we recognise the definitions we use need to encompass main protein types but also be pragmatic. When it comes to plant proteins, it's important to capture more than plant-based meat alternative products.

Companies should therefore include all products that fall within the protein and dairy segments of the Eatwell guide, encompassing fresh, frozen, tinned, processed. This would include legumes, beans and pulses as well as meat alternatives including soy (tempeh, tofu), wheat (seitan), pea protein, mycoprotein-based products.

Also included in the reporting would be dairy alternatives including plant milk and yoghurt, vegan cheese, butter and cream, even when these products are low/no protein containing foods because, within Eatwell, these foods are included in the protein and dairy segments of the plate.

## DATA SHOWS RED MEAT CONSUMPTION IS FALLING - WHY DOES WWF DIET TARGET FOCUS ON REDUCING MEAT SALES FURTHER, IF THERE IS ALREADY A DOWNWARD TREND?

A recent National Diet Survey suggested a ~17% decline in per capita meat consumption<sup>xi</sup>. According to the Lancet, the average UK meat consumption per capita per day has decreased in absolute terms for both red-meat and processed meat but there has been a corresponding increase in white-meat consumption.<sup>xii</sup>

While red meat production contributes the highest environmental impact in the animal meat category, a balanced, nutritious and sustainable protein split in the UK would require a careful reassessment of the rising trend in chicken consumption. Chicken now makes up over 50% of animal-based meat consumption with 95% of production from intensive farming<sup>xiii</sup>.

The UK currently imports around 3 million tonnes of soy annually, and it is estimated that up to 60% of soy is used by the poultry industry<sup>xiv</sup>. In addition to the detrimental impact of intensive chicken production on planetary health<sup>xv</sup> the rising cost of feedstock, labour shortages and other socio-political uncertainties affecting global feed and fertilizer supply chains now threaten the availability and cost advantage of chicken production.

A balanced protein shift should thus include a strategy to reduce, but also to decarbonise, chicken production and consumption<sup>xvi</sup>, as well as addressing the wider negative environmental impacts of chicken production by ensuring chicken is produced in line with "better" guidance, at a minimum.



## HOW IS ‘LESS AND BETTER’ MEAT REFLECTED IN THE DIETS TARGET?

‘Less’ in the WWF Basket is reflected by the need to reduce sales of meat and poultry, to move towards a 50:50 split on protein sales.

‘Better’ means ‘better’ environmental quality (e.g. looking across land use, biodiversity animal welfare, CO<sub>2</sub>e, fresh water, eutrophication).

For the full set of environmental quality standards associated with ‘better’ meat, please see Eating Better’s Sourcing Better framework<sup>xvii</sup>.

## HOW IS ‘BETTER MEAT’ REFLECTED IN THE DIETS GOAL FOR A 50:50 SPLIT ON ANIMAL/PLANT PROTEIN?

Rebalancing the UK’s average dinner plate substantially in favour of plants, and reducing all meat, not just red meat, will be needed to ensure a sustainable, healthy future.

Significant investment and innovation therefore needs to be directed towards driving behavioural and policy change towards protein diversification, namely increasing plant-based protein in our diets.

This consumption shift can be accomplished at the same time as prioritising and incentivising the ‘better’ production systems that value nature, animal welfare, and farmer livelihoods. Food businesses and government have a key joint responsibility to provide farmers with the economic and policy support that will enable a just transition to a ‘less and better’ system to occur – these two shifts sit hand in hand.

### **The emissions savings and nature benefits from ‘better’ meat will come from a range of factors including:**

- Reducing reliance on artificial fertiliser.
- Improved land use practices, for example rotational grazing or weaving in nature-rich habitats into farmland.
- Improved animal and soil health.
- Heritage breed and local feedstock.



## IF ‘BETTER’ IS NOT EXPLICITLY INCLUDED IN THE DIETS TARGET FOR 50:50 SPLIT, HOW IS RETAILER COMMITMENT TO BETTER STANDARDS RECOGNISED IN THE BASKET?

We account for better in the agriculture pillar of the WWF Basket which specifies ‘better’ through Eating Better Sourcing Better Framework<sup>xviii</sup>. The WWF Basket sets an outcome for 100% of eggs, meat and dairy sold – including as ingredients – to be sourced from ‘better’ and ‘Best’ categories of the Eating Better Sourcing Better Guide.

This is important because ‘basic’ meat doesn’t account for all the costs to the environment sustained in the production of that meat. Whilst we are therefore measuring the split of animal/plant proteins in the Diets target, ensuring production (and in turn consumption) of ‘better’ meat is also an integral outcome within the WWF Basket.

With regard to seafood, the WWF Basket sets an outcome for 100% of fish sourced from wild caught fisheries to adhere to the Seascope Approach, and for farmed seafood to be produced with a FFDR in meal and fish oil of <1.

## WHAT ROLE DO MEAT ALTERNATIVES PLAY IN THE 50:50 DIETS TARGET?

Meat alternatives are one of several options that could support retailers with the rebalancing of protein sales and making progress on the Diets target<sup>xix</sup>.

The emissions savings from meat alternatives come from direct like-for-like substitutes for meat which reduce the burden of increased protein production to meet the demands of UK’s growing population, as well as potentially reducing the land pressures of existing protein needs. However, meat alternatives are an emerging category of proteins and the overall environmental impacts are not yet documented at category level.

### **Initial evidence suggests emission reduction in this pathway could come from:**

- Direct replacements of meat and animal sourced proteins with meat alternatives (e.g. mycoprotein or plant-protein mince to replace beef mince as ingredient for sauces, pies etc.).
- Advanced plant based and fermentation technologies for meat replacers mean these can be blended into existing meat products, to replace a percentage of the meat these contain (e.g. blend plant-derived proteins with all meat and poultry-based convenience products such as patties, sausages, nuggets, strips, to reduce meat content).
- Advanced cell-based technologies for producing whole meat and premium cuts (e.g. steak).

These all have a potential role to play in alleviating the climate and nature impacts of the food we consume but should not be taken as the sole solution without also addressing the wider systemic impacts of the food system at large.

Furthermore, any shift towards meat alternatives or ‘future proteins’ must be balanced with products of suitable nutritional profiles (no red traffic lights, non-HFSS) and it’s vital to ensure increased acceptance of meat alternatives does not lead to poorer nutritional outcomes from product portfolios which are often higher in nutrients of concern, like salt, for instance.



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## HOW DOES WWF BELIEVE WHOLE FOOD PROTEINS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE 50:50 SPLIT?

The Diets metric aims to ensure that the reductions in animal proteins and introductions of new alternatives (including legumes, pulses) leads to a mix and match of nutritious and sustainable proteins within 50:50 split of plant and animal categories.

We have listened to expert feedback including “we don’t want to end up with a food system where we have replaced all our chickens with products made from alternatives high in cholesterol”. And “because most of the proteins we already consume in the UK are from low quality plant sources like corn, we need to also ensure whatever new plant proteins we introduce are of high nutritional quality else we will get rid of highly nutritious animal protein and replace them with low quality plant protein with high sugar and salt”.

In pathways towards a 50:50 split we advocate for a “nutritionally balanced mix” which therefore includes protein sources such as legumes and pulses to ensure that businesses can meet the nutritional requirements of customer groups.

Where whole grains are used as a proxy for protein in recipes and formulations, how can they be accounted for in the Disclosure?

WWF recognises the role of nutritionally balanced solutions to protein diversification, including pairing wholegrains with other plant protein sources to make complete protein meals (presence of all essential amino acids).

Wherever meat protein is substituted for plants, and data is provided at an ingredient (rather than product) level, this shift will be reflected with volume sales of meat reducing as more plant foods become included in dishes.

## HOW IS THE RETAILER ‘VEG PLEDGE’ WORK ACCOUNTED FOR IN THE PROTEIN DISCLOSURE GUIDANCE?

WWF recognises the critical role vegetables have to play in driving a healthy sustainable diet, and the need to increase vegetable consumption in the general population.

We note that over 100 organisations including major UK retailers have joined the Veg Pledge in line with Peas Please. This has seen retailers commit to increase sales of veg by adopting new measures which provides a series of 4 metrics specific to veg consumption.

Following a process of Basket consultation on the Diets metric, where overall retailers asked us to ensure we did not ask to duplicate reporting on targets already mandated elsewhere, the WWF Basket does not ask for specific reporting on vegetable sales.

Whilst we welcome the drive to increase vegetable consumption in the UK, the WWF Basket Diets metric is focused on areas where retailers can drive the biggest reductions in climate and nature impacts, by reducing sales of animal-based protein, through a shift towards plant-based proteins.

We recognise that increasing vegetable sales may contribute to a decline in meat and poultry sales, either directly, by adding to the bulk of vegetables on plate or, for example, by blending vegetables into ready-made meat-based products. Should this be the case, reporting on sales at an ingredient level will reflect declining meat sales, helping drive the shift to 50:50, without increasing overall volumes of protein consumed.

# THE SEVEN AREAS OF THE WWF BASKET



- i <https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/low-opportunity-cost-feed>
- ii [https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/future\\_of\\_feed\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/future_of_feed_full_report.pdf)
- iii <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-11-11-sustainable-eating-cheaper-and-healthier-oxford-study>
- iv British Nutrition Foundation. Data from: The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS). Retrieved from: <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthy-sustainable-diets/protein/?level=Health%20professional#:~:text=The%20RNI%20is%200.75g.and%20milk%20and%20milk%20products>.
- v [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00228-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00228-X/fulltext)
- vi Considering an average body weight of 75 and 60kg for men and women respectively
- vii <https://www.foodmanufacture.co.uk/Article/2021/03/08/There-is-more-to-eating-healthily-than-protein-intake>
- viii <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>
- ix <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>
- x <https://www.wwf.org.uk/what-we-do/livewell>
- xi <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2542-5196%2821%2900228-X>
- xii [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00228-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00228-X/fulltext)
- xiii [https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2020/EB\\_WeNeedToTalkAboutChicken\\_Feb20\\_A4\\_Final.pdf](https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/2020/EB_WeNeedToTalkAboutChicken_Feb20_A4_Final.pdf)
- xiv <https://www.eating-better.org/news-and-reports/reports/we-need-to-talk-about-chicken/>
- xv <https://www.eating-better.org/news-and-reports/reports/we-need-to-talk-about-chicken/>
- xvi <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/analyst-insight-in-a-flap-about-poultry-feed-demand>
- xvii [https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/Sourcing\\_Better\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/Sourcing_Better_Framework.pdf)
- xviii [https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/Sourcing\\_Better\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.eating-better.org/uploads/Documents/Sourcing_Better_Framework.pdf)
- xix <https://www.wwf.org.uk/our-reports/plant-based-alternatives-technical>





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