

GEARING UP FOR MEAT AND DAIRY ALTERNATIVES

POLICY BRIEFING

Britain is a global leader in bioengineering and food technology. Meat and dairy alternatives can play a key role in a more sustainable future with extensive domestic and global market potential. Ensuring the UK remains at the forefront as a global innovator with a thriving meat and dairy alternatives (MDA) sector should be a major priority for policy makers and regulators.

For decades the UK has been a leader in meat and dairy alternatives (MDA), with the world's largest production facility located in the east of England. The MDA industry is poised to be a global pioneer producing the next generation of low carbon, sustainable food products. Continued growth within this sector will depend on diversification of plant-protein crops and further development of precision fermentation and cell-cultivation technology. However, global competition is fierce, and many countries are edging ahead of the UK with products nearing entry into the retail market.



A Department for Science, Industry and Technology (DSIT) £2 billion package is now firmly behind the UK MDA sector, with new job creation and R&D funding adding a new strand to the economy, however, regulatory action is needed to further catalyse this emerging opportunity.

Today around half of households purchase meat and/or dairy alternative products with a 115% increase in household consumption in under 10 years. Market research suggests that the new generation cell-cultivated meat and other products may have significant market potential.

Plant-based alternatives have achieved normalisation, and market research suggests similar public interest in cell cultivated (lab grown) products where they are perceived as safe and well-regulated. For MDA products classified as 'novel foods', around 70% of people are either eager or willing to try them. Men are more open to cultivated meat, with 24% more likely to buy compared to just 9% of women. Crucially, a quarter of those unwilling to try cultivated meat would consider it if they were confident it is safe and/or well regulated.

Making Britain truly competitive in this economically important arena, worth a cautious estimate of 20% of global meat sales by 2035, means addressing two main barriers:

NOVEL FOOD REGULATION

Swift and thorough regulation will help get MDA products to market and catalyse the public's interest and confidence in them.

Regulators should adopt a fast-track regulatory framework. The FSA should focus on 'quick win' reforms of a pre-market authorisation process that would improve confidence and trust in the novel foods. The FSA should learn from the practices of regulators in more innovation-focused countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and the USA.

FAIR COMPETITION

Ensuring a level playing field for MDA products through parity labelling is the key to ensuring market growth and UK competitiveness.

Clear labeling of the health and sustainability benefits of MDA products will help shape consumer behaviours. Regulators should establish a fit-for-purpose framework that entails clear communication of the nature of products and that corresponds to consumer need for information regarding the sustainability and health benefits of products. DEFRA should remove existing restrictions on the use of conventional terminology such as 'milk' and 'yogurt' provided, on alternative products, providing that clear plant-based or novel labelling conventions are used in conjunction.

What is the Vegetarian Society doing?

We are calling for an industry-wide focus on the health and sustainability profiles of meat and dairy alternatives. As a member of the UK Plant-Based Foods Alliance, we take an active role in calling for healthy formulations of products across the UK meat and dairy alternative sector. We are working with technical committees at a national and global level to advocate for clean label approaches in product development and the rationalisation of fortification in plant-milks and other dairy alternatives. We aim to highlight and encourage replication of best-practice in the development of new plant-protein products, and we support effective regulation of novel proteins. We also work to encourage and expand the range of meat and dairy alternatives used in public sector catering through our outward-facing campaigns. Wider use of healthy, low carbon alternatives to meat and dairy can help the public sector meet their sustainability targets and healthy eating catering goals.

We are currently commissioning research aimed at exploring the health and sustainability benefits of MDA and the untapped potential in novel proteins, precision processes and micro-technologies that would expand and improve the range of products available.

Why are meat and dairy alternatives so important for health and the climate crisis?

How we produce and consume food is contributing to a triple planetary environmental crisis: the climate emergency, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, with farmed animal production and consumption playing a key role in all three.

It is a fact that globally, consumption of meat and dairy is rising and within the UK people value these familiar foods which are culturally ingrained in our diets. It follows, therefore, that meat and dairy alternatives that replicate both look, taste and texture could encourage dietary change. Meat and dairy alternatives can be healthier by design and new technology is making these products more attractive to consumers. Investing in a rapidly growing UK MDA sector could deliver substantial economic, environmental and public health outcomes.

Consumer Trends

It's a fact that, when it comes to food, our consumption patterns are changing. The number of vegans and vegetarians has increased by between two and four-fold in the last 10 years, and more than half of Gen Z (citizens born 1997-2012) could be eating a meat-free diet by 2025. As many as 6.4m people in the UK in 2024 intend to adopt a meat-free diet in the coming year.

KEY NUMBERS:

Targets

for meat and dairy reduction in the UK:



→ **20%** by 2030

→ **35%** by 2050
(for meat reduction)

Up to **90%**

Amount of greenhouse gas emissions reduction of plant-based meat (compared to conventional meat).

1/4

of hard-to-reach consumers would buy novel foods if well-regulated for safety

The UK is the second largest MDA market in Europe.



A record **£964m**

spent by UK consumers on plant-based meat and dairy in 2022.

By 2030, the MDA sector could provide

25,000
new jobs



We would be delighted to arrange a full briefing with you.

Please contact:

Jen Elford

Head of Policy and External Affairs

jen@vegsoc.org

0161 925 2000

www.linkedin.com/in/jen-elford-326b1b154/

Richard McIlwain

CEO

richard@vegsoc.org

0161 925 2000

www.linkedin.com/in/richard-mcilwain-37790431



About the Vegetarian Society

The Vegetarian Society is the UK's original and leading voice for the vegetarian and vegan movement. Our aim is to inspire and support everyone to move towards more sustainable and cruelty-free choices in their lives because kindness counts.

Through our education and engagement programmes to campaigning, policy work and product accreditation, we strive for a world without animal cruelty.

We do this by using our knowledge and expertise to work across our membership, communities, business, government, and likeminded organisations to help change behaviour, drive innovation and expand food choice across the industry.

In doing so we continue to build on our 175+ year legacy to grow a community driven by a collective desire to secure a kinder, healthier and more sustainable future for every life on earth.

REFERENCES

Climate Change Committee (2020) Sixth Carbon Budget

www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Policies-for-the-Sixth-Carbon-Budget-and-Net-Zero.pdf

GFI (2023) Sustainable Proteins in the UK: An Ecosystems Review

https://gfi-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/UK-ecosystem-report_Full_25aug23_final.pdf

DSIT (2023) National Strategy for Engineering Biology

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-vision-for-engineering-biology/national-vision-for-engineering-biology>

UNEP (2023) An Assessment of Alternatives to Conventional Animal Products

<https://www.unep.org/resources/whats-cooking-assessment-potential-impacts-selected-novel-alternatives-conventional>

Witte, B (2021) The Protein Transformation

www.bcg.com/publications/2021/the-benefits-of-plant-based-meats

IPSOS (2022) Almost half of UK adults set to cut intake of animal products

www.ipsos.com/en-uk/almost-half-uk-adults-set-cut-intake-animal-products

Bryant, C (2020) Consumer Acceptance of Cultured Meat

www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/10/15/5201



Publication date: March 2024

Review date: June 2024

Registered Charity Number: 259358 (England and Wales).
Registered Company Number: 00959115 (England and Wales).