



Talking About Sustainable Food:

A Communications Guide



July 2023

1. Overview



The global food system is a major driver of climate change. Food production accounts for one-quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and takes up half of the planet's habitable surface, and biodiversity of priority species has fallen more than 70% since 1970 (Dimbleby 2021).

Locally, the Oxfordshire Food Strategy sets out a vision in which everyone in Oxfordshire can enjoy the healthy and sustainable food they need every day. To achieve this vision, we need to ensure that we waste less food, and that the food that we do produce and consume has less negative impact on the planet.

It is widely recognised that we need an urgent focus to shifting to healthy, sustainable diets to support a nature-positive net-zero transition in the UK, and crucially, that these healthy and sustainable diets should be affordable and accessible for everyone.



What do we mean by a sustainable diet?

Guidelines from the World Health Organisation (WHO) show what we mean by a sustainable diet:

- Includes wholegrains, legumes, nuts and an **abundance and variety** of fruits and vegetables.
- Can include **moderate amounts** of eggs, dairy, poultry and fish, and small amounts of red meat.
- Minimises the use of **antibiotics and hormones** in food production.
- Minimises the use of **plastics and derivatives** in food packaging.
- Reduces **food loss and waste**.



Approach of this toolkit

This toolkit sets out ways to have positive, helpful conversations about sustainable food, and is broken down into three key drivers for behaviour change around diet: **Health, Environment and Cost**. It is based on research that has been distilled into this guide by Good Food Oxfordshire, and aimed at anyone advocating for food-related shifts that can deliver better outcomes for **our health, our planet and our communities**. The toolkit doesn't provide all the answers, but gives a framework and approach, to help guide discussions around sustainable diets.



2. Tips for improving communications



Talk positively about realistic, sustainable solutions and show how we can affect change.



Use statistics and data to back up your argument, but use them in a familiar or relatable context, for example by linking to the local picture around Oxfordshire.



Think of the motivations of the audience to change their behavior, for example would they be most concerned about the environment, about their health or about cost? Appeal to your audience by showing why eating sustainably is important for this reason.



Think about barriers that might stop people being able to change behavior in terms of eating sustainably and address these (time, money, access, social/ physical environment, limited options available).



3. Show why it matters



Eating sustainably can be better for your health.



Consuming less red and processed meat and more plant-based foods such as vegetables, beans, soy, and nuts can offer potential **health benefits** by lowering the risks of some diet-related diseases.

- Eating less meat and more plant-based foods, such as vegetables, beans, and nuts, can improve heart health, promote kidney health, and reduce the risk of heart disease.
- Switching your diet from meat to plant-based protein like beans or tofu can decrease your risk of getting type 2 diabetes.
- A diet high in red and processed meat increases the risk of some cancers, such as bowel cancer.

Eating sustainably can be better for the environment.

Reducing consumption of meat can have **environmental benefits** by reducing the production of greenhouse gases that impact climate change. It can also help lessen the demand for environmental resources such as land, water, and energy:

- Agriculture is a crucial driver of climate change, responsible for around one quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.
- Vegetable proteins have lower carbon footprints than dairy and meat.
- Diets with a greater proportion of fruit and vegetables have lower emissions, reduced water use, less land cleared for agriculture and less fertiliser use.

Eating sustainably can be cheaper.



In high-income countries like the US and the UK, vegan and vegetarian diets could have **cost benefits**. A global study by Oxford University found that vegan and vegetarian diets were the cheapest option in high-income countries:

- Vegan diets were the most affordable and reduced food costs by up to one third, followed by vegetarian diets.
- Flexitarian diets with low amounts of meat and dairy reduced costs by 14%.



Scan the QR code on the last page for sources.

4. Give solutions to the problem and show change is possible

Reduce the amount of animal products in our diet and replace them with plant-based alternatives. There are healthy and sustainable alternative sources of protein, for example **pulses and beans, nuts and seeds, wholegrains, soy and green vegetables.**



Reduce food waste by planning meals, using your freezer, labelling food and accessing your local community food larder or fridge. **Love Food Hate Waste** have plenty of tips for reducing food waste.



Think about energy-saving cooking techniques, such as **batch cooking** or **using slow cookers.**

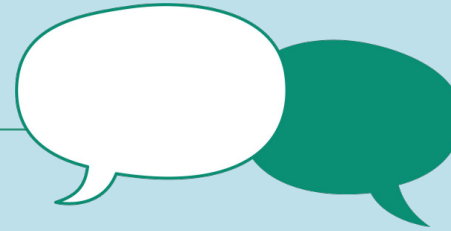
When eating meat and dairy, choose better quality meat and dairy from low-intensity farms with higher animal welfare. Look for these labels: **Organic, pasture-fed, LEAF marque, RSPCA-Assured, free range, Pasture-for-Life.**

Eat fewer ultra-processed foods which are typically high in salt, fat and sugar and usually **input-intensive** in terms of production.

Encourage retailers to source from sustainable production systems, for example using the **Better by Half** roadmap from Eating Better.



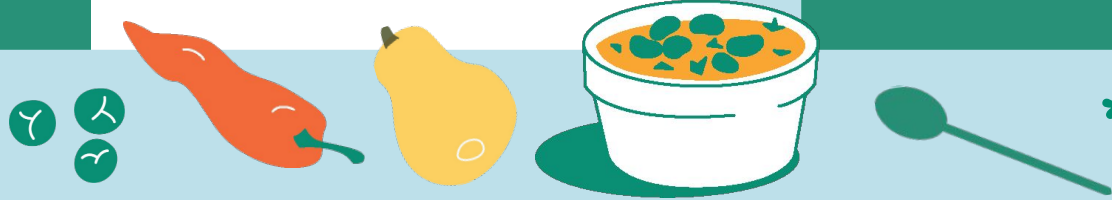
5. Putting it all together. Two examples:



Focusing on global emissions for an audience who is motivated by environmental impact.

Promoting protein alternatives to someone who is motivated by the impact on their health.

<p>Explain why it matters to your target audience.</p>	<p>The meat industry is a significant driver of global emissions which cause climate change.</p>	<p>Explain why it matters to your target audience.</p>	<p>Eating a lot of red and processed meat can lead to an increased risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer.</p>
<p>Use reliable and reliable data to strengthen your argument.</p>	<p>Evidence from the National Food Strategy shows that greenhouse gas emissions for beef and lamb are higher than any other protein.</p>	<p>Use reliable and reliable data to strengthen your argument.</p>	<p>The NHS recommends reducing meat intake to 70g per day to reduce the risk of bowel cancer.</p>
<p>Give relevant solutions and show how change is possible.</p>	<p>Reducing your meat and dairy intake and enjoying more plant-based meals is one of the best ways to reduce emissions.</p>	<p>Give relevant solutions and show how change is possible.</p>	<p>There are plenty of healthy and delicious plant-based alternatives, for example beans are a cheap, sustainable and nutritious form of protein.</p>



* Scan the QR code on the last page for sources.

6. Myth-busting some common misunderstandings around sustainable eating:



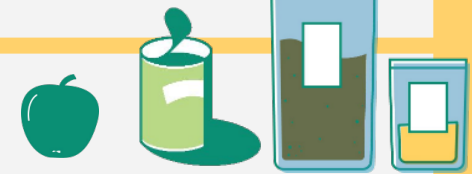
Eating sustainably is more expensive, for example eating locally grown, organic food or shopping in farmers markets. I can't afford it.



- Vegetarian and vegan diets have been shown to be cheaper than diets rich in meat.
- There are low-cost options available for a sustainable diet, for example tinned and frozen fruit and veg.
- Focusing on minimising waste and using community larders and fridges is a good way to cut costs.

Meat and dairy alternatives are ultra-processed and may incur high emissions due to processing, packing and air miles.

- Some meat alternatives are processed however generally speaking they are lower in terms of global carbon emissions than red meat.
- You can eat a variety of fruit and veg, beans and pulses and avoid processed meat alternatives altogether.



Deforestation and the use of natural resources such as water and land are also used for plant crops such as soy.

- The biggest cause of deforestation is to clear space for cattle ranching, and then to grow soy which is used by the farming sector as a livestock feed for chickens, pigs and other animals. Soy production for direct human consumption is a more sustainable use of land and resources.

Livestock are an essential part of the ecosystem.

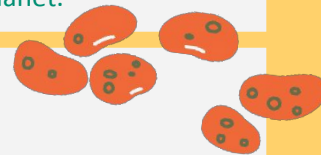


- Livestock can play a key role in various ecosystems - such as regenerative, mixed farming systems - recycling nutrients and improving soil health. However poorly managed livestock farming, including overgrazing and deforestation, can lead to environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Supporting local high welfare, pasture-based systems will improve both our diet and the planet.



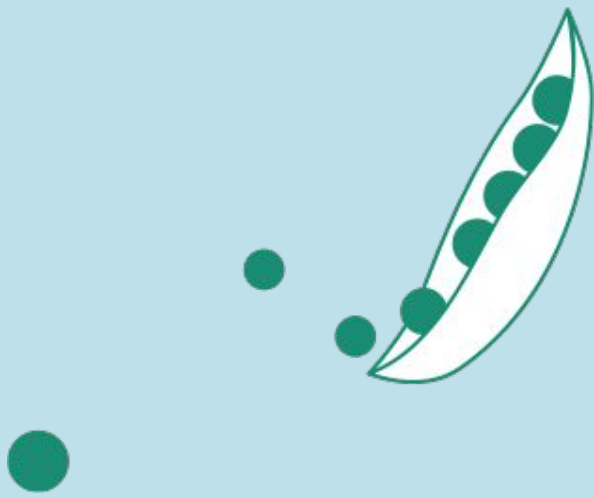
I won't get enough protein from a vegetarian / vegan diet.

- There are many alternative sources of protein such as beans, oats, pulses, nuts and seeds.



Does eating sustainably mean I have to go vegan / vegetarian?

- No! You can eat a sustainable diet by eating smaller quantities and better quality meat and dairy.



**Scan QR code for
sources, tools and
references:**

