

'Eat Balanced' issues support

Supporting information for potential issues in response to the campaign of January 2021.

Setting the scene

January has become one of the most prolific months for anti-meat and milk messaging, particularly on social media, due to the growing 'Veganuary' campaign. Given this, it is vital to note the campaign is to launch during a very busy and noisy period. Response from communities who oppose meat and dairy is fully expected, no matter the message.

We advise to focus on the facts, to remain objective and to avoid head to head discussions, due to the highly emotive nature of the topic. By highlighting the nutritional, quality and sustainability benefits of red meat and milk produced in Britain, the campaign aims to encourage those who choose to include animal products in their diets, to continue to do so.

Negative response

As with previous AHDB campaigns, it is high likely there will be some anti-meat and dairy attention on the campaign. With the expectation of online comments, backlash and hashtag hijacking or creations. There may even be a counter campaign created as seen with Milk Your Moments.

To ensure a full understanding of the responsive narrative, the campaign will be fully monitored by AHDB with daily review and consideration for any further actions.

AHDB as a trusted source

Whilst AHDB is governed by legislation, mitigation actions have been put into place to ensure AHDB is understood to be a trusted source. This is key as AHDB is not a consumer facing organisation and the campaign is to be branded with the AHDB logo.

A designated page on the [weeatbalanced](#) website outlines clearly who AHDB is and why consumers can trust the information is reputable. Should any questions arise about the credibility of the campaign and the information, navigation to this part of the webpage is advised.

Counter arguments

The evidence to support all four statements is included in the evidence dossier document, however we have listed the most likely counter arguments that may arise.

- 1. Statement: 'Red meat and dairy contain vitamin B₁₂, an essential nutrient not naturally present in a vegan diet'**
Counter: 'Animal products only contain B₁₂ because they are fed B₁₂ supplements'

Vitamin B₁₂ is produced by animals, specifically by the bacteria found in their guts.¹ Vitamin B₁₂ is found in almost all foods of animal origin, such as meat and milk, but not naturally in plant foods.²

While livestock are sometimes fed B₁₂ supplements this is for their own health and wellbeing, as ailments can cause gut bacteria imbalances and thus lower B₁₂ production.

- 2. Statement: ‘Evidence suggests 1 in 4 British women have a low intake of iron’**
Counter: ‘There are plenty of plant based iron rich food’

The British Nutrition Foundation recognises that haem or animal derived iron is more bio-available than non-haem or plant based iron, making it easier to adsorb by the body.³

- 3. Statement: ‘Red meat and dairy have world class food and farming standards’**
Counter: ‘Britain is not the best in the world for food and farming standards, particularly with welfare breaches seen in the press.’

The way in which food is produced in the UK is regulated by a number of different organisations, ensuring from farm to pack, it’s safe, of excellent quality and produced to high standards. Legislation, the Food Standards Agency, Trading Standards and assurance schemes such as Red Tractor and others, ensure standards are met. In 2019 an independent review⁴ of Red Tractor standards concluded the depth and breadth of the 1000 standards are world leading, with the author Dr Birnie stating “As a complete scheme Red Tractor is the highest performing on an international basis.” Red Tractor covers 46% of total agricultural output.⁵

- 4. Statement: ‘Red meat and dairy from Britain are among the most sustainable in the world’**
5. Counter: ‘Maybe it is but their carbon footprints are still higher than alternatives and methane is the most potent greenhouse gas’

Alternatives do show to have lower carbon footprints, however wider environmental implications have not yet been fully considered.

1. Livestock produce much more than just food, from medicines and fabric softener to glue and waterproofing agents, they are in a huge number of products. Consideration hasn’t been taken on the impact of these production processes and the impact of animal free replacements.
2. Land and water is different across the world, so whilst livestock require large amounts in comparison to plant based foods, they are often being used for their ideal purpose. For example, over 60% of UK farmland can’t viably sustain crops and we get a large amount of rainfall. Optimal food production from these available resources involves livestock. Whereas alternatives, particularly those produced abroad could be relying on processed/tap water and bio sensitive land.
3. Carbon footprints of food is limiting, they fail to include waste, travel and packaging. They are also calculated by weight, not reflecting portion size or most importantly nutrient value.⁶
4. Livestock also utilise much of our food production and processing waste, food we’ve taken the time and resources to produce but have no human value. Things like cereal crops waste, oils processing waste,

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29216732/>

² <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/nutritionscience/nutrients-food-and-ingredients/vitamins.html?limit=1&start=10>

³ <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/nutritionscience/nutrients-food-and-ingredients/minerals-and-trace-elements.html?start=8>

⁴ <https://assurance.redtractor.org.uk/media/news/red-tractor-leads-international-benchmarking-study>

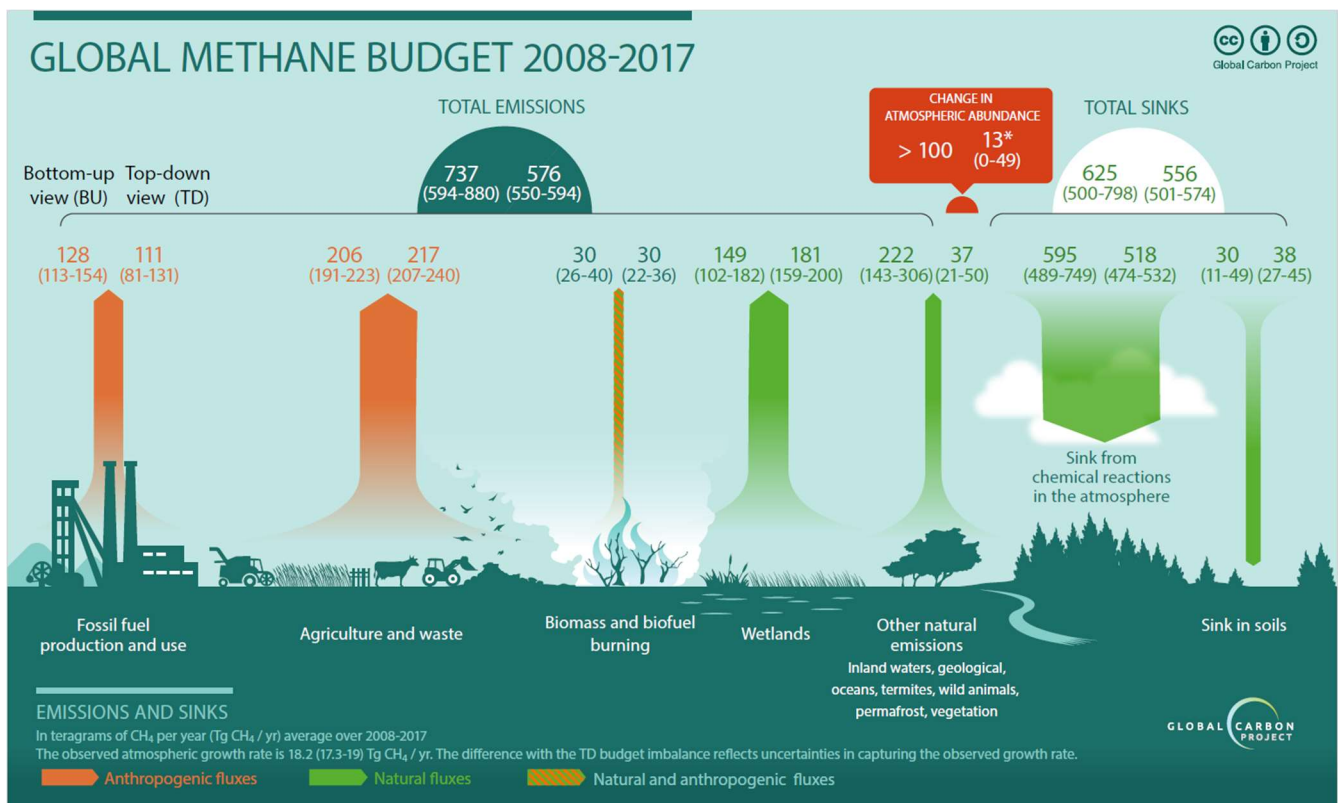
⁵ <https://redtractor.org.uk/press/creating-world-class-standards-for-uk-farming-and-beyond/>

⁶ <https://foodandnutritionresearch.net/index.php/fnr/article/view/670>

spent grain from brewing and vegetable peeling's and pods. Food waste would inevitably increase without livestock farming.

- Finally, agriculture has always been a dance between livestock and crop production - they are intrinsically linked. Little knowledge or research is in place to understand the impact 100% crop farming would have on the environment.

The vast majority of carbon emissions from livestock is methane (CH₄), produced from cattle and sheep. While methane (CH₄) is 28 times more warming than carbon dioxide (CO₂), it has a much shorter lifespan of decades (CO₂ is around 1000 years). The global methane budget shows that methane emissions are similar to total methane absorbed.



7 British farmers are working hard to cut emissions and aim to be net zero by 2040, along with all agriculture.

⁷ <https://www.globalcarbonproject.org/methanebudget/>

Red meat & dairy FAQ

land	All sheep and the vast majority of beef cattle and dairy cows spend spring to Autumn outside, grazing the grasslands which cover 60% of farm land. Much of this land is 'less favoured land', land deemed unsuitable for commercial crops. Cattle and sheep allow us to utilise this land to provide nutritious quality food and safeguard and maintain it for wildlife.
water	Over 90% of the water footprint of British cattle and sheep is met by rainwater, with less than 1% tap water. For dairy cows and pigs, rainwater makes up over 80%.
feed	Cattle, sheep and pigs play a vital role within sustainable food production because they eat so much of the plants and food we can't eat. Cattle and sheep are epic up-cyclers, converting grass and crop waste – stuff we can't eat – into delicious and nutritious milk and meat! Pigs eat a huge range of food production waste – or bi-products. Without livestock, millions of tonnes of food we take the time and resources to grow and produce would simply go to waste.
GHG	Livestock receive a lot of attention for their carbon footprint, yet in the UK they only emit 6% of total emissions. In fact, they are one of the smallest emitters. Globally, the FAO states livestock are responsible for around 5% of direct emissions. The carbon footprint of British milk is a third below the global average and beef and lamb is almost half.
sustainability	The UK is one of the most sustainable places in the world to produce red meat and milk because grass and rainwater are plentiful. The field's cattle and sheep live on also maintain animals and plants with habitats while soaking up carbon from the atmosphere. Livestock manure is also vital for fertilising our crops.
positive environmental impact	Carbon sequestration: absorbing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and storing them in vegetation and the soil. Preventing topsoil depletion: returning livestock to arable land which has poor soil is the only way to halt erosion and rebuild soil. Sustainable food source: ruminants graze the grassland that occupy 60% of UK farmland and pigs convert our food waste by-products into nutritious food. Biodiversity: outdoor production enables livestock and wildlife to coexist, maintaining habitats and aiding biodiversity. Rural socioeconomics: livestock farming brings income and employment to rural economies and livelihoods.
plastic	Processors have taken huge steps to reduce plastic use and continue to do so. Watch this video to find out about plastic use in milk bottles: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLPMV3-lj_o

veganism	Depending on how much meat and dairy you eat and how it is produced, studies suggest removing them from western diets could reduce personal carbon footprints by about 2–4%. ⁸ Changing the way we travel and power/heat our homes would have a significantly greater impact. ⁹
alternatives	Current calculations show alternatives have a lower carbon footprint. However, many wider environmental impacts aren't considered such as transport, resource sensitivity, emissions of replacement goods (after all livestock make much more than just meat and dairy), food waste and much more.
male dairy calves	The welfare of calves is at the heart of all good dairy farms and the industry is committed to rearing calves with care and securing their place in the beef supply chain. In general, males are raised in nursery areas with calves their own age or with their mothers, to then enter the beef supply chain.
cruelty/abuse	Cruelty has no place within British livestock farming, animal welfare is protected in law and aims to prevent cruelty. Any violations should be reported and are punishable by fines, bans and prison sentences. Find out more here: https://bit.ly/2Zd9uO9
calf separation	It is a highly debated topic; however, experts recommend cows and calves are separated early to keep any stress to a minimum. Calves are separated to ensure they receive the very best care to assure their health and welfare.
anti-biotic use	Farmers can only ever use antibiotics prescribed by a vet for treating ill animals, and no milk or meat from treated animal is allowed to go to people. Farmers have been working hard to reduce the number of antibiotic treatments needed.
slaughter	There are strict regulations in the UK to avoid any stress, pain or suffering when an animal is killed. Trained vets oversee this and all employees are licensed and trained. Since 2018, all slaughterhouses in England have CCTV. Read more here: https://bit.ly/382eS9L
artificial insemination	As the semen used in artificial insemination is screened, it gives farmers access to the best genetics to improve health, fertility and longevity. It also ensures the safety of farm workers and cows.
general welfare	Farmers take great care of their animals, not just because it's the law, or because their livelihoods depend on it, but because they care and take pride in what they do.
growth hormones	There are no growth hormones present in any milk or meat produced in the UK; they have been banned in agriculture since the 1980s.
nutrition	Lean red meat (beef, lamb and pork) is a good source of high quality protein, vitamins and minerals (iron, zinc, vitamin D and B12 and many others). Milk and dairy contain a number of important nutrients, including potassium, calcium, protein, phosphorus and vitamin B12.

If you have any questions, concerns or required further support or information please contact lisa.bray@ahdb.org.uk.

⁸ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2019/07/25/vegetarianism-climate-change-meat-vegan-livestock-column/1804090001/>

⁹ <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa7541>

