

## EU urged to adopt meat tax to tackle climate emergency

Levy would help offset impact of farming by raising price of steak in UK by 25%, says report

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A joint of British beef. The levy on pork and chicken would be lower owing to their smaller environmental impact. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty

A “sustainability charge” on meat to cover its environmental damage could raise billions to help farmers and consumers produce and eat better food, according to a report.

The levy, which would increase the price of a steak by about 25%, would be phased in over the next decade. The report focuses on EU countries and was produced for the [Tapp Coalition](#) of health, environment and animal welfare organisations. It says “fair pricing” for meat should be included in the forthcoming European “green new deal” and so-called farm to fork strategy.

The report, produced by environmental research group CE Delft, analysed the costs of greenhouse gas emissions, other air and water pollution, and losses of wildlife associated with livestock production. It estimated that covering these costs would increase the price of beef by €0.47 (40p) per 100g. This would increase the cost of a [227g supermarket steak in the UK](#) by about 25%.

The levy on pork and chicken would be lower owing to their smaller environmental impact, at €0.36 (31p)/100g and €0.17 (14p)/100g respectively. The report suggests such charges could reduce consumption of beef in the EU by 67%, pork by 57% and chicken by 30% by 2030.

As well as reducing emissions by 120m tonnes a year, the charges would raise €32bn a year for EU member states, according to the report.

The Tapp Coalition said about half of this should be given to help farmers move their production away from meat, which could increase individual farm incomes by thousands of euros per year.

The rest should be used to reduce the cost of fruit and vegetables, support poorer families and help developing countries deal with the climate crisis.

Jerome Remmers, a Tapp Coalition director, said: “Europeans eat roughly 50% more meat than is recommended in dietary health guidelines. [So] we could also [save billions of euros every year](#) in lower healthcare costs.”

In November, three [European health associations wrote to Frans Timmermans](#), the senior European commissioner leading the green new deal initiative. They said: “Numerous studies in recent years have shown that a shift to healthy, more plant-rich diets can deliver important health, environmental and economic benefits.”

A carbon tax on high-impact food is also backed by a [second report](#), from the Behavioural Insights Team (Bit), a social purpose company part-owned by the UK government. It further suggests making plant-based food the default choice at catered events or on flights.

Recent research has shown that a [huge reduction in meat-eating](#) in rich nations is essential to tackle the climate emergency. Other work indicates that avoiding meat and dairy products is the [single biggest way to reduce your environmental impact](#) on the planet.

“Including the environmental cost of animal protein in the price is a crucial element of meeting EU targets for climate, biodiversity, public health, and animal welfare,” said Prof Pier Vellinga at Wageningen University in the Netherlands and chair of the Tapp Coalition.

The report from Bit, also known as the “nudge unit” set up by David Cameron in 2010, examines how governments, the food industry and campaign groups can help shift diets away from meat.

As well as supporting a carbon tax on high-impact food, it says governments could lead by example, by “removing or reducing unsustainable foods from public canteens

in hospitals, schools and government offices”. It also says practical cooking skills could be taught in schools and colleges.

Food companies could make plant-based products the default choice, for example at catered events or on flights, the Bit report said. It also suggested marketing plant-based food as “delicious, normal, and satisfying, not as light, abstemious, or overtly healthy or vegetarian”. Another proposal is placing veggie burgers alongside their meat counterparts instead of separating them on menus or in supermarket aisles.

The report said campaign groups could reduce the perceived complexity of sustainable eating by promoting clear rules of thumb, such as “red meat’s a treat”.

Toby Park, the head of energy and sustainability at Bit, said: “Governments, industry and consumers around the world are more aware than ever of the need to live within our planet’s means.

“While some of the solutions will come from technical advancements, there is huge potential and need to reduce our environmental impacts with some simple behaviour changes.”

In the UK, the National Farmers’ Union says agriculture can become climate neutral by 2040 without cutting beef production. Instead, it says three-quarters of farming emissions can be offset by growing fuel for power stations and then capturing and burying the carbon dioxide.