

P-05-1452 Meat-free Monday in every school in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 16 Medi 2024
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Reference: SR24/8973-7

Petition Number: P-05-1452

Petition title: Meat-free Monday in every school in Wales

Text of petition: We are calling for the following: Meat-free Monday in every school in Wales for environmental reasons, and for the welfare of animals.

It reduces your carbon footprint and saves the lives of animals. Additionally, it takes 2,350 litres of water to create one beef burger, so this will save a load of water.

1. Background

1.1. Healthy Eating in Schools

The Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009 was passed by the Senedd in recognition that the food and drink provided in schools can make a positive contribution towards giving children and young people a healthy balanced diet and encouraging them to develop good eating habits.



The [Healthy Eating in Schools \(Nutritional Standards and Requirements\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2013](#), which were made under the Measure, set out what food and drink may be provided in maintained schools. The Regulations aim to promote healthy eating and consumption of a varied diet to get the right amount of nutrients to promote growth and good health.

The Welsh Government issued [statutory guidance in 2014](#) to local authorities and school governing bodies on how they should meet their responsibilities under the Measure and the Regulations. To comply with the Regulations, school meals must provide a balanced meal which meets [approximately one third of recommended daily nutrient requirements](#).

1.1.a. Meal content, including references to meat

The Regulations set out the type of food and drink which may be provided during the school day and define the nutrient content of school lunches. Food from [four categories, one of which is 'Meat, fish and other non-dairy sources of protein'](#) must form part of the school lunch provided on each school day. This can include meat, fish, eggs, nuts, pulses and beans (other than green beans).

The guidance [distinguishes between 'meat cuts' and 'meat products'](#). Chicken drumsticks, thighs, breast meat, joints, cooked sliced meat, bacon; mince meat, and lamb/pork chops are listed as examples of meat cuts. Burgers, hamburgers, chopped meat (finely chopped processed meat, e.g. canned chopped pork and ham), corned meat, sausage (including frankfurter/hotdogs and pepperoni), sausage meat, sausage rolls, meat balls, link chipolata and individual meat pies and puddings are listed as meat products.

Under the statutory guidance:

- Meat cuts must be offered on at least two days per week in primary schools and at least three days per week in secondary schools.
- Meat products must not be offered more than twice per week in both primary and secondary schools.

To monitor compliance, school governing bodies are required to provide information in their annual report on the action taken to promote healthy eating and drinking by pupils at their schools. Estyn is required to report to the Welsh Government on the action taken by schools. For background information on the impact of food and drink on pupil outcomes, see this [Senedd Research article](#) from May 2019.

1.2. Free School Meals.

In its Programme for Government and Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Government committed to extending free school meals to all primary school pupils. In February 2024, the then Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, indicated that the roll out was on track to deliver by September 2024. On 3 September (at the start of the new school year), the Welsh Government declared that the roll out was “complete”.

In secondary schools, the Welsh Government continues to fund local authorities to provide free school meals to those pupils eligible via benefit related criteria.

The requirements of the 2009 Measure, the 2013 Regulations and the 2014 statutory guidance apply equally to all school meals, whether provided free or purchased by parents.

1.3. Meat-free campaigns

In 2021, the children’s television programme Blue Peter urged its viewers to eat less meat as part of a climate change challenge. The campaign prompted a response from the farming community stating that farms in Wales “produce top-quality proteins – beef and lamb – and it is produced in a sustainable, regenerative, and very environmentally friendly way”.

It was reported in the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board’s 2021-22 Annual Accounts that Blue Peter retracted its ‘go meat free’ pledge following an open letter from UK meat industry promoters: the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, Hybu Cig Cymru and Quality Meat Scotland.

2. Welsh Government action

Welsh Government policy is to support the Welsh agriculture and food sectors, including meat (mainly lamb and beef). Lamb and beef production, alongside dairy, form the bulk of Welsh agricultural output. Any drive for less meat consumption may potentially be at odds with this policy.

The main strategy document is the Vision for the Food and Drink Industry (2021). It aims to:

- ensure an environmentally and socially responsible supply-chain with an international reputation for excellence; and
- grow the industry at a higher rate proportionally to the rest of the UK.

Hybu Cig Cymru, which is responsible for promoting Welsh red meat, has been partly funded by the Welsh Government as outlined in [HCC FAQs](#) and [HCC Business Plan 2020-26](#).

During scrutiny of Peter Fox MS's Food (Wales) Bill, the then Rural Affairs Minister, Lesley Griffiths MS, [told the Finance Committee](#) in February 2023:

“when you look at the amount of Welsh food and drink that is procured by our schools, for instance, in school meals, and our hospitals and health boards, I certainly think that we need to increase it.”

The former Deputy Minister for Climate, Lee Waters MS, [said in Plenary](#) back in November 2021:

“Finally, on meat, clearly, the UK Climate Change Committee sets a pathway for reducing meat consumption, and it's not just meat produced in our country. Yes, Janet Finch-Saunders is right that Welsh meat has comparatively lower emissions than meats from other countries, but as I mentioned with the experience of the indigenous people of Peru and Brazil, the cheap meat that we buy in from South America is the meat that is driving the demand for soy that is leading to destruction of the rainforest, which is not then there to sequester the carbon that we need sequestered in order to keep global levels down. So, on meat, overall, the consumption does need to come down. And as I've said consistently, I think there is a case for eating less meat, but that the meat we do eat is Welsh meat, is local meat, is higher quality meat. In all of these things, all of the changes required are difficult and uncomfortable for us, but we cannot afford to duck this challenge.”

3. Welsh Parliament action

Speaking in Plenary in November 2021, [Carolyn Thomas MS reported](#) that during the first week of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), at a conference with presentations by schools across north Wales:

“the students had a real understanding that we all have a part to play in tackling climate change. **Their suggestions included** cutting food miles, **meat-free Mondays.....”**

Leader of the Opposition, Andrew R.T. Davies MS tabled a number of written questions on 29 January 2024, enquiring about the progress of the roll out of free school meals and monitoring of **targeted nutritional values** set for the meals delivered to pupils who take up free school meals.

In February 2024 **Jenny Rathbone MS argued** the need for the new sustainable farming scheme to address a “shortage of local ingredients” for the free school meals programme. She said “local authority catering departments are struggling to find suitable supplies at prices they can afford”.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.