Psychologies of Food Choice:
Public views and experiences around meat and dairy consumption

Caitlin Connors, Melanie Cohen, Sam Saint-Warrens, Fan Sissoko, Francesca Allen, Harry Cerasale, Elina Halonen, Nicole Afonso Alves Calistri & Claire Sheppard

October 2021

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

Introduction

This report explores UK public views and experiences around meat and dairy consumption, including key drivers of participants' chosen dietary approach. It presents findings drawn from qualitative remote ethnography research with 24 UK people conducted during July and August 2021, plus 9 peer-to-peer interviews conducted by our main sample participants with their friends and family. We aimed to build on existing evidence in this area to fill gaps and provide an up-to-date snapshot of UK public experiences. Areas of focus included:

- Motivations for dietary choices
- Any gaps between consumer intention and behaviour
- Trade-offs and contextual differences (e.g. in vs. out-of home behaviours)
- The roles of specialist diets, substitution approaches, alternatives and 'imitations', locally/uk sourced meat and dairy, socio-demographics, culture and family
- Impact and role of food labelling and terminology

Our sample represented a range of variables including age, gender, nationality (UK, Wales, Northern Ireland), urbanity/rurality, lifestage and household composition - and dietary profile (carnivore, 'cutting down,' vegetarian, vegan). Each ethnographic participant participated in two weeks of fieldwork, comprising a first focus group of 1.5 hours, 6+ remote ethnography tasks (e.g., meal planning tasks; dietary identity exploration; dietary 'histories', etc), and a final closing focus group of 1.5 hours. In total, this approach represented over 130 hours of participant contact time. We used the COM-B behavioural framework, initially developed by academic experts at UCL and subsequently taken on board in a wide variety of UK policy formation projects, to structure project findings.

Key motivations shaping meat and dairy consumption

Consistent with the findings of the University of Bath's recent evidence review, participants in different dietary groups tended to have very different key motivations. Carnivore's core motivations tended to be focused on more automatic drivers such as taste and health: meat and dairy were sources of dietary pleasure, but also carried strong associations of 'health' - for example, as important 'natural', 'non-processed' sources of protein and calcium. These core motivations were then supported by wider social motivators such as the pleasure of eating with others, or feelings of responsibility to UK farmers and local agricultural economies (particularly for more rural participants).

Carnivore participants tended to find arguments around animal welfare and environmental impact unconvincing - either because they sparked cognitive dissonance, or because these arguments were quite new! Several carnivore participants reported never having considered environmental implications of their diets before the research sessions. When facing negative experiences like cognitive dissonance, some carnivore participants became very defensive about their choices - or angry that they felt they needed to 'justify' them.

Vegetarian and particularly vegan participants tended to have very strong motivations around animal welfare and/or environmental sustainability. They sometimes found these motivations in conflict with motivations like taste and social pleasure - but then 'put in the work' to figure out how to balance and satisfy these needs. Vegans particularly reported such strong motivations around animal welfare that all other motivations became very much secondary. This sometimes made it hard to understand the motivations of others; why would something like taste or social convenience override an animal's right to life?

Our 'cutting down' participants often found themselves highly conflicted: concerned about the environmental or animal welfare implications of their meat and dairy consumption, but also trying to meet needs for taste, health and social pleasure. They often reported negative feelings like shame or guilt as they balanced these competing motivation sets.

Key capability drivers shaping meat and dairy consumption

Participants across the dietary spectrum reported that understanding the 'right' way to eat - in a way that would deliver on their motivations, and ensure adequate health and nutrition - was generally quite challenging. There was a sense of information overwhelm, as well as distrust of 'marketed' information. Although meat and dairy eating participants tended to default to established nutritional 'experts' (e.g., doctors), these same sources of information were often roundly rejected by vegetarian and vegan participants.

People often used 'rules of thumb' (or heuristics) to help them navigate this overwhelm. Tropes like 'the importance of a balanced diet' or 'meat and dairy make you stronger' proved hugely influential, often serving as powerful drivers for people to maintain the status quo around meat and dairy consumption. In contrast to these 'easy rules', language used to describe alternatives and substitutes was also both seen as confusing, and as sometimes presenting strong barriers to reducing meat and dairy consumption. Although 'plant based diets' carried fairly positive associations, products described as 'alternatives,' 'substitutes', or marketed as 'vegan' or 'vegetarian' were often highly off-putting to those eating meat and dairy - assumed to be highly processed.

Change journeys for those attempting to cut down on/cut out meat and dairy were often difficult. Understanding how to meet nutritional needs without taken-for-granted sources of protein and micronutrients was hard, though sometimes made easier by peer-information sources (e.g., vegan blogs). Often those motivated to cut down on/cut out meat and dairy found themselves settling for 'easier' trade-offs - such as eating 'less but better', only eating meat/dairy out of home, or giving themselves weekend 'free passes.'

Key opportunity drivers shaping meat and dairy consumption

Social, geographical, cognitive and budgetary 'opportunity' factors were hugely influential in shaping participants' meat and dairy consumption choices - in ways that often interlinked with and shaped motivation and capability drivers.

For example, there were clear ties between geographical place, social exposure and capability formation - with urban participants much more likely to be exposed to the idea or practice of cutting down on/cutting out meat and dairy consumption, and also much more likely to have access to resources that allowed them to do this more easily. Our urban participants' social circles tended to include wider ranges of cultural and social influences in terms of dietary differences; they had vegetarian or vegan friends who modelled ways of cutting down on/cutting out animal products, and were more likely to have discussed issues like environmental impacts of dietary choices. They were also far more likely to have access to vegetarian/vegan food products and restaurants, making it less cognitively and socially taxing to reduce animal product consumption. Conversely, some rural participants had limited if any exposure to these kinds of dietary preferences, and also would have found it logistically far more difficult to cut down if they wanted to.

Social influences were deeply powerful, with vegetarian and vegan participants often reporting very difficult instances of social exclusion or judgment for their choices, and carnivore participants often fearing this kind of judgement or social isolation if they did change their own dietary habits. Differences within domestic space could also be deeply challenging, with those cutting down on/ cutting out sometimes made explicitly aware of how 'inconvenient' their choices were for those around them, or feeling less accepted.

Finally, participants also varied enormously in the amount of financial and cognitive resources they could dedicate to the challenge of eating differently. Particularly for those new to reducing or eliminating animal protein, reliance on more processed and marketed 'vegan' and 'vegetarian' foods (for example, meat and milk replacement products) carried a real financial cost. Alternatively, finding affordable but nutritious ways to eat differently involved a cognitive cost: it took brainpower to find the 'right' way to eat healthily when making a change. Participants varied highly in terms of the money, time and cognitive energy they had available to dedicate to this challenge - depending on factors like lifestage, number of dependents, and household budget and disposable income.

What next?

It was clear that across the widely varied participant journeys and contexts represented in this research, what people decide to eat and how they deliver on their dietary intentions are highly complex questions. Motivations are often layered and contradictory, particularly given how important health is to most people in shaping dietary choices, and how contested the health status of meat and dairy products can be across different public groups.

In general, we found that very strong motivations are needed to 'walk a different road' in terms of meat and dairy consumption, because this motivation helps them progress through barriers in terms of capability and opportunity - for example, challenges accessing suitable products; social isolation or judgement; and budgetary or time 'costs' of learning how to eat differently. Some of these are more tractable barriers than others. For example, social isolation may lessen as social norms begin to shift, and communications and other campaigns can play a role in speeding this. However, others are more intractable and structural - for example, geography and finance differences between participants.

In seeking to shift behaviours in this space, it is critical that policymakers are understanding of the nuanced drivers shaping current consumer views and actions - and that any interventions are both realistic in their intention and carefully built and tested. In particular, given the risk of 'backlash' when consumers feel they are judged for their current dietary preferences, any campaigns to shift behaviour will need to be finely tuned and extensively tested with consumers to ensure that they support change for those that desire it - rather than entrench current behaviours.

CHAPTER 1

METHODS: OUR APPROACH TO THIS WORK

1.1 Dairy and meat consumption in the UK

The FSA's quantitative data on consumer behaviours, via its flagship survey Food and You[1] as well as ad-hoc survey data[2] such as its suite of research on consumer experiences under pandemic, have shown rising consumer interest in reducing meat and dairy consumption. This is reflected in the wider evidence base on consumer attitudes and behaviours in this area; in 2020 65% of British people said they were willing to reduce their meat intake when asked, with 21% already having done so.[3]

Data suggest that this is in part because of environmental concerns around meat and dairy production - affecting water use and pollution levels; land use and deforestation; greenhouse gas emissions and, ultimately, climate change. Meat and dairy based foods account for 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and production is linked to a range of negative impacts in terms of deforestation, CO_2 emissions, and accelerated global warming. Increasingly, these environmental impacts are achieving high-profile interest in the UK - for example, with part two of the National Food Strategy calling for a 30% reduction in meat consumption over the next decade to help meet net-zero goals and support public health.

The FSA has developed an extensive evidence base on the drivers of consumers' general attitudes and behaviours around food. From the impact of interventions and nudges, to understanding the major barrier to changing food behaviours; habit. Building on this evidence, it wanted to explore in more detail the rapidly changing consumer landscape around meat and dairy consumption: what motivates consumers to cut down on or cut out meat and dairy, and their experiences in doing so.

1.2 Developing the aims and objectives for this work

This work aimed to explore the situational, social, emotional and psychological roles of meat and dairy and how these influence buying and eating decisions. We explored the behaviours, views and attitudes of a wide range of UK consumers around meat and dairy consumption, including:

- Health, environmental and animal-welfare influences
- The gap between intention and behaviour
- Trade-offs and contextual differences (e.g. in vs. out-of home)
- The roles of; specialist diets/wellbeing, substitution, alternatives and 'imitations', locally/uk sourced meat and dairy, socio-demographics, culture and family
- Impact and role of food labelling and terminology

In exploring these issues, this work has drawn on a wide range of existing insight and knowledge around consumer attitudes. Before finalising our approach and design, we reviewed 15 pieces of existing

literature, ranging from FSA consumer research to academic papers to strategic and policy pieces like the National Food Strategy. Our approach built on two pieces of existing FSA insight in particular:

- **A recent review on 'Moments of Change' by Cardiff University,**[4] exploring when and why people tend to make changes to their diets.
- **A recent Rapid Review on factors underpinning meat and dairy consumption**, ' conducted by Fiona Gillison and team at The University of Bath.[5] Exploring existing data and insight on the consumer rationale for reducing meat and dairy - such as concerns about the environment, health, and animal welfare. It also explored evidenced attitudes towards meat and dairy substitutes or alternatives, and barriers around meat and dairy reduction.

At the outset of this work, the Bright Harbour team worked directly with the University of Bath team to explore early Literature Review findings, and identify open questions and gaps in the academic literature that merited further qualitative exploration. This evidence and collaboration further shaped our sampling, overall design, and qualitative materials.

1.3 Our approach in summary

Methods

Bright Harbour utilised a three stage approach incorporating a mixed method, iterative qualitative investigation. This included group workshop discussions as well as remote ethnography, including a range of at-home tasks exploring meat and dairy behaviours and attitudes, with a total of 33 participants. The COM-B framework was used to support robust, structured behavioural analysis (see below for summary detail).

Fieldwork was conducted between w/c 26th July and w/c 9th August 2021. Over the two-week period, each participant participated in:

- **Six remote ethnography 30 minute 'homework' tasks** that provided honest accounts of the drivers underpinning meat/dairy/alternative attitudes and behaviours. To mitigate the common risk of vague answers, researchers were able to post comments on each task, to probe further/ask for more detail when needed.
- **2 group workshops of 1.5 hours each,** conducted at the close of each week of homework tasks. Week 1 groups explored general attitudes and behaviours around meat and dairy consumption, including identity considerations around dietary labels and meat and dairy choices. Week 2 focused on tension points and 'trade offs' in meat and dairy choices, as well as clarifications on consumer points of view around key motivators such as health, animal welfare and environmental sustainability. Groups were carefully constructed to enable robust analysis of different dietary groups, whilst still providing 'safe' environments for consumer engagement.[6]

In total, the findings in this report were built from consumer data from a total of 144 homework tasks and 10.5 hours of group workshop data.

Analysis using the COM-B framework

The behavioural framework we have utilised for analysis is COM-B, which forms the hub of the Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW)[7] - an evidence-based framework for designing and delivering interventions to change behaviours at the individual, organisational, community and population level.

Designed by behaviour experts at UCL, the COM-B framework identifies three factors that need to be present for any behaviour to occur: capability, opportunity, and motivation:

- **Capability** refers to a person's physical (e.g. skills to cook differently) and psychological attributes (e.g. finding information to trust and navigating how to do it).
- **Opportunity** refers to attributes of the physical and social environment: does it feel feasible to actually achieve this behaviour in environmental and social context?
- **Motivation** refers to reflective and automatic psychological processes that make a given behaviour more or less appealing.
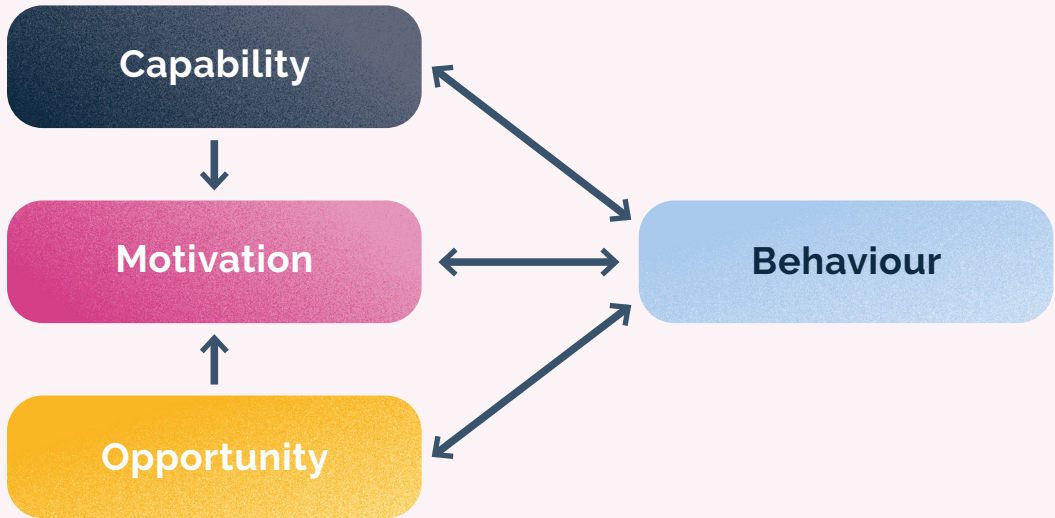
The COM-B system: a framework for understanding behaviour

This framework provides a simple and helpful way to explore core motivations for eating differently versus more practical and environmental drivers and barriers of behaviour[8]. It recognises that behaviour is part of a fluid, interacting system: barriers /interventions in one or more elements will reduce the likelihood of a behaviour overall and minimise the risk of desired behaviours reverting.

In practice, the 'drivers' of behaviour, and the triggers to try eating differently, can occur at any COM-B level - it's not just 'motivation' that leads us to try something new. But as we will see in the chapters to follow, core motivations were particularly influential in shaping participants' dietary paths.

Sample and recruitment; approach, strengths and limitations

In total, we recruited 24 'primary participants' - with an additional 9 participants taking part via peer research interviewing as part of one of the homework tasks. Our sample represented a broad cross-section of the UK: including residents of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and representing a range of variables including age, gender, lifestage, household composition, meat consumption habits, ethnicity and religion. Structured quotas and screeners were agreed with the FSA team. The Field Recruitment were chosen as our recruitment partner both because of their expertise in recruiting complex quotas for rigorous social policy research, and because of their commitment to safe, sensitive and positive experiences with fully informed and consenting research participants. They ensured the recruitment of engaged and dynamic participants via a mix of list recruitment and

free-find methods, Participants were provided with reimbursements in line with industry norms to thank them for their time and input.

See below for a full breakdown of our 24 'primary' participants, with screening questions detailed in Appendix 1.

Locations and areas	Area	Gender	Age	Lifestyle	SEG	Diet
NI (4), Wales (4) London (6) Manchester (5) Bristol (5)	Rural (8) Suburban & Urban (16)	Female (13) Male (11)	18-24 (4) 25-39 (8) 40-59 (7) 60+ (5)	Living alone/ housemates (6) Coupled/ No kids (4) At least 2 child under five (6) Child aged 11-17 (6) Adult children at home (3) Adult children moved out (3)	C2DE (8) C1 (8) AB (8)	Vegan (5) Vegetarian (5) Trying to cut down (8) Meat eaters (6)

Analysis and reflexivity

Our analytic approach for this work combined more structured analytics using the COM-B framework, and more creative thematic analysis. Our overall approach was as follows:

- **Data anonymisation and allocation**: all participant data was anonymised using participant codes (e.g. Participant 1). Each researcher 'followed' a set group of participants to build strong 'participant-researcher' relationships and gather rich, context based data.
- **Structured COM-B data coding**: All tasks and workshops were charted against a set pro-forma, using the COM-B structure introduced above.
- **Iterative analysis sessions**: The team shared and compared emerging findings throughout fieldwork (via WhatsApp). After each fieldwork week, the full research team (sometimes including FSA colleagues) conducted a structured review of data - noting new emerging questions or gaps and comparing audience groups.
- **Key findings brainstorm:** At the close of fieldwork, the research team and FSA partners conducted a creative 'key findings' brainstorm identifying some of the most surprising or notable findings of research; identifying a spread of participants who represented different types of audience context for case studies; and beginning to shape the overall 'story' of reporting.
- **Validation and data checking**: During reporting, structured analysis documents were referenced regularly, and the full research team reviewed draft reporting documents, ensuring the findings in this report are based on the evidence and representative of the spread of views and experiences gathered.

The Bright Harbour team was carefully designed to ensure senior expertise in food and public policy research, whilst representing a range of lived experience in the subject area - e.g., a mix of carnivores, those 'cutting down' on meat and/or dairy, vegetarian and vegan researchers. Ensuring this mix of lived experience enabled us to more easily identify and counterbalance any bias when gathering or interpreting the evidence.

CHAPTER 2

GUESTS ROUND THE UNCOMFORTABLE DINNER TABLE: VARIETY, DIFFERENCE & CONFLICT IN DIETARY CHOICES

One of the clearest findings of this report is the ways in which dietary choices are shaped by social identity and interaction - the ways our assumptions about what people's diets say about us shapes how we understand and interact with each other. This is consistent with wider literature in this area; food choices are felt to reflect identity, so consumption (or reducing it) can feel a highly value-laden choice[9].

Before exploring participant motivations, behaviours and views in the chapters to follow, in this section we briefly explore the ways in which this reflexive, interactive social process shaped both the research process and its data - and wider public experiences in this space.

2.1 A multitude of starting points and contexts

As noted in Chapter 1, the participants included in this report represent a wide spectrum of public motivations, behaviours and views around meat and dairy consumption. Across and within groups, we also represent a range of wider human experiences in terms of age, lifestyle, lifestage, geography, cultural group, budget, health status and so on.

In this report, we have for simplicity labelled participants by their dietary group: vegan, vegetarian, 'cutting down', and carnivore. From an analytic perspective, these groupings made sense; differences between groups were clear and fairly consistent, and understanding how experiences vary is critical to shaping policy that meets the needs of all.

However, before we continue, it is important to point out that of course the values, motivations and experiences that had led to the dietary choices participants had at point of research were typically complex and multi-layered. A simple label does little to communicate the social, geographical, and historical context shaping each participants' choices - and how easy those choices were to enact in their day-to-day lives.

To take one example from many: a well-off childless 'cutting down' participant in London surrounded by tasty vegetarian and vegan options had a very different experience than a busy, rural, local-shops-dependent parent wanting to eat less animal products.

Experiences were also fluid both within and across dietary groups. Some participants had experienced periods of heavy meat and dairy consumption, and periods of very minimal consumption, etc. Motivations often shifted over time, according to lifestage, health status and/or evolving ethical views. At any point in time, choices made total sense for that person within their own ecosystem and reality - even if when viewed from the outside from others, those choices seemed nonsensical, or even offensive - or if their day to day choices sometimes strayed from their dietary goals or ethics.

2.2 Dietary choices as contested social space

One of the reasons it is worth highlighting this multiplicity of experiences beyond dietary labels up front is that we otherwise risk confirming dietary identity stereotypes that were often a source of conflict for participants in their day-to-day lives.

As discussed further in Chapter 5, social influences on dietary choices and the experiences of those choices were pronounced and powerful in this work - with dietary labels in particular often shaping how participants saw each other and how others saw them. Labels like 'vegan' or 'carnivore' often functioned as short-cut stereotypes which sparked a wide range of assumptions about their values, priorities, and politics.

In the research workshops, our team sometimes felt as if we had gathered participants around a huge, vibrant but often uncomfortable dinner table; participants sat down to research tasks and conversations ready to engage, but carrying clear baggage of previous social interactions out in the 'real world' where they had felt judged for their choices. Regardless of how participants ate, they generally felt justified in their own point of view and behaviour, whilst questioning or sometimes actively criticising the dietary choices of others.

The 'othering' of those who ate differently was pronounced. Tasks in which participants were asked what questions they would have of others that chose to eat differently than them, or in which they described 'a typical vegan/vegetarian/carnivore', were revealing. Sometimes, exposure to others' different eating habits provided a catalyst for change - for example, with carnivore participants trying out vegetarian or vegan food on the prompting of a colleague, friend or family member.

However, in other circumstances participants often found others' eating choices not just confusing but affronting; it often felt very much like a judgment on their own ways of doing things. Whether thinking about the choices of strangers, or of those they knew and loved, this (perceived) judgment hurt.

For participants across the dietary spectrum, this feeling of being judged tended to result in feelings of defensiveness in evidence from participants across the dietary spectrum - sometimes twinned with (or in the form of) anger, disgust, or outrage at others' choices, or disbelief, frustration or scepticism about others' motivations for eating the way they did. These were strong and uncomfortable emotions for people to manage. Sometimes, it caused participants to 'double down' on why their choices were 'right', and others were 'wrong' for eating the way they did.

There was a sense that this feeling of meat and dairy as a combative and political space was a strong barrier to genuine, open discussion. When tasks opened up space for 'safe' questioning about meat and dairy choices, surface anger sometimes gave way to gentle curiosity: why have we chosen different things, and what impact do our choices have on each other?

"If I could ask someone who ate differently to me anything, I'd ask: what are your feelings towards people who do eat meat and dairy? I want to ask because some vegetarians and vegans have very toxic, negative views towards meat eaters because of animal welfare…. But also, I'd want to know: how would you feel about me eating meat in front of you? Would it cause discomfort or make them feel uneasy having to watch me eat?" (M, 24, Cardiff, Carnivore)

"I want to know what they [vegans] taste when they eat their meals, because my experience of what they eat is just cardboard, everything is cardboard flavour". (M, 69, Cardiff, Cutting Down)

2.3 Vegan diets and identities as a conflict flashpoint

Nowhere was this sense of social conflict more evident than between vegan and carnivore participants - with members of each group often feeling baffled by the choices of the other, and both feeling judged for their respective meat and dairy choices.

"The judging thing about vegans I don't understand… Is it because you feel guilty? […] Somebody I know is getting married soon and is having an all vegan wedding, and some of the guests said they're not coming because they basically said that her views shouldn't be a punishment to them on an enjoyable day!" (F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)

Veganism, for many non-vegan participants, was the most 'identifying' dietary choices discussed, often carrying mildly or starkly negative connotations for meat and dairy eating participants. Participants tended to associate veganism with opinionated young people; with social media activism and conflict; and with a wide range of political views far outside the realm of dietary choices - on the environment, on sexism and racism, on trans rights, etc. This may have been in part because for many participants, particularly those living in more traditional and less urban environments, they often knew few if any vegans in real life; veganism is something they found discussed on Twitter or Facebook.

"When I think of a vegan, I think of someone in fishnets, shouting at me on the internet with a lot of intolerance, going on about killing animals and trans rights. They don't want to listen, they just judge me." (M, 39, London, Carnivore)

Discussion of vegan diets tended to produce the most defensiveness and/or angry backlash from meat and dairy eating participants (mostly carnivores), largely because of the assumed judgment that vegan diets contain around the ethical 'rightness' of animal product consumption. Essentially, participants felt that they were being called out as bad people, explicitly or implicitly - and this stung, resulting in strong pushback.

"There are some vegans who talk about it a lot and push their opinions in your face a bit - 'I am doing this and I am saving the planet'. Well I love animals too, I would never mistreat my dog. I do sometimes feel you are made to feel cruel as you eat meat and fish and you eat animal based products." (F, 54, London, Carnivore)

In contrast, it was striking that for the most part, vegetarian participants felt that their way of eating had been largely normalised in recent decades; what once often felt like a political or even revolutionary act was now a fairly mainstream option that was generally better understood and catered to.

This shift was reflected in meat-eating participants' views of vegetarianism. Some found vegetarians 'confusing' or had questions, but most knew at least one vegetarian person 'in real life'; vegetarianism was not an abstract concept but a choice that people they knew and could relate to had made.

As explored further in Chapter 4, vegetarianism was also more likely to be associated with whole foods and plant-based diets, rather than 'specialist' products often assumed to be highly processed, untasty, and environmentally suspect.

Increased acceptance aside, the existence of people living differently can cause carnivores and those cutting down on meat and dairy to reflect on their own choices, without being directly called out by someone in their life.

However, participants in this sample often did not like to feel challenged about how they ate, because they genuinely believed their way of life was best for them. We can see that sometimes, this meant that participants were also quick to challenge and judge others living differently.

CHAPTER 3

WALKING A DIFFERENT ROAD?:
WHAT MOTIVATES CHANGE AROUND MEAT AND DAIRY?

In this section we explore common motivations around meat and dairy consumption and how these varied for different groups. This includes 'automatic' motivators such as taste and satisfaction, through to 'reflective' motivators such as ethical considerations around animal rights, and environmental sustainability.

We also briefly discuss participants' emotions, views and behavioural change when experiencing conflict in motivations around meat and dairy - for example, wanting to cut down on meat for ethical or environmental reasons, yet loving the taste, or worrying about health implications of reducing protein intake.

3.1 How motivation influences dietary behaviour

In the COM-B framework, motivation is a critical foundation for behaviour and action. Without a reason to change our behaviour - and take on all the capability and opportunity struggles that are likely to arise - we don't spend the effort needed to do something new or different. Motivations are varied and can occur at different levels. In summary, in our data gathering and analysis for this work, we explored motivation drivers at two levels:

- **Automatic drivers** - the responses we have to a situation or behaviour without much effort or thinking on our part: choosing a food because it is tasty or makes us feel good; cooking the same foods out of established habit, etc.
- **Reflective drivers** - motivations that occur because of how we feel or think about a situation or behaviour when we stop and reflect. This includes things like our ethical values, our dietary goals, etc.

In general, automatic motivators tend to be far more powerful drivers of behaviour than reflective drivers, simply because most behaviour occurs on 'automatic pilot'; if we stopped to think about every single decision we made, life would be hard and slow indeed! This is particularly true for food behaviours, in which automatic motivators like hunger, taste and satisfaction are often very strong, immediate, and regular. Below, we explore the key drivers beyond habit that tended to motivate dietary behaviours in our sample.

"I tend to stick with what I know. I don't try lots. I'm a repeat offender." (F, 40, Bristol, Carnivore)

"We are in a total routine with what we eat in a week, it's something that just happens when you get older and find that flow of what you like" (F, 61, Manchester, Cutting Down)

What motivates each groups' levels of meat and dairy consumption?
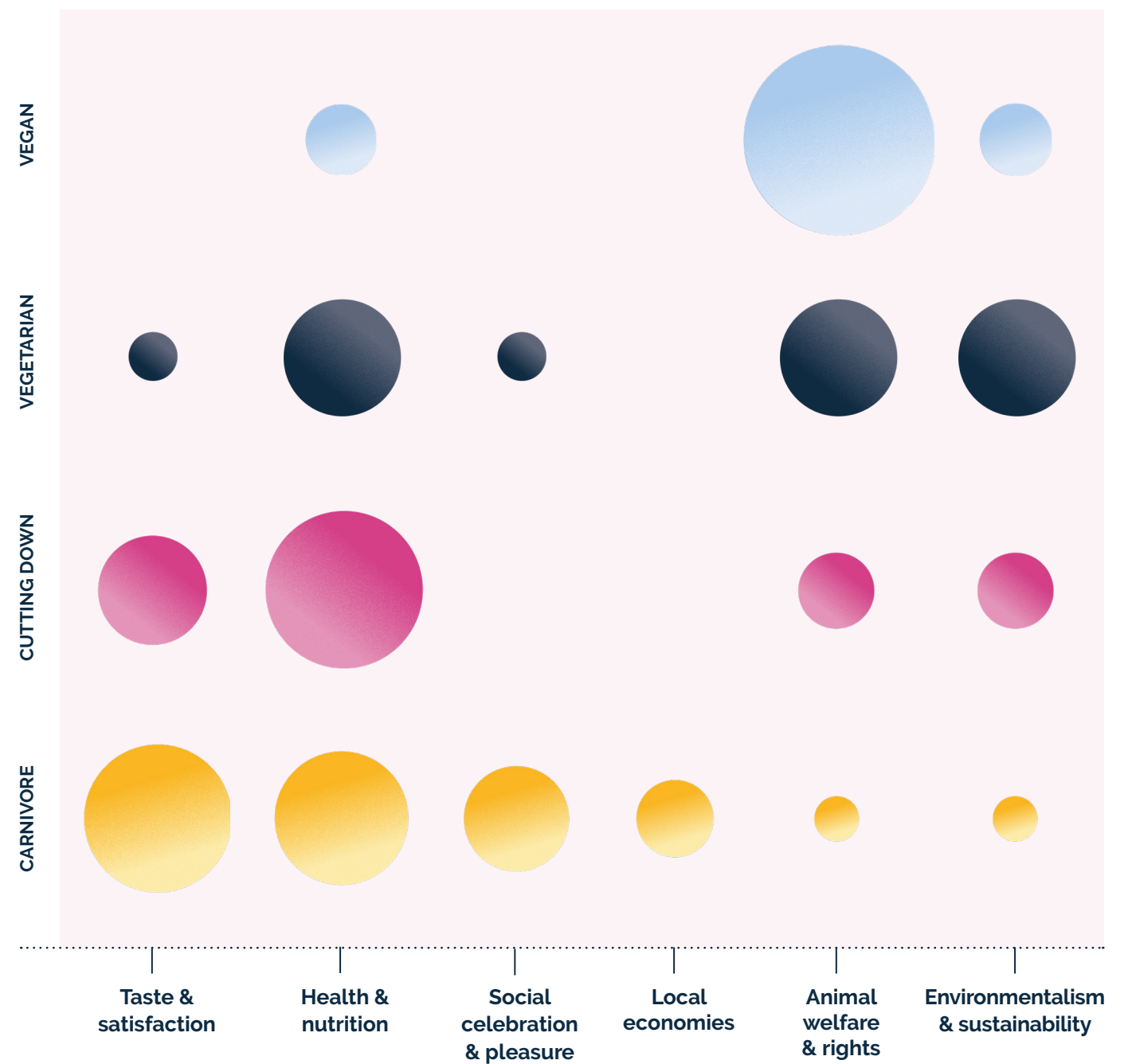
There were clear audience differences in terms of motivational starting point around meat and dairy choices between carnivore, 'cutting down', vegetarian and vegan participants.[11]

- Carnivore participants overall tended to be more 'me-focused' and engaged with automatic drivers like taste and health - though they were often also motivated by social motivators such as the pleasure of eating with others, or social responsibilities like supporting local economies.
- Vegetarian and particularly vegan participants tended to be more motivated by the impact their dietary choices had on others (including animals) and/or the planet; they then put in work to figure out how to balance and satisfy needs like taste and health.
- Our 'cutting down' participants often found themselves in conflict between these many motivation sets - feeling the tug of ethical animal and plant concerns, but also trying to meet their own needs for taste, health and social pleasure.

3.2 Core motivators around meat and dairy consumption in detail

Taste and satisfaction are powerful, visceral drivers of consumption

In line with wider evidence in this area,[12] taste and satisfaction were particularly powerful automatic motivators for meat and dairy-eating participants, and almost universally mentioned as core drivers by both our carnivore and 'cutting down' participants.

People valued meat and dairy as powerful sources of pleasure - associated with favourite, filling meals that provided positive experiences, and fundamental to participants' sense of 'luxury' and 'high quality' eating experiences. They also often had strong associations with social/cultural celebrations (birthdays; holidays; religious festivals; etc).

When research tasks or discussions asked meat and dairy participants to imagine how they would feel about cutting down on/cutting out animal products, participants often felt a real sense of loss: is it worth it to give up something I enjoy so much?

> **How do you feel when you eat meat and dairy?**
>
> *"Satisfied. Filling more than anything. Substantial part of a meal. "* C1, M, 24, Cardiff, Carnivore
> *Full!"* L2, M, 39, N London, Carnivore
> *"Satisfied and happy. I enjoy it"* L6, F, 54,London, Carnivore
> *"Satisfied and content"* N4, F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore
> *"Proper meal"* N3, M, 63, N Ireland, Carnivore
> *"Happy"* B3, F, 40, Bristol, Carnivore

This may seem an obvious point: people eat meat and dairy because they like eating meat and dairy! However it's worth remembering exactly how visceral (pun intended) these pleasure drivers are, and thus how powerful. The immediacy of pleasurable bio-feedback when eating meat and dairy hugely reinforces meat and dairy consumption: our bodies and minds are built to want more of what makes us feel good, and for many, meat and cheese feel very good indeed. As we will see when discussing other key drivers of meat and dairy consumption, these very primal automatic drivers were often compelling enough to outweigh - or at least challenge - more reflective or abstracted drivers like environmental or animal welfare concerns (see Chapter 5).

> *"One thing I've found hard to cut down on is cheese, there is just nothing quite like it. Cheese makes me happy and I think I will always want it"* (M, 30, London, Cutting Down)

Conversely, where meat and dairy eating participants had tried meat or dairy and alternatives and been disappointed in terms of taste and satisfaction, this was sometimes hugely demotivating in terms of repeating these experiences, depending on what they ate. When participants felt like taste was compromised, they often found cognitive 'loopholes' that helped them minimise the impact of their ethical motivations (see Chapter 4.2 for examples).

> *"I had one mouthful (at the Italian restaurant) and I was like no - I just don't like it - I am going to steer clear of the veggie option and pay for my meat."* (F, 40, Bristol, Carnivore)

Notably these 'bad taste' experiences tended to be with foods explicitly marketed as vegetarian or vegan: bland and poorly prepared side dishes at restaurants with little experience in catering to vegetarian or vegan people, or bad experiences with 'vegan cheese' (the clear villain of the research story!). Sometimes, this was because the taste itself felt unpleasant; sometimes, because it didn't feel 'the same' as meat and dairy options that were valued and enjoyed in terms of texture or taste. Conversely, participants sometimes became aware during home ethnography tasks that some of their favourite foods were 'accidentally' vegetarian or vegan - sometimes leading them to question their taste assumptions. This sometimes led to a sense of surprise: maybe some vegetarian and vegan food isn't as bad as I'd worried?

Our more experienced vegetarian and vegan participants fully agreed that they didn't need to sacrifice taste, satisfaction and pleasure when going meat and dairy free, though it had often involved a learning curve for them to find meals and products they truly enjoyed (these barriers are explored in more detail in Chapter 4). However, these positive taste experiences weren't always available to less experienced cooks or those with limited access to tasty, well cooked vegan and vegetarian options.

> *"There's such an amazing array of options out there right now, in 2021! That was never there, even five years ago. [...] It annoys me because it's like you're spoiled now. You know, we don't need to murder an animal to have a delicious, scrumptious dinner!"* (F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)

Nutrition and health: complex and often conflicted drivers across dietary groups

Health and nutrition were important motivators for most participants, with meat and dairy consumption levels powerfully shaped by what felt 'healthy' and nutritious to them. This was often particularly pronounced for those who were more health-focused (e.g., body-building or exercise enthusiasts, as well as those living with or caring for those with health issues), and for parents in the sample who were responsible for the nutritional needs of others.

However, participants had wildly divergent views on the health status of animal products, and carnivores and vegetarian/vegan participants alike often put forth compelling arguments for why 'their' way of eating was healthiest.

Most meat and dairy eaters generally considered animal products to be nutritious and healthy, though often also noting that 'you get what you pay for' when it comes to animal product health and quality. Meat and dairy were considered 'natural,' 'unprocessed' foods, particularly if investing in perceived 'higher quality' meat (e.g., buying organic, buying local). As explored in Chapter 4.1, many meat and dairy eaters were thus wary and distrusting of the idea of meat and dairy alternatives, which they assumed would lack the natural nutrition of meat and dairy and include 'unhealthy' ingredients or additives.

"I enjoy meat and dairy - I don't see the need to cook alternatives. I am wary of the processed nature of the meat and we don't know what we are eating. Whereas if I buy fresh meat and veg, I feel like I am putting out a good standard [in terms of health and nutrition] of food on the table for my family." (M, 28, London, Cutting Down)

Many of those who had cut down on/cut out meat and dairy held more mixed views about the health status of animal products - consistent with the wider literature in this area, health motivations had sometimes been primary reasons for reducing meat consumption.[13]

For example, some participants noted that they had researched the subject and come away with concerns about the impact of lactose protein on things like asthma or immune system health; of the 'questionable' need for the amount of animal protein recommended by nutritionists; and so on. They often also raised health concerns not about animal products per se, but about the health implications of eating animal products raised within modern agricultural systems: for example, raising concerns about the 'toxicity' of eating meat that had been stressed during slaughterhouse killing. This point was raised spontaneously by half of the vegan participant sample, and a point of general agreement during group workshop discussions.

Across groups, noticing health differences as a result of dietary change was often very powerful. These embodied, visceral indications of health were powerful motivators - more immediate than abstracted 'good diet' advice or information.

For example, one vegetarian participant had recently eaten vegan for two weeks on his doctor's orders, as a way to stay healthy and manage his asthma whilst travelling abroad. He was surprised to find that his asthma became far more controllable, briefly motivating interest in cutting out dairy long term. But as soon as health permitted, he returned to his carnivore habits; taste was too powerful a motivator. Conversely, some carnivores or 'cutting down' participants noted that they had sometimes felt weak or unwell when reducing their animal protein intake, whilst some vegan and vegetarian participants noted that they'd felt poorly when ingesting animal products.

"I found dairy products to be heavy for my sensitive belly, probably lacto-sensitive, and also made my skin break out... "When you haven't been exposed to those processed substances [meat], going to try them shows your body exactly how it's affecting you." (F, 24, London, Vegan)

"I did CrossFit and after eating heaps of chicken, a workout is okay; you know you can push it. Whereas when I started eating veggie, I definitely felt weaker in terms of core strength. So I would associate some meat with strength and vitality." (M, 24, N Ireland, Veggie)

Social celebration, pleasure and animal products

Social drivers are hugely powerful in shaping dietary choices, as explored in detail in Chapter 5. In particular, strong associations with celebratory pleasure often meant that meat and dairy eaters found it very difficult to imagine cutting down or cutting out when eating out of the home - especially for 'special' meals (date nights; holidays; etc). The association of meat and dairy with celebration made thinking about 'going without' feel like a real sacrifice.

*"When I go out and I want to have a steak, I'm gonna have a damn steak"
(M, 69, Cardiff, Cutting Down)*

One previously chatty participant, a young Londoner who had happily and easily shared all manner of views, opinions and personal anecdotes, went silent for a full minute when a moderator asked what he might eat on a night out if he was trying out not eating meat or dairy. When the moderator gave him a moment, and then returned for an answer after speaking to another group member, he simply replied, 'I just don't know." The cognitive dissonance of imagining a 'special' night out with no meat seemed to have shut him down completely.

Several participants who had successfully 'cut down', or who identified as vegan or vegetarian, noted the powerful impact of the campaigns that offered social lubrication for the tricky task of transitioning away from animal products - such as 'Veganuary' or 'Meatless Mondays'. The sense of 'becoming part of a movement' had been a powerful motivator (whilst also enhancing opportunity and capability, via social modelling from others).

Local economies, local meat and dairy: a mix of social duty and social pleasure

For some participants who felt particularly embedded in their local food economies, dietary choices felt tied into their local relationships and social responsibilities; they wanted to be able to support the food workers and businesses around them.

Quite a few of our more rural participants, primarily those from the devolved nations (Wales and Northern Ireland), felt strongly about meat and dairy consumption as a pro-social behaviour that supported their local agricultural economies. Challenges to these traditional economies in the form of vegetarianism or veganism even felt 'threatening' to some.

"It's a very big thing to shop locally. The majority of meat I will buy in my local butchers. Because I am from a farming background I just think it's really important to support the local farmers and keep it within your own country and local economy." (F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore)

"These replacement products you've showed me... I would feel threatened as part of the farming community if meat was being replaced in a local shop." (M, 63, N Ireland, Carnivore)

This became a powerful driver for these participants, in part because it was a potent blend of reflective automatic motivation. On a level of reflection, participants were convinced that this was an ethical approach to food purchase and consumption; they believed it was the 'right' thing to do. But buying locally also offered powerful immediate automatic positive feedback: a positive feeling about having done the right thing, and pleasurable social feedback from shopping with regular local meat and dairy contacts. It also tended to be a shortcut heuristic of quality for many; people assumed that local suppliers had treated animals better than 'supermarket' suppliers, and that taste and nutrition may thus be better.

Animal welfare: a critical driver for some, disregarded or ignored by others

For the most part, when participants spoke about animal welfare as a motivator, this tended to be in relation to meat consumption - with concerns focused on animal treatment before and during slaughter, and on the basic violence of killing a sentient animal for food. Overall, for most in the sample, animal welfare implications of dairy were less salient and powerful, mostly due to lack of exposure to concerns raised by the dairy production process.

This was however often a strong motivator for vegan participants who had transitioned for long-term vegetarianism; concerns about the dairy industry had often been the 'tipping' point to cut out dairy products.

"I don't understand why people cut down on dairy other than for health reasons. I don't really think it affects animals, does it? It's just something I don't understand." (M, 19, Manchester, Cutting Down)

Consistent with the wider literature in this area, animal welfare was a core driver for all vegan and vegetarian participants; they simply did not feel humans had the right to kill or harm other creatures for food, at least in a modern world in which this is no longer critical for survival or sustenance. Often, they could name 'critical moments' that had fundamentally shaped their views on our responsibilities to animals, and the ethical problems of animal product consumption.

Many of these memories were somewhat traumatic, often occurring during childhood; powerful experiences of feeling confronted with 'the truth' of where meat comes from, and the violence and harm to animals normalised within modern farming systems and UK culture. Often, these moments had forever shifted how participants viewed animals - seeing animals as whole 'selves' with intrinsic values and rights, embedded in whole emotional and social worlds. From then onward, meat and dairy consumption felt 'viscerally wrong' to them, as much an automatic response as a reflective ethical motivator.

"I'd watched a film or a programme where a baby cow was crying for its mom. And it didn't want to take milk out of a bottle, it just wanted its mum. And I thought, 'My God'. I'd been a bit blind to the dairy trade up until this age, and from that minute on I just cut out dairy." (F, 35, Manchester, Vegan)

For some of our vegan participants in particular, there was a sense that no challenge was significant enough to derail them from the vegan track; they would have approached the prospect of eating meat or dairy as similar to being offered meat from a pet or human. These ethical red lines felt so clear and apparent to them that some assumed that if others could just see and understand the meat and dairy industry in the way they had come to, they would of course become vegan too. Some felt a moral obligation to help speed this public education up - admitting some truth to the stereotype of the 'militant vegan.'

Conversely, 'cutting down' and some carnivore participants reported feeling an 'ethical tug' around animal rights and welfare; sometimes flipping their perspective to imagining the meat and dairy industries from the point of the animals involved, sometimes flipping back to a sense that humans eating animals was 'part of the natural order'.[15]

"I don't know why it'll be good for the environment as animals would eventually die just like humans and their precious meat would be wasted, however there may be other animals from the food chain that would have plenty to feast on with humans completely going meat free." (M, 39, N London, Carnivore)

"Animal welfare doesn't really come into my mind, I believe that eating animals is the circle of life" (F, 61, Manchester, Cutting Down)

There was a sense that the cognitive dissonance of holding animal welfare concerns whilst eating meat was simply too uncomfortable; if I really think eating animals is unethical killing, what does that say about me? Many simply 'shut down' this train of thought and tried not to think about it - making questions about their choices feel that much sharper. Others often engaged in other mental short-cuts or trade-offs that helped them justify their choices; see page X for examples of how people managed this dissonance).

"In terms of the welfare side, I know it sounds bad but I try not to think about the animal's living conditions." (F, 45, N Ireland, Cutting Down)

Environmentalism and sustainability

Consistent with wider evidence in this area,[16] knowledge around the environmental implications of meat and dairy consumption was fairly low amongst participants in this work - and perhaps unsurprisingly, participants thus generally felt a less strong motivating 'pull' of environmentalism or sustainability concerns in relation to meat and dairy consumption.

This potential motivator often crossed into capability territory; even participants who took an interest in environmental issues found it very difficult to determine the 'correct' diet for minimising environmental impact. There was a sense that there were no perfect options; that marketing, 'spin' and dietary tribalism often obscured true impact; and that if you looked hard enough you'd find that literally every diet was environmentally damaging - or, if environmentally sound, deficient in other ways.

"Avocados, they are good for you, with no harm to animals, but they are bad for the environment because of the shipping and carbon footprint. And with Vegan cheese I'm making a better choice for the environment and animal welfare - but it has lots of saturated fat and no protein, I feel like I can't win here." (M, 28, London, Cutting Down)

Though stronger amongst some vegan, some vegetarian and some 'cutting down' participants, for most environmental benefits were thus secondary motivators - often supporting decisions already made on the basis of stronger motivators such as health.

"I feel like I'm helping the environment in some way. But I know that people say veganism is actually detrimental. I'm not sure how we feel about that. [...] I've not really looked into it because I know it's not going to make me want to change back and eat meat." (F, 35, Manchester, Vegan)

In practice, this tended to mean that those who felt confident about their choices would use environmental motivators as a 'bolster' to their 'rightness'. But those who felt under pressure to justify their dietary choices could easily dismiss the relevance of environmental concerns.

For example, some (usually more rural) carnivore participants were not only un-swayed by arguments around potentially negative environmental implications of meat and dairy consumption, but confident meat and dairy consumption were environmentally sound choices. They pointed to examples of 'sound, ethical' practice by local, traditional small-scale suppliers as environmentally positive food production practices - perhaps, implicitly, in contrast to larger scale, more industrialised, more processed approaches.

3.3 Motivation, meet Conflict: adventures in cognitive dissonance

Although the motivators discussed above were often powerful, they also often operated in a way that was far more complex than they may seem from the 'simple' list above. In practice, multiple and sometimes conflicting motivators were in play at any given time for any given participant. Motivators that were easiest to articulate or more socially acceptable (e.g. ethical values) weren't always those that 'won out' in practice (e.g., the desire for a tasty burger).

As we explore in the sections to follow, participants that did aim to change their meat and dairy consumption patterns were often put in the very uncomfortable position of feeling highly motivated to change how they ate, but unable to put their goals and plans into practice. Capability and opportunity barriers could put the wrench in the works, and often, under tension, automatic motivators like taste and ease then became more powerful. Overcoming these barriers takes work, trial and error and time.

> *"We go through phases where we're cutting down, or maybe we try to go vegan, or we only eat meat on weekends or whatever it is. And we always do great for a while, but then when work gets busy and I get home at 8 instead of 6:30, and I'm tired - all I want to do is stop for the day. Those are the nights the vegan cookbook gets neglected and we fall off the wagon."*
> *(M, 31, London, Cutting Down)*

Often, participants responded to the cognitive dissonance of conflicting motivation - or failing to deliver on their reported dietary motivations - by simply shutting down or disengaging. Negative emotions like shame, guilt or confusion abounded, often resulting in a strong sense of defensiveness, and sometimes anger that they felt they 'had to' justify their choices. For some, this process even caused them to 'double-down' on why eating meat and dairy was important and not problematic; others felt frustrated that they were judged as if these concerns hadn't crossed their mind, as if they were 'less ethical' people. These are all common responses to cognitive dissonance - and all ways to help us reduce our discomfort.[17]

> *"In theory the changes would be better for animal welfare / environment but I'm not sure. I would always buy meat from local suppliers where I know animals are treated well, and organic veg and free range eggs etc. As for the environment I do get cross that people who make alternative choices think that we don't have the same thoughts about animal welfare. I try to shop as responsibly as I can and where the budget allows!"*
> *(F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore)*

Cognitive dissonance in action box: Examples of cognitive dissonance in action, particularly from 'cutting down' and carnivore groups.

I care about the environment, and I want to do my part...	... but it's all too complicated to figure out what really matters ... but one person can't make a difference, so why give up things I love? ... but I can do that by eating less but eating better, or buying local, or buying seasonal ... but surely food waste matters most, and I never waste meat? ... but I try to shop sensibly, and I watch my plastics!
I care about animal welfare and animal cruelty...	... but it's going to happen whether I eat this or not ... but I eat organic, so I know animals are well treated ... but I need to keep supporting my local meat and dairy suppliers - people matter too ... but surely I'm still allowed the occasional cheese? ... but isn't it a waste of meat if they die and no one even uses it?
I'm interested in the health benefits of a plant-based diet, but...	... there's no 'perfect' diet and no one agrees, so I should eat what I like .... I'm not sure that would give me the protein I need. ... are vegans and vegetarians really all that healthy? ... I'm not sure what's in those processed vegan and veggie foods... they just look full of additives.

Motivations around meat and dairy consumption

Andrew, 19
Manchester,
Cutting down

Case study 1: Cutting down on meat based on a doctor's suggestion.

Andrew reluctantly joined the ranks of those 'cutting down' on meat and dairy after a doctor suggested that some of his symptoms might be related to milk intolerance, and also encouraging him to reduce his meat consumption to manage cholesterol. When asked if he ever would have given up meat without his doctor's explicit suggestion, he told us that he couldn't really think of any other reasons to change how he ate - most of his favourite meals included meat, dairy and cheese! Animal welfare and environmental concerns weren't on his 'radar'.

However, he cared about his health a lot and wanted to ensure he stayed healthy enough to keep bringing a paycheck in, so was highly motivated to follow his doctor's advice - even though he was finding navigating menu planning and eating out a hard task. When he joined the research he was pleased to have finally found a milk replacement that worked for him, but was still making his way through finding meat alternatives and substitute meals.

Siobhan, 45
N Ireland,
Cutting down

Case study 2: Meat and dairy as embedded ways of life in a rural economy.

Siobhan had grown up surrounded by Northern Irish farmlands, and had raised her children much in the way that she was raised: eating 'fresh and local', and with fairly heavy consumption of meat and dairy. Eggs were a feature in most breakfasts; lunches tended to include local meat; dinners were often variations on 'meat and two veg'. She was proud of living in a place where she had access to 'good, unprocessed food', and got a lot of social satisfaction from supporting and chatting with local butchers and other suppliers.

The idea of cutting down on meat and dairy in her diet, and thus reducing the proportion of her food budget spend with these local suppliers, felt very confronting: it would be a social loss, and also feel like she wasn't holding up her 'duty' to her local community, particularly if she instead bought meat and dairy free products from supermarket suppliers. She worried about the health implications of this choice too; would she really be covering her nutritional needs if she switched from 'healthy, natural' foods to more processed ones like the vegetarian options she'd seen in the supermarkets?

Erin, 47
Cardiff,
Vegan

Case study 3: When animal welfare and rights beliefs make veganism the only option

Erin grew up in a meat and dairy eating family, but had become vegan as a teenager - when on a work experience placement at a local animal shelter she'd first seen pictures of slaughterhouses. Upon being faced with the reality of what happened behind the scenes to bring meat to her table, Erin found herself viscerally repulsed by the idea of eating meat: it became too clear that a living being had been killed to bring her a meal. She later learned more about the dairy industry and, increasingly convinced it was unethical to break up animal family units to enable milk production, also stopped eating dairy products.

The choice wasn't an easy or comfortable one. She had faced ridicule throughout her life for her dietary choices, which hadn't made much sense to the people in her local neighborhood, and there hadn't been a lot of vegetarian or vegan options available in her local shops. But her strength of belief meant that, for her, she had no option but to figure it out. She couldn't ethically condone eating meat when she felt it was so clearly wrong.

Luke, 31
London,
Cutting down

Case study 4: Environmentalism and ethical conflicts

Luke first started thinking about the environmental implications of global industrialised meat production through conversation with a vegetarian friend. As a big reader and someone who believed in the power of data, he'd then done his own research on meat-eating as a potential contributor to the environmental crisis, and come away convinced that reducing meat intake was an important way to reduce his personal negative environmental impact.

However, even as eating meat began to feel 'wrong', he found that figuring out what was 'right' to eat was a challenge. Many vegetarian and vegan staples were highly processed or involved a high carbon footprint; was that actually 'worth' cutting out meat, environmentally? Feeling like the best approach was uncertain could be demotivating - particularly when facing barriers around the amount of time and energy it took to change habits.

I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN'T: PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPABILITY IN DIETARY CHANGE

What we mean by capability in relation to dietary choices:
As noted previously, the COM-B framework suggests that motivation alone is insufficient to produce behaviour change; people must also have the realistic opportunity to put that intended change into action, and the capability to actually achieve it.

In this chapter we explore capability factors shaping people's experiences around meat and dairy consumption, and the ways in which **physical capability** (for example, having the skills to be able to cook differently) and **psychological capability** (for example, knowing how to reduce meat and dairy if desired, and the ease of finding information to trust) affected their behaviours and views.

4.1 The challenge of finding the right path: capability and knowing the 'right' way to eat

Finding the right path amidst overwhelm, echo chambers and marketers
Consistent with the findings of the University of Bath's literature review, conflicting dietary messaging and information[18] is a huge challenge for those who want to think about whether eating meat and dairy is 'right' or if they should be cutting down/out. What's 'healthy' is a particularly contested space and it can be difficult to know what or who to trust, with a pronounced wariness around trusting marketing materials or information provided by those that would profit off of one's dietary decisions. Education and information also don't necessarily help people find the 'right' path - this can often just result in having access to more conflicting information that they then need to balance and find their own way through.

Trusted information sources varied wildly by group. Meat and dairy eaters tended to have higher trust in 'traditional' health and nutrition experts such as health professionals and doctors. As discussed, social norms and 'true-isms' were also generally powerful, e.g. the idea of 'eating a balanced diet' and so on that were largely accepted and repeated in general UK society.

If wanting to make a change to how they eat, many would simply Google advice, prioritising sources like NHS websites which provided 'factual', 'evidence based' guidance. For these participants, social media was seen as an extremely poor - for some, even threatening - source of information, perceived as driven by 'agenda' rather than evidence.

"I'd look at the NHS website - an approved website for the health and wellbeing of the general public vouched by medical professionals." (M, 39, N London, Carnivore)

"I wouldn't go on social media as I think everyone has an agenda." (F, 54, London, Carnivore)

Many vegans and vegetarians held exactly the opposite view. Often, as these participants had read up on how best to manage their health whilst cutting down on/cutting out meat and dairy, their trust in traditional health professionals had decreased. Many weren't sure if health professionals had 'up to date' information about the impact of meat and dairy on health. For these participants, social media and other public-powered information sources were thus highly valued, because they were rooted in lived, bodily experience.

"I try to look for sources that are written by vegans or vegan parents or vegan nutritionists." (F, 32, Bristol, Vegan)

"Google has plenty of sources available, some that are from factual sites and reviews from people just like me." (M, 39, N London, Carnivore)

Labels and associations: 'Substitutes'? 'Alternatives'? 'Plant-based'? 'Fake'?
One of our objectives was to explore consumer understanding and definitions of meat and dairy alternatives labels. In practice, we found that usage was wildly inconsistent between participants, and often even within single participants' language. There was often differentiation between products that mimicked meat and dairy and those that didn't, but participants did not use consistent words to describe these differences.

However, some clear associations did emerge that were relatively consistent across the sample. For example, the phrase '**plant based diets**' generally carried positive associations - calling to mind less processed foods, more 'natural' and whole foods, and more evocative of the widely acknowledged health benefits of eating plenty of fruit and veg. It was mentioned positively by several carnivore and 'cutting down' participants who had otherwise been somewhat suspicious of vegan and vegetarian food. Often, foods in this category were given no label at all; for example, 'beans' were just beans! These findings are in line with wider evidence on consumer preferences for unprocessed alternatives as compared to products mimicking meat[19].

"To me that's not even like a meat free option, it's just something on its own, so I just call it falafel." (F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)

Associations around fresh-prepared vegan and vegetarian meals were also fairly positive, even for carnivore participants: associated with health and vitality. Though carnivore participants often worried these dishes may not meet their taste and pleasure requirements, they rarely sparked stronger reactions like disgust or anger.

In contrast, participants often had strong negative associations around products described as **'alternatives'**, or **'substitutes'** - sometimes for both carnivore and vegan or vegetarian participants. Although how participants defined these groups varied, there was a general assumption that these words were used to describe products to be used 'like meat and dairy', without actually using animal products. They also tended to be associated with more packaged and processed foods, which in turn were often assumed to signal lower nutrition and quality (e.g., 'full of additives' or 'unnatural').

"I like to know what is in my food, and with all these meat alternatives I don't know what is in them, it's not clear and I think they are heavily processed. It's a big turn off."
(F, 61, Manchester, Cutting Down)

Perhaps surprisingly, pre-packaged products labelled '**vegan**' or '**vegetarian**' often fared worst in terms of participant associations and expectations, even for many vegan and vegetarian participants! Often participants worried that these products a) might not taste that great, and b) might not be a nutritious option - sometimes, being very carbs-focused and with minimal vegetable input. This was consistent with the University of Bath's literature review findings; labelling products as vegan or vegetarian tended to reduce interest for people not already identifying with those diets. [20] Existing literature suggests that meat reduction with vegan and vegetarian diets may thus tie with the identity barriers discussed previously, and that dissociating 'cutting down' from these diets may increase appeal. [21]

Vegetarian and vegan participants also noticed that although these products might not contain meat or animal products, they didn't necessarily do much to tell them if the products were nutritionally equivalent or helpful for someone trying to consume adequate protein and/or nutrients. However, some viewed these products more positively; they did have a place in ensuring that they could eat something aligned with their dietary preferences, and the 'vegan' or 'vegetarian' labels short-cutted some of the 'work' of ensuring this.

All together, substitutes, alternatives and vegan/vegetarian labelled foods - particularly meat and cheese substitutes - were often labelled as 'fake' food, with all of the negative connotations that word carries: unhealthy, synthetic, manufactured, and so on. Participants often had strong feelings around anything they deemed fake, processed or trying to directly replicate the taste and flavour of meat. Some were angered about the idea; to them, it suggested the outrage they perceived from vegans and vegetarians about animal welfare and the 'badness' of eating meat as manufactured or 'fake' too, and thus hypocritical. It was notable that alternative milks generally escaped this fate; some carnivore people had used them simply because they tasted nice.

"All I see here is fake meat, fake chicken, fake dairy, fake meat, fake dairy… The fact that it is processed to look like a natural meat product really puts me off… I think that eating products designed to look like meat is a bit 'icky' - if you are doing this because you don't want to eat animals then surely something that looks like it's made from animals wouldn't be acceptable."
(F, 54, London, Carnivore)

4.2 Change journeys when cutting down on/cutting out meat and dairy

Imagining a world without meat and dairy: the daunting prospect of the new

Those that had not previously had a lot of practice in creating meals without meat or dairy often admitted that the prospect felt quite overwhelming - that even if they wanted to or were open to making a change, they worried they wouldn't have the skill to do so. It was often considered to be particularly tricky to make plant-based meals or 'alternative' meals as tasty as their meat and dairy counterparts.

"I've tried tofu and it was actually good and tasty. But in a restaurant, the chef has the skills to make it taste good - which I wouldn't feel confident in doing. And it's lack of knowledge; knowing the menu choices, and making sure we were getting the right nutritional values from what I cook." (F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore)

When asked to imagine how they might begin to cut down, meat and dairy eating participants thus often defaulted to imagining eating 'what they do now, without meat and dairy' - that is, adapting tried and tested recipes and habits rather than exploring totally new dishes and cooking techniques. Lasagne-loving participants told us that if they were cutting down they'd simply try 'vegan lasagne'; daily cereals would feature 'alternative milks'; family meals would introduce 'veggie burgers' or 'Quorn bolognese', etc. Building on current meal plans in this way helped reduce the sense of overwhelm.

Somewhat ironically, these imagined vegan and veggie meals were often highly dependent on exactly the kinds of food products participants had previously labelled as 'unhealthy', 'too processed,' 'too expensive', or 'fake.' Some of these participants' negativity or apprehension about cutting down on meat and dairy may thus have been driven by their own horizons and implicit assumptions about what vegan and vegetarian people actually eat.

The work of finding nutritional 'balance' when cutting down or out

Vegan, vegetarian and some 'cutting down' participants noted that it had been an involved process to find nutritional balance within their new restrictions. These include having to learn new rules around nutritional balance, and navigating the nutritional differences between different meat alternatives - for example, beginning to understand that some 'alternatives' replace meat in terms of texture and flavour, but are mostly carbs based, while others are very different to meat in appearance, but have equivalent nutritional benefits.

For example, without the heuristic shortcuts of 'to get protein, eat meat', or 'to get calcium, drink milk,' participants found themselves scouring nutritional breakdowns of their food products. For many, a stamp of approval (e.g. 'vegan' labelling, or approval from the Vegan Society) was a useful shortcut to help decide that a food was appropriate for them - far more trusted than brand marketing or labelling. But others noted that this wasn't sufficient to ensure balance and adequate nutrition. Even brand to brand, nutritional differences could be significant - in a way that meat produced by different suppliers simply wouldn't be. Finding products and meals that met their nutritional and other needs (e.g. taste, convenience, cost) was a labour of love.

"It has a big vegan sign on, which is perfect. So I don't have to start scrolling ingredients and check." (F, 35, Manchester, Vegan)

"Oatly's oat cream has approximately the same amount of calcium in it as cow's milk with none of the negative attributes of producing cow's milk attached to it." (M, 28, London, Vegan)

As discussed in Chapter 2, of the reasons that peer information sources (that is, guidance offered by people that shared their own food preferences) were so valued by these participants was the support they offered in exactly these kinds of daily logistical choices, as opposed to health experts that offered headline nutrition advice but less practical guidance on how to eat day to day in a

way that met all requirements: health, protein, budget, taste, convenience, etc. They would then combine guidance from vegan/vegetarian sources, blogs and social media, and their own lived experience to decide what was right for them.

Notably, journeys were not always linear or smooth. For example, a few participants talked about 'over-reliance' on processed meat alternatives and carbs at the start of their vegan or vegetarian journey, often eventually shifting towards more 'plant-based' and 'whole foods' ways of cooking. Creating new habits and meal plans in this way could be labour intensive.

4.3 Rules of thumb that helped simplify meat and dairy choices

Heuristic rules that shape food choices

Basic trusted heuristics or 'rules of thumb' were very simple and powerful ways for participants across the sample to navigate decisions about meat and dairy; they helped people explain why they did what they do (including to themselves), and to help them find a clean path through many courses of action. For example, the tendency to trust 'people like me' discussed in Section X was a powerful way for people to cut through the 'noise' around dietary considerations and decide what was best for them.

The below heuristics also proved particularly persuasive for participants in this work:

The importance of 'a balanced diet' - especially for health conscious meat and dairy eaters, this heuristic helped them simplify dietary choices, by focusing less on what foods are 'right' but on eating a wide range of foods. This heuristic was also often drawn on as an argument against cutting down on meat and dairy; surely 'cutting out' would reduce balance?

Some of our more engaged participants, including many vegan and vegetarians but also some carnivores or 'cutting down' people, interpreted and applied this heuristic very differently - as a way of talking about the importance of achieving a good balance of macro and micro nutrients. For them, it was possible to eat a meat and dairy free 'balanced diet' - it just took more work, for example to guarantee adequate protein intake.

Meat and dairy make you strong/meat gives you protein/dairy is critical for calcium - Related to the above heuristic, across the sample there was a strong association with meat and dairy as important sources of protein and calcium. Often, people worried that cutting down on/cutting out animal-product-derived protein would have detrimental impact on health and strength. This heuristic was a particularly powerful barrier for carnivores considering the implications of reducing meat and dairy in their diet. In line with wider evidence in this area, parents also generally reported a sense that dairy consumption was important for children's nutrition - although this sometimes conflicted with concerns about milk intolerances.[22]

This heuristic was sometimes recognised as one that had been marketing influenced, with some participants recalling 'catchy' campaigns from childhood. These campaigns were often echoed almost word for word by other participants; embedded from an early age, passed around by others as the years went on, becoming so 'true' as to be almost invisible.

"There were so many adverts, like: drink a pint of milk a day, go to work on an egg. This was a time when farmers were subsidized and encouraged to produce as much milk, eggs, cereal, potatoes etc. as possible." (M, 63, N Ireland, Carnivore)

This heuristic was also particularly powerful for younger (20s and 30s) men in our sample, especially those with a keen interest in exercising and/or weightlifting. Some participants noted that they had periods in their life where they'd eaten protein at every meal to help build muscle mass, for example. The idea that heavy animal consumption was critical to muscle building was an accepted truth within body-building and nutritionist communities.

*"When I began my fitness journey at 24, I ate a lot of lean chicken breast to get enough protein to build muscle because these are the suggestions I received from a personal trainer. I didn't think alternatives could meet my nutritional needs to build muscle."
(M, 28, London, Cutting Down)*

It was also mentioned by some parents in the sample that were keen to ensure that their children received good nutrition, often partially understood to include 'adequate' protein and calcium from animal sources - or felt pressured to provide meat and dairy to others. One vegan participant noted that particularly early on in her vegan journey she felt she should be feeding her children meat despite being vegan herself because it was 'normal.'

Many vegetarian and vegan participants noted that their dietary planning took a lot more cognitive effort and education because they had to put in a lot of work to achieve adequate protein intake, without being able to rely on this 'meat for protein' heuristic. Some resolved this conflict by dismissing this heuristic altogether - reporting that based on their own research, they didn't think protein deficiency was a realistic risk. For others, the bio-feedback of their own lived experiences won out: they still felt healthy without animal protein.

"I think generally protein is overrated and other nutrients are just as important. [...] I don't know anyone who's protein deficient. [...] I've logged on 'myfitnesspal' before and no matter how many plant based sources of protein I eat I'm always told I haven't had enough protein. I feel fine and have never suffered considering I'm never eating a lot of protein." (F, 32, Bristol, Vegan)

'Processed food is not healthy' - Carnivore and some 'cutting down' participants had very strong views that meat and dairy alternatives were less healthy than more 'natural, unprocessed' animal products - especially products marketed as 'vegan' or 'vegetarian' (as compared to, for example, actual vegetable produce, or pulses). In comparison, meat and dairy felt less 'tampered' with. Vegetarians and vegans also employed this heuristic - sometimes experiencing a sense of guilt or worry when eating 'packaged' foods, wondering if they were sacrificing their health for their ethics.

"For a long time, I have tried to eat things that contain less than 5 ingredients on the packaging. The more natural and the less ingredients the better is my rule." (F, 54, London, Carnivore)

Balancing acts and trade-offs: when perfect doesn't feel feasible

Heuristics also came in handy for participants when they found themselves in conflict between motivation and actual capability, or when they wanted to cut down on meat and dairy without cutting down entirely. A huge range of heuristic rules of thumb were reported across the sample:

- **Eating 'less but better'** - still eating meat and dairy, but buying from local and/or organic suppliers assumed to have better health, animal welfare and environmental impacts.
- **Only eating meat and dairy out of home** - enabling participants to cut down on overall consumption but still enjoy tasty treats socially, 'on the go', or when celebrating.
- **The weekend/take-away night 'free pass'** - some participants needed an 'out' in periods of overwhelm, stress or tiredness. Their solution was to cut down on meat and/or dairy during the week but give themselves a 'free pass' for 'special' nights.

"My boyfriend is vegan until we take a take-away, then he's vegetarian because he just loses the will to live, and he'll have a four cheese pizza... for him it is such an effort to go on the menu and find an alternative. If he's got a vegan section, he's fine." (F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)

CHAPTER 5

SHAPED BY PLACE AND PEOPLE: SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITY

In this chapter, we explore the ways in which social, geographical and cognitive 'opportunity' shaped participant experiences, views and behaviours. Drivers of behaviour and attitudes in this space clustered around the following key themes:

- **Environmental factors** - such as local product availability and accessibility.
- **Social opportunity** - including themes such as alienation - conformity - group identity - group and social norms - social power and pressure - social support - etc.
- **Material resources** - including food budgets and finance.
- **Cognitive and emotional resources** - the time and energy required to make change.

Although we have pulled apart drivers into rough themes above, findings in this section are invariably interlinked and intertwined. Where you live shapes who you are in contact with and the norms you grow up with; the people around you in turn shape your views, attitudes and behaviour; and the environment you share together may make it very easy or hard to try out new ways of thinking or doing.

5.1 You are where you eat: the importance of geography and place

Geography, place and social exposure

Geography was a powerful shaper of participants' views and attitudes around meat and dairy - with clear differences in participant view and behaviours emerging across nationalities, urbanity/rurality, and local socio-economics. In general, those that lived in more urban places or who had otherwise had more geographical (and social) exposure to different places and people, were less likely to view meat and dairy as 'normal' - they had been exposed to more dietary options, making a broader spectrum of ways of eating feel feasible for them. This is in line with wider literature on increased receptivity to eating meat and dairy alternatives for those who are more educated and/or living in urban areas.[23]

In particular, for participants living within farming communities (more common in Wales and Northern Ireland), meat and dairy consumption was a deeply embedded way of life: foundational to both their literal and psychological landscape. For these participants, meat and dairy industries were generally viewed positively and were highly normalised; meat and dairy had been presented from an early age

Jenny, 43
Carnivore

For Jenny, meat eating was deeply 'normal', as was supporting the local agricultural economy. She had only first encountered her first vegetarian acquaintance in her 40s, telling us alternative diets weren't something she'd really ever considered before.

"To be honest, this is the first time I've ever thought of some of the things we're talking about today, like meat and dairy and the environment, or animal welfare. I've only really ever met one vegetarian - that's in the last few years at work. People around us care about supporting the local community, and we eat good meat. But this is all a bit new. It gives you something to think about."
(F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore)

Hassan, 31
Cutting down

For Hasan, vegetarian and vegan diets were very visible in his daily life as a young Londoner - and he'd also done a lot of travelling during adolescence and young adulthood, exposing him to different UK and world cultures.

"I've lived in 5 or 6 different cities and you do get a lot of different exposure to different ways of eating, which means you get to talk that through and debate with lots of different kinds of people. In London, I know quite a lot of vegans and vegetarians, and I've talked a lot with my friends about cutting down on meat and dairy. It's not a hardship in London at all, there are so many places offering really beautifully prepared dishes - great mixes of flavours and textures." (M, 31, London, Cutting Down)

as part of a balanced diet; and farmers were generally trusted.[24] Often, these participants had met few if any people who took a different view or approach. A few participants noted that the research sessions themselves were the first time they'd considered that there might be any 'downsides' to meat and dairy consumption, such as environmental or animal welfare impacts.

> *"I was born and reared on a small farm with seven brothers and two sisters. I checked the internet to find that Vegans are mostly concerned with animal welfare. I would support animal welfare but not as a vegan. The idea that animals have an idyllic life in the wild or that they should be treated as humans or end up only to be seen in a zoo is completely wrong. We interact with animals as part of the food chain as they do with each other."*
> *(M, 63, N Ireland, Carnivore)*

In contrast, more urban participants and those who had travelled more (within or beyond the UK) typically had more varied exposure in terms of dietary influences and opportunities: more variety in places to shop and eat; more exposure to people with very different food values and habits; and so on. Those who had experienced exposure to different ways of eating - within their direct social circles, ideally in a 'safe' and non-polarised way - could 'see' different diets as a viable option. They knew that others like them, or others they liked, had done it; they had seen skills about how to achieve diet change modelled in practice; etc. Often, change in geography had also aligned with formative identity periods of adolescence and early adulthood - when participants were eager for new experiences and change.

> *"Now I'm out in the real world - no more uni, moved away from home and living the city life in London. Chicken stir fries are my go-to meal, but I find myself ordering more vegan options when I go out to eat because it's so widely available in London." (M, 28, London, Cutting Down)*

Geography often thus functioned as a shortcut measure of opportunity and exposure - critical requirements for change, and closely enmeshed with motivation and capability drivers. Without this kind of social exposure, the 'pathway' to dietary change was very hard to see; eating less or not eating meat often felt like a very foreign concept, and there was no social or cognitive 'scaffolding' to help people imagine what that might look like for them.

The role of geography in shaping accessibility of alternatives and substitutes
Geography played a very direct role in shaping the accessibility of 'alternative' diets, and of meat and dairy substitutes or alternatives. Many of our vegetarian and vegan participants noted that accessing appropriate food could be a challenge, particularly for those living outside of major cities. Many found that they needed to 'shop around' to buy their staples, not able to simply rely on a couple of key suppliers the way that their carnivore counterparts could (e.g., a supermarket and a butcher). For those living outside major cities, vegetarian and/or vegan restaurant and take-away options were often hugely limited.

> *"I like the vegan stuff from Waitrose. And then on the corner of my street to two sides I've got Aldi on one side and Lidl on the other side. So I buy some stuff from there. And then on the other side I've got Coop, and they've started doing some vegan things as well. And then Holland & Barrets, I buy a lot of my stuff there as well." (C3, F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)*

This was a particular challenge given that participants were often not just product-loyal but brand-loyal. For example, one participant had found via a process of trial and error that they only wanted to use Oatly's Barista as a milk replacement, far preferring the taste and texture to other brands. Likewise, when eating out, non-urban participants who were cutting down on/cutting out meat and dairy had very different access to appropriate food out of home. Londoners and other city residents were far more likely to be able to access a selection of cafes and restaurants with appealing vegan or vegetarian options; others were far less lucky.

As noted in Chapter 3, local geography was also particularly important for many of our rural participants given the importance that many participants placed on 'shopping local'. Buying local meat was not just an 'easy' thing for them to do, but one that provided benefits in terms of local relationships, support for local economies, and in terms of concerns about environmental sustainability.

> *"All meat from the butcher and weekly fruit and vegetables I shop locally. Most evenings we have a family meal all prepared from fresh - with locally sourced meat and veg." (F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore)*

5.2 You are who you eat with: social context powerfully drives behaviour

As illustrated in the examples below, social modelling from family, friend or participants' cultural norms provided powerful scaffolding for meat and dairy behaviours. Whatever was eaten (or not) by those around them made those choices seem not just 'easy' or 'doable', but 'normal' and default - and participants also learned skills that increased their capacity to repeat these choices on their own.

Family and childhood norms leave a long shadow of influence
Regardless of current eating behaviour, the importance of family in shaping meat and dairy consumption habits was reported as a universally powerful driver - particularly in terms of shaping childhood exposure to different kinds of foods, stances on the 'right' diet to achieve good health, and family 'norms' about what is and should be eaten day-to-day. In particular, families were an important source of early dietary heuristics as discussed previously.

> *"My parents - naturally as the ones who dictated my diet growing up and me being a man of habit, the meat and dairy I had as a child have stuck with me" (M, 24, Cardiff, Carnivore)*

> *"Growing up, my family ate a lot of meat with our meals. This influenced my preferences early on in life to where I have trouble feeling like a meal is complete without meat (or something that resembles it). I didn't grow up with any meat alternatives so I didn't seek them out until I went to uni at 18. As a result, I've become accustomed to eating a lot of meat in my diet." (M, 28, London, Cutting Down)*

As adults, partners often held similar sway over meat and dairy consumption. Some of our male participants had delegated much or all of the household cooking to their partners.

"Judging from the eating habits I've built up so far in my life I don't think my tea and dinner meals would change much at this or any future age. Only way I can see my eating habits changing is if my future wife was to prefer other things." (M, 24, Cardiff, Carnivore)

Cultural influences on dietary choices and behaviours

Cultural norms were a powerful driver of dietary habits across the sample, regardless of whether participants ate meat and dairy - although in line with the wider literature in this area, there was no evidence of clear ties between ethnicity and consumption habits or meat and dairy motivations. [25]

For example, many White English participants were for example deeply emotionally tied to their weekend take-away routines, favourite 'night out' curries or 'meat and two veg' staples. Some Asian participants referenced the importance of meat in both standard and 'special' cultural meals, whether in the form of a standard Tuesday night dinner, or a celebratory Eid family meal for example. And one vegan Greek-Cypriot participant mentioned that the word 'vegan' or 'vegetarian' didn't really exist in the Greek language, which sometimes made explaining his dietary preferences to family!

"Being from an Asian background the foods I eat have been heavily influenced by culture. I eat a lot like my parents; the foods I've grown to like and become accustomed to eating have been influenced by this since my childhood" (M, 24, Cardiff, Carnivore)

Conversely, others noted that being raised within largely vegetarian diet cultures had made not eating meat feel not only 'normal', but easy.

"My ma always raised us on the thought process that we don't need to kill someone else to keep ourselves alive. This principle is what probably maintained me being veggie/vegan after leaving the nest [...] 80% of Indians are veggie at least, so it wasn't tough to maintain." (F, 24, London, Vegan)

Family and friends are powerful influences of change and trying something new

Whilst this driver was in evidence across the sample, its power was sometimes clearest in discussion with our 'carnivore' and 'cutting down' participants, who often cited the influence of friends, family or colleagues as some of the only drivers of change to their habitual meat and dairy consumption. Colleagues, best friends, children, and partners often reduced the sense of discomfort or even fear of trying something new.

Often, carnivores had only considered trying to cut down or trying alternatives and substitutes because a direct family member or friend had encouraged them to do so, or because they had needed to cater for others' dietary choices within the home.

"In more recent times my friends have influenced my choices on what I eat, as I mentioned my best friend likes to eat a lot of vegetarian and meat free options so to support that I've started to do the same. I do usually go for vegetarian sausages when I go out for breakfast with my friends." (M, 24, Cardiff, Carnivore)

"I will continue to look for alternatives going forward, not because I am planning to go vegan/ vegetarian myself but because my daughter's vegetarian boyfriend is spending more time at our house so I do also cater for him." (F, 54, London, Carnivore)

"My friend said that oat milk is healthier than cow's, she gave me some and now I have it with my porridge every morning" (F, 45, N Ireland, Cutting Down)

Social identity, conflict and isolation:

Across our meat and dairy eating sample it was clear that animal product consumption was a ritualised norm in many social eating and gathering situations, from weekday family meals to special nights out. These occasions were sources of real social pleasure for most - ones that people considering cutting down on/cutting out meat and dairy worried they would miss out on. People were very aware of the ways in which having different dietary needs or preferences could be perceived as burdensome or 'other.'

"I'd feel a bit nervous about my choices and how my family would react." (F, 43, N Ireland, Carnivore)

These fears were not unfounded; vegetarian and vegan participants often reported painful memories of social isolation as a result of their dietary choices; wondering why they had more restrictions than other children at school; or feeling like 'the difficult one' in a group of friends or family. For these participants, what were for others moments of taken-for-granted social cohesion became potential sources of isolation, stress or even ridicule. Some talked about the stress of never knowing when you would need to 'justify' yourself - whether to strangers, workmates, or family. Throwing a dinner meant catering for all diets and cooking meals for all, rather than risk being accused of 'forcing others to be vegan.' In these stories, there was a clear penalty to be paid in deviating from the cultural norm: never being able to simply take for granted the ease of a school meal, work party, or night out with friends.

It was striking that vegetarians' stories in this space seemed to be primarily past tense; as acceptability and understanding of vegetarian diets increased over time, their choices had become more normalised and their social isolation lessened. Vegans were very much facing these issues now, in the present day. Worries about social isolation and judgment were often powerful barriers to 'switching' to veganism, at least initially.

Although at the time these moments had often caused real sadness or even anguish, those that persisted in their dietary choices reported that weathering the storm often strengthened their resolve over time, as discomfort was eventually (partially) replaced with pride and a stronger sense of identity. Finding others that shared their beliefs, and places where they could eat in ways that aligned with their values without needing to justify themselves or face social backlash, often solidified this sense of shared identity.

Social power at home: who are the 'real decision makers'?

Participants often mentioned that dietary choices don't occur in a social vacuum, and considered the impact of their choices on others in the home - and whether those choices would even be 'allowed'. The most obvious decision makers are those who do the shopping and cook the meals;

Amanda, 35
Carnivore

Amanda talked about feeling very judged for her dietary choices and ethics in her community just outside of Manchester. Finding specialist restaurants that 'understood' was powerful - providing options but also a sense of community.

"I have faced a lot of ridicule and misunderstanding because of my ethics and diet. I can remember going on like a work Christmas do and ordering food and I just got a plate of broccoli and some chips because there was just no vegan menu and I was just laughed at. "A

"I'd come across a vegan place on Facebook. And it made me feel really good because I knew that it was going to be completelyAvegan, there was nothing gonna contaminate it... The lady that owned the place came and sat down as well, and we just started to chat about veganism. And she was really positive about it... That's what made me feelA positive about my choice. The fact that I wasn't sat around people that judged. (F, 35, Manchester, Vegan)A

particularly in a 'nuclear family' household with more traditional gender roles, these were more likely to be women than men overall.

"We use more chicken because the boss [wife] says it's better than too much beef. She does all the cooking so I do what she says." (M, 69, Cardiff, Cutting Down)

However there are more dynamics at play within any given household that can heavily influence those with the final decision making power, for example:

- **The rise of the teenager** - family influences tend to be replaced by influence from friends or partners and they bring these requests home - often strongly asserting their independence and choice
- **The 'better cook'** - for example for those in a relationship the partner who most enjoyed cooking would have more influence over weekly meals and diet
- **Special diets and protein needs** - health needs amongst people at home took priority, often including assumed needs around dietary protein; for example, families tended to be fairly accepting of catering for 'needs' for more meat and carbs when (mostly male) members were 'bulking' or in growth spurts.
- Navigating social conflicts within the home

Meat and dairy participants were mostly open to being accommodating if family members became a vegan or vegetarian, but on the condition that they could justify the need for and importance for the change. Many felt that the impact on the rest of the household would be sizable, and thus understanding why was important for acceptance.

"I would sit down with them to find out why and what made them decide to become vegan and what this will mean for the rest of the household ensuring that they retain the right to consume meat. I would expect them to have researched this before making this decision and I have checked for myself on the internet the impact on the rest of the household."
(M, 63, N Ireland, Carnivore)

"I currently eat more vegetables than meat, however other family members do not wish to follow me. If I was to make a major change in how we all eat everyday, as a unit then I will be creating a big uprise in the family and I believe I would be voted out 5 against 1." (M, 39, London, Carnivore)
Many vegans and vegetarians felt 'at war' with the real decision maker in their home when they asked to be accommodated. For some, this can be quite a turbulent time to look back on where they had to hold their ground and prove themselves.

"I was screamed at by my mum. She was a single mother of three, and was adamant she could never afford to be specific with my diet compared to the other two. She gave me hell for it. She hit me, she grounded me, she took my pocket money off me. And she made me starve for two days because she kept putting a corned beef pie she'd made in front of me, and said to eat that or eat nothing, and I decided to eat nothing. [...] It went on for a good year of people trying to force me to eat meat. And after that time, they obviously accepted that I wasn't going to ever eat meat again." (F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)

For those who have caring responsibilities, or who are in charge of food for their household, balancing different diets at home is sometimes a challenge. They describe having to compromise on their preferences to maintain a sense of peace at home - though again, dairy is seen as an acceptable compromise, while meat tends to be off-limits.

"My oldest son who is 8, is not a massive meat eater. He will have meat and things if we go out for tea, but I don't really cook them at home. He is happy enough with vegetarian and vegan alternatives. [...] So I'll always make for myself the vegan things and generally a vegetarian meal for the other two." (F, 35, Manchester, Vegan)

Tense conversations about veganism tend to happen with friends, extended family or acquaintances, rather than with other members of the household. Those who had partners and children tend to live in all vegan households (apart from one whose eldest son eats meat outside of home). Therefore, where there is friction in the home, it isn't about veganism itself, but about the kind of vegan food they want to eat (processed vs fresh ingredients).

Interestingly, the idea of a romantic partner in a vegan household returning to meat and dairy was hard to imagine without causing some damage to the relationship. A conversation between a vegan couple highlights how significant veganism is to their joint identity...

"It would be weird, because we're both ethical vegans. [...] It would be such a major shift in your personality, so I'm going to assume that you have to eat meat for medical reasons. [...] The most important thing would be that the meat that you do eat would have to be organic and local and as humanely produced as possible. I know, it's not really possible, but there's better and worse

things. And I know it'd be really difficult for you. So I'd try to support it. Obviously, I'd find it quite difficult." (M, 28, London, Vegan - his partner responding to the hypothetical scenario of him returning to meat)

Navigating social conflicts out of the home

Vegan and vegetarian parents knew they had less control over what their children eat outside of the home. Some were more open to this than others, for example allowing their children to make their own choices about meat and dairy away from home, so long as they uphold their standards when under the same roof.

Social conflict can be experienced as early as the planning stages of an evening out, one vegetarian participant tells us a story of an uncomfortable meal out with friends…

"I've been in situations where I don't want to go to a place I have been invited to because it doesn't cater well to me as a veggie. But my friends suggested it because of convenience, and it's a safe bet so it can be hard to challenge that and explain myself. In the past a few friends went out and one of them got quite offended and said I was being fussy by suggesting a different restaurant, so I stepped back and we went to the original, less suitable (for me) place" (F, 60, Bristol, Vegetarian)

Those cutting down on meat and dairy were likely to avoid potential social conflict when out in restaurants by going with the social majority and ordering dishes with meat and/or dairy, some with the intention to 'make up for it' in another meal that week.

"If I'm out in a restaurant, and my friends are eating meat, I will most certainly eat meat. Not just to avoid annoying judgy convos, but to also avoid feeling like I'm missing out." (M, 30, Bristol, Cutting Down

5.3 The opportunity costs of change: time, effort and budget

Changing your diet is of course ultimately dependent on whether you have the money, spare brainpower, and spare time to do so. Below we explore the impact of these drivers on meat and dairy choices.

Budget powerfully shapes dietary opportunities

Although some acknowledged that it is feasible to eat an inexpensive plant-based diet, many participants had the perception that 'vegetarian' and 'vegan' food tended to be quite pricey - carnivore and vegetarian/vegan alike. This was particularly true for the pre-packaged marketed 'vegan' and 'vegetarian' products, such as milk and meal 'replacements' that people tended to default to when imagining non-animal-product foods.

"I think for somebody just starting out and looking at what they see when they go to Boots and they see that a sandwich is like 3 times more, they think oh no, I can't! (F, 47, Cardiff, Vegan)

One participant, a single mother carnivore feeding both her recently vegan daughter and 'very meat eating' sons, noted that trying to provide her daughter with equivalent meals had become

very expensive for her. She often felt conflicted, torn between a desire to support her daughter's choices, and the need to respect the realistic boundaries of her weekly food budget. Two vegan participants reported that family had been hugely unsupportive of their choice in diet in part because of budgetary reasons.

In contrast, it was notable that for some of our more rural participants, particularly those from Northern Ireland and Wales, meat and dairy consumption was not just a 'normal' dietary choice but an affordable one. When they imagined what a week of meal planning might involve if they cut down on or cut out meat and dairy, even the prospect of the additional produce budget caused worry.

"Every week I eat fish because my nephew fishes regularly, making it readily available for me. That's also very healthy and cost efficient. Eggs because I have hens in my garden, making them easily available and extremely cost effective for me budgeting my pension... If I wasn't eating meat and dairy, the biggest barrier would probably be financial. I am sure if I had to buy more fruit and vegetables or meat substitutes it would increase the cost of my weekly shop!" " (M, 63, N Ireland, Carnivore)

Time and effort resources were also often significant barriers to reducing meat and dairy consumption, particularly for our 'cutting down' participants. Several participants noted that they found it far easier to stick to their intentions around cutting down when life was calmer - for example during quieter periods at work, or during the restrictions of 2020 lockdowns. When life changed and became more stressful or unpredictable, they simply did not have the cognitive and calendar capacity to come up with new meals to eat; check nutritional balance; shop for specialist ingredients, etc.

Vegetarian and vegan participants sometimes mentioned that time pressure or stress also reduced the variety of what they ate; they would default to 'easier' tried and tested meals, sometimes offering less in the way of taste and satisfaction.

"We started eating veggie just in the first lockdown [...] it was epic, because we would go to Tesco [...] we could just be so creative with it. Whereas now it's a little bit more challenging as we have less time to play with [...] Tesco felt like a theme park in lockdown." (M, 24, N Ireland, Vegetarian)

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

At the outset of this work, our intention was to build on existing literature on drivers of meat and dairy consumption for UK participants and provide an up-to-date snapshot of varied motivations, views, attitudes and behaviours in this area. In particular, drawing on the findings of the University of Bath's rapid review, it was clear that there was far more evidence available on what people thought about meat and dairy consumption than on what happened when people actually tried to put their intentions into practice.

This research goes some way to filling that gap, providing rich lived experience evidence on what shapes meat and dairy consumption behaviours for a wide variety of UK residents. Findings were highly varied across participant groups, both in terms of dietary groups (carnivore; 'cutting down'; vegetarian; and vegan), but also in terms of lifestage and demographics. Why people might want to cut down on meat and dairy, and their experiences in attempting to do so, are highly individual - utterly different depending on geography, lifestage, budget, social network, and so on.

One clear and resonant finding of this qualitative and ethnographic exploration is just how complex, layered and contradictory people's motivations, capabilities and opportunities around animal product consumption are. Not one participant in this work reported a 'clear line' of behaviour across the COM-B framework - that is, between what they 'wanted' to do - how ready and able they felt to do that - and how supportive their social and geographical environments were in terms of supporting them to do it. Journeys to change (or failure!) were fluid, fraught and challenging. Participants wanting to change their behaviour often faced active barriers at almost every level; it requires an enormous amount of emotional, cognitive and logistical energy to escape the animal products dietary 'default'.

On one level, it is perhaps not a surprise that we found that change is hard and complicated. Humans are complicated creatures - and the reader themselves will likely be able to recall many instances in which their own dietary views and behaviour were fluid, contradictory and complex. It is far easier to express a view on a question of diet than it is to 'live' that view in practice, every day, despite the many barriers or changes in context that may emerge. What barriers emerge depends on the contexts we live in, which are unique for everyone.

But complexity and context were also a powerful finding to keep in mind for those who would seek to shape the diets of the nation; it is far easier to determine the 'right' diet for the UK public on a policy or environmental level than it is for the UK public to put 'right' into practice - if they even believe that there is any 'right' diet to follow at all.

For example, it was pronounced that even at the level of motivation, there were often no clear 'directions' shaping meat and dairy consumption; automatic drivers like taste, satisfaction and social pleasure are powerful and often sit in conflict with moral and ethical motivations around animal and planetary welfare. Many reported that their brains 'want' one thing whilst their bodies 'want' another - meaning that to enact

a change in meat and dairy consumption people don't just have to fight barriers from the outside, but from within. As creatures whose daily habits and behaviours are primarily driven by automatic drivers (and for whom drivers like taste and satisfaction are quite literally viscerally powerful), dietary change thus becomes a huge challenge: your stomach can be one's own worst enemy.

This conflict at the level of motivation was also particularly powerful given how much motivation participants tended to need to make a change, because it was these core motivations they returned to time and time again when facing inevitable challenges at the level of capability and opportunity. Motivation powered them through inaccessibility of meat and dairy alternatives. It softened the blow of social stigma or exclusion - helping them feel even these chronic pains were 'worth it'. It helped them stay the course when a favourite former meal beckoned, or to try again after 'falling off the wagon' after a busy week at work.

However, as we saw in this research, motivation is also something it is very difficult to 'instil' in others. Either a potential motivation appeals to you, or it doesn't, and being told by others that you 'should' care about something not only tends not to work, it tends to entrench rather than shift existing opinions. Policy approaches that focus on shifting motivation will need to tread carefully indeed. It is enormously difficult to challenge behaviours in this space without sparking a sense of judgment, and thus rejection. In trying to shift meat and dairy behaviours, there is a real risk that policymakers instead both entrench existing behavioural habits and also reduce participants' engagement with and belief in any authorities that they perceive as 'telling them what to do.'

And of course, it was a pronounced finding of this work that even with all the motivation in the world, people's ability to shift their animal products consumption is shaped largely by drivers out of their control: their social and geographical context; their budgets; the support or discouragement of those around them; their confidence in navigating information overwhelm, and so on. Not all UK people will live in contexts which make change easy - in fact, the vast majority, for one reason or another, do not.

Again, those seeking to shift behaviour in this space will need to honour and account for these deep contextual differences, and behavior change plans will need to acknowledge and plan for the varied and layered challenges that most citizens would need to navigate to make change. Some of the most powerful drivers are also the most intractable: budgets, social environment, and heuristics that have shaped dietary attitudes since childhood.

In some cases, changing these contexts is a matter of long-term planning and change by degrees - for example, shifting social norms around meat and dairy consumption, and countering rules of thumb that entrench animal consumption as default. Others are challenging to tackle head on without wider structural shifts; could we really ask those on lower incomes, for whom finance and time are often twinned barriers, to make a dietary change that may simply not be feasible in the budgets and time available?

In all cases, this is space to tread lightly, and in partnership with the public. Initiatives and communications will need testing; educational materials must be seen as only partial interventions; expected outcomes will need to be measured and realistic. We have certainly seen in this work that the tides are shifting, with many of our younger and more affluent participants very open to making change. They may yet lead the way - bringing the same change in acceptability and support that our vegetarian participants reported having experienced over time. But if policymakers seek to speed this shift, prioritising those who want to change is critical - and even those who are motivated may need structural support.

Appendix

[1] https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you

[2] https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/the-covid-19-consumer-research

[3] Sanchez-Sabate, R. and Sabate, J. 2019. Consumer Attitudes Towards Environmental Concerns around Meat Consumption: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071220

[4] Nash, N., Colin Whittle, C., and Whitmarsh, L., 2020, Rapid Review of 'Moments of Change' & Food-Related Behaviours.

[5] Gillison, F., Lannon, G., Verplanken, B., Barnett, J., and Grey, E., 2021, A rapid review of the evidence on the factors underpinning the purchasing and consumption of meat and dairy products.

[6] For week 1, four groups were held, split by dietary group: 'Vegans + Veggies', 'Veggies + Cutting Down', 'Cutting Down + Carnivores'. In week 2, we gently combined groups to explore points of commonality and difference, with three groups total: Carnivore/Cutting down; Cutting Down/ Vegetarian/Vegan. Note that we had originally intended to further 'mix' groups across dietary preference, but found during the ethnography fieldwork that this was too socially fraught.

[7] Atkins, L., West, R., and Michie, S., 2014, The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Designing Interventions.

[8] Note that for simplicity, we have applied a basic COM-B framework to the structure and reporting for this set of evidence; our purpose in applying it has been more to help structure behavioural findings across a wide set of exploratory objectives, rather than to report 'exactly how' meat and dairy decisions happen in action. There is extensive literature on applying the COM-B framework to more fine-grained modelling of behaviour in action. See further work from Susan Michie and colleagues taking this kind of approach here: https://www.qeios.com/read/WW04E6.2

[9] Sanchez-Sabate, R. and Sabate, J., 2019. Consumer Attitudes Towards Environmental Concerns of Meat Consumption: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071220

[10] This literature review found that targeting personal benefits like health, enjoyment and price were likely to be more powerful in motivating changes in meat and dairy consumption, as these drive habitual behaviour more strongly than motivators like environmental benefit. Gillison, F., Lannon, G., Verplanken, B., Barnett, J., and Grey, E., 2021, A rapid review of the evidence on the factors underpinning the purchasing and consumption of meat and dairy products.

[11] Note that these audience difference findings resonate with recent findings from the Nuffield Council on Bioethics' recent public dialogue on gene editing in farmed animals. In that piece of work, also conducted by the Bright Harbour team (supporting lead partners at Basis Social), this difference in audience 'starting points' shaped not just participants' dietary habits but their views on food systems and new food technologies (such as gene editing). https://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/assets/pdfs/BASIS-report-online-dialogue-genome-editing-and-farmed-animals.pdf

[12] Lin-Shilatra, L. and Fischer, A.R.H., 2020. Consumer Moral Dilemma in the Choice of Animal-Friendly Meat Products. Sustainability, 12(12).; Sanchez-Sabate, R. and Sabate, J., 2019. Consumer Attitudes Towards Environmental Concerns of Meat Consumption: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/su12124844

[13] Lin-Schilstra, L. and Fischer, A.R.H., 2020. Consumer Moral Dilemma in the Choice of Animal-Friendly Meat Products. Sustainability, 12(12); Ipsos, 2019. Global views on food; what are the world's food habits? https://doi.org/10.3390/su12124844

[14] Lin-Schilatra, L. and Fischer, A.R.H., 2020. Consumer Moral Dilemma in the Choice of Animal-Friendly Meat Products. Sustainability, 12(12). https://doi.org/10.3390/su12124844; Sanchez-Sabate, R. and Sabate, J., 2019. Consumer Attitudes Towards Environmental Concerns of Meat Consumption: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071220

[15] This sense of 'natural order' as partially justifying eating animal products was also a finding in Bright Harbour's recent work with Basis Social for the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, exploring public attitudes and views around gene editing in farmed animals. https://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/publications/genome-editing-and-farmed-animals/public-dialogue-on-genome-editing-and-farmed-animals

[16] Sanchez-Sabate, R. and Sabate, J. 2019. Consumer Attitudes Towards Environmental Concerns of Meat Consumption: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071220; Hartmann, C. and Siegrist, M. 2017. Consumer perception and behaviour regarding sustainable protein consumption: A systematic review. Trends in Food Science and Technology, 61, pp.11-25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2016.12.006

[17] Lin-Shilstra, L. and Fischer, A.R.H., 2020. Consumer Moral Dilemma in the Choice of Dairy and Meat Products. Sustainability, 12(12). https://doi.org/10.3390/su12124844

[18] Gillison, F., Lannon, G., Verplanken, B., Barnett, J., and Grey, E., 2021, A rapid review of the evidence on the factors underpinning the purchasing and consumption of meat and dairy products.

[19] Ipsos, 2019. Global views on food; What are the world's food habits?

[20] Gillison, F., Lannon, G., Verplanken, B., Barnett, J., and Grey, E., 2021, A rapid review of the evidence on the factors underpinning the purchasing and consumption of meat and dairy products.

[21] Onwezen, M.C., Bouwman, E.P., Reinders, M.J. and Dagavos, H. 2021. A systemic review on consumer acceptance of alternative proteins: Pulses, algae, plant-based meat alternatives, and cultured meat. Appetite, 113, pp.141-154. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2020.105058; Taufik, D., Verain, M.C.D., Bouwman, E.P. and Reinders, M.J., 2019. Determinants of real-life behavioural interventions to stimulate more plant-based and less animal-based diets: A systematic review. Trends in Food Science and Technology, 93, pp.281-303. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2019.09.019

[22] McCarthy, K.S., Parker, M., Ameerally, A., Drake, S.L. and Drake, M.A., 2017. Drivers of choice for fluid milk versus plant-based alternatives: What are consumer perceptions of fluid milk? Journal of Dairy Science, 100(8), pp. 6125-6138. https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2016-12519; Haas, R., Schnepps, A., Pichler, A. and Meixner, O., 2019. Cow Milk versus Plant-Based Milk Substitutes: A Comparison of Product Image and Motivational Structure of Consumption. Sustainability, 11(18). https://doi.org/10.3390/su11185046

[23] Onwezen, M.C., Bouwman, E.P., Reinders, M.J. and Dagevos, H. 2021. A systematic review on consumer acceptance of alternative proteins: Pulses, algae, insects, plant-based meat alternatives, and cultured meat. Appetite, 159 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2020.105058; Pandey, S., Ritz, C. and Perez-Cueto, F.J.A., 2021. An application of the theory of planned behaviour

Appendix

to predict intention to consumer plant-based yogurt alternatives. Foods, 10(1).; Boaitey, A. and Minegishi, K., 2020a. Determinants of Household Choice of Dairy and Plant-based Milk Alternatives: Evidence from a Field Survey. Journal of Food Products Marketing, 26(9), pp. 639-653. https://doi.org/10.1080/10454446.2020.1857318

[24] This is in line with wider evidence; urban dwellers tend to be much less trusting of farmers and farming than rural residents. Bryant, C. and Barnett, J. 2020. Consumer Acceptance of Cultured Meat: An Updated Review (2018-2020). Applied Sciences-Basel, 10(15). https://doi.org/10.3390/app10155201

[25] Desbouys, L., Mejean, C., DeHenaw, S. and Castetbon, K. 2020. Socio-economic and cultural disparities in diet amongst adolescents and young adults: a systematic review. Public Health Nutrition, 23(5), pp. 843-860. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980019002362