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VEG FACTS 2020 IN BRIEF

CONTRIBUTORS



What next for more veg?

When we first started compiling *Veg Facts: in Brief* at the beginning of 2020, we were particularly keen to explore vulnerabilities in the food system that look set to impact on veg over the coming decade. We hoped to identify some of the opportunity areas that with more investment and focus could help to build a food system that supports UK vegetable consumption.

Five months later, as Covid-19 and accompanying social distancing measures continue to impact on food systems globally, those themes of vulnerability and opportunity remain critical parts of the conversation when it comes to the case for supporting veg. If anything, they are now more important than ever.

- **With UK availability of veg heavily dependent on imports and a seasonal migrant horticultural workforce, the case for investing in the UK's efficient yet historically underfunded horticultural sector still stands.**
- **With financial institutions predicting a global recession, the need to ensure that veg is accessible and affordable remains as important as ever in the face of rising unemployment, shrinking disposable incomes, and widening health and dietary inequalities.**
- **With policymakers, farmers, and food businesses currently facing the challenging conundrum of how best to rebuild and adapt, the risks climate change and Brexit pose to UK vegetable supplies in the longer-term have not gone away.**

In the six weeks that followed the start of lockdown in the UK, 5 million households experienced food insecurity, with 72% of parents receiving free school meal vouchers reporting that they were worried about getting enough veg. The fragility of the UK's horticultural workforce became a national cause for concern as travel restrictions came into force, with a 'Pick for Britain' campaign launched in an attempt to recruit UK workers to take the fruit and veg picking jobs usually filled by migrant workers (just 1% of UK horticultural workers are UK residents). Yet we also saw opportunities for veg, with sales of veg boxes increasing 111% during this period, and with a new awareness among citizens of food supply chains.

It's our hope that *Veg Facts 2020: in brief* (although written just before Covid-19) acts as a useful reminder that we mustn't forget about vegetables, with their benefits for health, the environment, and the economy. With many beginning to think about how to build back better, there is a real opportunity for actors and influencers across the food system to use this moment to support UK vegetable production and consumption. With many predicting increases in food prices as the effects of Covid-19 begin to be felt along the food chain, the need to support and promote veg for everyone is an increasingly urgent one.



Veg, Veganuary and Vulnerability

WHAT NEXT FOR MORE VEG?

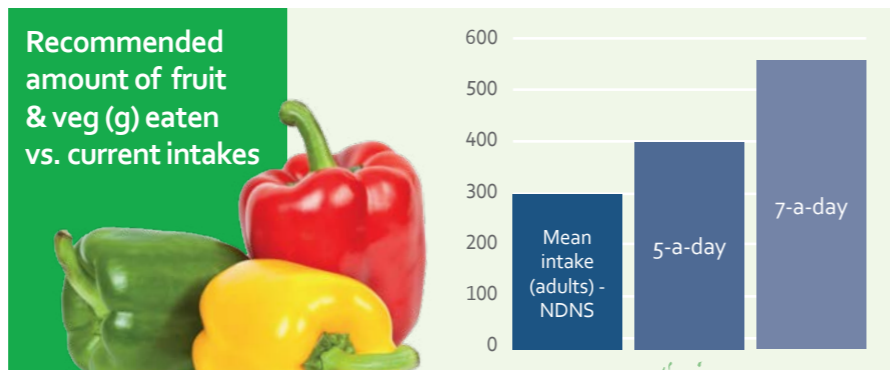
We all know veg is good for us, but we're still not eating enough of it. Four years ago, we explored the many reasons for this in *Veg Facts*, a brief which outlined key barriers to consumption. Four years on, the UK has undoubtedly changed, but has our veg consumption shifted? And what next for more veg?



Sources: One adult portion is 80g based on the recommended 400g a day of fruit and veg. For our calculations, we have used a portion size of 50g for primary school-aged children. This is the midpoint value of the 40-60g recommended for children aged 4-10 years old in the School Food Plan.

HOW MUCH SHOULD WE BE EATING?

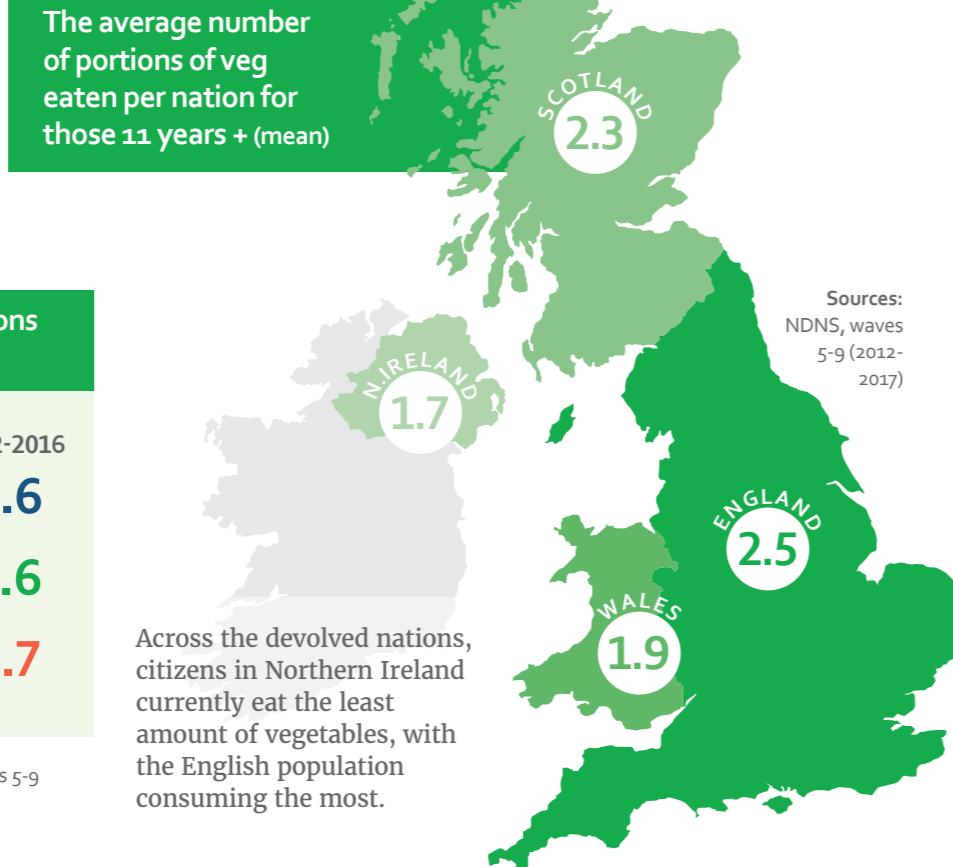
Although the 5-a-day message has been widely communicated, PHE's recommended quantity, as indicated in the Eatwell Guide, is actually closer to 7-a-day.ⁱ Others suggest we should be eating even more, with the EAT Lancet commission suggesting up to 11-a-day.ⁱⁱ Either way, we've some way to go before we hit dietary recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption.



Sources: NDNS, years 7/8, 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016.; NHS, Eat Well, 2018; PHE, 2017.

HOW MUCH VEG ARE WE EATING?

In the past five years, veg intake has remained fairly static, with children's consumption remaining particularly low.



The average number of veg portions eaten per day (mean)

	2008-2012	2012-2016
ADULTS (>16 YEARS)	2.5	2.6
CHILDREN (11-16 YEARS)	1.7	1.6
CHILDREN (5-10 YEARS)	1.8	1.7

Sources: NDNS, waves 1-4 (2008-2012); NDNS, waves 5-9 (2012-2017)



It's worrying that the amount of people eating less than one portion of veg a day has either remained the same or increased across all age groups since 2016, with almost a third of children under 10 now eating less than one portion of veg a day.

Despite the latest Eatwell Guide, which captures current dietary recommendations, recommending roughly seven portions of fruit and veg a day, very few people of any age eat three-and-a-half portions of veg a day, with these figures having remained fairly static over almost a decade.

% eating less than one portion of veg a day

	2008-2012	2012-2016
ADULTS (>16 YEARS)	10%	11%
CHILDREN (11-16 YEARS)	25%	25%
CHILDREN (5-10 YEARS)	25%	33%

Sources: NDNS, waves 1-4 (2008-2012); NDNS, waves 5-9 (2012-2017)

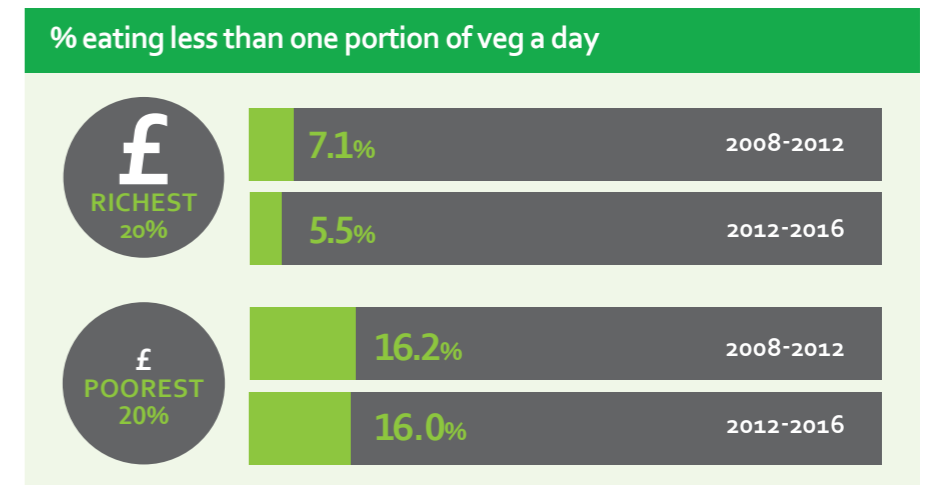
% eating less than 3.5 portions of veg per day

	2008-2012	2012-2016
ADULTS (>16 YEARS)	80%	79%
CHILDREN (11-16 YEARS)	95%	96%
CHILDREN (5-10 YEARS)	90%	94%

Sources: NDNS, waves 1-4 (2008-2012); NDNS, waves 5-9 (2012-2017)

Although there has been a welcome drop in numbers of those in high income groups eating less than one portion of veg a day, this has remained virtually the same among low income groups, suggesting widening dietary inequalities.

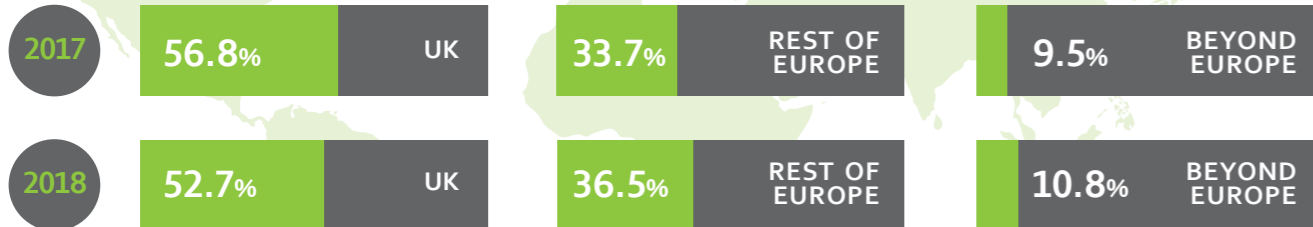
Government data that looks at levels of household income show that 3% of children live in households that cannot afford to buy fresh fruit and vegetables every day – around 400,000 children across the UK.^{iii*}



Sources: NDNS, waves 5-9 (2012-2017)

Where does the UK's veg come from?

The UK supplies 52.7% of our veg, with the majority of our imported vegetables coming from Spain and the Netherlands. Home production decreased by 12% to 2.4 million tonnes in 2018 – the lowest level of production for over 20 years.



Sources: UK (Defra, Horticulture Statistics 2018), with data for Europe and beyond Europe compiled from Defra, Horticulture Statistics 2018, and ITC Trade map, Trade statistics for international business development, accessed February 2020.

Why does the UK need to grow and eat more veg?

FOR OUR HEALTH

Diets that are low in vegetables are associated with almost **21,000 premature deaths** in the UK every year.^{iv*}

It's estimated that each additional portion of veg consumed can reduce risk of mortality by between 5% and 16%.^{v vi}

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

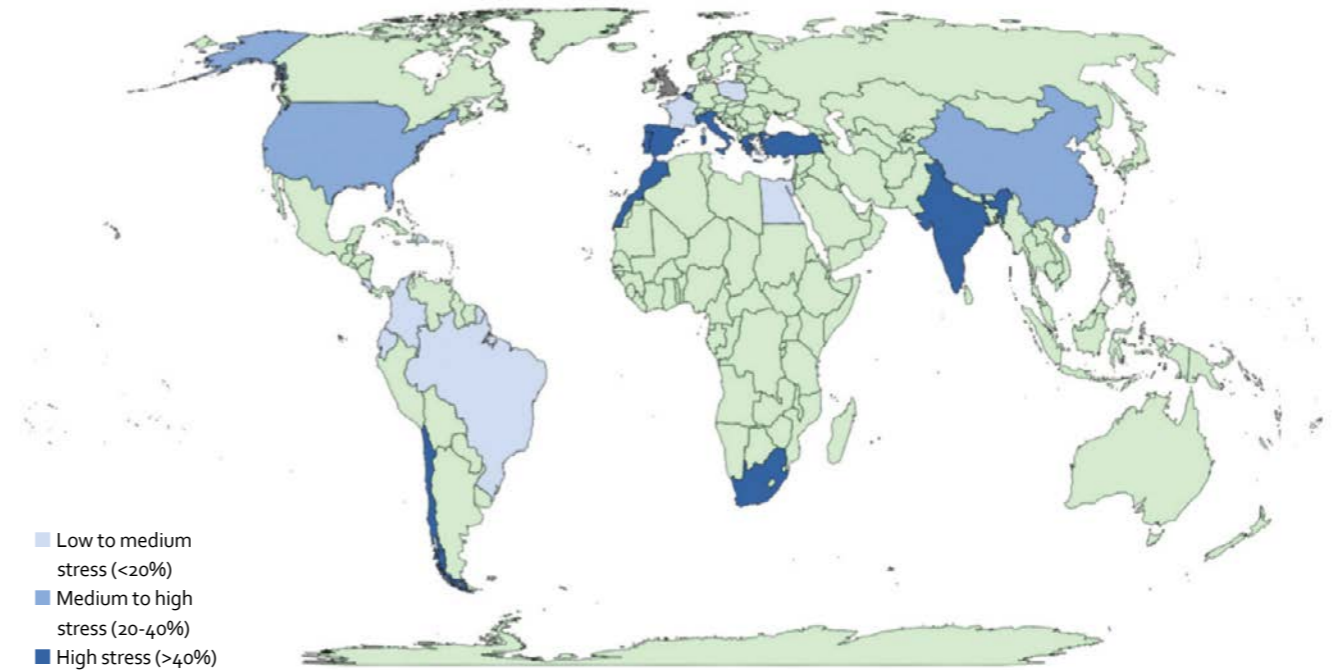
A growing proportion of the UK's fruit and veg supply is increasingly dependent on climate-vulnerable countries.

In 1987, approximately 20% of the UK market's fruit and vegetable supply was produced in countries vulnerable to climate change. This proportion had increased to 32% by 2013.

What's more, the UK's supply of fruit and vegetables from countries likely to face high, or extremely high, levels of water scarcity in the near future increased from 4.0.6% to 53.7% between 1987 and 2013.

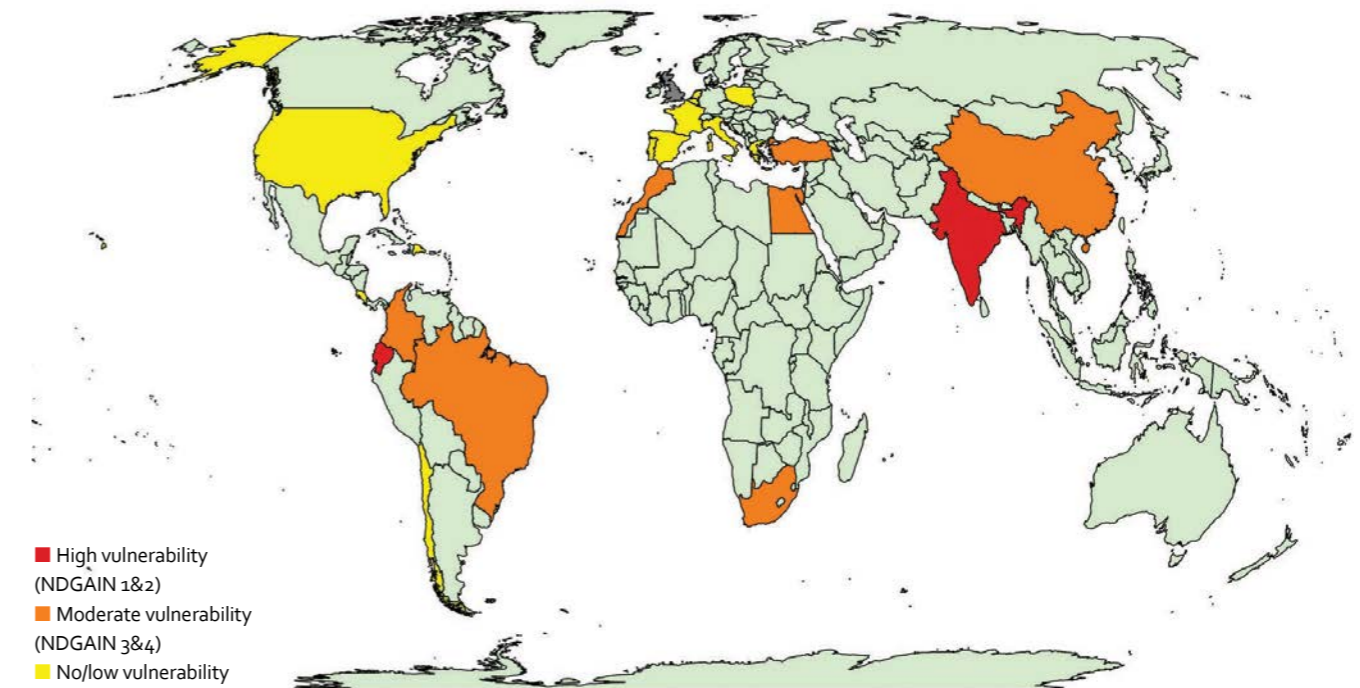
ALMOST
21,000
PREMATURE
DEATHS IN THE
UK EVERY YEAR
DUE TO LOW VEG
CONSUMPTION

The water stress of countries (ratio of total water withdrawals to total renewable supply, World Resources Institute) that provide a high proportion of the UK's fruit and vegetable supply (>1%), 2013

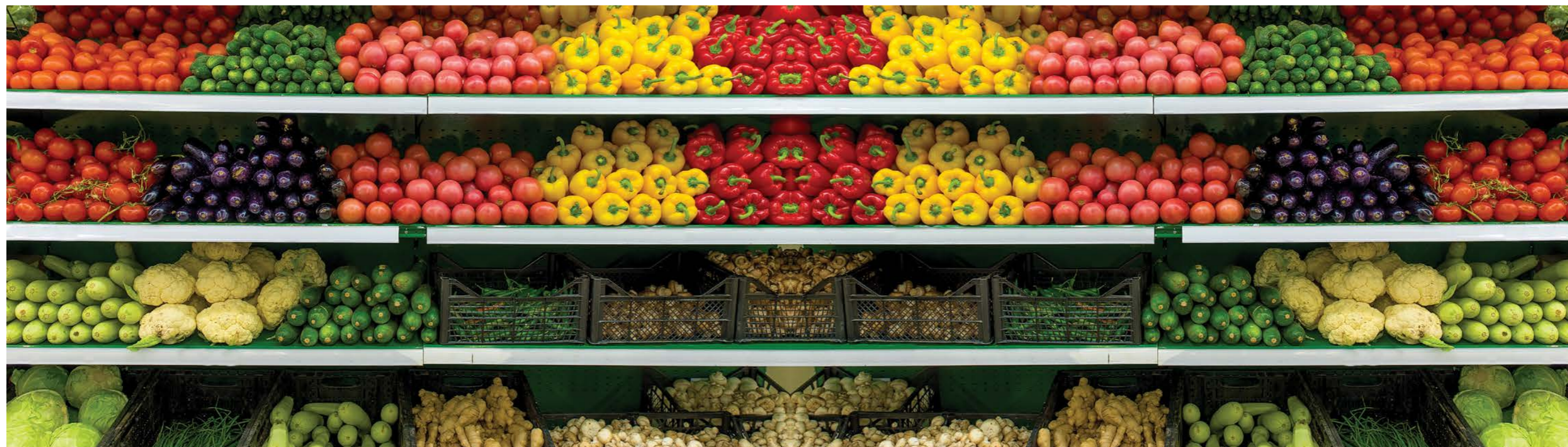


Sources: Adapted from World Resources Institute, WRI Aqueduct, Gassert et al. 2013

The climate vulnerability of countries (based on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (NDGAIN) country index) that provide a high proportion of the UK's fruit and vegetable supply (>1%), 2013.



Sources: SHEFS. Policy Brief 1: Is the UK's supply of fruit and vegetables future proof? 2020. www.shefsglobal.lshtm.ac.uk/publications



FOR THE UK ECONOMY

If the UK started eating 7-a-day and our current import and home production ratio remained the same, UK horticultural production would need to grow by **84.3%** to meet demand (taking into account food waste at current levels), creating **£1.18 billion in value** to the British economy.

Despite producing more than half of our total vegetable supply, the quantity of land used to grow our veg takes up less than 1% of total agricultural land area in the UK.^{viii} For the population to reach 7-a-day at the current yield and home production ratio, another 115,789 hectares of land would need to come into production, bringing the overall amount of land required to **just 1.4% of total** agricultural land available.



% land used for vegetables in the UK (2018)		
Region	Area used to grow veg (ha)	% total agricultural land used for veg
ENGLAND	116,741	1.22%
SCOTLAND	18,649	0.33%
WALES	670	0.04%
NORTHERN IRELAND	1,300	0.10%
UK	137,360	0.75%

Note: the definition of vegetables excludes potatoes.

Sources: England (Defra 2019, Horticulture stats 2018, Table 1), Scotland (June Agriculture Census 2019, Table 1b and 1c), Wales (Data from WG Stats Dept Direct for 2019), Northern Ireland (NI Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2018, p.34)

WHAT DOES BREXIT MEAN FOR VEG?

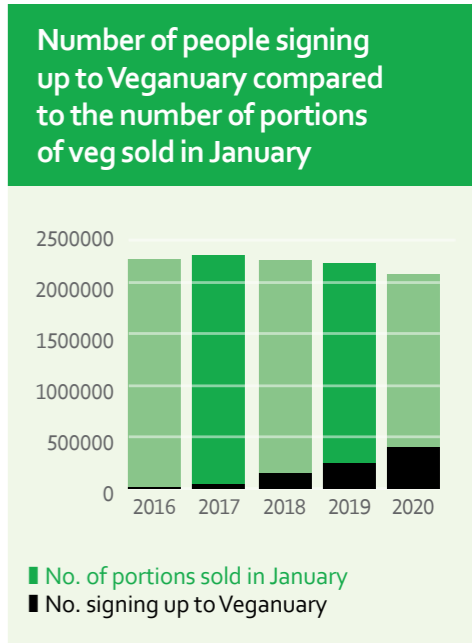
36.5% of veg eaten in the UK came from the EU in 2018, and beyond that, many of the UK's current trade deals have been negotiated through the EU. There is potential for serious market disruption if a trade deal is not agreed by the end of the year. The potential for labour shortages in the sector is a further complication. **In 2016, 75,000 positions in the horticultural sector were filled by seasonal workers, only 1% of which were UK residents.**^{ix}

Conversely, this could also create incentives to establish opportunities for UK-grown products to become more competitive. Thirteen varieties of UK-grown vegetables, with the right support, could become increasingly productive and begin to supply more of the UK market, thereby helping to mitigate potential price increases and benefiting UK consumers, farmers and the NHS alike.^x

Is the current shift towards plant-based diets boosting our veg consumption?

Despite ever-increasing numbers of people taking part in Veganuary, and a 23% growth in the number of plant-based meals eaten between 2015 and 2019, vegetable sales in January year-on-year are at best stagnating, at worst in decline.

While the numbers of people signing up to Veganuary have increased 1639.1% over the past five years, sales of vegetables in January actually declined by 6.5% during the same period.



Sources: (Kantar, 2020) and (Veganuary, uk.veganuary.com/categories/press-releases)

Can government policy help?

In short – yes. In fact it's critical. We believe there are three priorities for policy makers when it comes to boosting the UK's consumption of veg.

1 SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS.

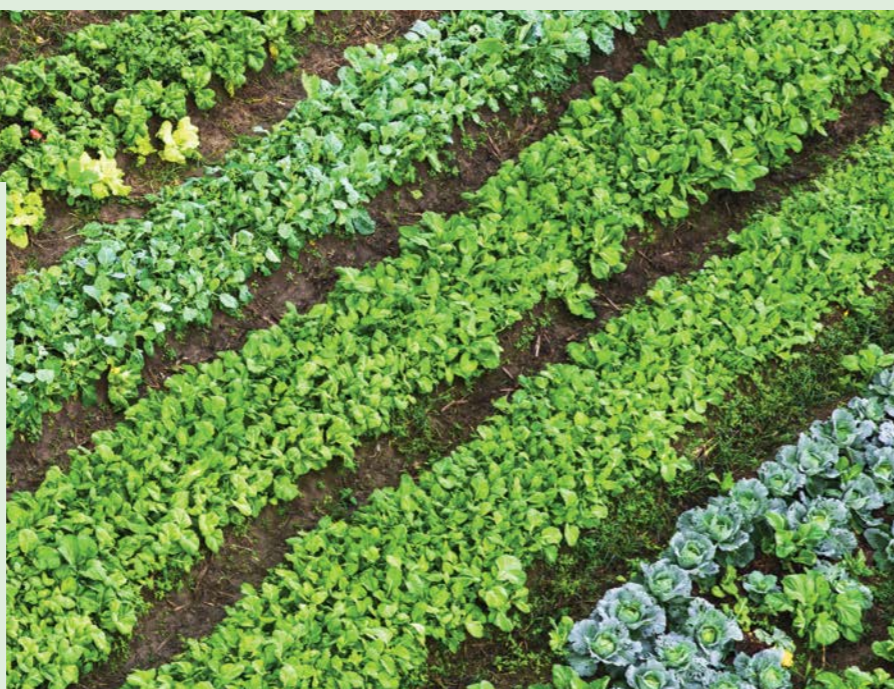
Scotland and Northern Ireland are now proposing that two portions of veg are included in every school meal as part of new school food standards. England and Wales should follow suit.

2 HEALTHY START.

Uptake of food vouchers for low-income families is at an all-time low, with urgent reform required. The UK government has yet to deliver on the promised consultation. This needs to be a priority given that Covid-19 has already seen 5 million households experiencing food poverty and a sixfold increase in applications to Universal Credit just two months into lockdown. ^{xii}

3 AGRICULTURE.

In the wake of Brexit, agricultural policy should support a commitment to develop a thriving horticulture sector across the devolved nations. Each nation should push for national Fruit and Vegetable action plans to support both production and consumption of veg. The absence of health or reference to fruit and vegetable production in the current Agriculture Bill is a missed opportunity.



How can Peas Please and Veg Power help?



Peas Please has a simple mission: to get everyone in the UK eating more veg.

Since 2017, nearly 100 organisations spanning the food system have signed up to play their part. So far, pledgers have collectively contributed to putting **90 million additional portions of vegetables** on people's plates and in their shopping baskets. ^{xi}

VEGPOWER

While Peas Please focuses on making veg more accessible and available, Veg Power works to make veg more appealing. In the UK, just 1.2% of food and drink advertising is spent promoting vegetables.

In 2019 ITV and Veg Power joined forces to tackle this, launching the *Eat Them to Defeat Them* advertising campaign, designed to get every child in the UK eating an additional portion of veg a day. 2019's ad campaign was seen by **38.2 million** people, with a **1.7% increase in veg consumption among the under-16s** during the course of the campaign. ^{xiii}

But we're only just getting started: these promising results are only a drop in the ocean. Visit the Peas Please website to find out more and get involved foodfoundation.org.uk/peasplease

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- xii. Food Foundation. Covid tracker: vulnerable groups. 2020. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/vulnerable-groups/>
- xiii. Eat Them To Defeat Them. Campaign Evaluation 2019.2019.

NOTES

*The absolute number of children cited does not include those in the population aged 16–19 who are also considered children and is therefore likely an underestimate.

**The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) consortium recently changed their methodology for measuring veg consumption. Vegetables and legumes have therefore been summed to maintain consistency with historical GBD data.