

For immediate release  
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## **NEW ZEALAND MEAT INDUSTRY RESPONDS TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUSTAINABLE HEALTH SECTOR REPORT**

The recent Ministry of Health *Sustainability and Health Sector* report recommends a range of actions for the New Zealand health sector to take an active role in implementing sustainability into its practices. This includes reducing meat and dairy in the belief this is more sustainable, but data is variable and contradicts other international reports.

Sustainability is at the heart of the New Zealand beef and lamb sector's farming practices and rural communities. New Zealand has one of the lowest input and most efficient livestock farming systems in the world because our animals are free-range on pasture all year around, our farmers use low levels of fertiliser and minimise the use of chemicals.

The recommendation is based on agriculture accounting for 49% of New Zealand's GHG emissions, however this is not because of the amount of meat New Zealanders eat and loses sight of New Zealand's unique situation in the world:

- The nutrient density of foods needs to be factored in when comparing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly when it comes to complete protein and bio-availability of minerals, which animal sourced foods are a unique source of. Simply looking at a single environmental metric ignores the critical dietary value of the meat, particularly red meat.
- The New Zealand beef and sheep sector has already reduced its emissions by 30% since 1990 and is on target to become a zero carbon industry by 2050.
- New Zealand's low-intensity, free range, pasture based sheep and beef farm systems have a low environmental footprint. The hill country, rain-fed land used for sheep and beef farming cannot be used for the production of crops without significant environmental damage. Using international data to compare products leads to unsound and invalid conclusions about comparative sustainability with New Zealand products. Health recommendations include avoiding highly processed foods.
- There is significant carbon sequestration already occurring on beef and sheep farms through trees on livestock farms. The University of Canterbury has [identified 1.4 million hectares of native forest on our sector's farms](#) and in addition there is 180,000 hectares of pine trees. Research is currently underway to measure how much carbon is sequestered by these trees.
- Beef and sheep farms are based on pasture-raised systems that contribute to New Zealand's biodiversity, being well managed to work within the natural equilibrium of eco-systems and natural resources, including fit-for-purpose sloped land and planting fit-for-purpose trees.

The Ministry of Health report bases its recommendation on the EAT Lancet report and a 2008 survey of American health facilities, hence a New Zealand context has been completely overlooked when looking at meat's impact from a global and American point of view.

Our locally produced red meat paints a very different picture when it comes to grass-fed farming practices in New Zealand as highlighted above. Other reports disagree with the EAT Lancet report, including the IPCC's latest report which identifies low energy emissions livestock produced product as part of a sustainable diet.

Red meat is a core, healthy food currently recommended in the Ministry of Health eating and activity guidelines for New Zealand adults.

Beef + Lamb New Zealand endorses a moderate consumption of red meat complementing a diet based on whole plant foods.

Recent Colmar Brunton consumer insights indicate the majority of New Zealanders enjoy beef and lamb well within national and international guidelines.

New Zealand red meat per capita consumption based on working figures from the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Economic Service indicates (reduction in last 10 years to 2017-2018 in brackets):

- 17.2kg beef (down 38%)
- 5kg lamb (down 45%)
- 0.7kg mutton (down 72%)
- OVERALL REDUCTION = 42%

The report hasn't taken into account the nutritional quality that meat brings to a diet for someone recovering in hospital. Red meat provides essential nutrients for health and well-being, particularly complete protein and bioavailable zinc.

Meals served in the health sector to patients need to provide good nutrition, which is critical for patient recovery, while being tasty and appealing so they are eaten, and aid in shorter hospital stays – as highlighted as one of the report's identified co-benefits of sustainability.

By stating a sweeping statement of *less meat and dairy*, this allows for an ambiguous target whereby existing amounts have not been measured, nor taking into account patient needs, whereby in some cases, an increase in their normal meat and dairy intake may be required for well-being.

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