



UEAA NEWSLETTER

2026, No. 6

Bucharest, June, 2026

LATEST NEWS

Which dietary choices should be prioritised to balance nutrition, the environment and budget? – Consequences for the poultry production chain

A major challenge for the agri-food system is to reduce its environmental impacts, while meeting human dietary needs. Animal products, which provide concentrated amounts of macro- and micronutrients of high dietary value, are major contributors to these impacts. Poultry has a comparatively lower carbon footprint than beef and pork, and it is a healthy source of protein. Nevertheless, its status as the world's most widely consumed meat highlights its role in modern diets.

The text below summarises a conference on this topic presented during the 16th « [Poultry Research Days](#) », which took place on 18 and 19 March 2026 in Tours (France). During this biennial event, about 500 poultry industry professionals and researchers gathered to discuss the sector's advances and challenges.

Two INRAE scientists (<https://www.inrae.fr/>), Aurélie Wilfart (specialist in agri-life-cycle assessment) and Nicole Darmon (specialist in human nutrition), raised the question: “What can we eat, if we want to reconcile climate, biodiversity, soil, air and water management with public health and purchasing power?”

The agri-food system remains a main driver of planetary limits' overuse, amounting to 1/4 of French households' carbon footprint. International comparisons show that its greenhouse-gas emissions depend on development level: in industrialised countries, one-half comes from production, the other half from energy, industry, and waste; in emerging countries the contribution of production dominates. The latest international reports outline the urgency for action. At the national level, most countries, including France, have developed a [low carbon strategy](#).

While at the global level the average daily food intake from animal products is about 40 %, France and other developed countries consume about 60% of their protein from animal sources. In doing so, the French population does not comply with its national recommendations. Indeed, a high percentage of the population exceeds the maximum recommended dose of 500 g/week for red meat (women 24 %, men 40 %) and 250 g/week for processed meat (women 57 %, men 70 %).

International and French national outlooks, among which [Eat Lancet](#) and [Tyfa](#) converge on the objective of a 50 % reduction in meat consumption, coupled with healthier practices: more plant-based foods, higher-quality products, lower losses and waste. All scenarios lead to a reduction in livestock farming systems, the extent of which depends on the underlying assumptions. Several propose a limited reduction of cattle, provided that its production relies on extensive systems, based on grazing and agroecological or organic schemes. By contrast, they propose a major reduction of monogastric production (pigs, broiler chickens and laying hens), which relies on the use of large areas of arable land to produce animal feed.

Modelling works, with constraints ensuring the fulfilment of nutrient-based and food-based recommendations, including sufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables (at least 5/day), and dairy products (2 or 3/day), have been conducted. They demonstrate that a 50 % reduction of meat in the diet is mathematically achievable. Such a modelled diet contains 435 g of meat per week (all types) and meets energy, protein, fibre, essential fatty acids, mineral and vitamin requirements—except for vitamin D, which will require fortification or supplementation. This diet should, however, depart from present consumption habits by incorporating higher levels of pulses and nuts, and much lower amounts of high-fat, high-sugar, or high-salt foods. It could lead to a 35% reduction in the carbon footprint and other environmental impacts, except for the water footprint resulting from the high demand for fruit cultivation. Such a diet would be available for a slightly reduced household food budget (- 10 %).

This presentation was followed by a lively and stimulating discussion. The audience asked for further precision on the recommended levels of poultry products in the diet. With the hypothesis that the present equilibrium would be conserved, up to 1/3 (20 g / day) of meat would come from poultry and 2/3 from beef and pork (40 g / day). Eggs could represent about 30 g/day. Of note, under these conditions, the need for imported poultry would quantitatively decrease. As mentioned by the chairman, this ignores that the relative price of French produced vs imported meat is the main driver of importation for out-of-home dining. Poultry meat producers hypothesise that the shares of red and white meat markets could evolve. Indeed, the comparatively lower carbon footprint of poultry meat could help reduce the diet's carbon footprint. The authors of the review argued that the services provided by grazing cattle and the eating habits would remain in favour of keeping a significant share of beef meat.

Take home message. A balanced and affordable diet with reduced environmental impacts is achievable with a smaller share of animal products, including poultry. This would have a significant impact on the poultry sector's market, on current international trade, and on domestic production levels.

For more information, see,

[The futures of livestock farming in agri-food systems](#), by Aurelie Wilfart and Jonathan Vayssieres, 2026

[How to conciliate nutritional and environmental targets of adult diet](#), by Nicole Darmon *et al.*, 2025

Conference video recording (in French) will soon be available at <http://www.youtube.com/@jra1487>

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