

Study reveals consumers value animal welfare more than environmental sustainability when buying meat and dairy products

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The treatment of animals rates higher than green issues when consumers choose meat and dairy products.

That's according to a new study, which suggests that while consumers consider sustainability important, other factors such as taste, quality, and [animal welfare](#) take precedence in their purchasing decisions.

On product labels, consumers valued information regarding animal welfare, food safety, and health and nutrition. The results can help producers to market particularly sustainably produced food products in a more targeted way and make them more attractive to consumers.

The study was conducted across five European countries—Czechia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK to identify the attributes that are most important to consumers buying meat or [dairy products](#).

Taking part in an [online survey](#), 3,192 participants were asked to rate the importance of 18 different factors when shopping for meat and dairy products on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important):

- Attributes—freshness, quality/taste, [healthy eating](#), nutrition, price, processing, special offers, convenience of use/preparation, and familiarity of brand.
- Animal welfare attributes—animal welfare, outdoor-reared/free range, and pasture-fed.
- Attributes related to environmental sustainability—locally produced, sustainable packaging, food miles, [carbon footprint](#), and organic.
- Social sustainability—Fair trade or producer/farmer fairly paid.

Across all surveyed countries, consumers consistently prioritized freshness, quality/taste, and animal welfare as the most important attributes. In contrast, environmental factors such as food miles, carbon footprint, and organic production were deemed less important in influencing purchasing decisions. However, sustainability labels were

perceived as helpful among consumers.

Study co-author Dr. Andy Jin, Senior Lecturer in Risk Management in the Faculty of Business and Law at the University of Portsmouth, said, "Our study highlights the complex interplay of factors that influence consumer behavior when buying meat and dairy products. Consumers indicated that information related to animal welfare, [food safety](#), and health and nutrition was considered more important than [environmental sustainability](#) when making food choices.

"The findings demonstrate the importance of labeling strategies that encompass multiple aspects of product attributes, beyond environmental considerations alone."

The implications of the research extend further than consumers to policymakers, producers, and retailers in the food industry who are striving to meet evolving consumer demands for more sustainable products.

Dr. Jin added, "Labels on their own are not enough to change behavior, especially for consumers who have low or no behavioral intention to buy sustainable meat or dairy products.

"These results should be translated into additional policy measures, such as nudges or behavioral interventions, helping individuals translate their attitudes into behavior and facilitating the choice of sustainably produced products."

The research, published in the journal [Food Quality and Preference](#), was conducted by the universities of Portsmouth and Newcastle in the UK, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, University of Córdoba in Spain, Mendel University in Czech Republic and Agroscope from Switzerland.

More information: Jeanine Ammann et al, Consumers across five European countries prioritise animal welfare above environmental sustainability when buying meat and dairy products, *Food Quality and Preference* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2024.105179](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2024.105179)

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