

Ultra-Processed Food

The issue

Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs) are foods made using modern manufacturing methods typically containing artificial ingredients not found in a home kitchen. Defined under the Nova classification system (the primary international food processing classification framework), UPFs are formulated for shelf stability and sensory appeal. They are low in fibre and micronutrients and high in saturated fat, salt and sugar.

Our diets are now the most ultra-processed in Europe, with growing scientific evidence linking high consumption of ultra-processed foods to poor health and wellbeing. These products dominate the food system, displacing more nutrient-rich whole foods from people's diets.

Why it matters to Wales

Poor diet:

- increases NHS costs - diet is rapidly becoming the leading cause of preventable poor health in Wales.¹ 60% of adults in Wales are overweight or living with obesity² and Wales has the highest childhood obesity rates in the UK³
- worsens inequalities - UPF consumption is consistently higher in more deprived groups, while consumption of fresh and minimally processed foods is consistently lower.
- harms the environment - the mass manufacture of UPFs often relies on damaging farming and industrial processes⁴

Alignment with Welsh policy context

In February 2025 the Sixth Senedd called for a "holistic, joined up government strategy to improve people's diets" and for the promotion of "the benefits of fresh, unprocessed food to encourage dietary shifts and tackle the dominance of ultra-processed foods".⁵

Allowing ultra-processed foods to dominate the food system and people's diets undermines specific aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to create a healthier, more equal and resilient Wales.

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 requires Welsh Ministers to produce a strategy to prevent obesity and reduce obesity levels in Wales. However, UPFs are not addressed as a distinct category of concern in the "Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales" strategy. This is a gap – a UPF product can meet the strategy's High Fat, Salt and Sugar thresholds while retaining properties associated with overconsumption and weight gain.

Evidence/References

1. [New curbs on unhealthy food promotions to tackle Wales' rising obesity levels](#) - Public Health Network Cymru
2. Senedd Health & Social Care Committee (2025). [Prevention of ill health](#) - obesity inquiry report
3. Senedd Research (2024) article: [Obesity levels in Wales](#)
4. [Soil Association \(2022\) Ultra-Processed Planet report](#)
5. [Motion - NDM8814 - Welsh Parliament](#)

- [Soil Association: Ultra-Processed Foods](#)

Contact/further information

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Our perspective

- The basis of a healthy diet should consist of whole and minimally processed food
- The consumption of ultra processed foods should be treated as a public-health priority
- Dietary health is linked to environmental health.
- Guidance and labelling should reflect the level of processing (not just nutrients) to discourage consumption of ultra-processed foods
- Systemic change is needed rather than individual blame.

What we're doing about it

The Soil Association's Food for Life Served Here⁶ programme works with public and private sector caterers in schools, hospitals, care homes and other institutions across the UK.

Sustainable Food Places, a UK-wide network co-founded by Soil Association and delivered in Wales by Food Sense Wales, putting communities at the heart of local food decision-making and supporting local councils and food leaders across the supply chain.

Our Out to Lunch campaign sends secret-diner parents to assess children's menus at popular UK restaurant chains. Our most recent campaign prompted seven chains, including Wetherspoons to conduct audit their food purchasing against the Nova system – a first for any food business in the UK.

In 2024 we submitted written and oral evidence to the House of Lord's inquiry into ultra-processed foods⁷. Several of the Soil Association's headline recommendations were adopted by the Committee, with our evidence cited in support.

Our Whole Truth campaign⁸ in 2025 called on the UK government to resist the influence of the ultra-processed food industry and make minimally processed food accessible to all. We also wrote to Deputy First Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies urging the Welsh Government to act swiftly to enable the increased consumption of whole and minimally processed foods in Wales.

What we want Welsh policy makers to do:

- **Add ultra-processed food reduction as an explicit objective in the next review of the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy**, with a measurable indicator tracking population-level UPF consumption in Wales
- **Explore the introduction of mandatory health reporting for all large food businesses and healthy sales targets for large retailers in Wales**
- **Amend national dietary guidance to include a clear percentage reduction target for UPF consumption**
- **Mandate a Whole School Approach** to embed food education across the curriculum, building a culture of healthy eating
- **Scale community food and edible horticulture** by investing in the Sustainable Farming Scheme, the Welsh Veg in Schools initiative and local food infrastructure to support small-scale and organic horticulture.

Evidence/references

6. Food for Life Served Here | Food for Life

7. 'A plan to fix our broken food system': House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee report

8. Soil Association: The Whole Truth Campaign

- Letter to Huw Irranca-Davies and Whole Truth Campaign briefing for Welsh Government (available on request)

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