

Series

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# Public health benefits of strategies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions: food and agriculture

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## Summary

Agricultural food production and agriculturally-related change in land use substantially contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide. Four-fifths of agricultural emissions arise from the livestock sector. Although livestock products are a source of some essential nutrients, they provide large amounts of saturated fat, which is a known risk factor for cardiovascular disease. We considered potential strategies for the agricultural sector to meet the target recommended by the UK Committee on Climate Change to reduce UK emissions from the concentrations recorded in 1990 by 80% by 2050, which would require a 50% reduction by 2030. With use of the UK as a case study, we identified that a combination of agricultural technological improvements and a 30% reduction in livestock production would be needed to meet this target; in the absence of good emissions data from Brazil, we assumed for illustrative purposes that the required reductions would be the same for our second case study in São Paulo city. We then used these data to model the potential benefits of reduced consumption of livestock products on the burden of ischaemic heart disease: disease burden would decrease by about 15% in the UK (equivalent to 2850 disability-adjusted life-years [DALYs] per million population in 1 year) and 16% in São Paulo city (equivalent to 2180 DALYs per million population in 1 year). Although likely to yield benefits to health, such a strategy will probably encounter cultural, political, and commercial resistance, and face technical challenges. Coordinated intersectoral action is needed across agricultural, nutritional, public health, and climate change communities worldwide to provide affordable, healthy, low-emission diets for all societies.