



As part of our vision to be a positive force for change, we've produced a series of factsheets to help our customers better understand sustainability issues, and what we're doing about them.

Overview

In the 1990s, the concept of 'food miles' rose to prominence, as awareness of carbon emissions grew. The general understanding was that by choosing local produce, consumers could reduce global transport emissions, support local economies, and eat fresher, more nutritious food. By choosing local produce, consumers could reduce these emissions, support local economies, and eat fresher, more nutritious food. This movement aligned with the early stages of the broader environmental movement, with an emphasis on a more localised, self-sufficient lifestyle - seen today in farmers markets, 'farm to fork' storytelling, and the influence of TV chefs and creators who've done a great job promoting the UK food scene.

There's also a lot to be said for UK-produced food, in terms of supporting our farmers, animal welfare standards, enhanced environmental standards, and reducing reliance on imports. However, focusing on food miles as a driver for carbon reduction is quite problematic – for reasons explained below.

What's the problem?

Reducing food miles as a lever for carbon reduction can be problematic for five main reasons:

1. Seasonality matters: From a carbon perspective, it's often better to buy food grown in regions where the climate naturally supports production, rather than rely on UK heated greenhouses that may use fossil-fuel-based energy.
2. Mileage is pretty meaningless without knowing the mode of transport; international shipping is much more carbon-efficient than by road (Source: [Food Miles](#)).
3. No standard measure: Modern supply chains are complex, even locally produced food may move through national hubs, creating a large gap between 'as the crow flies' distance and actual miles travelled, making mileage difficult to define.
4. Production impacts dominate: The majority of food-related emissions occur at the farm stage, so *how* food is grown (e.g. fertiliser use, land-use change, regenerative practices) matters far more than *where*.
5. Global fairness: Much of our food is produced in the global south, where agriculture supports smallholder farmers, shifting demand can harm livelihoods and create new challenges elsewhere.

Jargon buster

Want to know more about this? A few useful links are:

[Very little of global food is transported by air; this greatly reduces the climate benefits of eating local - Our World in Data](#)

[Are Food Miles Still Relevant? | Foodmiles.com](#)

[Food Miles - House of Commons Library](#)



Our targets and plans

For these reasons, we don't have an objective to minimise food miles alone. Improving UK transport efficiency plays an important role in reducing our operational carbon footprint, e.g. by upgrading vehicles to Euro 6 engines, investing in aerodynamic design, trialling alternative fuels, and optimising delivery routes. We're also engaging food and drink suppliers in overall carbon reduction via our CarbonCloud project.

What can you do?

There are many areas which can be tackled:

1. **Support UK-sourced products:** Choosing products sourced from the UK reduces the distance food travels, supports UK farmers and suppliers, boosts the local economy and sometimes comes with enhanced providence standards such as animal welfare. We currently offer over 2,000 core range food products, which are made with at least 65% British ingredients, this represents around 38% of our core range.
2. **Consider Seasonality:** UK-seasonal produce is fresher, tastier, and helps avoid energy-intensive growing and long-distance transport. When items aren't in season in the UK, sourcing from countries where they are naturally in season can be more environmentally efficient. Here is a link to Oliver Kay's British Seasonality chart for fresh products - [Our British Seasonality Chart - Oliver Kay](#)
3. **Reduce food waste:** Minimising food waste means you're making the most of what you order and handle, saving money and natural resources like water, energy and fuels. It also reduces the amount of wasted food sent to landfills, which in turn lowers methane emissions - a major driver to climate change. You can use free resources and tools such as [Guardians of Grub](#) and WRAP's [Food Waste Reduction Roadmap](#) to support your efforts.

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