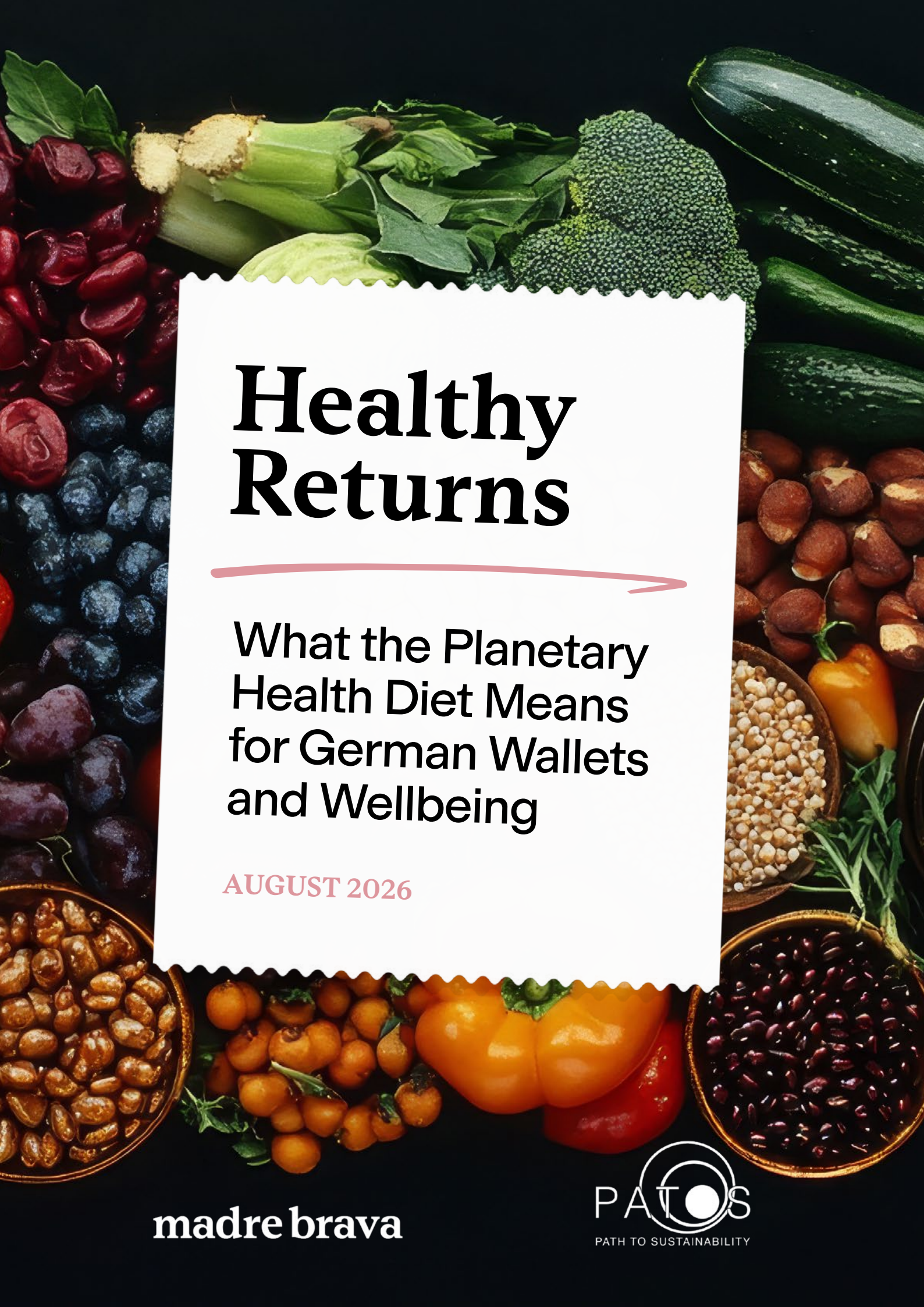

Healthy Returns

What the Planetary Health Diet Means for German Wallets and Wellbeing

AUGUST 2026

madre brava

PATOS
PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY

Contents

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1. Executive Summary

Rising prices in Germany represent a considerable burden for many people – especially when it comes to food. Groceries today cost around 30% more on average than in 2021, while a healthy and sustainable diet is often seen as expensive and difficult to adopt into everyday life. Yet surveys show that health and sustainability matter a great deal to consumers. According to the BMLEH Nutrition Report 2025, 90% of Germans consider it important or very important for food to be healthy. Furthermore, a representative survey by the AOK Bundesverband found that 68% of Germans would like to eat more sustainably.

€98.36 vs. €73.14 per week: A healthy diet is cheaper than the average diet in Germany

Against this background, 'Healthy Returns,' examines the cost and health impacts of a shopping basket modelled on the Planetary Health Diet (PHD), compared to the current average dietary consumption in Germany. It analyses both food costs and the possible effects on health and health-related societal costs.

One clear and compelling finding is that a healthy and sustainable diet can be significantly cheaper than the average diet consumed in Germany. While an average two-person household spends around €98.36 per week on their current shopping basket, the weekly cost of the PHD basket is around €73.14. This means an average household could save around €1,315 per year – for two out of ten households in Germany, that exceeds a full month's net income.

The differences are particularly pronounced when it comes to protein sources. While current consumption is heavily dominated by animal-based products, the PHD basket relies more heavily on plant-based protein sources such as pulses, nuts and seeds. By shifting protein sources and aligning intake with nutritional requirements, the overall cost of protein in the PHD shopping basket is markedly reduced.

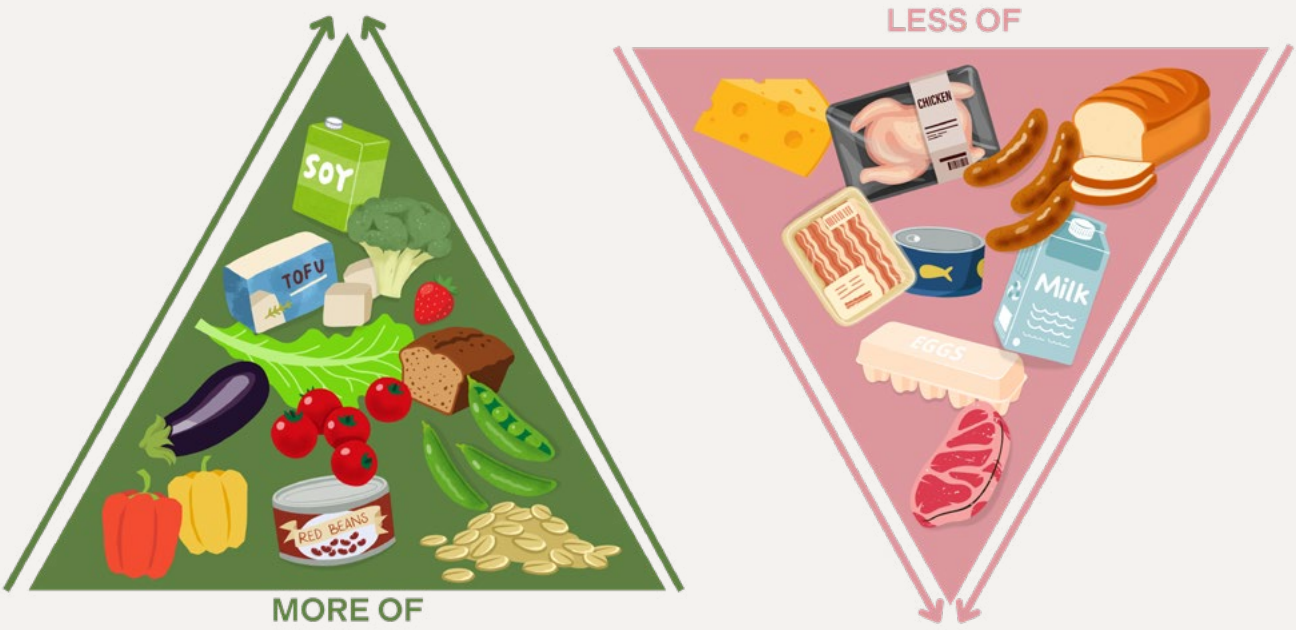
Alongside the financial savings, our analysis reveals substantial health benefits from a diet aligned with the PHD. Two independent scientific modelling approaches found that a more plant-based diet could significantly reduce the burden of disease in Germany.

Modelling by Springmann et al. shows that just over 199,000 premature deaths could be avoided each year through a diet aligned with the PHD. This is linked to annual savings potential of more than €26 billion – from lower direct and indirect health costs resulting from reduced premature mortality.

Modelling by Seidel et al. also points to the substantial health potential of a PHD-aligned diet. According to this model, people could gain nearly two additional years of good health over the course of an 80-year life.

Premature deaths avoided each year through a PHD-aligned diet

Years of good health over a lifetime with a PHD-aligned diet



Key dietary levers for health and disease prevention

Since Seidel et al. calculate not only mortality-related costs (avoided deaths × cost per death) but also the burden of morbidity (years of illness without resulting death), the associated savings potential is even higher – nearly €53 billion in direct and indirect health costs per year.

These calculations make it clear that a greater consumption of whole grains, legumes, fruit and vegetables, together with a reduction in animal protein sources, are key levers for health and disease prevention.

That means the PHD delivers a double dividend: households access cheaper groceries while public budgets cut diet-related health costs. At the same time, personal health improves and important climate mitigation strategies are set into motion.

However, the results also make it clear that, despite its potential, a healthy and sustainable diet is not easily accessible to everyone. Prices, the structure of what's on offer, time pressure, and existing food environments all influence what people consume. The responsibility for a healthy dietary shift cannot be placed on consumers alone.

For the PHD to become a practical part of everyday life, structural changes are needed across the entire food system. That means supermarkets, policymakers and health institutions need to come together to make healthy food more visible, affordable and accessible for all.

"The PHD delivers a double dividend: households access cheaper groceries while public budgets cut diet-related health costs. At the same time, personal health improves and important climate mitigation strategies are set into motion."

2. Foreword

This study shows that eating according to the Planetary Health Diet (PHD) doesn't have to be more expensive. Average consumers can even save money by changing their diet. Still, this finding does not relieve policymakers of their responsibility to counter food poverty and social exclusion so that everyone can eat adequately, healthily and sustainably, and take part in society.

A diet based on the PHD has positive effects on both personal health and the health of the planet. Preventive dietary approaches therefore hold a great deal of potential – for health equity, climate and resource protection, and social participation. The study's findings underscore the opportunities that lie in shaping food environments with health and the environment in mind. It is now important to design retail, advertising and food services in ways that make it easier for everyone to choose healthy, plant-based foods. Placing responsibility for a healthy diet solely on the individual would fall short, since there are many reasons, particularly from a social perspective, why people choose quick, cheap, and pragmatic food options: heavy workloads, psychosocial challenges, or unpaid care work are just a few of them.

As Der Paritätische, we therefore support a politically organised dietary transition that makes a healthy and sustainable diet possible for everyone. This requires a fairer distribution of wealth in the country.

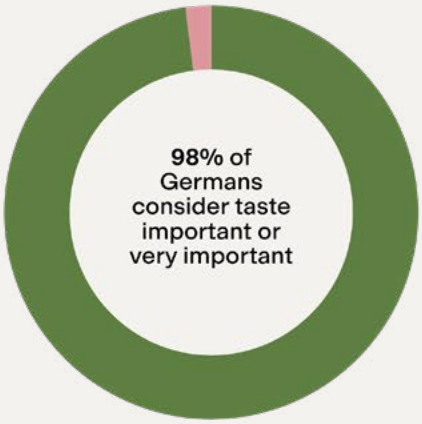
We see particularly great potential for health prevention, climate and environmental protection, and social participation in out-of-home catering, and, consequently, through public procurement. Every day, around 16 million people in Germany are fed in daycare centres, schools, canteens, hospitals, or care facilities. A sustainable diet that is affordable for everyone can promote social participation while also protecting health and the planet. It also helps establish healthy and sustainable eating habits, which can support consumers in making the healthy and sustainable choice – despite the temptations found in supermarkets. Food retail itself also bears a responsibility. It helps determine what ends up on the shelf, how it is advertised, and what it costs – and can thereby make the healthy choice the easy choice.

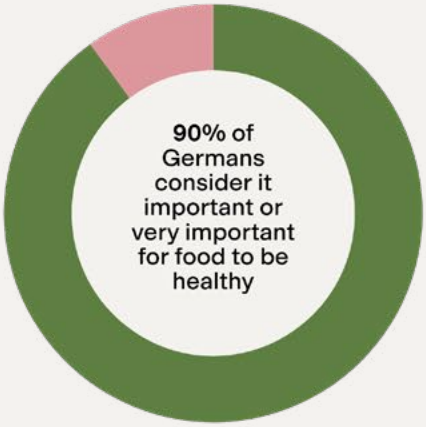
Lisa Dörfler
Climate Protection and Sustainability
Der Paritätische Gesamtverband

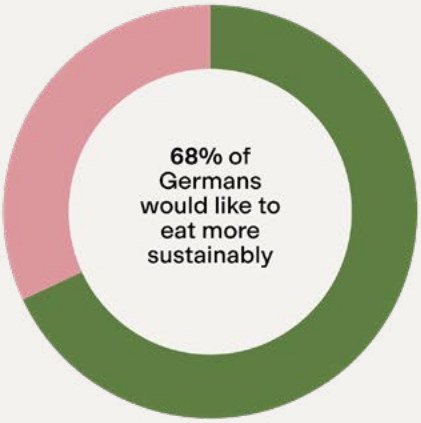
3. Introduction

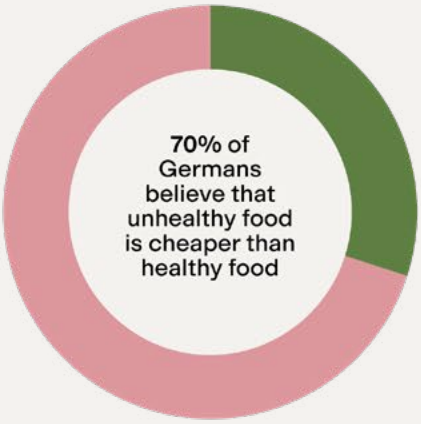
Rising prices in Germany represent a considerable burden for many people – especially when it comes to food. Groceries today cost around 30% more than in 2021 (1). In a 2025 Forsa study commissioned by the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv), around 45% of respondents said that rising prices are forcing them to cut back on grocery shopping (2,3). At the same time, higher energy prices mean that cooking at home has become more expensive (4). Vulnerable groups, low earners, and people with experience of poverty are especially affected by this.

In light of rising living costs, the question of whether a healthy and sustainable diet is more expensive than current consumption habits is an increasing area of focus. Surveys show that health and sustainability matter a great deal to consumers. According to the BMLEH Nutrition Report 2025, 90% of Germans consider it important or very important for food to be healthy – only taste ranks higher at 98% (5). Meanwhile, according to a representative AOK Bundesverband survey, two-thirds (68%) of Germans say they would like to eat more sustainably (6). Yet these attitudes are not reflected in the average diet. Part of the reason is price. 70% of respondents in the AOK survey said they believe unhealthy food is cheaper than healthy food (4). When asked why they had not recently bought sustainable products, 54% of respondents in a Deloitte survey cited higher prices (7).









The question of affordable diets is not just a social or environmental issue, but also a health policy challenge. The current average diet is linked to numerous diet-related diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers (8). As well as affecting individual wellbeing, these conditions create high follow-on costs for the health and economic systems. Therefore, diet plays a central role for disease prevention, quality of life and healthy years of life.

More and more, studies are finding that, contrary to public perception, a healthy and sustainable diet does not have to be more expensive. For example, a Madre Brava analysis from March 2025 showed that meat prices in Germany have soared over the past five years, while traditional plant-based protein sources remained stable or in some cases, cheaper over the same period (9). A 2025 ProVeg Price Study also indicates that plant-based alternatives in the entry-level price segment are already cheaper than their animal-based counterparts (10). A 2025 study by WWF in neighbouring Austria likewise found that a healthier diet, combined with less food waste, could generate enough savings that even a basket made up of 100% organic products could be possible at no extra cost (11).

What Does a Healthy and Sustainable Diet Look Like? The Planetary Health Diet (PHD)

The PHD is a scientifically grounded dietary pattern developed by the international EAT-Lancet Commission. It was first published in 2019 and updated in 2025 (12).

The PHD describes a dietary pattern that maximises human health and respects our planet's ecological boundaries. Its goal is to ensure healthy diets from sustainable food systems for nearly 10 billion people by 2050.

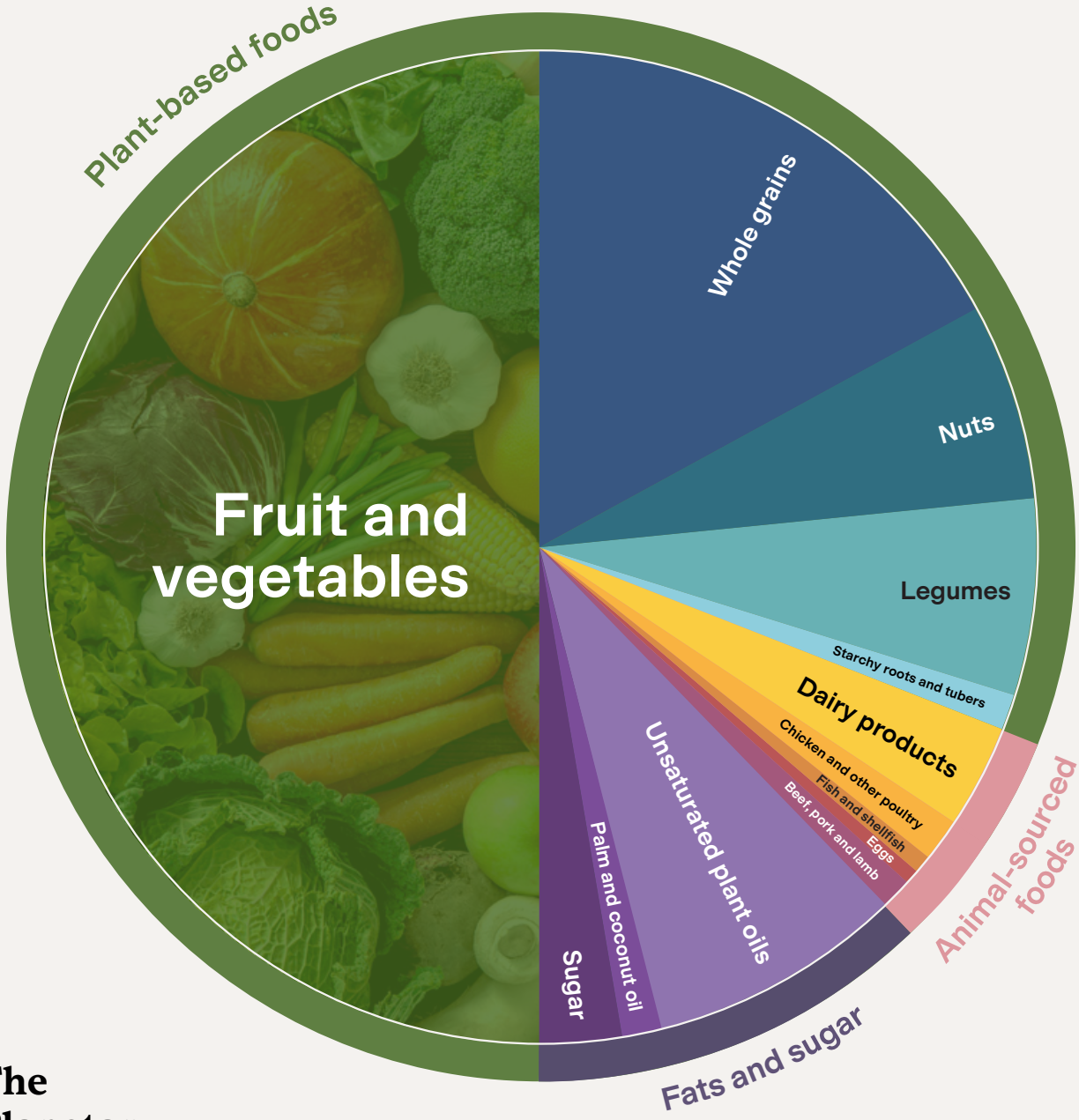
This is achieved through a predominantly plant-based diet that is rich in fruit, vegetables, nuts and legumes. It doesn't eliminate animal products altogether, instead recommending a maximum of 285 grams of meat per person per week for omnivores in Germany (13), compared with a minimum intake of about 510 grams of legumes and about 340 grams of nuts and seeds.

According to the EAT-Lancet Commission, world-wide implementation of the PHD could prevent up to 15 million premature deaths each year (12). Thanks to its high share of plant-based foods, the PHD also benefits the climate. Around 30% of greenhouse gas emissions globally are caused by food production (14), with livestock farming accounting for 20% alone (15). According to the Commission, a global shift to the PHD could more than halve these diet-related emissions (12), markedly benefiting the health of our planet and all who depend on it.

This study supports these findings. It uses comparable shopping baskets to compare the cost of an average diet in Germany to one aligned with the PHD.

The study also analyses the health effects of the two diets. In doing so, it seeks to answer the following questions: what health benefits arise from a PHD-aligned diet that includes more nuts, legumes and fresh vegetables? What health-related costs could potentially be saved? And what structural changes are needed to make a healthy and sustainable diet genuinely practical for everyday life and accessible to everyone in Germany?

The study concludes by examining the role that policymakers, supermarkets and health institutions can play in improving access to an affordable, healthy and sustainable diet for everyone in Germany.



The Planetary Health Diet

4. Methodology

Basket definition

To analyse the costs and health impacts, two standardised shopping baskets were developed: a 'current' shopping basket and a PHD-aligned shopping basket. The current basket is based on current projections of average consumption patterns in Germany. Possible food waste is not taken into account. The PHD basket is based on scientifically defined target values for a health-promoting and sustainable diet in Germany, following EAT-Lancet and Springmann et al. (12,13). A share of processed plant-based alternative products was deliberately included to reflect a gradual and realistic shift toward a more plant-based diet. Further explanation can be found in chapter 5.

Selection and structure of the food items

The baskets consist of 93 representative food items that reflect typical purchasing and consumption patterns in Germany. The selection covers all relevant food groups according to WWF methodology (16) and Springmann et al. (12,13). The products considered were predominantly those available nationwide in food retail and available as private-label products. Germany's five largest food retailers were also invited to give feedback on the product selection. Both discounters and full-assortment retailers took part in this process.

The individual food items were weighted based on real consumption data from various national sources. Frequently consumed products were weighted more heavily within their respective food groups than rarely consumed products.

Price analysis

Prices were collected from Germany's leading food retailers and covered both discounters (Aldi Nord, Aldi Süd, Lidl) and full-assortment retailers (Rewe, Edeka). This made it possible to account for different price levels and shopping realities. Data collection took place in Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony-Anhalt, and included both urban and rural regions. Prices were collected monthly in three collection waves between January and March 2026, directly in stores or online shops.

Private-label products were used primarily for the calculations. Where these were not available, the cheapest comparable product was chosen. Organic products were not specifically targeted, but were selected if they represented the cheapest private-label product. The average total costs of each basket was calculated based on all prices across all retailers, regions, and price collection points. For regional comparisons, calculations were based on the lowest prices across all retailers and price collection points within a given region.

Health analyses

Two established scientific modelling approaches were used to assess the health impacts of the two diets. The analysis is based on the work of Springmann et al. and Seidel et al., and examines both diet-related health effects and the resulting economic effects on the health system.

While the Springmann et al. approach models only diet-related avoidable premature deaths, the Seidel et al. approach calculates diet-related healthy life years lost or gained (DALYs). Both approaches derive direct and indirect health costs for Germany. Together, they enable a robust assessment of the health and economic impacts of a diet aligned with the PHD.

Detailed methodology

A detailed description of the models and underlying data and assumptions, along with a list of the 93 reference products, is provided in the Appendix.

5. The Shopping Baskets

Current basket

RECEIPT

€98.36*

Health:
Two fewer years of healthy life

This basket is:
- Meat-heavy
- High in sugar and confectionery

PHD-aligned basket

RECEIPT

€73.14*

Health:
Two more years of healthy life

This basket has more:
- Plant-based protein
- Fruit and vegetables
- Whole grain products

*Weekly shop for an average two-person household

A Look Inside the Baskets

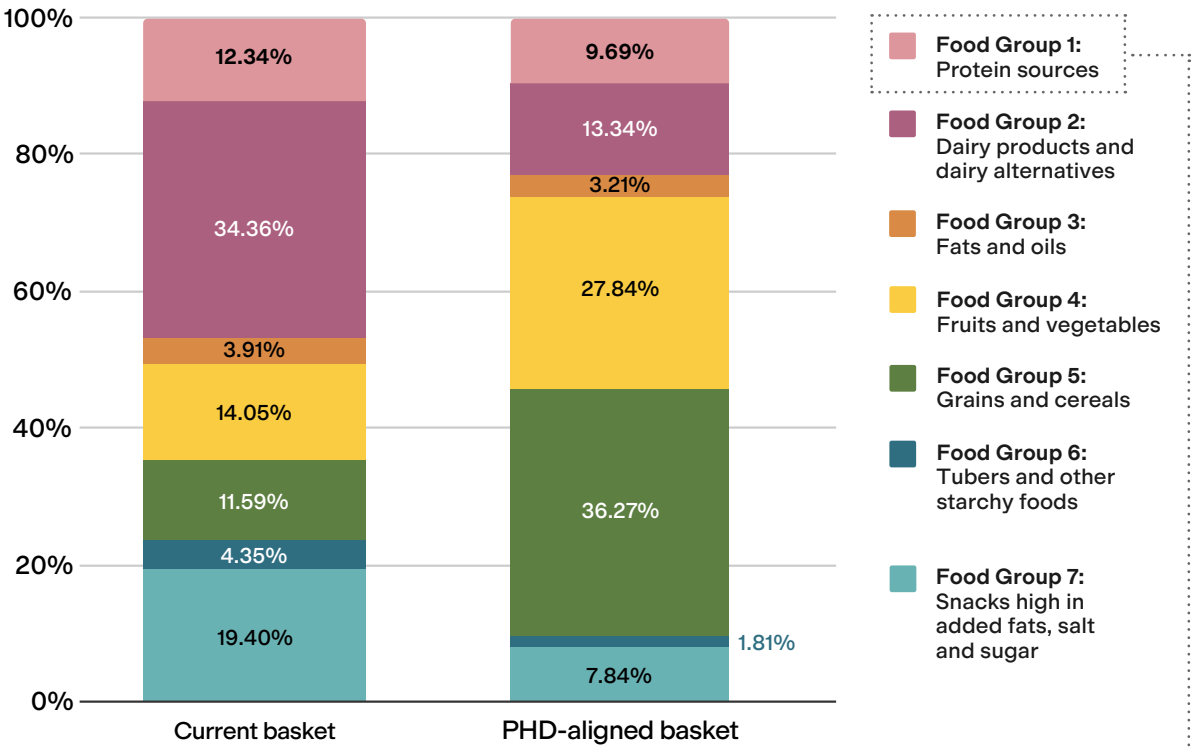
The baskets are made up of 93 reference products (see the Appendix for a complete product list). Based on the WWF methodology, the products were assigned to seven product categories ('food groups') (16).

The seven product categories include:

	Food Group	Example products
	1: Protein sources	Hummus, hazelnuts, plant-based mince, eggs, chicken breast
	2: Dairy products and dairy alternatives	Oat drink, plant-based cooking cream, plant-based yogurt, whole milk, natural yogurt
	3: Fats and oils	Olive oil, margarine, butter
	4: Fruits and vegetables	Apples, frozen vegetable mix, fresh salad from the salad bar, fresh cucumbers
	5: Grains/cereals	Whole grain toast, dark/rye/brown bread, bulgur, bread rolls
	6: Tubers and other starchy foods	Potatoes, sweet potatoes, gnocchi
	7: Snacks high in added fats, salt, and sugar	Honey, chocolate bars, potato chips, sugar

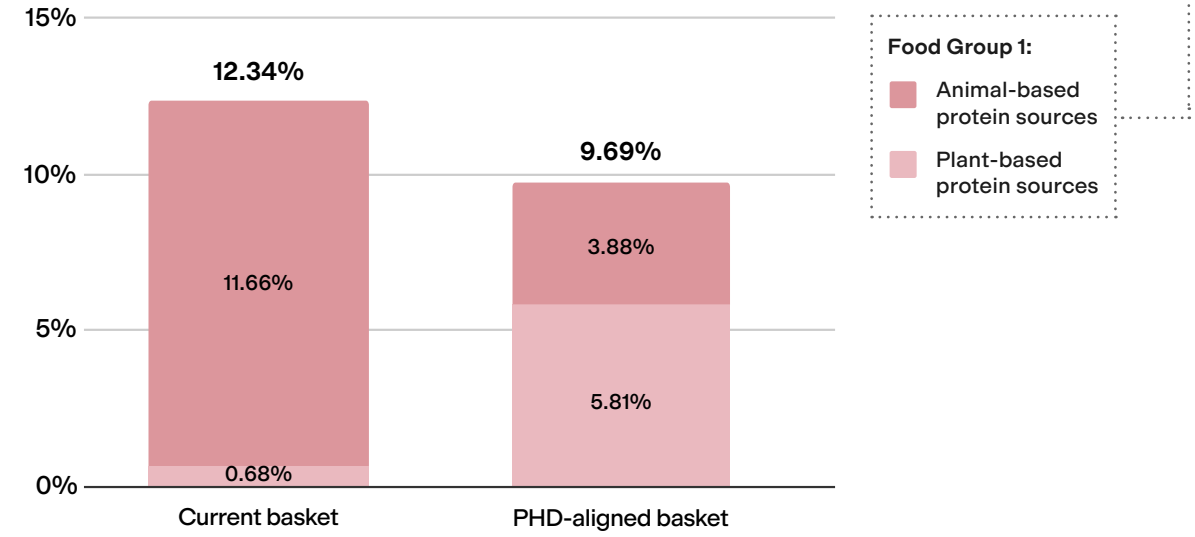
Figure 1 shows how the shares of the individual product categories shift between the current basket and the PHD-aligned basket.

Figure 1: Share of food groups in grams



Within the protein sources category, the current basket is shaped by animal-based protein sources, whereas plant-based protein sources predominate in the PHD basket.

Figure 2: Share of animal-based and plant-based products within Food Group 1: Protein sources



“The classic PHD does not include either animal-based or plant-based processed protein foods, such as sausages or mince. However, these products are still widely consumed, making it realistic to assume that swapping some of the processed animal sourced foods for plant-based ones will be part of the transition toward a more plant-forward diet.”

The classic PHD does not include either animal-based or plant-based processed protein foods, such as sausages or mince. However, these products are still widely consumed, making it realistic to assume that swapping some of the processed animal sourced foods for plant-based ones will be part of the transition toward a more plant-forward diet. As such, the PHD basket in this study replaces about half of currently consumed processed animal-sourced protein foods with plant-based alternatives. The other half of processed animal-sourced protein foods is replaced with unprocessed plant-based protein foods, like legumes, nuts, and seeds.

This approach is in line with the recommendations of the 3-R strategy from the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy, Food and Consumer Health Protection at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat). It describes the shift toward a more sustainable diet as a gradual process that can be supported by reducing animal products, replacing them with plant-based alternatives, and reorienting eating habits (17).[1]

Furthermore, in the PHD-aligned basket developed for this study, 55% of dairy products are replaced with plant-based alternatives, in line with a market potential analysis by the Good Food Institute and Systemiq (18).

Alongside this protein and dairy shift, the basket rebalances food groups. Fruit and vegetables gain considerable weight in a PHD-aligned diet, while confectionery, as well as dairy and meat products, lose importance.

1 The report of the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy, Food and Consumer Health Protection states: ‘Increasing familiarity with and use of alternative products suggest that the transition to a more sustainable diet can be achieved through gradual adaptation rather than radical change. The 3R strategy outlined in this report provides a particularly practical and socially acceptable framework for this transition (...). It comprises: (1) Reduce – reducing portion sizes of animal-based products; (2) Remix – combining animal-based with plant-based or biotechnology-derived ingredients in hybrid products; and (3) Replace – substituting animal-based foods with plant-based or technologically produced alternatives. The particular strength of this strategy lies in its practicality and flexibility. It builds on existing dietary habits and can be integrated into a wide range of lifestyles. Alternative products, including hybrid products, can support this gradual transition both at the individual level and in catering settings, including institutional food service.’ (Originally published in German; translation by the authors).

Bundesverband

Die Verbraucher Initiative e.V.

How the Planetary Health Diet Works in Everyday Life

More vegetables and fruit

Make fruit and veg the focus of your meals by filling at least half your plate with them. Raw or cooked – eat whatever suits your habits. Opt for seasonal, locally grown produce where possible.

If you're short on time, frozen, raw or pre-cut vegetables (without added ingredients) are good for snacking and most fruits only need a quick wash if you fancy something sweet.

More legumes and nuts

Eat a serving of legumes several times a week – for example, as a side dish, in salads, vegetable dishes, stews or sauces. For quick meals, use fast-cooking varieties like red or yellow lentils, or pre-cooked legumes from your pantry. Eat a handful of nuts every day – on their own, in muesli or in a salad.

Less meat

Eat meat rarely and in small portions. Use legumes instead, or replace meat with tofu or patties made from legumes, grains and vegetables.

Plant-based meat alternatives, like vegetarian or vegan 'sausages' or 'schnitzels', can make the switch easier. Raw sliced vegetables and plant-based spreads are also good alternatives to cold cuts or cheese.

By: Alexandra Borchard-Becker, Policy Officer for Nutrition and Health
Die VERBRAUCHER INITIATIVE e.V.

6. Price Comparison of the Shopping Baskets

A PHD-aligned diet can already be more affordable

This study reveals that a diet aligned with the PHD can already be cheaper in Germany today than the current average diet. By switching to a PHD-aligned basket, an average two-person household can save around €1,315 per year. For two out of ten households in Germany, the savings exceed a full month's net income (19). This amounts to a savings potential of around €108 per month, or around €25 per week.

Figure 3: Basket costs and savings potential for an average German household (two people)

	Current basket	PHD-aligned basket	Savings potential
Per day	€14.05	€10.45	€3.60
Per week	€98.36	€73.14	€25.22
Per month	€421.55	€313.45	€108.10
Per year	€5,128.87	€3,813.67	€1,315.19

Figure 4: Basket costs and savings potential per person

	Current basket	PHD-aligned basket	Savings potential
Per day	€7.03	€5.22	€1.80
Per week	€49.18	€36.57	€12.61
Per month	€210.78	€156.73	€54.05
Per year	€2,564.43	€1,906.84	€657.60

These results show that a more plant-based, healthy diet does not necessarily come with a higher price tag. On the contrary: the modelling highlights that moving closer to the PHD has substantial savings potential.

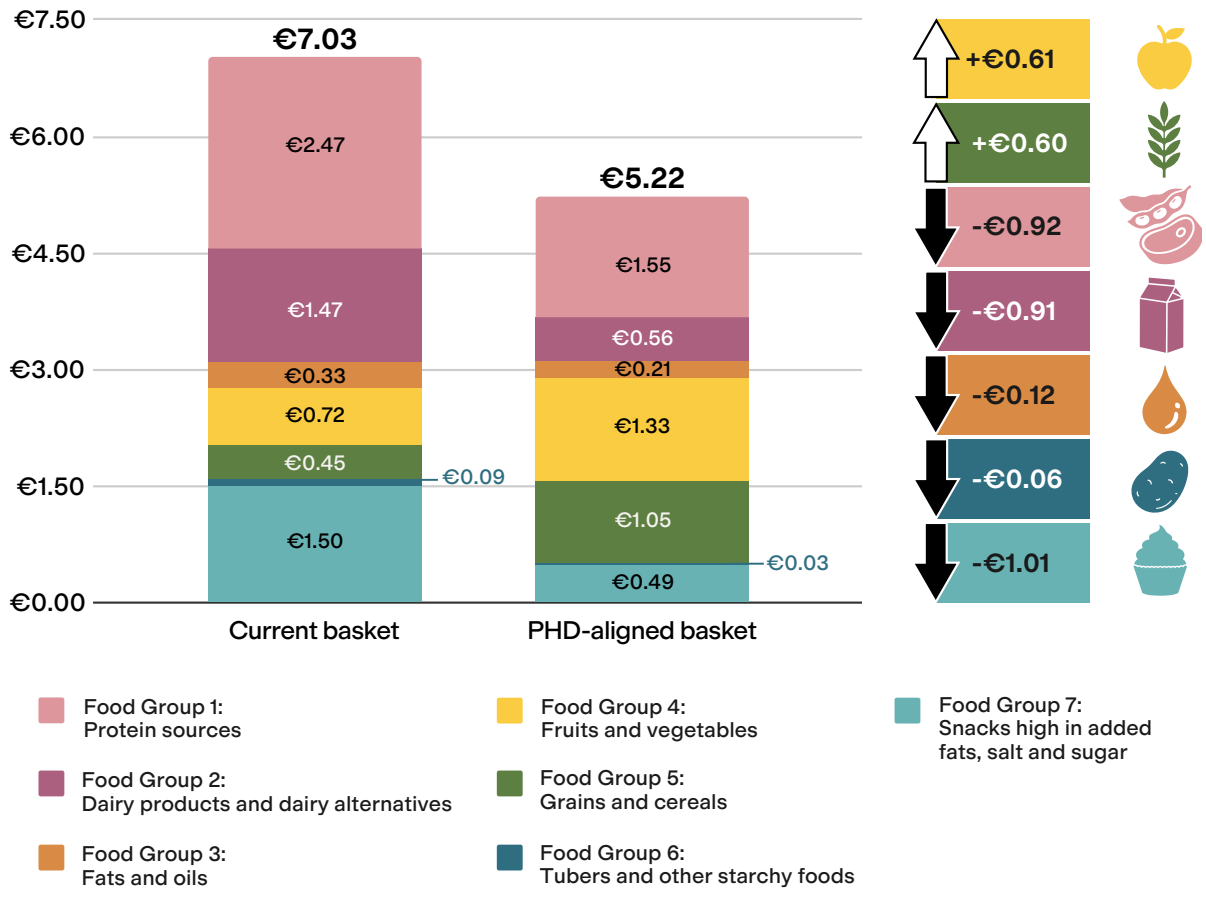
The PHD-aligned basket modelled here is flexitarian and, as mentioned, includes processed plant-based protein products. If the remaining portion of meat were decreased and/or unprocessed plant-based protein increased, the savings could be even greater.

"By switching to a PHD-aligned basket, an average household can save around €1,315 per year."

How the Shopping Basket's Spending Structure Changes

A comparison of the share of food categories reveals clear price shifts within the basket. While fruit and vegetables gain considerable importance in the PHD basket (+€0.61 per day), spending on grain products also rises noticeably (+€0.60). At the same time, costs for dairy products (-€0.91) and sugar and confectionery (-€1.01) fall considerably. Overall costs for protein sources drop significantly in the PHD basket (-€0.92).

Figure 5: Spending changes by basket and food group



What's clear is that the lower overall cost of the PHD basket is not due to individual products, but to a fundamental change in the basket's composition: away from heavily processed and animal-based products, and toward more plant-based food groups.

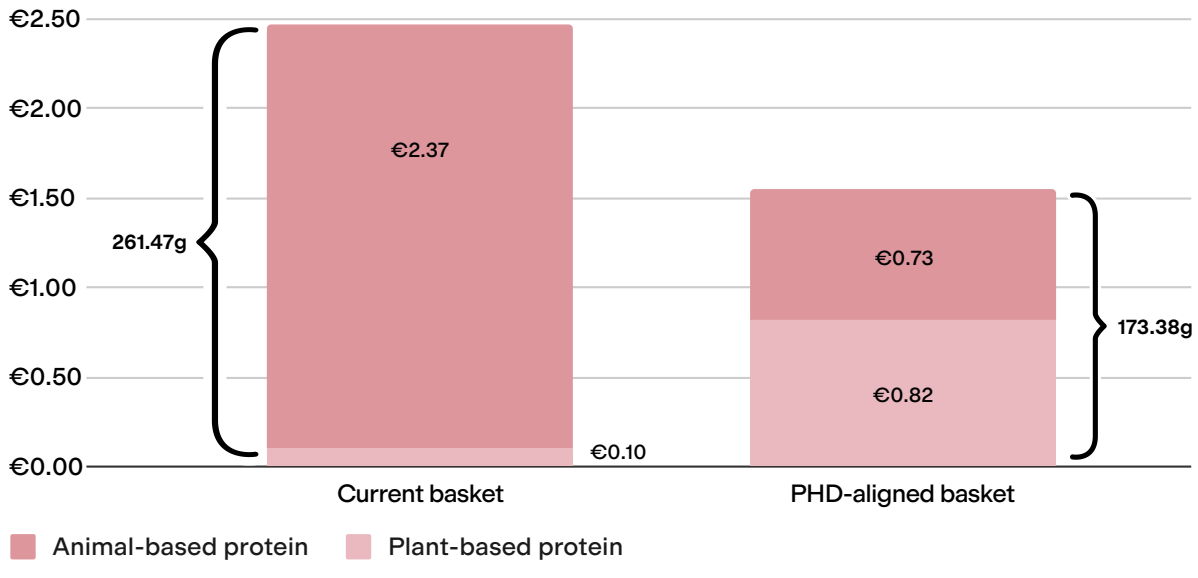
Beyond its composition, the PHD-aligned basket also addresses current overconsumption, which promotes weight gain and obesity, and can thereby increase the risk of diet-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Across all product groups, the PHD recommends a calorie reduction of around 14% in Germany, contributing to the 30% saving overall.

Lower Costs for Protein Sources

The differences between the baskets are especially pronounced for protein sources. While spending on protein sources in the current basket averages €2.47 per day, it falls to €1.55 in the PHD-aligned basket.

In the current basket, animal-based protein sources dominate the spending structure (see Figure 6), accounting for around 96% of protein costs. In the PHD-aligned basket, this share falls to just 47%, with plant-based protein sources rising considerably. These include legumes, nuts and seeds which are, on average, considerably cheaper than animal-based proteins like chicken breast, salami or ham. This helps to lower costs for the whole food group.

Figure 6: Average cost distribution by protein source



Plant-Based Alternatives: From Price Advantage to Widespread Availability

Since 2022, a study by ProVeg has annually tracked the price of plant-based alternative products across Germany's largest retailers. In the entry-level segment, ProVeg found that plant-based products, once priced over 50% higher than their animal-based counterparts, are now cheaper.(10).

In 2024, the study began tracking the availability of plant-based alternatives in stores (2025: n=153), because only what's on the shelf ends up in the shopping basket. In 2025, plant-based fish fingers showed the greatest room for improvement, available in only about one in three stores. Plant-based categories such as sausages and schnitzels, by contrast, were available on average in nine out of ten stores, with plant-based milk and cold cuts available almost everywhere. Categories like fish alternatives or pizza, however, still had room to grow.

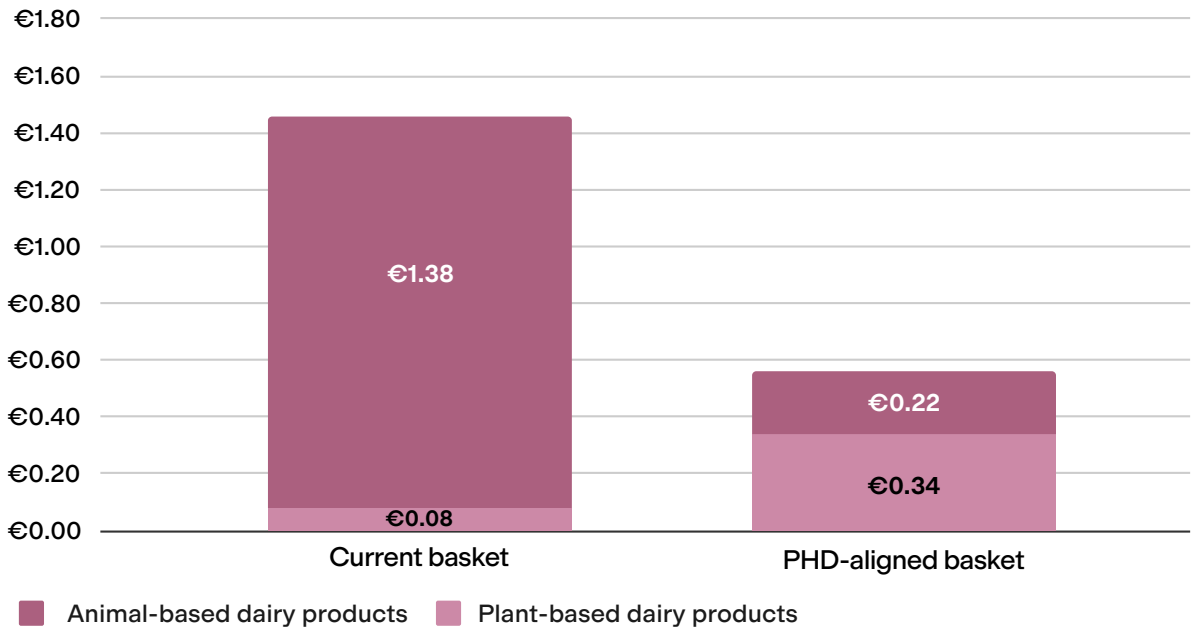
Plant-based burger patties offer consumers the biggest price advantage of any category, at 33%, but are missing from more than a third of stores, which calls for targeted listing decisions. With 94% availability across all categories, full-assortment retailers Kaufland and Rewe currently set the industry benchmark.

By: ProVeg

Fewer Dairy Products, Lower Costs

The PHD-aligned basket makes considerable savings when it comes to dairy. While dairy products represent a significant cost block in the current basket, their share falls from around 728.21 grams per day to around 238.76 grams per day in the PHD-aligned basket. Alongside this, 55% of dairy products are replaced with plant-based alternatives. As a result, the daily cost for dairy drops from €1.47 to €0.56.

Figure 7: Daily costs for dairy products



Basket Costs by Region

When comparing these findings by region, all three states studied show that the PHD-aligned basket costs less than the current one, with the gap between regions being relatively small.

Bavaria shows the greatest savings potential, where an average two-person household could save up to €1,384 a year by switching to the PHD basket. In Saxony-Anhalt, the potential savings reach up to €1,261 a year, and in North Rhine-Westphalia, up to €1,150. The results point to a consistent pattern across regions and retail formats: a more plant-based diet aligned with the PHD is already achievable and cost-effective across Germany. What's crucial now is ensuring that mechanisms are put in place by national and supermarket policy to ensure its widespread adoption.

7. Health Impacts

The impressive savings potential of the PHD extends not just to individual pockets, but to public purse strings, all while improving quality of life. Both of the scientific models used in this study reach the same conclusion: a more plant-based diet could substantially reduce the burden of disease in Germany, thereby generating significant cost savings for society.

A Healthier Diet Could Lead to Significantly Fewer Deaths and Ease the Burden on the Health System

Modelling by Springmann et al. focuses in particular on avoidable premature deaths from cardiovascular and heart disease, cancer, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and respiratory disease, as well as the associated direct and indirect health costs.[2] The calculations show that nearly 200,000 premature deaths could be avoided each year in Germany through a diet aligned with the PHD.

Based on this lower premature mortality rate, an annual savings potential of more than €26 billion emerges. The largest share of these savings comes from avoided costs related to coronary heart disease and cancer. More than half result from lower direct health-system costs, while the remaining savings stem from reduced indirect health costs such as productivity losses and informal care.

The premature deaths calculated by Springmann et al. that could be avoided in Germany through a classic PHD diet[3] (as opposed to the PHD-aligned basket) stands at around 221 thousand. This corresponds to more than €29.2 billion in health-related costs that could be saved each year.

"In Germany, nearly 200,000 premature deaths could be avoided each year through a PHD-aligned diet."

2 Respiratory diseases are included in the analysis but are not assigned a monetary value.

3 This differs from the dietary model used in the present study, as it does not include processed plant-based alternative products. However, processed plant-based alternatives represent a heterogeneous product category, meaning that their level of processing alone does not allow for general conclusions about their health effects. More important than the degree of processing itself are the products' specific composition and nutritional profile, as well as the foods they replace. Further research is needed to better assess the long-term health effects of different plant-based alternative products.

Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs): The PHD could increase healthy years of life while reducing disease-related costs

The DALY-based modelling by Seidel et al. shows substantial health benefits from a dietary shift toward the PHD, finding that 2,028,530 DALYs could be avoided annually. That's equivalent to 24 DALYs avoided per year per 1,000 residents in Germany (see Fig. 8).

As well as avoiding the burden of disease, the model reveals that individuals could gain around 8.8 additional healthy days of life annually. Over an individual 80-year lifespan, that amounts to almost two additional healthy years.

What Are DALYs?

DALY stands for Disability-Adjusted Life Year (a 'lost healthy year of life'). The indicator is used internationally to measure the health burden caused by disease. One DALY corresponds to one healthy year of life lost to illness, disability, or premature death (20).

In this study, DALYs are used to illustrate, in an accessible way, how many healthy years of life could potentially be gained through a PHD-aligned dietary pattern.

"Following a diet aligned with the PHD could result in nearly two additional years of healthy life over the course of an 80-year lifespan."

Figure 8: DALY savings – healthy years of life gained

Disease group	DALY: Current diet	DALY: PHD-aligned diet	Δ DALY	Reduction
Cardiovascular disease (CVD)	1,854,708	542,432	1,312,277	70.8%
Diabetes mellitus (DM)	395,060	123,457	271,603	68.7%
Neoplasms (cancer)	547,010	102,359	444,650	81.3%
∑ TOTAL	**2,796,778**	**768,248**	**2,028,530**	**72.5%**

These calculations cover cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. The modelling indicates that, in particular, reducing red and processed meat, and increasing consumption of whole grains, fruit and vegetables, could significantly benefit a healthier lifespan. The biggest lever lies in changing protein sources: reducing animal protein sources alone corresponds, by calculation, to around 2.4 additional healthy days of life per person per year (see Fig. 9).

Figure 9: DALY breakdown by food category

Rank	Food group category	Δ DALY/ year	Share	Days/ person/year
1	Animal-based protein sources	550,020	27.1%	2.4
2	Grain products (whole grain)	453,670	22.4%	2.0
3	Fruits & vegetables	306,285	15.1%	1.3
4	Plant-based protein sources	291,967	14.4%	1.3
5	Cross-cutting: salt/trans fats	162,523	8.0%	0.7
6	Cross-cutting: micronutrients	160,239	7.9%	0.7
7	Dairy products	58,045	2.9%	0.3
8	Sugar & confectionery	45,781	2.3%	0.2

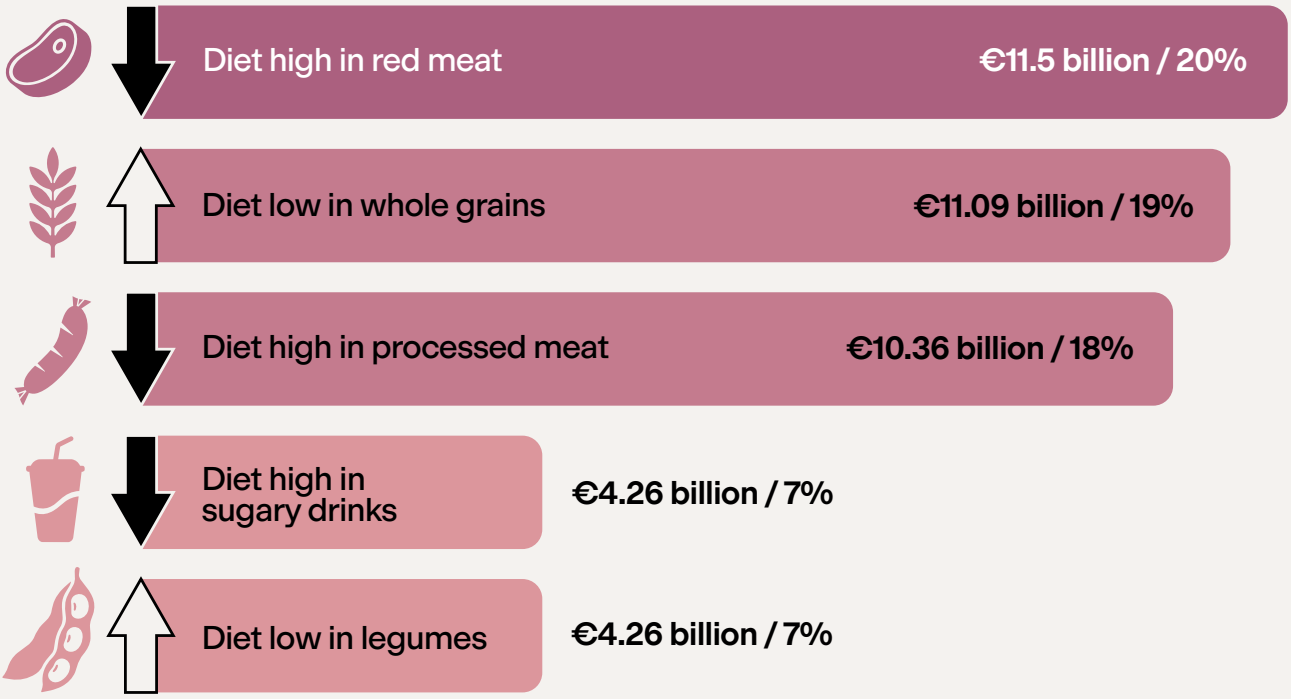
In addition to the health benefits, substantial savings potential also emerges. The Seidel analysis finds that direct and indirect diet-related costs in Germany could be reduced by nearly €53 billion per year through a diet aligned with the PHD. This corresponds to annual savings of around €626 per person.

This takes into account both direct treatment costs and indirect economic costs from productivity losses and home care that arise from mortality (deaths) and morbidity (years of illness without death). It also explains the higher cost savings compared with the Springmann et al. modelling, which only calculates mortality-related costs, not the burden of morbidity. At least half of the annual cost savings in the Seidel model result from lower direct health-system costs.

The scale of these potential savings underscores the enormous potential preventive nutrition policy has in balancing health insurance budgets. Indeed, the modelled savings in direct health costs alone – at least €26.5 billion a year – far exceeds the up-to-€19-billion deficit projected for the statutory health insurance system by 2027, a shortfall the GKV Contribution Rate Stabilization Act is meant to address (21). Thus, the modelling shows that a stronger alignment with the PHD could make a considerable long-term contribution to easing the financial burden on the health system.

According to Seidel et al, the five most important levers account for around 71% of the total savings potential (see Fig. 10). As established, the most effective levels include reducing animal protein (processed and red meat), while increasing plant-based protein and whole grains.

Which dietary patterns cost us our health?



Key finding

Reducing red and processed meat addresses nearly 40% of the total diet-related economic burden alone.

Figure 10: Top savings levers by risk factor

Rank	Global Burden of Disease study risk factor	Potential savings from shifting from the current diet to a PHD-aligned diet, € billion	Share
1	Diet high in red meat	11.50	20%
2	Diet low in whole grains	11.09	19%
3	Diet high in processed meat	10.36	18%
4	Diet high in sugar-sweetened beverages	4.26	7%
5	Diet low in legumes	4.24	7%

The PHD Offers a Double Win for Health and Society

Both modelling approaches reach the same conclusion: a diet aligned with the PHD could be transformative for individual wellbeing and society as a whole, easing the economic burden on the health system and improving the quality of life of everyone in Germany.

8. How Can the Planetary Health Diet Become a Reality?

The findings of this study are clear and compelling: a diet aligned with the PHD is healthier, can already be cheaper today and could save Germany's health system billions.

However, there are a number of barriers to achieving wide-spread adoption and accessing these potentially transformative benefits. The price and product structure in supermarkets influences what people buy and eat. Combine that with consumer time pressure, limited choice, consumption habits and poor nutrition education, and it's evident that diet is not simply a matter of individual responsibility. Systemic change is crucial.

To make a healthy and sustainable diet practical for the majority of the population, supermarkets need to champion it on the shelf while politicians drive uptake via policy. The goal is to create fair food environments in which the healthy and sustainable choice is easy, appealing and affordable.

"The goal is to create fair food environments where the healthy, sustainable choice is easy, appealing and affordable."

What Everyday Hurdles Make Healthy and Sustainable Grocery Shopping Harder?

Food choices are everyday decisions that are often made quickly, unconsciously, and in the context of daily routines. They are shaped by social, economic and political conditions that determine, among other things, access, availability and quality of food. Key factors include price, how easily people can reach stores and the range of products on offer, as well as the way food is presented, marketed and portioned.

Despite the seemingly wide variety and availability of food, the number of diet-related illnesses is rising in tandem to food poverty. This is aided by political and economic conditions that often set the wrong incentives. For example, highly processed, lower-quality, or high-fat, high-salt, high-sugar products tend to be more visible, ostensibly cheaper and easier to prepare than healthier, sustainable alternatives. In particular, people with low incomes or little time tend to reach for energy-dense filler foods, which are also heavily marketed by the food industry. In rural or structurally weak regions, and for people with mobility limitations, access to fresh food can be even harder.

Ensuring equal, health-promoting living conditions and fair access to healthy food is part of the public sector's responsibility for public services, even though this is often insufficiently

addressed in Germany. The Netzwerk der Ernährungsräte (Network of Food Policy Councils) advocates for the realization of the right to adequate food.

By: Netzwerk der Ernährungsräte (Network of Food Policy Councils)

The Key Role of Food Retailers

Food retail plays a central role in shaping the food environment in Germany. Over 80% of consumers regularly buy their groceries at a supermarket or discounter (22), while the market is dominated by just four large corporate groups (22). This gives Aldi, Edeka, Lidl and Rewe substantial influence over which products are visible, available, and affordable.

Germany's largest supermarkets thus have immense potential to accelerate the shift toward a healthy and sustainable diet, by making it easier for people to learn about plant-based protein, find them in stores, buy them, prepare them, and integrate them into their daily routines. Supermarkets shape our shopping baskets – and with them, our eating habits. They therefore have both the opportunity and the responsibility to make healthy, sustainable and tasty food the easiest and most affordable choice. Responsibility for this shift cannot be placed on consumers alone.

The following practical examples from ALDI SÜD, EDEKA, Lidl, and REWE show that some large retailers in Germany are already taking important first steps to act on this responsibility, shaping their food environments so that the healthy and sustainable choice becomes the easiest choice. In addition to improving accessibility and appeal, it is also important to increase availability and variety for consumers.

"Germany's largest supermarkets have immense potential to accelerate the shift toward a healthy and sustainable diet."

A Practical Example from

Every day, millions of people make purchasing decisions in German supermarkets. As part of a long-term collaboration with Leuphana University, EDEKA is studying how purchasing decisions in food retail can be steered toward a more sustainable and balanced diet (23). To this end, evidence-based approaches are tested in a real retail setting to better understand how effective different measures are at promoting plant-forward products.

One example is the use of in-store displays in selected markets that bundle recipes for simple, more sustainable dishes together with the ingredients needed – including plant-based protein sources. Sales figures for the products placed in this way were evaluated over the course of the trial period. The goal of these studies was to translate scientific findings directly into practice and thereby identify scalable levers for a more sustainable product range at EDEKA.

Beyond supporting research, EDEKA is already implementing measures today to make it easier for customers to access a balanced and more sustainable diet. Plant-based private-label products, for example, have been integrated into the 'EDEKA Herzstücke' brand (24). By bundling them under an established private label, plant-based products become easier to find and are more firmly embedded in familiar shopping patterns. The goal is to get consumers excited about plant-based alternatives through their existing routines – rather than solely through separate categorization.

In this vein, Edeka also provides recipes and weekly meal plans on its website for a diet aligned with the PHD. This is intended to translate abstract dietary recommendations into practical, everyday steps and make shopping planning easier (25). To offer customers with limited time plant-based, protein-rich meals, EDEKA is also expanding its range of plant-based convenience products. One such new product, for example, is the frozen 'EDEKA Herzstücke High-Protein Meal Lentil Curry,' which combines lentils, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes, among other ingredients.

A Practical Example from

Gutes für alle.

ALDI SÜD set up its own nutrition team in 2022, which focuses on promoting a balanced, plant-forward diet in line with the PHD (12). Among other things, the team works to make plant-based eating affordable and accessible (26).

A large and diverse plant-based product range plays a central role in this. It is meant to help customers adopt a balanced diet by choosing plant-based products more often. Throughout 2024, ALDI SÜD carried more than 1,400 vegan-labeled products under private labels such as MYVAY, BIO, NUR NUR NATUR, KING'S CROWN, and ALL SEASONS – more than twice as many as in 2021.[4]

In addition, ALDI SÜD provides information to support a balanced, plant-forward shopping experience. The Nutri-Score is used on all private-label products where possible, giving customers quick guidance on the nutritional quality of foods.[5] ALDI SÜD also offers practical tips and suggestions on its website that are designed to spark curiosity about a more plant-based diet. For example, it highlights the nutritional benefits of legumes and presents specific products from its range suited to different life situations – from 'slow' to 'ready' (27). These include, for example, pre-cooked beans and canned plant-based chili sin carne.

As part of its #Ernährungswechsel (dietary shift) initiative, ALDI SÜD has also developed recipe guidelines for its private-label products, setting out requirements for, inter alia, nutritional profiles, recipes and additives, with private-label products gradually being adapted to match. This also includes optimising its plant-based alternative products.

ALDI SÜD is also advocating for fair competitive conditions for plant-based alternative products. The company supports reducing the VAT rate on plant-based alternatives from 19% to the reduced rate of 7%, in order to strengthen their competitiveness relative to animal-based products.

4 The count covered food and cosmetic product lines carrying the V-Label or the Vegan Trademark (including standard, promotional and seasonal ranges) at ALDI SÜD over the course of 2024.

5 For new own-brand ranges, all products sold under the brand must display the Nutri-Score within two years. Under the Nutri-Score licensing rules, certain products (e.g. baby food) are exempt from this labelling requirement.

A Practical Example from

In 2023, Lidl became the first German food retailer to align the prices of almost all plant-based products under its Vemondo private label with the base price of comparable animal-based products. This is intended to invite customers to try plant-based alternatives without price being the deciding factor in their purchasing decision.

About six months after introducing price parity, Lidl reported a sales increase of more than 30% for Vemondo products. According to the ProVeg Price Study 2025, Lidl's vegan shopping basket was, on average, 18% cheaper than the comparable animal-based shopping basket (10).

In addition, Lidl has committed to increasing the share of wholegrain products relative to its total grain assortment to 20% by 2030, and to offering at least one wholegrain option in every relevant product category. The aim is to make it easier for customers to make healthier food choices in their everyday lives.

These pricing and range measures are part of the 'Bewusste Ernährung' (Mindful Nutrition) strategy, which is aligned with the PHD and is being driven forward as part of an international partnership with the WWF network, coordinated by WWF Switzerland.

Another area of focus is food advertising aimed at children. Since 2023, the company has refrained from advertising unhealthy private-label foods to children on TV, radio and social media. By the end of 2025, child-oriented packaging design was also removed for products that do not meet WHO criteria for a healthy diet (with the exception of seasonal items for Christmas, Easter and Halloween).

A Practical Example from

REWE Group is implementing a wide range of measures to make it easier for customers to eat a more plant-forward diet in everyday life. Through its 'REWE Deine Küche' ('REWE Your Kitchen') platform, the company provides inspiration and practical solutions for everyday plant-based cooking and eating. Suggestions are offered via more than 4,000 vegetarian recipes, over 2,000 fully plant-based ones and via newsletters, weekly meal plans, and seasonal menu ideas.

REWE Group is also consistently expanding its plant-based range. With over 2,400 plant-based items, REWE has one of the largest plant-based ranges in German food retail. Since 2026, REWE has bundled its vegan private labels 'REWE Bio + Vegan' and 'REWE Beste Wahl Vegan' under the 'Pflanzlich' (Plant-Based) umbrella, with a modern design, clear orientation and positive tone. With Germany's first fully plant-based REWE market in Berlin, the company is also sending a visible signal for the growing importance of plant-based eating (28).

In addition, the REWE Group supports innovative food technology solutions by bringing products such as plant-based ham and bratwurst alternatives developed by the Berlin-based start-up Project Eaden to market (29). Using novel fiber technology, the company develops cold cuts and sausage products based on plant proteins and fiber.

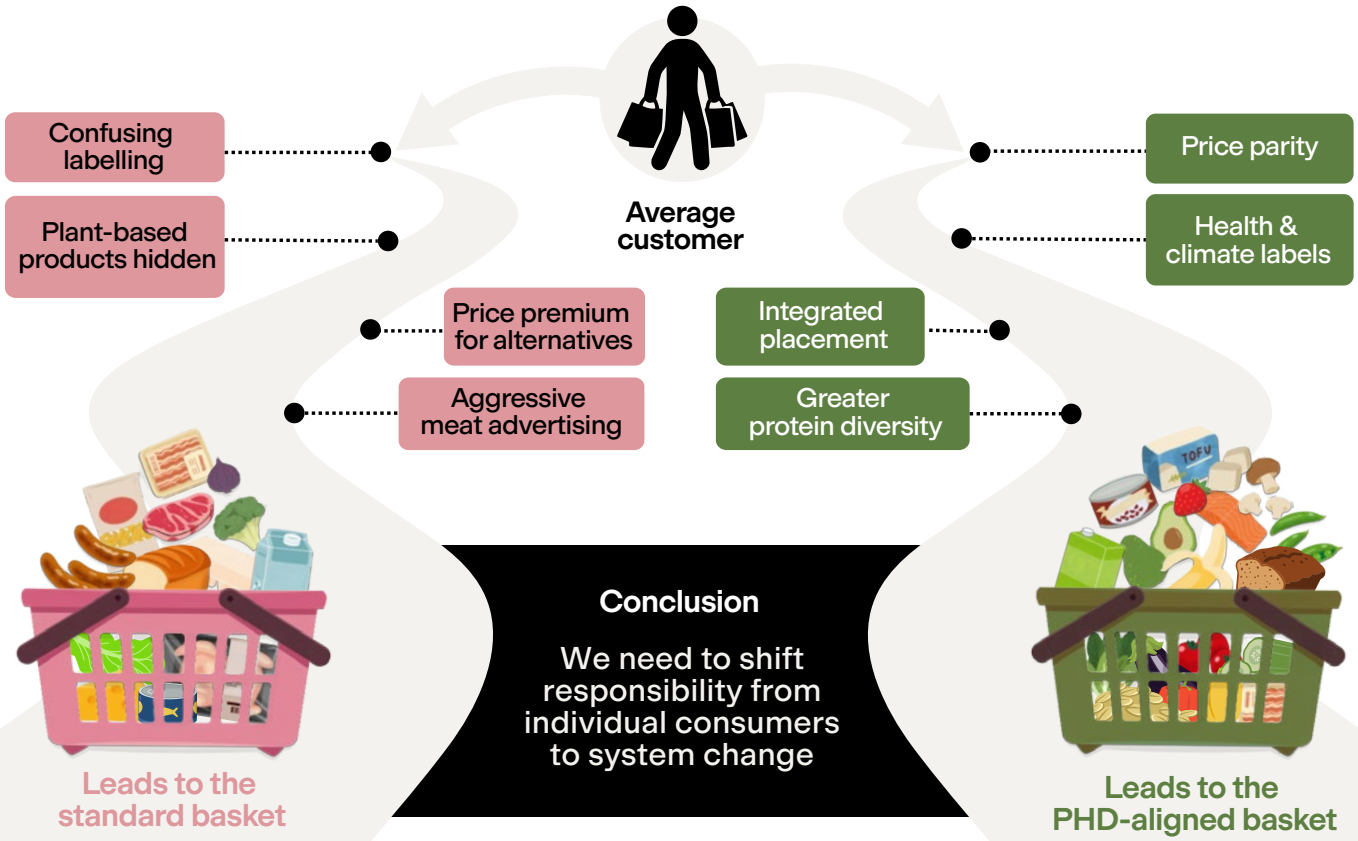
REWE Group is also advocating for changes in political conditions. Together with several manufacturers, it is calling for a VAT reduction on plant-based drinks from 19 to 7%, and has launched a petition to that effect, which has been signed by more than 140,000 people. For its efforts around plant-based nutrition, REWE Group was awarded the 2026 PETA Vegan Award in the category 'Best Vegan Variety'.

Despite this early progress, to make Germany's food environments better oriented toward health, sustainability and social accessibility, further actions need to be taken. The findings of this study point to several key recommendations for food retail.

Retailers should:

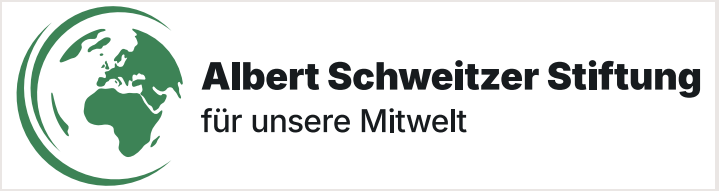
- Make it easy: Healthy and sustainable options such as legumes and other plant-based protein sources should be the cheapest, most visible and most accessible products in the supermarket. This includes competitive pricing, prominent shelf placement and consistent inclusion in promotions and recipe inspiration at the point of sale.
- Work with consumption routines, not against them: Offer plant-based products where consumers already select familiar items, positioning them as a natural part of everyday meals rather than separate 'specialty products'.
- Create better guidance at the shelf: Provide clear information that connects diet, health and climate – helping consumers make quick, informed decisions in line with their budget.
- Drive the diversification of protein sources through innovation: Invest in legumes and innovative plant-based protein sources, expand the range, and strengthen plant-based private labels.
- Win over customers through product quality: Use product development, tastings and targeted communication to ensure plant-based products are perceived as flavourful, high-quality and filling.

Figure 11: Redesigning the Supermarket Choice Pathway



- Create price incentives for the dietary shift: Use targeted pricing strategies to make plant-based protein sources and alternative products an affordable and attractive choice for broad segments of the population.
- Strengthen traditional foods: Integrate legumes into everyday cooking – with greater variety and formats that fit contemporary consumption habits, such as ready meals, snacks, or ready-to-eat products.
- Set clear targets for shifting protein sales: Work toward achieving a ratio of 38% plant-based to 62% animal-based protein sales by 2035, as well as a ratio of 32% plant-based dairy products to 68% animal-based dairy products.

All too often, a healthy and sustainable diet is seen as a niche or luxury choice. Price is the single best way to mitigate against this. As such, affordable private label brands and reasonably priced plant-based offerings play a central role in incentivising social participation and driving broad societal acceptance of a dietary transition.



The Planetary Health Diet Doesn't End at the Checkout: Eating Out

For the PHD to become a reality, change in food retail alone is not enough. The out-of-home market also plays a decisive role. Institutional catering is especially important: it reaches millions of people every day and can shape eating habits over the long term.

The Plant Potential Catering Report 2026 by the Albert Schweitzer Foundation for Our Contemporaries shows how the 15 highest-revenue contract caterers in Germany are currently approaching the shift toward a more plant-forward diet. 13 companies want to expand their plant-based offerings and 11 communicate an intention to reduce meat. Yet, only two companies have set specific percentage targets or target years for reducing meat sales, and none has yet established a measurable target for reducing sales of animal-based products overall. Meaningful and transparent reporting on the plant-to-animal protein sales split also remains largely absent.

The findings show that the willingness to change is there. Over the coming years, the key challenge will be to translate these ambitions into measurable targets, transparent reporting on the plant-to-animal protein sales split and demonstrable progress. Only through the combined efforts of the grocery retail sector and the food service sector can the PHD be embedded, step by step, into everyday life.

By: Albert Schweitzer Foundation

The Role of Politics

Food choices do not exist in isolation. They are shaped to a significant degree by the prevailing policy framework.

The results of this study show that a diet aligned with the PHD can not only have positive effects on our health and climate, but could cut societal costs considerably. Food policy is therefore health, social and economic policy.

In the 2025 AOK Public Health Index, Germany ranks among the lowest performers for nutrition internationally. Six measures were examined for promoting a healthier diet and none have been implemented nationwide (30). For example, there is no mandatory, easy-to-understand front-of-pack nutrition labelling system, nor are there binding quality standards for school meals.

In its position paper on plant proteins, the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv) calls on the German federal government to adopt a protein strategy that takes environmental and health considerations into account, creates tax parity, and expands and improves the attractiveness of plant-based protein options for consumers. The vzbv emphasises that all sectors should be involved in its implementation (31).

Similarly, 'Ernährungswende Anpacken!; ('Driving the Nutrition Transition!') was established in 2022 and comprises an alliance of more than 15 organisations from the health, social, environmental and nutrition sectors. It calls for comprehensive policy measures to promote healthy, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable diets (32). Key actions it advocates for include sustainable, healthy food services, measures to tackle food poverty, stronger regulation of food advertising aimed at children, and a health-promoting approach to taxes and levies (32).

To embed a healthy and sustainable diet into everyday life, policymakers should, in particular:

- Provide tax incentives for healthy and sustainable food, and align the VAT rate for plant-based dairy products – with the same reduced VAT rate of 7% given to animal-based dairy products.
- Provide stronger support for plant-based protein sources.
- Promote a healthy, more plant-based approach to food service in schools, daycare centres, hospitals and canteens.
- Improve consumer information on health, climate, and nutrition.
- Introduce or implement effective measures to protect children from unhealthy food advertising.
- Increase minimum social assistance benefits to help combat food poverty.
- Establish binding standards for healthy food environments.

A healthy and sustainable diet must not become a question of income. As such, policy measures play a crucial role in enabling social participation and making the dietary transition accessible to broad segments of the population.

"Food policy is health, social and economic policy."

A Special Role for Health Institutions

This study reveals that a healthy diet can cut long term health costs and ease the burden on the health care system. That means health institutions have an essential role to play in promoting better nutrition (33).

Education is key. According to a forsa survey, nearly a third of respondents believe that only animal-based foods can adequately provide enough protein (34). Yet, as this study shows, it is precisely the overconsumption of animal-based proteins that contributes to diet-related diseases. By reducing animal protein sources, individuals could gain around 2.4 additional healthy days of life annually, accounting for around 27% of the health gains under the Seidel et al. modelling (see Fig. 9). As such, comprehensive educational information is required to inform consumers of the health benefits of plant-based protein sources, like legumes, and the diverse ways they can be eaten. Alongside this, food environments need to make a health-promoting, plant-forward diet more accessible day-to-day.

Health institutions enjoy a high level of public trust and can make an important contribution to providing guidance on nutrition questions (33). Although doctors and nutritionists already publicise the link between diet and health (35), nutrition needs to be more explicitly linked to disease prevention and health gains (33). The PHD offers a scientifically grounded reference diet that takes both health and the environment into account, equipping health care professionals with highly effective guidance for a balanced, predominantly plant-based diet.

What's more, as part of their prevention mandate, statutory health insurers are responsible for providing evidence-based education on health-promoting diets (33) and have access to a wide range of options where promotion is concerned. This is, to some extent, already happening. In 2024, for example, nutrition was addressed in 63% of the activities supported by health insurers in daycare centres, schools and municipalities (36). These activities can be expanded to include nutrition education, disease prevention programs, and information services – as well as support programs that make healthy food more accessible, or free professional nutrition advice. One possible lever is cooperation with food retailers (37) and services (38) to co-create health-promoting food environments that reach consumers at the point of purchase.

This approach can extend to hospitals, rehabilitation clinics and other health facilities, which reach millions of people every year and can play a key role-model function through attractive, health-promoting, plant-forward meal offerings, contributing to their patients' recovery and health (39,40). Beyond this, health actors can support the transformation toward a healthy and sustainable diet across different settings and food environments, including schools, daycare centres, hospitals, care facilities, and even supermarkets.

"A healthy diet can prevent substantial health costs in the long term and ease the burden on the health system."

Health institutions should therefore:

- Strengthen healthy eating as prevention: Systematically anchor nutrition as part of health promotion and disease prevention.
- Expand nutrition education: Strengthen information and advice services on healthy and sustainable eating.
- Support health-promoting and sustainable food environments: Advocate for healthy catering standards in schools, daycare centres, workplaces, hospitals, care facilities and supermarkets.
- Reduce social inequalities: Support programs that help low-income and vulnerable groups, in particular, to gain access to healthy food.
- Make health costs visible: Communicate the link between diet, chronic disease, and health spending.
- Strengthen research and data: Support research on nutrition, prevention and the economic effects of diet-related diseases.

Just like consumers, health institutions have a huge amount to gain from embracing the PHD. By advocating for its adoption, diet-related diseases could be reduced, case numbers could be lowered, and associated treatment costs could be decreased – thereby easing the economic strain on the current healthcare system, improving its long-term stability and benefiting all those who rely on it.

9. Conclusion

A diet aligned with the PHD offers healthy returns to German wallets and wellbeing. An average household could save around €1,315 per year by switching to a PHD-aligned shopping basket.

The results also make it clear that the benefits of a more plant-based diet go far beyond the wallet. People could gain nearly two additional years of good health over the course of an 80-year life and 199,000 premature deaths could be avoided annually. Both of the scientific models used in this study consistently show that aligning with the PHD could bring substantial health benefits and save billions of euros in health and societal costs. One of the most effective levers to achieve this is by reducing the consumption of animal protein and replacing it with more whole grains, legumes, fruit and vegetables.

Yet a number of barriers are making the PHD shopping basket less than accessible. Our consumption choices are influenced by price across the full range of products, the structure of what's on offer, time pressure and existing food environments. It is all too apparent that the responsibility for a dietary transition toward the PHD cannot be placed on consumers alone. For it to become a reality, changes are needed across the entire food system. Supermarkets, food service providers, policymakers and health institutions must work together to make healthy and sustainable food more visible, affordable and accessible for all. Only then can these wide-reaching returns be harnessed.

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