



Policy Brief 2:7

Excerpt from the Swedish report [Konsumtionens gränser](#). (The Limits of Consumption)

Acceptability and Arguments for a Food Tax Shift

A food tax shift has the potential to reduce emissions and improve public health. Acceptability of a tax on red and processed meat varies among consumers and politicians, but it increases sharply when revenue is used to lower value added tax on fruit and vegetables. At the same time, there are clear differences between political groups. Right-wing voters and politicians are more skeptical and tend to oppose a meat tax. However, there is broad agreement that snacks and soft drinks should be taxed more heavily and that healthy foods should be cheaper.

A food tax shift means increasing taxes on foods that negatively affect climate and health and lowering taxes on foods with low climate impact or positive public health effects. It has been shown to reduce emissions from food consumption and improve public health, while not increasing food expenditures for low-, middle-, or high-income groups. Even when a policy instrument is effective, it is not guaranteed to be politically feasible. If it is perceived as unpopular, politicians may avoid it because they risk electoral punishment. We therefore need a better understanding of what acceptability looks like for a food tax shift.



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How acceptable is a food tax shift?

Our study is based on survey responses from 3,233 Swedish voters and 1,253 politicians. The results show, in line with earlier research, that acceptability is low for proposals that only raise taxes or introduce new taxes, in our case a tax on red and processed meat. Acceptability increases sharply if tax revenues are used to lower value added tax on other foods, especially fruit and vegetables. In that case, the average voter and politician become closer to neutral towards the proposal. Although right-wing voters and politicians are generally more negative towards all tax proposals studied than left-wing respondents, the food tax shift proposal was the one that received the highest acceptability across all political parties.

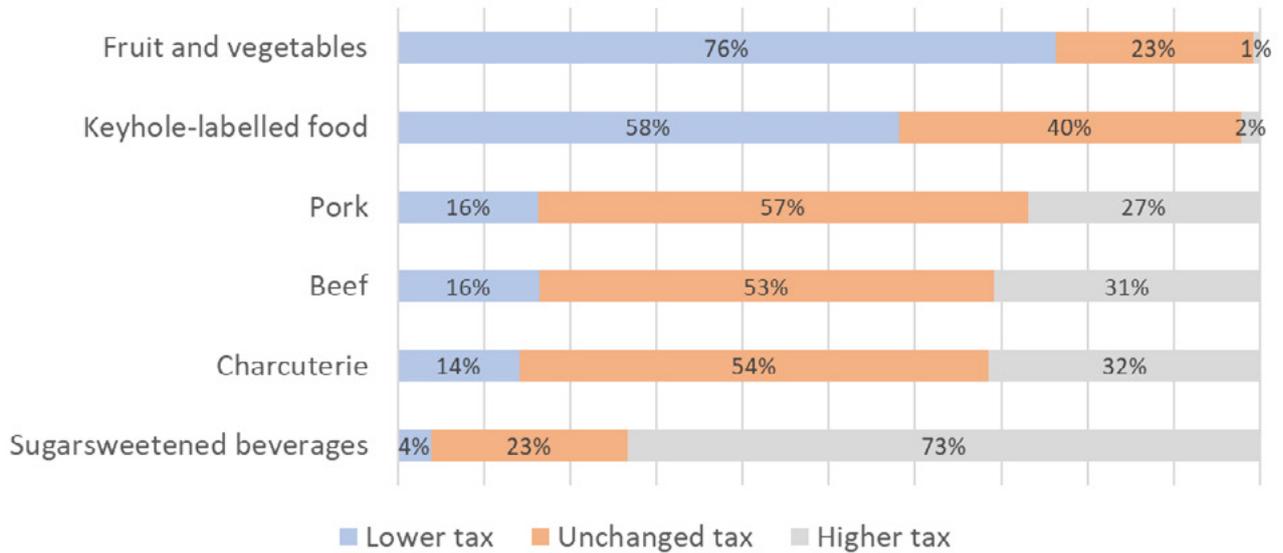


A food tax shift can be designed so that the average grocery bag does not become more expensive.

To understand why support is much weaker among right-wing voters and politicians, we analysed the extent to which they agreed with different arguments for and against a meat tax. Right-wing respondents tended to agree with arguments against a meat tax but not with arguments in favour. For example, they were less likely to agree that red and processed meat harms the climate or has negative effects on public health.

Misconceptions and objections

A common argument against a consumption tax on meat is based on the belief that the tax would mainly affect the price of domestic products, which is not correct. In line with this, many right-wing voters worry that Sweden's food self-sufficiency and biodiversity would be negatively affected. Another objection, shared by both left- and right-wing voters and by politicians, is the belief that a tax change would have negative economic effects specifically for low-income households. This objection can be addressed by designing the reform so that the average grocery bag does not become more expensive. In other words, negative attitudes to a meat tax can partly reflect misconceptions, while other objections can be met through a well-designed mix of a food tax shift and additional policy measures.



Share of voters preferring lower, unchanged or higher tax on specific foods.

**Right now!
Higher taxes on
sugar-sweet-
ened beverages and red
meat!**

Preferences for higher or lower taxes

When we asked about citizens' preference for lowering, maintaining, and raising the tax rate for different food products, clear patterns emerged. A majority prefers lower tax on foods such as fruit and vegetables, and keyhole/health labelled products. At the same time, a majority would like higher tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. For pork, beef and processed meat most respondents prefer keeping the normal twelve percent value added tax rate for food. Still, more people favour raising the tax on red and processed meat than lowering it. These results suggest that a food tax shift that raises taxes on red and processed meat as well as sugar sweetened beverages and snacks, while lowering taxes on fruit, vegetables, and whole grains, has potential to gain acceptability.



Further reading – or ask questions using www.greenchat.se/eng

- Ejelöv, E., et al. (2025). Public and political acceptability of a food tax shift, an experiment with policy framing and revenue use. Food Policy
- Ejelöv, E., et al. (2025). Understanding opposition: arguments for and against a meat tax in Sweden and their effect on policy attitudes. Environmental Research: Food Systems
- Larsson, J. et al. (2025). Cost neutral food tax reforms for healthier and more sustainable diets. Ecological Economics
- Web-page: www.foodtaxshift.com
- Podcast: Can we eat better without paying more?

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For further information, see:
www.sustainableconsumption.se/en

Reference to this text

Ejelöv, E., Nässén, J., Larsson, J. (2026). Acceptability and arguments for a food tax shift. Mistra Sustainable Consumption – policy brief 2:7. Stockholm: KTH Royal Institute of Technology.

