

## The Benefits of Legally Hunting Your Food

Many people in modern society have never considered the possibility of hunting for their own food. However, with the negative environmental and welfare implications associated with the agricultural industry and with the current high cost of meat, it is becoming more of a viable option.



### Welfare and Environmental Concerns

The EU imports a huge amount of meat every year with approximately 45% of it each year coming from Brazil. This is a major concern for animal welfare, as we have less control over the rearing process. Using the UK as an example, import statistics from [AHDB Beef & Lamb](#) demonstrate the sheer financial scale of what is being spent on meat every year in the UK. However, as can be seen during the last 12 months, the actual amounts are on the decline. This seems to be driven in part by the ability of fewer people to afford the cost of meat, and by environmental and welfare concerns. A report by [The Guardian](#) in 2010 highlighted that 25% of meat imported into the UK comes from countries which have weaker welfare controls than we do. As people's awareness of this rises, so their willingness to buy meat from sources they are not sure of decreases.

Furthermore the USA has recently reached a [draft agreement](#) with the UK whereby it will once again accept red meat from the UK, 20 years after it was banned due to the 'mad cow disease' scandal. There is concern about the food miles travelled by meat, both imports and exports. This could potentially further increase meat costs in the UK and it means that the meat itself will have a high carbon footprint. [Food miles](#) are the distance food travels to reach your plate and the less distance travelled, the lower the environmental impact. It is also important to eat foods which are in season, especially ones which can be sourced locally. Hence, traditional game shooting is driven by the seasons. For example, game and deer are protected at some points in the year to allow the population to flourish. Rabbit and woodpigeon do not have a

closed season, in most locations, and can be hunted throughout the year, because their populations are high.

### **The Benefits of Eating Meat You Have Hunted Yourself**

Many people will shy away from eating meat they hunt themselves however, when you weigh up the benefits, it can be seen to be one of the most ethical choices.

**Local:** If you have access to local country areas then the food you hunt will travel fewer food miles, as it will only need to travel from the field to your plate. Not only this, you will know exactly where your meat came from, and will not feel dissociated from the reality of your meats origin. This is unlike purchasing from a supermarket, where it is hard to visualize the meats origin when received in a packet on a continuous basis.

**Welfare:** The game will live in its natural habitat, not farmed and therefore not affected by any negative welfare standards. If a good marksman hunts the game it will also experience a pain-free death and not be subject to any of the fear associated with slaughter. Nor will the animal be subject to a life in the confines of small, indoor spaces.

**Healthy For You:** Wild game is also healthy for the person eating it because it is not intensively farmed and nor is it treated with antibiotics or growth hormones.

**Connects You Back to the Source of Your Food:** Many people are very detached from the source of their food. They are used to purchasing meat which has been neatly packaged up, and which bears little resemblance to meat found on a butcher's counter. Getting back in touch with the provenance of food can therefore be a positive thing.

### **Is Hunting Sustainable?**

It may seem very unsustainable for everyone to hunt unregulated, as this would not support such large populations. However, to hunt for your food, you would only be able to do it on your own land, or gain permission to hunt on somebody else's. So it is regulated at this first level, and furthermore you would need to prove yourself a responsible hunter if on somebody else's land. A second level of regulation is implemented when a species population show any sign of risk, where laws would be implemented to prevent hunting of that species until numbers replenish. In fact, many farmer's welcome hunters, as when pest numbers increase, such as rabbits, they can destroy much of their crop. In conclusion, hunting if regulated can be sustainable.

### **The Practicalities of Hunting**

There are several things you will need to consider before you decide whether hunting is right for you.

**Location:** Are you based close to open countryside where hunting is a possibility or are you willing to travel? For city dwellers this may be more problematic unless they go hunting several times a year and stock up the freezer each time.

**Permission:** You will need [permission](#) to shoot on a farmer's land. Always stress the benefits when you approach landowners, for example you can highlight the positive outcome of keeping pest numbers down.

**Insurance:** It's important to get insurance before you shoot to limit your liability in case of an incident. Both include low cost insurance options in their membership, and provide a wealth of other support, so opting to join one of these can be a wise choice.

**Equipment:** You will also need to purchase either a shotgun, rifle or air rifle. The latter can be the easiest option as there is usually less restrictions on a gun with 12ft lb in power. It is important to research the gun laws for the country you are in. If you are inexperienced with shooting, you may also want to join a gun club to practice. It is important when shooting game to get a clean shot so the animal doesn't suffer.

**Know What It's Legal to Shoot and When:** Different game will have open and closed season and some wildlife will be off limits completely for hunting as they are protected. It is very important to do thorough research on this before you start as breaking the law can lead to a hefty fine. Legislation also differs between the different countries.

### **Eating Your Quarry**

Hunting is only the first step. Once you take your game home, you will need to know how to clean, prepare and cook it. There are several websites which deal with these practicalities as well as providing you with a range of recipes you can use for [rabbit](#), [pigeon](#) and other game birds. For the bigger beasts, you can hunt deer when in season for some wild venison. Europe as a whole is not short of wild hogs, and are considered a pest in some areas. A [hog roast](#) is a great way to get friends and family together. You may even want to expand your horizons and consider fishing, for example wild trout makes a delicious meal.

### **Cost Savings**

One of the biggest benefits of hunting is the cost saving involved. Once you have kitted yourself out and gained a good understanding of where and how to shoot, you have limitless access to fresh game. As long as you have a big enough freezer! Combine this with the fact you will be eating healthy, local and ethically sourced meat and you benefit not only your own pocket but you will take positive steps for the environment too.