GLP-1 Medications & Changing Eating Patterns

GLP-1 medications are a key driver of emerging changes in food intake and eating behaviour.

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND

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Red Meat Sector

Nutrition Insights

Eating patterns in New Zealand and across key export markets are evolving rapidly, shaped by demographic, health and behavioural trends.[1] One of the most significant emerging influences is the growing uptake of GLP-1 appetite-suppressing medications.[2]

As these medications reduce appetite and overall food intake, they may influence consumer demand, purchasing behaviour and product expectations.[3] Understanding these changes is important for the long-term success of the red meat sector.

Key Takeaways

- **GLP-1 medications reduce a person's appetite and overall food intake.**
- **Smaller meals increase the importance of nutrient density and protein quality.**
- **Lean red meat naturally provides complete protein, bioavailable iron, zinc and vitamin B12.**
- **These characteristics make lean red meat well suited to lower-intake dietary patterns.**

What are GLP-1 medications?

GLP-1s (glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists) are medications initially developed for type 2 diabetes and now widely used for weight management and obesity.[3] They mimic a naturally occurring gut hormone that slows digestion, reduces appetite, increases feelings of fullness and helps regulate blood glucose.[3]

As a result, people using these medications typically eat smaller portions, eat less frequently and feel full sooner and for longer.[3] While effective for weight loss, these medications can also produce short-term side effects and potential longer-term nutritional concerns.[4,5] Dietitians and health professionals are concerned that this may unintentionally lead to inadequate nutrition (particularly insufficient protein intake and micronutrient deficiencies), loss of muscle mass, and detrimental impacts on bone health, especially when these medications are used without appropriate dietary support and oversight.[6,7]

In New Zealand, examples of GLP-1 receptor agonist medicines approved for use include dulaglutide (Trulicity), liraglutide (Victoza and Saxenda), and semaglutide (Ozempic and Wegovy) as injectables.[8] Of these, Trulicity and Victoza are publicly funded for people with type 2 diabetes who meet eligibility criteria.[9] Meanwhile, semaglutide (Ozempic/Wegovy) and Saxenda are approved for use but are not funded by PHARMAC for either diabetes or weight management.[8] These non-funded treatments can cost approximately $450–$600 NZD per month.

In the United States, oral (tablet) GLP-1 formulations, including an oral semaglutide pill under the Wegovy brand, were approved in late 2025 and launched in January 2026.[10] Currently, oral semaglutide products are not yet approved or available in New Zealand, with regulatory and funding pathways still pending.[11]

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Nutrition considerations for GLP-1 users

Nutritional considerations
For the purpose of this document, the focus is on protein, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12, as these are the key nutrients relevant to the red meat sector and current nutrition communications. When appetite and food intake is reduced on GLP-1 medication, these nutrient intakes can drop, creating potential deficits.[12-14] Dietitians emphasise that smaller meals still need to provide all essential amino acids and adequate vitamins and minerals, yet many light or convenience foods fall short.[7]

The combination of high-quality protein and key micronutrients makes lean red meat a practical option for GLP-1 users when food intake is lower.[17] However, some consumers may experience adverse side effects such as nausea, which could make consuming red meat challenging.[4] Strategies to work around this might include serving red meat in smaller, more frequent portions, or incorporating the meat into mixed dishes (e.g. in a stew, soup, stirfry, or salad) rather than serving it as a large, standalone portion (such as a steak) with other meal components.

Lean red meat is recognised as a key component in a healthy diet.[15,16] It is well-suited to lower-appetite eating patterns because it provides complete, highly bioavailable protein as well as key micronutrients: iron, zinc and vitamin B12 (Vit.B12).

Protein	Iron	Zinc	Vit.B12
To support muscle maintenance and strength.	**Carries oxygen around the body and supports energy levels.**	**Supports immunity, healing and normal growth.**	**Supports normal nerve function and energy metabolism.**

The impact of GLP-1 on body composition and weight

Body composition changes
GLP-1 use generally leads to significant fat loss, but international studies also report modest reductions in lean body mass, including skeletal muscle, with lean mass sometimes representing a substantial portion of total weight lost.[18,19] This raises concerns that decreases in lean mass could impair muscle strength and physical function, particularly in older adults with lower baseline muscle reserves. Research is underway in New Zealand looking at a variety of factors, including dietary intake, body composition changes and quality of life. Until more is known, clinical guidance often includes attention to nutritional intake, physical activity, and careful monitoring.

Weight regain and metabolic markers
Weight loss achieved with GLP-1 medication is commonly followed by weight regain after treatment cessation.[20] A 2026 systematic review and meta-analysis found weight was regained at an average rate of ~0.4 kg per month after stopping GLP-1s, with return to baseline weight typically within 1.5–1.7 years.[21] Additional cardiometabolic benefits associated with GLP-1 medications, including improvements in blood glucose and blood pressure, have been shown to attenuate over time.[22,23] This suggests that early gains may require continued treatment and/or complementary long-term lifestyle management strategies to be sustained.

Why GLP-1s matter for the red meat sector

Reduced overall intake
The global use of GLP-1 medications is rapidly increasing, extending beyond traditional clinical obesity treatment. This trend, coupled with an aging population, a greater emphasis on weight management, and shifts toward lighter eating and post-illness recovery, is leading a growing number of consumers to reduce their overall food intake.[24]

For GLP-1 users, this reduction is typically characterised by smaller portion sizes and lower caloric consumption, driven by reduced hunger and early satiety (or fullness).[25-27]

Changes in purchasing behaviour
Lower overall intake is already translating into measurable shifts in purchasing patterns. A Cornell University study showed households with a GLP-1 user have reduced grocery spending by approximately 5–8% within six months.[24] The decline was primarily driven by reduced purchases of calorie-dense, highly processed foods such as snacks, sweets, soft drinks and takeout.[24]

In contrast, the study showed spending on fresh produce, high-protein dairy and functional nutrition products remained steady or increased.[24] These patterns reflect smaller portions, more intentional choices, and a growing preference for nutrient-rich, functional products.[24,28] In response, food manufacturers and retailers may need to adjust product formats and positioning to align with this evolving demand.

Greater emphasis on nutrient quality
As total food intake declines, dietary choices are not always proportionally adjusted to maintain nutrient adequacy.[12] This heightens the importance of food quality, nutrient density and functional value per meal, ideally supported by appropriate nutrition guidance.[16]

There is increasing importance placed on foods that deliver complete protein and key micronutrients in smaller portions.[17] Additionally, formats that support satiety, appetite control, convenience and ease of digestion are also gaining importance.[17,29] Overall, it appears consumers are shifting from volume to value.

GLP-1 medications: Implications for the red meat sector

The evolving GLP-1 landscape may have implications for the red meat sector. As overall food intake declines and consumers shift from volume to value, lean red meat may play an increasingly important role as a nutrient-dense source of high-quality protein within lower-intake diets. As a natural source of complete protein and bioavailable iron, zinc and vitamin B12 (nutrients that may become harder to replace when overall intake falls), red meat can contribute meaningfully to balanced and varied eating patterns.

For meat processors, this may create scope to:

- Align product formats with smaller eating occasions.
- Highlight nutrient density and functional benefits.
- Reinforce the role of complete protein and key micronutrients.
- Explore convenient or portion-flexible formats.

Adapting to change

The following outlines evidence-informed approaches to respond to this emerging landscape, tailored to each processor's strategy, capability and market position.

Positioning red meat as a premium protein
The future of farming, and protein markets more broadly, is increasingly focused on premium, differentiated products rather than simply volume. The rise of GLP-1 medications reinforces this shift, as consumers with reduced appetites may prioritise foods that deliver greater nutritional value per portion. This creates an opportunity for the red meat sector to shift the narrative away from price per kilogram and towards nutrition and functionality per serving.

Lean red meat provides high-quality, complete protein, naturally containing all nine essential amino acids, alongside key micronutrients such as iron, zinc and vitamin B12. These nutrients support important physiological functions including muscle maintenance, energy metabolism and immune health.

These attributes allow red meat to be positioned not only as food, but as a functional ingredient that supports strength, recovery and healthy ageing, particularly relevant for older adults and individuals experiencing appetite suppression while using GLP-1 medications.

There is also an opportunity to align product formats with evolving eating behaviours. Smaller, convenient portions such as pre-cooked steaks, sliced proteins, or ready-to-eat meatballs may help consumers maximise nutritional intake even when overall appetite is reduced. Framing red meat in this way reinforces its role as a nutrient-dense, high-value protein within modern diets.

Product formats and consumer communication
Changes in appetite and meal size associated with GLP-1 medications may influence how some consumers approach food choices. Smaller eating occasions and reduced overall intake mean that nutrient density, portion size, and ease of consumption may become more important considerations.

In this context, formats that deliver meaningful amounts of high-quality protein in smaller portions may become increasingly relevant. Examples could include pre-portioned servings, sliced or ready-to-eat proteins, or smaller meal components that can be incorporated into balanced meals.

Convenience may also play a role. Products that are simple to prepare, easy to store, and adaptable across different meal occasions may align with the needs of consumers who are eating smaller amounts or seeking straightforward ways to meet their nutritional needs.

Clear communication around the nutritional role of protein and key micronutrients may also help consumers understand how foods such as lean red meat contribute to balanced diets, particularly where appetite is reduced.

While GLP-1 users represent a specific consumer group, many of these considerations, including portion flexibility, convenience, and nutrient density, align with broader trends in modern eating patterns.

GLP-1s are an emerging area, the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Inc. Nutrition Team can provide evidence-based advice, nutrition messaging frameworks, and content development support to ensure communications are accurate, consistent, and aligned with best practice.

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Summary

GLP-1 medications are an emerging influence on global food consumption patterns. By reducing appetite and total food intake, they may increase the importance of nutrient density, protein quality and functional value within smaller meals.

Lean red meat naturally provides complete protein and bioavailable micronutrients, including iron, zinc and vitamin B12. These characteristics position red meat as a nutrient-dense option within lower-intake dietary patterns.

As the GLP-1 landscape evolves, maintaining a clear focus on nutrition evidence, product quality and effective communication will help ensure red meat continues to play an important role in balanced diets.

For further information, nutrition insights, or a tailored nutrition approach for your organisation, please contact:

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