

Foreword

The Advisory Committee on Social Sciences (ACSS) formed a Working Group on Climate Change and Consumer Behaviours (CCCB).

Last updated: 04 Dec 2025

In this project

[In this project](#)

1. [Foreword](#)
2. [Executive Summary](#)
3. [Findings](#)
4. [Conclusions](#)
5. [Annex A: Evidence sources identified through expert engagement](#)
6. [Annex B: Workshop agenda](#)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46756/sci.fsa.icl350>

Authors: Rebecca Gillespie, Philip Jones

Conducted by: Food Standards Agency

Date published: 2022-07-14

Project status: Completed

The Advisory Committee on Social Sciences (ACSS) was established by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to bring social science expertise to the Agency's pursuit of food safety, food authenticity, and regulatory excellence. In fulfilling its remit, the Agency needs advice from a wide range of expertise, and this includes insights from disciplines such as behavioural science and economics as much as from the medical, agricultural, and animal health domains. It is crucial to understand how we as consumers, as well as the industries that feed us, might adapt our behaviours, perceive risks or alter our purchasing patterns.

Climate Change is now widely accepted as one of the gravest risks facing human well-being, not least because of its possible effects on the food system. These effects could be radical and sudden and are inherently unpredictable. At the same time, humans are extraordinarily adaptable and innovative, and so responses to this threat are also unpredictable. Many people are already 'doing their bit' towards the 'Net Zero' aspiration by adapting their diet, changing their consumption patterns, or striving to avoid waste. As one of the many

governmental bodies concerned with food supply the FSA has a strong interest in horizon scanning likely responses to climate change and understanding where it might impact its work.

The ACSS therefore offered to help with this large task and formed a Working Group on Climate Change and Consumer Behaviours (CCCB). We were fortunate to be able to begin our work by hosting a workshop with experts in the field to illuminate the trends already being observed, or considered possible. Following this we then convened a group of colleagues across the FSA to deepen understanding of how the identified trends might impact on food safety, food authenticity and regulation. We took as our initial scope end consumers (rather than the businesses that serve them), and we looked for behaviours that appear to be ones that consumers have adopted to respond to the Net Zero call. The concepts of 'choice' and 'preference' in relation to behaviour is complex, as much behaviour does not follow choice or preference. In future, climate change may bring about changes to food availability and price that mean that choices are constrained. Equally, consumer preferences may feed back into the supply chain, and lead to a degree of choice 'editing' by food businesses. These complexities are beyond our scope for the moment, but, as experts participating in our workshop emphasized, must be considered.

To get the full value of the expertise we were able to assemble, and the added value from our consultants, Ipsos UK who constructed and ran the first workshop, it is important to read the full report. It is also important to go directly to the centres of expertise for the insights that surfaced, but that we could only dip into and summarise. In this overview, the CCCB working group wants to highlight what we felt were some of the most interesting lines of enquiry, which are shown in table 1 below. We have to stress that these are possible trends of concern to the FSA, not necessarily with already observable effects, and more work needs to be done to explore them.

We are conscious that the Science Council also has a WG on Net Zero, with a wider scope than that of the ACSS, and we are closely in touch to ensure that the work is complementary.

I would therefore like to commend the work of the ACSS CCCB working group to the FSA, and we look forward to discussing how we can be of further help. I would also like to wholeheartedly thank everyone involved in making the workshops such stimulating and insightful exercises.

Julie Hill
 Chair, CCCB Working Group
 Deputy Chair, ACSS

Table 1: Key climate change relevant behavioural trends, implications for FSA policy areas, and potential actions.

Behavioural Domain of interest and possible trends of concern	Who are the potential stakeholders?	Reasons for concern?	Potential actions
1. Increased consumption of novel/alternative proteins Incorporating novel proteins in response to demands for vegetarian or vegan food without adequate testing/consideration.	Food manufacturers, retailers, consumers	Food Safety authenticity as novel proteins could generate hypersensitivity or increased food safety risks (for example, through new cooking practices)	Building knowledge on production standards and novel proteins role in nutrition. Seek partners including the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). Consider an overarching framework of oversight within the FSA.

Behavioural Domain of interest and possible trends of concern	Who are the potential stakeholders?	Reasons for concern?	Potential actions
2. Increased use of alternative packaging, including reusable containers Incorporating recycled material in packaging without appropriate safety testing. Re-use of food containers without adequate cleansing.	Packaging designers and manufacturers, retailers, consumers. Food delivery companies.	Food safety - possibility of contaminants migrating to food, risks of food residue contamination.	Consider suitable messaging on re-usable containers regarding use and cleaning. Ensure that the system is ready for a proliferation and increase in volume of novel and recycled materials.
3. Avoiding Food Waste Eating food dangerously beyond its use by date. Increased use of sharing apps.	Consumers at home, retailers	Food safety	Develop support mechanisms to help companies improve the accuracy of dates use by dates, and consumers to observe the dates correctly. Consider Food sharing apps as vehicles for FSA messaging.

The terms of reference for both the [ACSS](#) and the [CCB working group](#) can be found on the [ACSS website](#).