

Paper 10.4 Wider Consumer Interests - Update (February 2023)

Summary

This paper provides an update on progress for the Wider Consumer Interests Working Group. It summarises background, key activities, and future action. This paper is for information and discussion.

Background

The FSA is currently embarking on a programme of work drawing on our understanding of consumers' wider interests in relation to food as we develop our new strategy and approach for the coming years. We are expanding the scope of our evidence gathering to include wider interests of consumers in relation to food, giving perspective into wider food policy and provide evidence on some of the big challenges in the food system such as diet and nutrition, sustainability of food, food insecurity, provision, and choice.

The main aim of this Programme is to amplify the consumer voice in food policy in the FSA and across Government and broaden the scope of our evidence gathering to include wider interests of consumers, helping to join up food policy.

A number of projects have recently been delivered under this Programme of work, with many of the workstreams have now been delivered. The steer from the FSA board at the June board meeting was to continue to explore and progress with the future work programme focused on household food insecurity, which will be completed under the Wider Consumer Interests Areas of Research Interest.

The ACSS has been asked to consider how best to support the FSA's research to evidence the wider interest of consumers and have agreed that the creation of a Working Group will help support and assure the quality of this workstream.

Members

The Working Group is comprised of the following members:

- Professor Spencer Henson (chair)
- Professor Julie Barnett
- Dr Seda Erdem
- Professor George Gaskell
- Dr Charlotte Hardman
- Ms Julie Hill
- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford
- Dr Naomi Maynard

Terms of reference

The main objective of the Working Group is to provide impartial, ad-hoc advice, peer review the research and support broadening the scope of our evidence gathering to include wider interest of consumers and to help provide timely, relevant to robust evidence to join up food policy.

Key activities to date

Since its inception the Wider Consumer Interest Working Group has undertaken the following:

- After circulating the proposition paper in November 2021, ACSS members reviewed the paper, contributed to discussion points, and decided if they wanted to join this new Working Group.

- The ACSS members met together as a group in December 2021 with the FSA lead where they spoke about how the Working Group can contribute to the Programme.
- Formally agreed on members and Chair of the Working Group.
- Developed terms of references and defined the scope of the Working Group.
- Input on title of recent research publication
- In July 2022, members discussed The UK Public's Interests, Needs and Concerns Around Food publication and the steer from the Board in terms of a priority focus on Household Food Insecurity under this programme of work.

Current activities

- In September 2022, FSA Social Science leads requested ad-hoc support from the WCI Working Group to carry out an external review of the Consumer Insights Tracker which has been running since April 2020. Professor Spencer Henson is leading the review, which will provide a recommendations report to the FSA leads in February/March 2023. Interim findings and a progress update will be provided on the day of the plenary (item 11).

Background of the Consumer Insights Tracker

The [Consumer Insights Tracker](#) provides monthly monitoring of consumer behaviour and attitudes on the following topics:

- Food insecurity
- Food availability
- Concerns in relation to food

- Confidence in the food supply chain
- Confidence in the FSA

The tracker is used as a regular ‘temperature check’ on key issues that impact consumers. Although longer term trends can be established in [Food and You 2](#), the consumer insights tracker provides more regular updates on fluctuating issues month-to-month.

The tracker was established in November 2021 – continuing key trends from the previous COVID-19 (established Apr 20) and CO2 tracker (established Sept 21) surveys. The monthly survey currently is conducted online via Ipsos’ i:Omnibus with a nationally representative sample¹ of adults (aged 16-75) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The FSA is keen to align the consumer insights tracker to the [FSA’s 3rd strategy pillar](#) ‘food is healthier and more sustainable’, under the WCI programme.

Objectives of the review

- To determine whether the consumer insights tracker should become a permanent FSA project, by assessing whether it is needed by internal and external stakeholders.
- To review the current consumer insights tracker (including the purpose, aims, scope, content, outputs and methodology) and report actionable recommendations to the FSA and ACSS.
- To review and comment on the Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the supplier contract
- To advise on the extent to which questions within the consumer insights tracker and F&Y2 should be aligned, and to advise on the best ways to communicate the differences between these research projects with FSA stakeholders.

Approach

These objectives will be achieved by:

- Understanding the existing approach to the research by working collaboratively with the FSA project team
- Review the recommendations document provided by the FSA, and determine whether the proposed changes and rationale are appropriate (providing alternative recommendations where necessary)
- Investigating how key stakeholders (both internal and external) use the tracker and identify their needs going forward (FSA to provide a list of stakeholders) through interviews
- Determining the extent to which the consumer insights tracker meets the needs of the FSA's 3rd strategy pillar ("Food is healthier and more sustainable") and identify ways to better align the survey question to the strategy

Future Activities

- The findings from the external review will be presented to the ACSS Working Group and FSA leads to discuss the recommendations for the Consumer Insights Tracker. We would also welcome the ACSS WG's input into the Consumer Insight Tracker tender specification and when the time arises, reviewing the questionnaire.
- A full report of recommendations, based on the findings from the review, should be provided by the ACSS Working group to the FSA consumer insights tracker project team.
- Contribute to the tender evaluation panel to assess the bids for the project (one representative from the working group would be required).

Key activities for 2022 include:

- Keeping abreast of other external sources of information that could inform, improve and guide the Programme.
- Discussing and advising on the direction of work for the Programme for 2022/23 by providing a steer on evidence gaps that we may want to address, in line with our Strategy and board discussions around Household Food Insecurity.
- Exploring if we need/want to investigate and explore specific issues with certain groups of the population/consumer groups with protected characteristics
- Providing ad hoc support to the FSA Lead, e.g. peer review research material and final report, review and provide advice on research specifications, providing Board with updates etc
- Carrying out an external review of the FSA Consumer Insight Tracker

Spencer Henson, ACSS Wider Consumer Interest Working Group Chair

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