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Food and You 2: Wave 1 Executive Summary

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Foreword

The FSA has a unique role as the part of Government that looks after consumer interests when it comes to food. Representing people and communities that we serve is central to what we do.

There is really no such thing as 'the consumer'. We all consume food, and we are all individuals. The same person can be in combination or at different points in their life a small business owner, a new parent, an active citizen, a grower, a home cook, a person celebrating with special meals or indulging with a takeaway, eating in a college canteen, an inmate, a hospital patient or a care home resident. Our needs and interests are complex and constantly on the move.

Conducting deep and careful research and making the data available is a vital part of how we seek to understand and represent the consumer perspective. This first report from our new, more frequent, more flexible, flagship survey represents a huge amount of work.

It has never been more important than now, in the context of a pandemic which has changed how people buy and eat food profoundly, that we listen to the voices of consumers often and at a scale which allows for good analysis. I am delighted that the wholesale review of our flagship consumer survey now gives us the tools to do this better.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Miles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underlining the name.

Emily Miles

CEO, Food Standards Agency

March 2021

Introducing Food and You 2

Food and You 2 is a new biannual official statistic survey commissioned by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The survey measures self-reported consumer knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to food safety and other food issues amongst adults in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Food and You 2 uses a new methodology, known as 'push-to-web', which is primarily carried out online. This method allows the FSA to conduct fieldwork more frequently and with a much larger sample, whilst continuing to use a random probability sampling approach.

Food and You 2 replaces existing surveys including the face-to-face Food and You survey (2010-2018) and Public Attitudes Tracker (2010-2019). Due to differences in the question content, presentation and mode of response, direct comparisons should not be made between these earlier surveys and Food and You 2.

Fieldwork for Food and You 2: Wave 1 was conducted between 29th July and 6th October 2020. A total of 9,319 adults from 6,408 households across England, Wales and Northern Ireland completed the survey.

This survey was taken during the Covid-19 pandemic and so it records the reported attitudes and behaviours under unusual circumstances which have had a significant impact on how and where people buy and eat food, and on levels of household food insecurity.

The modules presented in this report include 'Food we can trust', 'Concerns about food', 'Food security', 'Food shopping' and 'Eating at home'.

Summary of key findings

Food we can trust

Confidence in food safety and authenticity

- More than 9 in 10 (92%) respondents reported that they had confidence that the food they buy is safe to eat.
- More than 8 in 10 (86%) respondents reported that they had confidence that the information on food labels is accurate.

Confidence in the food supply chain

- Over three quarters of respondents (78%) reported that they had confidence in the food supply chain.
- Respondents were more likely to report confidence in farmers (90%), and shops and supermarkets (86%) than in take-aways (51%), and food delivery services (39%).

Awareness, trust, and confidence in the FSA

- Over 9 in 10 respondents (91%) had heard of the FSA.
- Three quarters (75%) of respondents who had at least some knowledge about the FSA trust the FSA to make sure food is safe and what it says it is.
- Over half of respondents (57%) reported some knowledge of the FSA.
- Of those who had at least some knowledge about the FSA, most respondents (91%) were confident that the FSA can be relied upon to protect the public from food-related risks, 88% were confident that the FSA is committed to communicating openly with the public about food-related risks, and 91% were confident that the FSA takes appropriate action if a food-related risk is identified.

Concerns about food

- Most respondents (84%) reported they had no concerns about the food that they eat, and only 16% of respondents reported that they had a concern.
- Respondents who reported a concern about the food they eat were asked to briefly explain what their concerns related to. Food production methods (29%), environmental and ethical concerns (26%) and food provenance (21%) were the most mentioned concerns.
- When all respondents were asked to indicate if they had concerns about the food they eat, from a list of given options, the most common concerns related to the amount of sugar in food (59%), food waste (58%) and animal welfare (57%).

Food security

Food and You 2: Wave 1 data were collected between 29th July and 6th October 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic which had a significant impact on society, on the economy, on how and where people buy and eat food and on the day-to-day lives of everyone. It is expected that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the level of food security reported by respondents in Food and You 2.

- Across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, 84% of respondents were classified as food secure (72% high, 12% marginal) and 16% of respondents were classified as food insecure (9% low, 7% very low).
- Food security levels were comparable across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Over three quarters of respondents were food secure (high, marginal) in England (84%), Wales (83%) and Northern Ireland (85%). Approximately 1 in 6 respondents were food insecure (low, very low) in England (16%), Wales (17%) and Northern Ireland (15%).
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents who had changed their eating habits in the last 12 months reported the changes were, at least partly, due to COVID-19 and lockdown.

Food shopping

Where do respondents buy food?

- Most respondents reported that they have often (i.e. once a week or more frequently) bought food from a supermarket or mini supermarket (85%). Convenience shops (e.g. corner shops) (44%), and independent shops (e.g. greengrocers') (51%) were typically used on an occasional basis (i.e. '2-3 times a month' or less often). A small number of respondents (6%) have used Facebook marketplace to buy food.

What do respondents look for when buying food?

- When shopping, respondents reported they often checked the use-by (80%) or best before date (78%).

Confidence in allergen labelling

- Most respondents (79%) who go food shopping and take into consideration a person who has a food allergy or intolerance were confident that the information provided on food labelling allows them to identify foods that will cause a bad or unpleasant physical reaction.

- Respondents who buy food sold loose were more confident in identifying foods that will cause a bad or unpleasant physical reaction when buying this food in-store at a supermarket (74%), when buying food from a supermarket online (71%) and when shopping at independent food shops (68%). Respondents were less confident when buying food from food markets or stalls (56%).

Eating at home

Use-by dates

- Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents identified the use-by date as the information which shows that food is no longer safe to eat.
- Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents stated that they always check use-by dates before they cook or prepare food. A third (33%) of respondents check use-by dates at least occasionally and just 2% never check use-by dates.
- Many respondents reported that they never ate cooked meats (64%), smoked fish (85%), cheese (52%), bagged salads (49%) or milk (67%) past the use-by date. Conversely, some respondents reported that they had eaten those foods past the use-by date. For example, almost half of respondents had eaten bagged salad past the use-by date (6% every week, 21% some weeks and 17% just one week in the last month).

'Eat within' information

- Around a quarter (27%) of respondents reported that they always follow the on-pack instruction.

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