

ACSS: Working Group Proposition Paper

The impact of climate change on consumer behaviour

Summary

This paper is for information and discussion. It sets out some initial ideas for an ACSS working group exploring the impact of climate change on consumer behaviour. The Committee is invited to discuss options to best support and inform the FSA's work in this area.

Background

The environmental effects of climate change will impact the food system in a number of ways. Warmer temperatures will influence what types of food can be grown in different areas, consequently changing what can be locally grown, what is seasonal and what is affordably available to consumers. Furthermore, increased consumer awareness of the effects of climate change may also encourage consumer preference for locally sourced produce, and more sustainable products. Previous (2010) FSA work in this area ([Food and Climate change: A review of the effects of climate change on food within the remit of the Food Standards Agency](#)) concluded that more information is needed on how climate affects food choice. It also determined more information was needed on the likely affects of climate change on food price and availability in the UK and how this may differentially impact on the behaviours of consumers. A mori

The Committee on Climate Change is responsible for publishing a UK-wide Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) every 5 years as required under the 2008 Climate Change Act. The [most recent \(2017\) assessment](#) categorised risks to *domestic and international food production and trade* in the most urgent category of 'more action needed' (alongside another 4 risk categories) meaning "New, stronger or different government policies or implementation activities – over and above those already planned – are needed in the next five years to reduce long-term vulnerability to climate change".

In July 2022 the Climate Change Committee will publish its 3rd report setting out the most recent thinking on possible impacts of climate change on a range of issues including food and agriculture. [Global survey data](#) suggests that in 2019 around half of adults in Great Britain made changes to the food that they buy due to concerns over climate change. As such, the impacts identified in the 2022 CCRA are likely to influence consumer behaviour.

Objective/Potential scope

The main objective of the working group will be to explore the impacts of climate change on consumer behaviour. As such the group will be asked to provide ad-hoc advice for relevant research projects commissioned/conducted by the FSA, as well as exploring specific areas of interest. Further exploratory work, and initial

discussions with working group members, is needed to refine the scope further. Possible areas of consideration include:

- Consumer awareness of how the food system will change over the next decade, and any subsequent impact on consumer behaviour (e.g. emerging preferences for 'more sustainable' food.)
- Consumer perceptions of sustainability
- Climate change as a motivation for changes to individual diets (e.g. to a plant based diet) and how this will impact the food industry and demand for different foods;
- The impact of potential rising food prices and food scarcity on consumer behaviour in terms of the types of food people buy, the amount people cook for themselves, the volume of food waste and increased risky behaviours, e.g. consuming food past it's use by date;
- Differential impacts on consumer groups with protected characteristics.

Potential impact

Specific areas of impact will depend on the agreed scope, but overall the working group would be to explore how consumer behaviours may be influenced by climate change, so that these effects can be understood and effectively responded to. The working group would feed into a [key FSA research priority: The future of food systems](#) by helping the FSA remain responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Discussion

The Committee is invited to discuss:

- whether the ACSS has the knowledge/skill base to fulfil the overall objective of the working group;
- whether an ACSS working group would be a good model to provide the advice required by the FSA;
- potential scope (are there any areas that members feel the ACSS could contribute the most?);
- useful first steps (potentially a literature review outlining the evidence since the last CCRA report in 2017).