

Paper 3.1

FSA Social Science Update (April 2019)

SUMMARY

This paper provides an update on recent and upcoming FSA social science research publications. Hyperlinks for published reports are provided in the footnotes. This paper is for information only.

PUBLISHED RESEARCH (JAN-MAR 2019)

January 2019

- **The future of food recalls¹** - In July 2018, the FSA and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) commissioned a study to understand the channels, content and style that most support effective consumer awareness of, attention to and (if desired or necessary) action around food recalls. Findings revealed that consumers have little awareness of food recalls/allergy alerts and expect information to be pushed to them, with very few proactively putting measures in place to be notified of recalls when they occur. A number of key content and design needs were identified that need to be met for consumers to engage with, understand and take action off the back of food recall notifications/allergy alerts.

February 2019

- **Biannual Public Attitudes Tracker (Wave 17)²** - The Public Attitudes Tracker is a biannual survey designed to monitor changes in consumer attitudes towards the FSA (awareness and trust), food-related concerns and the awareness of hygiene standards in eating establishments. Latest results found that 77% of respondents were aware of the FSA and 67% of those aware of the FSA trusted the FSA to do its job. The top food safety issue of concern was food hygiene when eating out. Wider food issues that caused highest concern were the amount of sugar in food and food waste.
- **EU Exit Tracker (Wave 8)³** - Since October 2016 the FSA has been monitoring consumers' views of EU exit and food. Data is collected biannually through online interviews with approximately 1,500 adults (over 16) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The latest wave was conducted in January 2019. Results revealed that the proportion of citizens believing that EU exit will have a positive impact on food in the next 2-3 year is now at its lowest since the tracking

¹ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/the-future-of-food-recalls>

² <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/biannual-public-attitudes-tracker>

³ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/consumers-views-on-eu-and-food>

began in 2016 (18%). However since January 2018 there has been an general decline in concern about food issues. The top areas of concern are ‘food from outside the EU being safe and hygienic’ and ‘affordability’; albeit the proportion of citizens who think that food will become more expensive as a result of EU exit has fallen from 65% (in January 2018) to 60%.

March 2019

- **Small and Micro FBO Tracker (Wave 1)**⁴ - In August 2018 the FSA commissioned a survey of food organisations with up to 49 employees across all their sites in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The survey was designed to inform insights on the UK’s EU exit and engagement with small and micro food businesses; understand attitudes towards regulation and awareness of the FSA’s ‘Regulating our Future’ priority; and measure trust in the FSA. In total, 530 interviews were conducted in September and October 2018.

Results revealed that the top concerns for businesses were taxation (61%), competition in the market (53%), and staff recruitment and skills (47%). EU exit was a concern for 38% of respondents. Respondents were more likely to anticipate a negative impact on their business after EU exit than a positive one, particularly wholesalers, importers and businesses in Northern Ireland. Key concerns were increasing costs and the exacerbation of skill shortages. Businesses most likely to anticipate a positive impact included manufacturers and exporters; they felt EU exit may push purchasing and spending back towards UK businesses and eventually reduce red tape. Just 8% of respondents reported that their business was doing something to prepare for EU exit; these businesses tended to be those currently trading with the EU.

Views towards regulation within the food industry were positive and respondents believed regulation is beneficial and necessary for consumer safety and standards. Nevertheless, respondents were less positive about the process and paperwork involved. Micro and small food businesses are heavily reliant on their local council/authority for information and support.

Few businesses reported having had contact with the FSA and the FSA scores were lower than those of the local council/authority with regard to trustworthiness, approachability and communications or dealings. Businesses that serve the public directly and who have been in contact with the FSA recently tended to hold more positive views of the FSA.

⁴ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/regulating-our-future/fsa-small-and-micro-fbo-tracking-survey>

UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS

April 2019

- Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) Tracker (Wave 7)⁵
- Food and You (Wave 5)⁶ combined report (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- Food and You (Wave 5) secondary analysis paper on trust

May 2019

- Food and You (Wave 5) country comparison report
- Food and You (Wave 5) secondary analysis paper on the wider food landscape
- Food and You (Wave 5) secondary analysis paper on allergies

June 2019

- Food and You (Wave 5) Northern Ireland report
- Food and You (Wave 5) Northern Ireland secondary analysis paper

July 2019

- Food and You (Wave 5) Wales report
- Food and You (Wave 5) Wales secondary analysis paper

⁵ The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) is a partnership scheme between local authorities and the FSA which aims to provide consumers with information on the hygiene standards of places they choose to eat out at or purchase food from. Since 2014, the FSA has used a bespoke tracker survey to monitor awareness, attitudes towards and use of the scheme.

⁶ Food and You is the FSA's flagship consumer survey, measuring self-reported behaviours, attitudes and knowledge relating to food safety and other food-related issues. The survey is conducted biennially with approximately 3,000 adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland taking part in each wave. More information can be found here: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you>