



FOOD
STANDARDS
AGENCY

Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards: Wave 8
Wales Summary Report

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CONSUMER ATTITUDES TO
FOOD STANDARDS
WAVE 8

Wales Summary Report

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and
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1 Executive summary

This summary report gives the key findings specific to Wales from the 2007 UK Consumer Attitudes Survey.

1.1 Research methodology

Eight waves of this study have been conducted on an annual basis from 2000 to 2007. Interviewing was conducted face to face with respondents using CAPI technology, with the interview length approximately 20 minutes. A representative sample of 503 adults in Wales was interviewed for the 2007 study between August and October that year.

More details of the research methodology of the study can be found in the UK report.

1.2 Key highlights in 2007

Little change in concern about food issues and safety – but with some exceptions

- 2007 has seen a slight increase in concern about food safety at the general level, with fewer people saying they were 'not at all concerned' about this issue (11% in 2006 compared to 5% in 2007).
- However, there were significant decreases in the number mentioning food poisoning (from 43% to 36%) and the amount of fat in food (from 44% to 34%) as a concern, together with further slight decreases in the number mentioning the amount of salt and sugar.
- This year saw a highly significant increase in concern about food hygiene in supermarkets (up to 16% from 9% in 2006), possibly as a result of media coverage of this issue.
- There was also an increase this year in the number expressing concerns about raw beef, raw lamb and meat in general.

Slight improvement around the 5 A DAY message

- On a positive note this year, there was a further slight increase in awareness of the ‘at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day’ message (up to 76% from 74% in 2006) and a slight increase in claimed consumption of 5 or more portions a day (up to 50% from 45% in 2006).

Nutritional information on labels remains key – but date information is not consistently understood

- Despite the highly significant decrease in concern about how much fat there is in food, information about nutrition is still the key type of information that consumers seek on labels.
- Confusion over the meaning of the ‘use by’ date increased in 2007, with significantly fewer Wales respondents correctly stating that it means a food will be safe to eat up to this date but should not be eaten past this date (54%, down from 60% in 2006) and more incorrectly stating that it means a food will be at its best quality before this date but is not necessarily unsafe (32%, up from 27% in 2006).

Awareness and perceptions of the FSA

- Awareness of the FSA stabilised in 2007 (84%). However, while in general respondents in Wales remained positive in their perceptions of the FSA, 2007 saw decreases on a number of measures (trust: 51% from 59%; putting consumers first: 44% from 53%; confidence: 57% from 65%) from the peaks achieved in 2006.
- In 2007 there was also a shift in the perceived role of the Agency and of whose views it reflects:
 - While the Agency’s main role continued to be perceived as monitoring/checking food standards and more people in Wales mentioned this aspect this year (up to 28% from 15% in 2006),

there were decreases this year in the number referring to providing information/advice about the health and safety of food, or to maintaining standards. However, the decrease in the proportion mentioning maintaining standards could in part be due to the increase in those referring to monitoring/checking food standards.

- Opinion remains divided over whether the FSA reflects the views of Government (31%), the views of the food industry (20%), consumers (14%), or provides unbiased information (31%). Fewer people in 2007, however, agreed that the Agency reflected the views of consumers or the food industry.
- The Agency is seen as a reliable source of information for both food safety and healthy eating by the vast majority of those who use it, though it is used more so for food safety than for healthy eating.

Demographic differences

Some demographic differences emerged across the various topics covered in this study, with those between men and women being most consistent.

Men, and to some extent those in the lower social grades and those in the youngest age group (16-25 years) were less oriented towards healthy eating. Thus, men and the 16-25 year-olds were less likely to agree that healthy eating was important to them and fewer men than women were trying to avoid fatty foods. Men and the lower social grades were also less likely to know that 'at least 5 portions a day' are recommended.

Men made less use of labelling information and expressed less concern about food safety, particular foods and food issues. The 16-25 year-olds also expressed less concern than some older counterparts about food safety and particular foods.

We should note, however, that in the area of food safety and hygiene, those aged 66+ were an exception to the rule, being less likely than all or most younger age groups to mention hygiene in food outlets or issues around specific foods as a concern. Those in social grade DE were also less likely to mention these issues than those in the higher social grades.

The 66+ age group was also less likely to be aware of the FSA or to be aware of its independent status compared to some younger age groups. Awareness of the FSA was highest among AB's and declined through social grades C1C2 and DE, while confidence in the Agency was also highest among AB's.

Country differences

No particularly distinctive pattern of behaviour or attitudes emerged for Wales relative to healthy eating or food safety. Rather, where differences between the countries did exist, Wales was broadly similar to Scotland and Northern Ireland on some measures and all these countries were somewhat different from England. For example, fewer people in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland had special dietary requirements compared to England, and fewer claimed to eat more than 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day, compared to England.

Those in Wales were the most likely to be concerned about antibiotics in meat (31% vs. a maximum of 23% in all other areas) and the nutritional content of school meals (19% vs. a maximum of 14%)

Only in the areas of labelling and the sources of information respondents used did Wales emerge as somewhat different. Around labelling, Wales respondents possibly experienced more difficulty – compared to the other countries fewer of them said labels contained the right amount of information; more found the print size hard to read and fewer found labels easy to understand. Those in Wales were also amongst those most likely

to state the incorrect meaning of “use-by” dates.

Looking at the sources of information they used for both food safety and healthy eating, fewer respondents in Wales mentioned television or newspapers.

In addition, together with those in England, they had a less positive view of the FSA, rating it less highly than those in Scotland or Northern Ireland on a number of key measures such as trust, confidence, putting the consumer first and being independent/unbiased. This was not true in 2006 when only ratings on the confidence measure were lower than the other countries; this change is a result of the decline on these measures in Wales.

2 Further Findings

2.1 Eating Habits

- In 2007, foods containing fat and sugar continued to be the types of food that most people said they were trying to reduce or avoid consumption of (30% and 19% respectively). Salt was also mentioned (14%). This year there was a *significant increase in the number avoiding fat* (up from 22% in 2006) and salt (up from 9% in 2006).
- For parents, the key issue was sugary foods and drinks. Around a third (35% for sugary foods and 30% for sugary drinks) claimed they were making an effort to reduce their children's consumption in this area, compared to 19% mentioning fatty foods.
- Compared with 2006, there was an increase in the proportion of people trying to include more fresh fruit and vegetables in their diet (fruit increased for adults from 32% in 2006 to 45% and vegetables from 29% in 2006 to 40%). There were also increases in the number of adults mentioning white and oily fish, wholemeal bread and yogurts. Fruit and vegetables were the foods people were most likely to say they were trying to increase their own and their children's consumption of. These increases have meant that the figures for Wales are now much more in line with the UK as a whole.
- As in 2006, the vast majority (87%) claim that healthy eating is important to them, with a strong feeling that budget is not a barrier and that parents should be strict with their children and make them eat healthily.

2.2 Food Labelling

- Just over half of Wales respondents (52%) claimed ‘always’ or ‘usually’ to look at the labels on products they bought for the first time. This was also the case in 2006.
- The amounts of fat and salt, and to a lesser extent sugar, were the key information looked for on labels, which is consistent with 2006. Although still at relatively low levels, there were also significant increases on a number of labelling details related to environmental issues namely country of origin (from 4% to 7%), animal welfare (from 1% to 5%) and fair trade (from 1% to 3%).
- There was no significant change this year in the number who said they found food labels easy to understand (63% in 2006; 58% in 2007). However, there was a significant decrease in the proportion which felt that the print size on labels was very or quite easy to read (52% in 2006; 46% in 2007).
- The majority of consumers claim that food labels are important in their decision of what food to buy, with half of Wales respondents (49%) saying labels are very or quite important and a further fifth (21%) saying it depends on the type of food. Thus only just over a quarter stated labels were not very or not at all important.
- Compared to 2006 there was a similar level of confusion around the ‘best before’ date, with almost half the Wales sample (48%) giving the correct interpretation, but with 36% saying that ‘it should not be eaten past this date’.

2.3 Concerns around food, food safety and hygiene

- Healthy eating came sixth in the ranking in terms of how many people mentioned it as a concern in the context of wider issues (such as crime and the environment). It was mentioned by 17% of Wales respondents, a very similar proportion to 2006 (16%). Food safety was viewed as relatively less of an issue, with one in ten (10%) citing it as a major concern.
- As in all previous years, very few concerns (only 3% this year) were reported to any external body.

2.4 Sources of information on food safety and healthy eating

- TV news (27%) and newspapers (23%), together with TV programmes (23%) were the primary sources of information on food safety, whereas TV programming (26%) was the main source of information on healthy eating.
- Government (34%), the FSA (16%) and food manufacturers (14%) were most often spontaneously mentioned as providers of information on food safety. When a list of providers was shown Government achieved the most mentions (42% in total), followed by the Food Standards Agency (29%).
- Looking at the reliability of these sources of information for food safety the Food Standards Agency was highly rated. No fewer than 78% of those who claimed to have used the FSA described it as 'reliable'. Only the Department of Health was given a higher rating for reliability, but in contrast to the Agency, this source was used by somewhat fewer consumers (only 14%).
- The government (39%) was viewed as the main provider of information on healthy eating in terms of spontaneous mentions, followed by the FSA (13%) and food manufacturers (12%). When a

list of providers was shown the Government was still the main source (41%), but mentions of supermarkets increased (23%).

- Fewer people (23%) saw the Agency as a source of information on healthy eating compared to food safety (29%).
- In this context, the Agency was again highly rated, with all of the 29 respondents who had used it considering it reliable.

2.5 Perceptions of the Food Standards Agency

- Confidence in the current measures taken by all organisations to protect health with regard to food safety declined this year. Although over half of Wales respondents (54%) remained very or fairly confident, this represented a significant decrease compared to 2006, when 62% had expressed confidence in all organisations. Confidence in all organisations was lower in Wales than in all other countries (24% not confident in comparison to a maximum of 18% in all other areas).
- Almost two-thirds of Wales respondents (57%) expressed confidence in the FSA to protect health with regard to food safety, although this too represented a decrease from a peak of 65% in 2006. Among those who lacked confidence, the main reasons were a perception that the Agency 'does not tell the truth' or gives conflicting information, and general distrust of Government.
- As in 2006 there were spontaneous requests from consumers for the FSA to 'put across its message more strongly' and to enable better and clearer food labelling.

Further details of the 2007 Consumer Attitudes Survey can be found at:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/surveys/foodsafety-nutrition-diet/>

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