

Consumer Insights Tracker: Chapter 7

Consumer concerns about the food industry

Concerns about food quality

Participants were asked if they were concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK and of food imported from outside the UK (Figure 28). Since tracking began, the proportion of participants concerned about the quality of food imported from outside the UK has been significantly higher than the proportion of participants concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK. In March 2023, over half of participants (52%) reported feeling concerned about the quality of food imported from outside the UK, which is significantly higher than concern about the quality of food produced in the UK (42%). This trend is broadly stable across all waves for both measures. However, concern about quality of food produced in the UK steadily increased from 36% in March 2022 to 46% in October 2022, although since then the figure has remained broadly stable.

Figure 28: Participants who reported being ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat’ concerned about the quality of food produced inside the UK or food imported from outside the UK (March 2022 – March 2023)

Data source: Consumer Insights Tracker March 2022 – March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2, 3.

Concerns about food safety

Participants were asked if they were concerned about the safety of food produced in the UK and of food imported from outside the UK (Figure 29). The findings are very similar to the level of concern about food quality (Figure 28) with higher levels of concern in relation to imported food. In March 2023, over half of participants (53%) reported feeling concerned about the safety of food imported from outside the UK, compared to 38% who say they are concerned about the safety of food produced in the UK. This trend is broadly stable across all waves for both measures, although concerns about the safety of imported food displayed greater variations over time (still sitting within a range of 7 percentage points from 49% to 56%) (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Participants who reported feeling ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat’ concerned about the safety of food (March 2022 - March 2023)

Data source: Consumer Insights Tracker March 2022- March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2.

Concerns about food prices and food affordability

Figures for the last 12 months show that the highest levels of concern (based on questions asked) were reported for ‘food prices’. In March 2022, eight in ten (81%) participants reported that they were ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat’ concerned about food prices. This proportion rose to a peak of 87% in June 2022. While this significantly decreased the following month (80% in July 2022), it rose again in August 2022 (85%) and has remained high but stable since. The proportion of participants reporting concern about food prices in March 2023 was 86% (Figure 30).

In comparison to the issue of food prices, fewer participants reported concern about ‘food shortages’ or ‘food availability’. However, levels of concern rose steadily between March 2022 (55%) and June 2022 (63%) and have varied more in recent months (Figure 30). Furthermore, the figure for March 2023 is significantly higher than the 12-month average (59%).

Figure 30: Participants who reported feeling ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat’ concerned about the food prices and food availability (March 2022 - March 2023)

Data source: Consumer Insights Tracker March 2022- March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2.

Other concerns about the food industry

Figure 31 shows the proportion of participants reporting other concerns about the food industry. In March 2023, three in five participants (60%) report feeling concerned about animal welfare in the food industry (in line with the 12-month average – 60%). Between March 2022 and October 2022 there was a steady increase in the proportion of participants reporting concern about animal welfare. This figure was lower over the following three months (November 2022 to January 2023).

The proportion of participants who reported feeling concerned about sustainability followed a similar trend to concerns related to animal welfare and increased steadily from March 2022 (56%) to a peak of 64% in October 2022. The level of concern significantly decreased in November 2022, but has continued to rise steadily to (60%) in March 2023. The proportion reporting this concern in March 2023 (60%) is in line with the 12-month average (59%) (Figure 31).

Participants' concern about the 'healthiness' of food in their diets has fluctuated. In March 2023, 57% of participants were concerned about this issue, significantly higher than in March 2022 (52%) but in line with the 12-month average (56%) (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Participants who reported feeling 'highly' or 'somewhat' concerned about issues related to the food industry (March 2022 – March 2023)

Data source: Consumer Insights Tracker March 2022 – March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2.