

FY2 Wave 3-4 NI: Chapter 7 Food shopping and labelling

In March 2022, the FSA launched a new [5-year strategy](#) (2022-2027). Building on the previous strategy, the FSA's vision has evolved to include 'food is healthier and more sustainable', to account for the growing priorities of dietary health and sustainability for the Northern Ireland Executive, UK Government, Welsh Government, and for consumers.

Regulation of food labelling is complex, and the remit of food labelling is held by multiple bodies, that differ between [Northern Ireland, England and Wales](#).

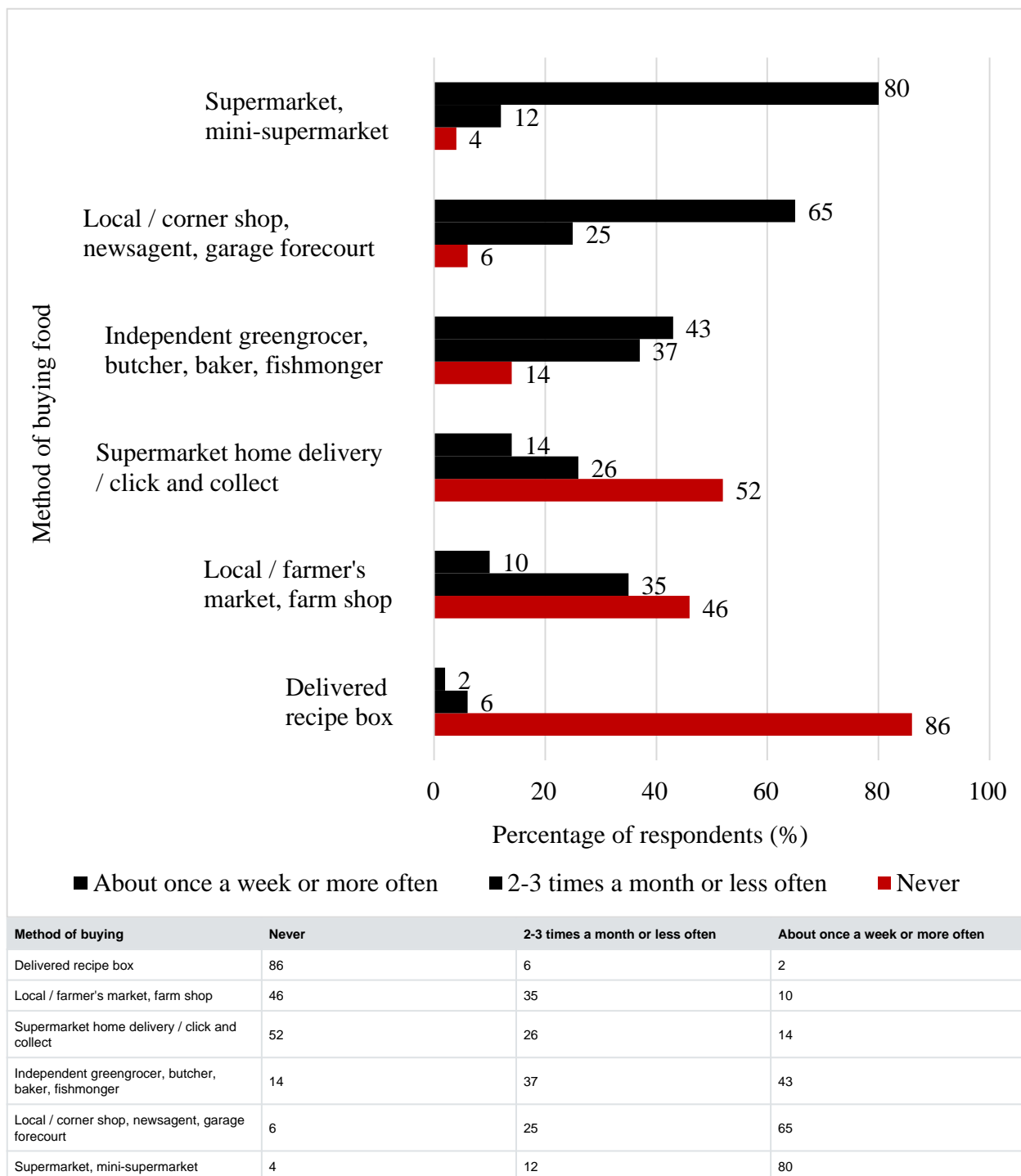
The [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#) plays a major role in food production and is responsible for aspects of food labelling such as composition and provenance. Defra only works directly in England but works closely with the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Where do respondents buy food?

Figure 17 Where respondents buy food from

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 3

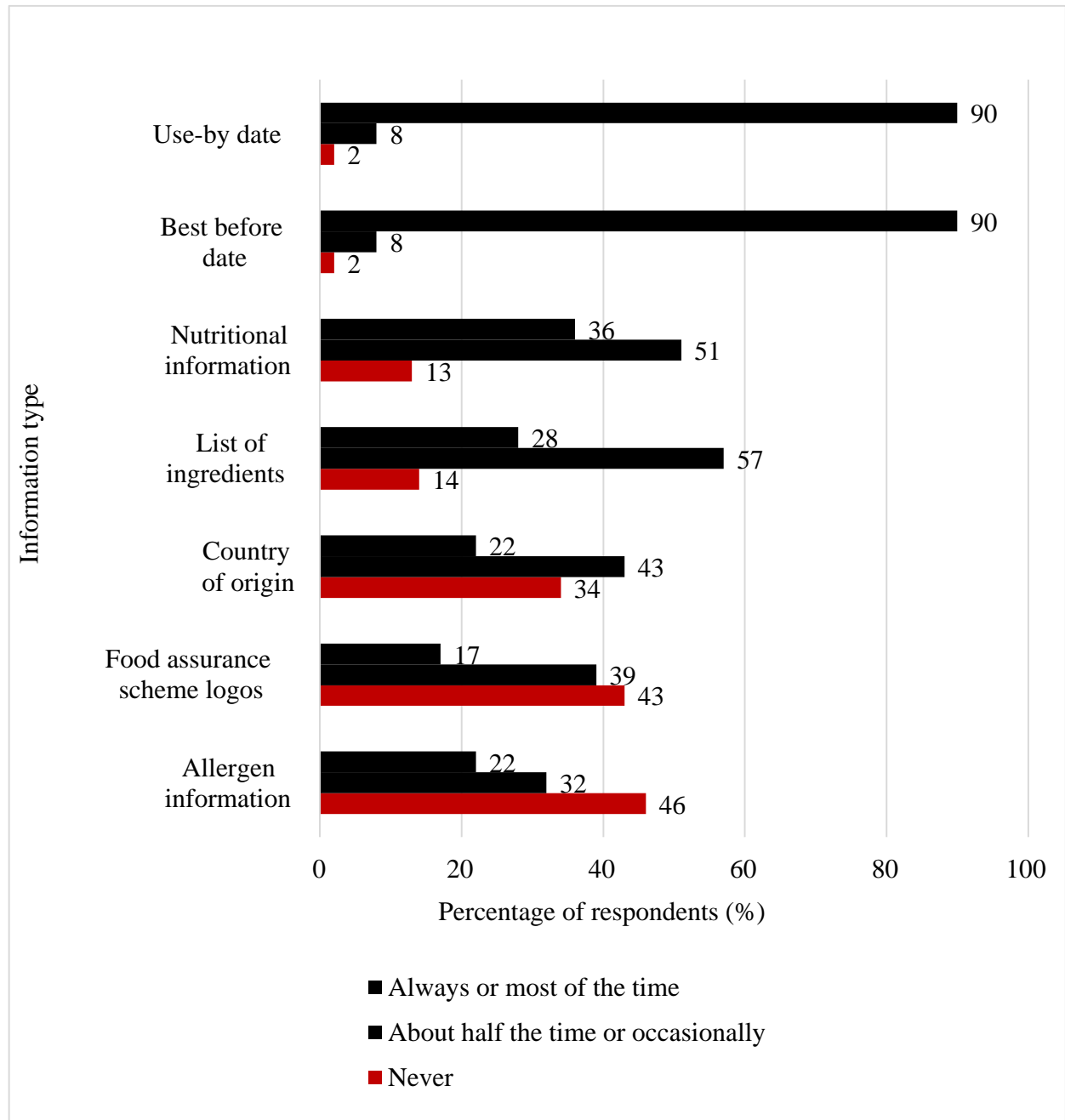
Respondents were asked to indicate where and how frequently they buy food. Most respondents reported that they bought food from a supermarket or mini supermarket (80%), or local or corner shops, newsagents or garage forecourts (65%) about once a week or more often (Figure 17) ([footnote 1](#)).

What do respondents look for when buying food

Figure 18 Type of information respondents check while shopping

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Information type	Always or most of the time	About half the time or occasionally	Never
Allergen information	22	32	46
Food assurance scheme logos	17	39	43
Country of origin	22	43	34
List of ingredients	28	57	14

Information type	Always or most of the time	About half the time or occasionally	Never
Nutritional information	36	51	13
Best before date	90	8	2
Use-by date	90	8	2

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 3

Respondents were asked to indicate what information they check when buying food. Most respondents reported that they often (i.e. always or most of the time) check the use-by (90%) or best before (90%) date when they bought food. Respondents reported that they check the list of ingredients (57%), nutritional information (51%), and country of origin (43%) about half the time or occasionally (Figure 18) [\(footnote 2\)](#).

When asked what information is used to judge the quality of food from a list of options, respondents reported that they most often used freshness (57%), taste (40%), and appearance (39%) to judge food quality. Fewer respondents reported that they used the price (27%), ingredients (26%), brand (25%), and country of origin (17%) to judge food quality. Assurance schemes (13%), animal welfare (13%) environmental impact (7%) and convenience (1%) were reported to be least used by respondents when judging food quality [\(footnote 3\)](#).

Around a third (31%) of respondents thought that meat, eggs, and dairy products show enough information about animal welfare, and 21% thought that food products show enough information about their environmental impact [\(footnote 4\)](#).

Confidence in allergen labelling

Respondents who go food shopping and take into consideration a person who has a food allergy or intolerance were asked how confident they were that the information provided on food labelling allows them to identify foods that will cause a bad or unpleasant physical reaction. Overall, 84% of respondents stated that they were confident in the information provided on food labels [\(footnote 5\)](#).

Respondents were asked how confident they were in identifying foods that will cause a bad or unpleasant physical reaction when buying foods which are sold loose, such as at a bakery or deli-counter. Respondents were more confident in identifying these foods at independent food shops (68%), in-store at a supermarket (67%), when buying food from a supermarket online (64%). However, respondents were less confident when buying food from food markets or stalls (51%) [\(footnote 6\)](#).

The importance of buying foods with a low environmental impact

Respondents were asked how important it was to buy food which has a low environmental impact. Around three-quarters (73%) of respondents reported that it was important (i.e. very important or somewhat important) to them to buy food which has a low environmental impact. Around 2 in 10 (22%) respondents did not consider it important (i.e. not very important or not at all important) to buy food which has a low environmental impact ([footnote 7](#)).

How often respondents check for information about the environmental impact of food

Respondents were asked how frequently they check for information about the environmental impact of food when purchasing food. A fifth (20%) of respondents reported that they often checked (i.e. always or most of the time) for information about the environmental impact when purchasing food, 41% did this less often (i.e. about half of the time, or occasionally) and 33% of respondents reported that they never checked for information about the environmental impact when purchasing food ([footnote 8](#)).

How often respondents buy foods with a low environmental impact

Respondents were asked to indicate how often, where possible, they buy food which has a low environmental impact. Almost a third (28%) of respondents often (i.e. always or most of the time) buy food which has a low environmental impact, 42% do this less often (i.e., about half of the time, or occasionally) and 8% of respondents reported that they never buy food which has a low environmental impact. However around 2 in 10 (22%) respondents do not know how often they buy food which has a low environmental impact ([footnote 9](#)).

Attitudes toward information about a products environmental impact

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree that food products show enough information about their environmental impact. Over a quarter (28%) of respondents agreed (i.e. strongly agree or agree) that products show enough information about their environmental impact, however around a quarter (24%) of respondents disagreed (i.e. strongly disagree or disagree). Around 1 in 10 (12%) respondents reported that they do not know whether products show enough information about their environmental impact ([footnote 10](#)).

Perceptions of factors which contribute to sustainable diets and shopping choices

Perceptions of what contributes to a sustainable diet

Figure 19 Factors which respondents thought contribute most to a sustainable diet.

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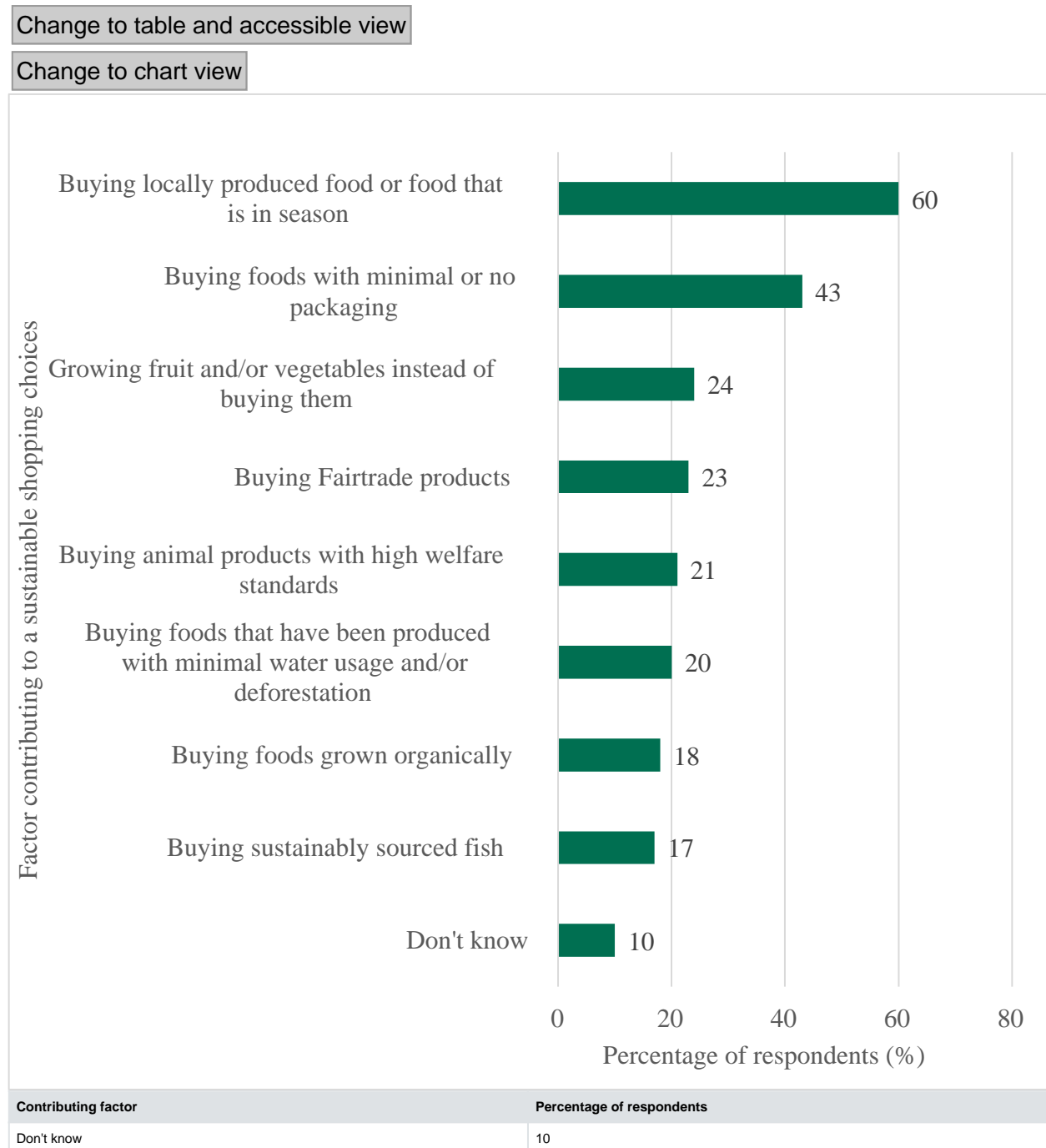
Source: Food and You 2: Wave 4

Respondents were asked, from a list of options, what they thought contributes most to someone having a sustainable diet. Over half of respondents thought that eating less processed food (55%) contributed most to a sustainable diet. Around 4 in 10 respondents thought that minimising food waste (44%) and eating more fruit and/or vegetables (44%) contributed most to a sustainable

diet. A quarter (25%) of respondents thought that eating less meat, poultry, or fish (25%) contributed most to a sustainable diet. Fewer respondents thought that consuming less dairy (10%), eating a vegetarian (9%) or vegan (8%) diet or contributed most to a sustainable diet. Almost 1 in 10 (9%) respondents reported that they did not know what contributed most to someone having a sustainable diet (Figure 19) [\(footnote 11\)](#).

Perceptions of what contributes to sustainable shopping choices

Figure 20 What respondents think contributes most to sustainable shopping choices



Contributing factor	Percentage of respondents
Buying sustainably sourced fish	17
Buying foods grown organically	18
Buying foods that have been produced with minimal water usage and/or deforestation	20
Buying animal products with high welfare standards	21
Buying Fairtrade products	23
Growing fruit and/or vegetables instead of buying them	24
Buying foods with minimal or no packaging	43
Buying locally produced food or food that is in season	60

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 4

Respondents were asked, from a list of options, what they thought contributed most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices. Most (60%) respondents thought that buying locally produced food or food that is in season or buying foods with minimal or no packaging (43%) contributed most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices. However, 10% of respondents reported that they did not know what contributed most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices (Figure 20) [\(footnote 12\)](#).

1. Question: How often, if at all, do you...A) Shop for food in store at a supermarket (including mini supermarkets like Metro/ Local). B) Shop for food at independent greengrocers', butchers', bakers' or fishmongers'. C) Shop for food at local/corner shops, newsagents' or garage forecourts. D) Get a home delivery from a supermarket. E) Shop for food at a local market, farmer's market or farm shop. F) Get a recipe box delivered (e.g. Hello Fresh, Gousto). Responses: Every day, Most days, 2 or 3 times a week, About once a week, 2 or 3 times a month, About once a month, Less than once a month, Never, Can't remember. Base is 1626, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
2. Question: When shopping for food, how often, if at all, do you check A Use-by dates. B Best before dates. C List of ingredients. D Allergen information. E Nutritional information. F Country of origin. G Food assurance scheme logos. Responses: Always, Most of the time, About half the time, Occasionally, Never, Don't know. Base is 976, all online respondents who have at least some responsibility for food shopping for their household, in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
3. Question: What do you use to judge the quality of food? Responses: Taste, Appearance, Country of origin, Convenience, Ingredients, Animal welfare, Freshness, Assurance schemes, Brand, Price, Environmental impact, Other. Base is 1079, all online respondents, in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.

4. Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? A Meat, eggs and dairy products show enough information about animal welfare. B Food products show enough information about their environmental impact. Responses: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents, in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
5. Question: How confident are you that the information provided on food labels allows you to identify foods that will cause you, or another member of your household, a bad or unpleasant physical reaction? Responses: Very confident, Fairly confident, Not very confident, Not at all confident, It varies from place to place, Don't know. Base is 655, all respondents who consider the dietary requirements of themselves/someone else in the household when shopping in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
6. Question: When buying food that is sold loose (e.g. at a bakery or deli counter), how confident are you that you can identify foods that will cause you or another member of your household a bad or unpleasant physical reaction? Consider food sold loose from the following sources A Supermarkets in store. B Supermarkets online. C Independent food shops. D Food markets/stalls. Responses: Very confident, Fairly confident, Not very confident, Not at all confident, It varies from place to place, Don't know. Base A is 632, B is 518, C is 608, D is 556, all respondents who consider the dietary requirements of themselves/someone else in the household when shopping excluding 'I don't buy food from here' and 'I don't buy food sold loose' in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
7. Question: How important is it to you to buy food which has a low environmental impact? Responses: Very important, Somewhat important, Not very important, Not at all important, Don't know. Base is 1263, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire. Wave 4.
8. Question: When purchasing food, how often do you check for information on environmental impact? Responses: Always, Most of the time, About half the time, Occasionally, Never, Don't know. Base is 1263, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire in Northern Ireland. Wave 4.
9. Question: How often do you buy food which has a low environmental impact, where possible? Responses: Always, Most of the time, About half the time, Occasionally, Never, Don't know. Base is 1263, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire, in Northern Ireland. Wave 4.
10. Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that food products show enough information about their environmental impact? Responses: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't know. Base is 1263, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire, in Northern Ireland. Wave 4.
11. Question: Which of the following do you think contributes most to someone having a sustainable diet? Responses: Eating a vegetarian diet, Eating a pescatarian diet, Eating a vegan diet, Eating less meat or poultry or fish, Eating/drinking less dairy, Eating less processed food, Eating more fruit and/or vegetables, Minimising food waste, None of these, Don't know. Base is 1263, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at

Home' postal questionnaire, in Northern Ireland. Wave 4.

12. Question: Which of the following do you think contributes most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices? Responses: Buying animal products with high welfare standards, Buying fair trade products, Buying locally produced food or food that is in season, Buying foods with minimal or no packaging, Buying foods that have been produced with minimal water usage and/or minimal deforestation, Buying foods grown organically, Buying sustainably sourced fish, Growing fruit and/or vegetables instead of buying them, None of these, Don't know. Base is 1263, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire, in Northern Ireland. Wave 4.