Consumer Insights Tracker – Monthly Bulletin (December 2022)

Background

The Consumer Insights tracker provides up-to-date findings each month on consumer behaviour and attitudes in relation to the following topics:

- Food insecurity (including food affordability)
- Food availability
- Consumer concerns in relation to food
- Confidence in the food supply chain and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) as a regulator

This monthly bulletin summaries the key findings for each of these topics from wave 17 of the survey (conducted 16-19 December 2022).

Monthly data tables are available to download via the FSA's data catalogue. Tracker bulletins dating back to April 2022 are available to view via the Consumer insights tracker webpage. More detailed commentary, and timeseries analysis is published periodically on the Consumer Insights tracker webpage.

Methodology

The Consumer Insights tracker survey is conducted online via i:Omnibus (provided by Ipsos UK) with a representative sample of approximately 2,000 adults, aged 16-75, living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The data is weighted to represent this population on the key demographics of age, gender, working status and social grade. Further details on the survey methodology can be found in the full publication reports.

Throughout this bulletin, where 'significantly' is used to describe a change over time, it refers to a statistically significant increase or decrease (at the 95% confidence level).

In November 2022, the FSA added some additional survey questions to understand consumer concerns in relation to food and changes to purchasing habits for the upcoming Christmas and New Year. The findings for these new questions are included in this monthly bulletin under the section 'Christmas and New Year'. Some of these questions were also asked in November and December 2021, which makes it possible to compare to last year. In this bulletin where possible, December 2022 data is compared with December 2021.

Key Findings

Food Affordability and Food Insecurity

In December 2022:

- 15% of participants reported that they had used a food bank or food charity at least once in the last month. This is significantly higher than the previous month (11%, November 2022),

but in line with the year prior (14%, December 2021). The latest figure (15%, December 2022) is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (8%).
- 26% of participants reported that they had skipped a meal or cut down the size of their meals because they did not have enough money to buy food in the last month. This is significantly higher than the previous month (23%, November 2022) and the year prior (22%, December 2021). The latest figure (26%, December 2022) is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (18%).
- 34% of participants reported feeling worried about being able to afford food in the next month. This is not significantly different to the previous month (32%, November 2022). The latest figure (34%, December 2022) is significantly higher than the year prior (24%, December 2021), and is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (28%).
- 84% of participants reported feeling concerned about food prices. This is not significantly different to the previous month (83%, November 2022). The latest figure (84%, December 2022) is significantly higher than in the year prior (71%, December 2021) and is significantly higher than when tracking for this question began in November 2021 (71%).
- 75% of participants reported that their shopping had 'got more expensive' in the past week. This is not significantly different to the previous month (76%, November 2022) but is significantly higher than the year prior (59%, December 2021).

From September 2022, participants were asked if any of the following applied to them, at least once, in the last month:

- 22% of participants reported that they had eaten cold food as they could not afford to cook hot food (significantly higher than the previous month; 18%, November 2022).
- 27% of participants reported that they could not afford their essential food shopping (significantly higher than the previous month; 22%, November 2022).
- 29% of participants reported that they had eaten food past its use-by date because they couldn't afford to buy more food (significantly higher than the previous month; 26%, November 2022).
- 31% of participants reported that they could not afford to eat a healthy balanced diet (not significantly different to the previous month; 29%, November 2022).

Food Availability

- In December 2022, 35% of participants reported feeling worried about there not being enough food available for them/their household to buy in the next month. This is not significantly different to the previous month (33%, November 2022), but is significantly higher than the same month last year (28%, December 2021). This is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (31%).

Food Safety Behaviours to reduce energy bills

From September 2022, participants were asked about a range of food safety related behaviours they carried out (at least once) in the last month to reduce energy bills and save money. To reduce energy bills and save money in December 2022:

- 15% of participants turned off a fridge and/or freezer containing food (not significantly different to the previous month; 13%, November 2022).
- 23% of participants changed the settings on their fridge and/or freezer so that food is kept at a warmer temperature (not significantly different to the previous month; 21%, November 2022).
- 24% of participants lowered the cooking temperature for food (not significantly different to the previous month; 23%, November 2022).
- 25% of participants reduced the length of time that food is cooked for (not significantly different to the previous month; 23%, November 2022).

- 61% of participants used cheaper cooking methods (e.g., using a microwave, air fryer or slow cooker) instead of an oven to heat or cook food (not significantly different to the previous month; 58%, November 2022).

Christmas and New Year

- In December 2022, 41% of participants reported that they, or someone in their household, had purchased additional food in preparation for Christmas within the past week. This is significantly higher than the figure reported in December 2021 (37%).

In December 2022, participants were asked about their level of personal concern when doing their food shopping, specifically in relation to Christmas (2022) and New Year (2023). In December 2022:

- 82% of participants felt concerned about the price of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (63%, December 2021).
- 56% of participants felt concerned about the availability of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (44%, December 2021).
- 50% of participants felt concerned about the quality of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (35%, December 2021).
- 50% of participants felt concerned about the sustainability of food/ the environmental impact of food (this question was not asked in 2021)
- 51% of participants felt concerned about the healthiness of food (this question was not asked in 2021)
- 43% of participants felt concerned about the safety of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (32%, December 2021).

In December 2022, participants were asked what actions (if any) they had taken this year, in comparison to last year, to save money in relation to food for Christmas and New Year. This was a new question for November 2022, so comparisons are not available against 2021.

Across the whole survey sample, 77% of participants reported taking at least one action (from the list provided) to save money for Christmas and New Year.

- 36% changed to cheaper brands
- 36% shopped in multiple supermarkets/shops to get a better deal
- 29% bought 'yellow sticker' reduced food items that are close to their use-by date
- 35% bought less food than they usually would for Christmas
- 24% waited to buy food items until they were discounted or on offer
- 28% switched to a cheaper supermarket
- 20% bought less fresh food (e.g., fruit, vegetables, meat) and more long-life products instead (e.g., tinned or frozen products)

Concerns about the Food Industry

In December 2022:

- 55% of participants reported feeling concerned about the healthiness of the food in their personal diet. This is not significantly different to the previous month (53%, November 2022) or to the same month last year (52%, December 2021).
- 59% of participants reported feeling concerned about animal welfare in the food industry. This is not significantly different to the previous month (58%, November 2022) or to the same month last year (57%, December 2021).
- 56% of participants reported feeling concerned about sustainability/the impact of food production on the environment. This is not significantly different to the previous month

(54%, November 2022) or to the same month last year (54%, December 2021).

In December 2022:

- 38% of participants felt concerned about the safety of food produced in the UK, compared to 52% who felt concerned about the safety of food imported from outside the UK
- 42% of participants felt concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK, compared to 52% who felt concerned about the quality of food imported from outside the UK.

Confidence in the Food Supply Chain

- The proportion of participants who reported that they were ‘confident’ in the food supply chain was 65% in December 2022. This is significantly lower than the year prior (71%, December 2021), but not significantly different to the previous month; 64% (November 2022).

In December 2022:

- 76% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure that food is safe to eat. This proportion is significantly lower than the year prior (December 2021, 81%), although the overall trend remains broadly stable.
- 69% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure food is of a high quality. This proportion is significantly lower than the year prior (December 2021, 75%), although the overall trend remains broadly stable.
- 49% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure that there are affordable food options for everyone. This proportion is significantly lower than a year prior (December 2021, 64%)
- 67% felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure there is enough food available for people to eat. This proportion is significantly lower than a year prior (December 2021, 74%)

Confidence and Trust in the FSA

- 59% of participants reported that they trust the FSA to do its job in December 2022. This figure has remained broadly stable over the past year (December 2021, 60%).

In December 2022, most participants felt confident that the FSA:

- Can be relied upon to protect the public from food-related risks (71%)
- Is committed to communicating openly with the public about food-related risks (67%)
- Takes appropriate action if a food-related risk is identified (75%)

Each of these measures has remained broadly stable since tracking began in November 2021.

If you’d like further information on the data provided in this bulletin, please contact the FSA’s Social Science Team at socialscience@food.gov.uk.