

Objectives and Methods - SME allergen provision in the non-prepacked sector

Objectives

The study had four objectives. To understand:

1. How SMEs currently provide allergen information to consumers (including any written or digital materials) and the reasons for this approach.
2. The challenges SMEs face in managing allergen cross-contact.
3. The challenges SMEs face in providing accurate allergen information to consumers. T
4. The challenges and benefits for SMEs of a range of different options for providing allergen information to consumers.

Methods

This research consisted of three methods, which were implemented simultaneously between January and February 2023.

1. Online interviews with SME FBOs (x30)

Online interviews with SME FBOs were undertaken to understand whether and how allergen information is provided to customers across a range of different service models. The interviews also explored how cross-contact was managed in the kitchen and the views of businesses on different options for providing allergen information. Online interviews were conducted via Zoom using a semi-structured topic guide (see Appendix A: FBO Online Interview Topic Guide). Each interview lasted one hour and was recorded with the interviewee's consent. Recordings were uploaded to an online qualitative data analysis platform, which was used to manage, organise and interpret the data collected. As part of this process, a codeframe was developed to serve as the basis for coding and analysing the raw data (see Appendix B: Online Interview Analysis Codeframe. If you would like to see this appendix, please email fsa.communications@food.gov.uk).

In advance of the online interview, FBOs were requested to complete a short pre-task requiring them to send in photos of different parts of their business, such as the kitchen and service area (see Appendix C: FBO Online Interview Pre-task, for more details. If you would like to see this appendix, please email fsa.communications@food.gov.uk). These photos were used as stimulus during the interview, to allow both the interviewer and interviewee to refer to ways in which the physical layout of the business influences behaviour.

Recruitment for online interviews was conducted via Acumen using free-find methods. An incentive of £100 was paid to FBOs who participated in an online interview.

2. Face-to-face ethnographic deep dives (x10)

Face-to-face ethnographic deep dives were conducted with an additional 10 FBOs. The purpose of the ethnography was to observe how physical and environmental factors influenced allergen information provision. It also enabled the research team to see first-hand how customers are served. For each deep dive, a researcher spent between 2-3 hours at a food business. During this period, the researcher:

- interviewed the owner or manager of the business, using the same topic guide as used for the online interviews. Most of these interviews were not recorded due to background noise and to ensure that the interviewee could attend to the day-to-day management of the business if required during the interview. However, where the environment allowed and the participant gave permission, interviews were recorded to give a record of the discussion for analysis.
- observed the business in action, using a Fieldwork Notes Template (see Appendix D. If you would like to see this appendix, please email fsa.communications@food.gov.uk). This template included sections for the researcher to capture observations of the physical layout of the business, the culture and ambience of the business, and whether and how allergen information is provided to customers when they are served. With the business owner or manager's permissions, the researcher also included photographs as part of these observations.

Recruitment for ethnographic deep dives was conducted via Acumen using free-find methods. An incentive of £120 was paid to FBOs who participated in the ethnographic deep dives.

3. Online interviews with trade body representatives (x6)

Interviews with trade bodies were undertaken to explore issues regarding allergen information provision in SME FBOs at a strategic and sector wide level. One-hour online interviews were conducted via Zoom using a semi-structured topic guide (see Appendix E: Online Interview Topic Guide).

Each interview was recorded with the interviewee's consent. Recordings were uploaded to the same online qualitative data analysis platform as the FBO interviews and were analysed using the same codeframe (see Appendix B: Online Interview Analysis Codeframe. If you would like to see this appendix, please email fsa.communications@food.gov.uk).

Recruitment for online interviews was conducted via Acumen using free-find methods, however, trade body representatives were not paid for their time.

Achieved sample

This section provides an overview of the businesses and trade bodies that participated in this research.

Table 1 provides an overview of the sampling characteristics of all 40 FBOs who participated in both the online interviews and ethnographic deep dives, as well as the characteristics of those who took part in ethnographic observations, specifically. Table 2 presents the names of trade body organisations that took part in the research.

Table 1: FBO Sample

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Total	40

Size of business

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Micro business (less than 20)	23
Small (less than 49)	17

Sector

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Catering	25
Restaurants	6
B&Bs	1
Pubs and bars	2
Cafes	6
Leisure and entertainment venues	3
Mobile catering	7
Retail	10
Delicatessens	3
Bakers	4
Fishmongers	1
Butchers	2
Institutions	5
Care homes and hospitals	1
Nurseries and schools	4

Service delivery model

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Takeaways	10
Counter services	12
Table service	8
Market stalls	3
Mobile food vans	7
Food for online delivery	12

How allergen information communicated

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Menu	14
Online menus only	6
Display boards	10
Other notices	5
Predominantly verbal	5

Food packaging

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Non-prepacked only	23
PPDS, distance selling & non-prepacked	17

Region

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Wales	10
NI	9
NW England	8
NE England	4
Midlands	4
London and SE	5
SW England	3

Allergen policy

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
No allergen policy in place	9

Food hygiene

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Rating 1-3	10
Rating 4-5	30

Ethnographic sub sample

Sampling characteristic	Achieved quota
Takeaways	2
Counter service	2
Table service	2
Market stalls	2
Business selling via mobile food vans	2
London	2
England	4
Wales	2
NI	2

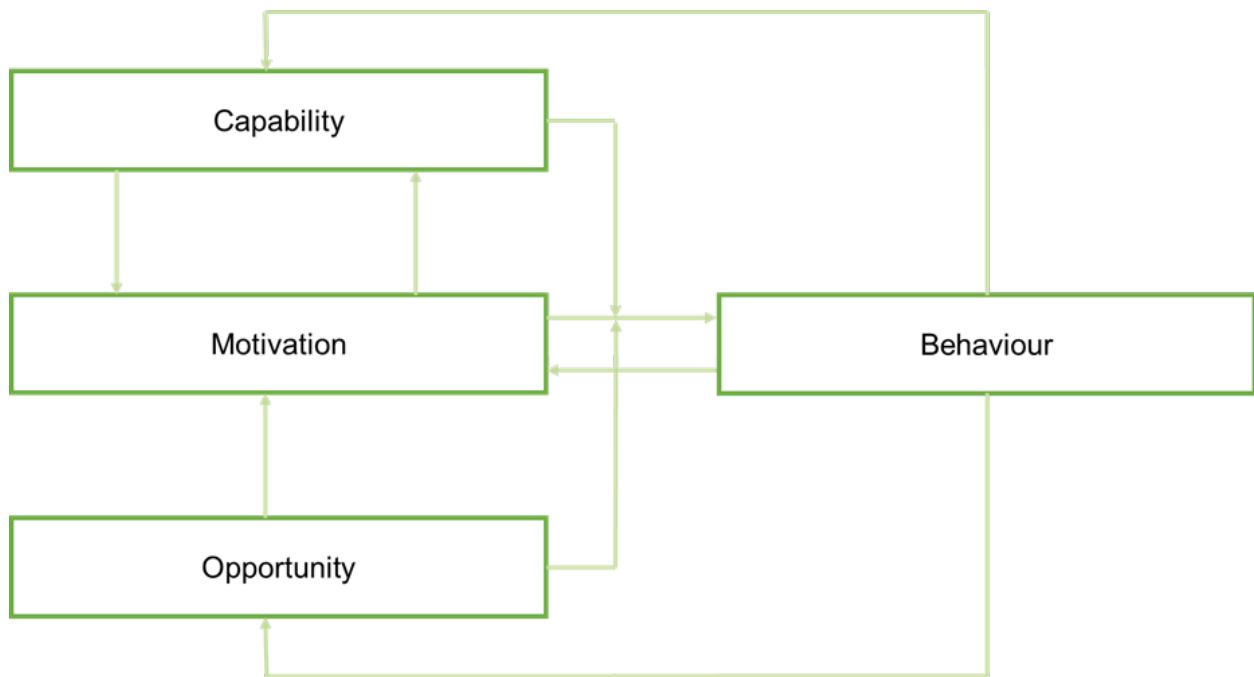
Table 2: Trade Body Sample

No.	Trade body organisation
1	British Sandwich Association
2	UK Hospitality
3	Welsh – School Caterers Association
4	Nationwide Caterers Association
5	Institute of Hospitality
6	Safer Food Scores (via Craft Bakers Association)

Analysis

The overall analysis of the study was informed by the COM-B behavioural model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The COM-B behavioural model



The COM-B model is a 'behavioural system'. It identifies three factors that need to be present for any behaviour to occur: capability, opportunity and motivation.

Capability refers to whether a person has the knowledge, skills and abilities required to engage in a particular behaviour.

Opportunity refers to the external factors which make the execution of a behaviour possible. These include opportunities provided by the environment, such as time, location and resource, and also opportunities as a result of social factors, such as cultural norms and social cues.

Motivation refers to the internal processes which influence our decision making and behaviours. These include our values and beliefs, as well as automatic processes such as our desires, impulses and inhibitions.

These factors interact over time so that behaviour can be seen as part of a dynamic system with positive and negative feedback loops. For example, not having the capability or opportunity to perform a behaviour can make it more difficult to perform, decreasing a person's motivation to perform the behaviour. Similarly, engaging in a behaviour is a form of practice, and as such can lead to increased capability and reduced time and energy costs (a form of opportunity) associated with performing that behaviour. These feedback loops are illustrated by the arrows in Figure 1.