

Healthier food reformulation

An overview of the Making Food Better programme.

The Making Food Better programme supports Northern Ireland food businesses to make the food environment healthier through reducing calories, saturated fat, sugar, and salt in the food they produce, sell or serve, reducing portion size, providing nutritional information and delivering responsible promotions.

The programme aligns with the UK Government's [Sugar reduction and wider reformulation programme](#) which encourages all sectors of the food industry to reduce calories, sugar and salt in foods which contribute most to these intakes.

The acronym below outlines the meaning of “Better” and what we aim to achieve under the Making Food Better programme:

Balanced – providing nutritionally balanced options

Environment – promoting a healthier and more sustainable food environment

Transparent – providing consumers with more information about the food they eat

Trusted – high quality food, that is what it says it is

Education – educating consumers about a healthy balanced diet and providing data and insights about food product improvement

Reformulation – food product improvement to make food that is healthier

We work with a range of stakeholders across Northern Ireland including local councils and academic institutions to support the food industry in making food better.

Bakery reformulation webinar

The FSA hosted a webinar for the bakery sector to engage with local businesses on reformulation and provide information on the wide range of support available. Speakers at the webinar included two local bakeries who worked successfully with the FSA to reformulate bakery products, an ingredient supplier who outlined the advice and support they can provide to bakeries and Invest NI who discussed the available funding opportunities.

Watch a recording of the Bakery reformulation webinar:

Scone reformulation guidance

Scones were identified within the ‘morning goods’ category as a food of particular relevance to the Northern Ireland population. Foods included in this category are amongst the top ten contributors to sugar intake in the UK. In Northern Ireland, scones are frequently consumed as a mid-morning snack and are also regularly served at meetings and events.

The FSA, in partnership with the 11 district councils in Northern Ireland, surveyed and sampled a range of scones available from high street coffee shops during 2018, to determine the level of calories, fat, sugar and salt. The [project](#) found the average scone contained 408kcal (one fifth of the recommended daily calorie intake), 20g of sugar (equivalent to five sugar cubes) and 1.9g of salt (one third of the guideline daily amount) (FSA 2018).

The FSA, in partnership with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, has created [guidance](#) (and a [summary](#)) to help businesses produce great-tasting, healthier scones lower in calories, fat, sugar and salt. The guidance contains recipes and tips businesses can use to make their own unique scones that meet the Government guidelines for calories, sugar and salt, as well as providing novel ideas on how to make smaller sized scones appealing to customers.

Cheesecake reformulation guidance

'Puddings' such as cheesecake, pies, tarts, crumbles and gateaux are one of the top ten sources of sugar in the UK diet. Cheesecake is recognised as a food of particular relevance to the Northern Ireland population, as it is a popular option, with many restaurants and hotels offering it as a hand-made dessert on their menus.

The FSA and the 11 district councils carried out a [survey](#) of cheesecake served in restaurants and hotels in Northern Ireland to determine the typical portion sizes and nutritional composition of this popular pudding. The results showed that portion sizes are often very large with bigger cheesecakes containing more energy, sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt.

The FSA in partnership with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise has created [guidance to help businesses produce cheesecake lower in calories, sugar, saturated fat and salt](#). The guidance also provides innovative ideas on how to make smaller sized portions of cheesecake appealing to consumers. To support businesses to use the advice contained in the technical guidance, recipe resources containing the ingredients and preparation instructions for a range of fruit, chocolate and luxury cheesecake are also available.

You can also download PDF versions of the cheesecake reformulation guidance and recipes:

- [Cheesecake reformulation technical guidance](#)
- [Fruit cheesecake recipes](#)
- [Chocolate cheesecake recipes](#)
- [Luxury cheesecake recipes](#)

Ice cream reformulation guidance

'Ice cream, lollies and sorbets' are one of the top ten contributors to take home saturated fat in Northern Ireland and contribute 2.5% to total take home sugar. Ice cream and gelato have been identified as a category of particular relevance due to the large dairy industry in Northern Ireland.

The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) collected samples of ice cream and gelato served in outlets across Northern Ireland to determine typical portion sizes and nutritional composition. The outlets also completed questionnaires which highlighted that medium portion sizes are most popular for both cone and tub sales.

The FSA, in partnership with CAFRE, have created [guidance to help businesses produce healthier ice cream and gelato](#). The guidance contains recipes that businesses can use as a starting point to make their own unique ice cream formulations that meet the Government guidelines for calories and sugar.

Consumer perceptions research

We commissioned [independent research exploring Northern Ireland \(NI\) consumers' perceptions of product reformulation](#) (to reduce levels of sugar, saturated fat and salt) and reduction in portion size by the NI food industry.

The research focused on categories included in the [Eatwell Guide](#) and the [UK Government's sugar reduction programme](#):

- breakfast cereal
- morning goods
- ice cream
- yoghurt
- cake
- pudding
- biscuits

The key findings were:

- acceptance for food reformulation exists regardless of what people believe the rationale for it is or who they think is driving it. However, acceptance is significantly lower when people are told that it is driven by industry than when told that it is driven by government or when not told anything at all
- acceptability of reformulation (both reformulated and resized products) rests on three conditions – that the new products match old ones in terms of taste, value and health/safety properties of replacement ingredients (i.e. that they are no worse for people than the originals)
- acceptability of resized products is generally lower as people believe consumers are losing out at manufacturers' gain
- while there is broad acceptability, consumer concerns surrounding taste, value and health/safety properties will need to be addressed in roll-out and communications to guarantee the initiative's success. Shoppers are making quick on-the-spot decisions often guided by habit. Both changes to the retail environment and clear in-store and product information will be key
- the retail environment is seen as the logical place for engagement initiatives such as in-store demos, tastes tests and information stands – given the questions people have surrounding reformulation, being able to engage with new products prior to purchase can help allay doubts, create positivity and raise general awareness in turn prompting word of mouth
- finally, there is an important role for public education and a proactive government voice to build public trust in the initiative and make the consumer benefits of reformulation clear

For more information on reformulation email dietaryhealthNI@food.gov.uk

Making Food Better Tracker Survey

The Making Food Better Tracker Survey, previously known as the Eating Well Choosing Better (EWCB) Tracking Survey, collects information on Northern Ireland consumers' perceptions of healthy eating, healthier options and reformulation, the use of traffic light labels and knowledge and understanding of the recommended daily calorie intake:

- [Making Food Better Tracker Survey 2024](#)
- [Making Food Better Tracker Survey 2023](#)

Resource to support food businesses with reformulation

The FSA in Northern Ireland aims to support small and medium-sized food businesses across all sectors of the food industry to reduce the calorie, sugar, saturated fat and salt content of the food they produce, sell or serve. This resource outlines sources of funding and support available to food businesses in Northern Ireland to help them on their reformulation journey.

[Resource to support food businesses with reformulation](#)

Healthier food case studies

Here are examples of how businesses have benefited from funding and technical support to develop healthier food products.

- [Case Study: Karri Kitchen](#)

Making Food Better newsletter

The FSA in Northern Ireland publishes a Making Food Better newsletter containing the latest consumer insights and technical information for food manufacturers, caterers and retailers in Northern Ireland.

[Sign up to the Making Food Better newsletter.](#)