

Our Food Future

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Co-funded by the Food Standards Agency, Food Standards Scotland and Sciencewise, this work focused on understanding public hopes, fears and aspirations about what the future could look like, exploring people's priorities and needs, and their initial expectations about what should be done, and by whom.

Research approach

The research was developed in an iterative fashion across:

- a scoping exercise, consisting of an online quantitative survey of 1,383 UK participants, and online qualitative forum research with 22 participants
- a deliberative dialogue involving a total of 63 participants across London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast – with participants engaging in two in-person workshops in each location

A range of stimuli and perspective-taking exercises were used to help encourage and inspire debate. This included the use of 'scenario' exercises in which participants were asked to imagine living in four very different projections of Our Food Future – in order to help challenge assumptions, identify priorities, and encourage participants to consider the implications of differing trade-offs within and between the scenarios.

Key findings

Though there was a wide range of engagement and knowledge levels about the global food system, in general, 'thinking globally' about food was new and challenging. Participants were surprised and concerned to realise they knew so little about the complex global food system. There was a strong desire to know more about the processes that bring food to our tables, in particular:

- the links between our food production systems and climate change
- the complexity of the global farm to fork process
- the role of the food industry in shaping global food trends
- the role of Government in working with global industry

When confronted with potential future challenges, including scarcity, participants began to interrogate their own consumption patterns and whether these were sustainable in global context.

Some were inspired to examine the UK consumer lifestyle and consider change, for example by buying less, eating less meat or re-thinking their demand for non-seasonal food availability.

Others were reluctant to change their own behaviour. They were most concerned that steps be taken to protect the future food supply in the UK, ideally so that we can maintain our current consumer lifestyles.

Throughout the research, participants used their personal experiences and priorities as a lens through which to understand and interrogate the often complex issues at hand. They remained most comfortable thinking about the impact of global food challenges at the consumer level: the

impact that developments were likely to have on themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. In part, this was because the discussion was new territory for them. With more time and more public discussion, participants thought we might be more ready as a society to change what we do.

Research report

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

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