

Northern Ireland food manufacturers' views on healthier food reformulation

Between October 2023 and March 2024, 15 food manufacturers across Northern Ireland participated in interviews

The reformulation journey



The reformulation journey for each manufacturer is varied and multifaceted. There is generally a commercial drive underpinning reformulation efforts and any change to activities must be financially viable. Each reformulation process is unique, with distinct opportunities and challenges, leading to different outcomes and perceptions of success.

Awareness of UK Government guidelines



Awareness of the UK Government's guidelines on sugar, salt and calorie reduction is mixed and impacted by business size

Larger and medium-sized businesses tend to be more knowledgeable about the guidelines due to more technical expertise in-house and working with retail sector customers who often encourage reformulation



Enablers to reformulation

Support and partnership working with suppliers, retail customers and experts in nutritional and technical fields

Perceptions of changing consumer preferences

Market and retail customer demand

Motivations to reformulate are individual to each business but are largely driven by end cost of the product, exploring healthier product lines to meet consumer demand, or adhering to retail customers' guidelines



Barriers to reformulation

Cost implications including food wastage, redundant stock and purchasing new ingredients

Perceived lack of need to reformulate i.e. food products are not suitable for reformulation

Time and resourcing challenges

Consumer acceptance

Impact on product quality and integrity including changes to taste, texture, and mouthfeel

Support required for food manufacturers to participate in reformulation



Guidance to support businesses to include reformulation as a key business goal or priority



Financial assistance and incentives to reformulate food products



Concise reformulation guidelines including relevant nutritional and technical considerations



Signposting businesses to relevant organisations or representatives



Connecting businesses with technical colleges for tailored advice