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Consumer Insights Tracker – Monthly Bulletin (November 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 16 of the survey (conducted 11th-15th November 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, November 2022 data is compared with November 2021. Next month, data for December 2022 will be compared with December 2021.

Key Findings

Food Affordability and Food Insecurity

In November 2022:

- 11% of participants reported that they had used a food bank or food charity at least once in the last month. This is significantly lower than the previous month (15%, October 2022), but not significantly different to the year prior (11%, November 2021). The latest figure (11%, November 2022) is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (8%)
- 23% 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 lower than the previous month (31%, October 2022) but not significantly different to the year prior (November 2021, 21%). The latest figure (23%, November 2022) is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (18%)
- 32% of participants reported feeling worried about being able to afford food in the next month. This is significantly lower than the previous month (39%, October 2022). The latest figure (32%, November 2022) is significantly higher than in the year prior (25%, November 2021), and significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (28%)
- 83% of participants reported feeling concerned about food prices. This is significantly lower than the previous month (86%, October 2022). There has been a significant increase in consumer concern over food prices since November 2021 when tracking for this question began (71%)
- 76% of participants reported that their shopping had ‘got more expensive’ in the past week. This is not significantly different to the previous month (77%, October 2022) but is significantly higher than the year prior (60%, November 2021) and since tracking began in September 2021 (49%)

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

- 18% of participants reported that they had eaten cold food as they could not afford to cook hot food (significantly lower than the previous month; 24% October 2022)
- 22% of participants reported that they could not afford their essential food shopping (significantly lower than the previous month; 28% October 2022)
- 26% of participants reported that they had eaten food past its use-by date because they couldn’t afford to buy more food (significantly lower than the previous month; 33% October 2022)
- 29% of participants reported that they could not afford to eat a healthy balanced diet (significantly lower than the previous month; 36% October 2022)

Food Availability

- In November 2022, 33% of participants reported feeling worried about there not being enough food available for them/their household to buy in the next month. This is significantly lower than the previous month (41%, October 2022), but is significantly higher than the same month last year (28%, November 2021). There is no significant difference compared to 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 November 2022:

- 13% of participants turned off a fridge and/or freezer containing food (significantly lower than the previous month; 18% October 2022)

- 21% of participants changed the settings on their fridge and/or freezer so that food is kept at a warmer temperature (significantly lower than the previous month; 26% October 2022)
- 23% of participants lowered the cooking temperature for food (significantly lower than the previous month; 29% October 2022)
- 23% of participants reduced the length of time that food is cooked for (significantly lower than the previous month; 30% October 2022)
- 58% 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 (significantly lower than the previous month; 67% October 2022)

Christmas and New Year

- In November 2022, 22% of participants reported that they, or someone in their household had purchased additional food in preparation for Christmas within the past week. This is similar to the figure reported in November 2021 (23%)
- In November 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 November 2022:
  - 81% of participants felt concerned about the price of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (62% in November 2021)
  - 55% of participants felt concerned about the availability of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (48% in November 2021)
  - 50% of participants felt concerned about the quality of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (37% in November 2021)
  - 49% of participants felt concerned about the sustainability of food/the environmental impact of food (this question was not asked in 2021)
  - 47% of participants felt concerned about the healthiness of food (this question was not asked in 2021)
  - 41% of participants felt concerned about the safety of food, this is significantly higher than the year prior (31% in November 2021)

In November 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 to 2021.

Across the whole survey sample 69% of participants reported taking at least one action (from the list provided) to save money for Christmas and New Year.

- 33% changed to cheaper brands
- 29% shopped in multiple supermarkets/shops to get a better deal
- 25% bought ‘yellow sticker’ reduced food items that are close to their use-by date
- 23% bought less food than they usually would for Christmas
- 23% waited to buy food items until they were discounted or on offer
- 23% switched to a cheaper supermarket
- 17% 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 November 2022:

- 53% of participants reported feeling concerned about the healthiness of the food in their personal diet. This is significantly lower than the previous month (61%, October 2022). When tracking began in November 2021, 53% reported feeling concerned about the healthiness of food in their diet (no significant difference to the latest month)

- 58% of participants reported feeling concerned about animal welfare in the food industry. This is significantly lower than the previous month (63%, October 2022). When tracking began in November 2021, 62% reported feeling concerned about animal welfare in the food industry (significantly higher than the latest month)
- 54% of participants reported feeling concerned about sustainability/the impact of food production on the environment. This is significantly lower than the previous month (64%, October 2022). When tracking began in November 2021, 62% reported feeling concerned about the impact of food production on the environment (significantly higher than the latest month)

In November 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
- 41% of participants felt concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK, compared to 54% 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 64% in November 2022. This is significantly lower than the year prior (69%, November 2021), but not significantly different to the previous month; 66% (October 2022)
- In November 2022:
  - 79% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure that food is safe to eat. This proportion has remained stable since tracking began in November 2021 (80%)
  - 72% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure food is of a high quality. This proportion has remained stable since tracking began in November 2021 (74%)
  - 48% 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 has significantly decreased since tracking began in November 2021 (57%)
  - 66% 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 has significantly decreased since tracking began in November 2021 (70%)

Confidence and Trust in the FSA

- 59% of participants reported that they trust the FSA to do its job in November 2022. This figure has remained broadly stable since tracking began in November 2021 (61%)
- In November 2022, most participants felt confident that the FSA:
  - Can be relied upon to protect the public from food-related risks (73%)
  - Is committed to communicating openly with the public about food-related risks (69%)
  - 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.