

FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity

FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: main report

This paper summarises the evidence we have about levels of household food insecurity and food affordability, and the impact on consumers and the food system.

A full PDF version is available for download:

PDF

[Gweld FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: main report as PDF](#)(Open in a new window)
(223.65 KB)

Report by Katie Pettifer and Michelle Patel.

1. Summary

1.1 Food prices in the UK are rising rapidly. The price of food on supermarket shelves increased by 9% from April 2021 to April 2022. Alongside other rising costs, particularly energy, and with growth in real pay lagging behind, this has meant UK consumers are increasingly struggling to afford food. And this issue is escalating rapidly.

1.2 The FSA has been tracking consumer experiences of food access and affordability for some years. Our data tells us that increasing numbers of consumers are being forced to make difficult choices when it comes to food.

1.3 Household food insecurity is a consequence of wider poverty, but food is often the first expenditure to be cut when disposable income is tight; for example, by 'trading down' in brands or, for some, by skipping meals, reducing portion sizes or reducing their choices. It is increasingly likely that consumers will reduce their spending on food to ensure they are able to meet the increasing pressures on their disposable income due to the rise in energy bills, petrol prices and background inflation.

1.4 Although alleviating poverty is not an FSA policy lead, food affordability cuts right across the FSA's vision and mission. We need to understand how rising food prices and rising levels of food insecurity – which have consequences for consumers' behaviour and for the food system more generally – will affect our ability to ensure that food is safe, food is what it says it is and that food is healthier and more sustainable.

1.5 We are already undertaking a portfolio of work in this area and have increased our evidence provision since the start of the pandemic, and again more recently in response to the increased cost of living. However, there are further options for the Board to consider where the FSA could expand on our work.

1.6 The Board is asked to:

- **note** the work the FSA is already doing on food affordability, including our increase in work since 2020 and more recently in 2022
- **note and agree** the suggestions in Annex A for increasing the level of work the FSA undertakes given the speed at which this issue is accelerating
- **comment on and decide** whether FSA should expand the suggested level of activity, **noting** that other work may need to be de-prioritised to accommodate the redeployment of resource to meet these further activities.

2. Introduction

2.1 The FSA has a statutory objective to 'protect consumers' wider interests in relation to food'. To support the delivery of the new FSA Strategy, we have recently undertaken a new study to establish, explore and prioritise consumer interests, needs and concerns in relation to food in the UK. The report ([Public Wider Interests in Food 2022](#)) shows that food affordability and food insecurity is currently the most important aspect in consumer decision making and the way that people think and feel about food.

2.2 We have used several terms in this paper, including food insecurity and food affordability. Household food security exists when people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, as defined by WHO. Food affordability is a key component of food security and is the cost of the diet of a household relative to the household's income. When safe and nutritious food is not available at a price affordable to all, then the welfare of some people is jeopardised, which risks the cost of food crisis turning into a future health crisis.

2.3 In this paper we summarise the evidence we have about levels of household food insecurity and food affordability, and the impact on consumers and the food system. We then draw out the consequences for the FSA's ability to deliver food you can trust. Considering each of our different roles in the food system, set out in our strategy, we set out the work we are already doing and what more we propose to do to help protect the interests of consumers and to deliver food that is safe, is what it says it is, and is healthier and more sustainable.

3. Evidence

3.1 Annex B sets out the socio-economic evidence, the potential impacts of this on food safety and the main areas for concern. Our tracking analysis shows that almost one in four consumers (22%) now report skipping a meal, or cutting the size of meals, because they did not have enough money to buy food – this has risen steadily since June 2021. Reported food bank usage has steadily increased since June 2021 (9%), with 15% saying they used a food bank in March 2022.

3.2 Food prices in the UK are rising rapidly. The price of food on supermarket shelves increased by 5.76% from March 2021 to March 2022. This is a substantial rise given that, between 2016 and 2020, food prices rose by 0.93% from one March to the next on average. In 2022, prices rose by more than 0.8% between January and February alone. Economic projections indicate a worsening picture over the next 12 months.

3.3 Our Public's Interests, Needs and Concerns Around Food project ([Public Wider Interests in Food 2022](#)) found that concern around the cost of food is now the top concern reported by consumers when it comes to food.? When asked, 42% of people report they are concerned about food prices. Approximately one in five people are trading down, changing what and where they buy, for cheaper food alternatives ([Food and You 2, Wave 3](#)).? Our expectation is that these

behaviour patterns will increase.

3.4 Price increases, compounded by the rising cost of living, means that household food insecurity has increased in the UK. The latest published wave of Food and You 2 indicates that, 15% - or roughly one in seven - people live in household food insecurity. This increases to one in six in Wales and Northern Ireland (18% and 16% of households respectively) and one in five in the North West of England (20% of households). Our data shows that household food insecurity is particularly acute among younger adults, low-income families, and people who are unemployed. Our analysis also suggests that lower middle-income households are also at risk of food insecurity if there are any further economic shocks.?

3.5 People with low food security are making different and difficult choices.??Those who are food insecure report different behaviours, such as eating less than they should (31%), cutting the size of their meal or skipping meals (30%), being hungry (20%) and losing weight (12%). Our tracking data shows that 15% of respondents reported using a food charity or food bank in March 2022; a proportion that has significantly increased since the year before (9% in March 2021). Food insecure households are more likely to buy food close to its use-by date and eat food past its use-by date, than food secure households ([Food and You 2, Wave 3](#)).?They are more likely to have reduced choices, (for example 'free from foods' are often more expensive) when managing hypersensitivities.

3.6 We also know that the impact of cost-of-living increases on the food system is about more than food choices. Our safety regime is built around assumptions involving effective cooking, storage and cleaning. But all of these are likely to be compromised if people are facing increasing financial pressures. Fuel bills especially may mean that people feel unable to cook food thoroughly (or at all) and indeed even the cost of powering a fridge or freezer may put some consumers under strain.

3.7 Furthermore, people in low food security are more likely to be vulnerable to obesity and malnutrition and to suffer from the anxiety and worry of not having access to sufficient nutritious food. Further data in Annex B.

3.8 In addition to the direct impact on consumers, we are conscious of other potential impacts on the food system that might arise from rising food prices. Work is ongoing to review the potential food fraud risks in particular - including but not exclusive to the potential issues surrounding waste diversion and misrepresentation. We have seen no evidence of these risks manifesting at this time.

4. Discussion

4.1 The evidence clearly shows that consumers are changing their behaviours when it comes to food. As consumers feel the pressure of food insecurity, they are making different choices, which could increase the risk of unsafe practice and unsafe or inauthentic food. Rising food insecurity could also make it more difficult for consumers to eat healthier and more sustainable food. So, the context in which the FSA is working is changing. We do not believe there is a choice for the FSA about whether we want to do work on food insecurity; it is an integral part of our job already. While the underlying causes of food insecurity may not be for us to solve, we need to understand the changing context for consumers and to consider how our work needs to change to reflect their new lived experiences.

4.2 We have been tracking levels of food insecurity for some time, which has given us a bank of evidence and the ongoing ability to see how the picture changes over time. This growing evidence base is one of the most important contributions that the FSA can make to wider efforts to tackle food insecurity, and we know it is valued by government policy-makers and third sector organisations, with frequent requests from others to use our data.

4.3 We are considering whether there is more we can do as an evidence generator, or in our other roles, to respond to this rapidly changing context. In doing so, we have been guided by the principles the Board agreed in our strategy. In particular, we think it is important that:

- to protect consumer interests, the FSA should work to mitigate the risks and impacts of food insecurity where we have the means and capacity to do so
- FSA will be led by the science and evidence and will not compromise on food safety, given that this is the Food Standards Agency's primary remit
- FSA will be open and transparent with our evidence; we should be independent in what we say but do not need to be neutral on food affordability and insecurity
- FSA does not hold policy levers to solve the food insecurity issue, but we will seek to work with, and through others to amplify our voice, communicate, educate, and seek to mitigate food insecurity issues

4.4 We have set out our proposals in detail, taking each role in turn below. A more detailed table of the work we are proposing, and the work that we have considered but do not propose to undertake, is at Annex A.

Evidence Generator

4.5 This is where the FSA does and can continue to add most value. As the independent government department with the exclusive remit for food, we have a crucial role informing the wider debate around food affordability.

4.6 What we are already doing: We have put much of our effort into gathering data during 2020 and 2021, interpreting what this data is telling us to inform wider Government priorities and engaging with other civil society actors in this area. In 2020 we stepped up our consumer tracking and explored the lived experience of household food insecurity through qualitative work. We have:

- a) measured and published biannual official statistics on household food insecurity since 2016 through [Food and You 2](#). The datasets are available to analyse this by ethnicity, socio-demographic group, region, and disability, and in future reports we will include any clear disparities routinely in our summary report.
- b) published a report ([Food in a Pandemic](#)) on attitudes to the food system in a pandemic (2021), which traced changing attitudes to food provision.
- c) measured consumer concern and indicators of household food insecurity on a monthly basis through our [consumer tracker](#), with the most recent published data running up to March 2022.
- d) published qualitative research into the lived experience of household food insecurity ([FSA Food Insecurity 2020](#)) and analysed the data emerging from [The Public's Interests, Needs and Concerns Around Food project \(2022\)](#) to map the variety of experiences among those in this situation.
- e) tracked conversations around food poverty on social media, reporting this each month to colleagues in the FSA and across government to complement our consumer survey data and food price tracking.
- f) commissioned work to map the journey food goes on in various models of community food provision (e.g., food banks, food sharing apps), which will be published this summer.
- g) in Northern Ireland, the FSA has a partnership with Safefood which commissions research on the cost of the minimum essential food basket for four household types with low-income scenarios. With data going back to 2014, the reports demonstrate the average weekly cost of

healthy food, and the level of household income that may need to be spent on attaining this minimum standard.

4.7 Swift analysis, open sharing of data and ongoing synthesis of the findings has allowed us to act as a provider of timely and reliable evidence to others operating in this space, including: [the National Food Strategy](#), the upcoming Defra Food White Paper and the upcoming DHSC Health Disparities White Paper. We are advising; the Office of National Statistics, on their new index measuring the cost of the basic staples for the poorest consumers (successfully campaigned for by Jack Monroe and dubbed the 'Sam Vimes' index). We have shared this data with Cabinet Office, and we are working with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission who wish to continue using our data to inform their Human Rights Tracker. We are also working with the main NGOs and consumer groups, such as the Food Foundation and Food Ethics Council as well as the main community providers, such as Fareshare, IFAN and the Trussell Trust. We have shared our data with colleagues at DWP.

4.8 How the FSA could expand our work: Our Science, Evidence and Research Division (SERD) are already planning to divert additional resources to dial up our research and evidence effort to further work in 2022-3. If the Board agree, SERD will divert more resources to further work. In the shorter term this will include further synthesis of the evidence base, work to identify and fill evidence gaps, working with others in the research community. Our risk analysis processes look at impact on consumers in the round: consistently including criteria such as; social equity, impact on household food insecurity (as well as healthy/sustainable consumer choices, food waste, animal welfare and trade).

4.9 Until now, we have our data in the public domain but not taken a strong position. We are proposing to interpret and report the evidence more proactively to ensure it is useable to campaigning organisations, and presenting it to policymakers, Parliamentarians and media at their conferences. We could also take a stronger public position in terms of drawing conclusions from the data about the impact on consumers or the food system. This may bring risks and move us closer to the watchdog role.

Policy maker and regulator

4.10 As food affordability is changing the context in which we do our jobs, it is essential that our core functions reflect this. The FSA needs to understand how affordability impacts how our consumers interact with our policies, and whether we need to amend existing ones to adjust to this new environment. For example, the rise in community food provision (e.g., food banks) presents new risks to ensuring that food is safe and what it says it is, which the FSA should respond to.

4.11 What we are already doing: We need to be alive to the risk that household food insecurity leads consumers to adopt riskier behaviours in relation to food. Our work in the Achieving Business Compliance programme on online food sales becomes increasingly important if financial pressures are leading more people to buy food in ways that are less visible to regulators, for example through online marketplaces. We commissioned research into consumers' understanding of online risks, which are we are currently analysing.

4.12 We have already carried out a significant programme of work on Best Before End and Use by Dates, with the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), an organisation focusing cutting waste out of our global food system and making it more sustainable. We have published extensive guidance on our website, co-produced with Defra and WRAP, who we have worked with for many years. This can help to reduce waste in the food system, and to raise understanding amongst consumers.

4.13 While it is important that community food provision is not viewed as the solution to food insecurity, we are stepping up our work to make sure that our regulation helps support the provision of safe food through these mechanisms to those who need it. Our research project on community food provision (referenced in 4.6) highlighted areas in which the FSA can support businesses – and non-profit organisations - do the right thing when it comes to supporting consumers and food safety. We are already acting on some of these recommendations, such as providing more accessible, and ‘bite-sized’ guidance allowing it to be easily shared amongst volunteers, providing our guidance as downloadable products that they can easily share and print off for easy and accessible resources. This is in line with our guiding principle to make it easier for businesses and organisations to meet their obligations and is an opportunity to apply some of the principles of service design we want to roll out across the organisation.

4.14 How the FSA could expand our work: As consumers and businesses come under greater financial pressures, it is important the FSA pivots to adjust to our new climate. We should make sure that considerations about affordability are embedded into decision making at all levels; we have already begun to look at how we could do this going forward, with the Analytical Unit considering how to include affordability into impact assessments. We could embed these considerations into other decision making, for example in response to a food incident.

4.15 There may also be more that we can do to encourage greater use of this guidance, especially with some of our partners such as the supermarkets, or with community food providers to ensure this messaging is targeting consumers more directly. We could further provide guidance for businesses who wish to donate to food banks, to ensure that food safety is not compromised in the process and set a standardised approach to those wishing to contribute to their community.

Convenor and Collaborator

4.16 This area has the most potential for the FSA to step up our activities. We have significant amounts of insight and evidence, provided by our evidence generator function. At the moment, we provide our data into other organisations, both across Whitehall and external partners such as the white papers.

4.17 What we are already doing: The FSA already works with multiple partners across non-governmental organisations and across Whitehall when it comes to food insecurity, using our links and evidence/data to promote messaging and ensure food safety is constantly on the agenda. For example, in Northern Ireland, the FSA co-chairs the All-Island Food Poverty Network in partnership with Safefood. The network provides a co-ordinated and strategic approach to tackling food poverty on the island of Ireland, supporting the development of consensus on related issues, collaboration and shared learning.

4.18 We are also engaging with food industry partners, such as food retailers and organisations which play major roles in community food provision and food redistribution, to understand how the FSA can help them in areas like reducing waste, and to understand how we can work together to make cheap food good food.

4.19 How the FSA could expand our work: the FSA could look to take a more prominent role in convening policy leads across Whitehall and the NGO sector to encourage joined up thinking and informed discussions about the impact of food insecurity across the food sector. For example, we could convene seminars or run joint events with partners, using our evidence as the basis for discussion, to help build a shared picture of the likely impacts of food insecurity and to develop thinking on mitigations. The extent to which we act in this space is naturally constrained by resources – if we run events on this topic, we will have less capacity to do so on other issues (for example, consumer information on sustainability) – and by the extent to which other departments also plan to convene discussions.

Watchdog

4.20 **What we are already doing:** We are already publishing evidence on levels of food insecurity and planning to report on it in our annual report with FSS on food standards in the UK.

4.21 **How the FSA could expand our work:** We could be bolder in drawing conclusions from the evidence we have generated and calling these out, for example the potential impacts of food insecurity on people's short-term health (i.e., through risks to food safety) and on their ability to access healthy and sustainable food.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Alleviating household poverty is an issue far bigger than the remit of one single department, nor is it an FSA policy lead. That said, food affordability cuts across and impacts on the FSA's ability to deliver its vision and mission. We need to ensure that all consumers, including those that are facing food insecurity or struggling with the cost of food, are protected and can access food that is safe, whether their food comes from a shop, an online platform or a food bank.

5.2 As consumers' behaviours change due to cost of living increases, the FSA needs to understand this changing context and how it impacts food safety and authenticity and ensure that our work adapts accordingly. As the food regulator we have a role to make sure that a food insecurity crisis does not become a health or food safety issue and so must build on the work we are currently doing to and act within our resources and remit.

5.3 The Board is asked to:

- **note** the work the FSA is already doing on food affordability, including our increase in work since 2020 and more recently in 2022
- **note and agree** the suggestions in Annex A for increasing the level of work the FSA undertakes given the speed at which this issue is accelerating
- **comment on and decide** whether FSA should expand the suggested level of activity, **noting** that other work may need to be de-prioritised to accommodate the redeployment of resource to meet these further activities.

FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: Annex A (table of suggested possible interventions)

A detailed table of the work the FSA proposes and the work that we have considered but do not propose to undertake in relation to household food insecurity and food affordability.

A full PDF version is available for download:

PDF

[Gweld FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: Annex A as PDF\(Open in a new window\)](#)
(166.58 KB)

Evidence Generator

Current Activity

- a) measured and published biannual official statistics on Household Food Insecurity from Food and You 2 (ongoing), allowing us to analyse the data by ethnicity, socio-demographic group, region, and disability?
- b) monthly tracking of consumer concerns around affordability, with quarterly publishing (ongoing) ?
- c) completed "The UK Public's interests, needs and concerns around food" research, understanding priorities for UK consumers in UK food.?
- d) published a report on attitudes to the food system in a pandemic (2021), which traced changing attitudes to food provision.?
- e) tracking conversations around food poverty on social media (ongoing)?
- f) economists are actively tracking food prices to understand increases over time?
- g) completed research on Community Food Providers, understanding what support community providers might need in relation to food safety.?

Suggested expanded activity within capacity and within remit

- a) synthesis and interpretation of currently available data, generating more products, for example, academic articles, thought pieces, from existing data, including our own, for example, Food and You 2?
- b) systematic review of Household Food Insecurity in the UK (check with FSS) identifying existing evidence gaps?
- c) host a workshop with others in the research community, assessing and filling gaps and sharing research plans ?
- d) mapping of Household Food Insecurity at LA level (overlaid with for example, food deserts, types of food businesses, food banks, Indices of Multiple Deprivation, FHRs etc - to inform LA / local response) ?
- e) explore NHS datasets to assess the impacts of household food insecurity on food borne disease, as well as nutrition and health, depending on access to data.?
- f) actively report on food prices, joining up our reporting to produce a dashboard with OGD partners?
- g) explore how we develop our risk analysis and impact assessment capabilities to look at impact on consumers in the round: consistently including criteria such as; social equity, impact on household food insecurity (as well as healthy/sustainable consumer choices, food waste, animal welfare and trade.)

Further activity beyond current capacity

- a) commission new primary research on additional questions, such as the lived experience of those in household food insecurity, the hidden costs of food, or the trade-offs that consumers make in practice against health and sustainability.

Activities outside FSA remit

- a) use the data to advocate publicly for specific policies (except where we have policy lead for example, food safety). Use the data in political discussion.

Convenor and Collaborator

Current activity

- a) engagement with NGOs, and OGDs on consumer concerns and household food insecurity?
- b) data sharing with OGDs to aid understanding of Food Insecurity landscape, (for example, DHSC, ONS, DWP, NFS, Defra).?
- c) proactive X-Whitehall outreach to ensure joint approach to the issue.?
- d) organise and host seminar in Q3 of 2022 to convene senior leaders from across the food system, to encourage an informed discussion of food insecurity mitigations for consumers. ?
- e) engage with community food providers and retailers to develop best practice guidance on food donations.

Suggested expanded activity within capacity and within remit

- a) collaborate with NGO partners in hosting events, convening senior policy leaders to broaden reach of our data and inform proactive policy solutions to food insecurity.?
- b) engage with aggregators through ABC Programme to understand possible community-based action.

Further activity beyond current capacity

- a) work with NGOs and partners on the implementation of ideas/policy solutions generated through our convening role, if these would require substantial resource?
- b) do new work with NGOs and partners to more actively promote food safety messages for looking after food in the home.

Activities outside FSA remit

- a) convene on questions of how to mitigate poverty, rather than how to manage the food impacts and risks for consumers.

Policy maker

Current activity

- a) provide advice on common household food safety questions, including UBD/BBE advice amongst other key food safety in the home advice?
- b) share website links to WRAP for further consumer information.?
- c) increase promotion of guidance on use by/best before dates (as well as freezing) guidance, and review whether our guidance, and the format of our guidance, is user-friendly and appropriate for a range of audiences, so we are a service?.

Suggested expanded activity within capacity and within remit

- a) accelerate anticipatory regulation preparation to aid food affordability options in the future

Further activity beyond current capacity

?a) consider stronger advice on the need for BBD on some products. We can support WRAP with their influence in this space.?

b) consider whether certain products could be fast tracked in regulation to support reduced food prices.

Activities outside FSA remit

a) devise policies to address the wider issue of poverty (which would sit with DWP supported by Defra, though we might contribute by providing evidence)?

b) review whether current legislation relating to food disproportionately / unnecessarily increasing cost of food, as most of this is Defra's remit. Only food safety and hygiene policy is under FSA's remit, which has a minimal impact on food prices.

Regulator

Current activity

a) current guidelines are in place for compliance for FBO's working with charities. (for example, Fare share, Trussell Trust)?

b) provide information on community food provision and how to access it.?

c) communications campaign to ensure new food businesses are aware of the need to register (inc food banks)?

d) review guidance to FBOs and LAs on community food provision and revise if appropriate.?

Suggested expanded activity within capacity and within remit

?a) provide accessible and usable products containing advice for private sector food donors to maximise the impact of food donations - especially around labelling/allergens/traceability.

Further activity beyond current capacity

a) review regulation and guidance in other specific areas, ahead of the work already underway in the two transformation programmes to make regulation more targeted and proportionate. ?

Activities outside FSA remit

a) regulating food prices, as opposed to food standards

Watchdog

Current activity

a) we will report on Food Affordability in our Annual Report.

Suggested expanded activity within capacity and within remit

- a) work with other actors and provide data to aid this activity, for example, Which. ?
- b) offer public value judgment on implication of food insecurity for people's short-term health – for example, greater risk around food safety.?

Further activity beyond current capacity

- a) monitor impact of further changes (for example, future HFSS regulations, or steps taken by government to mitigate food price rises) to understand whether retailers/suppliers pass any costs on to consumer.

Activities outside of FSA remit

- a) offer value judgment on the likely effectiveness of policy responses from Government and others in mitigating food insecurity or protecting long term health or sustainability.?

FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: Annex B

Annex B to the FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: main report sets out the socio-economic evidence, the potential impacts of this on food safety and the main areas for concern.

A full PDF version is available for download:

PDF

[Gweld FSA 22-06-09 Household Food Insecurity: Annex B as PDF](#)(Open in a new window) (1.13 MB)

What is the food price commodity tracker dashboard?

This dashboard provides a snapshot of commodity price changes across the food system. The following categories of indicators, with direct and indirect impacts on food prices, are tracked and updated monthly relying on published data sources from the ONS, FAO and World Bank:?

Exchange rate:

See Annex A for explanation on Exchange Rate Pass-Through.

The UK 'effective' exchange rate tells us how "strong" the pound sterling is compared to other competing currencies around the world.?

?If the pound strengthens and rises in value, then imports become relatively cheaper. If the pound falls, then imports become relatively more expensive which may lead to food becoming more

expensive on shop shelves.

Global commodities:

World bank data is used to track the price changes of the following global commodities: ?

- Fertiliser?
- Energy ?
- Wheat?
- Rapeseed Oil ?
- Maize?
- Sunflower Oil ?

Food Producer costs:

ONS data has been used to track how the price of producing certain food items has changed over time:?

- Oils and Fats?
- Grain and Starch ?
- Animal Feed?
- Soft and bottled Drinks?
- Dairy?
- Meat?

Consumer food prices:

The ONS publishes data on how the price of high-level food groups are changing over time. The groups included are listed below:?

- All Food Items?
- Oils and fats?
- Milk, Cheese and Eggs?
- Meat?
- Fruit?
- Bread & Cereals ?
- Vegetables ?
- Fish ?
- Sugary Items ?

How to read the food price commodity tracker dashboard



Commodity being tracked is listed first.

Second is the monthly change in price, in the example given this is February 2022 to March 2022.

Aligned to the left is the annual change in price from March 2021 to March 2022, in the example this 1128.1%. An asterisk next to this figure denotes that the change is significant.

Food Price Commodity Tracker Dashboard

Exchange rate

Monthly change: 0.4% February to March 2022

Annual change in price: 0.7%

Global commodities

Commodity	Monthly change in price (February to March 2022)	Annual change in price	Significant change
Fertiliser	20.7%	128.1%	Yes
Energy	24.1%	101.6%	Yes
Wheat	24.5%	78%	No
Rapeseed oil	24%	63.6%	No
Sunflower oil	57.5%	46.6%	No
Maize	14.7%	36.9%	No

Food producer costs

Commodity	Monthly change in price (February to March 2022)	Annual change in price	Significant change
Oils and fats	1.6%	28.8%	No
Grain and starch	0.9%	10.7%	No
Animal feed	1.1%	9.4%	No
Soft and bottled drinks	0.8%	8.6%	Yes
Dairy	0.9%	7.2%	No
Meat	0.4%	6.3%	No

Consumer food prices

Commodity	Monthly change in price (February to March 2022)	Annual change in price	Significant change
Oils and fats	7.2%	18.1%	Yes
Milk, cheese and eggs	0.7%	8.6%	No
Meat	0.4%	5.6%	No
Fruit	1.3%	5.4%	No
Bread and cereals	0.1%	5.3%	No
Vegetables	0.8%	4.8%	No
Fish	0.4%	4.7%	No
Sugary items	0.3%	3.8%	No

All food items, February to March 2022 0% and annual change in price 5.8%.

Commentary

Oils and fats

The cost of producing Oil and Fat products rose by 28.8% from March 2021 to March 2022. This is the largest annual increase from one March to the next since 2011.

Drivers

Ukraine and Russia are large exporters of cooking oils such as Sunflower Oil. The war between these countries has disrupted the supply chains of these products. ?

The Oils and Fats industry is particularly vulnerable to “shocks”. A shock, such as the Ukraine-Russian war, is likely to have a greater impact on the production of oils and fats than other sub-sectors of the food industry.

Impact

This increase in the cost of producing Oil and Fat products has been passed onto consumers. ?

The price of Oil and Fat products in UK shops rose by 18.1% from March 2021 to March 2022, which is the largest annual increase from one March to the next in the time period analysed (January 2000 to March 2022).?

Cooking oils are UK consumer staples and are used to create other food products such as crisps, fish fingers and biscuits. Oils such as Palm Oil are also used in cosmetics and cleaning products.

Fertiliser

From February 2022 to March 2022, the global price of fertiliser rose by 20.7%. From March 2021 to March 2022, the global price of fertiliser rose by 128.1%. The latter is the largest annual increase from one March to the next in the time period analysed (Jan 2000 – March 2022).

Drivers

Ukraine is a large exporter of fertiliser and Russia is the world's largest exporter of fertiliser. The war between these countries has disrupted the supply chains of these products.?

In an attempt to control rising food prices in China, Beijing imposed greater controls on the export of phosphate (a major ingredient of commercial fertiliser) in October 2021. This reduces global supply, increasing prices for firms outside of China. This ban is expected to last until June 2022 at least.

Impact

Fertiliser is a major input into the production of food. It increases farming yield as it ensures the nutrients in farming soil are not depleted. ?

More expensive, limited supplies of fertiliser makes food production more expensive. This higher cost of producing food may result in food price increases for consumers.

Consumer price in food

The price of food on supermarket shelves rose by 5.8% from March 2021 to March 2022. This is the largest annual increase from one March to the next since 2009. It rose by 0.0% between February 2022 and March 2022.

Drivers

A combination of factors are driving the recent rise in the cost of food for UK consumers. ?

These factors include the rising cost of agricultural inputs (Energy, Fertiliser, Oils and Fats) and a reduction in the supply of labour in the agri-food sector (as a knock-on effect of EU Exit and the Pandemic).?

The 0.0% price change from February to March 2022 echoes a similar trend seen in the % change between February and March in other years.

Impact

The affordability of food is a key component of household food insecurity. In January 2022, 15% of respondents across England, Wales and Northern Ireland were food insecure when surveyed by the FSA.?

The fact that the 0.0% February 2022 to March 2022 price change echoes other years, suggests that this is not evidence of the cost of food crises “cooling off”.

One in seven people lives in household food insecurity

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” World Food Summit, 1996.?

The potential food health risks of inequality:

- listeria
- reduced choice/higher prices for people with hypersensitivities
- reduced visibility of food safety ratings out of home
- obesity and malnutrition
- poor mental health
- risky food safety behaviours

Our tracking survey shows that almost one in four consumers (22%) now report skipping a meal, or cutting down the size of meals, because they did not have enough money to buy food – this has risen steadily since June 2021. 15% of respondents reported using a food charity or food bank in March 2022; a proportion that has significantly increased since the year before (9% in March 2021). ?

?Our Consumer Interest in Food report indicates that the cost of food is now the top concern for consumers. The latest wave of Food and You 2 shows that 42% of people are concerned about food prices. 15% - or roughly one in seven - people live in household food insecurity. This is around one in six in Wales (18%) and Northern Ireland (16%) and one in five in the North West of England (20% of households). Our data shows that household food insecurity is particularly acute among younger adults, low-income families, and people who are unemployed. Our analysis also suggests that lower middle-income households are also at risk of food insecurity if there are any further economic shocks. People with low food security are making different and difficult choices. Those who are food insecure report different behaviours, such as eating less than they should (31%), cutting the size of their meal or skipping meals (30%), being hungry (20%) and losing

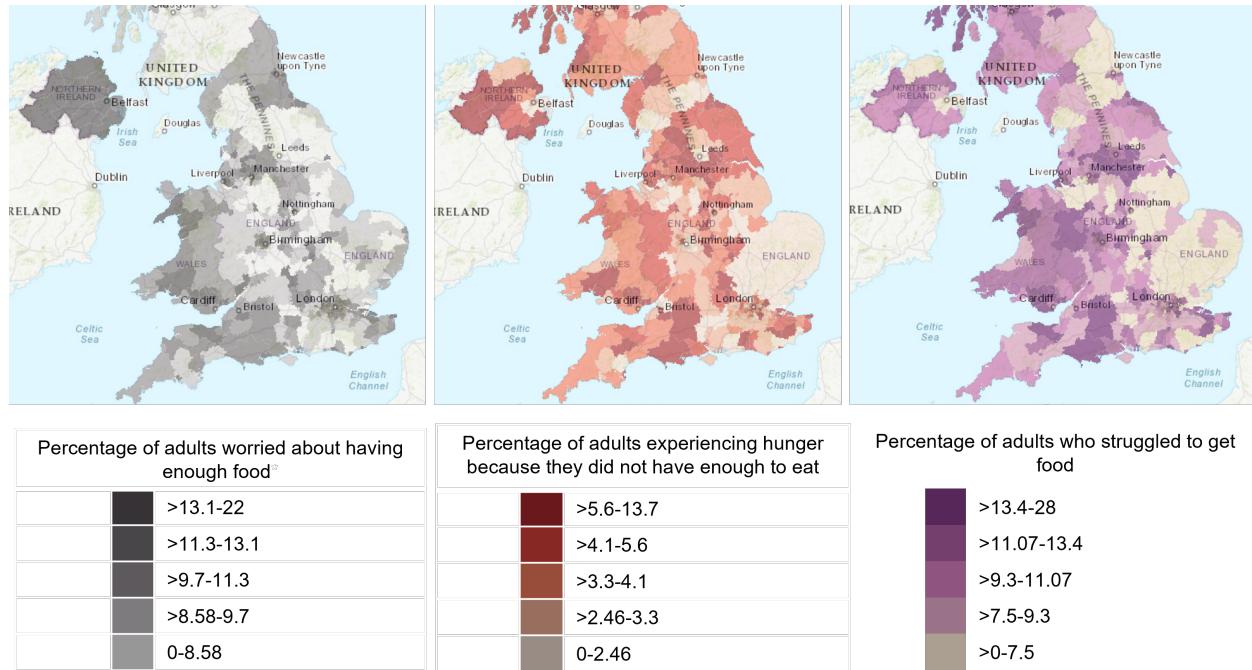
weight (12%). Food insecure households are more likely to buy food close to its use-by date and eat food past its use-by date, than food secure households (Food and You 2, Wave 3). They are more likely to have reduced choices, (for example 'free from foods' are often more expensive) when managing hypersensitivities. ?

Base: COVID-19 Consumer tracker April 2020-October 2021, [Consumer insights tracking survey](#) November 2021 - March 2022 Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75?

Public Wider interest in food ?

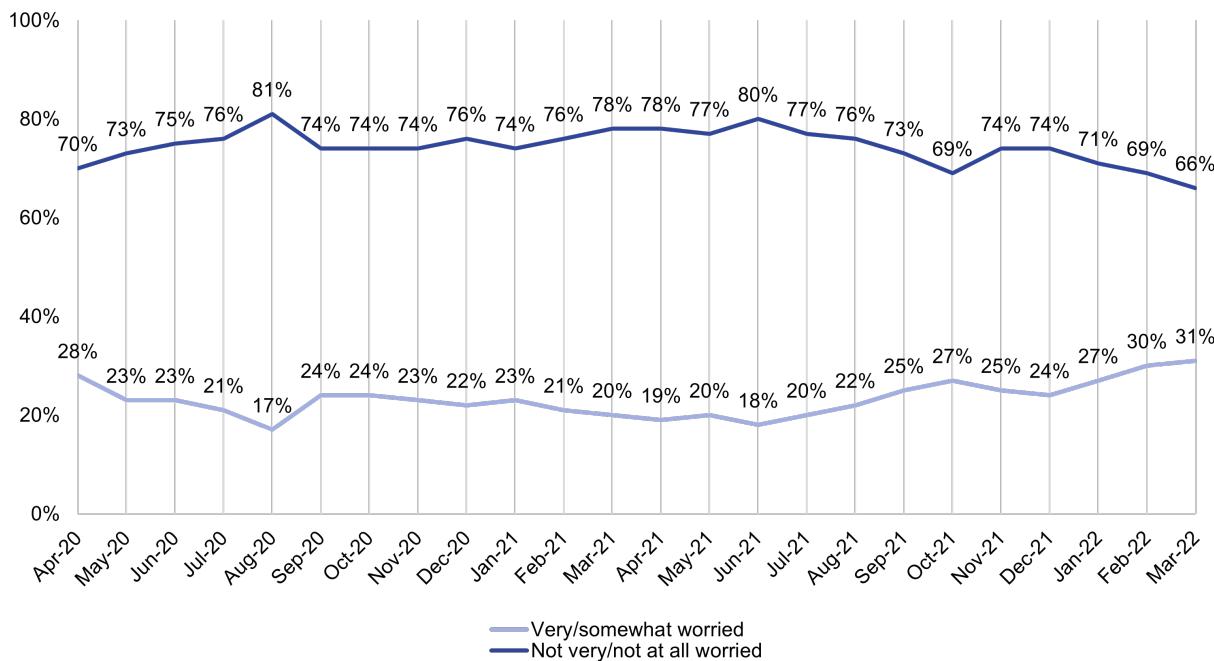
Food and You 2 Wave 3?

Estimates of the percentage of adults who worried about having enough food, experienced hunger or struggled to get food at a local authority level



March 2022: Almost 1 in 3 people are worried about being able to afford food

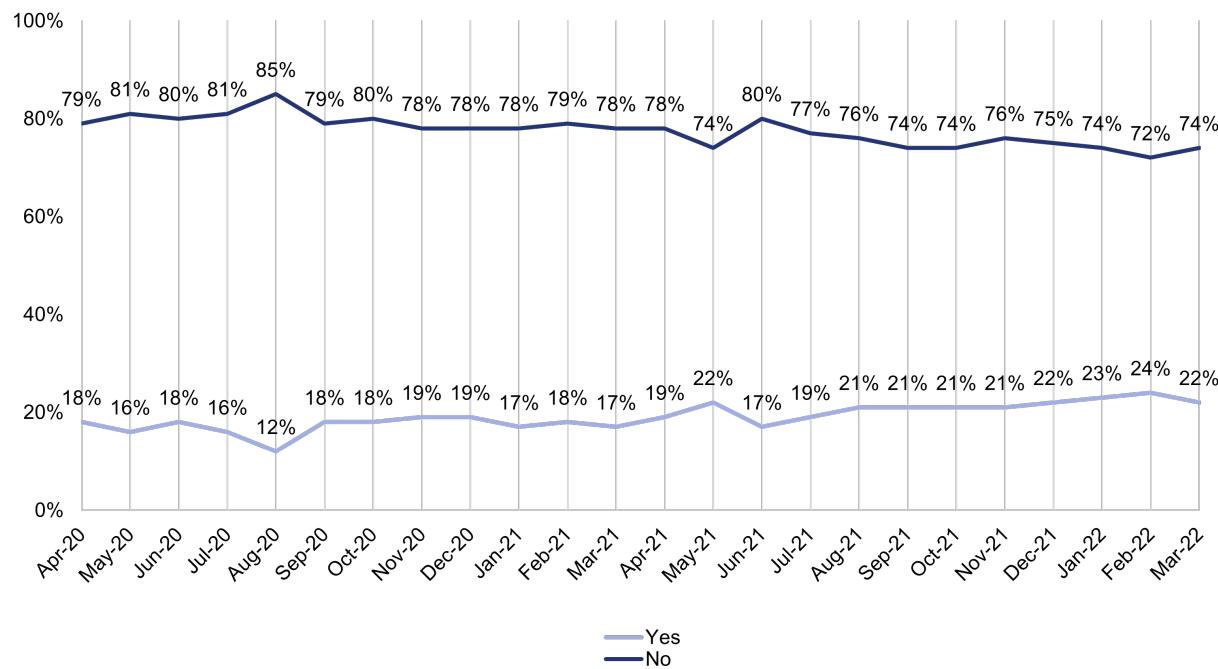
Question: To what extent, if at all, are you worried that you/your households will not be able to afford food in the next month?



Base: COVID-19 Consumer tracker April 2020-October 2021, Consumer insights tracking survey November 2021 - March 2022. Base size: approximately 2,000 per wave. Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' and 'prefer not to answer' responses are not shown?.

March 2022: Over 1 in 5 people cut meal size or skipped meals

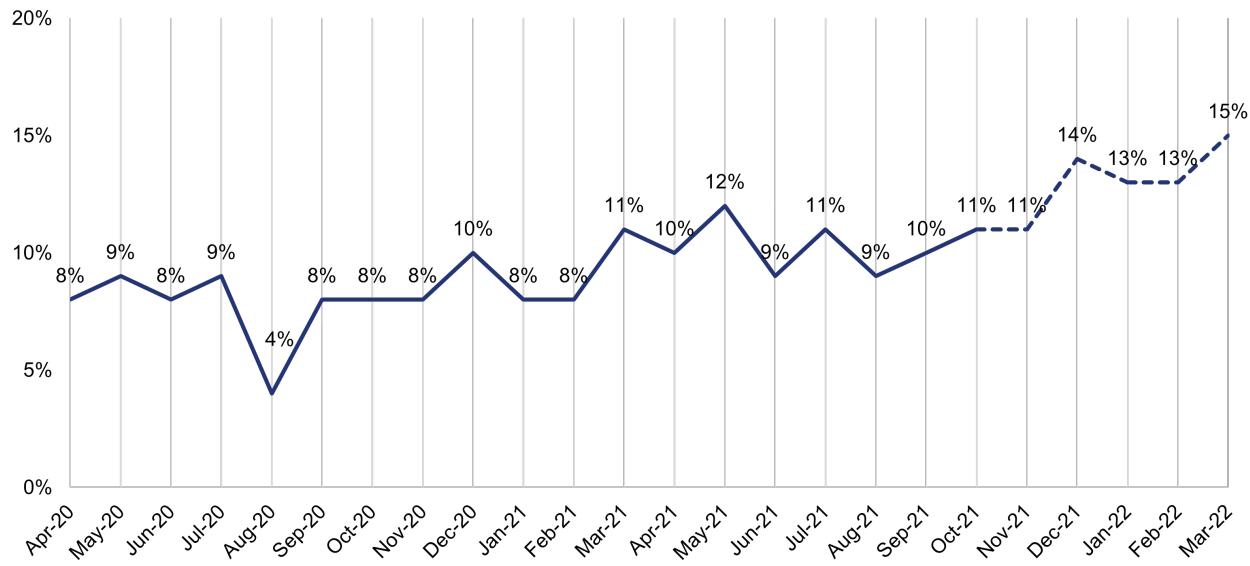
In the last month have you cut down the size of your meals or skipped meals for any of these reasons? You did not have enough money to buy food.



Base: COVID-19 Consumer tracker April 2020-October 2021, Consumer insights tracking survey November 2021 - March 2022. Base size: approximately 2,000 per wave?.. Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' and 'prefer not to answer' responses are not shown?.

March 2022: Around 1 in 7 people used a food bank or charity

In the last month, how often, if at all, have you used a food charity or food bank?



Base: COVID-19 Consumer tracker April 2020-October 2021, Consumer insights tracking survey November 2021 - March 2022. Base size: approximately 2,000 per wave?. Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' and 'prefer not to answer' responses are not shown?.

Food security: demographic groups

?Respondents are classified as being food secure (high, marginal) or food insecure (low, very low).

High 72%

Older adults, high income households, retired, working in managerial, administrative and professional occupations, white, smaller household size, no children in household?

Marginal 13%

Younger adults, low income households, full-time students, semi-routine and routine occupations*, Asian/British Asian, larger households, children in the household*?

Low 9%

Younger adults, low household income, long term unemployed or never worked, semi-routine and routine occupations?

Very low 6%

Younger adults, low household income, long term unemployed or never worked, long term health condition* .

Food security: food-related behaviours

High 72%

- Shopping: Most likely to consider quality (46%); unlikely to have bought processed food everyday or most days (4%)?
- Top food-related concern: The amount of sugar in food (68%)?
- Eating habits: Most cook from scratch (66%) and eat healthy meals (71%) everyday or most days ?
- Safety: Most likely to know the correct fridge temperature (63%)

Marginal 13%

- Shopping: Most likely to consider price/value for money (60%); 24% had bought food close to the UBD in the previous year, changed where (34%) and what (29%) food is bought for cheaper alternatives ?
- Top food-related concern: Food waste (61%)?
- Eating habits: Most cook from scratch (63%) and eat healthy meals (59%) everyday or most days; 47% had made changes to eating habits for financial reasons in the previous year?
- Safety: 21% had eaten more food past the UBD than in the previous year

Low 9%

- Shopping: Most likely to consider price/value for money (62%); in the previous year 25% had bought more food close to the UBD, and changed where (42%) and what (40%) food is bought for cheaper alternatives ?
- Top food-related concern: Food prices (62%)?
- Eating habits: Many cook from scratch (52%) and eat healthy meals (54%) everyday or most days; in the previous year, 67% had made changes to eating habits for financial reasons; 25% have cut the size of meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- Safety: 22% had eaten more food past the UBD than in the previous year?

Very low 6%

- Shopping: Most likely to consider price/value for money (68%); in the previous year 25% had bought more food close to the UBD, changed where (66%) and what (65%) food is bought for cheaper alternatives, and 13% had used a food bank/emergency food; 24% had bought processed food everyday or most days?
- Top food-related concern: Food prices (60%)?
- Eating habits: Many cook from scratch (50%), eat healthy meals (49%) and snack on cakes, biscuits, confectionery and/or savoury snacks (59%) everyday or most days; in the previous year 91% had made changes to eating habits for financial reasons; 98% have cut the size of meals or skip meals, 43% lost weight, and 38% didn't eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food ?
- Safety: 37% had eaten more food past the UBD than in the previous year?

Source: [Food and You 2: Wave 3](#)

The lived experience: a case study

Brianna Beans

- **Age:** 72
- **Gender, ethnicity:** Female, Mixed race, Jamaican heritage
- **Household:** Living alone
- **Income and Education:** Retired, DE
- **Health:** Has amyloidosis, an incurable condition requiring monthly treatments to slow progression
- **Location:** Bristol & Avon

Food system feelings

"As I've gotten older, I really have noticed how horrible cheaper food is. I wish that they would sell food that is accessible to everybody so that poor people could eat things like salmon for example, because they happen to like it or because it's good for you or whatever.

There's no doubt about it, in the long run, you eat cheap stuff, you get ill. The NHS is suffering blah, blah, blah. Because you're ill because you can't eat properly!"

'It's unfair that poor people have to make do with poor quality food.'

"If you've got to pay for a nice tin of Heinz baked beans, it's gonna maybe cost you one-pound something. But if you're like my son and his partner, you can only afford the nasty 20p-a-tin one, which is not good for you, not good for the kids. It's full of sugar, it's horrible."

'I dream about being able to afford the good quality, fresh food that I need to feel well.'

"If I had more money, I could afford to go to a proper greengrocer, Eastern European Or something. Which I did once and it was absolutely amazing. Lots of lovely fruits, I didn't even know what they were. But I came out of there and I've spent 20 quid! I eat a lot of grapes because I can taste them and they cleanse my mouth and they help with the ulcers. If only I could afford the best grapes!. You buy a cheap bag of potatoes and half of them have got nasty potato things on them. They've got to be cut out, which makes the potato smaller, which makes me use potatoes ad infinitum."

'I worry about my grandkids and I help my children financially, but that sets me back too.'

"Your kids go to school and are dozy [from being hungry]... I mean, we don't have that in our family, because I make sure that doesn't happen, but that has an impact on me because then I have got cheap food, which I really hate. Without being disrespectful to my kids, if I didn't have the grandchildren or them to worry about, I'd be rich. I could afford to have the best apples instead of the cheap ones that dry up and go mouldy in two days, but it's not a big deal. It's not a

sacrifice. It's my family, you know. If I didn't have my kids, then I would be able to put £30, £40 worth of fuel in my car. Whereas at the moment I'd put in, you know, £10 at a time and that's got to last me a week."

'I take risks with unsafe food because it is more affordable and my concerns are dismissed because of my skin colour.'

"I've been in the supermarkets before, when I went up and said, 'You got some beef in there and it's bleeding you need to take it out.' They must think 'bloody black people'... you know, straightaway, they see the colour of your skin, and it's like, 'oh my God, here we go' I can't imagine going to some of these upmarket supermarkets and seeing that - you simply wouldn't see it. I'm quite prepared to open up the freezer and take out that other piece of beef, not knowing if any of the blood from other meats leaked into that. I'm quite happy with that because it's only X amount of pounds to buy."

'I don't trust the FSA to protect our interests, because they don't understand how food inequality affects us.'

"I have lactose-free milk and it's expensive but I have to have it because otherwise, I get problems. The lactose-free milk is like £1.45 a pint... And I think well, I've got one that'll last me till Monday. It would be brilliant if the food standards people would employ people to go into ordinary houses and actually see how I'm living and ask me to open up my cupboards and see that most of the stuff is tinned."

Food priorities

- Food justice
- Food Of adequate quality is not affordable for people on low incomes, especially when managing a chronic illness.

Food banks are under increasing pressure

Across the UK, there was a 177% increase in demand for food banks between March 2019 and March 2020, driven by reduction in income, increased basic costs (such as utility bills or caring for parents or children and reduced access to affordable food), exacerbating existing insecurity and vulnerabilities?.

Food banks are predicting a further increase in demand: Universal Credit cuts and rising energy prices have disproportional impact on those already experiencing financial difficulties. This is despite some people being unable to access sufficient help to meet their needs, or being unaware support may be available, or unwilling to access help due to perceived stigma?.

Most common challenges for food banks are: being unable to provide fresh foods and meet dietary needs for example, allergy sufferers; relying on an insufficient, voluntary workforce and continually increasing demand for food provision?.

Food banks, particularly newer, less formal models, are highly localised and the level of services they can provide depends on others for example, local food poverty alliances, informal neighbourhood groups and local businesses?.

Some people may be more vulnerable to food insecurity in the future

Food Hypersensitivity for example: Greater costs and reduced availability of 'free-from' foods compared to standard food items, makes this group more vulnerable to further changes in the affordability and accessibility of food. ?

Northern Ireland for example: Despite facing the highest (joint first with London) grocery prices in the UK, NI households experience some of the lowest disposable incomes in the UK. This makes NI households particularly vulnerable to changes in the affordability of food. ?

North West and North East of England for example: Lower incomes, greater than average unemployment, and greater than average rises in energy costs makes these regions vulnerable to future changes in the affordability of food. ?

Households with children for example: additional living costs associated with children such as larger housing and additional food costs make this group more vulnerable to future changes in the affordability of food.?

People with disabilities for example: Above average difficulty accessing food shops and preparing and cooking food where fine motor skills are required. ?

Low-income households for example: Correlation between low-income areas and food deserts mean that access to food is lower for low-income households. Having less disposable income to spend on food makes these households more exposed to changes in the affordability of food. ?

[Yn ôl i'r brig](#)