

Chapter 7: Food shopping: sustainability and environmental impact

Introduction

In March 2022, the [FSA launched a new 5 year strategy \(2022-2027\)](#). Building on the previous strategy, the FSA's vision has evolved to include 'food is healthier and more sustainable', to account for the growing priorities of dietary health and sustainability for the UK Government, Welsh Government, Northern Ireland Executive, and for consumers.

The [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#) has a broad remit but plays a major role in increasing the sustainability, productivity and resilience of the agriculture, fishing, food and drink sectors; enhancing biosecurity at the border; and raising animal welfare standards.

This chapter provides an overview of respondent knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relating to the sustainability and environmental impact of food including shopping choices and diets. Defra co-funded questions in this chapter which relate to the environmental impact and sustainability of food.

The importance of buying foods with a low environmental impact

Respondents were asked how important it was to buy food which has a low environmental impact. Over three-quarters (78%) of respondents reported that it was important (for example, very important or somewhat important) to them to buy food which has a low environmental impact. Almost 2 in 10 (18%) respondents did not consider it important (i.e., not very important or not at all important [\(footnote 1\)](#)).

The perceived importance placed on buying food which has a low environmental impact varied between different categories of people in the following ways:

- NS-SEC: respondents in some occupational groups (for example, 82% of those in intermediate occupations) and full-time students (78%) were more likely to consider buying food which has a low environmental impact as important compared to those in other occupational groups (for example, 69% of those in lower supervisory and technical occupations) and those who were long term unemployed and/or never worked (68%)
- responsibility for cooking: respondents who were responsible for cooking (79%) were more likely to consider buying food which has a low environmental impact as important compared to those who do not cook (58%)
- responsibility for shopping: respondents who were responsible for shopping (79%) were more likely to consider buying food which has a low environmental impact as important compared to those who never do food shopping (59%)

How often respondents check for information about the environmental impact of food

Respondents were asked how frequently they check for information about the environmental impact of food when purchasing food. Around 2 in 10 (21%) respondents reported that they often checked (for example, always or most of the time) for information about the environmental impact when purchasing food, 45% did this less often (for example, about half of the time, or occasionally) and 29% of respondents reported that they never checked for information about the environmental impact when purchasing food ([footnote 2](#)).

How often respondents checked for information about the environmental impact of food, varied between different categories of people in the following ways:

- annual household income: respondents with an income of £19,000 or below (28%) were more likely to often check for information about the environmental impact of food compared to those who had a higher income, for example, 17% of those with an income of £64,000-£95,999
- food security: respondents with very low food security (34%) were more likely to often check for information about the environmental impact of food compared to those who had high (18%) or marginal (22%) food security
- ethnic group: Asian or British Asian (33%) respondents were more likely to often check for information about the environmental impact of food compared to white (20%) respondents
- food hypersensitivity: respondents with a food allergy (31%) were more likely to often check for information about the environmental impact of food compared to those who did not have a food hypersensitivity (20%)
- responsibility for cooking: respondents who were responsible for cooking (22%) were more likely to often check for information about the environmental impact of food compared to those who do not cook (10%)

How often respondents buy foods with a low environmental impact

Respondents were asked to indicate how often, where possible, they buy food which has a low environmental impact. Almost a third (30%) of respondents often (for example, always or most of the time) buy food which has a low environmental impact and 43% do this less often (for example, about half of the time, or occasionally). Less than 1 in 10 (7%) respondents reported that they never buy food which has a low environmental impact, however almost 2 in 10 (19%) respondents do not know how often they buy food which has a low environmental impact ([footnote 3](#)).

How often respondents bought food which had a low environmental impact, where possible, varied between different categories of people in the following ways:

- age group: older adults were more likely to have bought food which has a low environmental impact compared to younger adults. For example, 39% of those aged 75 years or older bought food which has a low environmental impact compared to 26% of those aged 16-24 years
- annual household income: the likelihood that respondents bought food which has a low environmental impact did not vary by income. For example, 31% of those with an income of £19,000 or below bought food which has a low environmental impact compared to 33% of those with an income of £96,000 and over**
- food security: the likelihood that respondents bought food which has a low environmental impact did not vary by level of food security. For example, 29% of those with high food security bought food which has a low environmental impact compared to 35% of those with very low food security**
- food hypersensitivity: respondents with a food intolerance (44%) were more likely to have bought food which has a low environmental impact compared to those who do not have a food hypersensitivity (28%)

- responsibility for cooking: respondents who were responsible for cooking (31%) were more likely to have bought food which has a low environmental impact compared to those who do not cook (17%)

Attitudes toward information about a products environmental impact

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed that food products show enough information about their environmental impact. Almost a quarter (24%) of respondents agreed (for example, strongly agree or agree) that products show enough information about their environmental impact, however around a third (34%) of respondents disagreed (for example, strongly disagree or disagree). Almost 1 in 10 (11%) respondents reported that they do not know whether products show enough information about their environmental impact ([footnote 4](#)).

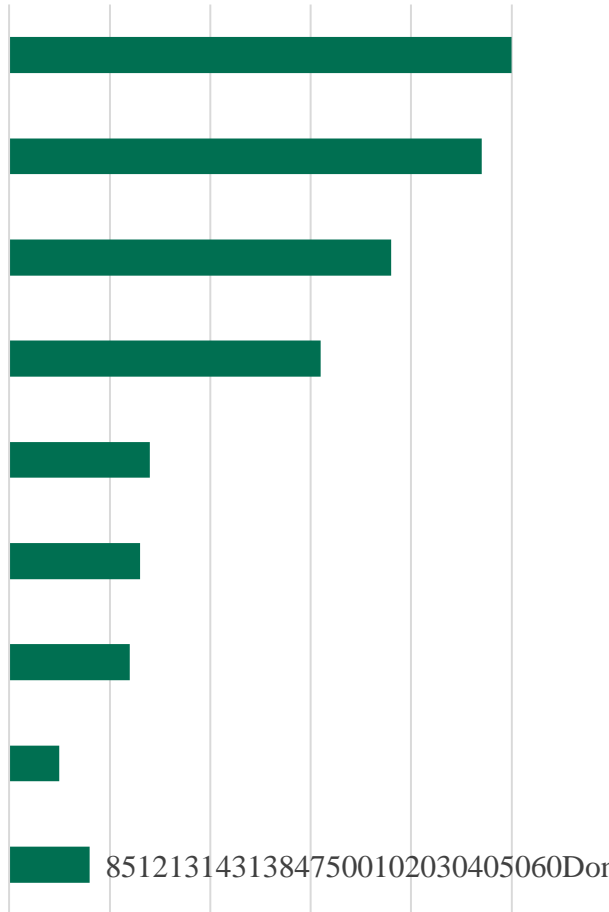
Perceptions of factors which contribute to sustainable diets and shopping choices

Figure 23: Factors which respondents thought contribute most to a sustainable diet

Change to table and accessible view

Change to chart view

Factors contributing to a sustainable diet



Factors contributing to a sustainable diet	Percentage of respondents
Don't know	8
Eating a pescatarian diet	5
Eating/drinking less dairy	12
Eating a vegan diet	13
Eating a vegetarian diet	14
Eating less meat, poultry or fish	31
Eating more fruit and/or vegetables	38

Factors contributing to a sustainable diet	Percentage of respondents
Minimising food waste	47
Eating less processed food	50

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 4

Respondents were asked, from a list of options, what they thought contributes most to someone having a sustainable diet. Half of respondents thought that eating less processed food (50%) and 47% thought that minimising food waste contributed most to someone having a sustainable diet. Around a third of respondents thought that eating more fruit and/or vegetables (38%), and eating less meat, poultry, or fish (31%) contributed most to a sustainable diet. Fewer respondents thought that eating a vegetarian (14%) or vegan (13%) diet or consuming less dairy (12%) contributed most to a sustainable diet. Almost 1 in 10 (8%) respondents reported that they did not know what contributed most to someone having a sustainable diet (Figure 23) [\(footnote 5\)](#).

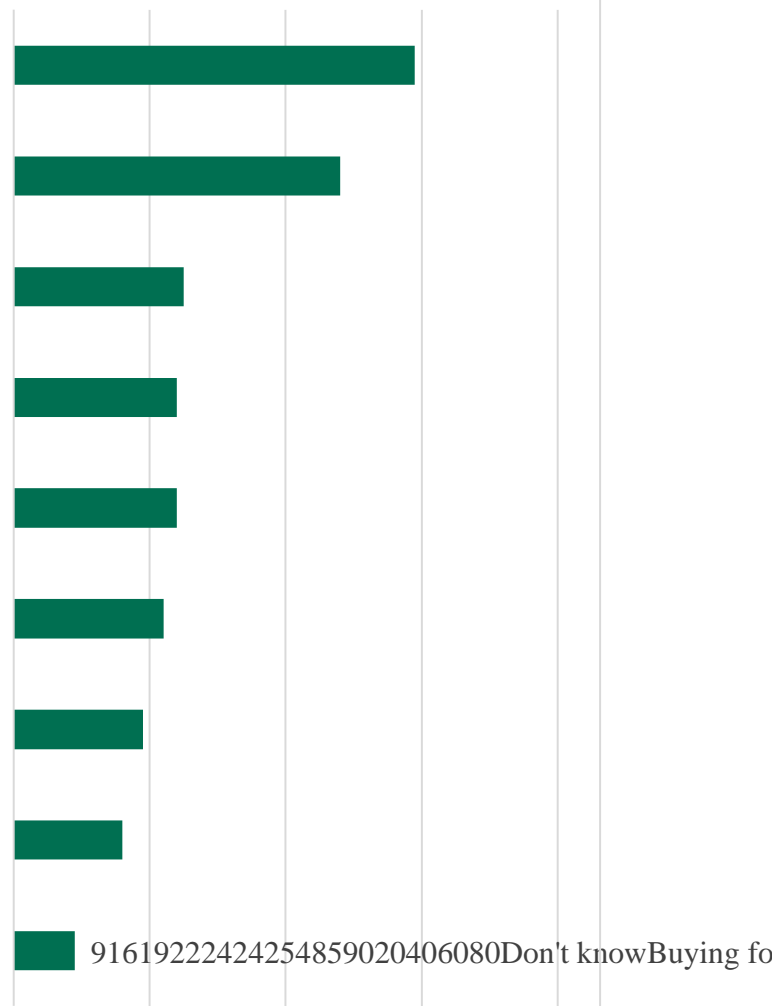
Perceptions of what contributes to sustainable shopping choices

Figure 24: What respondents thought contributes most to sustainable shopping choices

Change to table and accessible view

Change to chart view

Factors contributing to a sustainable shopping choices



Factors contributing to sustainable shopping choices	Percentage of respondents
Don't know	9
Buying foods grown organically	16
Buying sustainably sourced fish	19
Buying animal products with high welfare standards	22
Buying Fairtrade products	24

Factors contributing to sustainable shopping choices	Percentage of respondents
Buying foods that have been produced with minimal water usage and/or deforestation	24
Growing fruit and/or vegetables instead of buying them	25
Buying foods with minimal or no packaging	48
Buying locally produced food or food that is in season	59

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 4

Respondents were asked, from a list of options, what they thought contributed most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices. Almost 6 in 10 (59%) respondents thought that buying locally produced food or food that is in season contributed most. Around half of respondents thought that buying foods with minimal or no packaging (48%) contributed most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices. Around a quarter of respondents reported that growing fruit and/or vegetables instead of buying them (25%), buying foods that have been produced with minimal water usage and/or minimal deforestation (24%), buying Fairtrade products (24%) and buying animal products with high welfare standards (22%), contributed most. Almost 1 in 10 (9%) respondents reported that they did not know what contributed most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices (Figure 24) ([footnote 6](#)).

1. Question: How important is it to you to buy food which has a low environmental impact?
Responses: Very important, Somewhat important, Not very important, Not at all important, Don't know. Base= 4786, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire.
2. Question: When purchasing food, how often do you check for information on environmental impact? Responses: Always, Most of the time, About half the time, Occasionally, Never, Don't know. Base= 4786, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire.
3. Question: How often do you buy food which has a low environmental impact, where possible? Responses: Always, Most of the time, About half the time, Occasionally, Never, Don't know. Base= 4786, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire.
4. Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that food products show enough information about their environmental impact? Responses: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither

agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't know. Base= 4786, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire.

5. Question: Which of the following do you think contributes most to someone having a sustainable diet? Responses: Eating a vegetarian diet, Eating a pescatarian diet, Eating a vegan diet, Eating less meat or poultry or fish, Eating/drinking less dairy, Eating less processed food, Eating more fruit and/or vegetables, Minimising food waste, None of these, Don't know. Base= 4786, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire.

6. Question: Which of the following do you think contributes most to someone making sustainable food shopping choices? Responses: Buying animal products with high welfare standards, Buying fair trade products, Buying locally produced food or food that is in season, Buying foods with minimal or no packaging, Buying foods that have been produced with minimal water usage and/or minimal deforestation, Buying foods grown organically, Buying sustainably sourced fish, Growing fruit and/or vegetables instead of buying them, None of these, Don't know. Base= 4786, all online respondents, and those answering the 'Eating at Home' postal questionnaire.