

# Annex A: Discussion guide

## Research objectives

The FSA is interested in exploring consumers' perceived risks of purchasing food from a range of online businesses including online supermarkets, food delivery companies, online/social media marketplaces and food sharing apps, across higher and lower-risk foods.

Note: this discussion guide is intended to inform the discussion in each focus group. Questions may not be asked in the order below, and not every question will be asked in each focus group.

## Section 1: Introductions

5 minutes

### Objectives covered:

- introduce participants to the research
- clarify that groups will be audio-recorded.

Introductions, setting aims and ground rules for discussion

Moderator introduction:

- thank participant for taking part.
- introduce self and Ipsos MORI.
- explain purpose of the discussion:
- this research is being carried out on behalf of the Food Standards Agency. They are interested in understanding consumers' attitudes to buying food sold online, and what influences people's decisions when doing this.
- discussion will last 90 minutes.
- set ground rules: no right or wrong answers, interested in hearing everyone's views. Please be respectful of others. May need to move you on in the interest of time, not because we are not interested in what you are saying.
- we will be audio-recording this discussion in line with MRS Code of Conduct. The recording will be stored on our secure servers and no one outside of the research team will have access to this.
- following these discussion groups, we will be writing up our findings into a report for the FSA which will be published. However, no findings will be attributed to you and we will not include your name in any reports.
- any questions?
- introduce note taker
- ask if everyone is happy for the recording to begin
- **turn on recording** and record consent that everyone is happy to participate in the interview, that they understand the aims of the research, that their participation is voluntary

and that their responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

## **Section 2: Icebreaker exercise exploring spontaneous and top-of mind reactions to topic**

15 minutes

### **Objectives covered:**

- Icebreaker to introduce participants to each other

### **Introduction and warm-up exercise**

Participant introduction:

#### **Go around and ask for:**

- first name
- where and who they live with
- where they most commonly buy food from (online or offline)
- moderator to probe in turn why their favourite place, if not spontaneously mentioned

I'd like to start by asking you what comes to mind when you think of buying food online.

If not mentioned already: What sorts of:

- websites come to mind?
- food delivery companies?
- apps?
- food sharing platforms? (for example Olio or Too Good to Go)
- any other ways in which people get food online? (If not spontaneously mentioned: online marketplaces? (for example Facebook Marketplace, Nextdoor, Amazon)

#### **If any participants are unaware of particular platforms (for example, Olio/Too Good to Go) Moderator to briefly explain what these are:**

Too Good To Go and Olio are food sharing apps which aim to reduce food waste. Through Too Good To Go you can buy food from local cafes, restaurants and shops which hasn't sold at the end of the day.

Olio has a similar model, but also connects neighbours with each other, as well as local businesses, so that surplus food can be shared. This includes sharing surplus home-grown fruit and vegetables, groceries in your fridge if you were going away, or food nearing its sell-by date in local shops. To pick up the food you select through the app and arrange a pick-up via private messaging.

#### **Move on to more general discussion in group:**

- why might people choose to buy food online?
- how often do you buy food online for you or your family to eat in a typical month?
- has this changed in any way since the pandemic? If so, in what ways?
- have you seen any adverts online, or social media posts promoting buying food products online (for example, promotions by influencers/celebrities)? If so, has this influenced your thinking/behaviour in any way?
- have you ever bought food online after seeing any adverts online, or social media posts promoting products?

For groups who buy online:

- are there any particular reasons why you choose to buy food online?
- who are you buying for?
- what kinds of food do you tend to buy online?
- what kinds of platforms do you use to buy food online?

**Probe whether local online delivery service/website, or one of the 'big three' online ordering and delivery services**

- how do you tend to pay for food online?
- debit/credit card on website/app/platform
- any reason why use this method specifically?
- cash on collection?
- why/why not?
- is the way you pay for food bought online different to the way you make other online purchases?
- what kinds of things are important to you when buying food online, to make sure what you buy is safe to eat?

**Probe if needed:** comments/reviews of online food? FHRS scores? Allergen information?  
Anything else?

- how often do you consider these? Why/why not?
- is this the same for all foods, or more important for specific food in particular?
- what kind of information do you need when buying food online?
- does this change for particular foods?
- does this change when buying food for certain people/occasions?
- how often are you able to get all of this information?
- if you are unable to get this information, does this have any impact on your decisions?
- what sorts of things do you think might stop other people from buying food online?

For groups 1, 5 and 9 (who do not buy food online)

If not already mentioned:

- what sorts of things do you think are stopping you from buying food online?
- are there any reasons why you/other people may feel more worried about buying food online?

## **Section 3: Exploring participant behaviour, levels of trust and confidence in buying food online**

15 minutes

**Objectives covered:**

- explore perceived risk when buying food online, with specific reference to authenticity, food safety and hygiene and food delivery
- understand whether perceived risk is influenced by types of foods and/or types of platforms and reasons for this
- explore current behaviour of those who do buy food online, including what information they require, and methods of payment, and how often this is available
- discuss factors which influence online food purchasing behaviour, including hypersensitivities/caring responsibilities/social media and any (perceived/actual) barriers to

purchasing food online

### **Trust and confidence in buying food online**

I'd like to now ask you a bit about levels of trust.

How much, if at all, do you trust that food that is bought online will be safe to eat? (for those who don't buy online. Ask them to think about this in abstract, rather than something they do themselves)

How does this compare to when buying food in person? What do you think is different?

Does this change depending on the platform food is purchased through?

#### **Probe:**

- ? Online supermarkets
  - ? Online ordering and delivery companies, such as Uber Eats, Deliveroo and Just Eat)
  - ? Online marketplaces/social media
  - ? Food sharing apps?
- to what extent would you trust that food bought online would match the online description, on arrival?
  - how much, if at all, would you trust that appropriate food hygiene and food safety standards have been followed, when preparing food to be sold online?
  - does this differ depending on the type of food? In what way?
  - and what about where online you buy the food – does that make any difference, or not?
  - how much do you trust that food bought online is transported and delivered to consumers safely?

**Probe:** reasons for views, including online vs. offline purchasing  
What kinds of risks may be involved here?

#### **For groups who buy online:**

- how confident do you feel when buying food online?
- does this depend on the platform you use to buy food through, in any way?
- what if the business you bought through was cash-only?
- does this change in any way when you buy food for yourself, vs. for other people?
- are there any foods you feel less confident about buying? Why do you think that is?
- are there any foods you wouldn't buy online? If so, for what reason?
- what about pet food?
- if not already mentioned: Have you ever had any problems with the quality, or safety of food to eat, when buying food online?
- did this result in any changes in your decisions/behaviour?

For groups 1, 5 and 9 (who do not buy food online)

- what do you think other people think about to make sure the food they buy online is safe to eat?
- **Probe if needed:** comments/reviews of online food? FHRS scores? Allergen information? Anything else?
- how often do you think people consider these? Why/why not?
- if you were to, what sort of foods might you think about buying food online?
- are there any situations/occasions where you might consider buying food online?

## **Section 4: Presenting participants with different online food purchasing scenarios to prompt further reflection and**

## **discussion, including action taken where food was not suitable to eat**

35 minutes

### **Objectives covered:**

Further exploration of objectives above as applied to scenarios of particular foods and platforms, including understanding participants' course of action where food purchased online is not suitable to eat/as expected

### **Scenarios activity**

I have some different scenarios showing different ways in which people may buy food online that I'd like to show you to get your thoughts on. Please think about the way of buying food online, and not just what food is being bought in these scenarios.

Moderator to show each scenario, for each ask:

- any initial thoughts about this scenario?
- would you feel happy to buy this food in this way? Why/why not?
- what would you be thinking about if buying food in this way, to ensure the food would be safe to eat?
- is there anything about buying food in this way which worries you?
- o Would this change depending on the type of food? If so, in what way?
- if you ordered this item through this platform and when it arrived it was not as expected, or not suitable for you to eat, what action would you take?

Moderators to steer conversation away from late deliveries/being overcharged - focus on food safety and quality

- who would you contact?
- what would you expect their response to be?
- would your response differ depending on the type of food which was not suitable to eat?

## **Section 5: Exploring participants awareness of any current regulation of online food, and thoughts on what process should look like**

15 minutes.

### **Objectives covered:**

- explore awareness of controls and regulations currently in place to regulate the online food purchasing industry across different platforms
- explore participants' views on what regulations and complaints processes should look like

### **Awareness of and thoughts on controls and regulation**

Now I'd like to ask you about what you think about regulation for food sold online more broadly.

### **Moderator to show timeline on slide 6 as prompt**

Are you aware of any measures in place to regulate food purchased online?

**Probe:** Across different platforms? Any differences/similarities with food purchased in person?

Who would you expect to be responsible for regulating food that is bought and sold online?

### **Explore spontaneous responses first**

Who would you trust to be responsible for this?

#### **Probe if needed:**

- the platform/website
- the seller (if on online marketplace/food sharing app)
- the delivery company
- the Food Standards Agency
- anyone else?
- explore reasons why/why not

#### **If not already mentioned**

- What measures should be in place at the ordering online stage?
- Any information people need included here as standard?
- What about in the packaging and transportation stage? What regulations should suppliers/sellers/delivery companies be adhering to?
- If the food you bought arrives and is unsafe to eat, or is not as described at purchase, should there be anyone else involved in dealing with any complaints?

## **Section 6: Wrap-up**

### **5 minutes**

#### **Objectives covered:**

To sum up the discussion and thank participants for their time.

### **Wind down and close**

- Is there anything you have learnt today which might make you change the way you think about buying food online?
- Is there anything else you would like to mention about buying food online, that we have not covered, or that you would like to go back to?
- Thank you for your time today, the findings from our research will be written up into a report for the Food Standards Agency. They will use these findings to inform policies and the development of new regulatory approaches. These will be published but your name will not be included in any reports we write.

### **Signposting stimulus**

If anyone has any questions about buying food online safely, you can find out more here. I'm going to leave this slide up, so you can take a note of their names and details if of interest. Please let me know if you would like me to send you a copy of this.

Thank and Close.