Consumer perceptions of precision breeding: Devolved nation summaries

Wales

Context of the Bill in Wales

Under the UK Internal Market Act (2020) market access principle of mutual recognition precision bred products authorised in England may be sold directly to consumers in Wales. Therefore, we have included Welsh consumers in this research. However, businesses in Wales would not be permitted to produce precision bred goods to sell in Wales themselves.

Difference in quantitative findings for Wales

Slightly fewer respondents in Wales think precision bred foods should be available for sale in the UK (47% vs 50% of the UK total) and more think it should not be (32% vs 29% of the UK total). However, as with the UK total, Welsh views are not generally strong, with 13% saying these products should ‘definitely’ be available and 34% thinking they ‘probably’ should.

There were no major differences on acceptability of plants between Welsh respondents and the UK total. When it came to precision breeding in animals, the same proportion of Welsh respondents thought it acceptable (35%), but a higher proportion thought it unacceptable to precision breed animals (37% vs 33% of the UK total).

Welsh respondents were more likely than the UK total to expect negative impacts on welfare of animals (36% vs 32% UK total), and on small scale farmers if they cannot access precision breeding (54% vs 50% of UK total).

People in Wales are particularly open to eating precision bred food if the food meant certain potential benefits compared to UK total: two in three say they would eat a precision bred product if it had health benefits (69% vs 65% UK total), was better for the environment (67% vs 64% UK total), improved animal welfare (70% vs 64% UK total), was safer for people with allergies (67% vs 64% UK total), was cheaper (64% vs 61% UK total) or more resilient to changing climates (65% vs 60% UK total).

Qualitative findings particularly notable in Wales

In workshops, Welsh groups spoke frequently about ‘unnaturalness’ of precision breeding or seemed uncomfortable with too much change from traditional crops. Welsh workshop groups often referred to recent food scandals, such as horse meat and BSE (Mad Cow disease). They also spoke often about potential positive and negative impacts for small farmers.

Welsh groups seemed particularly on the fence about precision breeding in Workshop 1, expressing uncertainty about the balance of risks and benefits. By Workshop 2 several Welsh

groups were leaning towards more positive but were still very cautious.

As discussed in Chapter ‘Views on the bill and regulatory framework’, Welsh participants had concerns about the Bill and regulations being too England focused. They worried that Wales would not have as much input into safety regulations if the Bill is England only, and shared frustration at being impacted by decisions made by England’s government with little say as a devolved Nation.

“The Welsh or Scots have got no input into the safety of the product, we've got to rely on what English people are telling us?” **(Wales, Workshop 2)**

There were particular concerns about the impact on the Welsh farming industry, which they expected may be at a disadvantage to English farmers who are allowed to grow precision bred crops. Participants expressed that this may well lead them to avoid buying precision bred foods in order to support Welsh farms.

Some Welsh participants argued that it could save Wales money and time to collaborate and adopt this Bill alongside England, especially if it is likely that the Welsh government will repeat the process later and align with English Bill and regulations anyway.

Northern Ireland

Context in Northern Ireland:

Precision bred organisms authorised in England will not be permitted to be sold in Northern Ireland.?Northern Ireland continues to comply with EU Law under the current terms of the Protocol on?Ireland/Northern Ireland, and any precision bred organism would need to be authorised under the current EU framework for GMOs in order to be legally marketed in Northern Ireland.?We have included consumers from Northern Ireland in this research to understand their views on precision bred foods should products be sold in Northern Ireland in future.

Difference in quantitative findings for Northern Ireland:

Note: As fewer interviews were conducted in Northern Ireland (256), this means we are unable to comment on significant differences by demographics.

Respondents in Northern Ireland were more likely to say they have never heard of precision breeding (78% vs 75% UK total). They were also less positive about safety of precision bred foods: around two in five (42%) people in Northern Ireland think precision bred food products are safe to eat (vs 50% of UK total), whilst around three in ten (28%) say they are unsafe (vs 22% of UK total).

The strength of these attitudes also varies compared to the UK total. Confidence in safety is weaker in Northern Ireland with just 9% presuming it would be “very safe” (vs 13% of UK total), and concern stronger with 11% saying ‘very unsafe’ (vs 16% of UK total).

People in Northern Ireland are slightly less confident about current food safety, with 77% saying they are confident (vs 83% of UK total). Northern Ireland respondents are also less confident that if precision bred food became available to buy in the UK that it would be safe (51% vs 56% of UK total), but still a majority.

People in Northern Ireland are slightly less likely to think it would be acceptable to use the precision breeding of plants in food production (46% vs 54% of UK total), and more likely to say it would be unacceptable (20% vs 16% of UK total).

As with UK total, NI respondents are divided over whether the precision breeding of animals is acceptable. People in Northern Ireland are more likely than average to say that it is unacceptable (37% vs 33% UK total) and less likely to say it is acceptable (30% vs 35% UK total). However, due to the base size in Northern Ireland, this difference cannot be claimed to be statistically significant.

Northern Ireland respondents are less positive than UK total about the likelihood of positive impact from precision breeding on:

- Affordability of food: 34% positive (vs 38% UK total)
- The environment: 34% positive (vs 36% UK total)
- How nutritious precision bred food products are: 25% positive (vs 34% UK total)
- The health of people eating precision bred food products: 19% positive (vs 29% UK total)
- How precision bred food tastes: 18% positive (vs 23% UK total)

Those in Northern Ireland had stronger negative views about the potential impact on the welfare of animals bred using precision breeding techniques: 37% said this would have a negative impact (vs. 32% of UK total), and 19% said it would have a positive impact (vs 25% of UK total). Northern Ireland respondents were also more likely than the UK total to say it will have a negative impact on small scale farmers if they cannot access precision breeding (55% vs 50% of UK total).

Three quarters of Northern Ireland respondents (74%) said it is important to know if a food item they were buying had been precision bred. This is slightly less than the UK total (77%).

On willingness to eat precision bred foods, Northern Ireland respondents were slightly less willing to eat some sub-categories:

- Precision bred cereals, grains or flour (54% vs 59% UK total)
- Fruit or vegetables (52% vs 59% UK total)
- Processed foods (53% vs 56% UK total)
- Dairy products (49% vs 52% UK total).
- Precision bred meat (41% vs 44% UK total)

Northern Ireland respondents willingness to eat precision bred food due to specific benefits was generally in line with UK total, but with slightly softer trends: they would still be likely to eat a precision bred product if it was better for the environment, but less so than the total UK (61% vs 64% UK total), also if tasted better (58% vs 62% UK total), was cheaper (57% vs 61% UK total) or more resilient to changing climates (56% vs 60% UK total).

Qualitative findings particularly notable in Northern Ireland:

In workshops, Northern Ireland groups often spoke about distrust in large food corporations, agricultural industry, and politicians. They shared their concerns about how these bodies may prevent cost benefits being passed onto the consumer, or may interfere with decision making and regulation to further their profit or political goals.

As with Wales, Northern Ireland groups often referred to recent food scandals, particularly horse meat and BSE (Mad Cow disease).

As discussed in Chapter ‘Views on the bill and regulatory framework’, groups discussed concerns about how an England-only bill could impact Northern Ireland due to inconsistent standards between nations. They worried that inconsistent precision breeding rules could complicate matters at the border but were also keen to see existing standards in Northern Ireland maintained. There seemed to be trust in EU standards and decisions regarding food, and precision breeding.

“Who know what's going to happen with this protocol thing. Right now, Northern Ireland is in line with the EU... If the UK standards were lower than the EU standards then they potentially wouldn't be allowed in Northern Ireland” **(Workshop 2, Northern Ireland)**

Scotland (survey only)

Context of the Bill in Scotland

Under the UK Internal Market Act (2020) the market access principle of mutual recognition allows for precision bred products authorised in England to be sold directly to consumers in Scotland. Therefore, we have included Scottish consumers in this research. However, businesses in Scotland would not be permitted to produce precision bred goods to sell in Scotland themselves. Scotland was included in the quantitative research only as FSS plan to run their own qualitative research.

Difference in quantitative findings for Scotland

Scottish respondents were more likely than the UK total to say precision breeding will have a negative impact on small scale farmers if they cannot access precision breeding (55% vs 50% UK total). There were no other Scotland specific trends on the benefits and negatives of precision breeding.

People in Scotland are slightly less likely to say it would be important to know if a food product they were buying had been precision bred (75% vs 77% of UK total), however still a clear majority.

Scottish respondents were particularly open to certain potential benefits compared to UK total: they would eat a precision bred product if it had health benefits (68% vs 65% UK total), improved animal welfare (67% vs 64% UK total) or was more resilient to changing climates (63% vs 60% UK total).