Consumer Insights Tracker – Monthly Bulletin (January 2023)

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 18 of the survey (conducted 13 – 15 January 2023).

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).

Key Findings

Food Affordability and Food Insecurity

In January 2023:

- 15% of participants reported that they had used a food bank or food charity at least once in the last month. This is not significantly different to the previous month (15%, December 2022), and remains in line with the year prior (13%, January 2022). The latest figure (15%, January 2023) is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (8%).
- 25% 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 not

significantly different to the previous month (26%, December 2022) or the year prior (23%, January 2022). The latest figure (25%, January 2023) is significantly higher than when tracking began in April 2020 (18%).
- 29% of participants reported feeling worried about being able to afford food in the next month. This is significantly lower than the previous month (34%, December 2022). The latest figure (29%, January 2023) is not significantly different to the year prior (27%, January 2022), or to when tracking began in April 2020 (28%).
- 81% of participants reported feeling concerned about food prices. This is significantly lower than the previous month (84%, December 2022). The latest figure (81%, January 2023) is significantly higher than in the year prior (76%, January 2022).
- 69% of participants reported that their shopping had 'got more expensive' in the past week. This is significantly lower than the previous month (75%, December 2022) but is significantly higher than the year prior (61%, January 2022).

From September 2022, participants were asked if any of the following applied to them, at least once, in the last month. In January 2023:

- 22% of participants reported that they had eaten cold food as they could not afford to cook hot food (not significantly different to the previous month; 22%, December 2022).
- 25% of participants reported that they could not afford their essential food shopping (not significantly different to the previous month; 27%, December 2022).
- 30% of participants reported that they had eaten food past its use-by date because they couldn't afford to buy more food (not significantly different to the previous month; 29%, December 2022).
- 30% of participants reported that they could not afford to eat a healthy balanced diet (not significantly different to the previous month; 31%, December 2022).

Food Availability

- In January 2023, 30% 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 (35%, December 2022), but is not significantly different to the same month last year (29%, January 2022) or 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 January 2023:

- 16% of participants turned off a fridge and/or freezer containing food (not significantly different to the previous month; 15%, December 2022).
- 24% of participants changed the settings on their fridge and/or freezer so that food is kept at a warmer temperature (not significantly different to the previous month; 23%, December 2022).
- 25% of participants lowered the cooking temperature for food (not significantly different to the previous month; 24%, December 2022).
- 27% of participants reduced the length of time that food is cooked for (not significantly different to the previous month; 25%, December 2022).
- 60% 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 (not significantly different to the previous month; 61%, December 2022).

Concerns about the Food Industry

In January 2023:

- 54% of participants reported feeling concerned about the healthiness of the food in their personal diet. This is not significantly different to the previous month (55%, December 2022) or to the same month last year (57%, January 2022).
- 56% of participants reported feeling concerned about animal welfare in the food industry. This is not significantly different to the previous month (59%, December 2022) but is significantly lower than the same month last year (60%, January 2022).
- 56% of participants reported feeling concerned about sustainability/the impact of food production on the environment. This is the same proportion as in the previous month (56%, December 2022) and in the same month last year (56%, January 2022).

In January 2023:

- 38% of participants felt concerned about the safety of food produced in the UK, compared to 50% who felt concerned about the safety of food imported from outside the UK
- 40% of participants felt concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK, compared to 50% 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 65% in January 2023. This is in line with the previous month (65%, December 2022), but is significantly lower than the year prior (70%, January 2022).

In January 2023:

- 76% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure that food is safe to eat. This proportion is not significantly different to the previous month (76%, December 2022) but is significantly lower than the year prior (January 2022, 79%).
- 70% of participants felt confident that those involved in the food supply chain in the UK ensure food is of a high quality. This proportion is not significantly different to the previous month (69%) but is significantly lower than the year prior (January 2022, 73%).
- 52% 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 is not significantly different to the previous month (49%, December 2022) but is significantly lower than a year prior (January 2022, 59%).
- 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 is not significantly different to the previous month (67%) but is significantly lower than a year prior (January 2022, 72%).

Confidence and Trust in the FSA

58% of participants reported that they trust the FSA to do its job in January 2023. This figure is significantly lower than the same month last year (January 2022, 62%) but is in line with the previous month (December 2022, 59%).

In January 2023, most participants felt confident that the FSA:

- Can be relied upon to protect the public from food-related risks (72%)
- Is committed to communicating openly with the public about food-related risks (66%)
- Takes appropriate action if a food-related risk is identified (73%)

Each of these measures has remained broadly stable since tracking began in November 2021, although several measures are showing signs of decline. Further monitoring is required to

understand this trend.

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.