

Consumer Insights Tracker: Chapter 9

conclusions

The following conclusions provide an overview of the main themes and findings discussed in this report.

Over a third of participants (35%) are concerned about the affordability of food in March 2023, significantly higher than March 2022 (31%). Concern peaked in September 2022 (40%). Furthermore, the findings indicate that reported levels of food insecurity, as measured by reports of cutting down or skipping meals and using a food bank or food charity, have significantly increased from March 2022 to March 2023. Reflecting the pattern for food affordability, several measures of food insecurity peaked in Autumn 2022. These figures have since declined, although reported food insecurity is still higher than in March 2022.

Consumers have adopted measures to reduce energy bills and save money linked to food storage and preparation. Trends in these reported behaviours follow a similar pattern to food insecurity generally, having declined or stabilised since Autumn 2022.

Demographic analysis shows higher levels of food insecurity for households with children, larger and single person households, younger people, those in work, and those with health conditions. This general pattern of demographic differences has remained consistent over time.

The demographic analysis also highlights that some groups are more worried about food affordability in March 2023 than they were in March 2022. This includes those from households without children, individuals aged 25-34, males, and people in work.

Concern about food availability remained stable over the past year, with a third (34%) of participants expressing worry in March 2023 (36% in March 2022). In March 2023, 65% of participants reported experiencing unavailable food items, the highest figure since tracking began. The most commonly reported unavailable food items were fresh vegetables, eggs, fresh fruit, fresh milk, and bread.

Food prices have consistently been the top concern for participants over the past year, with 86% expressing concern in March 2023, an increase from 81% in March 2022. Concerns about availability or shortages have steadily risen since March 2022, with 63% saying they are concerned in March 2023, significantly higher than the 12-month average (59%). Other concerns, such as sustainability, the healthiness of food, and animal welfare have also increased since March 2022.

Confidence in the food supply chain in the UK has declined since the tracker began, reaching its lowest level in March 2023 (63%). More specifically, confidence in the supply chain ensuring affordable food options for everyone has fallen from 56% in March 2022 to 49% in March 2023, and confidence in the quality of food has decreased from 75% in March 2022 to 70% in March 2023. Confidence in the safety of the food supply chain has remained stable over the past 12 months (79% in March 2022 and 78% in March 2023).

There is continued and high public trust in the FSA's commitment to open communication with the public about food-related risks and taking appropriate action when a food-related risk has been identified. While also high, confidence in the FSA's ability to protect the public from food-related risks has fallen slightly, as has trust in the FSA to 'make sure food is safe and is what it says it is'.