

Food in a Pandemic report published

[The Food in a Pandemic report](#), commissioned by the FSA and produced by Demos as part of Renew Normal: The People's Commission on Life after Covid, looks to understand how a new food environment created during the pandemic has impacted the public's behaviours and preferences. The research included: a nationally representative survey of 10,069 UK adults, a nationally representative online deliberative method called Polis with 1,006 UK respondents, a series of four deliberative workshops, and an open access survey of 911 adults.

Key findings on the public's experience during the pandemic

Food insecurity

The report shows that people have stepped in to help prevent new forms of food insecurity caused by people self-isolating by offering informal forms of support such as shopping for others

Findings also show there is a public appetite for the government to take action to help feed those without the means to feed themselves. People also tend to be more supportive of preventative actions for food insecurity, such as ensuring well-paid jobs are available to all. Just under two thirds (63%) agreed in the Polis that 'it is the government's responsibility to make sure no-one goes hungry'.

UK food supply

It's reported a significant proportion of the population have bought food more locally or grown more food during the pandemic, reflecting a wider move towards individual self-sufficiency. Many of those who have made this move expect it to continue after the pandemic.

78% of those surveyed supported the UK keeping its current food quality standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market. A similar proportion (82%) also supported maintaining the UK's current animal welfare standards, when presented with the same trade-off against prices and competitiveness.

Diet and eating habits

There has been a complex shift in people's diets during Covid-19, with more home cooking. Although a third (32%) of respondents in the poll reported eating more healthy main meals, a third (33%) ate more unhealthy snacks.

Some of the restrictions and public health advice, such as stay at home, might have encouraged more healthy eating. Those who have cooked more or eaten healthier main meals tend to expect this change to continue. However, this is likely to be somewhat dependent on the other changes, such as continued flexible working.

Emily Miles, Chief Executive of the FSA, said:

'It's clear from this research that our experiences of food have diverged widely during the pandemic.

'While some have seen eating habits improve, and potentially made lifelong improvements to their diets, others have struggled to feed themselves and their families.

'All of us in government must now reflect on what this means for the future of food and public health.'

Rose Lasko-Skinner, Senior Researcher at Demos and co-author of the report, said:

'Our research highlights three key shifts in people's eating and consumption habits during the pandemic. The first is an unprecedented rise in food insecurity caused by new physical and financial barriers to buying food as a result of the pandemic. The second is a potential improvement in eating habits for those who have had more free time and spent more time at home. And the final shift is a new consumer consciousness, with people having wasted less food and bought and shopped more locally.'

The FSA's Research

The Food in a Pandemic report is the latest research in the FSA's growing evidence base on consumer issues in relation to food. The first wave of our new Food and You 2 survey which collects information on the public's self-reported knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours regarding food safety, as well as food supply and food insecurity, is also due to be published on Friday 19 March.

Read the report

The full report is available in our [research section](#).

Notes to editors

This report draws on a broad set of methodological approaches, which provide qualitative and quantitative data about people's experiences of food during the pandemic and their preferences for the future of the system.

Four main methodologies were used:

1. a series of four deliberative online workshops with 30 participants
2. a nationally representative poll of 10,069 UK adults
3. an open-access survey with 911 respondents
4. A nationally representative Polis, an online deliberative research method, with 1006 UK adults