

Stories from Wales: The Public's Interests, Needs and Concerns Around Food

Stories about UK Public Interests, Needs and Concerns around Food from people living in Wales

Conducted for the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland by Bright Harbour, in partnership with Esposito Research & Strategy and AndGood



Preface

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) commissioned Bright Harbour to explore the public wider interests around food - the interests that the public want represented and protected on their behalf.

Research explored the views of both the 'general public' as well as groups that are traditionally less heard by policy-makers - drawing on qualitative research with 95 participants and a nationally representative quantitative survey of 6175 respondents. Research took place across the UK, including in Wales. The full findings from this research have been reported separately.

The 'stories' in this booklet represent the views and experiences of people from Wales who took part in the wider interests research. They are not 'personas' - but rather a selection of quotes and other materials from real individuals. They offer a chance for policy-makers to hear from the UK public directly, and see how some of the issues explored in the main reporting are felt and experienced by everyday people.

The stories included here were selected to provide a cross-section of attitudes and priorities around food, and are broadly representative of the needs and interests reported in the research. The voices of people who are often less heard by policymakers have been boosted (e.g., people with health conditions; people on lower incomes; younger people; ethnic minorities; older people). They should not be used to assess scale of interest around a given interest/concern - overall public priorities - or be viewed as the 'only' public interests emerging from research.

Note: All names have been changed and people's choice of favourite food has been used as their last name

Sarah Steak

- Age: 40-59
- Gender, ethnicity: Female, White British
- Household: Parent to neurodivergent children
- Income and Education: C1/C2, Working full time, GCSE/ O Levels
- Health: Autistic with some sensory issues
- Location: Wales-Cardiff (Rural)

Food priorities:

- Looking for convenience and routine while also trying to provide healthy options for her children

Food system feelings:

- "I find it so hard with food sometimes. I feel that I don't have much control. I sometimes find it difficult to make a choice so I order takeaway. I eat from the same restaurant and order the same items. I know it is not healthy or value for money but it is easier than stressing about prep, choices or having to go to the supermarket."

Being autistic makes food shopping more difficult for me.

"Supermarkets are a very stressful situation. To enable me to choose optimal healthy food, I need to see/feel/smell foods. This is difficult for me due to being on the spectrum and time spent in the supermarket is limited and unhealthy convenience foods are easily accessible. Noise, lights, crowds, choices all have an effect on me - sensory overload."

I feel like I'm having to make sacrifices to provide healthy options.

"I have a very rigid routine with as little change as possible. I do however try to make healthier choices as an example to my child. I would choose to give my children the healthier option above myself, as it can cost more. With myself and children being picky eaters I try and offer as many healthy options as possible. I

worry that healthier food costs more and fresh foods are often imported so not as fresh as they state. Healthy options should not cost more.”

Lewis Sushi

- Age: 43
- Gender, ethnicity: Male, White British
- Household: Partner and kids 8-15
- Income and Education: C1, Full time work, Undergraduate degree
- Location: Wales-Cardiff

Food system feelings:

- “Especially with all the problems with the truck drivers, and the shortage of things coming into the country, you realise how much food travels to get on the shelf. You know, when you could get it a couple of miles down the road maybe rather than from Spain?”

Personal food priorities:

- Trying to prioritise shopping local and buying good quality, healthy food.

I want big businesses to make sustainable changes.

“Lots of the big chains like Tescos and Asda can make a lot more of a difference if they weren't so profit oriented rather than doing more to help with the environment. ... [It] could be working with the companies to help them towards using the biodegradable plastic, because they obviously haven't been forced to use better things...I want the companies who sort of use the products we're all talking about to have a bit more thought for the world.”

I can't always afford to shop as locally as I would like.

“[Farmer's markets] are sort of seen as, you know, the organic stuff, and the more expensive stuff. I know lots of people won't even be able to afford to buy at the farmers market. I tend to go and look at lots of things, but I don't really buy much there, as much as I'd like to. There's a split with healthy food, and it always seems

to be a lot more expensive than you know the potato waffles. So there is a fine line between splitting what people would like to do for the environment and then what they can actually afford to do."

Terry Pizza

- Age: 24
- Gender, ethnicity: Male, White
- Household: Lives with girlfriend
- Income and Education: C1, Working full time, Undergraduate degree
- Allergies/Dietary restrictions or eating habits: Nut allergy, Avoids meat and processed foods
- Location: Wales-Cardiff (Urban)

Food priorities

- Looking for allergen free food and feeling safe when shopping

Food system feelings

- Blanket terms like 'may contain traces of' should not mean that people with allergies to such ingredients should be put off through fear. "

Prabhleen Cake

- Age: 33
- Gender, ethnicity: Female, Pakistani
- Household: Lives with husband, husband's parents, and 2 children
- Income and Education: C2, Working part time, A Level education
- Allergies/Dietary restrictions or eating habits: Avoid certain foods for religious or cultural reasons
- Health: Asthma • Location: Wales-Cardiff (Suburban)

Healthy food is important to me, but it's not always affordable

"Healthy means fresh and freshly cooked in my household. Some days however healthy means a meal on the table from the freezer. Feeding a household of 6 means it is not cheap and I'm not always able to get only healthy food items. We are not a family that has salad with everything but we do try to get our 5 a day. ... I put off buying healthy foods such as avocados because I always think I could use that extra money to buy the kids a treat or I can buy another box of meat which would make another meal for my family. Good food equals good health. It is not just about healthy food, it's about having a healthy relationship with food It's simple. Healthy food should be made more affordable to those that have to budget."

I don't feel confident about the quality of food I am buying.

"When it comes to buying meat, I like to know that my food is safe as there have been lots of scandals like the dog meat or infectious diseases in the pork arriving from outside of the UK.

When the bird flu outbreak happened a while back I was very scared and nervous when buying chicken products. I always make sure my meat is British produce but I stopped buying any sort of frozen chicken. I only brought fresh chicken from the butchers to ensure it was safe for me and my family to eat. I am still not that keen on buying frozen chicken products.

Being honest, I don't think food is healthy or safe to eat in this day and age. Some items I used to eat as a child don't taste the same as now. Food and the way it is grown and processed is becoming more and more dangerous. Meat is mass produced and pumped to up the weight. Vegetables are being genetically modified. There are a whole heap of additives and preservatives in certain foods.

More and more people are also getting allergies to certain foods. But factories are producing and packaging food items around certain food items which cause allergies."

Jane Cauliflower

- Gender, ethnicity: Female, Pakistani
- Household: Lives with husband and two sons (18 and 21)
- Income and Education: C1, Full time work
- Allergies/Dietary restrictions or eating habits: 'Part time vegan' (Tuesdays and Thursdays)
- Location: Wales-Cardiff (Suburban)

Food system feelings

- Food means a lot to me: 'every day is about food!'

Food priorities

- Making healthy, home cooked food for her family while working a busy schedule
- Trying to save money as costs go up despite not being able to plan in the same ways that she used to

Home cooked food is important to me - but it takes planning and time

"My boys are quite big boys, quite big eaters and all about meat. Every night I clean up the kitchen and then I ask 'what would you love to have tomorrow'. And then we have to plan the night before - and then get up and start it early. Like, if I'm going to work because I start early, I start preparing at seven in the morning, taking food out of the freezer to make sure it is ready for me to cook, or planning to go to the supermarket for what they've asked for."

My husband and I both have a busy work lives with an unpredictable routines

"I work in retail and there is a lot of travel. I go to London a lot to help people in different stores with less staff, so there's a lot of hotels, and sometimes night shifts when we're moving the store around, moving the stock around, stuff like that... And my husband owns a business, and he comes and goes... he lives at work because he's the management of a pub office. So he stays there often so

he knows what's going on. He mostly comes on weekends, and then he goes back to work."

I'm always balancing price, quality and health and avoid the 'cheapest' foods and shortages have messed with that!

"I mean, if you're going for something cheap, and if you put a little bit more in, like 10p to pay extra, which I don't mind, you can get better quality. So I go for like... average. Not organic. I watch the money, and I watch the quality of what I'm paying for. And if I go for the cheaper one, they don't like the taste, right? Yeah. So I have to go for the quality as well."

"With Covid, I noticed changes with the supermarkets... sometimes they don't have the stock or they're really short of stock as well. That is frustrating. The queues are massive and it's just time consuming. You're working and you have to travel to the store, park your car and walk and then get a lift upstairs and all that - it all just adds on. And then you go up and there's not the stock you were looking for. For someone like me who does their shopping in a big go that makes it a lot harder."

What I see in supermarkets suggests the food I eat is mostly safe but I don't always trust use-by dates, especially for things that don't feel very 'fresh'.

"To be honest, I would say [food businesses] are doing their best. You see a lot of things on news and if there's anything that goes wrong (like with food recalls), obviously they alert you straight away. And if you go in the supermarket in the afternoon you see them checking things, not just things in the fridge but even canned things, keeping everything up to date. So, you know, I think they're doing the best they can do for us..."

Although I did see a mouse once running around in the supermarket where they have bread rolls and things. It's not his fault because that's where his food is, but it's not nice to see! You know, in the superstores, you see these things that are still in date, but the ready-meals and things, they don't feel that fresh. And also, you know, maybe sometimes customers are maybe taking things out of the

fridge and they are being in trolleys, or you know, like people change their mind or something that makes it go funny as well. So then I have to think... what do I really want to be buying?"

I'm making effort not to waste food - you can't the way the prices are going up

"The prices for food have gone really up. Yeah. And literally everything - like petrol and other stuff as well... So you have to think in other ways, like. You can't just be spending all your money on food, food, food, there's other stuff as well. So you try to keep food as much as you can as long as it's good and healthy and eatable. And I cook more, as much as we can eat I cook and then we try to use it the next day. That's hard though... every day they want fresh food, not things from the fridge, but I don't want to be wasting food."

Keith Roast

- Age: 62
- Gender, ethnicity: Male, White
- Household: Lives with wife
- Income and Education: B, Retired, A Level education
- Health: Chronic asthma
- Allergies/Dietary restrictions or eating habits: Food allergies
- Location: Wales-Cardiff (Suburban)

Food system feelings

"I think food is getting safer as you keep making more regulations so hopefully the company's handling food will listen. ... We maintain regular checks on slaughterhouses in the UK, to ensure that they comply with our regulations that maintain animal welfare. ... The only time I think food is unsafe is when you get mp's saying chickens give you Salmonella then you start thinking is food fit for purpose"

I think treating animals poorly affects the safety of our food.

"Farm animal welfare matters. It's not just an important indicator of how sustainable our food system is, it also shines a spotlight on our values for the future. The welfare of the animals should be at the forefront of all farming so we get a better quality of food and better hygiene in the process. [Food will be] safer food to consume, because the bad keeping of animals causes infection."

I don't know what the future of food looks like. Less meat? Innovation?

"In five years from now I think that more people will be eating a lot less meat products... We could be eating cell-cultured meat, insects or maybe jellyfish as long as it is made to look like the food we eat now, no problem as most people eat with their eyes. In the future, all food and farming including fisheries should be working together to supply us with the best food possible, hopefully. Like I said we will be eating more plant-based foods - and possibly jellyfishes!"