Covid-19 consumer tracker survey

Annual summary report (Waves 1-12)

May 2021

Authors: The Food Standards Agency

Contents

How to read this report

Context of report

In April 2020 the Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned Ipsos MORI to develop its evidence base on issues affecting consumers and businesses, to inform its Covid-19 response in the short to medium term. This monthly tracker survey is intended to understand the attitudes and behaviours of consumers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland during the pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions. This report provides commentary on a year (twelve waves) of data collection for this tracking survey (April 2020 to March 2021).

The project objectives were:

- To understand the impact of concerns or experience of food unavailability, health restrictions or household food insecurity on consumer food safety behaviours.
- To understand potential new food safety risks, for instance changes in reported adherence to FSA food hygiene guidelines.
- To understand shifts in food consumption or purchasing behaviours, for instance, increased online shopping or use of takeaways.

Over the course of the data collection period, the restrictions imposed on the public varied because of rising and falling Covid-19 cases. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the changes in restrictions from March 2020 to March 20201, alongside the data collection dates. This contextual information should be considered carefully alongside the findings of this report, although it is not possible to make causal assumptions on the impact of these restrictions upon this data. Some survey questions were altered from one wave to the next, to acknowledge the changes in restrictions and in some cases, this causes a break in the timeseries data available. An example of this is question 1 (see appendix 2 for full list of survey questions) where questions around shielding and travel were altered according to national guidance in place at the time of data collection.

Content of report

Where possible, this report provides commentary across the full year of data collection (April 2020 to March 2021). However, the survey has been expanded and edited to incorporate new areas of interest. Accordingly, time trends are not available for all measures and some measures comment on a more limited time period, where data is available.

Demographic commentary is provided where this additional commentary is of particular interest for the FSA and its audiences. For some sections, demographic commentary has not been included to limit the length of this report. Demographic analysis is available for each wave in the accompanying data tables, published via the FSA data catalogue. The methodology section provides further information about significance testing applied to demographic commentary.

Note on interpreting the data

Results should be interpreted with care. In this survey, the data relies on respondents' self-reported behaviours. Errors could occur due to imperfect recollection, or respondents' tendency to overreport behaviours which are perceived as being desirable, and to underreport undesirable behaviours.

Executive summary

The Covid-19 consumer tracker has now completed its 12th wave, allowing commentary across a full year of data (April 2020-March 2021).

Household food insecurity

- Each measure of food insecurity in the Covid-19 tracker declined significantly in August 2020, rising again from September onwards:
    - In April 2020, 31% of respondents were concerned about food availability and 28% reported concern about food affordability. In August 2020 these dropped to just 16% (availability) and 17% (affordability). Rising again from September, they are currently 22% and 20% respectively in March 2021.
    - At its highest in November and December, 19% of participants reported skipping meals or cutting the size of meals because they did not have enough money to buy food. This was lower in August 2020 (12%) and is currently 17% (March 2021).
    - 9% of respondents reported using a food charity or food bank in March 2021. This proportion has remained relatively stable but dipped to just 4% in August 2020.
- Participants from larger households (4+), those in younger age groups (aged 16-24), and households with a child present were more likely to be ‘food insecure’, across all these measures of food insecurity.

Food purchasing behaviours

- Food purchasing trends have remained stable overtime.
    - 7-8% of respondents reported using Facebook marketplace to purchase food each wave, except for August 2020 which was only 4%.
    - Over half of those surveyed reported purchasing food from takeaways (either direct or online) each wave, whilst between 33% and 43% reported ordering food from an online food ordering company (such as Just Eat or Uber eats).
    - For those who did not purchase a takeaway, the main reason was because they ‘preferred to cook at home’ and ‘preferring to eat more healthily’ (50%

and 38% in March 2021). These were the two most sighted reasons across all available waves.

Food habits at home

- Food habits have remained stable across all reported waves.
    - On average across all waves, 60% of respondents reported wasting or throwing food away, 65% reported cooking food to freeze for later, 78% reported eating together with the family and 78% reported buying food from local shops at least once a month or more.

Nutrition behaviours

- Food nutrition behaviours have remained stable across all reported waves.
    - On average across all waves 92% of respondents reported eating healthy meals, 92% reported cooking food from scratch, 90% reported eating meat, 81% reported buying processed food and 91% reported snacking on cakes, biscuits, confectionary or savoury snacks at least once a month or more.

Food safety and hygiene in the home

- Food safety behaviours in the home – including adherence to use-by dates have remained stable since data collection began.
    - In March 2021, 53% of all participants reported that they do ‘not always’ check use-by dates when they are about to cook or prepare food. A stable figure across all waves.
    - 42% of respondents reported eating cheese past the use-by date, whilst 38% reported doing this with bagged salads, 37% for milk, 35% for cooked meats and 16% for smoked fish. These findings are relatively stable across all waves.

Food shortages

- From December 2020 to March 2021, the Covid-19 tracker asked respondents to report if their preferred choices were unavailable to them when shopping for food (a list of 14 food products were provided to participants for consideration).

    - Most respondents said that none of these 14 food items were unavailable to them when shopping for food – 60% in December 2020, dropping to 53% in March 2021.
    - Of those who reported an item unavailable, the majority (over half) were able to find a suitable alternative in each wave.

Consumer's food concerns

- From December 2020 to March 2021, the Covid-19 tracker asked respondents about their food concerns.
- 28% of respondents reported being 'concerned' about the quality of food produced in the UK in March 2021 whilst 50% reported being 'concerned' about the quality of food imported from outside the UK. These were consistent across all collected waves
- In March 2021, 22% of participants reported having a concern about the food they eat 'at the moment'. The **3 biggest concerns** selected by participants were:
    - The 'healthiness' of food in my diet (53%)
    - Animal welfare (52%)
    - The ethical treatment of producers and farmers (50%) *and* Food freshness (50%) *and* Hormones, steroids or antibiotics in food (50%)

Background and Methodology

The Covid-19 tracker was conducted monthly between April 2020 and March 2021 using Ipsos MORI's online i:Omnibus. Foods Standards Scotland (FSS) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) also contributed to the tracker in several waves. Available data for Scotland is published separately via the FSS website. The contents of this report only refers to the survey data commissioned by the FSA, and therefore comments on England, Wales and Northern Ireland data only (not Scotland).

In each wave, Ipsos MORI surveyed a representative[1] sample of approximately 2,000 adults aged 16-75 living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Table 1 provides a full list of data collection dates and sample sizes (see appendix 1 for a summary of lockdown restrictions in place at the time of each data collection period). Weighting is also applied by Ipsos MORI to ensure the sample is representative of this population. The profile was generated from the latest PAMCo data.

Table 1: Data collection dates and sample sizes

Data collection period	Wave and sample size
April 10-13th	Wave 1 data collection (2,039)
May 8-12th	Wave 2 data collection (2,040)
June 12th-15th	Wave 3 data collection (2,045)
July 10-14th	Wave 4 data collection (2,068)
August 14th-17th	Wave 5 data collection (2,071)
September 18th-21st	Wave 6 data collection (2,065)
October 16th-20th	Wave 7 data collection (2,067)
November 13th-16th	Wave 8 data collection (2,023)
December 11th-15th	Wave 9 data collection (2,073)

[1] Representative according to age, gender, working status, social economic grade and region

January 15th-18th	Wave 10 data collection (2,131)
February 12th-15th	Wave 11 data collection (2,047)
March 12th-15th	Wave 12 data collection (2,013)

Data with demographic breakdowns are published alongside this report via the FSA data catalogue and raw SPSS data files are available upon request. Demographic variables available include age, gender, social grade, region, urban/rural setting, marital status, household size, education level, employment status, household income, presence of children in the household, main shopper, main earner, lone parents and long-term health conditions. Please note that i:Omnibus does not allow for detailed analysis by ethnicity.

Most waves of the tracker also include demographic questions about self-isolating and shielding, although these demographics do vary according to restrictions in place at the time of data collection. For example, where shielding was ‘paused’, questions on shielding were removed from the survey.

Unless stated otherwise, where comparisons are made in the text between different demographic groups, only those differences found to be statistically significant at the 5% level are reported. In other words, differences reported have no more than a five per cent probability of occurring by chance. The relationship between survey findings and different types of respondents were investigated using chi-square tests of association.

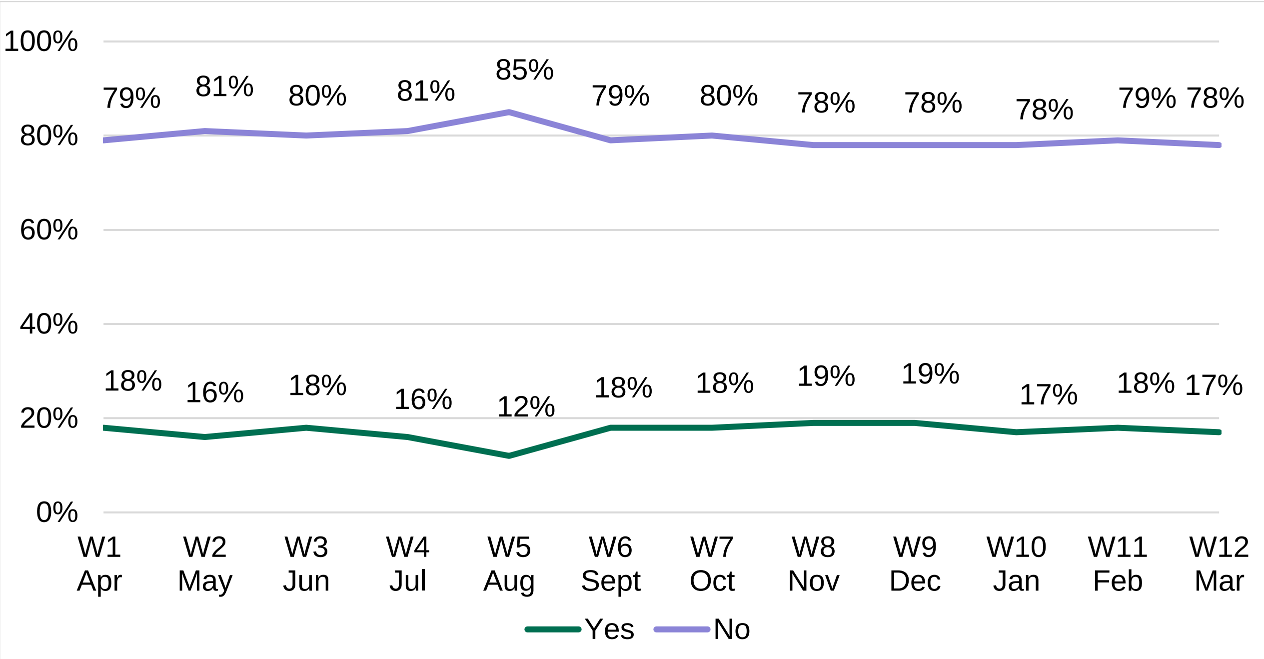
Main findings

Household food insecurity

Cutting down or skipping meals for financial reasons

Each wave, participants are asked whether they have cut down the size of their meals, or skipped meals because they could not afford to buy food. The proportion who reported doing so has remained relatively stable since the tracker began in April 2020, with 17% of respondents reporting this on average across all waves. At its peak, 19% of respondents reported this in November 2020 and December 2020, whilst significantly less reported this in August 2020 (12%) (Figure 1).

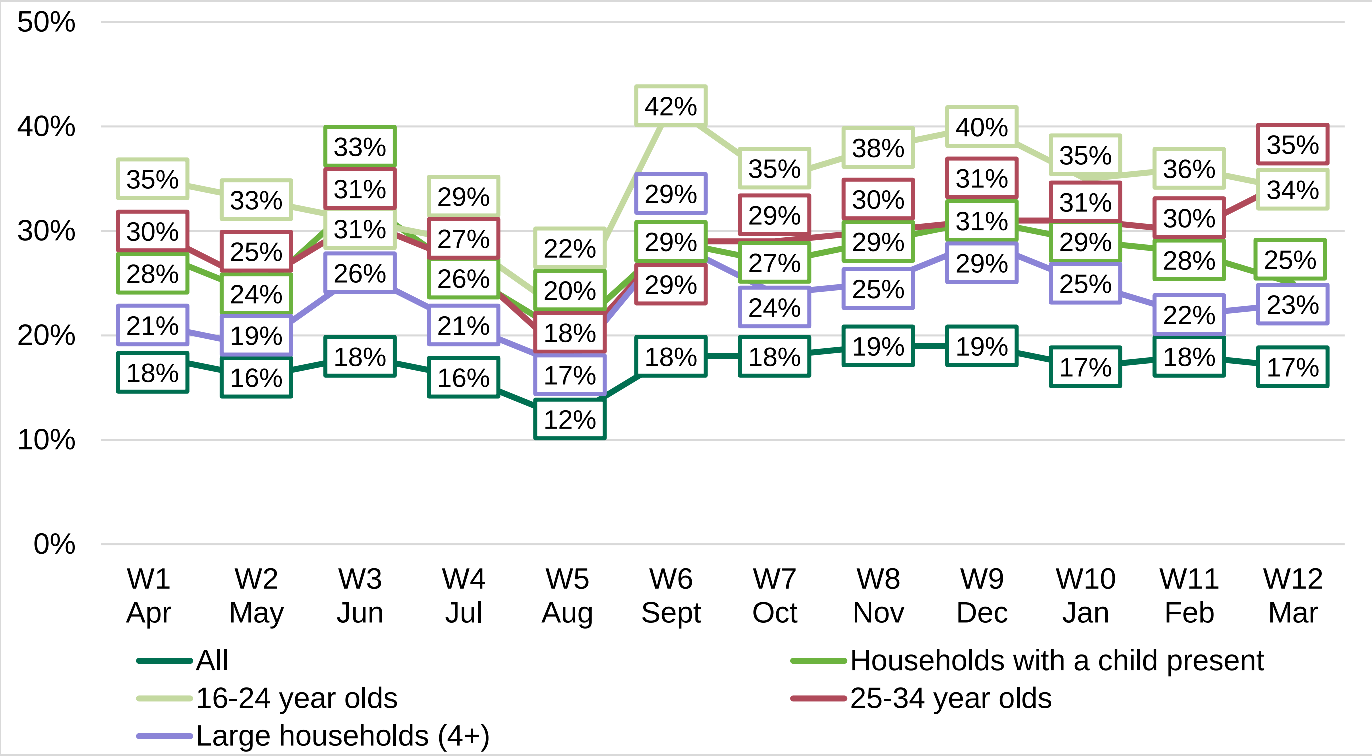
Figure 1: Participants who cut down the size of meals, or skipped meals for financial reasons i.e. 'did not have enough money to buy food' (April 2020 - March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Values may not add to 100% due to rounding and because 'don't know'/'prefer not to say' responses are not shown. 'Yes' responses combine all affirmative responses.

Across all waves, participants aged 16-24 or 25-34, those from larger households and from households with at least one child present, are significantly more likely, than the total survey population, to report skipping meals or cut down the size of meals because they could not afford food (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Participants who cut down the size of meals, or skipped meals for financial reasons - demographic breakdown (April 2020 - March 2021)



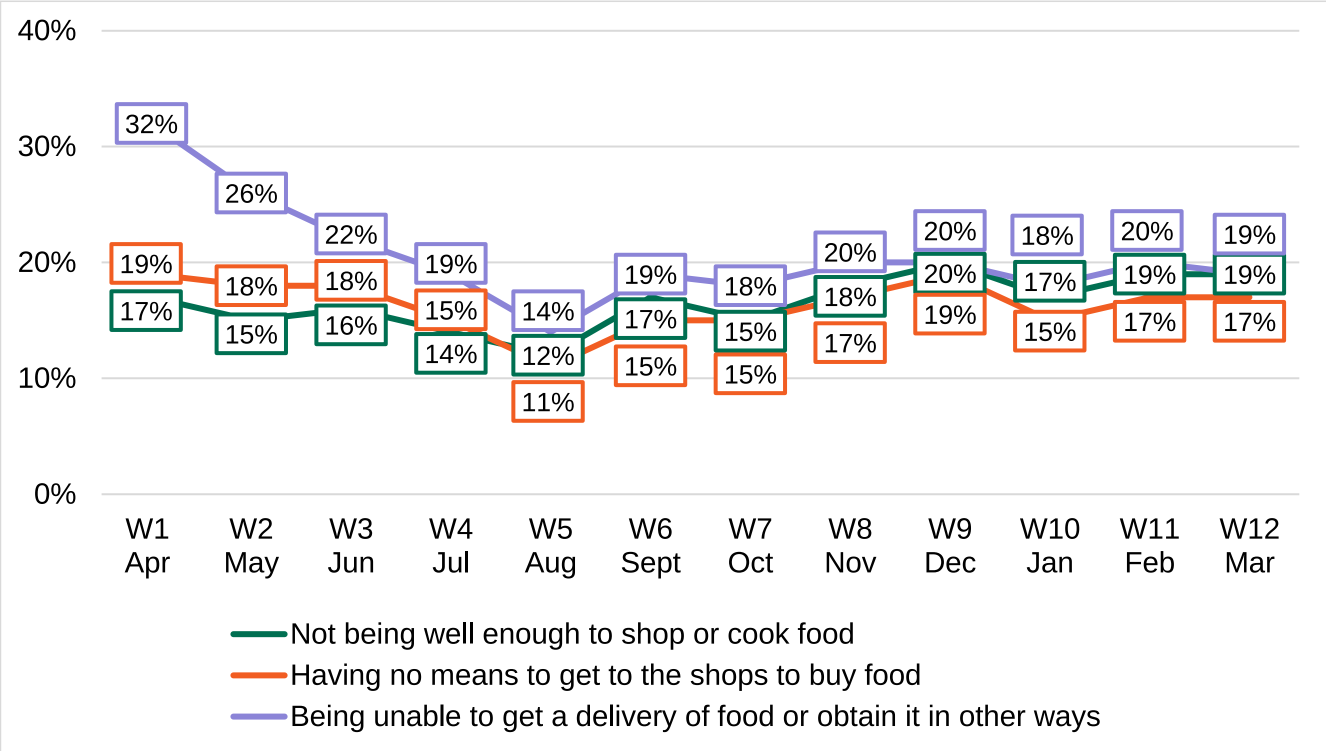
Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, total adults (aged 16-75), between 2,023 and 2,131 total adults included in each wave. Indicative base sizes in March 2021 are: 16-24 (328), 25-34 (381), households with children (621), larger households (4+) (506). 'Yes' responses combine all affirmative responses.

The tracker also monitors other reasons for skipping, or cutting down the size of meals including:

- not being well enough to shop or cook food
- having no means to get to the shops to buy food
- being unable to get a delivery of food or obtain it in other ways

As illustrated in Figure 3, the most commonly reported reason for skipping meals or cutting down the size of meals across all waves, was being unable to get a food delivery or obtain food in other ways – 32% reported this as a reason in April 2020, and this dropped significantly to 14% in August 2020. Despite rising again, it has remained stable between 18%-20% since and is 19% in March 2021. Other reasons for skipping meals or cutting the size of meals have remained more stable across the waves, but all displaying a statistically significant decline in August 2020 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Other reasons for skipping meals or cutting down the size of meals (April 2020- March 2021)

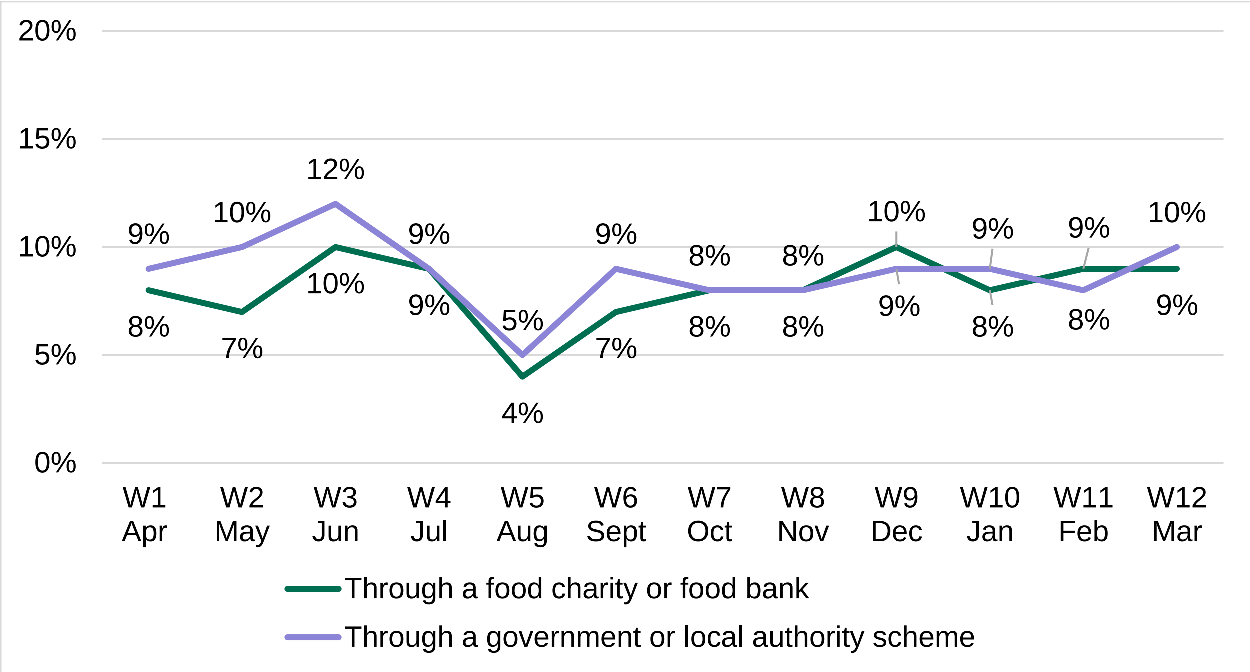


Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Combined affirmative responses shown.

Use of emergency food providers

Respondents were asked whether they had used emergency food providers either through food banks/charities or through a government/local authority scheme. As shown in Figure 4, the proportion who reported using food banks/charities has remained relatively stable, except for a statistically significant drop in August 2020, where the proportion fell to 4% (from 9% in July 2020). The proportion reporting use of food charities/food banks was at a peak of 10% in June and December 2020. The proportion reporting use of government or local authority schemes has followed a very similar trend, peaking at 12% in June 2020, but taking a statistically significant drop in August 2020 (5%).

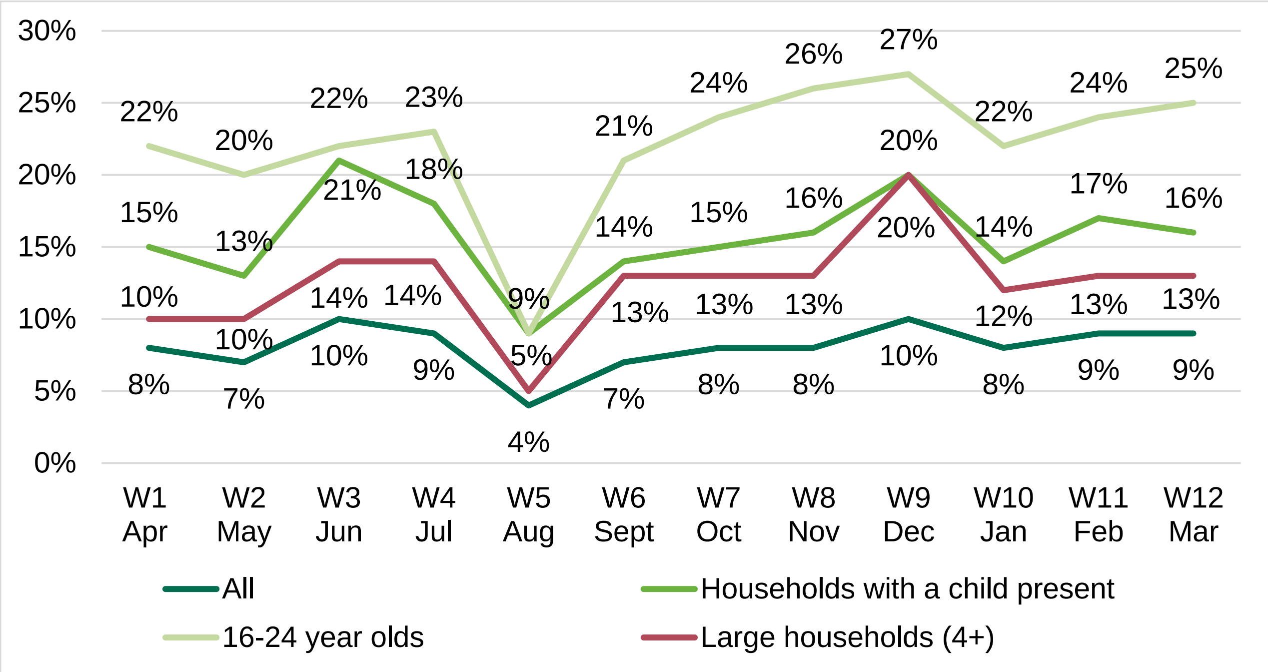
Figure 4: Respondents who report using food banks or government or local authority schemes to access food (April 2020 - March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Combined affirmative responses shown.

Across most waves, participants aged 16-24, those from larger households and from households with at least one child present, are significantly more likely to report using a food bank or food charities compared to the total survey sample (Figure 5).

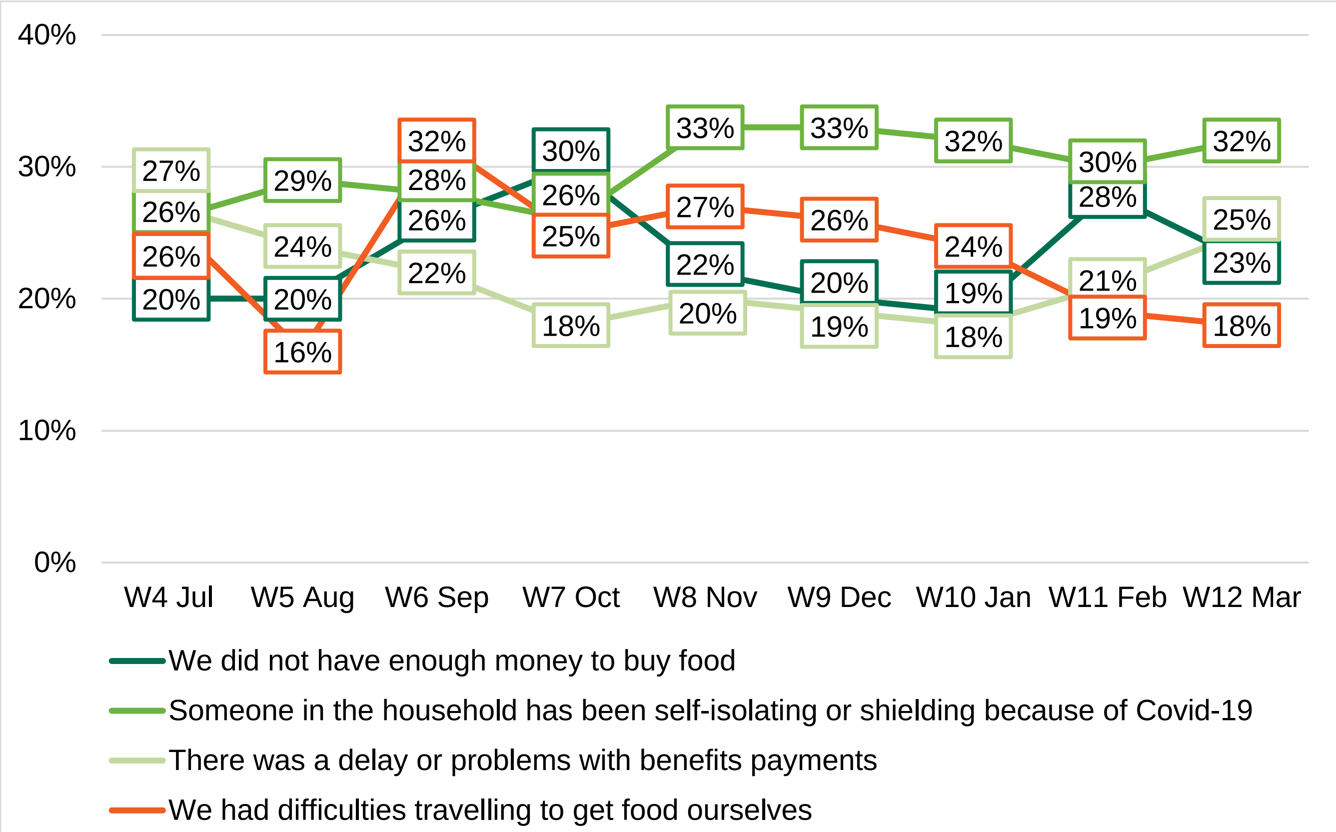
Figure 5: Use of food banks/food charities by demographic group (April 2020 - March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Indicative base sizes in March 2021 are: 16-24 (328), households with children (621), larger households (4+) (506). Combined affirmative responses shown.

From July 2020, respondents who reported using food banks/food charities were also asked to provide their reasons for doing so. Figure 6 illustrates the most reported reasons. In July 2020, the most common reason reported was ‘there was a delay or problem with benefits payments’ (27%). However, in August 2020 and from November 2020 onwards the most reported reason was ‘someone in the household was self-isolating or shielding because of Covid-19’ (ranging between 29% in August and 33% in November and December 2020). In September 2020, the most common reason sighted was ‘we had difficulties travelling to get food ourselves’ (32%), a reason that has since declined to just 18% in March 2020. In October the main reason sighted was ‘we did not have enough money to buy food’ (30%).

Figure 6: Reasons for having food delivered from a food bank or a food charity (July 2020 - March 2021)

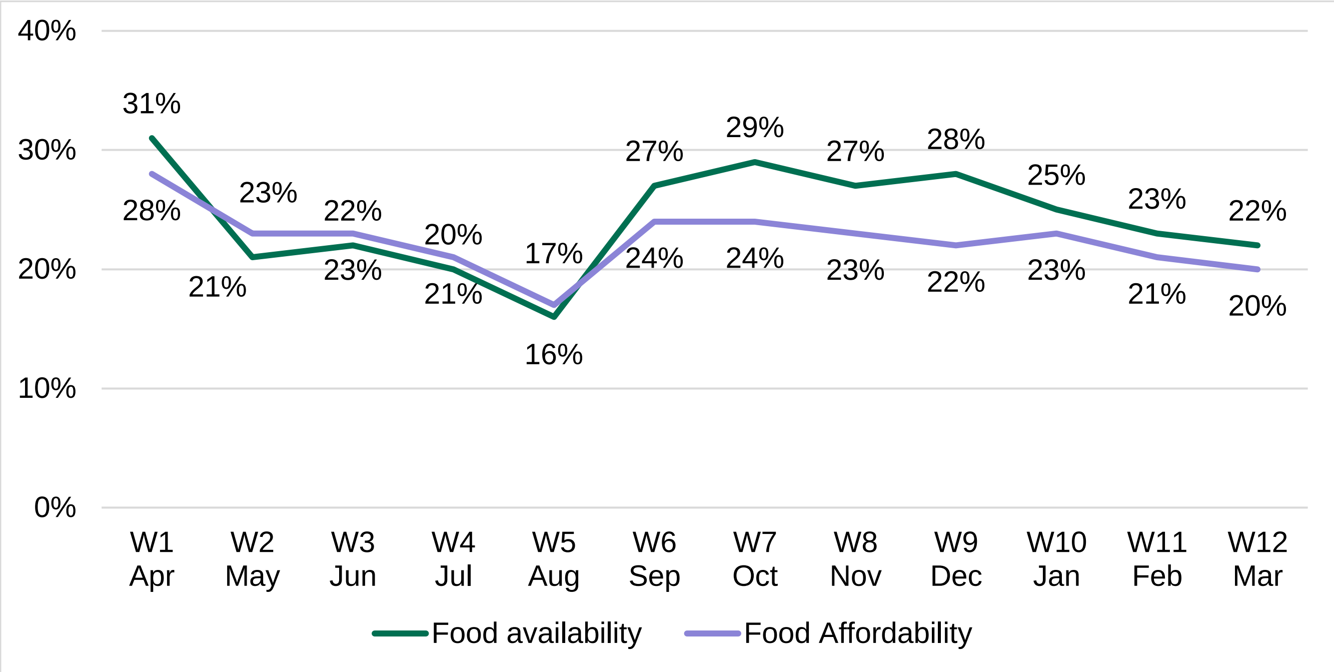


Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75 who used a food bank or food charity. Base sized range from 70 in August 2020 to 188 in March 2021.

Concerns about food availability and food affordability

Levels of concerns for food availability and affordability have followed a similar trend over time to other measures of food insecurity, outlined above. Concerns about food availability and affordability were both at a peak in April 2020 (31% and 28% respectively). This proportion declined significantly until the lowest point in August 2020 (16% for food availability and 17% for food affordability). Concerns then increased again significantly in September 2020. Since then the figures have declined slowly to 22% (food availability) and 20% (food affordability) in March 2021 (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Levels of concern about food availability and affordability (April 2020-March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Combined affirmative responses shown.

As shown in Table 2 and 3 demographic groups who are significantly more likely to report concerns about food availability and affordability, across most waves, include:

- larger households (4+)
- Households with at least one child present
- Younger age groups (aged 16-24)
- Those self-isolating due to Covid-19

Table 2: Demographic groups who are more likely to report concern over food availability (April 2020 – March 2021)

Survey wave	All	Ages 16-24	Larger households (4+)	Households with children present	Self-isolating
W1 (Apr 20)	31%	43%	38%	42%	NA
W2 (May 20)	21%	34%	25%	29%	NA
W3 (Jun 20)	22%	34%	29%	33%	51%
W4 (Jul 20)	20%	38%	26%	33%	63%

W5 (Aug 20)	16%	25%	20%	23%	32%
W6 (Sep 20)	27%	43%	37%	40%	50%
W7 (Oct 20)	29%	45%	37%	38%	55%
W8 (Nov 20)	27%	48%	36%	39%	50%
W9 (Dec 20)	28%	43%	40%	38%	48%
W10 (Jan 21)	24%	35%	31%	34%	41%
W11 (Feb 21)	23%	38%	30%	32%	46%
W12 (Mar 21)	22%	38%	26%	31%	46%

Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Indicative base sizes in March 2021 are: 16-24 (328), households with children (621), larger households (4+) (506) and those self-isolating (195). Data on self-isolation was not collected in Waves 1 or 2, labelled as 'NA'. Combined affirmative responses shown.

Table 3: Demographic groups who are more likely to report concern over food affordability (April 2020 – March 2021)

Survey wave	All	Ages 16-24	Larger households (4+)	Households with children present	Self-isolating
W1 (Apr 20)	28%	37%	36%	40%	NA
W2 (May 20)	23%	40%	28%	33%	NA
W3 (Jun 20)	23%	32%	28%	34%	51%
W4 (Jul 20)	21%	36%	26%	32%	61%
W5 (Aug 20)	17%	27%	23%	26%	36%
W6 (Sep 20)	24%	40%	35%	36%	47%
W7 (Oct 20)	24%	40%	32%	33%	43%
W8 (Nov 20)	23%	38%	31%	35%	45%
W9 (Dec 20)	22%	38%	33%	33%	41%
W10 (Jan 21)	23%	33%	31%	34%	39%
W11 (Feb 21)	21%	34%	23%	29%	36%

W12 (Mar 21)	20%	34%	23%	27%	45%

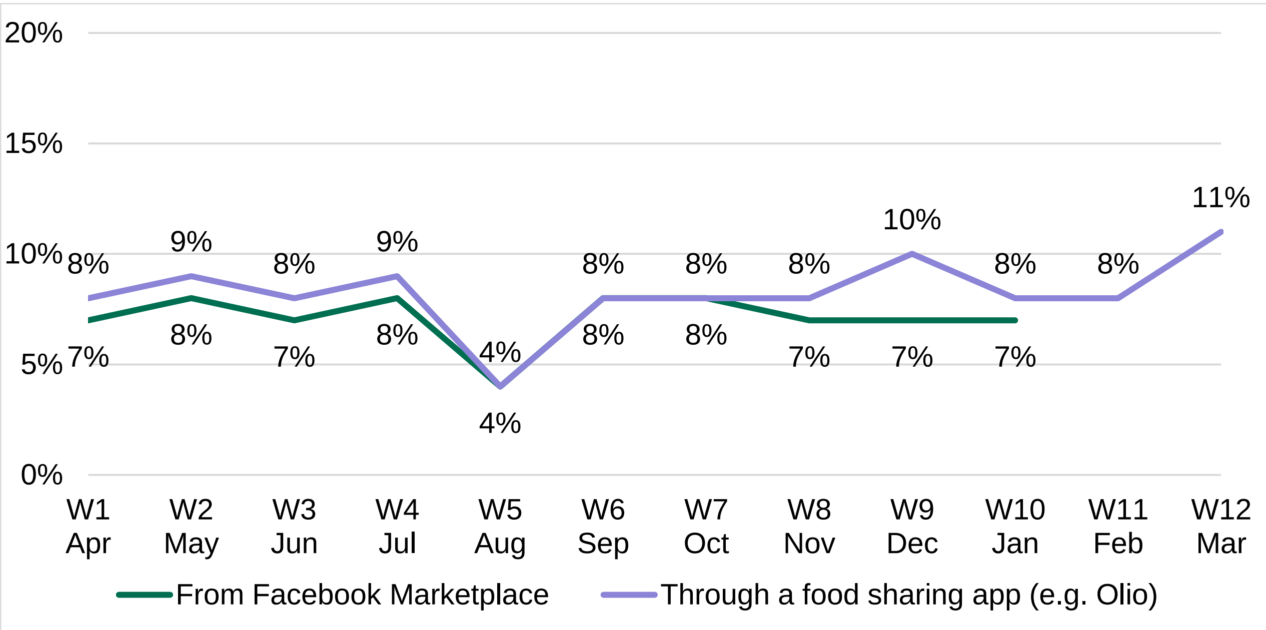
Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Indicative base sizes in March 2021 are: 16-24 (328), households with children (621), larger households (4+) (506) and those self-isolating (195). Data on self-isolation was not collected in Waves 1 or 2, labelled as 'NA'. Combined affirmative responses shown.

Food purchasing behaviours

From April 2020 to January 2021, the tracker asked participants about purchasing food through Facebook marketplace. Typically, 7% or 8% of respondents reported using Facebook marketplace to purchase food each wave, except for August which was only 4% (Figure 8). However, from Wave 11 (Feb 2021) onwards this question was altered, and the tracker now asks participants if they have purchased food through an online marketplace more generally (examples provided to participants include Facebook Marketplace, Etsy, Gumtree, Instagram and Nextdoor). In February 2021, 14% of participants reported using one of these marketplaces to purchase food, increasing marginally to 16% in March 2021 (Figure 9).

Figure 8 also illustrates reported use of Food sharing apps (such as Olio). The use of food sharing apps has followed a similar trend to reported use of Facebook marketplace, with a drop in August 2020 (4%) and peaks in March 2021 (11%).

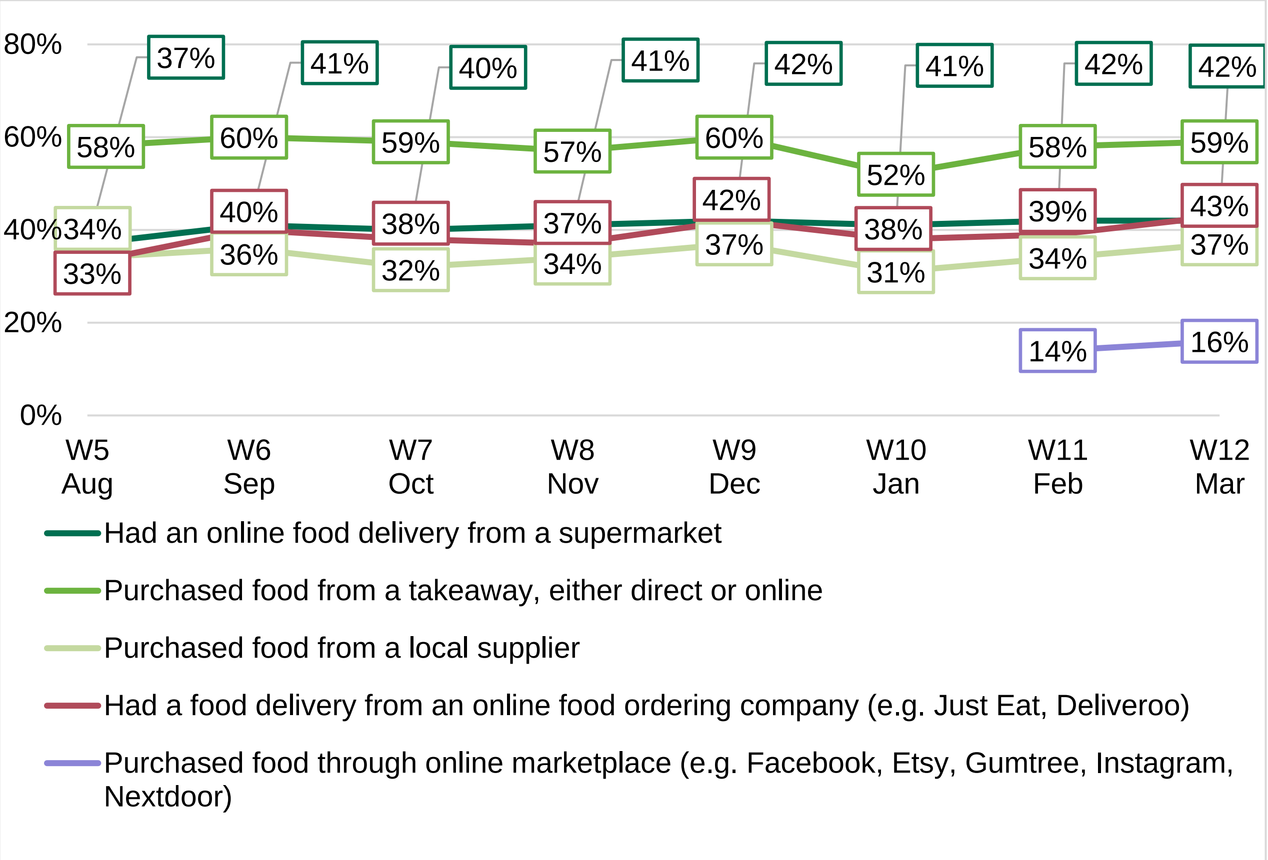
Figure 8: Reported use of Facebook marketplaces and Food sharing apps (Olio)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Combined affirmative responses shown. Data for 'Facebook Marketplace' not available from Feb-21 onwards.

The Covid-19 tracker monitors other food purchasing habits. As shown in Figure 9, trends in food purchasing behaviours have remained relatively stable (timeseries data available from August 2020). Over half of those surveyed reported purchasing food from takeaways (either direct or online) each wave, whilst between 33% and 43% reported ordering food from an online food ordering company (such as Just Eat or Uber eats).

Figure 9: Methods of food purchasing used in the preceding month (affirmative responses) (August 2020 - March 2021)

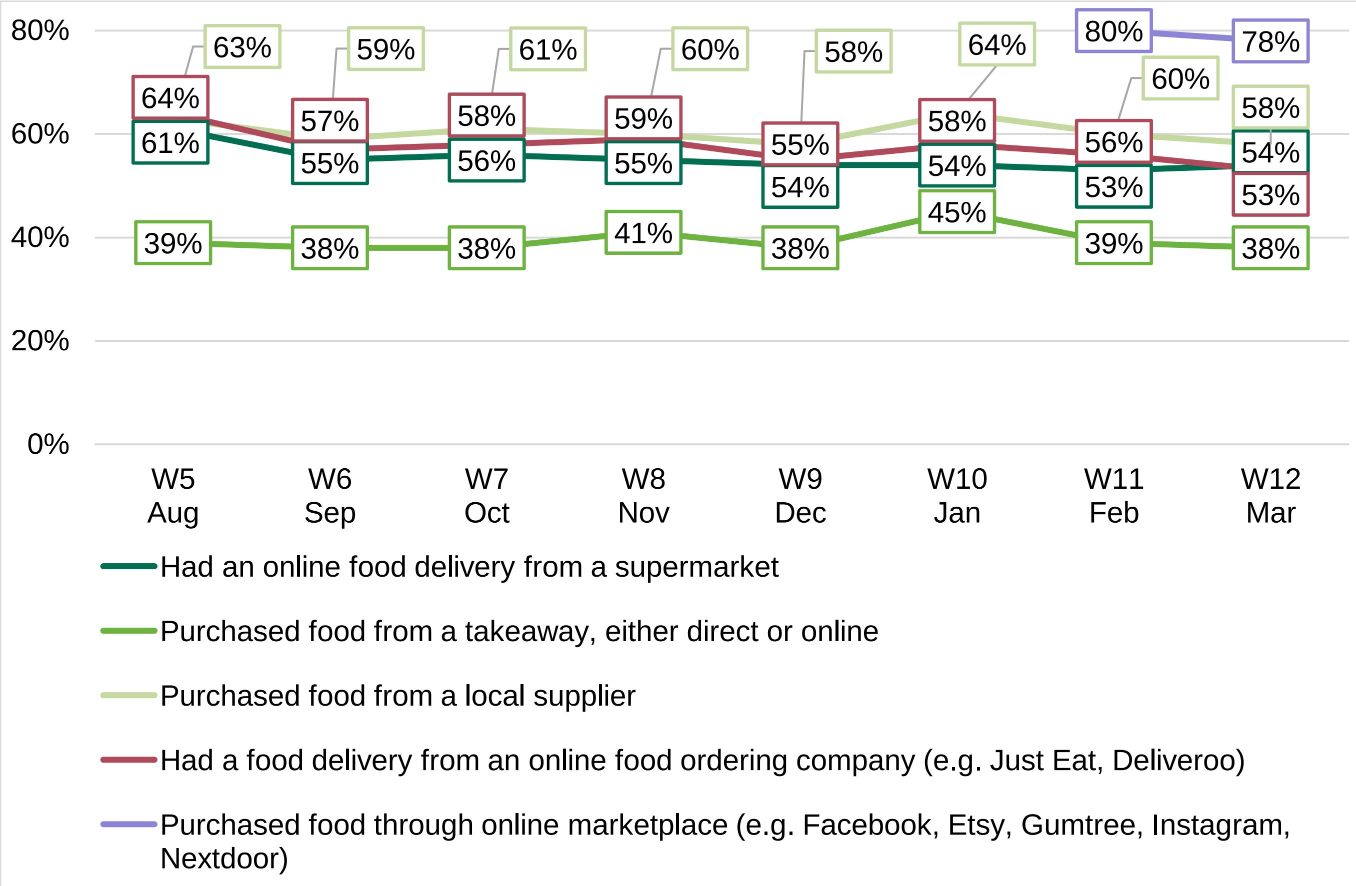


Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Combined affirmative responses shown. Data for 'Online marketplaces' only available from Feb-21 onwards.

Figure 10 shows the proportion of respondents who did not use these food purchasing methods in the preceding month. In January 2021, there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of participants who reported not having a takeaway in the reporting month (45%), but this stabilised again to the typical proportion (38% in March

2021). An increase also occurred in January 2021, for those who reported not using local suppliers (64%), again this returned to a usual proportion in March 2021 (58%).

Figure 10: Participants who reported not using these food purchasing methods in the past month (August 2020- March 2021)

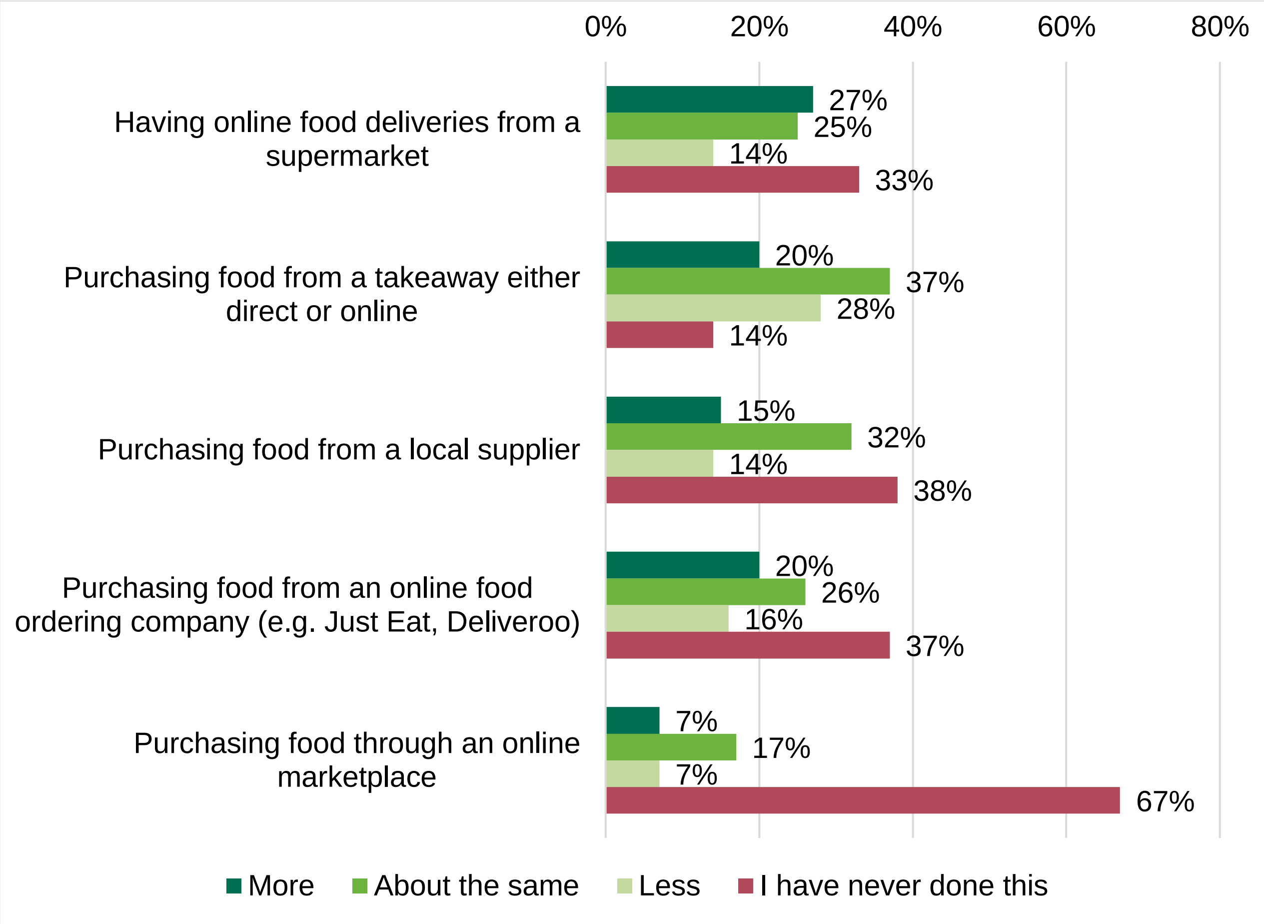


Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Data for 'Online marketplaces' only available from Feb-21 onwards

In March 2021 a new question was added to the tracker survey which asked participants to reflect on their food purchasing behaviours now (March 2021) in comparison to before the Covid-19 pandemic (before March 2020). Figure 11 summarises the findings for this question. 27% of respondents thought that they were using online food deliveries 'more often' in March 2021 than compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst 25% felt that they were doing this the same amount, and 14% thought they were doing this less. 37% of respondents felt that they were purchasing takeaways the same amount now, as before the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst 28% thought they were doing this less. Only 20% thought they were purchasing a takeaway more often. Views on purchasing food from a local supplier and purchasing food through an online marketplace were polarised, with approximately the same proportions reporting that they purchased food ‘more’ and ‘less’ since before the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 11).

When reflecting on the result of this question it is important to consider the accuracy of respondent recall, to reflect on behaviour a year ago in comparison to the present day. It is also important to note that this question does not ask about frequency of food purchasing. For example, if respondents report that they purchase more takeaways now than compared to the period before Covid-19, we do not know from this question alone the extent to the increase in purchasing habits.

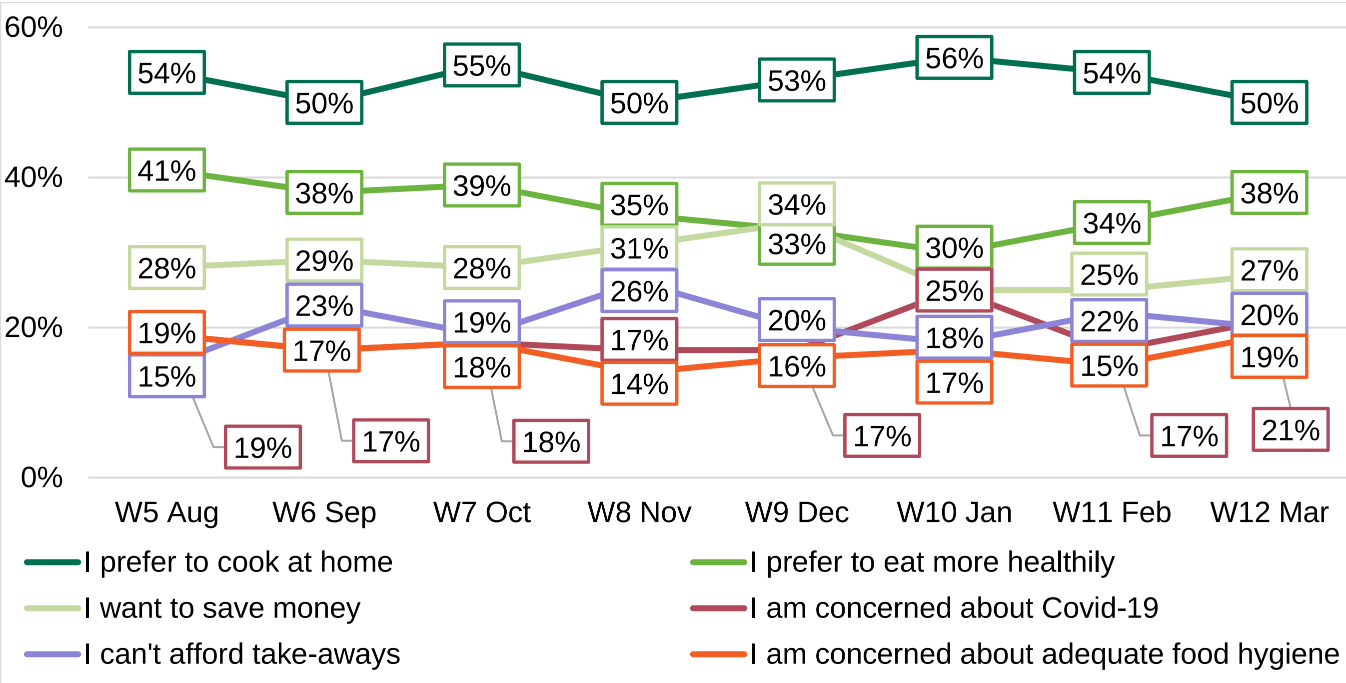
Figure 11: Changes in food purchasing behaviour (Comparing March 2021, to period before the Covid-19 pandemic i.e. Before March 2020)



Base: 2,013 Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 12-15 March 2021. Responses may not total 100% due to rounding, and because ‘don’t know’ and ‘prefer not to answer’ responses are not shown.

From August 2020, participants who reported not purchasing a take-away in the preceding month were asked for their reason for not doing so. Consistently, across all waves the most common reason for not doing so was wanting to cook at home (50% or more in each wave), with wanting to 'eat more healthily' and wanting 'to save money' being the second and third most commonly reported reasons (Figure 12). Concerns about Covid-19 were less commonly reported, typically between 17% and 21% each wave, although this did increase to 25% in January 2021.

Figure 12: Reasons for not purchasing a takeaway in the preceding month (August 2020 – March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75 not buying takeaways in the past month – base size ranged from 628 to 780 participants in each wave.

Food habits at home

From August 2020, participants were asked to report the frequency that they had wasted or thrown food away, cooked food to freeze for later, bought food from local shops and eaten together with the family. As illustrated in Figure 13, the trends in these key behaviours (those who reported doing this at least once in the past month) have remained broadly stable overtime, with no significant changes wave to wave.

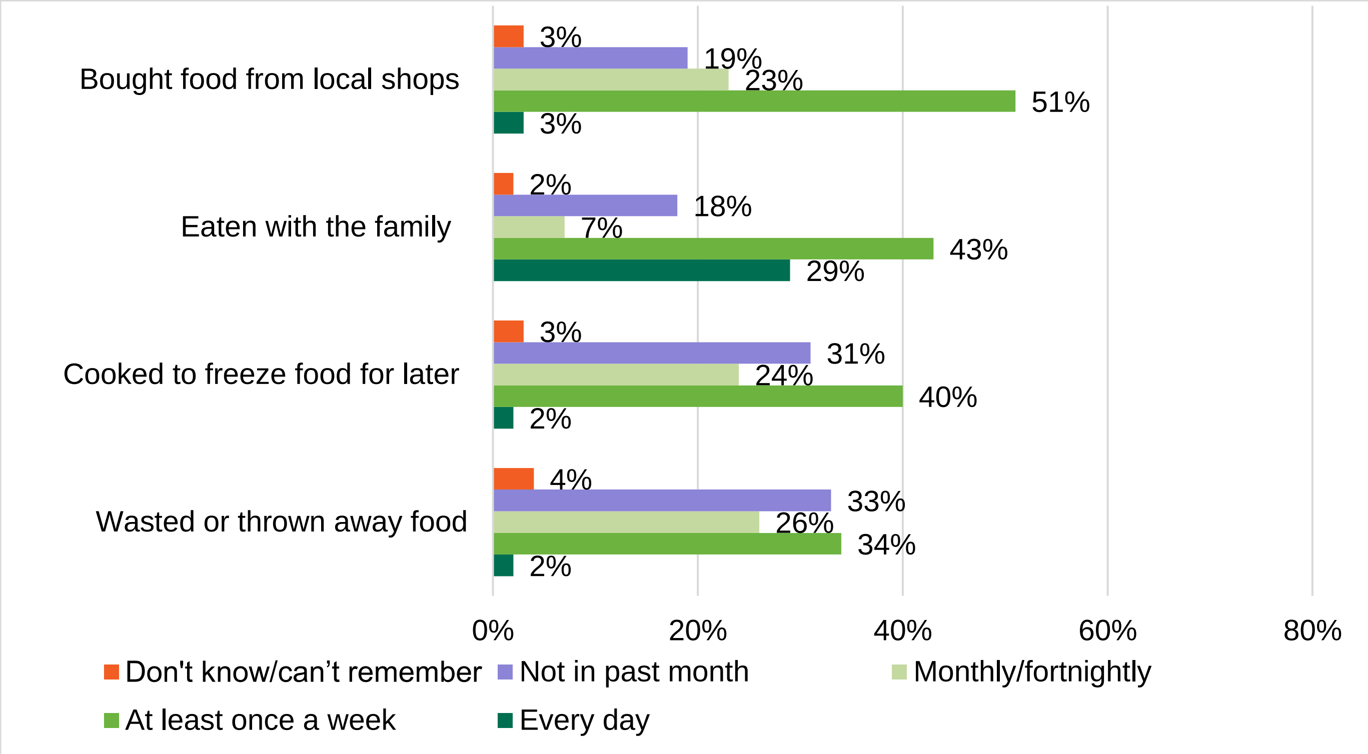
On average across all waves 60% of respondents reported wasting or throwing food away, 65% reported cooking food to freeze for later, 78% reported eating together with the family and 78% reported buying food from local shops at least once a month or more.

Figure 13: Reported food consumption behaviours (August 2020 - March 2021)

Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Affirmative responses are combined.

As illustrated in Figure 14, the respondents were most likely to report doing these food habits ‘at least once a week’, this finding is consistent across all waves although only March 2021 data is provided for the purposes of visualisation.

Figure 14: Frequency of reported food habits (March 2021)



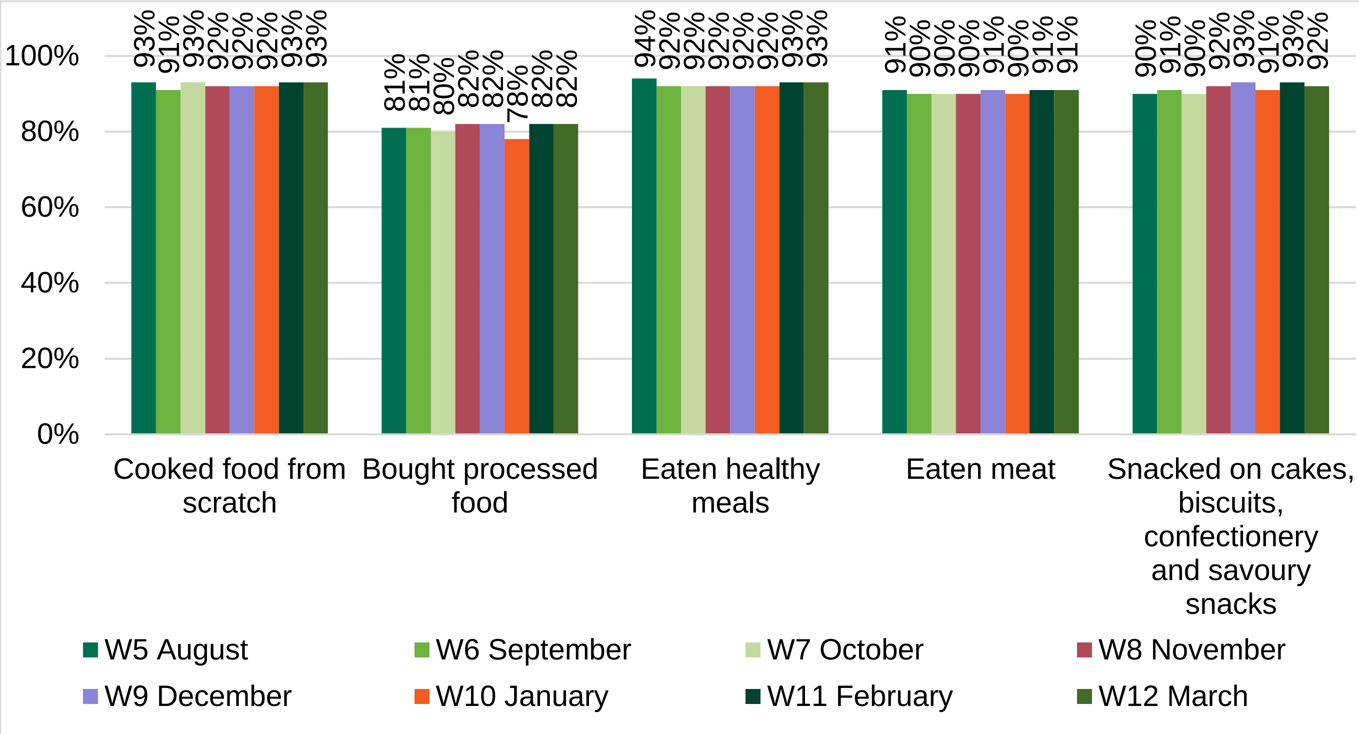
Base: 2,013 Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 12-15 March 2021. Responses may not total 100 due to rounding, and because 'prefer not to answer' and 'don't know' responses are not shown. At least once a week combines – most days, 2-3 times a week, at least once a week.

Nutrition behaviour

From August 2020, participants were also asked to report various nutrition behaviours such as cooking food from scratch, buying processed foods, eating healthy meals, eating meat and snacking. Figure 15 illustrates the proportions that reported doing these behaviours at least once in the month prior. There are no significant changes across the reported waves for any of these key nutrition behaviours.

On average across all waves 92% of respondents reported eating healthy meals, 92% reported cooking food from scratch, 90% reported eating meat, 81% reported buying processed food and 91% reported snacking on cakes, biscuits, confectionary or savoury snacks at least once a month or more.

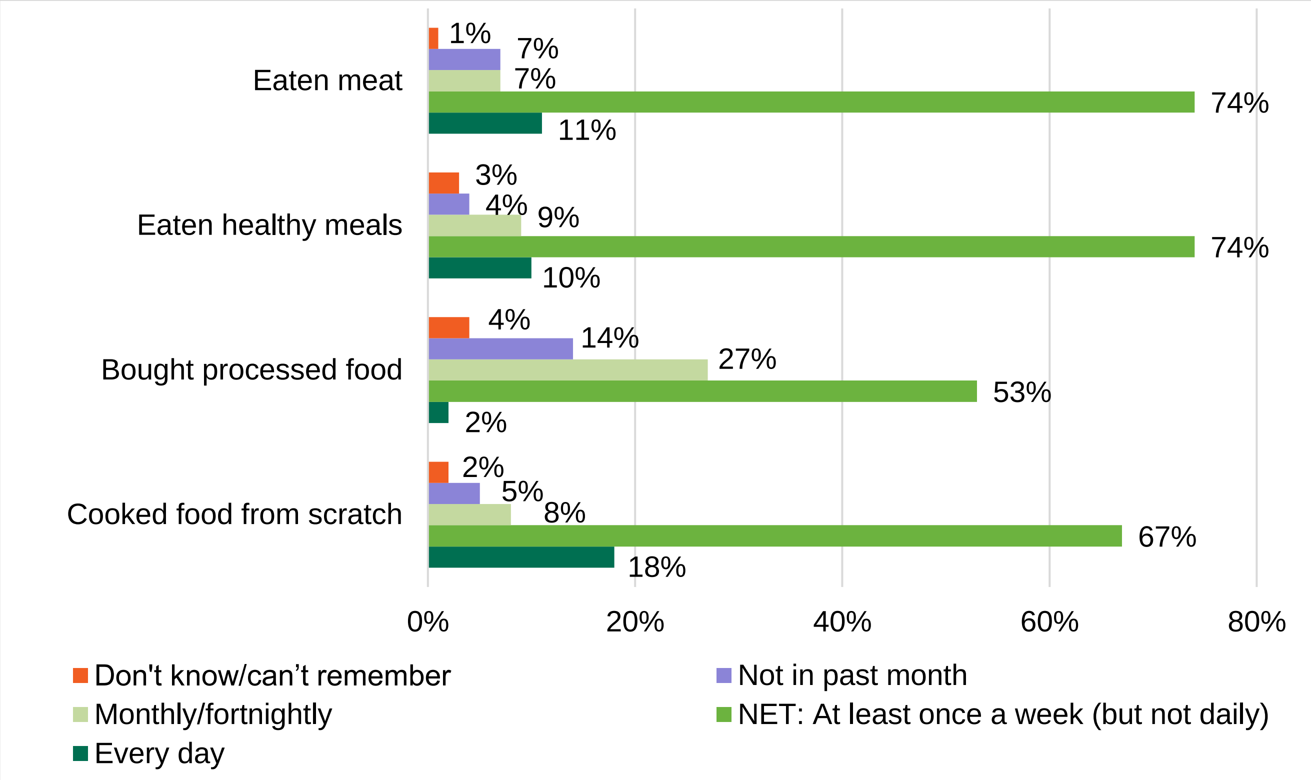
Figure 15: Proportion of respondents who report these nutrition behaviours in the preceding month



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, between 2,023 and 2,131 adults included in each wave. Affirmative responses are combined.

For all of these nutrition behaviours, participants were most likely to report doing them ‘at least once a week’, as displayed in Figure 16 where March 2021 data is provided as an example. These frequencies were consistent across all waves of the tracker. 74% of respondents reported eating meat and eating healthy meals ‘at least once a week (but not daily)’ in March 2021, with a further 11% and 10% reporting they did this ‘every day’ respectively. 53% reported eating processed foods ‘once a week or more’ (just 2% reported doing this daily), and 67% reported cooking food from scratch ‘once a week or more’; a further 18% reported doing this daily.

Figure 16: Frequency of reported nutrition behaviours (March 2021)



Base: 2,013 Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 12-15 March 2021. Responses may not total 100 due to rounding, and because 'prefer not to answer' and 'don't know' responses are not shown. At least once a week combines – most days, 2-3 times a week, at least once a week but excludes 'every day'.

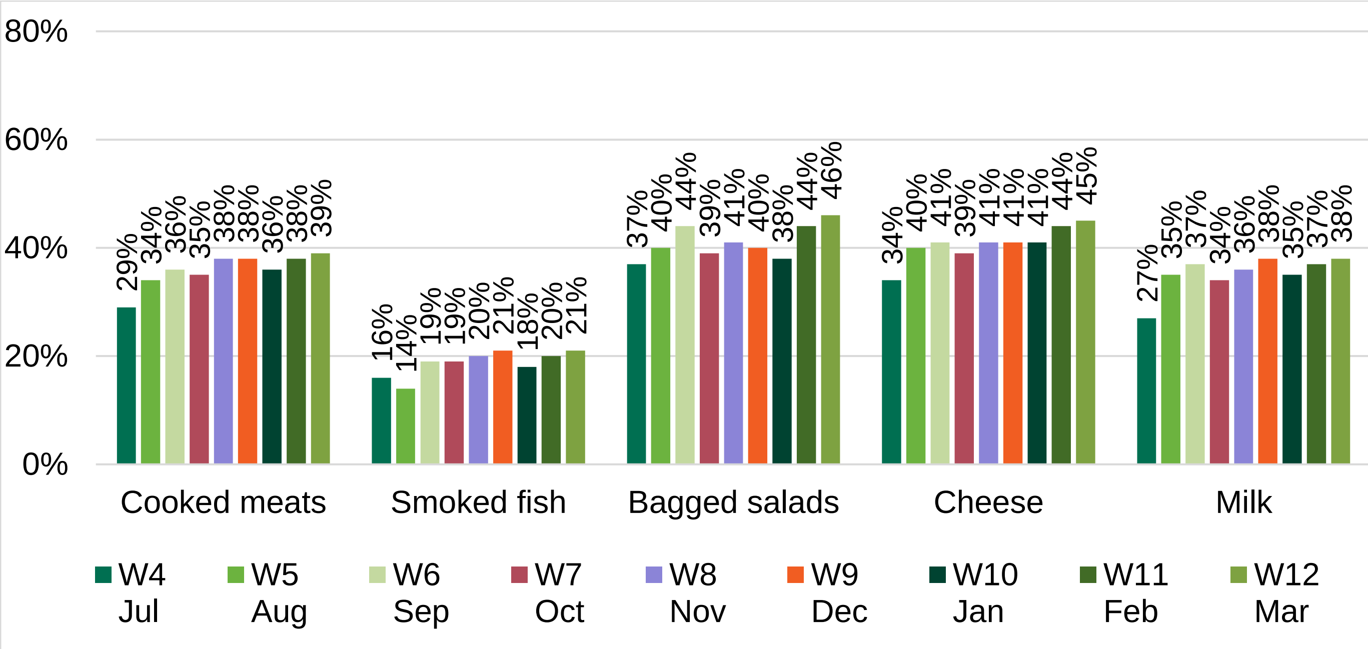
Food safety and hygiene in the home

The Covid-19 tracker also monitors key food safety behaviours, in accordance with FSA recommended practices.

Eating food past the use-by date

From July 2020, participants are asked the frequency that they eat specific foods past the use-by date. Figure 17 illustrates the proportion of respondents that reported eating the food past the use by date at least once in the past month. These figures are based on respondents who reported eating these foods (i.e. those who report not eating these foods in the past month are excluded from the base). In March 2021, 46% of participants who eat bagged salads reported eating this food past the use-by date, whilst 45% reported doing so for cheese, 39% for cooked meats and 38% for milk. Across all waves, participants were less likely to report eating smoked fish past the use-by date (21% in March 2021).

Figure 17: Proportion of respondents who report eating food past the use-by date (of those who reported eating these foods during that month) (May 2020 - March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults who had eaten the specified food (aged 16-75). Indicative base sizes in March 2021 are: 1,840 (cooked meats), 1,537 (smoked fish), 1,694 (bagged salad), 1,880 (cheese), 1,918 (milk). Data shown combines all affirmative responses.

Analysis of wave 12 data also shows that those who report cutting or skipping meals for financial reasons were significantly more likely to report that they or someone in their household had eaten bagged salad (67%), cheese (64%), cooked meat (61%), milk (61%) and smoked fish (48%) past its use by date, compared to those who hadn't skipped meals/cut down meals for financial reasons (bagged salad 40%, cheese 41%, cooked meat 33%, milk 33%, smoked fish 15%). Similar findings were also evident in analysis conducted on Wave 8 and Wave 4 data (see previous FSA Covid-19 tracker publications).

Other food safety behaviours

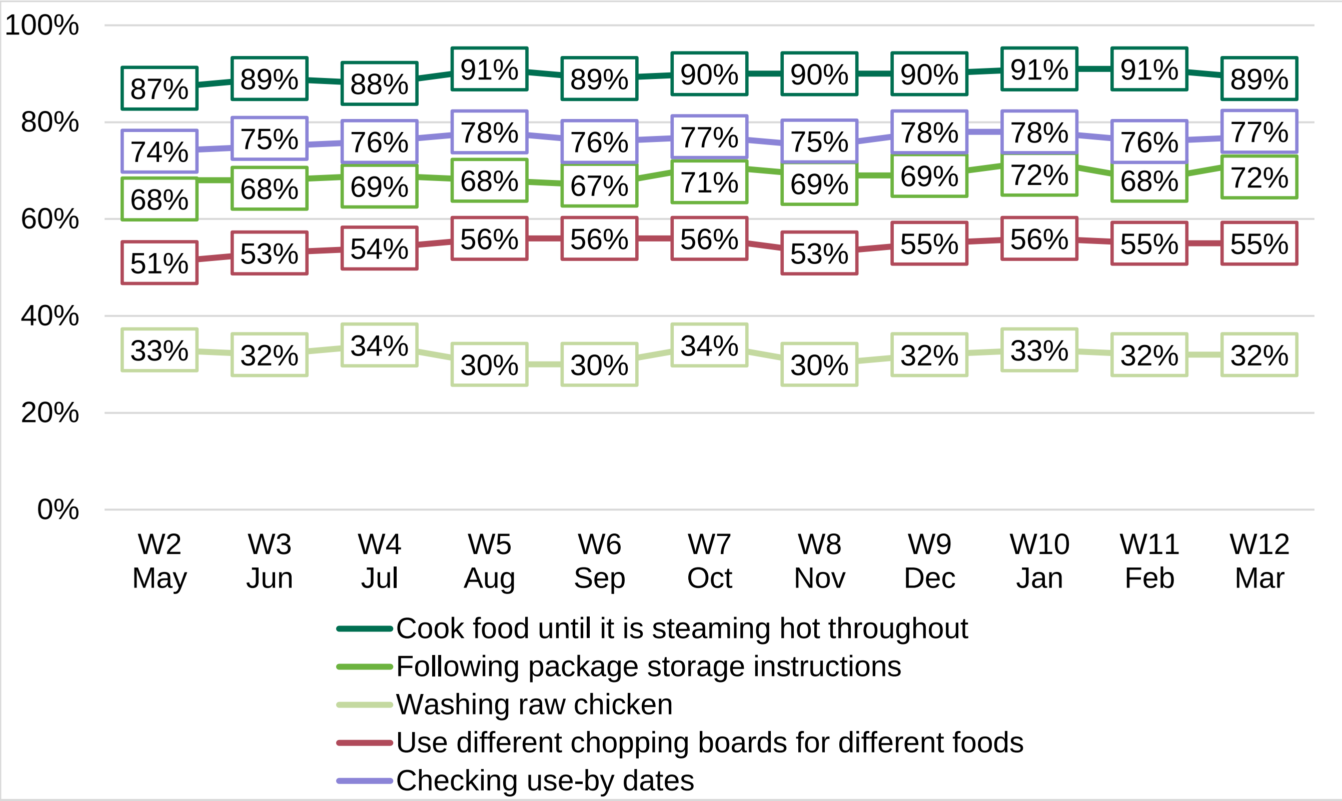
The Covid-19 tracker also monitors several other key food safety behaviours in the home including the following, which are all recommended by the FSA:

- Cooking food until steaming hot throughout
- Following storage instructions on food packaging (once food is opened)
- Using different chopping boards for different foods
- Checking use-by dates before cooking or preparing food

As shown in Figure 18, a high proportion of respondents who cook, report cooking food until steaming hot throughout ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ (87% or more across all waves), whilst over 74% report checking use-by dates before cooking/preparing food ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’. Over 65% of those who cook report following instructions on food packing related to food storage ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’, and over half (50%) reported using different chopping boards when cooking or preparing food across all waves. These findings have been broadly over time.

The tracker also monitors participants who report washing raw chicken, a practice not recommended by the FSA. At least 30% or more respondents who cook reported washing raw chicken ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ across all waves.

Figure 18: Reported Food Safety behaviours by respondents who cook (those report doing these practices ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, base is ‘adults who cook’ (aged 16-75). Data shown combines all affirmative responses.

However, over 20% of adults who cook reported ‘never’ using different chopping boards for food preparation, against FSA recommended practice. In contrast, just 2% reported ‘never’ cooking food until steaming hot throughout across all waves, and less than 6% reported ‘never’ following storage instructions on packaging or checking use-by dates before cooking or preparing food across each wave (Table 4).

Over half (50% or more) of adults who cook reported ‘never’ washing raw chicken across all waves, in line with FSA guidelines (Table 4).

Table 4: Reported Food Safety behaviours by respondents who cook (those who report doing these practices 'never')

Survey Wave	Cook food until it is steaming hot throughout	Following package storage instructions	Washing raw chicken	Use different chopping boards for different foods	Checking use-by dates
W2 May	2%	6%	52%	24%	5%
W3 Jun	2%	7%	53%	23%	4%
W4 Jul	2%	6%	51%	21%	4%
W5 Aug	2%	6%	57%	22%	4%
W6 Sep	2%	6%	56%	21%	3%
W7 Oct	2%	5%	52%	22%	4%
W8 Nov	2%	6%	56%	23%	5%
W9 Dec	2%	5%	55%	22%	3%
W10 Jan	2%	4%	52%	21%	3%
W11 Feb	2%	5%	52%	22%	4%
W12 Mar	2%	5%	53%	21%	4%

Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, base is 'adults who cook' (aged 16-75). Data shown combines all affirmative responses.

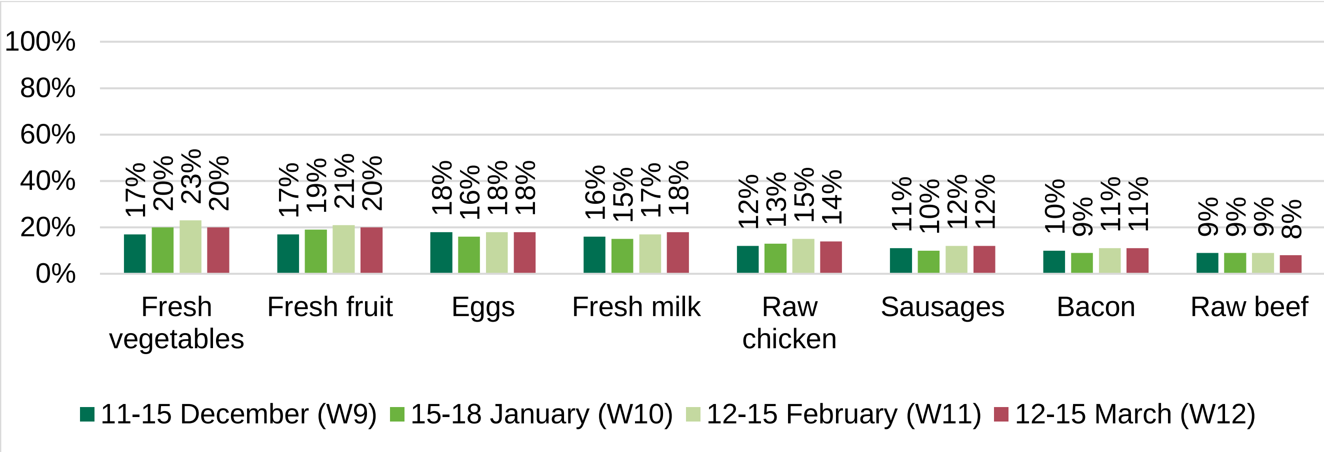
Food Shortages

From wave 9 (December 2020), the FSA commissioned some additional questions on food availability, food shortages and consumer concerns about their food. This was to monitor consumer perspectives during the second national lockdown, and as the UK left the EU.

Consumers were asked to identify if their preferred foods were unavailable to them whilst shopping (a list of foods were provided to participants for consideration). Figures 19 and 20 illustrate the proportions that reported certain food products as 'unavailable'. Most respondents reported that 'none of the above' were unavailable – 60% in December

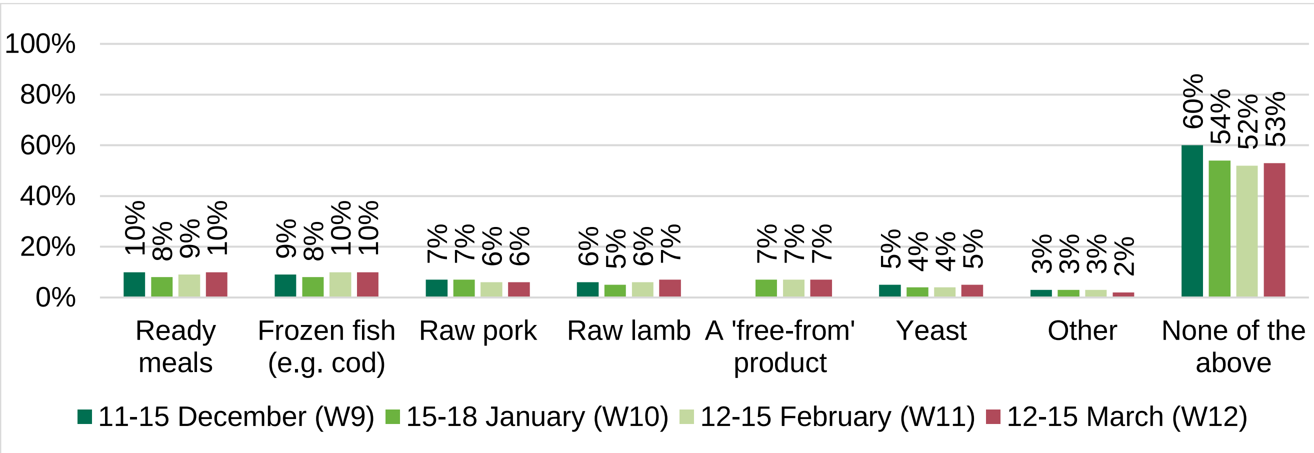
2020, dropping to 53% in March 2021. However, some participants did report lack of availability of some of the listed products. Fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, eggs, and fresh milk were among the most reported (Figure 19). Reported unavailability across all waves is relatively stable, and relatively low (the highest was 23% in February for fresh vegetables).

Figure 19: Foods reported as 'unavailable', Graph 1 (December 2020-March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013)

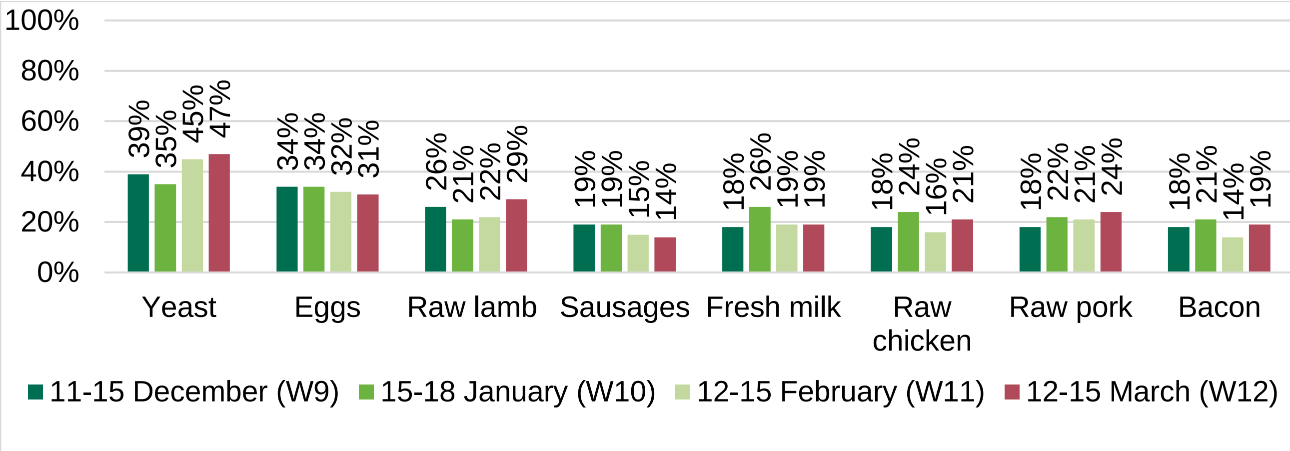
Figure 20: Foods reported as 'unavailable', Graph 2 (December 2020-March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013). Data collected on 'free from products' from January 2021 onwards.

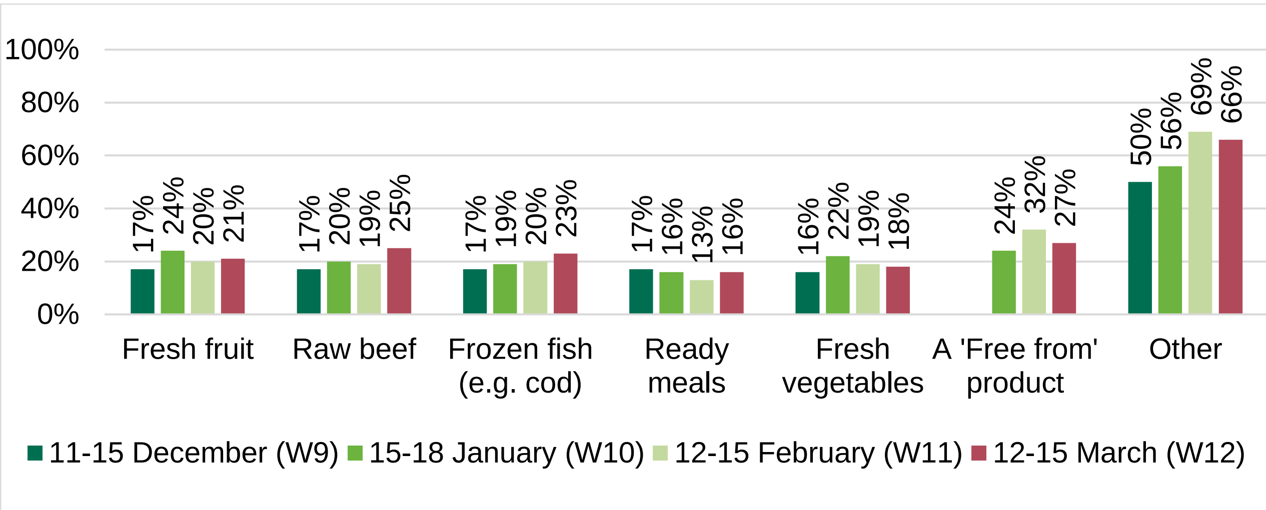
Those who reported food shortages, were also asked if they were able to find a suitable alternative for the product/s that were unavailable. For most products, participants were able to find a suitable alternative. Figures 21 and 22 illustrates the proportion of respondents each wave who could not find a suitable alternative. For example, 16-22% of participants could not find a suitable alternative for fresh vegetables across the reported waves. Whilst 17-24% could not find an alternative for fresh fruit, 31-34% for eggs, and 18-26% for fresh milk. Yeast and eggs were most consistently reported as products where no suitable alternative available. The ‘other’ category also had consistently high reports of no suitable alternative being available (50-69%); however, this category included a large range of free-text responses on various types of products.

Figure 21: Unavailable products with ‘no suitable alternative’, Graph 1 (December 2020-March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75 saying types of food products were unavailable. Participants who chose at least one food product in December 2020 (839), January 2021 (979), February 2021 (992), March 2021 (941).

Figure 22: Unavailable products with ‘no suitable alternative’, Graph 2 (December 2020-March 2021)



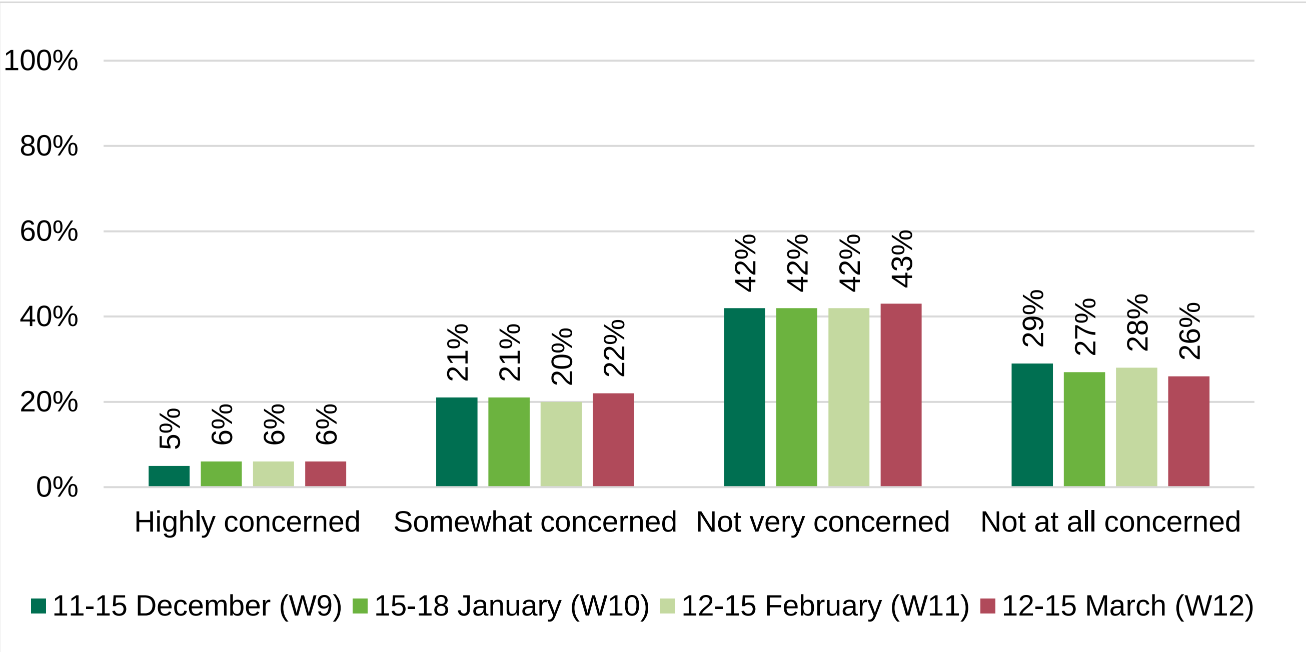
Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75 saying types of food products were unavailable. Participants who chose at least one food product in December 2020 (839), January 2021 (979), February 2021 (992), March 2021 (941). Data collected on 'free from products' from January 2021 onwards.

Consumer's food concerns

From December 2020, participants were also asked to what extent (if any), they were concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK, and the quality of food imported from outside the UK.

The majority of participants were not concerned about the quality of food produced in the UK; 42-43% reported 'not very concerned' and a further 26-29% reported 'not at all concerned', consistent across all 4 waves (Figure 23). This leaves just 20-22% reporting 'somewhat concerned' and a further 5-6% reporting 'highly concerned'.

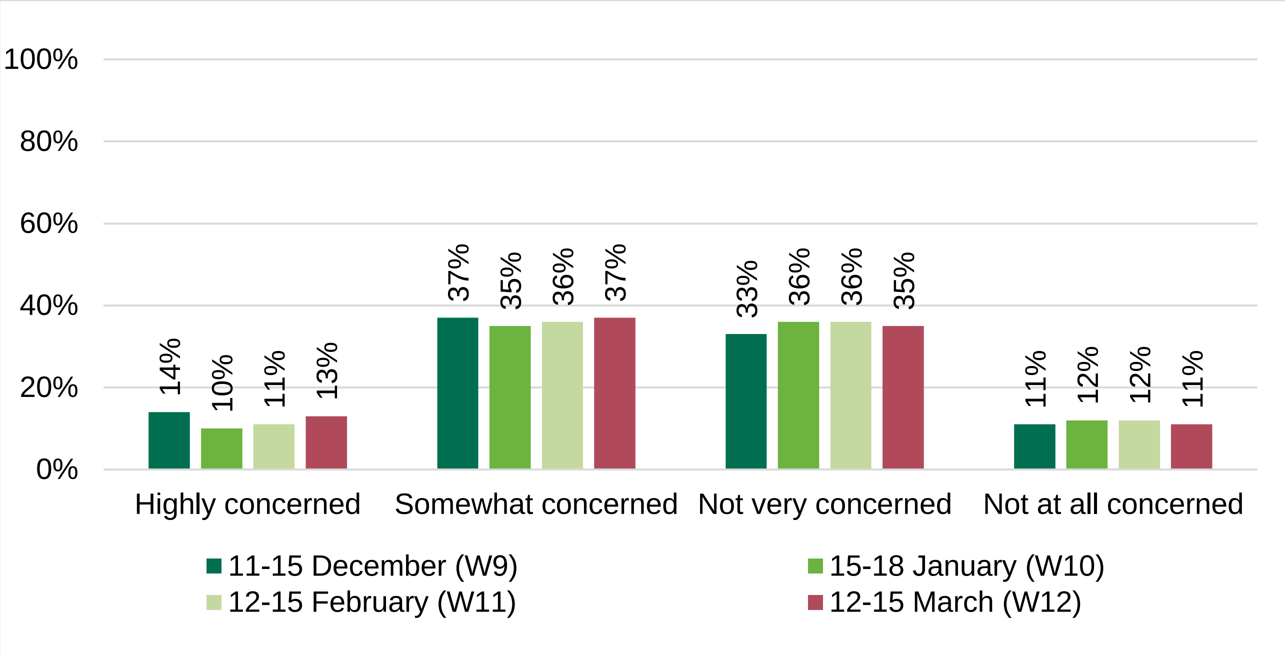
Figure 23: Reported concern about the quality of food produced in the UK (December 2020- March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013). Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' responses not shown.

In contrast, a much larger proportion reported concern about the quality of food imported from outside the UK; 35-37% reported being ‘somewhat concerned’ and a further 10-14% reported being highly concerned (Figure 24). This means that just less than half of respondents reported concern about the quality of food being imported from outside the UK each wave.

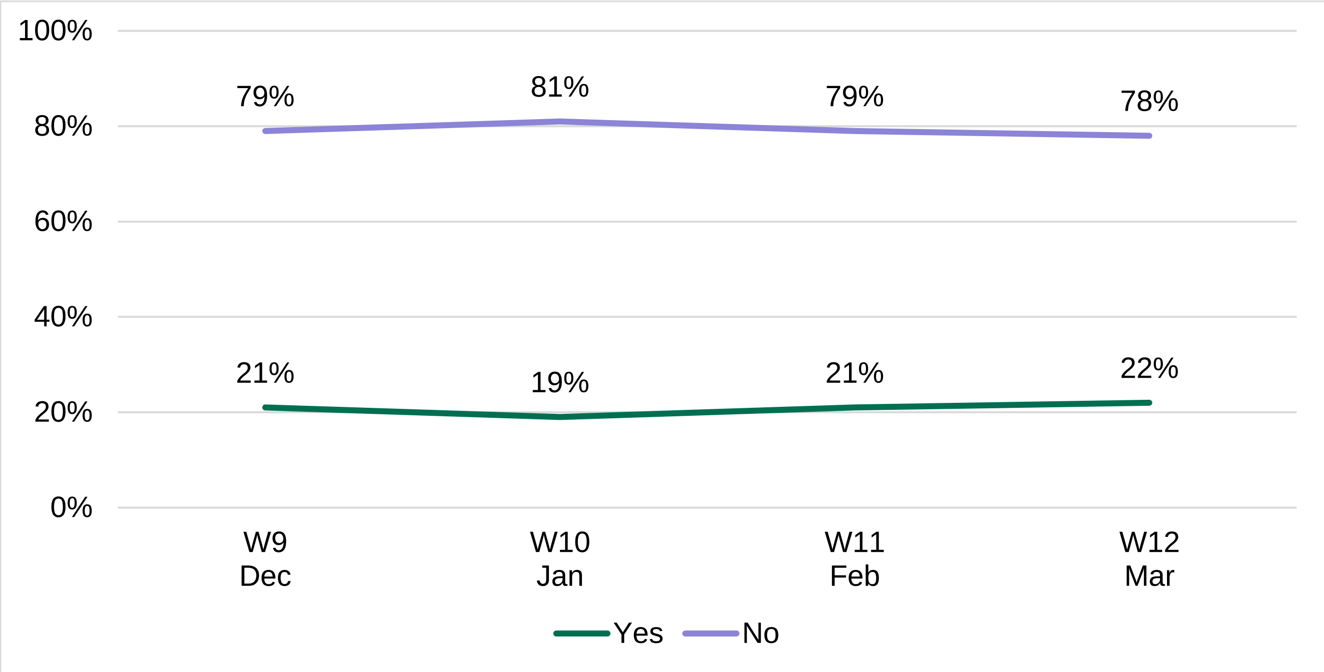
Figure 24: Reported concern about the quality of food imported from outside the UK (December 2020- March 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013). Values may not add to 100% as ‘don’t know’ responses not shown.

In a separate question, participants are also asked if they have any concerns about the food they eat ‘at the moment’. Between 19% and 22% of respondents reported having a concern about the food they eat, averaging 21% across all waves, whilst the majority of those surveyed said they did not have a concern (78-81%) (Figure 25).

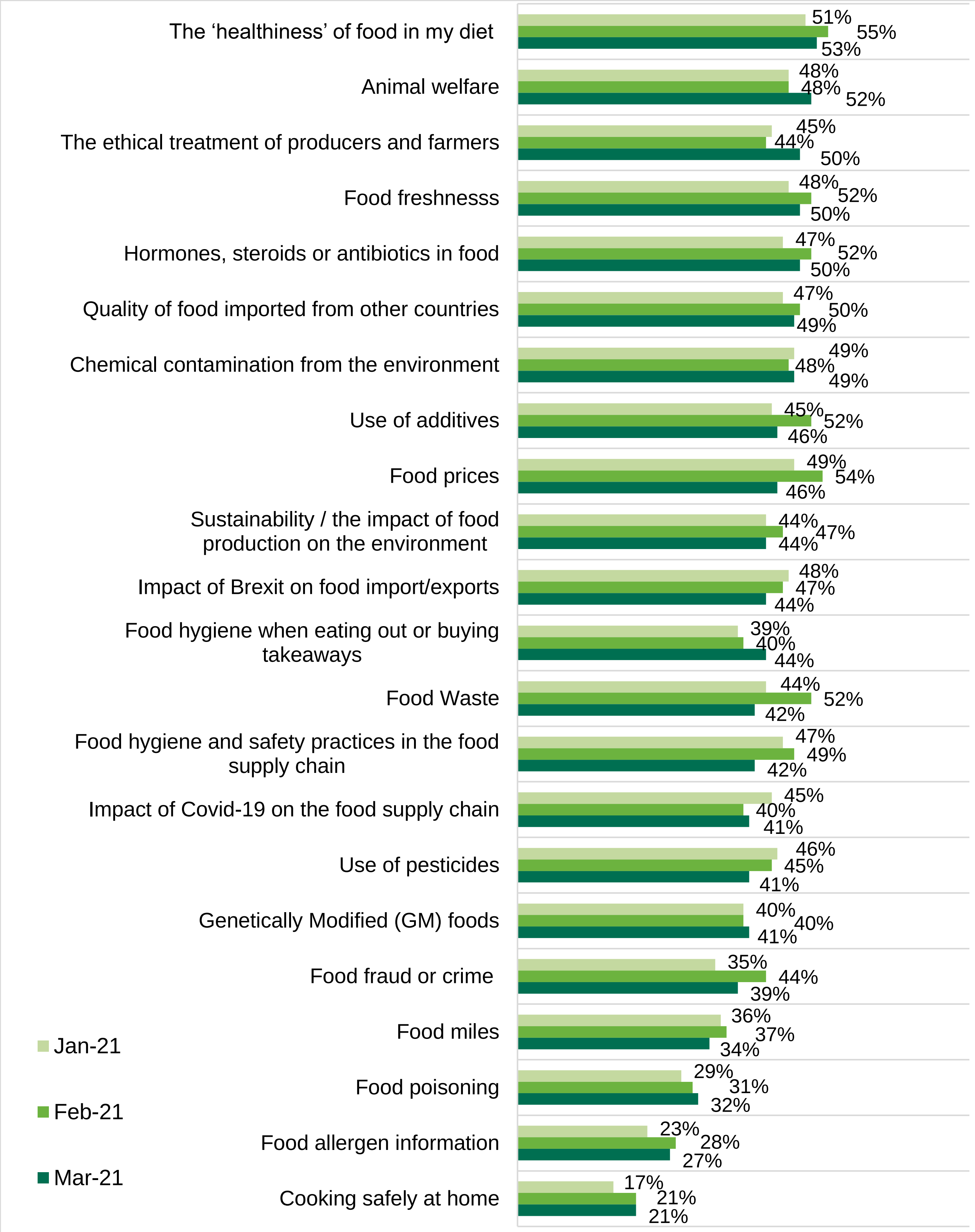
Figure 25: Participants who did/did not report they had a concern about the food they eat (December 2020-January 2021)



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013)

Those who reported having a concern 'at the moment' were asked the nature of their concern. In December 2020, this was asked as an free-text response question, allowing participants to write their concerns in their own words. These responses were then used to produce a list of the most common responses, allowing participants to choose from a standardised list from January 2021 onwards. From January onwards, the preset list was provided as a multi-choice question, allowing respondents to select multi issues from the list of concerns (results shown in Figure 26). Consistently since December 2020, the most common concern was 'the healthiness of food in my diet' (53% in March 2021), followed by animal welfare (52% in March 2021). Concerns around the impact of Covid-19 on the food supply chain were highest in January 2021 (45%), but have declined marginally to 41% in March 2021. The impact of Brexit on food imports/exports also declined from January (48%) to March 2021 (44%).

Figure 26: Concerns selected by participants (January 2021 - March 2021)

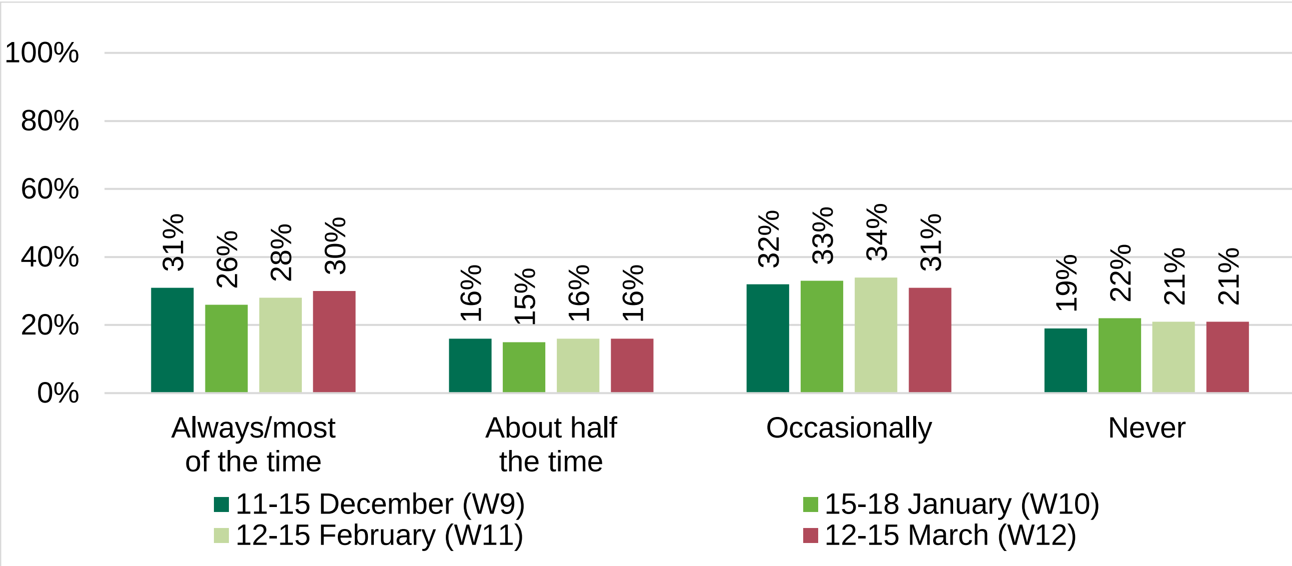


Base: 2,013 Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75; 453 Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75 saying they have concerns about food issues, 12-15 March 2021

The majority of those who said they had a concern about the food they eat ‘at the moment’, selected 4 or more from the list provided (80% in March 2021), which suggests that participants who have concerns have several concerns.

In addition to asking about participants concerns, we also asked participants to report how often they check the country of origin on food, and food assurance schemes (such as Red Tractor, The Lion Mark, RSPCA Assured, Soil Association). Figure 27 shows that 30% of participants reported checking the country of origin ‘Always’ or ‘Most of the time’ in March 2021, with a further 16% reporting they do this ‘about half the time’. 21% reported that they ‘never’ do this.

Figure 27: Whether participants check country of origin

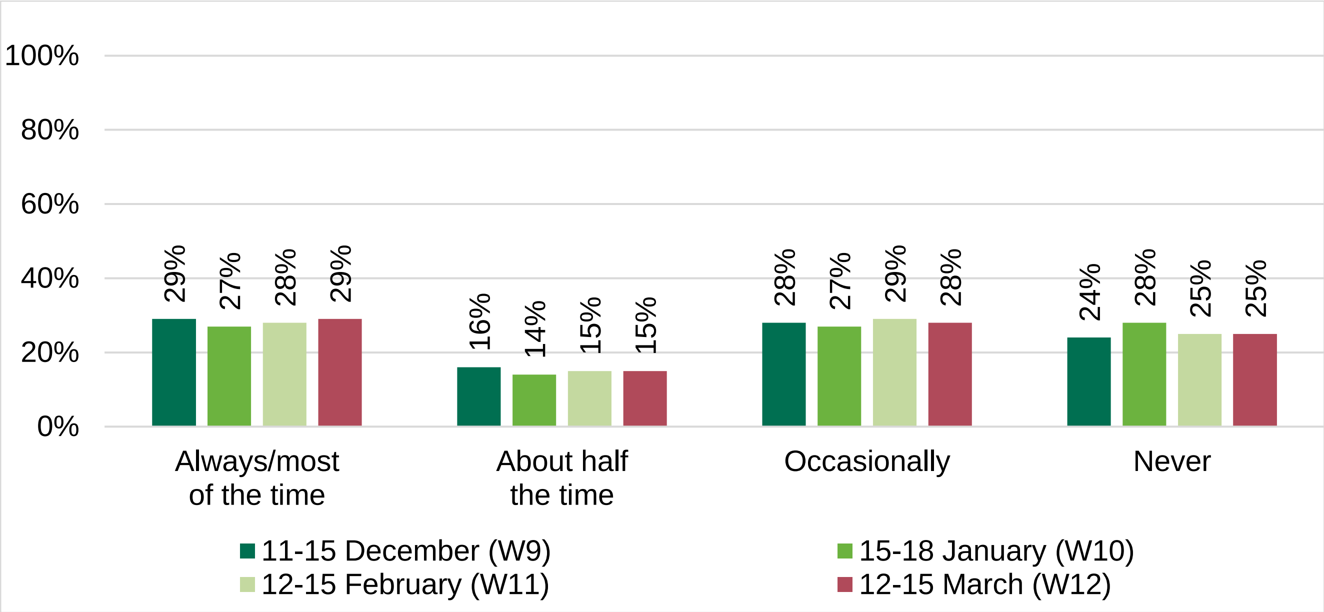


Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013)

Additional analysis of Wave 12 data shows that participants who report being ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat concerned’ about the quality of food produced **inside** the UK, were significantly more likely to check the country of origin ‘always or most of the time’ (46%) than those who were ‘not very’ or ‘not at all concerned’ (25%). Similarly, of those who reported being ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat concerned’ about the quality of food imported from **outside** the UK, 46% reported checking the country of origin ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’, compared to just 15% who reported being not concerned (a statistically significant difference).

A very similar proportion reported to check food assurance schemes; 29% reported doing this ‘always’ or most of the time in March 2021, with a further 15% reporting doing this ‘about half the time’ (Figure 28). 25% of respondents reported ‘never’ doing this in March 2021, consistent with previous waves.

Figure 28: Whether participants report checking food assurance schemes



Base: Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75, 11-15 December 2020 (2,073); 15-18 January 2021 (2,131); 12-15 February 2021 (2,047); 12-15 March 2021 (2,013)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Key changes to lockdown restrictions

Table 5: Fieldwork dates, sample size and key changes to lockdown restrictions

Date or period	Event
March 23rd	Start of first national (UK) lockdown and 'stay at home' order
April 10-13th	Wave 1 data collection (2,039)
May 8-12th	Wave 2 data collection (2,040)
May 10th	First national lockdown easing in England (return to work for those who cannot work from home
May 18th	First national lockdown eases in Northern Ireland
June 1st	Phased re-opening of Schools in England. Easing of first national lockdown begins for Wales.
June 12th-15th	Wave 3 data collection (2,045)
July 4th	First localised lockdowns come into force in UK.
July 10-14th	Wave 4 data collection (2,068)
August 3rd	'Eat out to Help Out' Scheme begins in the UK
August 14th-17th	Wave 5 data collection (2,071)
September 14th	Rule of 6 introduced in England and Wales – banning indoor and outdoor gatherings of more than 6 people
September 17th	Wales placed under lockdown restrictions
September 18th	Almost 2m people under local lockdown restrictions in North East England
September 18th-21st	Wave 6 data collection (2,065)
October 14th	3 tier lock down system introduced in England
October 16th-20th	Wave 7 data collection (2,067)

October 23rd	Welsh 17-day ‘firebreak’ national lockdown comes into force
November 5th	Second national lockdown comes into force in England
November 9th	Welsh 17-day ‘firebreak’ national lockdown comes to an end
November 13th-16th	Wave 8 data collection (2,023)
November 27th	National lockdown comes into force in Northern Ireland
December 2nd	Second national lockdown ends after four weeks, England returns to three-tier system.
December 11th	Northern Ireland lockdown eases
December 11th-15th	Wave 9 data collection (2,073)
December 19th	Tier 4 restrictions announced for London and South East England. Single-day Christmas restrictions announced in England (similar in Wales and Northern Ireland) Lockdown announced for Wales, with single day break for Christmas.
December 26th	Northern Ireland enters a 6-week lockdown, rules were briefly relaxed for Christmas day
January 6th	England enters third national lockdown
January 15th-18th	Wave 10 data collection (2,131)
February 12th-15th	Wave 11 data collection (2,047)
March 8th	Beginning of ‘Roadmap out of lockdown’. Step 1: Schools reopening in England
March 12th-15th	Wave 12 data collection (2,013)
March 15th	First stages of Welsh lockdown easing
March 21st	‘Roadmap out of lockdown’. Step 2: Outdoor gatherings of 6 people permitted in England, reopening of outdoor activities.

Appendix 2: Survey questions

The full list of FSA survey questions for Wave 12 (March 2021) is provided below. Please note that the survey questions vary in some waves. A full list of survey questions for any specific wave can be provided on request.

1) Which, if any, of the following applies to you? Please select from the options listed
    a) I have been advised to self-isolate because I have been contacted via the NHS 'test and trace' scheme or because I have returned from a trip to another country that requires self-isolation on return
    b) I am choosing to self-isolate for another reason
    c) I, or a member of my household, have suspected Covid-19 symptoms
    d) I, or a member of my household, is in the shielding category
    e) I have physical or mental health condition(s) or illness(es) that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more
    f) None of these
    g) Prefer not to say

2) To what extent, if at all, are you worried about there not being enough food available for you/your household to buy in the next month? Please select one answer only
    a) Very worried
    b) Somewhat worried
    c) Not very worried
    d) Not at all worried
    e) Don't know
    f) Prefer not to answer

3) To what extent, if at all, are you worried you/your household will not be able to afford food in the next month? Please select one answer only
    a) Very worried
    b) Somewhat worried
    c) Not very worried
    d) Not at all worried

e) Don’t know
f) Prefer not to answer

4) In the last month have you cut down the size of your meals or skipped meals for any of the following reasons? Please select one answer for each statement.
   a) You did not have enough money to buy food
   b) You (or others in your household) were not well enough to shop or cook food
   c) You had no means to get to the shops to buy food
   d) You were unable to get a delivery of food or obtain it in other ways

      i. Yes, this happened every week
      ii. Yes, this happened some weeks but not every week
      iii. Yes, this happened just one week in the last month
      iv. No, never
      v. Don’t know/can’t remember
      vi. Prefer not to answer

5) In the last month, how often, if at all, have you done any of the following? Please select one answer for each statement.
   a) Had an online food delivery from a supermarket
   b) Purchased food from a takeaway, either direct or online
   c) Purchased food from a local supplier (i.e. farm shops, veg box), either direct or online
   d) Had a food delivery from an online food ordering company (e.g. Deliveroo, Just Eat, Uber Eats)
   e) Purchased food through an online marketplace such as Facebook marketplace, Etsy, Gumtree, Instagram, Nextdoor etc.
      i. Every day
      ii. Most days but not every day
      iii. 2 to 3 times a week
      iv. Every week
      v. Some weeks but not every week

vi. Just one week in the last month
vii. I have not done this in the last month
viii. Don't know/can't remember
ix. Prefer not to answer

6) Compared to the period before the coronavirus pandemic (i.e. before March 2020), are you doing any of the following more or less often? Please select one answer for each statement.
    a) Having online food deliveries from a supermarket
    b) Purchasing food from a takeaway, either direct or online
    c) Purchasing food from a local supplier (i.e. farm shops, veg box), either direct or online
    d) Purchasing food from an online food ordering company (e.g. Deliveroo, Just Eat, Uber Eats)
    e) Purchasing food through an online marketplace such as Facebook marketplace, Etsy, Gumtree, Instagram, Nextdoor etc.
        i. A lot more now
        ii. A little more now
        iii. About the same
        iv. A little less now
        v. A lot less now
        vi. I have never done this
        vii. Don't know

7) [Ask if codes 7 at Question 6] Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you did not buy a take-away in the past month? Please select from the options listed

    a) I prefer to cook at home
    b) I prefer to eat more healthily
    c) I can't afford take-aways
    d) I am concerned about Covid-19
    e) I want to save money
    f) I am concerned about adequate food hygiene
    g) Other (specify)

8) In the last month, how often, if at all, have you arranged for food to be delivered to your house in the following ways? Please select one answer for each statement.
    a) Through a food sharing app (e.g. Olio)
    b) Through a government or local authority scheme
    c) Through a food charity or food bank
        i. Every week
        ii. Some weeks but not every week
        iii. Just one week in the last month
        iv. I have not done this in the last month
        v. Don't know/can't remember
        vi. Prefer not to answer

9) Ask if codes 1,2,3 selected for food bank/charity in Qu 8] Which of the following, if any, are reasons you have had food delivered to your house from a food bank or a food charity in the last month? Please choose up to 3 options.
    a. We did not have enough money to buy food
    b. Someone in the household has been self-isolating because they have Covid-19 symptoms, have been contacted by the NHS 'test and trace' scheme, or have returned from a trip to another country that requires self-isolation on return
    c. There was a delay or problems with benefits payments
    d. Someone in the household lost their job
    e. Someone in the household was on furlough or on a Covid-19 specific Government Job support Scheme
    f. We had difficulties travelling to get food ourselves
    g. Other (please specify)
    h. Prefer not to answer

10) In the last month have you or anyone in your family eaten any of the following foods that has gone past its 'use by' date? Please select one answer for each food.
    a. Cooked meats
    b. Smoked fish

c. Bagged salads
d. Cheese
e. Milk
    i. Yes, this happened every week
    ii. Yes, this happened some weeks but not every week
    iii. Yes, this happened just one week in the last month
    iv. No, never
    v. We haven’t eaten this in the last month
    vi. Don’t know/can’t remember
    vii. Prefer not to say

11) In the last month, how often, if at all, have you done any of the following? Please select one answer for each statement.
    a. Cooked food from scratch
    b. Cooked to freeze food for later
    c. Wasted or thrown away food
    d. Bought processed food
    e. Eaten together with the family
    f. Snacked on cakes, biscuits, confectionery and savoury snacks
    g. Bought food from local shops
    h. Eaten healthy meals
    i. Eaten meat
        i. Every day
        ii. Most days
        iii. 2 to 3 times a week
        iv. At least once a week
        v. At least once a fortnight
        vi. At least once a month
        vii. I have not done this in the last month
        viii. Don’t know/can’t remember
        ix. Prefer not to answer

12) How often, if at all, do you do each of the following? Please select one answer for each statement.

a. Cook food until it is steaming hot throughout
b. Follow instructions on food packaging which tells you how long food should be stored once opened
c. Washing raw chicken
d. Use different chopping boards for different foods
e. Check use-by dates when you are about to cook or prepare food
    i. Always
    ii. Most of the time
    iii. Sometimes
    iv. Never
    v. I don’t cook

13) Please think about the food products that you usually prefer to buy. These might be specific types of food or particular brands, or products you prefer for some other reason. Thinking about each of the following types of food, in the last month, have any of your preferred products been unavailable when doing your food shopping? By unavailable, we mean that your usual or preferred product was out of stock.
a. Fresh milk
b. Eggs
c. Raw chicken
d. Raw beef
e. Raw lamb
f. Raw pork
g. Sausages
h. Bacon
i. Frozen fish (e.g. cod)
j. Ready meals
k. Fresh fruit
l. Fresh vegetables
m. Yeast
n. A ‘free-from’ product (such as gluten free, dairy free, wheat free etc)
o. Other (please specify)
p. None of the above

14) Ask if a-n is selected at question 13] Thinking about the following types of food products you said were unavailable, were you able to find a suitable substitute when doing your food shopping? For example, a suitable substitute might be another similar product or a different brand of the same product.
    a. Q19 responses (one per row)
        i. I was always able to find a suitable substitute
        ii. I was sometimes able to find a suitable substitute
        iii. I was not able to find a suitable substitute

15) Thinking about food in the UK today, how concerned, if at all, do you feel about…? Please select one answer for each statement.
    a. The quality of food produced in the UK?
    b. The quality of food imported from outside the UK?
        i. Highly concerned
        ii. Somewhat concerned
        iii. Not very concerned
        iv. Not concerned at all
        v. Don't Know

16) When shopping for food, how often, if at all, do you check:
    a. The country of origin
    b. Food assurance scheme logos (eg Red Tractor, The Lion Mark, RSPCA Assured, Soil Association) [Info button: In the UK, food assurance schemes, such as Red Tractor and Lion Eggs, help to provide consumers and businesses with guarantees that food has been produced to specific standards of food safety or animal welfare]
        i. Always
        ii. Most of the time
        iii. About half the time
        iv. Occasionally
        v. Never
        vi. Don’t know

17) Thinking generally, do you have any concerns about the food you eat at the moment?

a. Yes
b. No

18) Ask if yes is selected at Question 17] Which of these food issues are you concerned about, if any? Please select all that apply. If you have a concern that is not listed, please select ‘other’ and write your answer in a few words.

a. The ‘healthiness’ of food in my diet (e.g. the number of calories, fat, sugar or salt in the food you eat or the nutritional content of your diet)
b. Cooking safely at home
c. Food poisoning (e.g. Salmonella and E. Coli)
d. Food hygiene when eating out or buying takeaways
e. Food hygiene and safety practices in the food supply chain. [INFO BUTTON: The food supply chain is everything that goes into bringing food to our plates; from food production, transportation, packaging, storage, sale of produce through to consumption and disposal].
f. The use of pesticides
g. The use of additives (e.g. preservatives and colouring)
h. Chemical contamination from the environment (e.g. lead in food)
i. Hormones, steroids or antibiotics in food
j. Genetically Modified (GM) foods
k. Food prices
l. Food allergen information (e.g. availability and accuracy)
m. Food waste
n. Animal welfare
o. Food miles (e.g. the distance food travels)
p. Sustainability / the impact of food production on the environment
q. Food fraud or crime (e.g. food not being what the label says it is)
r. The quality of food imported from other countries
s. Food freshness (e.g. how long it has been stored before reaching your plate)

t. The impact of Covid-19 on the food supply chain. [INFO BUTTON: The food supply chain is everything that goes into bringing food to our plates; from food production, transportation, packaging, storage, sale of produce through to consumption and disposal].
u. The impact of Brexit on food import/exports
v. The ethical treatment of producers and farmers (e.g. Fair Trade)
w. Other - please specify
x. None of these
y. Don’t know

19) Ask if 4 or more options are selected at question 18] Which of these food issues are you most concerned about, if any? Please select up to three food issues from this list that you are most concerned about

    a) Display all responses selected at question 18.

Appendix 3: List of figures

For enquiries about this publication, contact the Food Standards Agency.

Follow us on Twitter: @foodgov

Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/FoodStandardsAgency