THE CONSUMER INTEREST IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

Report by Michelle Patel, Director of Communications

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1 SUMMARY

1.1 The Board is asked to:

Note -

- our work so far to listen to and understand, inform, and ultimately empower consumers in the food system.

Discuss -

- where we should focus our consumer insight in the coming year;
- whether the Board is content to receive an annual review of our consumer engagement work ;
- how we can support the Board's interaction with consumers

2 INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 Section 7 of the Food Standards Act says that the FSA 'has the function of—(a) providing advice and information to the general public (or any section of the public) in respect of matters connected with food safety or other interests of consumers in relation to food…with a view to ensuring that members of the public are kept adequately informed about and advised in respect of matters which the Agency considers significantly affect their capacity to make informed decisions about food.'

2.2 These 'informed decisions about food' encompass both those areas where we would provide information and advice so people can understand and manage the longer and shorter term risks to them and their communities from food, and, in line with their own stated interests, areas where we would provide information and advice so people can understand and manage the impact they have on the food system.

2.3 We said in our Strategic Plan that 'we want consumers to be and feel powerful - able to contribute effectively to shaping a food system that protects their interests and respects their rights. We have roles in protecting, informing and empowering consumers as part of helping them secure those rights.'

2.4 And, we said that we would do this in ways that are 'genuinely open and engaging, finding ways to empower consumers both in our policy making and our delivery and in their relationship with the food industry'.

3 UNDERSTANDING 'THE INTERESTS OF CONSUMERS IN RELATION TO FOOD'

3.1 The FSA Board represents the consumer interest and directs the FSA's work accordingly. Last year we committed to update the Board annually on our consumer engagement and how we seek to understand, engage and involve consumers in our policymaking.

3.2 Our consumer engagement projects fall into three main areas:

(a) More open listening work to inform our prioritisation of issues and improve delivery – for example, seeking insights into:

- how consumers might respond to potential medium term changes in the global food system
- where consumers are themselves most active and interested when it comes to food
- levels of adherence to recommended practice on food safety among different ethnic communities

(b) Specific work to inform options appraisal of a range of possible interventions and to support Board decision making; for example, on:

- how consumers respond to messaging around rare burgers
- how consumers understand chemicals in food
- how consumers in Northern Ireland engage with food labelling
- how consumers engage with the Food Hygiene Rating scheme
- the consumer view of acceptable levels of Campylobacter in chicken
- how small businesses prefer to receive information digitally
- the risks some consumers on low incomes take to make food go further

(c) Surveys which look at trends over time and which inform our evaluations of the consumer information and other interventions we make, tracking:

- concerns about the food system and trust in the work of the FSA
- how our campaigns have resonated with consumers over time

3.3 A synthesis of some of our most influential projects is attached at Annex A.

3.4 On-going and planned projects in the next quarter include:

- consumer and small business views of the proposed changes to how the food system is regulated;
- how we can make product recalls more effective;
- consumer understanding and response to potential changes in the food system following the result of the EU referendum;
- practices and messaging around the consumption of 'smokies' in some communities; and
- further work to understand how to nuance messaging around the risk of chemical contaminants.

3.5 People's relationship with food is complex, cultural, often emotional and values-based as well as rational. Thus, people's interests in the food system are varied and wide ranging. We track them on a regular basis. Some of these are what we might class as 'consumer' interests - based on immediate concerns about health, safety and price. Some, however, are more like 'citizen' interests, thinking more broadly about the wider impact of our food choices.

3.6 People have told us that they worry about losing connection to family, society and identity in the face of modern, convenience based lifestyles. They worry that access to healthy food will become a luxury, and there is concern that if we value and connect with food less, we are more likely to waste it.

3.7 But people feel that one of the welcome changes is the trend for increased information and education available about the food we eat. Clear information also reassures them that the food industry is being encouraged to act in consumers' interest. There is a growing belief that transparency is a public right, driven by increasing openness in a digital world.

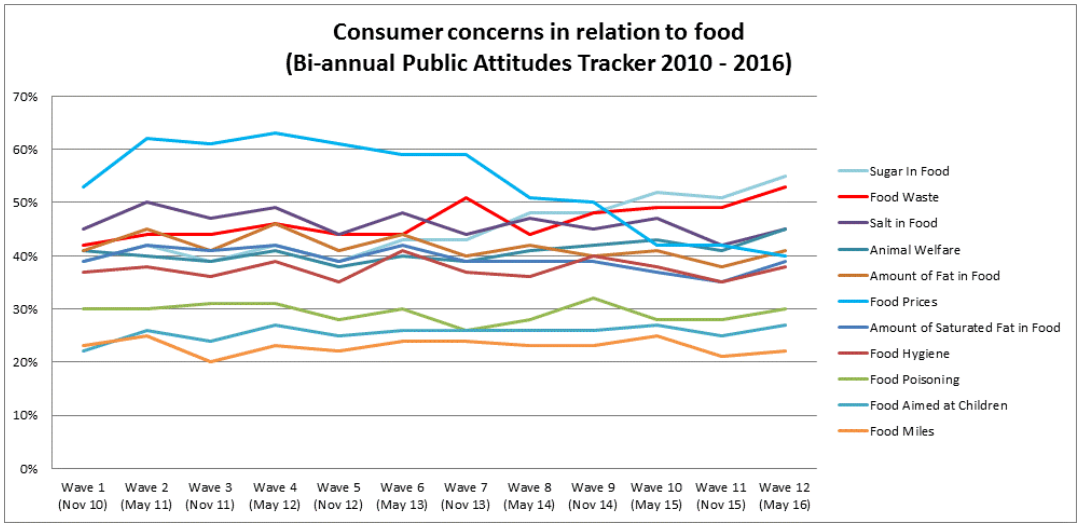
3.8 People sometimes ask to be 'forced' to listen. There is a real challenge for all of our policy and communications to not simply help educate people about safe practice, but help present the case for paying attention to the issue of food in a compelling way.

3.9 Consumer interests change over time. We believe that this is due to many factors including the media agenda, the economic climate and trends in food and diet. We have seen an increase over time in the level of general concern about the food system.

3.10 In Q1 2016, the top stated concerns of consumers were:

1. Sugar in food (55%)
2. Food waste (53%)
3. Salt in food (45%)

3= Animal welfare (45%)



3.11 We also track trust in the FSA and trust in the food system. Consumer faith in the food industry is patchy. In the latest wave of our tracker taken in February 2016, only 44% of people agree that 'the people who produce and supply food make sure it is safe, honest and ethically approved'.

3.12 57% of people are 'confident that the food I buy or eat is what it says it is and accurately labelled', and 57% of people 'trust the authenticity of the ingredients, origin or quality of the food I buy or eat'.

3.13 Trust in the Government and the FSA is higher. In a similar size survey taken at the same time, 74% of respondents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland reported being aware of the FSA; amongst those aware of the FSA, 64% said they trusted the FSA to do its job.

3.14 People tend to ascribe the most influence and power in shaping our food future to market forces; followed by Government; and then the public themselves.

4 BUILDING A CULTURE OF LISTENING

4.1 Active and impartial listening is more crucial than ever to staying relevant to the people and the communities that we serve and the changing world in which we operate. Governments, civil servants, experts and representative bodies can no longer presume that we understand and know what citizens are going to say, feel and think. Feelings and opinions change regularly and we need to keep engaged in the conversations taking place.

4.2 We continue our commitment to supporting social equity, opening our ears to voices or discourses that we may not be used to hearing. Taking learnings from 'Creating an Architecture of Listening in Organizations: The Basis of Engagement, Trust, Healthy Democracy, Business Sustainability, and Social Equity', a recent publication by Professor Jim McNamara to which we and other Government departments have contributed, we are exploring what the FSA might need to engage more closely in conversation with people.

4.3 For him, this includes:

- A culture of openness and willingness to learn, so listening is ingrained into our policies, procedures and priorities;
- Being clear in our motives and reasons for listening to people;
- Structure, processes and resources providing teams and individuals the right tools to effectively hear from society; and
- Technologies for listening, adopting new platforms that enable the FSA to better listen to citizens.

5 DIRECT CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Much of our current engagement is at one remove, through a research agency or online. We would like to enrich this by exposing our policymakers and the Board to more direct interaction with the publics and communities we serve.

We might do this in several ways:

- Continuing to report to the Board annually on our consumer engagement work;
- Using new technologies like social media listening to hear the voice of consumers at scale;
- Ensuring that the direct voice of citizens is included in inputs to Board decisions wherever possible;
- Including Board members as observers in our Citizens Fora and other research; and
- Ensuring that the Board have every opportunity to engage directly with citizens on the occasions when it comes together, as well as ad hoc direct engagement for the Board and senior managers in the FSA.

5.2 We have been looking at ways of bringing people's direct voice and views into our decision making. We plan to pilot an innovative participatory process, engaging in a dialogue with a representative panel of citizens to help the Board decide which of their stated interests, alongside food safety and authenticity, members of the public would want the FSA to prioritise. If the Board is content, we will report back on this piece of work after Christmas.

5.3 There is also an opportunity for the Welsh and Northern Irish Advisory Committees to play an enhanced role in engaging with people in those nations and feeding their perspectives into wider Board discussions.

6 CONSUMERS OR CITIZENS?

6.1 Some of the findings of our insight work throw up some strategic questions. For example, from the Our Food Future study and subsequent discussions has emerged a line of thinking about the person as citizen in relation to food, rather than as just a consumer whose only agency is through their purchasing power. We have been working with others to think about how we can do more to build the engagement in the food system that some people in that study told us they were worried about losing as individual consumers but also as communities, social media users, and citizens.

6.2 We are about to embark on a joint project with others such as the New Citizenship Project and the Food Ethics Council to explore how thinking of people differently can make our policies more well-rounded and strengthen engagement with the food system as a whole, developing a theory of change and an action plan to support ongoing progress. The themes and ideas will be drawn together into a final report for publication.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ANNEX A

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY
Embedding Public Insight

11 insights to inform our work

TNS BMRB - June 2016

The FSA holds an incredible amount of data and insight on what the UK public really need, feel, think and do in relation to food. This includes a wide range of work across:

- Deep explorations of public responses to complex policy and communications issues via Citizen's Forum dialogues and workshops;
- Face-to-face focus groups and depth interviews;
- Online forum research and 'diaries';
- Message testing – including online and in-restaurant sessions;
- Tracking data;
- Ad-hoc policy and PR surveys;
- Social media analysis; and
- Desk research and literature reviews.

This document summarises key data and insight from the last three years of our consumer engagement research programme. Links to the original research materials are contained in the Appendix. In total, this document summarises insight from analysis of over 780 qualitative research sessions, 6,590 online survey responses, and 36,000 verbatims from social media.

The work that the FSA commissions in this space is robust, independent, tailored to the question at hand, and often peer-reviewed. Much of our work is also UK-wide, typically including varied public participants which represent a broad spectrum of experiences, contexts, values, needs and behaviours around food. We've spoken to the public in traditional market research environments but also in their homes, in restaurants, in supermarkets and online – helping ensure we see and understand the contexts in which they live and in which we will be communicating with them.

Crucially our work is also intentionally, strategically iterative. Each project reflects and builds upon existing insights about the public that we serve and what they need, think, feel and do. As such, we can be confident in taking action against what they have told us – about their key needs around food, but also around how they want to be supported and communicated with.

The pages to follow briefly summarises what we know so far about:

- **The public we serve**: how they think about food, what matters to them, and what their concerns are;

- **Our challenge as communicators**: who want to engage with, educate and empower a varied public audience about often complex issues; and

- **What works and what doesn't:** in terms of engaging our audiences, helping people understand sometimes complex risks and challenges, and 'stop, think and choose.'

Insight 1: Food is a 'people' issue – not a 'consumer' issue

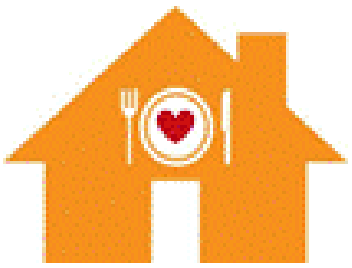
"Food is so important… when you're socialising you'll sit and eat, go to a café or a restaurant with friends. It all happens around food. At work you're sitting down with a cup of tea and there's coffee, tea, biscuits, and you're sitting chatting away. Or with your family you have your family meals. It's all about food."

#OurFoodFuture My relationship with food is so much more than my economic engagement. I am not only a consumer.

What are we hearing from the public?

Food is also a topic that people think about and talk about – a lot. For example, our recent social media analysis tracked 54M conversations about 'our food future' topics.[1] And although food is of course a complicated 'consumer' issue, it is also an intensely personal and social one. Everyone eats, and everyone makes daily decisions about how they will use the time and money they have to buy, prepare and consume food that will sustain and nourish them.

These everyday moments are integral to how people understand and engage with the world we live in. Food is critical to how people participate in their social networks and communities; part of their cultural and religious heritage; a vehicle through which they interact and express care for children, loved ones and friends. It is fundamental to daily well-being and to our hopes (and fears) for strong and healthy futures.



Why is this important for our work?

Our language will dictate the level of trust the public has in us, and whether they engage and listen. When we talk to the public as 'consumers' only, it can raise real anxiety, feelings of overwhelm, confusion, or sometimes cynicism.

For example, in the 2015-2020 Strategy research, we found that being asked to rank key 'consumer issues' around food sparked real fear about whether market forces are the only powerful shapers of our food systems – and whether this meant that more 'human' impact was being side-lined. And at the Our Food Future summit this year, both stakeholder conversation and social media reaction confirmed that feeling 'boxed in' by a consumer label can inspire frustration and even anger. In everything we do, we need to think carefully about how we address and engage with our public audiences – as parents, citizens, consumers, political actors, and so on.

[1] FSA and Manning Gottlieb (2016). Identifying activist consumers of food

Insight 2: Food is emotional – so empathy is key

"It makes me angry when I can't afford good food for my kids. You go in with a budget but it's all pizzas. It makes you want to cry – makes you feel bad. Am I good mother if I'm giving them pizza?"

What are we hearing from the public?

The depth of feeling involved in the public's relationships with food means that even seemingly 'contained' communications around food can spark strong emotion.[2] Our research sessions are usually vibrant and intense – and often fun! But emotional reactions can sometimes be surprising. 'Narrow' questions like how to engage with FHRS online or how to encourage safer food preparation behaviour can trigger expressions of anxiety, mistrust, frustration, or defensiveness.

Why is this important for our work?

At every public contact point, we need to remember that the personal and emotional matters. Seemingly small, contained issues and engagements points can feel big, or activate wider concerns and anxieties.

If we are trying to communicate with people who are in emotional space, they won't listen to us if they feel those emotions are side-lined or misunderstood. Of course, our public engagement isn't therapy – and it's not the job of our policy simply to make people feel better. But we do need to be careful with our tone of voice when we work with the public – to provide information, educate, persuade and support. What sounds 'logical' and 'scientific' to us may feel clinical, or too distanced to someone operating from emotional space. A more personable, supportive tone of voice will help engage people on a human level, meeting people 'where they live,' and help build trust.

Insight 3: 'Food Safety' isn't always something the public think much about – and they tend to downplay risk

"Sorry, this whole session is going to be about food poisoning? Is that what the Government spends its money on?"

What are we hearing from the public?

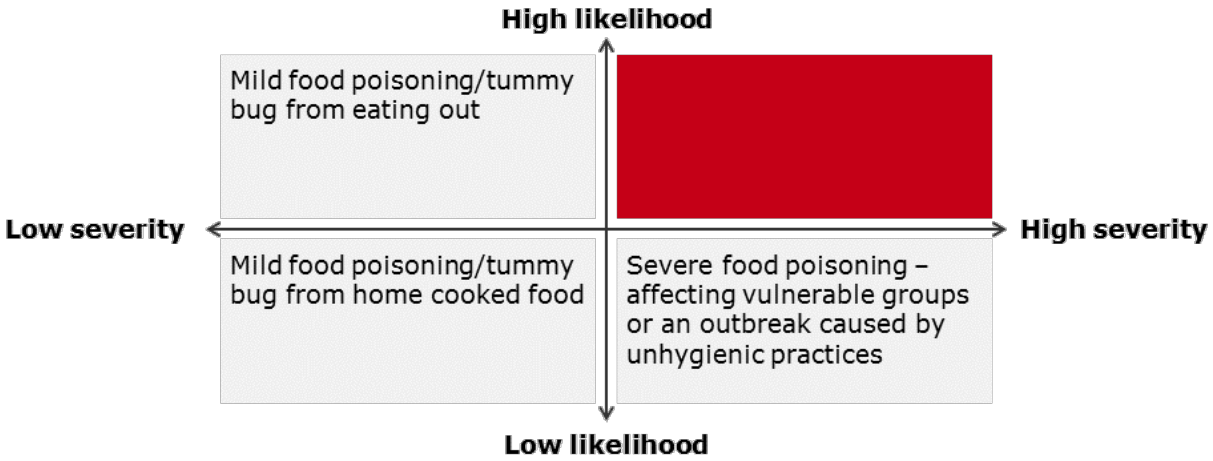
Much of the research work we do is in some way about understanding how to support public interests around food hygiene and safety: how to make sure they have the information they need to not get ill; how our food safety processes can reflect public priorities; how to help people to stop, think and choose, etc.

However, we often find that the public aren't thinking much about food safety and hygiene on a day-to-day basis. When we explain what the FSA is doing on their behalf, most hugely appreciate the support. But often the public is taking for granted that 'someone' is looking out for their interests in this space, and aren't engaging with 'who'

[2] For example, discussions around the best way to communicate food hygiene ratings lead to Conversations about how you might report a food incident have ignited larger, heated conversations about whether consumers have any power to drive change, and who is protecting their interests about an important issue.[2]

that is. Often, people even initially question whether food safety and hygiene is actually a priority issue - they understand that protecting the public interests in this space is important once they stop and think about it, but don't always walk into the room with a strong view.

Why is this? First, people tend to think that food poisoning isn't a big risk – at least for them. They often don't initially take that risk as seriously as we might think they should, because it isn't perceived as 1) a high likelihood event, or 2) a high severity event. They don't think that food poisoning is going to happen to them, and they think that if it does, it will probably only be inconvenient at worst. The highly euphemistic language that we use to describe food poisoning doesn't help here. The FSA may think in terms of, for example, campylobacter poisoning – which carries a totally different tone in terms of risk than 'the tummy troubles' or 'trouble downstairs.' And whilst they accept that consequences may occasionally be severe, there is a native assumption that food poisoning is only really risky for people that are already vulnerable.



What does this mean for our work?

Getting people to 'stop, think and choose' is harder if they don't think that the issue at hand presents a credible risk. There is a real challenge for all of our policy and communications to not simply help *educate* people about safe practice, but help present the *case for paying attention to the issue* of food safety and hygiene in a compelling way. We need to frame the risk of food poisoning in a way that matters to the public.

For example, we often find that people engage more with issues around food safety regulation when they aren't thinking of what kind of system they would want to protect themselves – but when they consider how our society needs to protect their children, their loved ones, and more vulnerable groups. Thinking about 'others' lowers the bar on how likely and how severe an event would need to be to be worth paying attention to.

The lack of native widespread worry about food poisoning as a public health issue also means that how we frame and present likelihood and risk is a careful balance. People in our research often reject facts about worst case scenario outcomes – for example, that severe food poisoning can cause death or lifetime impairment. That level of risk severity seems too far from their current understanding to be accepted. Case studies and more emotional, persuasive examples can help make the same point in a more compelling way – showing people that things can be serious, rather than trying to convince them.

Insight 4: 'Food Safety' is one of many public concerns – and lower on the agenda than we might expect

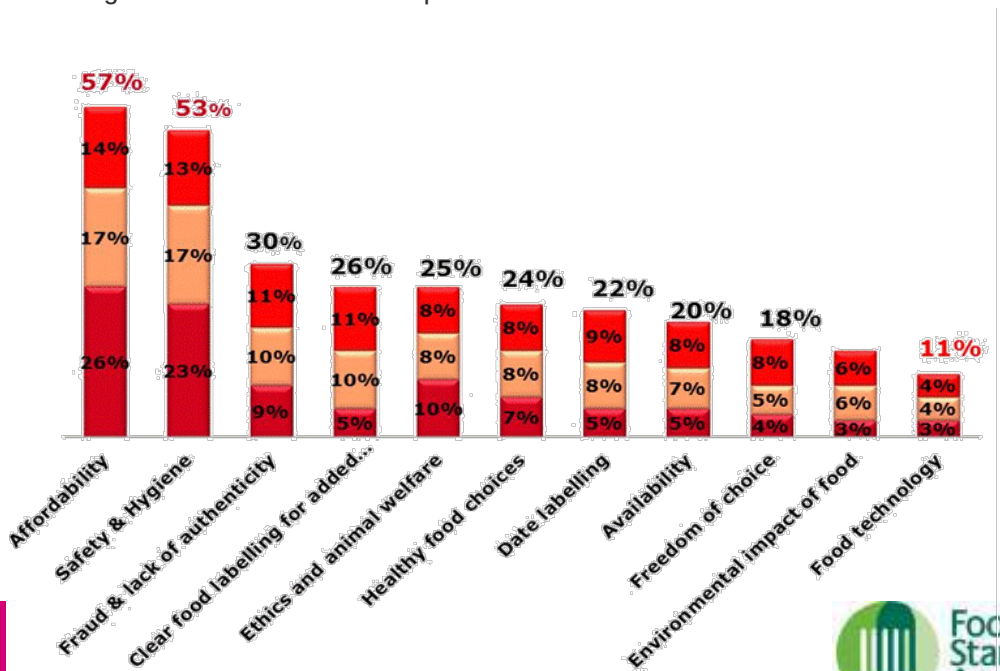
"My kids were sent back with messages from school about healthy eating – but who's stopping the supermarkets from marketing the unhealthy foods? I don't know if those things are safe and that's what the government should be helping families with."

What are we hearing from the public?

As noted above, the public often express and often deeply emotional views about a variety of food issues in our research sessions – including but also well beyond the relatively narrow confines of 'food safety and hygeine.' Our 2015-2020 FSA Strategy Research represented an opportunity for us to understand what really matters to the public when they think about food, in a more exploratory way. We conducted mixed-method deliberative and public survey work to explore spontaneous and prompted views around key public concerns in relation to food.

At a spontaneous level, food safety and hygiene came up lower on people's list of concerns than you might expect. Issues around health, value for money, and food quality clearly trumped considerations of cleanliness, hygiene and safety.

However, at a prompted level (see below), food hygeine and safety do come out much more strongly – second in concern only to the question of affordability. 53% of our survey respondents said that food safety is something they really worry about. Food fraud also came up quite high on the list – despite being an absent issue at a spontaneous data level.



What accounts for this difference? Why does prompting suddenly shoot safety to the (near) top of the agenda, with food fraud being almost as highly ranked? What happened to health, which now takes a distant 6th place?

The key to understanding this data was going back to the public's own words – to the way they understood the different concerns we were presenting to them for ranking. When we analysed our open-response data on *why* they had ranked issues in the order they had, it became clear that the public thought of 'safety', 'health,' 'affordability', and 'fraud' as interlinked concerns. When they ranked 'safety,' they were often thinking about health implications rather than food poisoning: for example, about the long-term health implications of the food that they eat, and whether eating more processed foods might have health consequences. When they thought about 'affordability', they were wondering if the money we have to spend dictates whether we can make safe, healthy choices. When they talked about fraud, they considered the issue of whether the food we eat is what it says it is, but also whether they feel 'lied to' – by food marketing, labelling, and so on.

What does this mean for our work?

In everything we do, we need to remember that whether food is safe and hygienic to eat is only part of what the public are worried about. They don't see food safety as a stand-alone issue, or even as the most important issue. And as we will discuss later on, they are eager for help – to know and see that someone out there is making sure that the food they eat is safe to eat, but also that these wider interests and concerns are protected.

Insight 5: People mostly 'think personal' - but want to know more

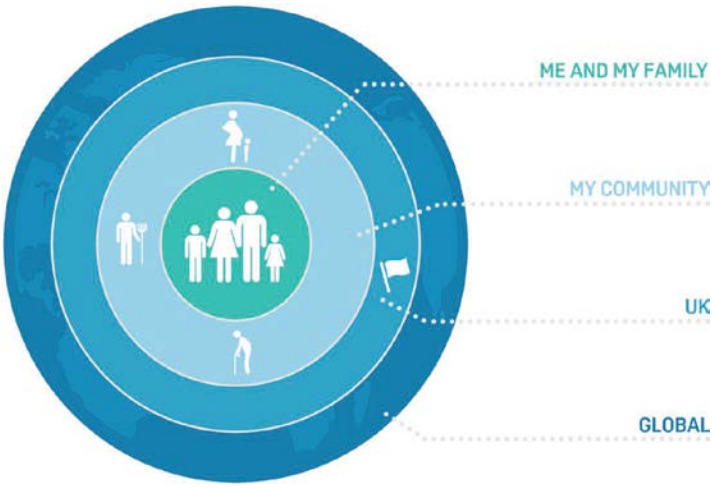
"You don't think about it do you. I never thought about where chocolate comes from. All those ingredients coming from all over the world. That's quite strange to me."

"How am I just learning about this? Surely if we don't know how we're going to feed people in the future, we should be talking about that all the time?"

What are we hearing from the public?

Food is of course a complicated political, economic and environmental issue. And we know that given the time, space, and supportive environment to do so, public participants can meaningfully contribute to policy making around complex questions. Our participants have held heated discussions and shared pressing worries about issues like food waste; global and local environmental impacts of complex food production chains; and how we can ensure food safety and public health amidst complexity.

At the same time, people also tend to know very little about the systems and processes that bring food to their plate, or about how their personal food choices play into global economics and environmental issues. And they tend to think of themselves as 'people first', not political actors in our UK food ecosystem, or as global consumers and citizens. Opening the 'black box' can be



quite frightening for some people – as they realise that much of the safety they take for granted is actually the result of a lot of hard, complex work.[3]

Why is this important for our work?

Not everyone wants to think in the 'macro' space about food; complexity is challenging, and the uncertainty inherent in modern global food systems can cause discomfort. But most of the time, the people we talk to are interested in learning more about where their food comes from. In the recent Our Food Future work – as in much of our research – people strongly called for more national conversation about complex food systems and challenges, and about how our food is protected and regulated.

People often even ask to be 'forced' to listen. Recognising that breaking through complacency requires more than a one-off education campaign, they often call for 'everyone to be talking about it' – e.g., Government, newspapers, celebrity chefs, documentary makers, and so on.

At the same time, ultimately people will always return to the personal amidst the complex: What does this mean for me, and my needs? For the safety and health of my family? For the food that I can buy and eat – on the budget I have?

Insight 6: A lot of people are feeling vulnerable about food

"People feel pressured and overwhelmed, which leads to silly choices around food and in supermarkets. The people who eat convenience foods are those under more financial and time pressure."

"Going into the supermarket to buy a tomato sauce – you need a degree! It's confusing really… there can be too many options."

"Consumers have so little power – whoever has the money is in control really…"

"After last year's scandal it was said that 'as long as it's packaged in this country they can put on that it's British' so you do think well what can you believe?"

"I'm thinking about pesticides and stuff now. There are unexplained increases in cancer – so you're wondering is it to do with the food chain, or what they're spraying on crops."

What are we hearing from the public?

Overall, the public recognise that 'someone' must be helping protect their interests. Their experiences with mostly bear this out: people tell us that so far their food seems to have been safe – so something is working.

[3] This is a consistent finding in our research: we often use personal impact or touchpoints with a system as a way of making sense of complex issues. People's interest in engaging with the complexity of food issues beyond this personal impact varies: there are always individuals who start out thinking in this space; individuals who are prompted to consider more macro or even global issues during discussion and reflection; and some individuals who are disinterested in thinking macro, simply wanting to have a nice personal experience with as little engagement or effect as necessary. EG: Our Food Future; FSA Strategy 2015-2020; Identifying activist consumers of food; Balance of Risk and Responsibility.

Unfortunately, as part of our research discussions we also often hear people express real vulnerability and anxiety about food. Scratch the surface, and you find a lot of discomfort – even fear – about whether public interests are being protected. Our participants have said[4] they:

- feel more **disconnected** from food, and that it can be scary when food production feels like a **'black box'**. Complexity and difficulty understanding how food gets to your plate is uncomfortable given how important food is to us.
- are anxious about **who is 'steering the ship'**. They assume that our food ecosystems are largely driven by **market forces** and **industry**, which they do not **trust** to prioritise their interests over the profit motive.
- feel frustrated and manipulated by **food marketing**, and by a perceived lack of **)** on food labelling (i.e., how easy it is to understand which ingredients are sugars; or whether foods marketed as 'healthy' are really good for you.
- sometimes find the degree of **choice** available to them overwhelming: everyone likes having options, but people also recognise that when there is too much to choose from, you are more susceptible to manipulation or 'bad' choices.
- often find information about food (ingredients; what is 'healthy'; etc) **confusing** – particularly when they feel like they are given conflicting facts or guidance.
- worry about the long-term implications of **modern diets**. Studies showing basic 'safety' are not persuasive for people wondering about personal and social impact of eating more processed and 'quick' foods on the development of chronic health conditions and obesity.
- are feeling under more pressure **financially** – not everyone, of course – but not just people in the lower socio-economic grades. Including among middle-class professionals, there is sometimes a perception that food costs more than it used to, that food budgets don't stretch as far, and (particularly in the South) that rising cost of living expenses are causing strain. In this environment of financial pressure, they also tell us they sometimes feel pushed into less healthy choices to feed themselves and their families.
- don't have the **time** to invest in planning, cooking and eating food in quite the way that they would like – which can be tied to a sense of guilt for some.

Why is this important for our work?

The public need to know that we hear their concerns, understand why they matter – and that someone is acting to protect their interests. People are eager for a visible counterpart to the power of the profit motive, and to hear that where industry or retailers put the public at risk, they are held to account.

Often, participants in our research sessions are relieved to hear about what is already being done: that a body like the FSA exists; that industry-independent voices are active in protecting their interests; that there are reduction targets for campylobacter; that specific initiatives like FHRS are there to support them, and so on. And they want to hear more about what we do.

[4] This summary is drawn particularly from Our Food Future; FSA Strategy 2015-2020; Balance of Risk and Responsibility – but echoes concerns raised with us in other research sessions over the last 5 years.

Insight 7: People come from different starting points: tailoring is critical to reach a varied public audience

"A little bit of dirt never did me any harm. I think the trouble these days is that we're too precious about germs and bugs."

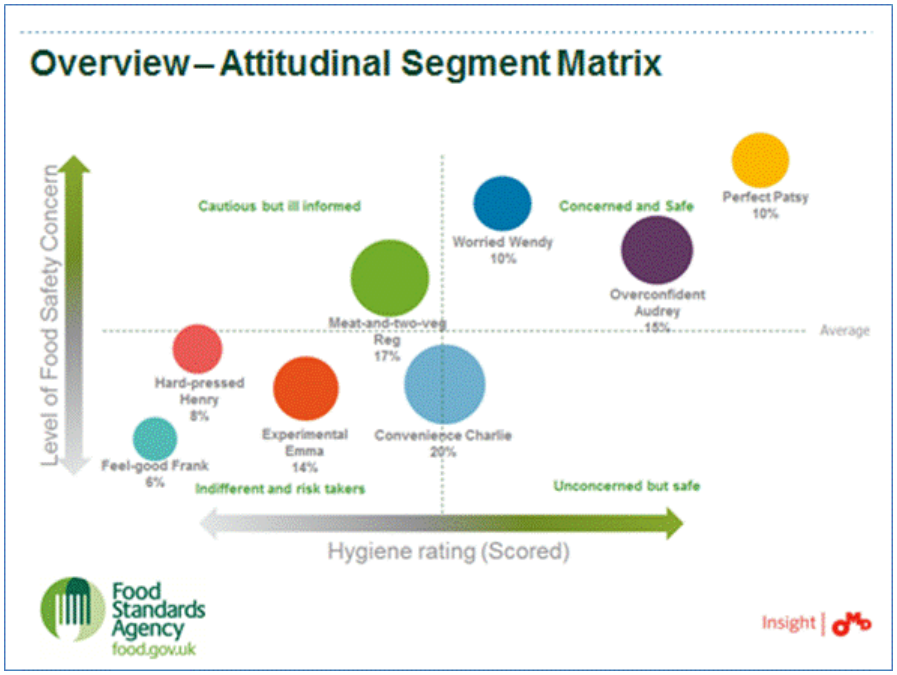
"I bleach everything. You just imagine everything spreading around, all of those bacteria. It's disgusting."

"My mother never let me into houses where people didn't wash their chicken well – she'd think they were dirty. I was shocked to find out that English people don't wash!"

What are we hearing from the public?

Our evidence base is increasingly clear that variation in public 'starting points' and needs around food matters for communication and engagement. Several pieces on drivers of attitudes and behaviours around food safety risk suggest a few key factors are worth paying attention to.

First, both the qualitative and quantitative evidence show clear differences in overall **attitudes towards risk**. Our 2015 Consumer Segmentation Matrix shows a clear correlation between how concerned people are about food safety overall, and what kinds of risks they are willing to take in terms of the food they eat.



A 'Hard Pressed Henry' or 'Feel Good Frank' who is relatively indifferent to issues of risk is likely to take more challenges with their health as a result. And this type of participant, in our research, is typically much harder to reach with 'stop, think and choose' messaging than, say a more risk-conscious 'Worried Wendy.'

Second, strength of **investment in current practice** also plays a critical role in receptivity to communications in this space. For example, we find that family cooks tend to be more wedded to current practice and resistant to being told to do things differently; habits and learned behaviours are powerful. We should not confuse investment and confidence with safe practice. Views and behaviours are hard to break if they 'feel right', or provide a solution to a personal need or concern – e.g., keeping food costs down; managing discomfort around germs and contagion; 'feeling clean' and so on.

For example, we know that in some cases, cultural values around 'cleanliness' can drive potentially risky practices like chicken washing – and these practices can be even harder to break given deep traditions and familial practices.[5] Conversely, younger people and non-cooking men typically offer more 'blank slates' in terms of messaging. They are less invested in current practices, and thus often more open to being educated about good practice if engaged.

Finally, it is important to remember that people will differ in terms of their fundamental **food values**. As we saw clearly in the Our Food Future research, though many concerns are shared, individual personalities and priorities clearly play a role in what people want and need. Food 'quality' (organic food; 'healthy' foods; taste, etc) is a priority for many – who may deeply worry about where their food comes from; whether they can afford food of a quality they desire; and so on. Others are happy to view food as sustenance, and will be more concerned around whether food is of 'good enough' quality for their needs, safe, and affordable.

Why is this important for work?

Communications will be most effective if they reflect the concerns and needs of the particular audience in question. For example, posing safety as a benefit will only be effective if people are worried about risk in the first place (e.g., for 'Overconfident Audrey'). If not, safety measures may just feel like a burden, or a faff – and helping safe practices feel easy is critical to success (e.g., for Feel-Good Franks).

Considering attitudinal groups separately is important to ensure that we don't accidentally 'average out' when considering public need, and that we understand what kinds of approaches will work best with each audience. Early insight suggests, for example, that we might begin to reach 'Hard Pressed Henry's via framing safe practice as part of the solution to a key 'problem' for this audience: how to minimise food wastage and overall spend.[6] In our recent qualitative work, we are also using a simplified risk segmentation to help us consider implications of different attitudinal starting points for expectations around retailer control of campylobacter, and interest in communications on retailer targets.[7]

Insight 8: There's a lot of public conversation and energy around food that we could tap into

"I don't earn that much money and sometimes I really want to buy something that's good for me. I eat quite healthily. It tends to be quite expensive and that's frustrating."

"I hate thinking about all the processed stuff and chemicals that my kids are eating!"

As explored above, our work consistently shows that the public don't think about food safety and hygiene as much as they do other food issues – although deep discussion and reflection tend to leave them much more interested in the topic. At a survey level, spontaneous concerns tend to cluster around healthy eating and concerns about processed foods and the affordability of a

[5] FSA and TNS BMRB (2014) Food hygiene practices and attitudes amongst BME groups
[6] FSA and TNS BMRB (2016) 'Hard Pressed Henrys' insight.
[7] FSA and TNS BMRB (2016) Consumer Acceptability of Campylobacter in Chicken

healthy diet. When prompted, complex issues like food fraud, authenticity, ethics and environmental impacts begin to emerge as important if slightly lesser areas of concern.[8]

Our recent work on activist consumers echoes these broad priorities. We explored what kinds of conversations people are having in the social media space – and again found that health and affordability are key concerns:

- **Healthy Eating** - generates the largest volume of conversation (32M) – with the most active conversationalists tending to be female, under 35, single city-dwellers
- **Affordability** generates 9.2M conversations – with active conversationalists being students; young professionals; and growing families feeding loved ones on a budget. Food waste is becoming a big issue in this space as people try to make their food budgets stretch further, ideally without compromising on health.
- **Sustainability** generates 8.9M conversations – with active conversationalists tending to be younger (under 35), living in London and major university cities. Attitudinally, this segments out to 'eco-warriors', 'local-vores' and vegetarian activist types.
- **Food safety** generates a lower volume of conversation overall – around 2.5M – with active conversationalists tending to be older males working in healthcare and Government industries

There is a real opportunity to tap into the kinds of issues and concerns that people are already worried about, engaging with, and active around.

Insight 9: The public are eager for a Government voice that can cut through cynicism, confusion and overwhelm

> ***"There should be an independent agency that looks after these things. You want to know you're protected."***
>
> ***"Straightforward – honest. Not just loads of spin. Just – here's what it means for you. Here's what we think."***

The research consistently suggests that the public want a visible, credible and powerful Government voice who will 1) show that public needs are acknowledged and protected, and 2) support them to have as much power and empowerment as possible. And across a variety of recent engagement research, we've heard a pretty consistent picture about what kinds of things they want us to talk about – and what they want us to say.

Overall, research suggests demand for:

- **More information about what is being done to protect public interests and ensure a safe, sustainable Food Future** – e.g., in terms of issues like:
  - Protecting hygiene and safety standards
  - Stamping out bad practice, and coming down hard on rule breakers
  - Wider advocacy with industry, food producers, and global stakeholders –

[8] FSA and TNS BMRB (2014). FSA Strategy 2015-2020.

- Looking out for the 'long term' – e.g., in terms of environmental and sustainability issues
- Pushing for improvements in labelling and transparency of information from industry
- Bringing disparate bodies together to tackle difficult food challenges
- What's happening to tackle risks – and what happens to wrong-doers

- **Clear and simple information to support empowered choices and behaviour** – about:
  - What is in their food – and implications for health and wellbeing (including in the long-term)
  - How to make safe, healthy choices – in terms of food preparation and storage, and in terms of building nourishing diets on a budget
  - How to develop cooking and food budgeting skills
  - How retailers perform against standards – e.g., via FHRS
  - What our food system looks like – and what this means for individual consumer choices

And people are also clear about what kind of voice they want from Government. They are eager for honesty; credibility; independence; clarity; empathy; power; and speed. They want a voice that cuts through complex issues, isn't afraid to tell the public what's happening, and has a point of view.

Insight 10: We know a lot about what works – and what doesn't.

"Science is just an opinion, really. You've got your view, I've got mine. It's not going to change what I do."

"It really changed how I was thinking about my food. Every time I see chicken in the supermarket I'm thinking – does that have campylobacter on it? Or when it's in my kitchen. You're just that little bit more careful."

We've conducted several research pieces over the last few years that have tried to really test which kinds of messages and framing 'cut through' for the public, help them engage with important issues, and support them to 'stop, think and choose.' The research we conduct is also a test in itself: every time we conduct a workshop or design a survey we learn more about how to speak in a way that will be understood; what the 'penny drop' moments are; what helps people engage with complexity; what actually seems to shift views and behaviour; and what makes people tune out.

What works to engage:

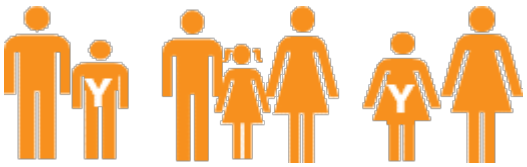
- **Simplicity and transparency:** Easy to understand information and communications do more than help people understand – they actually inspire trust, confidence and engagement with the food system. For example, we regularly hear from consumers that changes in package labelling have inspired trust and engagement more widely. Being able to easily understand what you are eating 1) makes you feel more powerful, and 2) reassures you that someone is looking out for your interests. This helps consumers feel more in charge of their own food environments – potentially even laying the groundwork for more advocacy and

activism. The clearer we can be, the more people will listen.

- **A supportive, empathetic approach – that leaves the choice to consumers:** People are often wedded to current attitudes and practices, and no one likes being 'told off'. Our participants are really receptive to the idea that the FSA isn't there to 'tell them what to do,' but instead to make sure they have the information they need to 'stop, think and choose.'

- **Engaging the emotions:** 'Flat' messaging is ignored, particularly around food safety and hygiene communications. Emotion is needed to cut through. For example, we have found that using uncomfortable germ imagery, or even 'disgust' imagery (food-poisoning battered toilets), helps safety messaging really stick in people's minds. It also makes them more aware of the risks they are taking without 'arguing' with them about whether food safety is something to take seriously.

- **Acknowledging and responding to people's worries and core needs:** Framing matters: the same message can fly or fail depending on whether people see it as relevant to them. People engage and listen more when they feel we provide information that responds to their key concerns. It's empowering as a consumer to hear that we provide food safety information because we know it's important to them to keep their loved ones safe - or that we make campylobacter retail information available because we know people care about whether retailers are protecting them.



- **Tailoring to the audience:** As per Insight 5, where an individual is coming from makes all the difference. Take the disgust imagery: it works great for people who are already more risk-conscious and/or made uncomfortable by germs. But put a toilet picture in a room of men who are less germ-bothered? You get laughed out of the room.

- **Appealing to people's duty of care and love for others:** For food safety messaging in particular, we frequently find that messaging 'lands' much more strongly when we talk about risk to others rather than risk to self. Whether people believe that food poisoning will have any real impact for them is variable. And people have widely varying risk tolerances – as the segmentation clearly shows. But few people would willingly put someone they love in danger, particularly if that person is more vulnerable. And they are unconsciously flattered if we acknowledge how important their caring role is – and support them to deliver it well.

- **Getting visual:** Helping people 'see' what we are talking about makes all the difference. A chicken with green dots suddenly makes campylobacter contamination targets understandable. A chocolate bar and a map spark consideration about the challenges of global production systems. An FHRS sticker serves as easy, recognisable visual short-hand. A traffic-light label reassures and is used, whilst an itemised ingredients list is ignored. Wherever we can, visuals will help us have better engagement and better impact.

- **Case studies, testimonials and other 'personal' data:** People don't respond to strength of data, they respond to imaging something happening to them. And when they try to think about complex issues, it's a lot easier when they can imagine their impact on an actual individual: a consumer, a farmer, a parent, etc. Where we can bring an issue to life with personal stories (food poisoning; global scarcity; etc), it makes it easier for people to understand and engage.

- **Giving people an out – and providing a clear action:** Where we are trying to influence behaviour or views, it helps when we can provide a clear 'to do' that still aligns with people's values and needs. For example, we never want to raise discomfort (for example, around the risks of bad food hygiene, or campylobacter levels in supermarkets) without giving people a way to resolve it.

What makes people tune out:

- **Jargon and complexity:** Language that is difficult to understand is a sure-fire pathway to disengagement. It is harder to get through so requires more investment from readers; makes people feel we can't 'speak their language'; reduces trust; and makes it less likely people will listen. Worse, it can just confirm the idea that food issues are so complex that only 'the powers that be' can engage with them, or activate fears that decision makers don't actually care about real people.

- **Telling people they are wrong:** The moment we try to tell people they are doing something unsafe, they fight back – it can be a big waste of time and reduce engagement with us. No one likes to feel stupid, or dirty. And the 'unsafe' behaviour we are tackling might be meeting an emotional need (e.g., chicken washing to feel 'clean'), be a learned behaviour from a loved one, or simply be how that person likes to do things.

  Putting the spotlight on their behaviour makes people feel defensive – or can even feel like we are insulting their personality, family or cultural traditions. Putting the spotlight on the risk or the germ, and telling people what might work to counter it, feels less judgmental and minimises pushback.

- **Relying too much on logic, 'arguing' and myth busting:** Rationale arguments can't touch attitudes or behaviours that are driven by emotional needs: unless we have first engaged an audience, and ideally built an emotional connection, we are wasting our breath.

  Worse still, the behaviour science literature suggests that argument can actually *entrench* positions. Going in hard with 'the facts' puts people in debate space.

They automatically move to a space of defending their position, thus convincing themselves they are 'more right' than before we started! That doesn't mean facts and science don't have an important role for our communications – but timing is key.

- **Acting alone:** Sometimes, we won't be the right voice. Will an 'Overconfident Audrey' hear us if we tell her to store her food differently, or be careful with her chicken juices? Maybe, maybe not. She might not 'hear' the scientific advice, because she thinks she knows what she's doing. If Gino told her the same thing, as part of learning to make a chicken cacciatore? Maybe: as it's part of a wider, fun learning process. Participants also tell us it's because we aren't as cute.

Insight 11: Make it easy – use road-maps for change

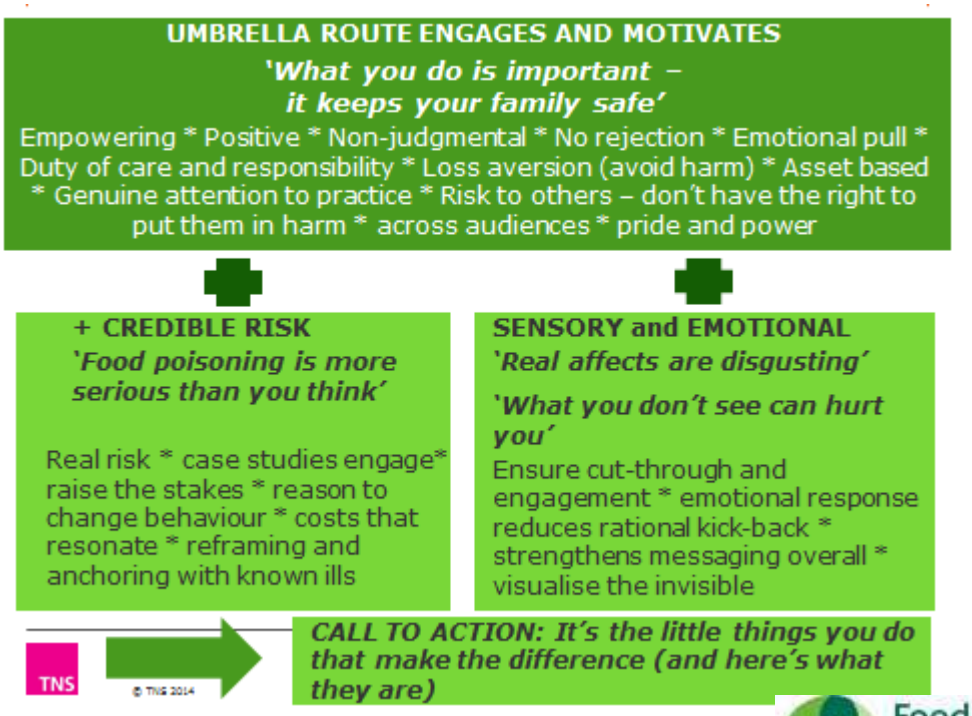
Changing attitudes and getting people to listen:

Where we are trying to change attitudes, or to get people to stop, think and choose, how we bring some of the key insights above together – and in what order – is critical. We have been testing out what works over a range of distinct research pieces, but the overall formula that is starting to emerge is consistent – whether you're trying to get people to consider the risk of rare burgers, to check the FHRS ratings before they eat out, or to just take a bit more care in the kitchen.

1) Before you argue or present 'facts', engage people by framing the issue in a way that resonates with them
2) Help them understand the risk is credible
3) Use visuals and emotional engagement to 'cut through' and help them remember the message long-term
4) Give them something 'to do' with their discomfort (e.g., check a rating; keep your chopping boards separate; make your voice heard).

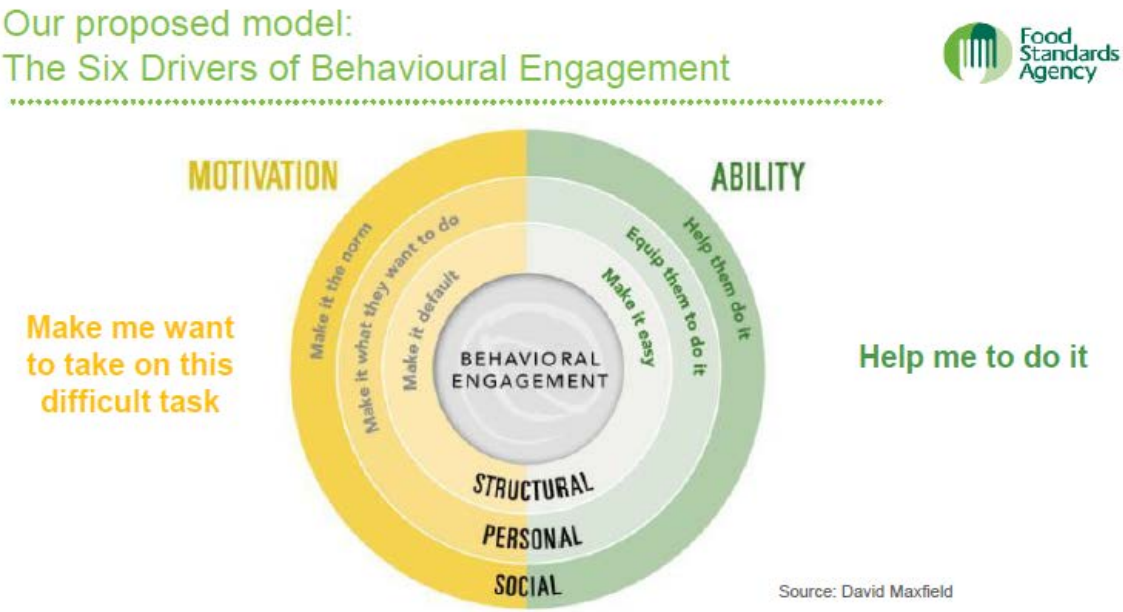
In the case of messaging around home hygiene behaviours, our 'winning' formula was:

4



Changing behavior:
If we are going to change behaviour with our communications, we'll also need to ensure that we are taking a holistic view – and that we have a sense of 'what works' to spur change.

Our recent work on understanding active consumers[9] has produced a draft behaviour change model – in terms of what 'might work' to help empower consumers to take action on issues that are important to them around food.



[9] FSA and Manning Gottlieb (2016). Identifying activist consumers of food.

APPENDIX

The following research pieces were included in this insight summary:

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2016). Experimental testing of risk messages around rare burgers. (in publication).**
  - Key question: What kinds of on-menu messages will best help us support the public to 'stop, think and choose' before eating rare burgers, without adversely impacting industry?
  - Method: Online experimental message testing and questionnaire of 2,000 participants via the FSA Consumer Panel

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2016). Consumer acceptability of campylobacter contamination. (in publication)**
  - Key question: What are public views on the FSA's current and potential future industry targets for campylobacter reduction?
  - Method: Iterative, mixed method research including:
    - Deliberative 'Citizen's Forum' research consisting of:
      - 56 participants x 2 waves of research
      - 112 research contact points total
      - Video 'vox pop' capture to illustrate common views
    - Online omnibus survey of c.1,200 participants

- **FSA and Manning Gottlieb (2016). Identifying activist consumers of food. (in publication).**
  - Key question: Why do 'active' consumers become so; what are they talking about; and what is the nature and intensity of conversation?
  - Method: Iterative, mixed method research including:
    - Systematic review of case studies, reports articles and trends
    - Word-of-mouth analysis based on a nationally representative online survey – including 26,000 interviews and diaries
    - Social listening to identify 10,000 relevant verbatims
    - 27 30-minute telephone interviews
    - Social listening and analysis of 46,800 verbatims

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2016). Our Food Future.** https://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/campaigns/ourfoodfuture
  - Key question: What are the public's priorities in relation to the future of food – to inform how we respond to pressing challenges facing the global food supply.
  - Method: Iterative, mixed method approach including:
    - Scoping exercises of online quant survey of 1,383 UK participants
      - Online qualitative forum with 22 participants
    - Deliberative 'Citizen's Forum' research consisting of:
      - 63 participants x 2 waves of research
      - 190 research contact points total
      - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2016). Hard Pressed Henry Campaign Insight. (in publication)**

- Key question: What needs and attitudes underlie unsafe behaviours around use-by dates and leftovers by the Hard Pressed Henrys segment?
- Method: Online self-completion survey via the FSA Consumer Panel
  - 499 online self-completion interviews conducted
  - England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2015). Consumer understanding of food risk: rare burgers.** http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsa-risk-rare-burgers.pdf
  - Key question: How can we support people to 'stop, think and choose' in relation to rare burger consumption?
  - Method: Iterative, mixed method approach including:
    - Citizen's Forum research consisting of 80 participants x 1 wave of research
    - 23 in-restaurant mobile message testing and interviewing sessions – whilst participants ordered burgers
    - Online discussion follow-up with all in-restaurant participants
    - An online survey of 2,708 participants using the FSA's Consumer Panel
    - All strands of research engaged participants from England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2014). FSA Strategy 2015-2020.** http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsa-strategy-research-report.pdf
  - Key question: What are consumers' key concerns in relation to food? What do they expect from the FSA/Government in terms of safeguarding these interests? What drives these interests and concerns?
  - Method: Iterative, mixed method approach including:
    - Knowledge review of Food and You, Biannual Tracker Survey and Citizens' Forum data
    - Review of findings from national online omnibus with 2000 respondents (conducted by Harris Interactive) https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsa-strategy-omnibus-survey.pdf
    - Citizen's Forum research with 100 participants X 2 waves of research across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2014). Balance of Risk and Responsibilities. Research for the Food Standards Agency.** https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/risk-responsibility-report.pdf
  - Key question: What do the public see as 'their job' and 'someone else's job' in relation to food safety and hygiene? What are they willing to take responsibility for and why – both in home and out of home?
  - Method: Deliberative 'Citizen's Forum' research consisting of:
    - 120 people x 2 waves of research
    - 240 research contact points
    - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2014). Food hygiene practices and attitudes amongst BME groups.** https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/food-hygiene-practices-and-attitudes-bme-groups.pdf

- Key question: What underpins differences in food hygiene attitudes and practices of BME groups in the home – as evidenced by data on demographic differences in the Food and You survey
- Method: 'Citizen's Forum' focus group research
  - 112 people x 1 wave of research
  - 16 groups, 7 people each
  - Single ethnicity groups (Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian, Mixed, White)
  - First and second-generation ethnic minority respondents
  - England

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2014). Consumer Insight Research: Messaging for Food Safety Communications.**
  - Key question: What messaging levers are most successful in helping people understand the potential implications of food poisoning; shift attitudes in terms of whether this risk is important; and potentially begin to shift food hygiene practices to support public safety?
  - Method: 'Citizen's Forum' focus groups
    - 120 people x 1 wave of research
    - 22 telephone follow-up interviews
    - England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- **FSA and TNS BMRB (2014). FHRS Components: consumer response to information about FHRS components.**
  http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/committee/tns-report.pdf
  - Key question: How can component score data for the FHRS rating scheme be displayed in a way which is easy to understand and most likely to be actually used by consumers – within design and practical constraints?
  - Method: Iterative, multi-stage method consisting of:
    - 84 participants participating across 14 focus groups
    - An interim workshop with the FSA team to develop wording options for the presentation of component scores
    - 34-participant online testing