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FOOD IN A PANDEMIC

FROM
RENEW NORMAL:
THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSION
ON LIFE AFTER COVID-19

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MARCH 2021

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Rose Lasko-Skinner and James Sweetland

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Executive summary

The food system experienced immediate shocks in the first lockdown, resulting from a mixture of stockpiling and the overnight closure of the 'out of home' food sector.¹ While our supply chains bounced back - and proved relatively resilient - the resilience of individuals to food insecurity and diet-related vulnerability to the virus has been weaker.²

Like the health impact of the virus, this report finds that our experiences of food have diverged widely during the pandemic. While some have seen their eating habits improve, and potentially made lifelong improvements to their diets, others have faced acute levels of food insecurity during the pandemic. In addition, some people's poor diets before the pandemic have made them less resilient to the virus itself - diet-related poor health is one of the top three risk factors for experiencing severe health consequences from Covid-19.³

These extremely varied experiences have led to important questions for the future of food. What can we learn from this unintended experiment of closing the 'out of the home' food sector and insisting people spend more time at home? How have people's new lifestyles in lockdown changed? And crucially, what should this mean for the future of diet and public health? The answers to these questions will inevitably shape how we as a country aim to 'Build Back Better' after the pandemic.

For 'Renew Normal: The People's Commission on Life After Covid-19', Demos has worked with the Food Standards Agency to better

understand the answers to these questions. We focus on people's experiences with food during the pandemic - across multiple lockdowns - and the public's preferences for the future of the food system.

We have explored three key parts of the food system: food insecurity, diet and eating habits, and food supply. In each of these areas, we have sought to build on the evidence base around how people and their behaviours have changed during the pandemic. As a consequence, this research provides one of the most detailed snapshots of people's experiences of the food system, from food supply to diet during the pandemic; in addition to capturing their attitudes and areas of consensus going forward. Drawing on mixed methods, we detail our findings across four chapters:

- First, we present a strengthened evidence base on the underlying psychology of food in the UK. This sets the scene, before exploring changes to public attitudes to food in the pandemic.
- Second, we build on our understanding of food insecurity during the pandemic, exploring the extent to which citizens have been involved in tackling new forms of food insecurity. In addition, we have sought to better understand the public's attitudes towards the future role of government, communities, individuals and businesses in tackling food insecurity.

1 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

- Third, we explore eating habits and healthy eating, considering how restrictions such as working from home and staying at home might have changed people's habits and how these might then have impacted their diet and health. Similar to our questions for the future of food insecurity, we have considered public preferences about the future of food policy in this area and how these interact with wider views about the role of government, business, communities and individuals.
- Fourth, we have developed a better understanding of individual and national food supply. This includes the extent to which people have shopped more locally during the pandemic and their desire to become more self-sufficient as a nation after the pandemic.

Methodologically, the report draws on:

- An evidence review;
- An online nationally representative poll of 10,069 UK adults;
- A series of four online deliberative workshops;
- An open access online survey of 911 adults;
- A nationally representative Polis – an online consensus-building polling tool - of 1,006 UK adults (see Appendix for more detail).

Key findings

The psychology of food in the UK

1. We found that people in the UK tend to have positive attitudes towards food.

When we asked people (in our poll of 10,000 UK adults) what they think of when they think about food, we found people are most likely to think of positive things:

- 64% said a source of comfort.
- 62% said family time.
- 51% said a luxury to treat yourself.
- 47% said time with friends.

2. There are strong differences in the relationships different groups have with food, with important implications to help guide future interventions, for example around public health.

In particular, young people are much more likely than older people to have more negative psychological relationships with food, seeing it as a form of stress relief, and associating it with a struggle to eat healthily. In our poll we found:

- 50% of those aged 18-24 think of food as a "struggle to eat healthily" compared with 15% of those aged 65 and over.
- 59% of those aged 18-24 who think of food as a "form of stress relief" compared with 22% of those aged 65 and over.

In addition, people in receipt of benefits or with children on free school meals are far more likely to see food as an "annoying necessity":

- 41% of those in receipt of benefits before the pandemic and 39% of those with children eligible for free school meals think of food as an annoying necessity, compared with 16% of those who are not on benefits and 21% not eligible for free school meals.

Food insecurity

3. There has been an increase in multiple forms of food insecurity including physical availability and financial access.

- In our evidence review (see Appendix 3), we found that the Food Foundation estimate 14% of households - 4 million people, including 2.3 million children - had experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in the 6 months following the start of the March 2020 lockdown, compared to 11.5% before the pandemic.

4. There has been increased community activity and engagement in response to food insecurity.⁴ The most common form of support has been food shopping for those self-isolating.

In our poll, we found that:

- Four in ten (40%) people have helped others by shopping for food for someone who was self-isolating.
- A third (32%) have helped someone in their community with a problem specifically related to the pandemic.
- 16% had joined a 'mutual aid' group to either offer help or seek support.

These new, organic community links may hold the potential to form part of future solutions to food insecurity.

5. There is strong public support for a child's right to healthy food.

- 89% of people in our Polis agreed that: "Every child has the right to have a healthy meal at least once a day".

6. The public think parents are responsible for feeding their children, but that the government must step in when parents cannot play this role.

- 75% of people in our Polis agreed that: "Parents are responsible for feeding their children but government must step in for children whose parents are unable to do so".
- 63% agreed with the statement in our Polis: "it is the government's responsibility to make sure no-one goes hungry".

7. Given this, it is unsurprising that the public think the Government should continue to provide the additional support it offered during the pandemic.

- 69% of respondents to our poll support children getting free school meals during the holiday throughout the pandemic and 59% support children getting free school meals during the holiday after the pandemic.

- Similarly, there is some support for providing free school meals to all children, to ensure receiving them is not stigmatising. 51% agreed with the statement: "school meals should be free for all students so that poor students are not stigmatised".

8. The public tend to be more supportive of preventative actions for food insecurity, such as ensuring there are well-paid jobs available to all.

- Two thirds (65%) agreed that: "The two people who create the child are responsible for looking after it however the government should provide well paid jobs for all" (user generated statement).

Diet and eating habits

9. There has been a complex shift in people's diets during Covid-19, with more home cooking, more healthy meals, but also more unhealthy snacking.

In our poll we found:

- Half (51%) cooked more meals at home during the pandemic.
- A third (32%) spent more time eating with people they live with.
- A third (32%) ate more healthy main meals.

10. Some of the restrictions and public health advice, such as stay at home, might have spurred more healthy eating.

In our poll, we found that:

- Of those who have eaten much more healthy main meals, 75% have had much more or slightly more free time, and 89% have cooked more.
- Of those who cooked 'much more', 72% reported having more free time.
- Three quarters (74%) of those who had reported 'much more' meals with their household during the pandemic also stated they had more free time.

4 We define food insecurity according to the FAO four pillars, see definition on page 25.

11. Those who have cooked more or eaten healthier main meals tend to expect this change to continue - although this is likely to be somewhat dependent on how far the 'new normal' provides for things such as flexible working.

In our poll, we found:

- Of those who cooked more during the pandemic, 82% expect this change to continue.
- Of those who had eaten more meals with their family, 79% expect this change to continue.

12. The public are broadly in favour of government intervention to encourage healthy eating - particularly after the pandemic.

The public do not appear to think that government involvement in the food sector is an example of the 'nanny state', with the majority thinking that the government should encourage healthy or more sustainable diets.

- In our poll, 71% thought the government should be doing a "great deal" or a "fair amount" to encourage people to eat more healthily.
- In our Polis, we found the majority felt that the pandemic had increased the need for government action - 67% overall agreed with the statement: "The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for government support to ensure everyone can afford to eat healthy food".

Food supply

13. We found a significant proportion of the population have bought food more locally or grown more food during the pandemic - and expect to continue doing so afterwards - reflecting a wider move towards individual self-sufficiency.

In our poll, we found:

- Just over a quarter (28%) have bought more locally-produced food, while 62% reported it stayed the same and 8% said less.

- More than a quarter (29%) reported more purchases in small grocery stores - in contrast to a far lower percentage (18%) who said they had done less.
- Over a third (37%) had eaten at or ordered from a takeaway that they had never visited pre-pandemic, or bought groceries somewhere they had never shopped at before the pandemic (35%).
- Close to half (41%) have wasted less food, while half (49%) said that they have wasted no more food than usual.
 - Of these, only 40% expect this change to continue after the pandemic. This could be related to scarcity or financial difficulties; for example 17% of people have also reported eating more food past its use-by date.
- Nearly one fifth (18%) said they had grown more of their own food during the pandemic, compared with 16% who had grown less.

14. Maintaining the UK's quality and animal welfare standards around food are seen as non-negotiable by the public, even if this comes at the expense of international trade deals and higher food prices.

In our poll, we found that:

- 78% support the UK keeping its current food quality standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.
- 82% support the UK keeping its current animal welfare standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.

In our deliberative workshops, we found:

- The public feel that high food standards should be considered a non-negotiable in future trade deals.
- The public feel in principle that if cheaper food means lower safety standards, we need to ensure those on low incomes are protected from poor quality food.

15. The public support increasing the amount of food the UK supplies itself, but in practice are not dogmatic about it.

In our poll, we found:

- Six in ten (59%) are in favour of policies to make the UK able to grow enough food to feed the population without importing food from other countries, even if it means higher taxes and more expensive food.
- In addition, there is a clear generational split:
 - Seven in ten (73%) people over the age of 65 would support the UK growing enough

food to feed the population without importing food from other countries, even if it meant higher taxes and more expensive food, compared with just over four in ten (44%) of those aged between 18-24.

In our deliberative workshops, we found:

- The public are supportive of the UK growing more food in principle, but when it comes to practical trade-offs - such as environmental sustainability - they are not dogmatic. For example, only supporting the increased supply of specific products, such as meat or fresh vegetables.

Summary findings and principles

	Experience during the pandemic	Principles for after the pandemic
Food security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been an increase in multiple forms of food insecurity, including physical availability and financial access. • People have stepped in to prevent new forms of food insecurity caused by people self-isolating, such as by offering informal forms of support such as shopping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People should have the right to access healthy food. • The government should take action to help feed those without the means to do so. • The government is responsible for setting the wider conditions in society, to ensure families have sufficient income levels to eat well.
Diet and eating habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a complex shift in people's diets during Covid-19, with more home cooking and more healthy meals, but also more unhealthy snacking. • Some of the restrictions and public health advice, such as stay at home, might have spurred more healthy eating. • Those who have cooked more or eaten healthier main meals tend to expect this change to continue - although this is likely to be somewhat dependent on the new rules in the 'new normal', such as flexible working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People should have the right to access healthy food. • The government should support healthy eating - in particular providing more advice or educational resources. • The government should prioritise interventions that make healthy choices easier, rather than taking decisions that make unhealthy choices harder.

	Experience during the pandemic	Principles for after the pandemic
Food supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant proportion of the population have bought food more locally or grown more food during the pandemic, reflecting a wider move towards individual self-sufficiency. • Most people who have moved towards more self-sufficiency, such as buying more locally-produced food, expect this to continue after the pandemic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While some of us want the UK to grow more of our own food, we aren't dogmatic about it – we recognise the benefits for us, and other countries, of buying from abroad. • If cheaper food means lower safety standards, we need to ensure those on low incomes in particular are protected. • The UK must maintain its high food standards after Brexit – these shouldn't be compromised even if it means higher costs. • We are keen to minimise our environmental impact and protect animal welfare along the food supply chain, but how to do this isn't always obvious.

Introduction

Our food system embodies some of the greatest social challenges the UK may face for the rest of the century. Pre-pandemic, poor diets were the biggest risk factor for poor health among people in the UK. Now, diet-related poor health, such as diabetes and obesity, is in the top three biggest risk factors for death from Covid-19.⁵

There is also a close relationship between diet and inequality. Low-income households in deprived communities are most likely to have poor diets and they experience worse health outcomes as a result. This is partly why Covid-19 has been a 'discriminatory' virus, disproportionately affecting ethnic minority groups and the physically vulnerable.⁶ Compounding this has been a sharp increase in food insecurity that spiked during lockdown and is unlikely to quickly return to pre-pandemic levels without further action.⁷

The resilience of our national food supply has also come into question, with the public seeing the first food shortages for years during the first Covid-19 lockdown. The overnight closure of our 'out of the home' food sector - that provided nearly a quarter of our calories before lockdown - intensified food insecurity and indirectly put millions on furlough and at risk of redundancy.⁸

While Covid-19 has created many new challenges, it also provides an unprecedented opportunity to reassess our food system.

Not all of the impacts of the pandemic have been negative. As this research highlights, a significant proportion of the population have had more time to cook, eat with family and eat more healthily. People have perhaps never been more conscious of the food system, with many spending more time improving their diets or supporting others with theirs than previously. These changes - together with a new National Food Strategy on the horizon - provide an unprecedented moment for policy makers to improve the food system, from farm to fork.

To aid the policymaking process, Demos has taken a deep dive into people's experiences of Covid-19, to better understand how a new food environment created during the pandemic has impacted the public's behaviours and preferences going forward. Through our previous research and evidence review, we have identified and focused on three main areas of the food system that have been particularly affected by the pandemic: food insecurity, diet and eating habits, and food supply - as well as exploring people's psychology of food to provide a wider context. These make up four chapters:

- The Psychology of Food in the UK
- Food Insecurity
- Diet and Eating Habits
- Food Supply

5 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

6 Public Health England. [Covid-19: Review of Disparities in Risks and Outcomes](#), 2020. Available at [accessed 10/02/2021]

7 Loopstra, R. [Vulnerability to food insecurity since the Covid-19 lockdown](#). King's College London, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]; Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

8 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

To contextualise the research, we first consider how individuals and specific demographic groups in the UK relate to food. How do people think about food? How do demographic characteristics such as age or income impact these psychological relationships? To help answer these questions, we draw on a nationally representative poll conducted in November 2020 and an evidence review to understand attitudes towards food, as well as how these compare to other nations. Understanding people's everyday experiences of food and their psychological relationship with it during the pandemic will be essential to building better food policies in the future. In particular, understanding the situational factors, such as time and where we work from, that affect people's diets and lifestyle better.

We then consider how food insecurity has changed during the pandemic. An increase in multiple types of food insecurity in the UK due to the pandemic has been widely identified. We follow the Food and Agriculture Organisations (FAO) four pillar definition, that includes physical access and availability as well as financial determinants. Building on this insight, we then collected additional data through our poll on how individuals and communities have responded to the increase in food security. How have people responded to non-financial forms of food insecurity? How has informal volunteering to tackle food insecurity changed during the pandemic? The answers to these questions may help us develop strategies that maximise community resources to tackle food insecurity.

We then explore how people's food environments - i.e. where and how they shop, prepare and eat food - have changed during the pandemic, and the effect any changes have had on people's diets and habits, (e.g.) whether they eat healthier meals or snack more. We have sought to examine how behaviours have changed overall, rather than during specific lockdowns, to better understand how the aggregate environmental changes have changed our ways of approaching food throughout this tumultuous period.

It's vital to understand public attitudes towards the role of government, business and communities in supporting healthy eating and tackling food insecurity, to ensure policies reflect what the public needs and are seen as legitimate. This means answering questions such as: what do the public think the government and communities should do to tackle food insecurity after the pandemic? What do the public think the government, businesses and individuals should do to tackle diet-related poor health and support healthy eating? How do these attitudes interact with individual values and different demographic characteristics? To answer these questions, we hosted a nationally representative Polis (see Methodology section). This has enabled us to explore how values and policies sit together in relation to healthy eating and food insecurity - again to better understand the nuance of public opinion - but also to highlight any areas of consensus in a policy area that has been historically divided between the 'nanny state' and the free market.⁹

Finally, this research seeks to build a more nuanced perspective of the public's preferences for the future of where and how the UK sources its food. While in principle the majority of the public may want the UK to grow and supply more of its own food domestically, it is important to understand what trade-offs the public are willing to make to deliver this vision. Should the UK supply more food itself, even if it means it is more expensive? How do food standards - quality and animal welfare - relate to these preferences? And how do public preferences in relation to food standards interact with those regarding affordability? To help answer these questions, we hosted a series of deliberative workshops to better understand the nuance of public attitudes and the particular trade-offs underpinning them.

In sum, this research provides a detailed snapshot of the impacts of the pandemic on eating and consumption habits in November 2020 and on the public's preferences for the future of the food system.

9 Lasko-Skinner, R. [Turning the Tables](#), Demos, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Methodology

This report draws on a broad set of methodological approaches, which provide qualitative and quantitative data about people's experiences of food during the pandemic and their preferences for the future of the system. Four main methodologies were utilised: (1) a series of four deliberative workshops with 30 participants (held online, to comply with government lockdown regulations), (2) a nationally representative poll of 10,069 UK adults, (3) an open-access survey with 911 respondents, and (4) a nationally representative Polis with 1,006 UK adults. This section outlines these methodologies in more detail.

Fieldwork dates are provided for each methodology. However, note that all of these took place in November 2020, while the UK was under various lockdown restrictions: England was in a full lockdown from 5 November through the duration of the fieldwork, Wales was in a 'firebreak' lockdown until 9 November (followed by tight restrictions), Scotland had a system of 'protection levels' and Northern Ireland had various restrictions, which were tightened significantly on 27 November.

Evidence Review

To help design our primary research, we conducted an extensive review of the existing data and literature around people's experiences of food, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This helped outline gaps in existing research, including a lack of data broken down by demographic groups and limited evidence about the experiences of those vulnerable to food insecurity. This included academic research, think tank and

private sector reports, as well as relevant news articles. The topics covered by the evidence review were as follows:

- Part 1 - Evidence & Sources
- Part 2 - People's Daily Lives
- Part 3 - Buying Food
- Part 4 - Changing Attitudes
- Part 5 - The Future

Polling

We conducted a nationally representative online survey of 10,069 adults in the UK. The fieldwork for this poll was conducted between 2-16 November 2020. This is the base for all the poll results presented in this report, unless otherwise stated.

We used the poll to better understand the national picture of how behaviours have changed during the pandemic. We used a large sample to ensure we were able to explore the impacts of the pandemic with a new level of granularity - for example, this allowed us to highlight the experiences of ethnic minority groups in far greater detail.

We asked respondents about changes during the pandemic overall, rather than in different stages of the pandemic - e.g. during different lockdowns - to build a clearer picture of the aggregate impact of the pandemic, rather than specific restrictions. We asked respondents how the pandemic had changed their circumstances, such as increased working from home or having more free time. This allowed us to analyse how these changes related to behavioural shifts around food and to highlight the circumstances that might have had an effect on individuals.

The data was weighted to reflect the demographic profile of the adult population of the UK. The poll included a large number of questions relating to experiences of food during the pandemic, including whether participants wanted or expected any behavioural changes to continue. It also included extensive demographic questions, to determine the income, age, gender, ethnicity, welfare status (etc.) of respondents. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Open access survey

To understand in more detail the impact of the pandemic on people's experiences of food, we conducted an open access survey which was completed by 911 respondents across the UK.

The survey was sent out to Demos' own mailing list and promoted through our networks and social media channels. It was publicly accessible between 3-29 November 2020.

As an open access survey, this method is not nationally representative, nor does it seek to be. Responses were analysed qualitatively via coding, to highlight key themes, trends and relationships between them. The survey therefore complements the nationally representative research provided by the deliberative workshop, poll and Polis. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Polis

To explore the desirability of policies relating to tackling food insecurity and healthy eating after the pandemic - and how policy preferences interacted with other personal values - we conducted research via an additional methodology, called Polis.

Polis is a tool which allows participants to respond to a series of pre-submitted statements - saying 'agree', 'disagree' or 'pass' - before submitting comments of their own, which their fellow users can then respond to. Polis therefore facilitates a kind of conversation between participants, as

they submit and respond to each other's statements. Following this, Polis conducts an automated cluster analysis of the results, separating participants into separate groups based on shared attitudes and common perspectives. This method helped us understand how attitudes towards policy areas sit together and allowed us to identify key areas of consensus.

For the Polis, we recruited 1,006 respondents from the UK, who utilised this tool between 6-19 November 2020. This was a nationally representative sample, with data weighted to the demographic profile of the adult population of the UK. As a consequence, Polis provides results which should reflect the views of the population at large. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Deliberative workshops

To better understand public views on the trade-offs involved in the future of the UK's national food supply, we convened four deliberative workshops throughout November 2020. These helped us to explore the nuances of opinion in attitudes to the future of the UK's food supply. The group consisted of 30 participants who were broadly demographically representative of the UK. This same group took part in all four of the workshops.

Each workshop was a two hour session on a discrete topic related to the food supply chain and trade. This involved a presentation by a Demos researcher, followed by a number of break-out groups and feedback sessions facilitated by staff at Hopkins Van Mil, deliberative research specialists. The topics covered were as follows:

- Session 1 - Introduction to Food Supply Chains: Existing Knowledge & Concerns
- Session 2 - Trust and Attitudes Towards the UK's Global Food Supply Chain
- Session 3 - Weighing Pros and Cons of a Globalised Food Supply Chain
- Session 4 - The UK's Food Supply After Covid-19

The insights generated through these workshops helped us identify five key principles for the future of the UK's food supply chain. In the final workshop, we presented these principles to the group members for discussion and, in light of their feedback, we updated these principles to more accurately represent their views and beliefs. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Chapter 1: The Psychology of Food in the UK

While the bulk of this report examines how attitudes to food have been shifted by our experience of the pandemic, this chapter considers the psychology of food in the UK more broadly. What does food mean to us, as individuals, communities and as a country? In answering that question, this short first chapter provides important context for the broader findings we present throughout this report.

The National Food Strategy offers details on how our relationship with food differs to other similar countries. In the UK, only 8% of consumer spending is for food eaten at home, a much lower figure than the 11% recorded in Germany, 13% in France and 14% in Spain and Italy.¹⁰ The same report found that we eat fairly quickly, spending around 79 minutes per day consuming food, in contrast to 95 minutes in Germany, 126 in Spain, 127 in Italy and 133 in France. This might suggest a more negative attitude towards food than other countries - we invest small amounts of our income in buying food and spend a lot less time enjoying it. In this vein, the National Food Strategy concludes that we place less 'social value' on food than other countries in Europe. However, our research found an optimistic

picture with most people thinking of food in a positive light.

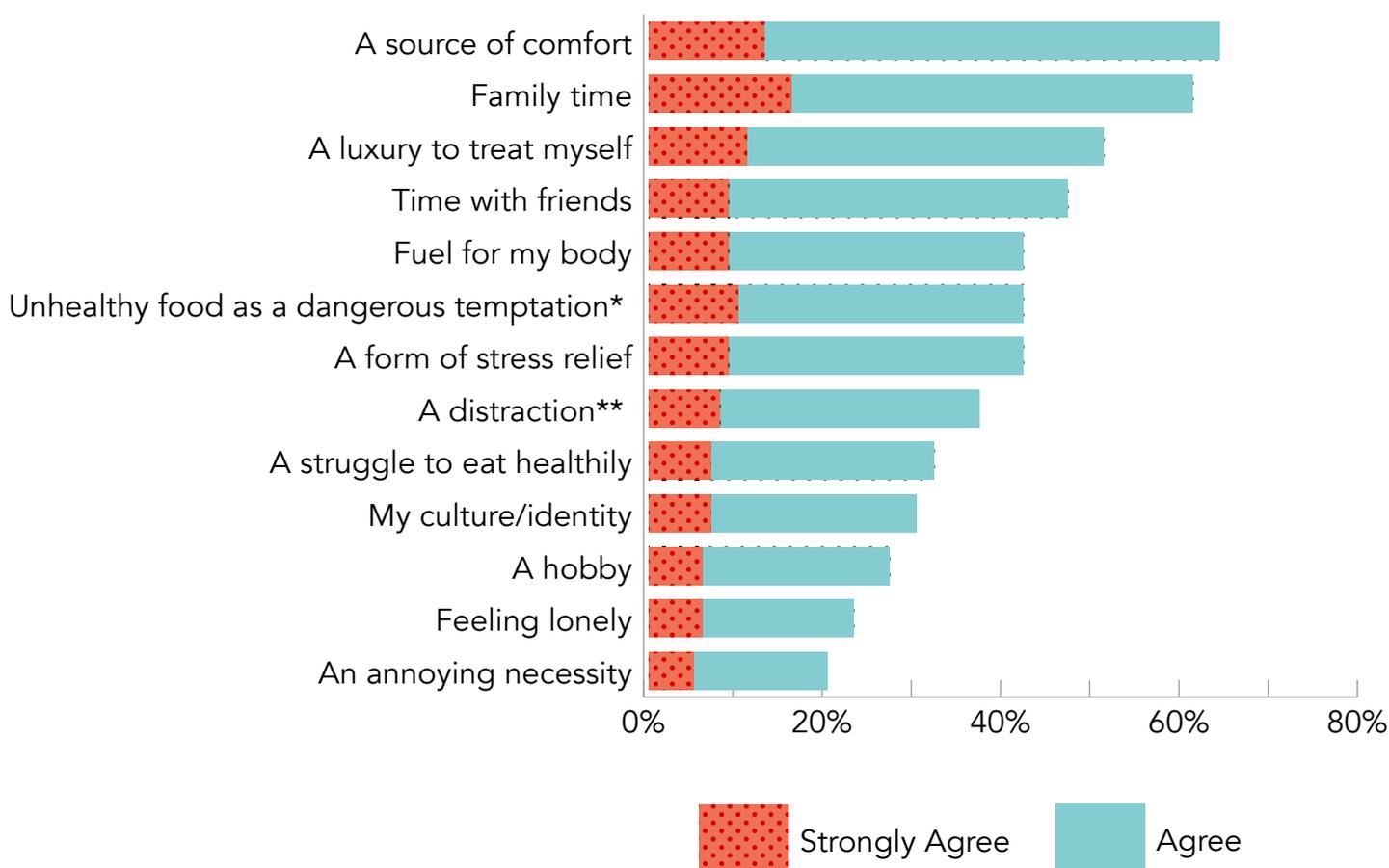
Key findings from our poll

- In general, people think of food in positive terms.
 - When people were asked what they think about food, the four options which received the most agreement were: (1) a source of comfort (64%), (2) family time (62%), (3) a luxury to treat yourself (51%), and (4) time with friends (47%).
- While food as a source of comfort was the most popular selection, it varies across different demographic groups.
 - Women were 10% more likely to agree with this than men.
 - Ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities were 7% more likely to agree than White ethnic groups are.
 - There is also a clear trend across age groups: support is highest (69%) among 18-24s and 25-34s; it is lowest (56%) among those aged 65+.

¹⁰ National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

- We found the same trend among people who supported the idea of food as a form of stress relief (42% overall).
 - 48% of women agreed with this vs 36% of men.
 - 56% of ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities agreed vs just 40% of White people.
 - There was a clear age trend once again: support was much higher among 18-24s (59%) than it was for those aged 65+ (22%). Notably, this was remarkably consistent, with a decline in support across each older age group.
- We found a third (32%) think of food as a struggle to eat healthily - this was particularly high among the youngest age group (50%).
 - 37% of women and 41% of ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities agreed with this, versus just 28% of men and 31% of White ethnic groups.
 - Across age, exactly half (50%) of those aged 18-24 viewed food as a struggle to eat healthily, compared to 45% of 25-34s, 36% of 35-44s, 29% of 45-54s, 25% of 55-64s and 15% of 65+ adults.
 - In addition, we found those with children eligible for free school meals (51%) or children who received them (42%) were much more likely to hold this negative view, compared to those with children who were not eligible (37%) or did not receive free school meals (29%) respectively.

Figure 1. What the public think about when they think of food



*Full statement: Unhealthy food as a dangerous temptation to avoid

**Full statement: A distraction from other things in my life

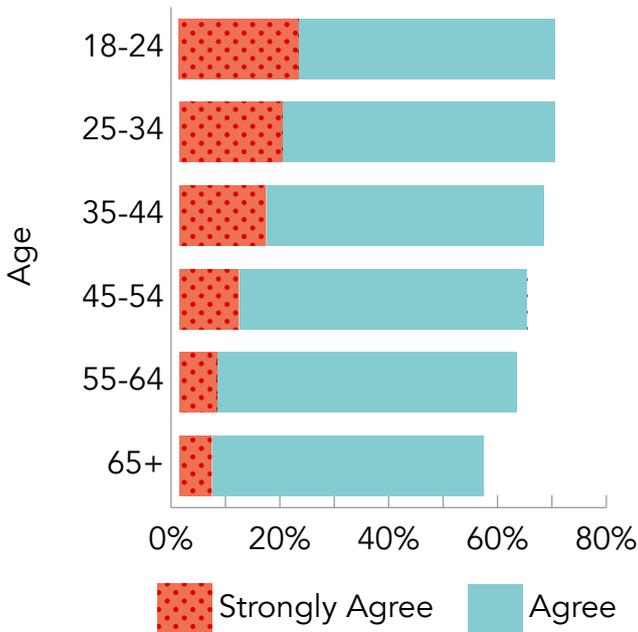
Source: Demos polling (2-16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

A source of comfort

The most common association we make with food is that it is 'a source of comfort', an idea supported by 64% of respondents to our poll. Notably, this is a positive description of food, suggesting that it may be something we use to support us during difficult times. This makes sense in the context of the poll, which was conducted in November 2020. Perhaps food has been one way that we have been able to cope with the challenges posed by the global pandemic.

However, we found that these results varied significantly across different demographic groups. For example, while 69% of women viewed food as a source of comfort, this was much lower among men at 58%. Similarly, 70% of ethnic minority groups excluding White minority groups perceive food as comforting, compared to 63% of White ethnic groups. We also find an interesting trend across age groups on this question, as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. People who think of food as a source of comfort across age groups

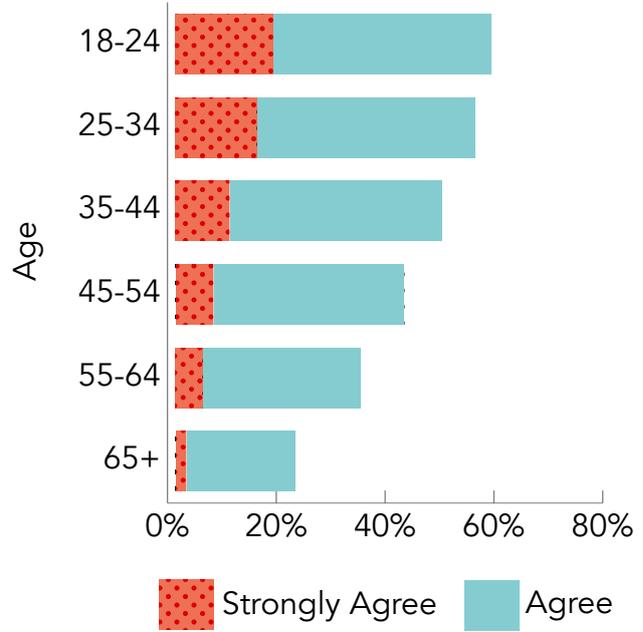


A form of stress relief

In this context, it's interesting to look at a related question within this part of our survey: our poll found that 42% of people view food as a form of stress relief. Again, this may partly reflect when we conducted our fieldwork; as the remainder of this chapter suggests, food has become an important way for us to tackle the stresses and anxieties which the pandemic has inflicted on our everyday lives.

There were clear contrasts across different demographic groups. Just 36% of men viewed food as a source of stress relief, compared with 49% of women. Among respondents from White ethnic groups, only 40% agreed with this statement, rising significantly to 55% among those from ethnic minority groups that exclude White minority groups. In addition, while there was no obvious trend on this question in relation to income, there was again a clear variation across different age groups (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. People who think of food as a source of stress relief across age groups



Source: Demos polling (2-16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Figure 3 provides a stark illustration of this clear trend. A full 58% of 18-24s view food as a source of stress relief, falling consistently with each higher age group: 55% of 25-34s, 49% of 35-44s, 42% of 45-54s, 34% of 55-64s and finally just 22% of those aged 65+. This implies that age plays an important part in how we think about our food, as the youngest age group views food as a means of relieving stress at a level nearly three times that of the oldest group.

A struggle to eat healthily

However, it's important to also look at some of the more negative associations with food. Our poll shows that 32% of us view food, in part, as 'a struggle to eat healthily'. This is especially high among women (37%) and those from ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities (41%), in contrast to just 28% of men and 31% from White ethnic groups. Across income, we found somewhat counterintuitive results, with the highest support being found at different ends of the earning spectrum: both 36% of those on

incomes up to £20,000 and 35% of those earning £80,000-£99,999 viewed food as a struggle to eat healthily. This may reflect those who have less free time - possibly due to working lifestyles - being more inclined to think of healthy eating as a struggle than others.

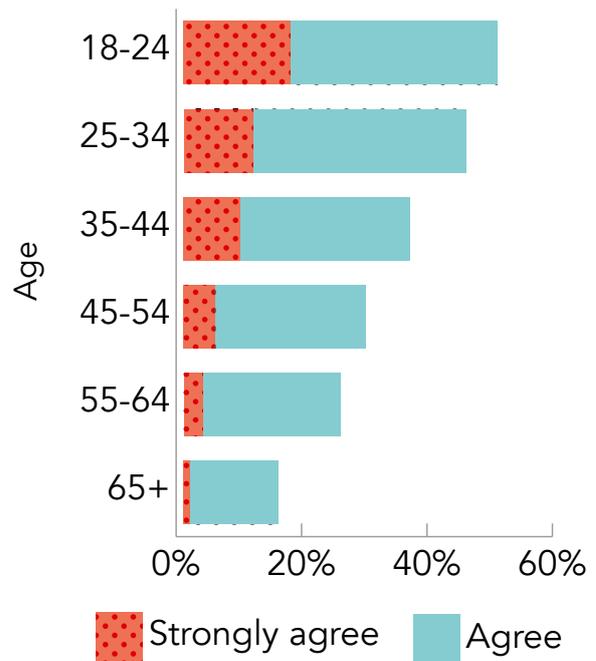
As in the previous section, there was an extremely pronounced trend around age distribution. Exactly half of those aged 18-24 viewed food as a struggle to eat healthily, compared with 45% of 25-34s, 36% of 35-44s, 29% of 45-54s, 25% of 55-64s and 15% of 65+ adults.

Finally, we found a trend in relation to those who are vulnerable to food insecurity, e.g. those who have children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (see Figure 6). Our polling found that those who are vulnerable to food insecurity are more likely to view food as a struggle to eat healthily: 51% of those with children eligible for FSM view food as 'a struggle to eat healthily', compared with 37% of those with children who are not

Figure 4. People who think of food as struggle to eat healthily across income



Figure 5. People who think of food as struggle to eat healthily across age groups



Source: Demos polling (2-16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

eligible. Similarly, 42% of those as children who received FSM saw food as a struggle to eat healthily, compared with just 30% of those who did not receive FSM. This is likely to reflect their wider circumstances, perhaps suggesting that purchasing power in the food sector may impact your psychological relationship with food - as well as your diet. This suggests that our psychological relationship with food could be influenced by our financial circumstances.

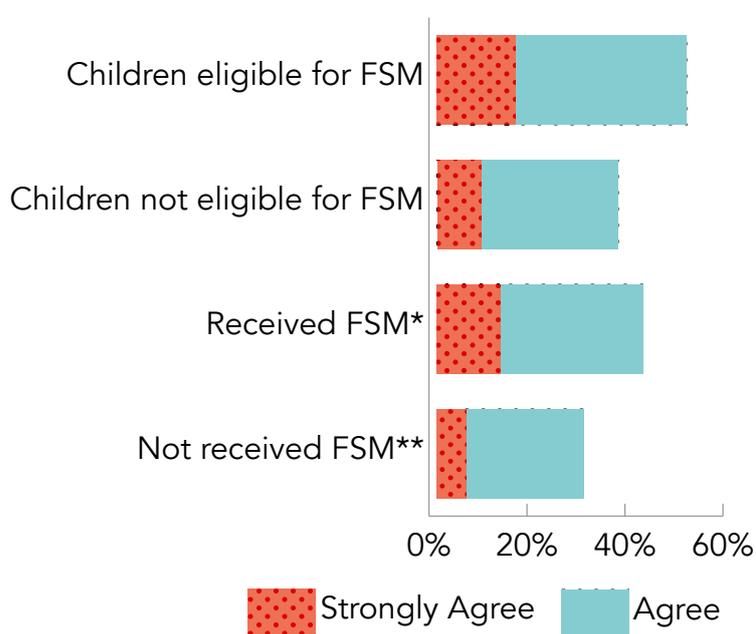
Conclusion

As the National Food Strategy points out, relative to the rest of Europe, the UK places relatively little social value on food. In the context of relatively high rates of obesity and diabetes compared to the rest of Europe, it is worth considering the impact this might be having on our diets and health. However, our research has found strong evidence to suggest that people in the UK tend to have positive relationships with food, often viewing it as a source of comfort or part of socialising. Given this, it seems likely that food has played a role in maintaining the nation's spirits during the pandemic.

However, it is important to flag the stark generational differences in attitudes we found here. Younger people were much more likely to have negative associations with food and healthy eating than older people, as 50% of 18-24 year olds think about food as a struggle to eat healthy. Though understanding exactly what drives this would require further investigation, we know from previous Demos research that younger adults are more likely to struggle to access or afford healthy foods.¹¹ Alternatively, these differences may present a wider cultural shift that may happen as these generations age.

Beyond the pandemic, it is important to ensure that a better understanding of our psychological relationships are capitalised on when trying to bring about dietary shifts. For example, ensuring healthier food products are marketed as something comforting rather than purely 'healthy' for younger consumers.

Figure 6. People who think of food as struggle to eat healthily across FSM recipients



*Received FSM as a child

**Not received FSM as a child

Source: Demos polling (2-16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

11 Lasko-Skinner, R. [Turning the Tables](#), Demos, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Chapter 2:

Food Insecurity

During the pandemic, we have seen an increase in food insecurity. The Food Foundation and King's College London estimate that food insecurity - defined in this context as people either being unable to afford food or unable to access food under new circumstances - quadrupled among adults in April 2020.¹² This should not necessarily come as a surprise - food insecurity levels in the UK before the pandemic were among the highest in Europe.¹³

Covid-19 has presented a variety of threats to household food security that cover all four pillars in the definition provided in Figure 7.¹⁴ We use a broad definition of food security from the Food and Agriculture Organization

to describe different types of food insecurity during the pandemic. We have focused on physical availability and access in addition to financial access (or affordability) during the pandemic.

In this section, we draw together evidence of how food insecurity has changed during the pandemic, with a focus on insecurity created by financial issues. In addition, we build on the well-documented evidence base of different government and third sector responses to food insecurity, to draw a clearer picture of how individuals may have informally been involved in helping to respond to the crisis of food insecurity.¹⁵

In response, we have seen a significant increase in support for those facing food insecurity from the government, charities and individuals.¹⁶ However, the economic scars from the pandemic are likely to continue long after the immediate health risk of the virus retreat and this is likely to translate into higher levels of food insecurity longer-term. As we step out of crisis mode, policy makers will be faced with very difficult questions about how best to support people going forward.

12 Loopstra, R. [Vulnerability to food insecurity since the Covid-19 lockdown](#). King's College London, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

13 The Food Foundation. [Too Poor to Eat: 8.4 million struggling to afford to eat in the UK](#), 2016. [accessed 10/02/2021]

14 Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R., and Gordon, K. [Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the Covid-19 crisis across the UK](#). Sheffield University, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

15 Ibid.

16 BBC. [School meals: Councils promise help after Rashford campaign](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Figure 7. Defining food insecurity

We use a definition of food insecurity from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). This ensures we can be consistent with other research conducted in the UK during the pandemic, such as at Sheffield University who have been monitoring the responses to food insecurity. This definition outlines four broad pillars:

- 1. Food availability** - Ensuring the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality supplied through domestic food production or imports.
- 2. Food access** - Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.
- 3. Utilisation** - Utilisation of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.
- 4. Stability** - To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security.

Source: Food Security, Policy Brief, FOA¹⁷

Our research seeks to better understand how individuals responded to increased food insecurity during the pandemic and changes in public attitudes towards tackling food insecurity in the future.

Key research questions include:

- 1.** How have individuals responded to new forms of food insecurity during the pandemic?
- 2.** What are the demographic characteristics of those who have been providing additional support to others facing food insecurity during the pandemic?
- 3.** What are people's preferences for tackling food insecurity going forward? How do these preferences intersect with other attitudes and preferences towards the role of the state, businesses and individuals?

Food insecurity and community responses during the pandemic

Key findings:

- Our evidence review found that insecurity has risen during the pandemic - driven by a reduction in income and reduced access to affordable food - and according to additional data collected in our poll individuals have stepped in to help mitigate this.
- Our poll found that 40% of people had helped others by shopping for food for someone who was self-isolating during the pandemic, with 23% having received this kind of support for themselves.
- Some groups have been more likely to shop for someone who is self-isolating than others, in particular:
 - Key workers.
 - People with children eligible for free school meals.
 - Younger people, such as those aged 18-24.

17 FAO. [Food Policy Brief](#). Food Security, 2006. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Covid-19 has caused a significant increase in food insecurity. The Food Foundation in September 2020 found that 14% of households - 4 million people, including 2.3 million children - had experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in the 6 months following the start of the March 2020 lockdown, compared to 11.5% before the pandemic.¹⁸ Families facing food insecurity may have been forced to skip meals entirely, with 12% of adults living with children having skipped meals in the past six months.¹⁹ Research commissioned by the FSA highlighted that this has been driven by income loss - exacerbating pre-existing food insecurity - and a lack of accessibility to affordable food during lockdown.²⁰

There's also evidence that the increase in food insecurity could be disproportionately affecting younger people. A survey conducted by YouGov in June 2020 for Co-operatives UK found that 43% of the public were worried about the extra cost of providing food for their household, rising to over 50% of those aged 25-44.²¹ Food insecurity is also likely to be particularly affecting those in low-income households; another survey published in August 2020 found that 83% of low-income families reported struggling to afford the food they need.²²

A number of research findings have highlighted the increasing demand for food

banks. The Trussell Trust found that there was an 89% increase in food parcels handed out in April 2020 (compared to April of the previous year).²³ In addition, half of the families that requested food in April had never used a food bank before.²⁴ Similarly, the Independent Food Network (which represents food banks not affiliated with the Trussell Trust) reported an almost 300% increase in demand during May 2020.²⁵ This reinforces the findings of monthly tracking data published by the FSA.²⁶

While food bank use tells part of the story, it does not provide a comprehensive picture of the state of food insecurity in the UK on its own. This is because individuals and families may be discouraged from using food banks due to the stigma surrounding them, even if that means skipping meals. As qualitative research by the FSA concluded: "Most of the [research] participants we saw regularly skipping meals, or unable to feed regular meals to their children, had not used [food banks]."²⁷ Thus, even though the data shows a dramatic increase in new food bank users - especially so at the start of the pandemic - this is likely to underestimate the true level of food insecurity in Britain during the pandemic.

This rise in food insecurity has had a number of wider, negative impacts. Those who experience food insecurity tend to buy cheaper, less nutritious food, have more 'unbalanced' meals and eat more food past

18 The Food Foundation. [14% of UK families with children have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months](#), 2020. Available at [accessed 10/02/2021]

19 Ibid.

20 Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

21 Wells, L. [Consumers aim to shop locally after lockdown](#). Talking Retail, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

22 Howes, S. et al. [Poverty in the Pandemic: The impact of coronavirus on low-income families and children](#). Child Poverty Action Group, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

23 The Trussell Trust. [UK food banks report biggest month ever, as coalition urgently calls for funding to get money into people's pockets quickly during pandemic](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

24 Westwater, H. [Foodbanks could give out six food parcels every minute this winter](#). The Big Issue, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

25 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

26 Food Standards Agency. [The Covid-19 consumer research](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

27 Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

its 'use-by' date. These behaviours negatively impact on diet and health.^{28, 29} Importantly, food insecurity also negatively affects children's wellbeing, with a survey of frontline practitioners finding that lack of access to food was the basic item most commonly associated with harm to children's mental health and their education.³⁰

During the pandemic, there have been several interventions from the government, third sector and industry retailers to support those at risk of food insecurity, whether they were shielding, moderately clinically vulnerable, or on a low income. These have included grocery box schemes and priority delivery schemes for those who were shielding, shopping hours specifically for the moderately clinically vulnerable and government financial support for those on low incomes.³¹

Around 15% of state school children in England received Free Schools Meals in 2019 (approximately 1.3 million children), encouraged by a campaign by footballer Marcus Rashford.³² The government then introduced a voucher scheme - worth £15 per week per child - to replace these meals, following the closure of schools during the first lockdown in March 2020.³³

Our research finds there has been a great deal of citizen involvement in tackling food insecurity: a spirit of togetherness and mutual support during a challenging time. Our poll found strong evidence of extensive community engagement: two in five (40%) people offered to help others in their local community during the pandemic. Much of this activity is related to tackling food insecurity. Our poll found that 40% of people had helped

others by shopping for food for someone who was self-isolating during the pandemic, with 23% having experienced this kind of support themselves. It is likely that this form of support has often been in response to physical in-access to food during self-isolation rather than for financial reasons.

Our poll also found that key workers and younger people were more likely to help others with their shopping. Half (51%) of key workers have been shopping for food for someone who was self-isolating, in addition to over half (57%) of those with children eligible for free school meals. Younger people have been more likely to help others with shopping than older generations. 49% of those aged 18-24 have shopped for someone who was self-isolating, which is somewhat to be expected, as they are less at risk from visiting shops. However, as older age groups are more likely to get involved in volunteering than younger people in normal times, this could be a moment that helps mobilise younger generations to get involved with informal community support both now and for the future.³⁴

This wave of community action was also reflected in the responses to our open-access survey. Repeatedly, respondents told us of the action they had taken to support people with food needs:

"It has certainly brought us and some of our neighbours much closer (not literally of course!) and far more communicative... I have always made it clear to all that if they need me to shop for them when I am shopping, I would happily do so."

Female, 65+; North-West England

28 Taylor, A. [New Food Foundation Survey: five million people living in households with children have experienced food insecurity since lockdown started](#). The Food Foundation, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

29 Unbalanced meals referring to those without the right balance of foods and nutrients for a healthy diet. For more, see: National Health Service. [Eat Well](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

30 Buttle UK. [The State of Child Poverty 2020](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

31 Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R., and Gordon, K. [Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the Covid-19 crisis across the UK](#). Sheffield University, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

32 Duffield, C. [What is the free school meals scheme and what was Marcus Rashford campaigning for?](#) Evening Standard, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

33 DfE. [Providing school meals during the coronavirus \(Covid-19\) outbreak](#). HM Government, 2021. [accessed 10/02/2021]

34 NCVO. [UK Civil Society Almanac 2020](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

"I'm more involved with the community now, shopping and collecting pharmacy prescriptions for people who are isolating (through the council healthwatch volunteer group). I talk and greet more of my neighbours when I see them to make sure they're OK or need any help."

Male, 45-54; South-East England

"Have joined a volunteer shopping group which I would not have done pre-COVID."

Female, 35-44; South-East England

"I joined the local charity during lockdown... I am enjoying the telephone befriending... The charity is also planning to organise about 100 Christmas food hampers and I have been contacting supermarkets to ask them if they would support our initiative."

Female, 45-54; London

Interestingly, our data suggests that people used a mix of approaches to support their community. Only 16% had joined a 'mutual aid' group to either offer help or seek support; a much smaller proportion than the 40% of people who reported offering to help others in their local area. This suggests that people often supported their community in much more informal ways, perhaps through things like shopping for neighbours, rather than through more formal mutual aid groups.

It's also important to look at why some people were less involved in helping others in their local community during the pandemic. Our poll found a relatively even split among respondents. Nearly one fifth (19%) reported that they had not helped out in their community because they were self-isolating or were not physically able to help, a point also reflected in our open-access survey:

"My husband and I have shielded since the start of March on doctor's advice for my husband. We therefore have not been able to help out in our community as we would have liked to."

Female, 35-44; Wales

"As my wife is shielding I have not got as involved with the local community activities that I would have wished."

Male, 55-64; East Midlands. England

Beyond this, 21% had not been involved because they had not thought about doing so, which could suggest a need for clearer opportunities to get involved in community activities or simply a lack of interest. Beyond this, another 19% reported lacking the time to be involved, reflecting the pressures facing people in particular households in the pandemic. Several examples of this emerged from our open-access survey:

"...we were both working more than our normal hours as well as home educating so didn't have time to support the community."

Female, 25-34; East Midlands, England

"I have been lucky enough to be able to continue to work full time during the pandemic, as I do office work which I have done from home. So I haven't had any more time during lockdown to get involved in the local community than I already did."

Male, 45-54; South-East England

Tackling food insecurity in the future

How best to tackle food insecurity remains a difficult question. The National Food Strategy has made a series of recommendations to safeguard low income consumers and children from food insecurity, including the extension of the Free School Meal scheme to all those children whose parents are in receipt of Universal Credit.³⁵ To better understand public attitudes towards tackling food insecurity during and after the pandemic, we conducted a nationally representative Polis. This enabled us to understand how different attitudes overlapped - such as attitudes towards the role of the state, business and the individual in relation to food insecurity - and how these attitudes differed across demographic groups.

Key findings:

- There is strong public support for a child's right to healthy food.
 - 89% in our Polis agreed that: "Every child has the right to have a healthy meal at least once a day" (user generated statement).
- The public think parents are responsible for feeding their children but that the government must step in when parents cannot play this role.
 - 75% in our Polis agreed that: "Parents are responsible for feeding their children but government must step in for children whose parents are unable to do so" (user generated statement).
 - 63% in our Polis agreed that: "it is the government's responsibility to make sure no-one goes hungry".
- Given this, it is unsurprising that the public think the government should continue to provide the additional support it offered during the pandemic.
 - 69% of respondents to our poll support children getting free school meals during the holiday throughout the

pandemic and 58% support children getting free school meals during the holidays even beyond the pandemic.

- Similarly, there is some support for providing free school meals to all children, to ensure receiving them is not stigmatising.
 - 51% in our Polis agreed that: "school meals should be free for all students so that poor students are not stigmatised" (user generated statement).
- The public tend to be more supportive of preventive actions for food insecurity, such as ensuring there are well-paid jobs available to all.
 - Two thirds (65%) agreed that: "The two people who create the child are responsible for looking after it however the government should provide well paid jobs for all" (user generated statement).

Two attitudinal groups

Our Polis research revealed two attitudinal groups defined by different views of what role the government should play in ensuring people can access food. For ease, we have named these groups: (1) Food Free Marketeers and (2) Food Interventionists. These names have been chosen to highlight the spirit of some of the attitudes held within the groups, rather than to entirely represent their political views. In this sense, the names reflect a characterisation of the views and attitudes of the groups.

Food Free Marketeers tend to be less supportive of the government playing a role in directly tackling food security, such as through providing free school meals during the holidays after the pandemic. They represent a third of the population (33% of respondents) and tend to be older and more likely to be from White ethnic groups (see Figure 8).

In comparison, the Food Interventionists, make up more than half of the population (55%). They are more likely to feel strongly

35 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Figure 8. Food Free Marketeers and Food Interventionists attitudes to food insecurity



that it is the government's responsibility to directly prevent hunger and support a wider range of state actions to tackle food insecurity. They tend to be younger and are more likely to be from ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities (see Figure 8). The remaining 13% did not fit into clear attitudinal groups.

Our findings here suggest that there is majority support for the government taking additional steps, in order to alleviate food insecurity.

We found that both groups - both the 'Food Free Marketeers' and 'Food Interventionists' - believe the government has two roles to play in tackling food insecurity. These roles are: (1) to create a universal right to food, which may require legislative change, and (2) to ensure that incomes are high enough to prevent food insecurity.

Figure 9 summarises the important areas of consensus between the two attitudinal groups which Polis identified. In addition, we

Figure 9. Consensus principles for tackling food insecurity from Polis

1. People have the right to healthy food.

- Around nine in ten (89%) agreed that: “Every child has the right to have a healthy meal at least once a day” (user generated statement).

2. The government should take action to help feed those without the means to do so.

- Eight in ten (79%) agreed that: “Government funding should be sufficient to enable people to feed their children, but not so much that it acts as a disincentive to work” (user generated statement).
- Three quarters (75%) agreed that: “Parents are responsible for feeding their children but government must step in for children whose parents are unable to do so” (user generated statement).

3. The government is responsible for setting the wider conditions for families to have sufficient income levels to eat well.

- Two thirds (65%) agreed that: “The two people who create the child are responsible for looking after it however the government should provide well paid jobs for all” (user generated statement).

found the majority of people (71%) across both groups - 67% of Food Free Marketeers and 73% of Food Interventionists - thought it would be “better if food banks didn’t have to exist”. This reinforces the earlier finding that a majority think that people should not be food insecure and should be able to earn enough to access food.

We found in our Polis survey that where the groups tend to differ is in terms of the deployment or the design of policies to prevent or alleviate food insecurity. Food Free Marketeers are much less likely to think the government should be involved in delivering food banks, while Food Interventionists were much more inclined to think the government should. In addition, Food Free Marketeers are less likely to think it is the government’s role to make sure no-one goes hungry; 56% disagreed with the statement: “It is the government’s responsibility to make sure no-one goes hungry” (user generated statement) compared with just 26% of the overall population.

This presents an interesting nuance. Food Free Marketeers think the government is responsible for tackling food insecurity - it

should ensure people have sufficient income to support themselves - but they do not think the government is responsible for preventing hunger altogether. This divergence between Food Free Marketeers and the rest could reflect the fact that, as a group, they think people tend to be food insecure because of poor decisions. 70% of Food Free Marketeers agreed with the statement: “children go hungry because parents spend money on other things [sic] instead of food” (user generated statement).

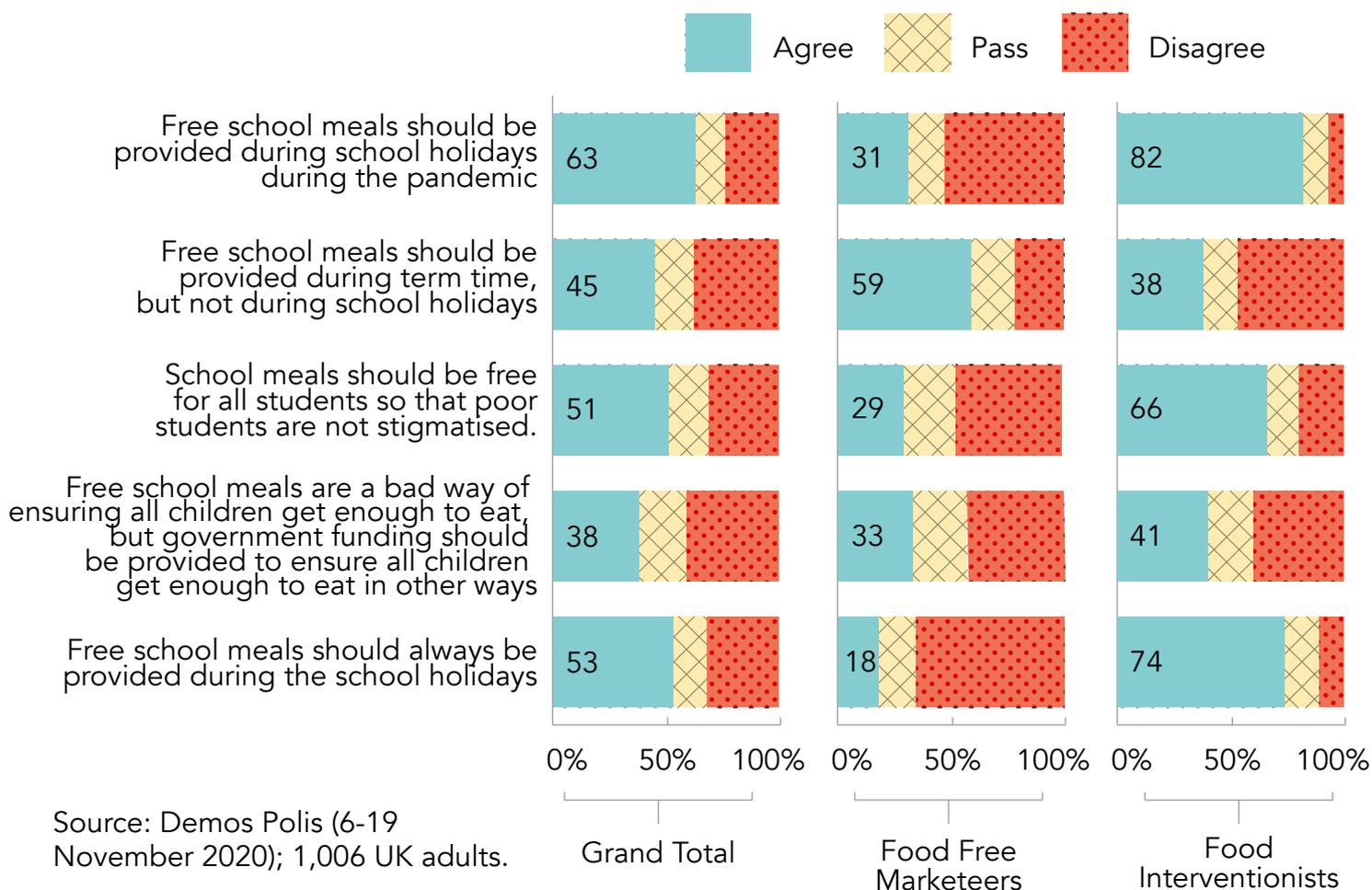
The future of free school meals

Our poll found strong support for providing free school meals (FSM) in holidays, both during and after the pandemic:

- 69% of people support children getting free school meals during the holiday, throughout the pandemic.
- 59% of people support children getting free school meals during the holiday, after the pandemic.

Interestingly, there was overall support in our Polis for providing free school meals to all

Figure 10. Statements on free school meals across attitudinal groups



Source: Demos Polis (6-19 November 2020); 1,006 UK adults.

children, to ensure receiving them was not stigmatising. This suggests that the public might be in favour of expanding some state provision around supporting low income families to access food.

As Figure 10 illustrates, there was some consensus between Food Free Marketeers and Food Interventionists over the provision of free school meals during school time. Where the groups diverge is over the extension of FSM. While Food Interventionists support FSM outside of term time after the pandemic, Food Free Marketeers disagreed with this idea.

Conclusion

The public agreed that the government should pursue policies which ensure household incomes are sufficient to prevent them suffering from food insecurity. There was also strong support for the idea of a right to healthy, good quality food among respondents. However, views are more split

on particular food provision interventions. Notably, we found strong support for free school meal programmes. Going forward, there is clear consensus that the government should be involved in tackling food insecurity and ensuring that people can afford and access good quality food.

We also found a high number of people getting involved in the community to tackle food insecurity caused by lack of physical access during lockdown. In particular, this is among young people who are usually less likely to volunteer. In the future, we also found strong support for community involvement in tackling food insecurity, particularly in relation to interventions to support financial access, such as food banks. This additional volunteering capacity could continue to contribute to these efforts - at both a national and local level - to alleviate food insecurity more generally, but equally, once normal working and social lives return, the capacity and commitment to do so may wane.

Chapter 3:

Diets and Eating Habits

“[I’ve been] more conscious, especially during the early weeks of the first lockdown, of the availability of food and access to it. More conscious of where food has come from and how much the UK can support itself. More conscious of the need to stay as healthy as possible and the benefit of eating better.”

Male, 45-54, Yorkshire and the Humber, England

“It has helped me reconnect with food. I’ve always been passionate about food and cooking, but the pandemic has given me more time at home to get back into cooking good food and exploring new recipes. I’d say the pandemic has improved my relationship with food.”

Male, 35-44, North West England

In March 2020, the UK entered the first nationwide lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic. Overnight, many of the usual places we would normally eat or buy food – including schools, offices, restaurants, cafes, pubs – closed, necessitating huge changes in what and how we eat.

It is worth noting that restrictions, public health advice and personal steps to respond to the virus have not been constant during the pandemic, and therefore it is unlikely that lifestyle changes have stayed completely constant throughout.³⁶ But in this research we found that many members of the public did change their diets and eating habits during the pandemic and, crucially, many expect these changes to be long-term.

These findings could have significant implications for the future. Tackling obesity has long been a priority for policy makers, given poor diet is the biggest cause of poor health in the UK. Even before Covid-19, an estimated 90,000 people died from diet-related disease every year in the UK.³⁷ The pandemic has catapulted the challenges of obesity to the front of our minds, in part because diet-related illnesses such as obesity and diabetes are in the top three risk factors for dying from Covid-19.³⁸ As we think about how to rebuild our food system after the pandemic, it is essential that we take on board what we have learnt about the relationship between people’s diets and their environment during the pandemic.

36 HM Government. [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#). 2021. [accessed 17/02/2021]

37 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

38 Ibid.

This chapter presents findings from the following key research questions:

1. How have eating habits - including cooking, preparing, who we eat with and diets – changed during the pandemic? How likely are these shifts to continue?
2. Which demographic groups are most likely to have experienced changes in their behaviours or habits?
3. How have these changes intersected with other experiences during the pandemic, such as working from home, having more free time and financial concerns?
4. What are the public's preferences for further action on healthy eating, post-pandemic?
5. What new interventions to improve public health and nutrition, if any, do the public support?

Changing behaviours during the pandemic

Key findings from our poll:

- The majority of people have spent more time cooking, preparing and eating with family members.
 - Half (51%) of people have cooked at home more throughout the pandemic.
 - In particular, those who live in London (60%), people on higher incomes (see Figure 11) and those in households of four or more people (59%) have cooked at home more during the pandemic.
 - Of those who cooked "much more", 72% also reported having more free time - suggesting an important connection between the two.
 - Of those who cooked more during the pandemic, 82% expect this change to continue.
 - A third (32%) of people have eaten together with people they live with more during the pandemic.
 - In particular, higher earners such as those earning £80,000-

£99,999 (48%) and ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities (48%) have eaten together more with people they live with.

- Similarly, 74% of those who had reported "much more" meals with their household during the pandemic also stated they had more free time
- 79% expect this change to continue.
- A significant proportion have eaten healthier main meals, particularly among those who have cooked more and had more free time.
 - A third (32%) of people reported that they had eaten much or slightly more healthy main meals, while 59% said it had stayed the same and 9% said they had eaten less healthy meals.
 - In particular, those in full time employment (36% vs 24% of unemployed people), higher income groups (28% of those earning up to £20,000 vs 36% of those earning between £60-80,000) and those with children eligible for school meals (45%) were more likely to have eaten healthier meals.
 - Of those who have eaten much more healthy main meals, 75% have had much more or slightly more free time, and 89% have cooked more.
- A third (33%) reported that they had eaten more unhealthy snacks, while 49% stayed the same and 18% reported eating less.
 - Of those who had eaten much healthier meals, 38% reported eating much more unhealthy snacks while 40% reported eating much less.

Cooking at home

Our poll of 10,069 UK adults (fieldwork 2 – 16 November 2020) found that half (51%) of people have cooked at home more throughout the pandemic than they did before, while as little as 4% did so less and

45% stayed the same. This was particularly high among those who live in London (60%).

Interestingly, when comparing rural and urban groups, the rate stayed relatively flat – suggesting that more cooking from home has been a London-specific phenomenon rather than a wider experience of urban areas. In addition, the full-time employed (57%) and those in the £60,000-£80,000 income bracket (56%) were also more likely to cook more during the pandemic (Figure 11). By contrast, the unemployed (40%) and those on incomes up to £20,000 (46%) were less likely to have cooked from home.

Figure 11. Cooked at home more across income



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

In addition, larger households have been more likely to cook during the pandemic. For example, those in households of four or more people have been much more likely to cook more (60%) than those in single person households (44%). This may reflect the power of the social and environmental factors that drive cooking habits, such as family life.

The data also reveals a strong relationship between cooking more at home and changes

in 'free time' during the pandemic. Of those who cooked much more, 72% reported having more free time; of those who cooked slightly more, 66% reported more free time during the pandemic. This suggests that people may have utilised the additional time they have at their disposal to spend more time cooking at home.

The increase in cooking at home is also likely to reflect the shutdown of almost the entire 'out of home' food sector – restaurants, cafes, takeaways, and pubs – which had previously supplied 20-25% of the UK's calories.³⁹

This hypothesis matches up with findings from the FSA Covid-19 Consumer Tracker, which asked those who reported eating takeaways less often than pre-lockdown why this was the case. The most popular reasons given were:

- cooking at home more (36% June and July)
- wanting to save money (35% June, 29% July)
- takeaways not being open (33% June, 25% July)
- concerns around Covid-19 (32% June, 36% July)

This last reason was given more often by older age groups.

However, can we expect this shift to hold in a post-pandemic world, when it becomes far easier to eat outside the home? Our poll suggests these behaviours are likely to continue after the pandemic. Of those who changed their behaviour to cook more at home during the pandemic, 82% expect this change to continue and 79% of these people want to sustain this behavioural change.

Eating with others

Our poll found that while over half (58%) of people had eaten together a similar amount as pre-pandemic, a further third (32%) have eaten together more often throughout the pandemic period. By contrast, just 9% of the public reported eating less with those that they live with.

³⁹ National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

An increase in eating with those they live with was particularly common among Londoners (42%), those earning £60,000-£80,000 (43%; see Figure 12) and £80,000-£99,999 (48%), and the full-time employed (38%). It was also particularly high among ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities (48%). Comparatively, those who are unemployed (just 19%) were less likely to report an increase in eating with those they live with during the pandemic.

Figure 12. Eaten more with people they live with by income



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

We again found that an increase in free time is linked to an increase in eating with those we live with. For example, 74% of those who had reported eating ‘much more’ with their household during the pandemic also stated they had more free time. Similarly, 67% of those who had eaten ‘slightly more’ with their household also reported more free time. Once again, it appears that we have redirected some of our free time acquired during the pandemic into food-related activities.

In addition, of those who changed their behaviour to eat more with those they live with, 79% expect this change to continue, while a similar percentage (77%) express support for maintaining this behavioural change after the pandemic. In some sense, this is unsurprising. As a survey by the FSA found 44% of 14-19 year olds reported that they were eating more meals as a family, with 60% agreeing that eating as a family had positively impacted their health and wellbeing in lockdown.⁴⁰ Our open-access survey revealed similar sentiments among the public:

“We have eaten together, sat around the table more rather than on our laps in front of the TV, which has meant we have communicated better and taken an interest and listened to each other’s views.”

Male, 55-64, East Midlands, England

“We have valued the social aspects and routines of cooking and eating together.”

Male, 25-34; North-West England

“We eat together every day – that can also include family members in our bubble.”

Female, 65; South-East England

Meal planning and batch cooking

A final trend identified by our research relates to how we have prepared and stored food throughout the pandemic.

In general, the public have spent more time meal planning, batch cooking and freezing fresh meals to be eaten later. In April 2020, a survey by Hubbub found that 35% of people said they were using their freezer more and 29% report freezing a wider variety of foods.⁴¹ Freezer use appeared to decline slightly in the following months, with between 23-25% of

40 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

41 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

the public reporting using their freezer more in May, June and July.⁴²

However, even when lockdown had been significantly eased (by the end of August), 22% of the public said they were batch cooking and freezing more than they had done prior to the pandemic.⁴³ More recent data from November 2020 shows that 64% have cooked food to be frozen in the past month, with little change in this rate between August and November.⁴⁴

Thus, a picture of change emerges: people were more likely to have batch cooked, planned meals in advance and frozen their food during lockdown than before the pandemic. While we did not examine this issue directly in our poll, it does appear to match with some of the responses to our open-access survey:

“[We have] done more batch cooking of stews etc. to go in the freezer.”

Female, 45-54; South-East England

“We have started the fasting diet as that is easier to do when you are completely in control of your own food. I use the freezer more, to batch cook.”

Female, 45-54; Yorkshire, England

“Our tendency is to go to supermarkets for food shopping less often, but we are also planning meals further days in advance more, which means we probably are eating more healthily and cooking more at home.”

Male, 64; North-West England

Healthy eating

As the Health Foundation notes: “Poor diet is now the biggest risk factor for preventable ill health in England.”⁴⁵ Our high rates of diabetes and obesity pre-pandemic have been blamed in part for our high Covid-19 death toll.⁴⁶ As a result, it is important to understand whether the pandemic, as well as the specific advice and regulations related to it, have made our diets more or less healthy throughout this time.

We found many of us have changed our diets during the pandemic. Yet this is something of a mixed picture, with increases in both healthy and unhealthy eating reported. Within this, we found a positive picture for those who have had more time, cooked more and eaten with their family more – indeed, they have also been more likely to report healthier eating. This is consistent with other research – such as that published by the IGD – which suggests the public consciously took opportunities to make their diets healthier during the first lockdown.⁴⁷

A third (32%) of people in our nationally representative poll reported that they had eaten much or slightly healthier main meals, while 59% said it had stayed the same and 9% reported less. Of those who changed their behaviour to eat healthier main meals, 84% expect this change to continue, while 80% want this change to continue

Across demographic groups, we found Londoners (44%) were particularly likely to have eaten healthier meals in comparison to people in the Midlands (31%), Wales (30%) and Northern Ireland (28%). That Londoners were particularly likely to report eating more healthy meals may reflect its demographic

42 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. Available at [accessed 10/02/2021]

43 Restorick, T. [Hubbub partners with Tesco to launch ‘No Time for Waste Challenge’](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

44 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 5-8](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

45 Health Foundation. [Our food and our health: How is our health influenced by the food we eat?](#) 2017. [accessed 17/02/2021]

46 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]; Lasko-Skinner, R. [Turning the Tables](#), Demos, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

47 IGD. [Appetite for change - how to shift consumers’ mindsets around fruit and vegetables](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

make-up, whereby some demographic groups are more prevalent in London. For example, those who are employed full time (36% vs 24% of unemployed people), ethnic minority groups excluding White

minorities (48% vs 30% White ethnic groups), higher income groups (28% of those earning up to £20,000 vs 36% of those earning between £60-80,000) and those with children eligible for school meals were also more likely to report eating healthier main meals. It is worth noting that some of these groups – in particular ethnic minorities excluding White minorities – are more likely to think of food as a “struggle to eat healthy”. Thus, these improvements during the pandemic should be seen as particularly positive.

We found only 9% of people in our nationally representative poll have eaten less healthy main meals during the pandemic. This paints a positive picture overall – with people being significantly more likely to eat more, rather than less, healthy meals. However, we also found that some consumers have been more vulnerable to change, being more likely to report eating less healthy meals as well as eating more of them.

For example, 15% of those with children eligible for free school meals reported eating fewer healthy main meals. We found a similar

trend with those from ethnic minority groups excluding White minority groups. 14% of people from these ethnic minority groups reported eating fewer healthy main meals, in comparison with 8% of those from White ethnic groups.

Our data suggests there has been a positive relationship between more free time, cooking more and eating healthier meals during the pandemic. Of those who have eaten much more healthy main meals, 68% have had much more or slightly more free time, and 89% have cooked more – reinforcing the importance of cooking in healthy eating. This suggests there may be a positive feedback loop between time, cooking and healthy eating (see Figure 13). At the same time, a third of people (33%) reported in our poll that they had eaten more unhealthy snacks, while 49% stayed the same and 18% reported eating less. In effect, people have been equally likely overall to eat more unhealthy snacks as they have healthy meals.

More positively, however, we found nearly a fifth of people (18%) have eaten fewer unhealthy snacks. This suggests that people have seen improvements in their diets from eating less snacks as well as eating more healthy main meals. However, those who had eaten healthier meals were equally likely to

Figure 13. Relationship between free time, cooking more and eating healthier meals

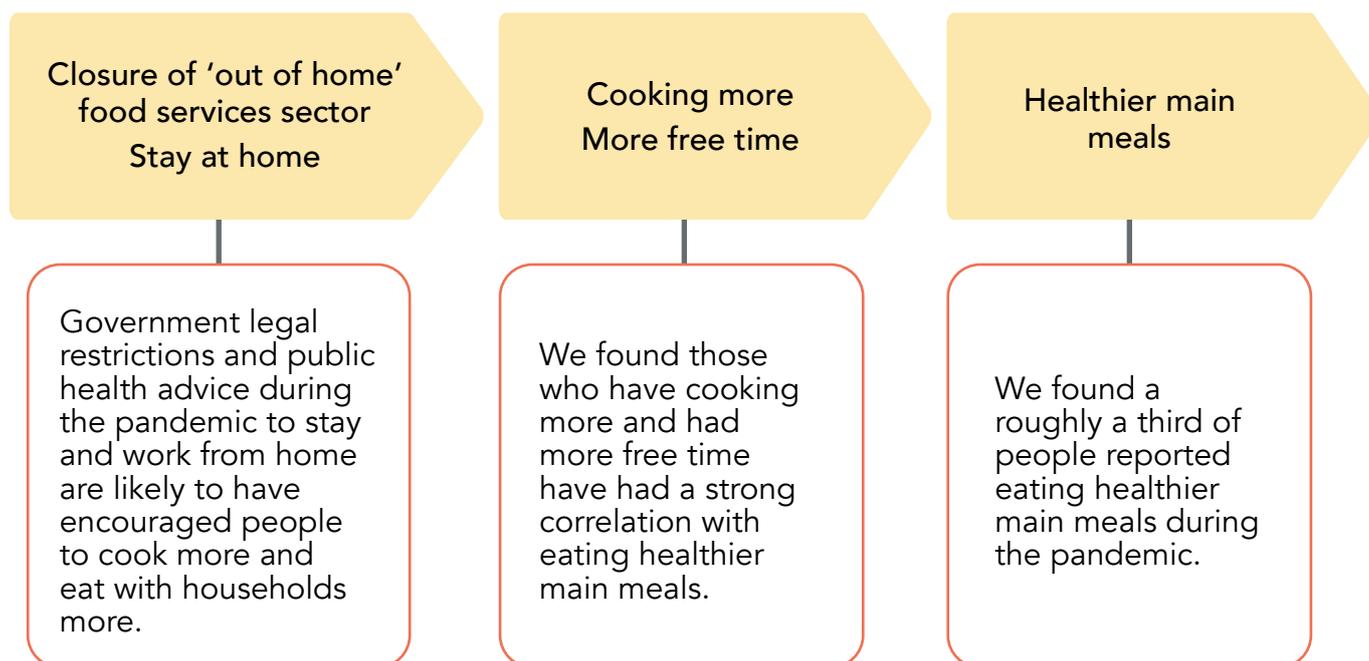
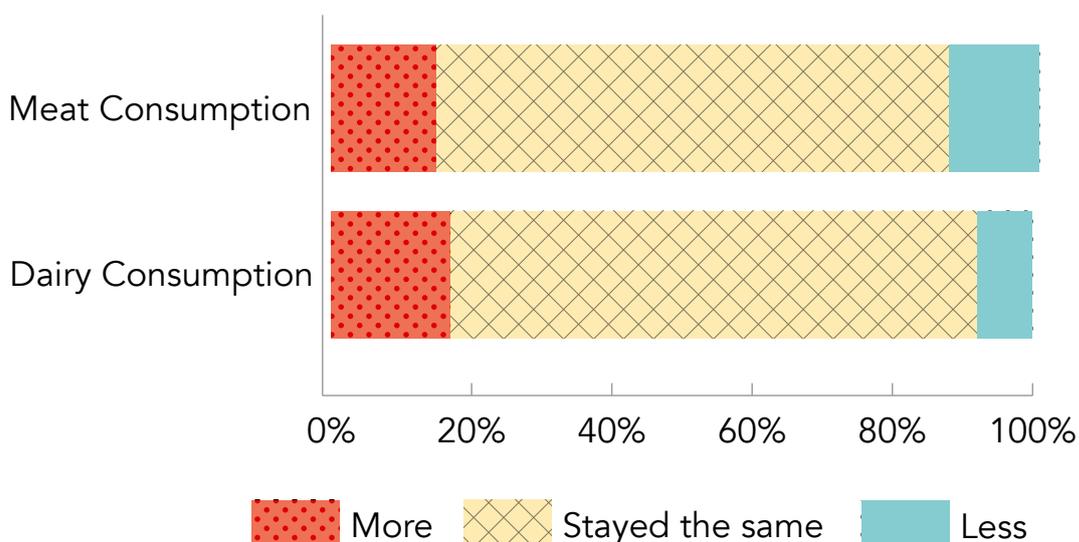


Figure 14. Change in meat and dairy consumption during the pandemic



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

eat more snacks and less snacks – of those who had eaten more healthy meals, 38% reported eating much more or slightly more unhealthy snacks while 40% reported eating much less. This suggests that unhealthy snacks have not necessarily been a replacement for healthy meals.

In our poll, we found that those who had been snacking more were from similar demographics groups as those that had eaten more healthier meals. For example, those in full-time employment were snacking more than the unemployed (a 35% increase vs 23%), as were ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities compared with those from White ethnic groups (40% increase vs 32%).

The FSA Covid-19 Consumer tracker came to similar conclusions from data collected earlier in the pandemic. July 2020 data shows that 27% of people were eating more healthily, but 40% were also eating more unhealthy snacks.⁴⁸ IDG research also found that (51%) claimed to have eaten more fruit and vegetables during lockdown.⁴⁹

Meat and dairy consumption

In general, our poll found that roughly three-quarters of people have eaten the same amount of meat and dairy products during the pandemic. However, while 75% said they had eaten or drunk the same amount of dairy products, 17% said they had eaten or drunk more and just 8% said less: the public were twice as likely to increase their dairy consumption as they were to reduce it. We see a different picture for meat, with roughly equal increases and decreases in consumption. 71% said the amount of meat they have eaten stayed the same, while 15% said more and 13% said less.

Some groups in particular, such as those with children eligible for free school meals, have been especially likely to increase their dairy consumption, with over a third (36%) reporting so.

In addition, we found a strong generational difference: younger people were much more likely to change their meat and dairy consumption during the pandemic (see Figures 15 and 16). Older generations were more likely to report no change in their consumption either way.

48 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker waves three and four report published](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

49 IDG. [Appetite for change - how to shift consumers' mindsets around fruit and vegetables](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Figure 15. Consumption of meat products during the pandemic across age

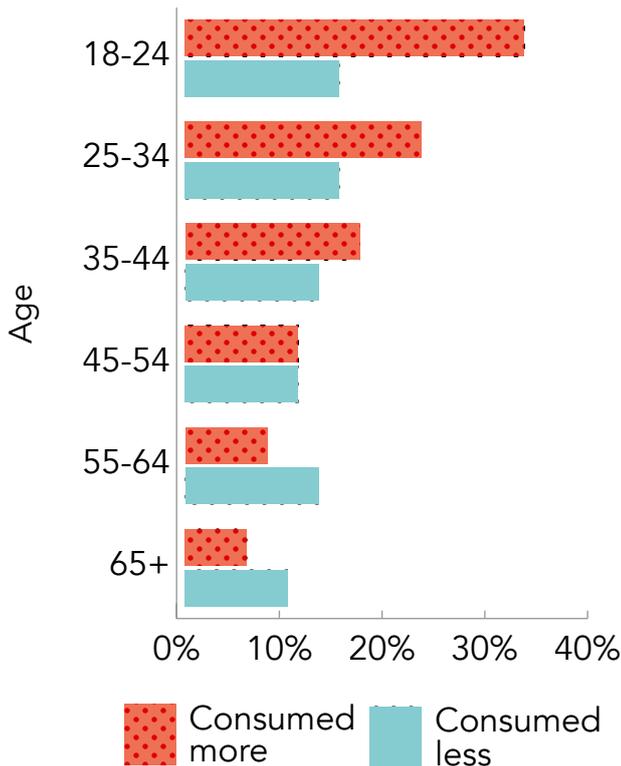
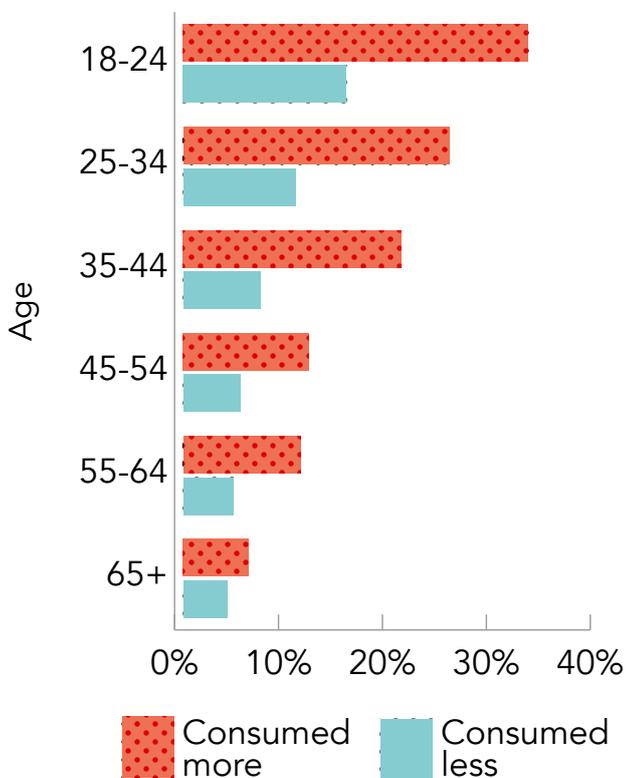


Figure 16. Consumption of dairy products during the pandemic across age



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Supporting healthy eating in the future

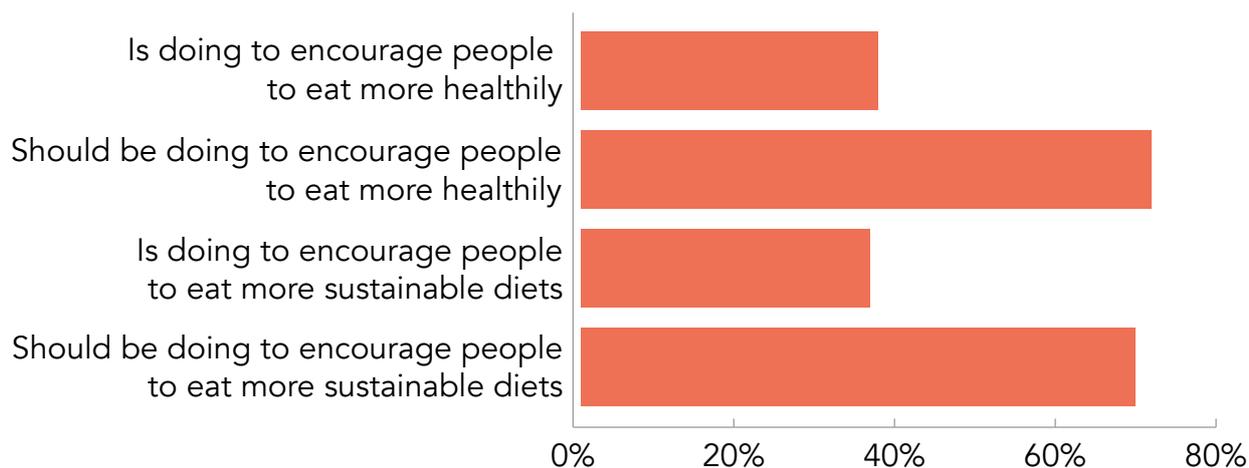
As we think about recovering from the pandemic and how to ‘Renew Normal’, policy makers are beginning to grapple with difficult questions around the role of government and business in promoting healthy eating. As the National Food Strategy points out, this poses a fundamental question to citizens and policy makers: what role should the state play?⁵⁰ To aid policy makers, we included a mixture of statements in our Polis relating to the role of the state, businesses and individuals in healthy eating, in order to gather public perspectives on key policies in this area.

Key findings:

- The public are broadly in favour of government action to encourage healthy eating – particularly after the pandemic.
 - In our poll, 71% thought the government should be doing a “great deal” or a “fair amount” to encourage people to eat more healthily.
 - In our Polis, we found the majority felt that the pandemic had increased the need for government action – 67% overall agreed with the statement: “The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for government support to ensure everyone can afford to eat healthy food”.
- At the same time, the public strongly support people’s right to choose what they eat and, to a lesser extent, businesses’ right to sell unhealthy food.
 - In our Polis, 82% of the population support the statement: “I think it is everyone’s individual choice what to eat” (user generated statement). More than three quarters (77%) agreed that: “Businesses should be free to sell food people want to eat but Government should advise on health issues” (user generated statement).

50 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Figure 17. Public attitudes towards government involvement in healthy eating and sustainable diets



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

- Public support is strongest for interventions that make healthy choices easier rather than those that make unhealthy choices harder.
 - In our Polis, 87% support “advice being provided for anyone who wants to be able to eat more healthily and cheaply” (user generated statement) and a further 83% would support cooking lessons becoming part of the curriculum.
 - In our Polis, 60% agreed that “the government should subsidise healthy food (that is, provide funding to make it cheaper)”, while 60% disagreed with the statement “junk food should be banned” (user generated statement).

Our poll found that a clear majority of the public want the government to encourage healthy eating and more sustainable diets. Nearly three quarters (71%) think the government should be doing a ‘great deal’ or a ‘fair amount’ to encourage people to eat more healthily. A similar proportion (69%) think the government should be doing a ‘great deal’ or a ‘fair amount’ to encourage people to eat more sustainable diets. Roughly one in three (37%) think the government is already doing ‘a great deal’ or ‘a fair amount’ to encourage people to eat more healthily, leaving another third who think the government should be doing more (see Figure 17).

We found that a significant proportion felt that the pandemic had increased the need for the government to take action on healthy eating. 67% agreed in the Polis that: “The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for government support to ensure everyone can afford to eat healthy food”.

As Figure 18 demonstrates, however, a minority do not think the government should be involved in promoting healthy eating. The role of the government in the food system is not an area of consensus between the Food Free Marketeers and the Food Interventionists. These are the same attitudinal groups discussed in the previous chapter and thus have the same demographic characteristics as previously described (see Figure 19). In addition, the smaller group, what we call the Food Free Marketeers, tend to disagree that the pandemic has catalysed the need for change or that it is the government’s role to support people to eat healthily.

We found strong support across both groups in our Polis for freedom of choice around food: 82% of Polis respondents supported the statement “I think it is everyone’s individual choice what to eat”. Further, we found that the majority support the statement: “People should be free to eat what they want, whether that’s healthy or unhealthy, and the government should stay out of it”. This

Figure 18. Support for statements relating to healthy eating in general & across groups

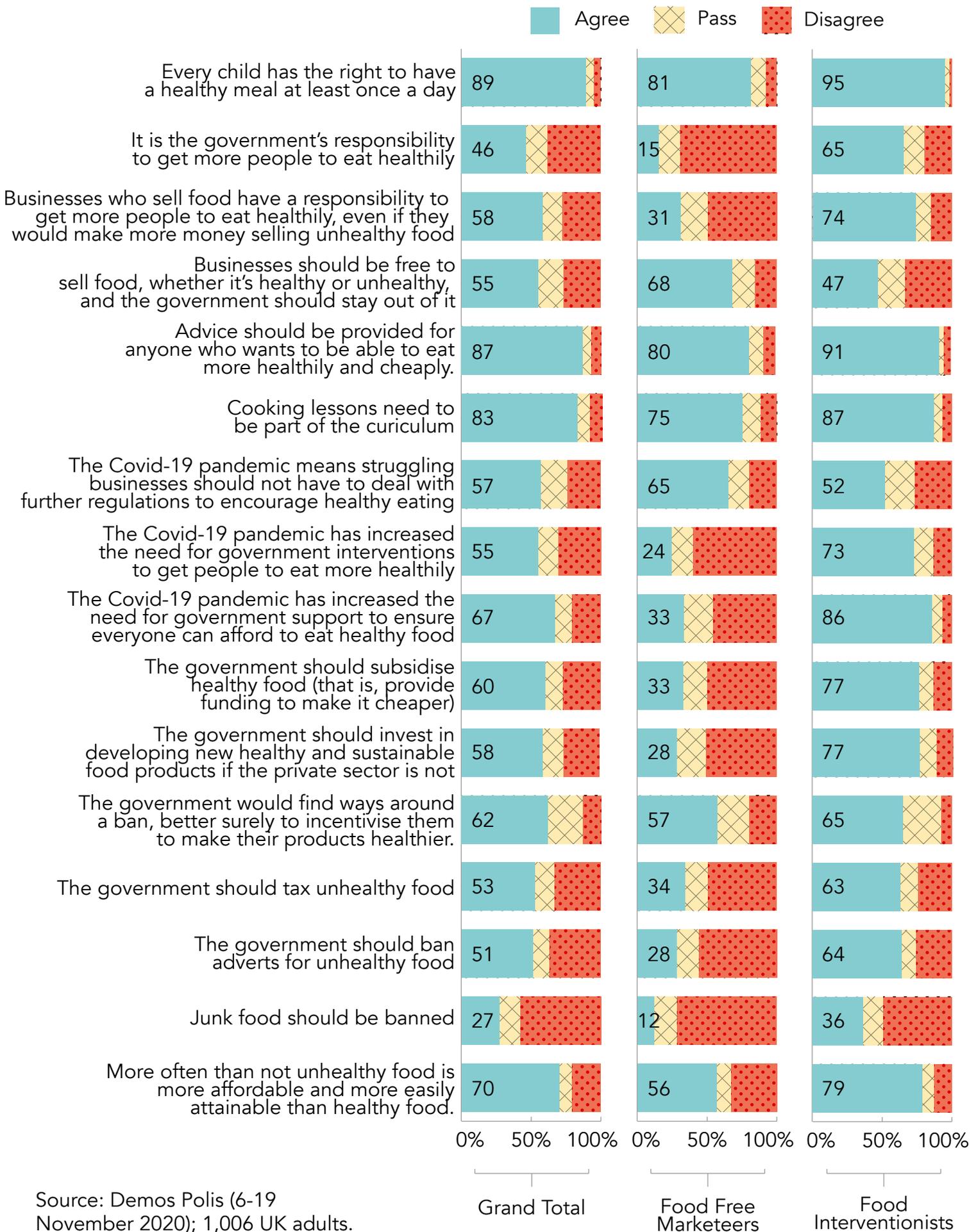
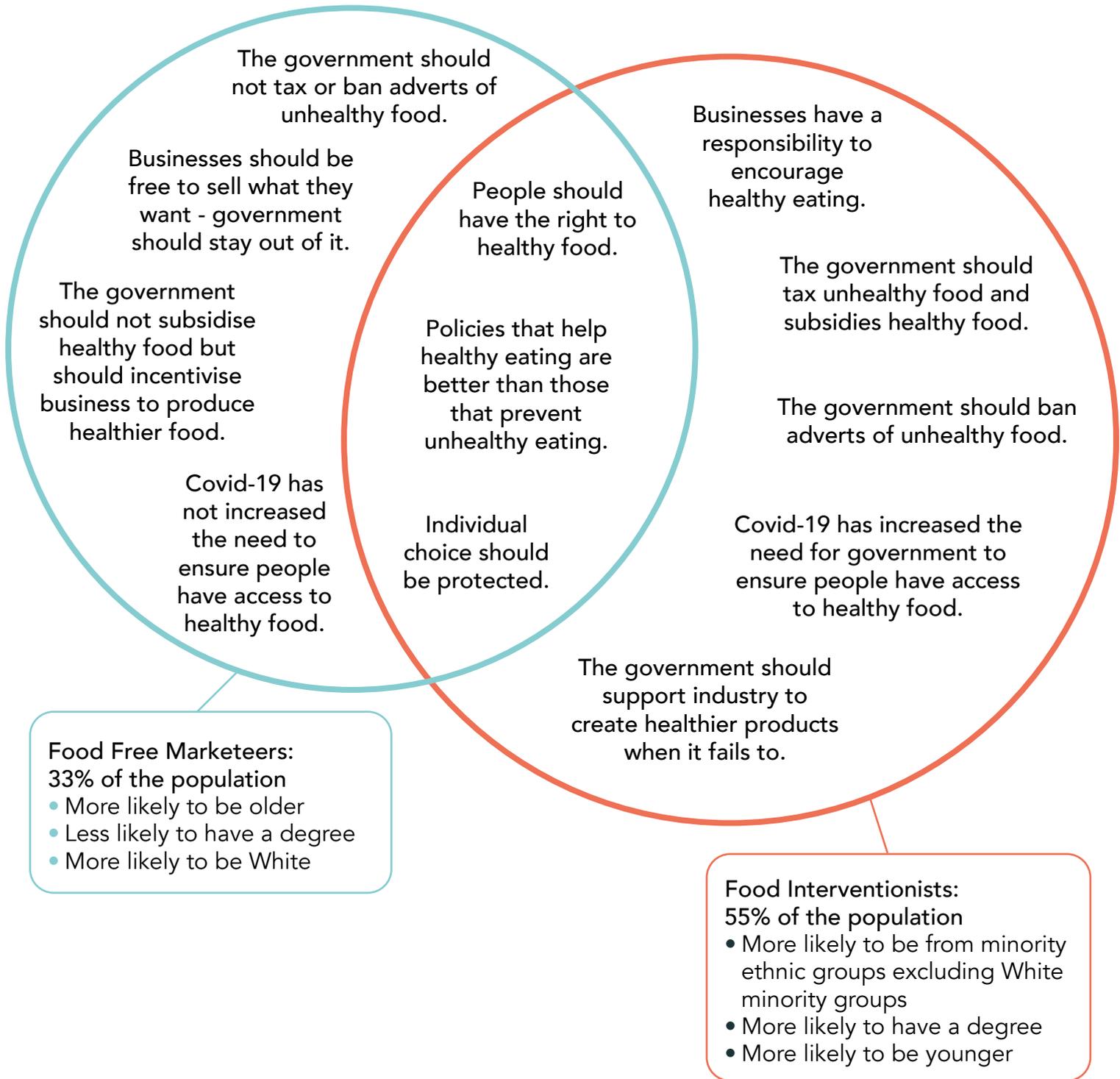


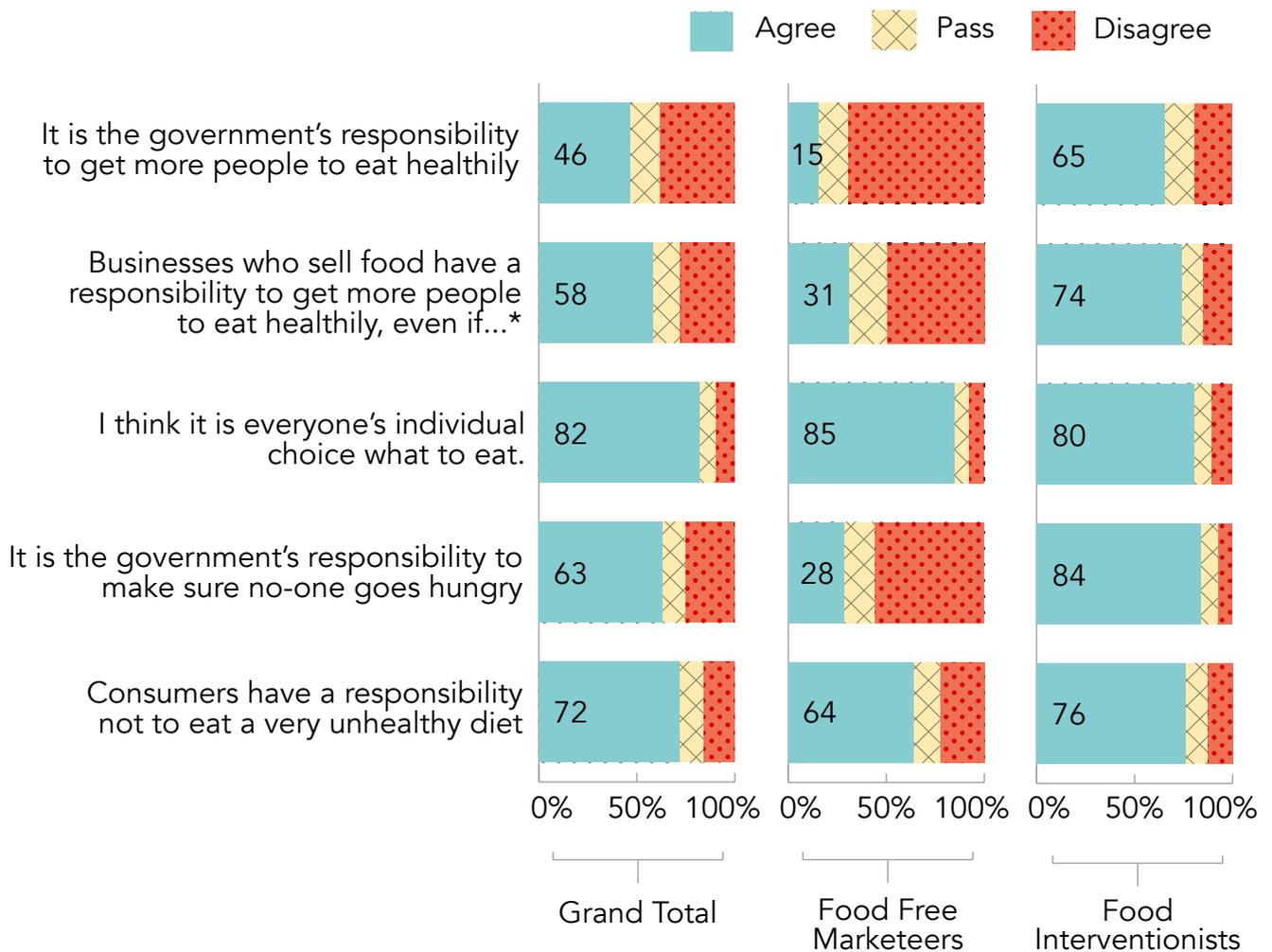
Figure 19. Food Free Marketeer and Food Interventionist attitudes to healthy eating



suggests that while the public are in favour of more action being taken to make healthier food more accessible across all income groups, they do not want this to come at the expense of choice around food. This perhaps reflects why Food Free Marketeers and Food Interventionists are both more likely to be in favour of policies that make it easier to eat healthy foods such as subsidies or advice, rather than those that restrict choice such as banning junk food or unhealthy food adverts.

The public are less likely to think it is the government's responsibility to make sure people eat healthily than ensuring that everyone has access to food (as Figure 20 demonstrates). This suggests that the public are slightly more supportive of government intervention in the face of more immediate needs such as hunger, rather than long-term poor health resulting from inadequate diets

Figure 20. Statements on the responsibility for healthy eating across attitudinal groups



*Full statement: Businesses who sell food have a responsibility to get more people to eat healthily, even if they would make more money selling unhealthy food
 Source: Demos Polis (6-19 November 2020); 1,006 UK adults.

Based on the findings from our Poll and Polis, we highlight the following principles for policy makers going forward, in Figure 21.

Advice on healthy eating

In our Polis, we found strongest support across both attitudinal groups for greater advice on healthy eating. Nearly nine in ten (87%) of our Polis respondents supported "advice being provided for anyone who wants to be able to eat more healthily and cheaply" and 83% would support cooking lessons becoming part of the curriculum. As Figure 22 demonstrates, support was consistent across

both Polis groups, suggesting that people may support more advice and education on healthy eating, while being less supportive of the government taking more direct action.

These findings are consistent with previous Demos research which found that the public generally support further educational resources from the government to make healthier choices.⁵¹ We also heard, during the deliberative workshops, that participants struggled to navigate the food market and were keen for clearer information to help them buy healthier, more sustainable and more ethical food products. Typical comments from the workshops included:

51 Lasko-Skinner, R. [Turning the Tables](#), Demos, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Figure 21. Principles for the future of healthy eating

Principle 1: People have the right to access healthy food.

- Around nine in ten (89%) agreed that: “Every child has the right to have a healthy meal at least once a day” (user generated statement).
- We found the majority felt that the pandemic had increased the need for government action – 67% overall agreed with the statement: “The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for government support to ensure everyone can afford to eat healthy food”.

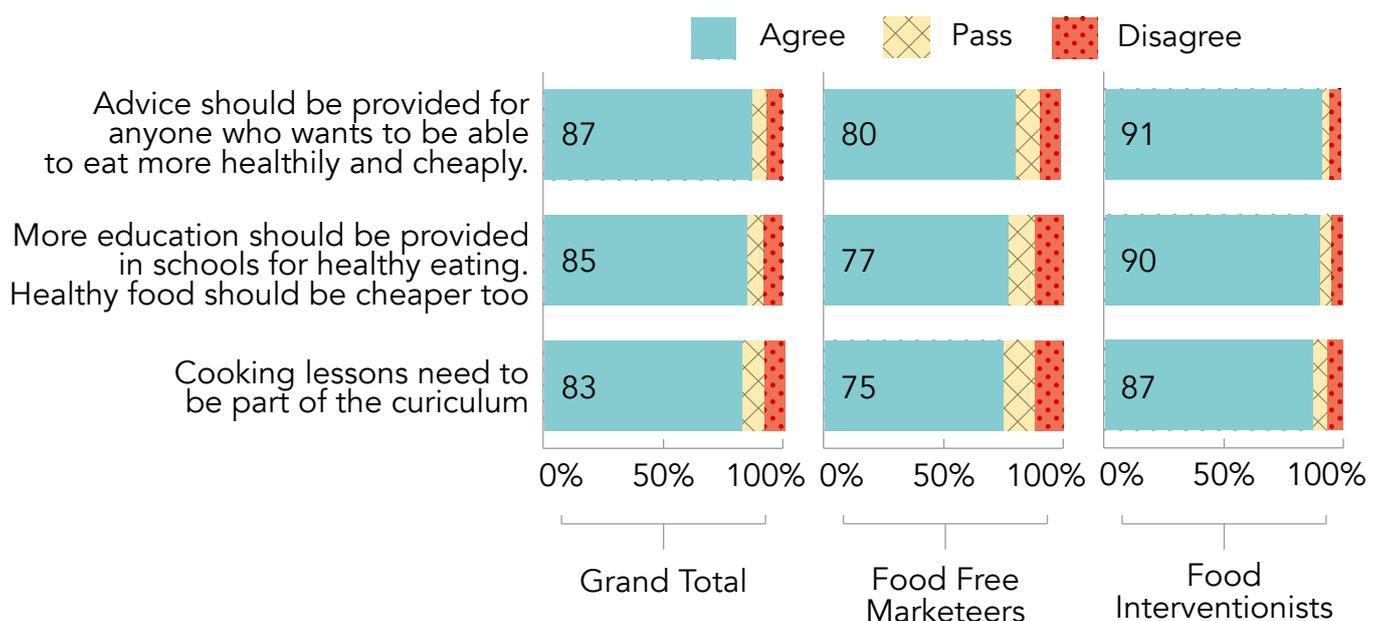
Principle 2: The government should support healthy eating - in particular providing more advice or educational resources.

- In our poll, we found 71% thought the government should be doing a “great deal” or a “fair amount” to encourage people to eat more healthily.
- In our Polis, nearly nine in ten (87%) support “advice being provided for anyone who wants to be able to eat more healthily and cheaply” (user generated statement) and a further 83% would support cooking lessons becoming part of the curriculum.

Principle 3: The government should prioritise interventions that make healthy choices easier rather than those that make unhealthy choices harder.

- In our Polis, 60% agreed that: “the government should subsidise healthy food (that is, provide funding to make it cheaper)”.
- Also in our Polis, 58% disagreed with the idea that: “junk food should be banned” (user generated statement).

Figure 22. Statements on advice and education for healthy eating across attitudinal groups



Source: Demos Polis (6-19 November 2020); 1,006 UK adults.

"...there isn't... [enough] information readily available. Information about supply chain should be on the product label of the product. Where it is from, when it was made, factories it was made in and where it originates."

Female⁵²

"We have not been educated about it, informed, it's not been communicated to us what that label means, really. So, we can't trust something we don't know much about, that's how I feel about it."

Female

"As long as the food product has got a website on the back that if we really want to we can go and visit it and they've got all the information there... Maybe they could have a QR code on the back that you could scan, it would bring you up the page quickly and you could get all the information like that."

Male

Taxes, subsidies and regulations

Previous Demos research found strong public support for policies to promote healthy eating. In general, support was strongest for those policies that would help consumers access or afford healthier foods over and above those that would make unhealthy foods less easy to obtain.⁵³

The findings in the Polis fit this trend, with the strongest support reported for reducing the cost of or subsidising healthier foods, rather than banning unhealthy foods. Just over half (53%) agree with the statement: "the government should tax unhealthy food" and nearly two thirds 60% agreed that: "the government should subsidise healthy food (that is, provide funding to make it cheaper)". The majority of respondents think that unhealthy food is more likely to be cheaper than healthy food (see Figure 23).

Similarly, previous Demos research from March 2020 (before lockdown) found that four in ten (39%) felt they could not afford to eat healthy foods.⁵⁴ This could help explain why the public prefer the cost of healthy food to be reduced, instead of banning or increasing the cost of unhealthy food.

It may also be related to concerns about the 'nanny state' – that people should not have their choices restricted. This is also reflected in Food Free Marketeers's opinions – who are less inclined to support government intervention in the food system. While Food Free Marketeers are often opposed to these policies, they are marginally more likely to support interventions that enable the provision of healthy food (rather than banning the provision of unhealthy food). For example, in addition to demonstrating strong support for cooking lessons in the national curriculum, the majority (75%), agree the government should incentivise the food sector to provide healthier products and a further 65% agree with direct subsidies while only a quarter (12%) support banning adverts for unhealthy food. This suggests that certain regulations – such as banning adverts – might be considered more 'nanny state', than those that try to make it easier to sell healthy foods.

The role of businesses in healthy eating and sustainability

Overall, we found the majority think businesses who sell food have a responsibility to encourage healthy eating, but that they also have a right to sell unhealthy food. However, participants were only likely to support the right for businesses to sell unhealthy food if consumers are adequately informed about health risks by the government. This chimes with the strong public support identified above, for more information and advice on healthy eating.

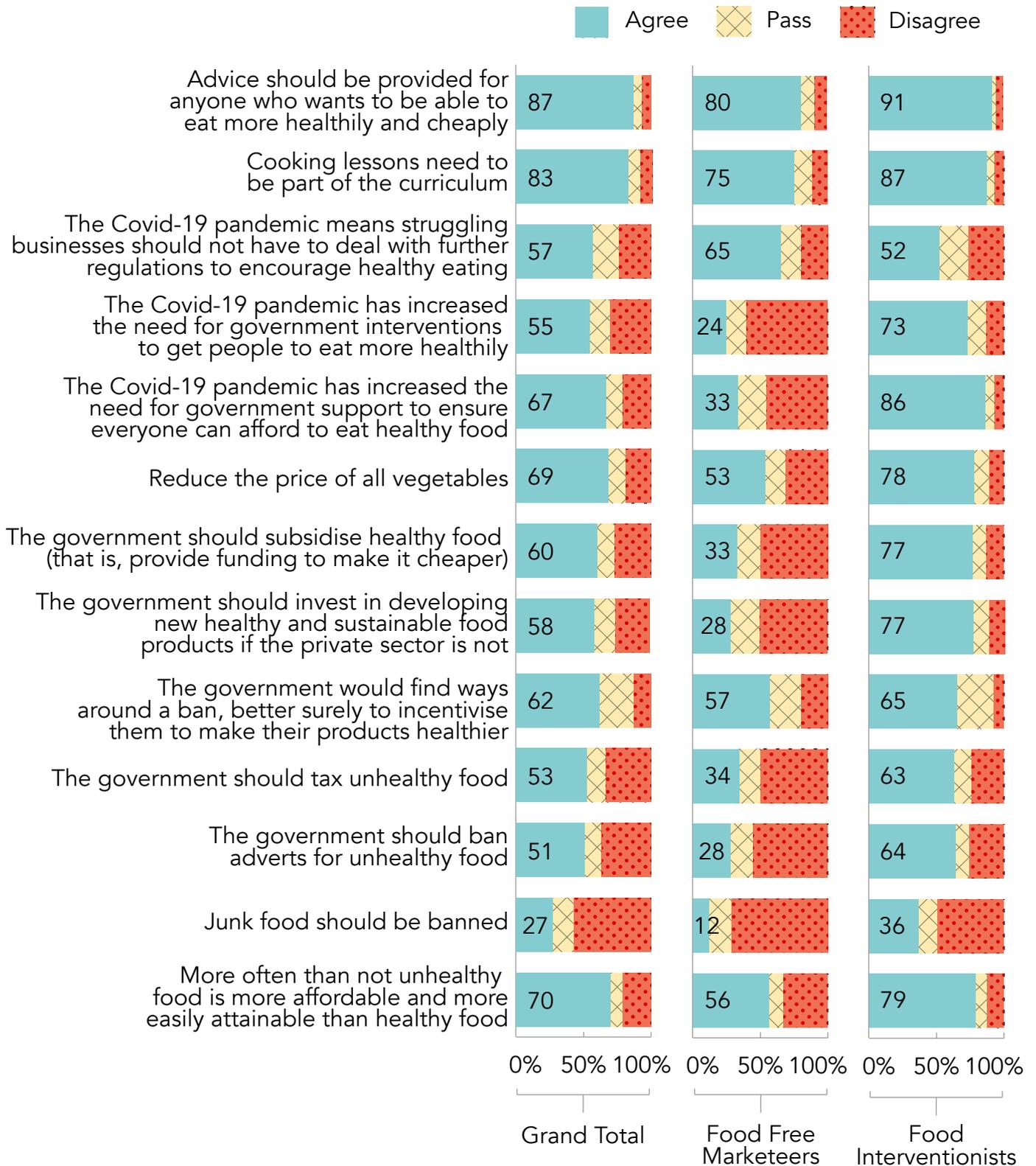
Over half (58%) in the Polis agreed that "Businesses who sell food have a responsibility to get more people to eat healthily, even if they would make more money selling unhealthy food".

52 Please note, quotes from the deliberative workshop do not include other demographic characteristics than gender.

53 Lasko-Skinner, R. [Turning the Tables](#), Demos, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

54 Ibid.

Figure 23. Statements relating to tax, subsidies and regulation across groups



Source: Demos Polis (6-19 November 2020); 1,006 UK adults.

Over three quarters (77%) in the Polis agreed that: “Businesses should be free to sell food people want to eat but Government should advise on health issues”.

When looking at how these attitudes differed across groups, we found Food Interventionists were significantly less likely than both Food Free Marketeers and the overall population to think businesses have a responsibility to encourage healthy eating. Just over half (53%) of Food Free Marketeers disagreed with the statement: “Businesses who sell food have a responsibility to get more people to eat healthily, even if people want to eat unhealthy food”, compared with 17% of Food Interventionists who disagreed with the statement – demonstrating quite strong divergent views in relation to the role of business.

Similarly, we found strong differences in attitudes across the groups in relation to the role of the government in encouraging further innovation in the food sector – for example to create healthier and/or more sustainable food products. Overall, 58% of people are in favour of the government investing in developing new healthy and sustainable food products if the private sector is not, but there is clear division here: 51% of Food Free Marketeers were opposed, while 77% of Food Interventionists were supportive.

Conclusion

This research found the majority of the public are supportive of more government action to support healthy diets. The public overwhelmingly support more advice around healthy eating, driven by the fact that they often feel ill-equipped to make healthy choices. This action could be a priority for the government’s healthy eating agenda.

In addition, the public were more supportive of policies that make healthy choices easier, than of those that make unhealthy choices harder. Even those who are less supportive of government intervention – a minority of the population – were more likely to favour supportive interventions than restrictive ones. This suggests that supportive policies that make healthier choices easier could be an area of consensus going forward.

There have also been lessons from the change in eating habits during lockdown. In particular, those who have had more free time and have cooked more at home have also eaten more healthily in general. This has been particularly common for those on higher incomes and, given this group has been more likely than others to work from home, this suggests that remote work could be positively correlated with more healthy eating habits.

Ensuring that people who have seen a positive feedback loop between more free time, more cooking and healthier meals can continue to do so after the pandemic will be important. It also raises questions of fairness. How can we ensure those on lower incomes who have gained less free time are also able to eat more healthily? Inevitably, this will bring important questions for the future of the food services sector – without which many of us seem to have eaten healthier meals – and where and how we seek to organise healthy working lives.

Chapter 4:

Food supply

“I think the pandemic has shown us that we really need to take a long hard look at our food system... We need to take seriously the threat of this happening again, if we don't examine the nature of the food system and the need for high welfare and quality standards... If people want cheaper food then the solution is to help more people to afford better food, not to drive down standards and threaten whole ecosystems.”

Female, 45 – 54, East of England

The pandemic has seen radical shifts in where we buy food, with more people shopping locally and in smaller shops than they did before. Many have experienced shortages due to early stockpiling (as discussed in our evidence review - Appendix 3), raising national as well as individual questions about how much we can trust our food supply chains.

This section will outline how individuals have changed where they purchase their food from, including whether they have wasted less food or grown more food during the pandemic, and their preferences for the UK's food supply – at a national level – in the future. The key research questions for this section are:

1. How have individuals changed where they source food from? How likely are these to continue?
2. To what extent have individuals subscribed to more localist or self-sufficient forms of food supply?

3. What are the public's preferences for the future of food supply? How do food standards and considerations around trade fit into these preferences?

Local food sources and self-sufficiency

Our research found more local food purchasing and greater household self-sufficiency (i.e. households sourcing and cooking more food themselves) during the pandemic. One hypothesis is that with more free time and tougher lockdown restrictions, people have opted to source local food from different local shops or takeaways – some of which they may have never tried before. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many have cooked more and/or spent more time preparing meals. In this section we will explore the extent to which individuals' food supply has become more local and/or self-sufficient

Key findings from our poll:

- Just over a quarter of the public (28%) have bought more locally-produced food, while 62% reported it stayed the same and 8% said they had bought less.
- More than a quarter (29%) reported more purchases in small grocery stores – in contrast to a far lower percentage (18%) who said they had done less.
- Over a third (37%) had eaten at or ordered from a takeaway that they had never visited pre-pandemic. Similarly, 35% bought groceries somewhere they had never shopped at before the pandemic.

- Close to half (41%) have wasted less food, while half (49%) said that they have wasted no more food than usual.
 - Of these, only 40% expect this change to continue after the pandemic – this could be related to scarcity; for example 17% of people have also reported eating food past its use by date.
- Nearly one fifth (18%) said they had grown more of their own food during the pandemic, compared with 16% who had grown less throughout.

The pandemic has seen a significant expansion in online food shopping.⁵⁵ For example, online ordering and delivery increased by 75% in May 2020, accounting for 11.5% of all grocery shopping – the biggest increase in five years. However, this chapter will focus on the physical shifts in shopping patterns, such as buying food locally and shopping at smaller retailers.

Buying locally-produced food

Our research suggests there has been a shift towards buying more locally-produced food during the pandemic. Our poll found that while 62% said they had bought the same amount of locally-produced food, over one-quarter (28%) of us have purchased more locally-produced food. This is particularly high among those from ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities (34%), those with one or more children (32% or higher) and for those on incomes from £40,000-£60,000 (33%). By contrast, we found lower rates among those earning up to £20,000 (23%), the unemployed (24%) and people without children (26%).

It seems possible that this could be a durable change. This partly reflects shifts in the nature of work. In the short-term, working from home is far more common, due to lockdown restrictions, so shops selling local food may be more accessible to the working-age population than they were before. In the longer-term, however, the possibility of

greater flexibility in some jobs, with workers able to work from home at least part of the week, means local food shops selling locally-produced food may continue to see greater traffic. Indeed, our poll also provides evidence that this shift towards buying local produce may endure: of those who changed their behaviour to buy more locally-produced food, 81% expect this change to continue and 78% want this change to continue.

Figure 24. Bought more locally-produced food across income



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Our open-access survey revealed similar sentiments, suggesting that people recognise the shift to buying local and consciously support it:

“I deliberately asked around several farm shops in Yorkshire - all are providing mainly local produce and experiencing not only a far greater turnover but a greater appreciation of the food they are buying. Farm shops in turn are developing their range of food and services to incorporate the needs of their customers. Brilliant. This may continue.”

Female, 65+; North-East, England

55 Smithers, R. [Pandemic prompts doubling of online grocery shoppers in UK](#). The Guardian, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

“Hopefully more [growth of] local shops like butchers and greengrocers – where profits go into the local community and the food supply may be more local.”

Male, 25-34; North-West, England

“I believe that more will work from home, which by its very nature will mean less working lunches in terms of nipping out to purchase. This will increase grocery store purchases.”

Female, 35-44; West Midlands, England

Smaller grocery shops

Our nationally representative poll found that there has also been an uptick in our purchases within smaller grocery shops, with some consumers trying local shops they may have never visited before. While 52% reported that such purchases had stayed the same, more than one-quarter (29%) reported more purchases in small grocery stores – in contrast to a far lower percentage (18%) who said they had done less.

Of those who purchased more in smaller grocery stores, this was particularly high in London (34%), among ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities (36%), those with children eligible for free school meals (36%) and those on incomes of £60,000-£80,000 (33%). By contrast, this was lower among those not receiving free school meals (27%) as well as those living in the South (27%). Similarly, a survey conducted by Hubbub in April found that 29% of people said they had used a convenience shop for the first time.⁵⁶

This trend has had real impacts on smaller shop sales. For example, the Co-op, a retailer with smaller premises, has done well as people have tried to avoid the

queues associated with large retailers. Their sales increased 31% in the 12 weeks to May, remaining up 13% in the 12 weeks to September, when most restrictions had been eased. Revealingly, its sales were twice as high in the North of England, where a second wave of local lockdowns meant consumers were once again remaining closer to home, instead of visiting larger stores.⁵⁷

Figure 25. Shopped in smaller grocery stores across income



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Further data from Kantar also suggests that smaller retailers have benefitted from the pandemic. Sales in independent retailers and convenience stores increased 63% overall in the 12 weeks to May, and by 69% four weeks later, with the average shop spend increasing 17% year-on-year.⁵⁸ Another ACS survey found that two-thirds of convenience stores reported a sales increase between April and May 2020⁵⁹ - meaning that the sector had a market share of 2.5% at its peak – the biggest since 2009.⁶⁰

56 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

57 McKeivitt, F. [Supermarket sales slow as UK shoppers Eat Out](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

58 Fortune, A. [Coronavirus to drive 8% growth in convenience sales in 2020](#). Convenience Store, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

59 ACS. [Covid Impact Survey Reveals How Stores Have Adapted Since Lockdown](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

60 Convenience Store. [Coronavirus: Will the boost to local shopping last after lockdown?](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

As noted in the previous sub-section, the prospects of increased working from home may increase the chance that smaller grocery stores benefit from increased demand in the longer-term. Indeed, our poll also found some support for this idea – of those who changed their behaviour to purchase from smaller grocery shops, 72% expect this change to continue, while 73% want it to do so.

However, it is also worth noting that sales at large food retailers sales have also been up – as they have absorbed the fallout from the ‘out of home’ food sector. And while some smaller local retailers have seen increased footfall, the largest supermarkets seem to have been the overall winners, as food purchased from over 100,000 small restaurants is now being purchased from ten large grocers.⁶¹

New food sources

These trends – around greater local food shopping and a switch to smaller grocery stores – are likely related to a final shift: we found people have utilised the pandemic as an opportunity to explore new food sources. Our poll found that a substantial chunk of the population had sourced food from places that they had never previously visited. We found that 37% have eaten at or ordered from a takeaway that they had never visited pre-pandemic. Similarly, 35% bought groceries somewhere they had never shopped at before the pandemic, while 29% have eaten at a new restaurant since the pandemic began.

This builds a picture of people adapting to and coping with the disruption caused by Covid-19, through enjoying new sources of food – whether ordering in, eating out or buying new groceries. This is consistent with the FSA Consumer Tracker which found that two-thirds of 14-19 year olds reported they missed eating out in usual social spaces.⁶² Food has provided an outlet for people during often challenging times, as we have explored new food sources while often supporting existing ones – as revealed by our open-access survey:

“I really appreciate the way that independent local shops have adapted – taking orders over the phone, on the internet for home deliveries of food. Likewise the local takeaways, fish and chip shop, cafes and restaurants.”

Female, 65+; North-West

“Working from home has allowed more time to shop locally: buying a veg box & using the farm shop...”

Female, 45-54; South-West

“Where rules have allowed takeaways we have used different local restaurants that have proved similar quality to our regular but closed outlets.”

Male, 65+, North-West

“I support my local butchers and bakers. I enjoy cooking, but I miss going to good restaurants. We are having one or two restaurant boxes to support them, as well as something to look forward to ourselves. Also, takeaways from the pub we usually dine at.”

Female, 55-64, West Midlands

Food waste

Our poll found that four in ten people (41%) have wasted less food, while half (49%) state that they have wasted no more food than usual. This could be related to multiple factors, such as people responding to additional preparation time and an additional awareness of food insecurity (see Appendix 3).

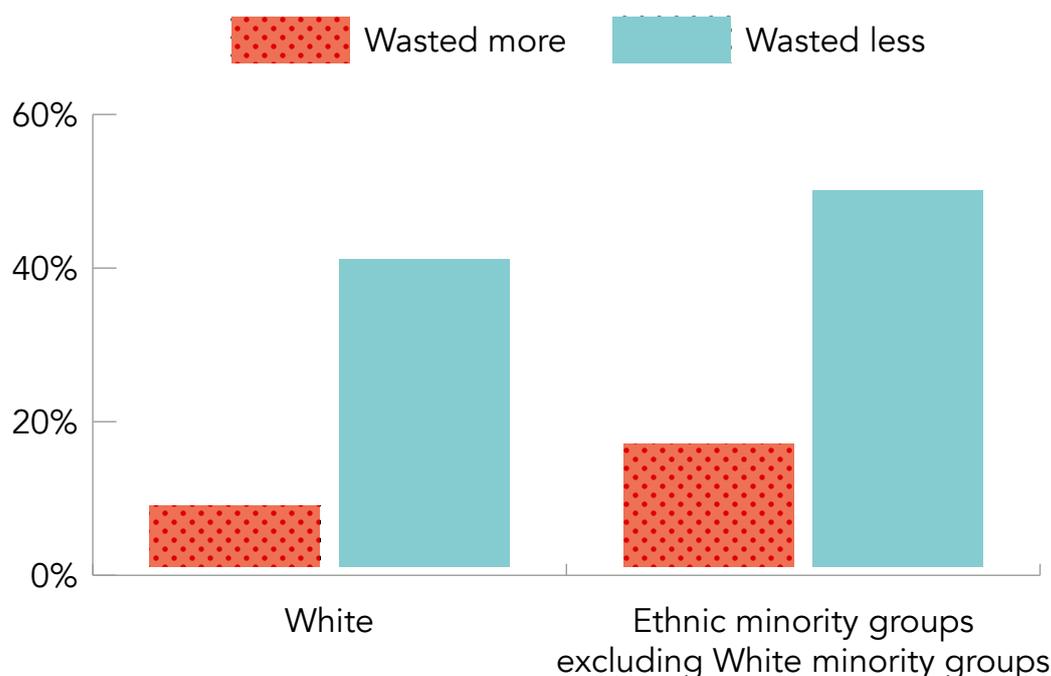
Notably, there was relatively little demographic variation in terms of who has wasted less food. However, one exception to this was ethnic minority groups excluding White minorities who were more likely to report wasting less food (49%) in comparison to other White ethnic groups (40%).

This data appears to fit with evidence collected by other organisations, which shows that consumers did indeed waste less food

61 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

62 BiteBack 2030. [Hungry for Change - giving children a food system that works for them](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Figure 26. Wasted more and wasted less food by ethnicity



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

throughout the pandemic – especially during the early months of lockdown. In April, 48% of people reported throwing away less food, while just 5% reported throwing away more.⁶³

Other data suggests slightly more modest reductions in food waste, but nonetheless supports our overall finding that food waste has decreased during the pandemic. The FSA’s Covid-19 Consumer Tracker found that 30% reported throwing away or wasting food less often as of July 2020 – approximately four months into the first lockdown period.⁶⁴ Further data collected by the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP), which looked at four key foodstuffs (bread, chicken, milk and potatoes), also vindicates these reports, showing that 14% of these foods were thrown away in April 2020, compared to 24% in November 2019 – a 10 point fall over a relatively short period.⁶⁵

Our open-access survey also illustrated people’s greater focus on trying to minimise food waste, in part because of the pandemic:

“I have started buying oddbox – food which would have been discarded by supermarkets for not being perfect. It’s important food is not wasted.”

Female, 35-44; London

“[We] have wasted less and tried to use things up or freeze things, have also batch cooked for the freezer. We are definitely more grateful and less wasteful of food and milk due to the food shortages and supermarket queues at the start of lockdown.”

Female, 35-44; East of England

“The pandemic has made me even more conscious of the need to avoid wasting food, since buying it is now more difficult. But the pandemic has really brought home to me the importance of not wasting any food when it’s more difficult to go to the shops to get more.”

Male, 45-54; South-East

63 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

64 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

65 Wrap. [Citizens and food during lockdown](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Of those who changed their behaviour to waste less food, 40% of respondents to our poll expect this change to continue after the pandemic, significantly less than other behaviour changes reported during the pandemic. This might suggest that the public has less interest in maintaining this change or that it requires a higher level of commitment than the other behavioural shifts discussed here.

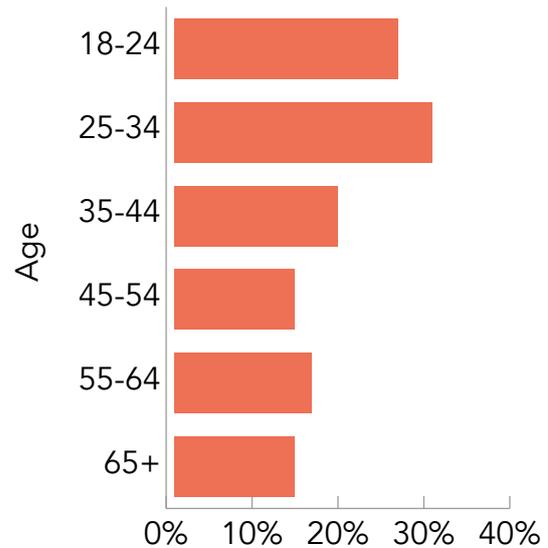
In our poll we also found that 17% of people have eaten more food past its sell-by date. Interestingly, although there was relatively little variation in this rate across income groups, this was highest among more vulnerable consumers such as those with disabilities: 23% of whom report eating more food past its use by date, compared with 16% of people without. Similarly, those on benefits during the pandemic were twice as likely (30%) to have eaten more food past its use by date as those who were not (15%). This reinforces the picture that consumers have been more vulnerable to food scarcity during the pandemic, either from a lack of income, physical inaccess or a lack of food available in shops.

Growing food

We found a more mixed picture around whether people grew more of their own food during the pandemic. 60% reported no change, while 18% said they had grown more of their own food during the pandemic and 16% said they had grown less.

We found clear evidence of a divide across demographic and socioeconomic groups for this question. First, we found those on benefits were far more likely to be growing more food during the pandemic. Roughly a third of those on benefits before the pandemic (28%) and those with children eligible for free school meals (30%) reported growing more food. While just 14% of adults aged 65+ and 16% of those aged 55-64 had grown more food during the pandemic, there appeared to be a much more significant change among younger people (see Figure 27). Over one-quarter (26%) of those aged 18-24 had grown more of their food, as well as 20% of those aged 25-34.

Figure 27. Grown more of their own food by age



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Figure 28. Grown more of their own food by Income (Excluding >£100,000 due to small sample size (66))



Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Furthermore, Londoners were particularly likely to have grown more food, with 20% reporting they had done so. This was closely followed by Wales (18%) but contrasts sharply with 12% in Northern Ireland and 12% in

Scotland. In addition, we found a clear trend across income groups, with those on higher incomes being more likely to report growing more food, in contrast to just 14% of those earning up to £20,000 per year (see Figure 28). There are clear divides on income too, with around one-quarter of those on the highest incomes (£80,000-£99,999) reporting an increased amount of homegrown food.

There are a number of reasons why younger people may have been more likely to grow more food during the pandemic. First, younger age groups have had more free time, 66% of those aged 18-24 reported more free time during the pandemic compared with 54% of those aged 65+. Second, they have been more likely to work from home – 50% of those aged 18-24 reported working from home more compared with 29% of those aged 55-64. This could mean they have had more time to spend growing food. Third, they have also been significantly more likely to be worried about money – 66% of those aged 18-24 reported being more worried about money compared with 19% of those aged 65+. While we did not directly ask survey respondents why they had grown more food, it is therefore likely that there have been multiple factors explaining this trend, from more free time to personal finances.

While it is unclear exactly how substantial this shift might be in the long-term, our poll does reveal an interesting contrast between those who have grown more and those who have grown less. Of those who have grown more food, 77% expect this change to continue, in contrast to just 18% of those who have grown less. If these views are correct, this would suggest that overall, the pandemic may lead to an increase in the amount of food which we grow at home.

In fact, our poll found that, of those who changed their behaviour to grow more food, 76% want this change to continue, suggesting that they recognise the benefits that it can offer – as identified by many respondents to our open-access survey:

“[The pandemic] enabled more time to grow our own food. Planted [an] apple tree, asparagus bed, caged cherry tree and made more use of the greenhouse for cucumbers and tomatoes. Used the internet to find out more about producing home grown food.”

Male, 65+; South-East

“The lockdown gave us time to grow our own food and to try different meals, so it’s widened the library of meals that we eat.”

Male, 55-64; Wales

“Growing our own was a little adventure, and we preserved or shared what we could not eat. I have brewed homemade beer, wine, and mead (a particular success that was) and made jam, chutneys and pickles. It felt very important that nothing was wasted. We now have food items to gift at Christmas, and it feels good that we can give something made with love.”

Female, 55-64; South-East England

The future of food standards and trade

The first lockdown brought our supply chains under immediate scrutiny, as for the first time in decades consumers were experiencing food shortages and informal rationing by supermarkets.⁶⁶ The pandemic has added further questions to those already being asked about food supply chains because of Brexit, including where in the world we get our food from and what food standards underpin these trading relationships.

Naturally, these are all linked. Food standards in the UK are likely to impact our trading relationships with other countries, while any support, financial or otherwise, for British agriculture is likely to impact the trade we do with other countries. This section reveals public opinion towards some of these challenging questions about the future of the food system, primarily drawing on our deliberative workshops and poll (see Methodology chapter for further details).

66 Armstrong, A. [Supermarket rationing 'did not prevent food shortages' before the lockdown](#). The Times, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Key findings:

- Eight in ten (78%) were supportive of the UK keeping its current food quality standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.
 - Those more vulnerable to food insecurity, such as those with children eligible for free school meals (64%), were less likely to support the UK keeping its current food quality standards if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.
- Eight in ten (82%) were supportive of the UK keeping its current animal welfare standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.
- In our deliberative workshops, participants suggested that food standards should be non-negotiable in future trading relationships.
- Six in ten (59%) were in favour of policies to make the UK able to grow enough food to feed the population without importing food from other countries, even if it meant higher taxes and more expensive food.
 - Older groups, such as those over 65 (73%), are much more supportive of Britain growing its own food than younger groups, such as those between 18-24 (44%).

Figure 29. Support for maintaining food and animal welfare standards across income groups



-  The UK keeping the same **food quality** standards it currently has, if it means food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market
-  The UK keeping the same **animal welfare** standards it currently has, if it means food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market

Source: Demos polling (2 – 16 November 2020); 10,069 UK adults.

Food standards

We found people in the UK are strongly supportive of maintaining food quality standards – even at the expense of cost or global competitiveness. 78% support the UK keeping its current food quality standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market. We found similarly high levels of support for animal welfare standards: 82% would support the UK keeping its current animal welfare standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.

Support among the public for maintaining food quality standards in our polling was relatively consistent across different demographic groups. However, those from ethnic minority backgrounds excluding White minority groups (68%), households with more than two children (68%), those on benefits before the pandemic (61%), and those with children eligible for free school meals (64%) were significantly less likely to support the UK keeping its current food quality standards, even if food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market.

For the latter groups, this is likely related to their relative vulnerability to the cost of food. Income itself did not correlate with support for this idea, suggesting that only

particularly vulnerable groups – who are at risk of food insecurity – might be less supportive of maintaining standards at the expense of cost or global competition. Even then, there remains majority support within these groups for maintaining standards, even if it means higher costs. We found a similar pattern for support of animal welfare standards – although across the board, people were more likely to support protection of current animal welfare standards than of food quality regulations (see Figure 29). There is also wider evidence of strong public support for maintaining food standards. According to a survey by ComRes from June 2020, 74% of those questioned were opposed to importing food produced to lower safety standards.

These findings were consistent with the main principles articulated by participants in the deliberative workshops, in which the majority of participants expressed clear support for high quality and animal welfare standards, even at the cost of new trade deals. In comparison, we found a more nuanced picture with regard to standards and those on low incomes, which will be explored in more detail in the next section (see Figure 30).

We found participants felt strongly that the UK should not lower food standards for trade deals. Typical comments included:

Figure 30. Principles for the future of food standards and trade

Principle 1: While some of us want the UK to grow more of our own food, we aren't dogmatic about it – we recognise the benefits for us, and other countries, of buying from abroad.

Principle 2: If cheaper food means lower safety standards, we need to ensure those on low incomes in particular are protected.

Principle 3: The UK must maintain its high food standards after Brexit – these shouldn't be compromised even if it means higher costs.

Principle 4: We are keen to minimise our environmental impact and protect animal welfare along the food supply chain, but how to do this isn't always obvious.

“My hopes are that we don’t lower our food standards just to get trade deals. We need to keep up our high standards.”

Male⁶⁷

“I think we should stand firm on the food standards, hopefully find trade partners, even if it means a little pain in the early stages, who share our values.”

Female

Echoing our findings in the poll, participants felt particularly strongly about animal welfare standards – both from a food safety and an ethical perspective. Driving this was a concern among participants about the safety of food as a result of new trade deals. In particular, participants were concerned about meat standards. Typical comments from the groups included:

“Animal welfare is also important, so high demand shouldn’t mean cruelty, and you don’t know if cheaper food means high demand for livestock [which] will be contaminated because of bad living conditions of farming animals.”

Male

“My concerns are that Brexit will allow for the introduction of poor practices – we hear a lot about chlorinated chicken and beef that’s been hormone injected or fed with hormones banned in Europe, things like that worry me, and that we will allow food to enter the supply chain containing substances that would be deemed unsafe in Europe. So, Brexit is quite a worry I find, when it comes to food supply.”

Female

This strong support led participants to favour maintaining current trade standards over lowering them in order to strike new trade deals; indeed, some participants referred to food standards as “non-negotiable” when it

came to making new trade deals. Others felt that UK food standards should be something we strengthen or increase, rather than something we either maintain or bargain away for global competitiveness and lower food prices.

“What we’d hope to find is, when we’re looking at trade deals when trading with other countries, they need to meet our high food standards... non-negotiable.”

Female

“I agree that we should not lower any standards, we have to keep them high and we thought of looking at ways of improving our standards rather than going through a lower standard and cheaper alternatives...”

Male

Participants were also worried that lower food standards could push those on low incomes into less healthy diets. In particular, participants recognised that food with higher standards, such as organic food, was already less accessible to those on low incomes and may already be limiting access to higher quality food. As a consequence, some participants were keen to see additional help from the government to support low income families to pay for good quality food.

“My concern is more for the families with a lot of children and things like that, when it comes to the price, and the standard as well. You already see it now, where people will choose the lower standard food at the lower price because it’s not really a choice, it’s all they can afford. And I imagine that will just get worse.”

Female

“I’d say with the cheap food, sometimes it’s not very nutritious. People who eat it are on the breadline. They have no choice. They just have to have it, because

⁶⁷ Please note, quotes from the deliberative workshop do not include any other demographic characteristics than gender.

that's all they have money-wise. They wouldn't choose to eat it if they could eat something better."

Female

"If you could not afford food, you should be supported for it, but I don't believe food should be unnaturally cheap, that it should be made cheap for the sake of it. If you cannot afford food at that price, then you should be supported to afford it."

Female

Food supply and trade

We also explored to what extent the public backs a 'Buy British' agenda for food. The disruption to food supply seen in the early stages of the pandemic has refocused attention on the resilience of our food supply chain. In the UK, we currently supply 55% of our own food and rely on international imports for the rest.⁶⁸

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology concluded that stockpiling in the earliest phase of the pandemic and the slow reaction of retailers to ration in-demand items "exposed the limitations of cost-efficient and streamlined supply chains to be agile and adapt to unforeseen shocks."⁶⁹ Some concluded that the UK's insufficient domestic food production, combined with "lean" and "just in time" supply chains,⁷⁰ meant that the UK relied on a small number of international suppliers for a lot of our food, making our food supply highly vulnerable to disruption (whether by a sudden spike in demand, or interruptions to international distribution). However, in the eyes of many, the 'just in time' supply chains generally held out – proving

that despite huge, unexpected shocks, our food supply could bounce back relatively quickly.⁷¹

In our poll, we found the majority of the public (59%) were in favour of policies encouraging the UK to be able to grow enough food itself to feed the population without food imports, even if this meant higher taxes and more expensive food. Support for this notion was fairly consistent across some demographic groups, with Londoners (51%) and people on benefits before the pandemic (52%) slightly less likely to support.

There were, though, significant differences across age with older groups, such as those over 65 (72%) being much more supportive of Britain growing its own food than younger groups, such as those between 18-24 (44%).

However, we found a more nuanced picture when we explored these questions in our deliberative workshops. In these sessions, participants explained that they were supportive of the UK growing more of its own food. And for some, this was about the principle of growing food:

"Obviously not everything, but it would be nice to grow more food in Britain. Apparently in the past we grew a lot of our own food in the 70s and 60s. But today we import quite a lot of food from the EU and other countries."

Male

However, often the desire to grow more food in the UK came with conditions. These included that we should only be expanding the UK's food supply if we already have the internal capacity to do so or can ensure short supply chains:

68 Defra. [Food Statistics in your pocket: Global and UK supply](#). HM Government, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

69 Wentworth, J. [Effects of Covid-19 on the food supply system](#). The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

70 Garnett, P., Doherty, B. et al. [Vulnerability of the United Kingdom's food supply chains exposed by Covid-19](#). Nature Food, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

71 Lockton International. [Creating a more resilient supply chain post-Covid-19](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

“I think we shouldn’t be importing if we grow it ourselves. We should be utilising our own capability before we import, if obviously you can’t get mangoes in the UK in January then by all means import them to the people that want to buy them.”

Male

“The UK should be self-sufficient where it can be and support short supply chains where appropriate.”

Female

In addition, for many participants, ‘buy British where possible’ only applied to certain products, such as meats, or in certain contexts, such as farmers markets:

“But things like rice, and pasta, or things you’ve got there, it doesn’t really bother me where it comes from to be fair. As long as the meat is local, I’m probably easy going.”

Female

“I think I don’t really tend to look at where the food comes from – unless I’m going somewhere like a farmer’s market. Because then I think: ‘Oh, I want them to be locally sourced’, because that’s what you’re going there for. You wouldn’t go to a farmer’s market to buy stuff from abroad. But, if I’m just in a supermarket, I wouldn’t necessarily look.”

Female

Nonetheless, despite preferences over provenance, participants were also pragmatic about the need for the UK to be involved in global supply chains:

“Clearly we import food and we export it, it’s a fairly obvious point but with a globalised world economy we’re all dependent on each other in a way. Our economy if it’s doing well does well because we’re exporting some of our products abroad and similarly other

economies are dependent on us. There is an interdependency in the supply chain.”

Male

Overall, while participants were often supportive of the UK growing more food in principle, when it came to other trade-offs – such as environmental sustainability – it appeared to be something they weren’t dogmatic about. Indeed, many recognised the benefits which Britain and other countries receive from the international trade in food.

Conclusion

Food quality and animal welfare standards are seen by the public as non-negotiable. The public also wants pre-existing food quality standards to be strengthened and for consumers on low incomes to be better able to access good quality, healthy food.

We found a less clear picture of public attitudes towards the provenance of British food supply. There is a distinction between principle and practice for the public, highlighted through our deliberative workshops – people tended to support the idea of increasing the proportion of food Britain supplies itself but in practice were more pragmatic. This pragmatism recognised that it was still important to trade with other countries and that there were only certain products that it already produces, such as meat and vegetables, that they felt the UK should supply more of.

There has been a shift towards more localism and self-sufficiency during the pandemic – inasmuch as people are buying from more local shops or growing more food. While most of those who have experienced changes expect it to continue, it is unclear as to whether they will continue as restrictions ease long-term. Moreover, our evidence review suggests the overall winner in terms of increased footfall during the pandemic seems to have been the larger supermarkets. Given this, it does not seem likely that we are on the precipice of a significant shift towards localist shopping or becoming self-sufficient consumers.

Conclusion

The pandemic has brought about significant challenges to our food system. According to the data we collected, most consumers have seen a shift that they expect and want to endure even beyond the pandemic. The changes that came about during the pandemic may have given birth to a new type of consumer altogether - one that cooks more, eats more at home, and is more conscious about where their food comes from.

It seems the advice and restrictions to working from home may have had some of the most significant and positive impacts on our behaviours and diets. We found that more free time has a strong relationship with cooking and eating healthier meals, particularly for those in full-time work. If anything, such a shift in eating habits during the pandemic should remind us how intimately linked our eating habits are with our work and social lives. And while policy makers would never want to continue the extreme measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus, the impacts of additional time on employees' lifestyles should not be forgotten or underestimated.

Beyond individuals, we have also become more aware of the challenges in our food system, witnessing food shortages for the first time in decades and unprecedented levels of food insecurity - many of us have had first hand experiences of these challenges or been involved with supporting others through them.

Going forward, we have heard clearly that people want high food standards in the UK and are keen to protect them, even willing to forgo new trade deals if international partners

demand that we lower them. In addition, we found a far more nuanced opinion among the British public towards food supply and provenance. In particular, consumers are more pragmatic than dogmatic, about where their food comes from.

We have also seen public preferences for further government involvement, in shaping a healthier, more accessible food system. Key to this is providing consumers with better and clearer information about their food. As we found in our deliberative workshops and our Polis many of us are keen to better understand our food system and the products that we're consuming but feel unable to do so. Beyond this, there are clear tensions over exactly how the government should go about providing support, but also a clear majority who are in favour of further action to support families into adopting healthier diets.

In addition, we also found strong support for the right to healthy, good quality food. We saw this not only in our polling and Polis, but also within our deliberative workshop, where consumers emphasised the importance of low income consumers being protected. For the majority, this protection looks like an expansion and continuation of the policies the government has in place. But for a minority, this might look like a more active role in the creation of good jobs and incomes that support a healthy diet alone. Going forward, it might be difficult for policy makers to strike a balance between the majority who want to see more direct support and the minority, who clearly do not.

Appendix 1: Deliberative Workshops

Within this project, we held a series of deliberative workshops with members of the public, to discuss key issues related to the food supply chain and trade. The insights generated through these workshops helped us identify five key principles, which reflect the perspectives shared by our participants. In the final workshop, we presented these principles to our group members for discussion: in light of their feedback, we adapted these ideas to more accurately represent their views and beliefs. The final five principles are presented below, with supporting evidence.

Methodology

We convened one group to take part in four different deliberative workshops throughout November 2020. This group consisted of 30 participants who were broadly demographically representative of the UK. Each workshop consisted of an online, two-hour session and each explored a different area related to the UK's food supply chain and its international links. This gave participants time to discuss the issues at hand in depth and, importantly, enabled them to provide views and comments, which shaped the principles resulting from this process.

Participant characteristics

We aimed to ensure that the participants of our group were generally representative of the wider population. Thus, the 30 members

of our deliberative group were representative of the UK, across five demographic criteria: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) race, (4) socioeconomic status, and (5) region.

Workshop topics

For each of the four workshops, we focused on a different topic, so that our participants had the chance to discuss different elements of the food supply chain. This ensured that our five principles reflect a broad understanding of what we want from our food.

- Session 1 - Introduction to Food Supply Chains: Existing Knowledge & Concerns
 - Presentation topic: The Food Supply Chain.
 - Breakout group topics: (1) Knowledge of the food supply chain: who is responsible for upholding standards, and (2) Existing concerns and aspirations about the food supply chain.
- Session 2 - Trust and Attitudes Towards the UK's Global Food Supply Chain
 - Presentation topic: Where does the UK get its food from, in relation to global food markets?
 - Breakout group topics: (1) Trust in the food supply chain, (2) Responses to presentation, and (3) The EU and food: difference between food from inside/ outside the EU.

- Session 3 - Weighing Pros and Cons of a Globalised Food Supply Chain
 - Presentation topics: (1) Food Resilience and Trade-Offs, and (2) Food Standards and Trade-Offs.
 - Breakout group topics: (1) Responses to presentation 1, (2) Responses to presentation 2, and (3) Impact of a recession on trade-offs around food.
- Session 4 - The UK's Food Supply After Covid-19
 - Presentation topics: (1) How Covid affects the UK's Food Supply Chain, and (2) Principles for the Food Supply Chain After Covid-19.
 - Breakout group topics: (1) Responses to presentation 1, (2) Reflections on whether participants' trust in the food supply chain has changed, (3) Responses to presentation 2.

Principles

Principle 1: While some of us want the UK to grow more of our own food, we aren't dogmatic about it - we recognise the benefits for us, and other countries, of buying from abroad.

Generally, we hold mixed views around whether the UK should have greater self-sufficiency in terms of its food supply. Some of us express support for the UK growing more of its own food:

"Obviously not everything, but it would be nice to grow more food in Britain. Apparently in the past we grew a lot of our own food in the 70s and 60s. But today we import quite a lot of food from the EU and other countries." (Male)

However, more often, those of us that support greater self-sufficiency acknowledge the trade-offs and limitations this must involve. We recognise that some food will always have to be imported from overseas, or that we can grow more of our own food only 'where appropriate':

"I think we shouldn't be importing if we grow it ourselves. We should be utilising our own capability before we import, if obviously you can't get mangoes in the UK in January then by all means import them to the people that want to buy them." (Male)

"Could we say something on [that principle]? 'The UK should be self-sufficient where it can be and support short supply chains where appropriate'." (Female)

Thus, while we value self-sufficiency, it is often only in a slightly limited way. While we might want some food products, such as meat, or some food sources, such as farmer's markets, to reflect what we grow within the UK, this is not a major concern for us in general when buying food:

"But things like rice, and pasta, or things you've got there, it doesn't really bother me where it comes from to be fair. As long as the meat is local, I'm probably easygoing." (Female)

"I think I don't really tend to look at where the food comes from - unless I'm going somewhere like a farmer's market. Because then I think: "Oh, I want them to be locally sourced", because that's what you're going there for. You wouldn't go to a farmer's market to buy stuff from abroad. But, if I'm just in a supermarket, I wouldn't necessarily look." (Female)

"I would rather it be closer to home, that it be from the British Isles... I won't admit to looking into it massively. But naturally, anyone would rather their food came from somewhere that was reputable, had good standards, and so on." (Male)

Finally, we also recognise that there are broader benefits which result from the global food trade between different countries. We benefit from importing some food, as well as exporting to others around the world - and we recognise that self-sufficiency would involve economic trade-offs in domestic terms too:

"Clearly we import food and we export it, it's a fairly obvious point but with a globalised world economy we're all dependent on each other in a way. Our economy if it's doing well does well because we're exporting some of our products abroad and similarly other economies are dependent on us. There is an interdependency in the supply chain." (Male)

"Ideally it would be wonderful, but do we have enough space, and are we able to do it? Is there enough land to grow what we need? Especially with the growing population. We need more housing on one hand, and more space to grow things on the other." (Female)

Principle 2: If cheaper food means lower safety standards, we need to ensure those on low incomes in particular are protected.

We recognise that for those living on lower incomes, many food products or brands in our supermarkets are likely to be inaccessible. Those in the most challenging circumstances have no option but to buy the cheapest food available, meaning that safer or most nutritious food will be unaffordable:

"My concern is more for the families with a lot of children and things like that, when it comes to the price, and the standard as well. You already see it now, where people will choose the lower standard food at the lower price because it's not really a choice, it's all they can afford. And I imagine that will just get worse." (Female)

"Consumers could be forced to lower their standards through no choice, purely because they have to go for the cheaper option." (Female)

"I'd say with the cheap food, sometimes it's not very nutritious. People who eat it are on the breadline. They have no choice. They just have to have it, because that's all they have money-wise. They wouldn't choose to eat it if they could eat something better." (Female)

"My kids do eat well, but I just don't have time to sit there looking at labels, and I go for the cheapest option, what I can afford, because organic is generally more expensive. So, cost is really important, price, when I go shopping." (Female)

As a consequence, we acknowledge the need to ensure high standards even for the cheapest food products, as those on lower incomes will otherwise be unable to receive a healthy diet:

"No matter what the food cost is, if you're buying a tin of beans costing 9p or a tin of Heinz beans costing 50p, regardless of the taste might be different, you want to know that the quality of that food, the food you're eating, is still safe." (Male)

"I think we should have high food standards and we should have it at a reasonable cost." (Female)

"Naturally, a lot of those things that we're discussing will go out of the window when you think: "We've got myself, children to feed." Yes, they don't stay as important... We do need to maintain the standards." (Male)

Crucially, this leads some of us to endorse government intervention, to enable those who cannot currently afford high-quality food to gain access to it. This might require financial support for families on the lowest incomes:

"We just really talked about wanting food to be available and affordable to everyone, especially families that were struggling more with money or low income families. They should be supported so that they can still buy the high quality food and they're not suffering just because they can't afford the food." (Female)

"If you could not afford food, you should be supported for it, but I don't believe food should be unnaturally cheap, that it should be made cheap for the sake of it. If you cannot afford food at that price, then you should be supported to afford it." (Female)

Principle 3: The UK must maintain its high food standards after Brexit - these shouldn't be compromised, even if it means higher costs for our food products.

Building on the previous principle, our workshops revealed that we are deeply concerned about the impact Brexit could have on food safety standards in the UK:

"Yes, I think we need to keep to the high standards of food that we've got in this country now after Brexit, because I think people are quite concerned once we leave the EU that the standards are going to drop." (Male)

"I don't know if I would trust the standards to be as high as what they were before because of the whole Brexit thing. Will the UK have to lower their standards to be able to get these certain foods from other countries?" (Female)

More specifically, we are particularly concerned about the prospects for 'chlorinated chicken' to be imported into the UK, following Brexit. This suggests that the public are conscious of some ongoing debates about how trade deals with other countries might affect our food standards:

"My concerns are that Brexit will allow for the introduction of poor practices - we hear a lot about chlorinated chicken and beef that's been hormone injected or fed, with hormones banned in Europe, things like that worry me, and that we will allow food to enter the supply chain containing substances that would be deemed unsafe in Europe. So, Brexit is quite a worry I find, when it comes to food supply." (Female)

"So, when we've left the European community, will there be any independent oversight of our food standards and the standards of the food that we import? I inevitably bring us back to chlorinated chicken and that type of thing." (Male)

This concern reflected a common belief about food standards in the UK - we feel that our standards are very high and are keen to ensure they are protected in the future:

"I think we've got some of the strongest food standards in the world and I'm hoping that we will maintain them." (Female)

"[Moderator: We discussed on food safety, that we shouldn't lose our high food standards after we leave the EU, both for quality and safety reasons?] 'I think that's a goal that we should aim for.'" (Female)

Significantly, participants were clear that post-Brexit trade deals which result in lower food standards are likely to be unacceptable. We are interested in politicians pursuing trade deals, but only where they protect the high standards we believe the UK currently sets for our food:

"My hopes are that we don't lower our food standards just to get trade deals. We need to keep up our high standards. We do have some of the highest food standards around the world. One of the few things that we actually are world beating in still, and we need to keep those." (Male)

"Yes, I think with trade deals around food especially that the politicians need to be careful in trying to maintain the standards that we're used to. We're striking deals with countries that we haven't dealt with before, and not looked for other benefits, really, from making deals." (Male)

"I think we should stand firm on the food standards, hopefully find trade partners, even if it means a little pain in the early stages, who share our values." (Female)

"What we'd hope to find is, when we're looking at trade deals when trading with other countries, they need to meet our high food standards. A bit like the last group, [it's] non-negotiable." (Female)

Finally, participants further argued that we should not be willing to compromise our standards, even if this means higher costs for our food:

"I agree that we should not lower any standards, we have to keep them high

and we thought of looking at ways of improving our standards rather than going through a lower standard and cheaper alternatives..." (Male)

"Cheaper food is great, but it sounds like there are compromises. It's uncertain. All of the benefits seem like there's a lot of uncertainty behind them.?" (Female)

"[Moderator: Does health and safety trump price?] 'Absolutely. 100%'." (Female)

Principle 4: We are keen to minimise our environmental impact and protect animal welfare along the food supply chain, but how to do this isn't always obvious.

Throughout our workshops, it became clear that we are increasingly committed to ensuring the food we eat is produced as sustainably as possible. This applies to a number of different things, including concerns over unnecessary packaging on food items, and the carbon trade-offs involved in producing our food:

"I would like to see food supply chains, the main thing in the future to be more environmentally friendly and sustainable. I think that's definitely a big thing, everybody's working towards being more environmentally friendly and sustainable now, and I think things like packaging and stuff like that, does it really need to be used?" (Female)

"We would like to see that the carbon footprint for the supply chain would not only be reduced but would be carbon positive." (Female)

One participant even expressed a willingness to forgo access to particular food products, via foreign food imports, if this would help to reduce the damage caused to the environment:

"But the environment is really important to me, and I don't want my daughter to grow up in a world where they can't grow anything at all. I don't know. It's more

important to me, as a trade-off, to just not have the things that we can't grow in this country, if that was an option to save the environment." (Female)

Another participant identified a separate point about food supply in the context of environmental disruption, noting the impact that climate change is likely to have on the resilience of supply chains:

"The government and suppliers should look at their resilience to climate change starting now and going on over the next 20, 30 years, because that could change. That could bring about some shocks as well." (Male)

Similarly, we are equally committed to ensuring that our food is produced in ways which uphold high standards of animal welfare. This suggests that, while affordable food is important to us (as addressed above), we are unlikely to accept cheaper food, if it comes at the cost of unnecessary suffering to animals:

"I think it's the same thing. We're keen to minimise our environmental impact and animal welfare, protect our animal welfare standards maybe." (Female)

"There are still terrible animal welfare standards out there, and I think we should hold firm on that one." (Female)

"I think animal welfare, in various aspects, is an important standard. We shouldn't trade off on it. Throughout the years, it's been a very hard-won standard." (Male)

"Animal welfare is also important, so high demand shouldn't mean cruelty, and you don't know if cheaper food means high demand for livestock will be contaminated because of bad living conditions of farming animals." (Male)

However, there is some confusion about how to achieve these goals - reflecting the complexity of supply chains, as well as a lack of information available to consumers:

"I think our overall feeling was that this was a very complex issue and a couple of people talked about having brain ache, having thought about it, because of all the complexity and trade-offs around it." (Male)

"We had come to the conclusion that there isn't... [enough] information readily available. Information about supply chain should be on the product label of the product. Where it is from, when it was made, factories it was made in and where it originates." (Female)

Part of the challenge that people face, when trying to understand the trade-offs involved in supplying the food that we buy, is a sense that reliable sources of information about food are hard to come by:

"Obviously you can go onto Google to research things but how much of your search is going to give accurate or easy results? I don't know. How much fake news is there out there about the supply chain?" (Male)

Principle 5: There is a need for greater transparency and better food labelling. This is because we care about where our food comes from but we often lack knowledge about it, which makes it hard for us to make informed decisions about what we eat.

While we know that information about our food is provided on packaging or labels, we still feel that we lack sufficient knowledge about where our food comes from. This partly reflects a sense that we don't have the knowledge required to understand labelling:

"We have not been educated about it... it's not been communicated to us what that label means, really. So, we can't trust something we don't know much about, that's how I feel about it." (Female)

"I'm just saying labelling should be more transparent so people can clearly understand what they're having." (Male)

There are also issues around accessibility and the challenges involved in providing all necessary information on a single label alone:

"That's my problem, the labels are that small that I can't read them. It's impossible to put the information on a label." (Male)

Generally however, we want greater transparency around what we eat - perhaps via better labelling - which would enable us to make more informed decisions about what we buy:

"I think it should be clearly labelled... In an ideal world, it would be perfect if they would put it on the label and you could see it, if it's something you're really concerned about. If it was transparent, they just put it on there, on the front." (Female)

"I think for labelling to be clearer as well about what's grown in the UK. If there was one standardised logo that all companies use and it was easy for us to identify... because when I'm shopping my mind is full of about 50 different things." (Female)

"We felt like food labelling needs to be a lot clearer and transparent so that people know what they're buying, to avoid any confusion and educate people on where their food is coming from... a standard system of labelling that goes right across the board no matter what supermarket you're in or where you're buying your products from." (Female)

However, there are other ways to reassure and inform the public about where our food comes from. One example might be clearer and more transparent ways for the public to access information about what we choose to buy:

"We hope that there is transparency, that there are strict procedures in place and that they are followed up regularly with spot checks from the beginning to the end at every stage of the process. Also it would be great if this was publicised to reassure consumers." (Female)

“As long as the food product has got a website on the back that if we really want to we can go and visit it and they’ve got all the information there... Maybe they could have a QR code on the back that you could scan, it would bring you up the page quickly and you could get all the information like that.” (Male)

**Topic brief provided to participants:
Deliberative workshop on our food supply chain and trade after Covid-19**

What we are meeting to discuss and why

Policy makers are currently reviewing our food supply chain and the way it needs to change after the pandemic. This relates to how food is made, processed and distributed, and how food is sold and consumed in the UK. A vital part of this is where in the world the UK’s food is sourced from.

The purpose of this session is to explore and understand the public’s view of our food supply chain and, in particular, our relation to international food markets. We will be focusing on the following questions

1. What people know and how much they know about food supply chains?
2. How do people get their information and how do they engage today with food supply chains?
3. Do people care about food provenance?
4. What do the public trust and mistrust about food supply chains?
5. Attitudes towards imported food, and EU vs non-EU imported food
6. Exploring public preferences with relations to trade offs around a less globalised food supply chain
7. How might an economic crisis affect the public’s attitudes towards food supply chains and how does this affect the trade offs the public are willing/not willing to make?
8. How has Covid-19 changed attitudes towards food supply chains?
9. How should food supply chains and trade change post-Covid-19?

To achieve the above research objectives across the four sessions we will generate a set of principles that reflect the discussions and can be used to inform future policy making, or additional research, in this space.

Session One - Introduction to food supply chains - existing knowledge and concerns

- Welcome & Intros
- Presentation 1.1: Introduction
 - Based on ‘what we are meeting to discuss and why’ as above.
- Perceptions of food supply chain (plenary area)
 - What’s the first thing that comes into your mind when we say ‘food supply chain’ - what do you think of?
- Presentation 1.2: Definitions
 - A clear definition of the food system and how the food supply chain fits within that.
- Is food provenance important to you? (breakout groups)
 - Is it important to you to know where your food is from, how it is grown, how it is transported etc.?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups
- BREAK
- Existing knowledge, where that knowledge is from and sense of who is responsible (Breakout groups)
 - How much do you feel you know about food supply chains?
 - Where do you get that knowledge from?
 - Who do you feel is responsible for keeping food safe along the food supply chain
 - Without prompts initially, but if necessary: e.g. government, businesses, consumers etc.?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)

- Feedback from breakout groups
- What are your existing concerns and aspirations about food supply chains? (breakout groups)
 - Does anything immediately come to mind - does anything bother you? Are you reassured by anything?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups

Session Two - Trust and attitudes towards the UK's global food supply chain

- Trust and the food supply chain (breakout groups)
 - Does anything immediately come to mind - does anything bother you? Are you reassured by anything?
 - Reflecting on the initial discussion we had yesterday about the UK's food supply chain, is it something you have trust in or are you mistrustful of it and its ability to deliver what you want?
- Presentation 2.1: An overview of where the UK gets its food from in relation to global food markets
- What are your immediate responses to this? Breakout groups
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups
- BREAK
- Do you distinguish between food from outside and inside the EU? How do you view the EU and food, if at all? Breakout groups
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups

Session Three - Weighing pros and cons of a globalised food supply chain

- Presentation 3.1: Stimulus materials relating to resilience and the associated trade offs (eg less global but higher cost)
- Reflections on presentation - breakout groups
 - How did it make you feel?
 - Were you surprised/shocked/concerned?
 - Do you think this is more/less safe? Why?
 - Has it changed how you feel about the issue at all?
 - Do you think the benefits outweigh the cons (or vice versa)?
 - Are you willing to make the necessary trade offs?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups
- BREAK
- Presentation 3.2: Stimulus materials relating to standards and the associated trade offs (eg lower standards but lower cost)
 - Reflections on presentation - breakout groups
 - How did it make you feel?
 - Were you surprised/shocked/concerned?
 - Do you think this is more/less safe? Why?
 - Has it changed how you feel about the issue at all?
 - Do you think the benefits outweigh the cons (or vice versa)?
 - Are you willing to make the necessary trade offs?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups
- Discussion of impact of an economic crisis on these trade offs (breakout groups)
 - How do you think your assessment of these trade offs might change in an economic crisis (e.g. with significant

wage decreases and/or higher unemployment)?

- Would this affect your preferences at all (e.g. would you be willing to tolerate lower standards in this situation now for cheaper food)? If so, why?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups

Session Four - The UK's food supply chain after Covid-19

- Presentation 4.1: Covid-19 and the UK's food supply chain
 - A brief overview of some of the main issues relating to Covid-19 and the UK's globalised food supply chain as flagged by experts
- Reflections on presentation - breakout groups
 - Has Covid-19 changed how you think about the UK's food supply chain at all? If so, how?
 - Has it highlighted some issues to you before that you weren't aware of?
 - Has it changed your trust in the food supply chain?
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups
- BREAK
- Reflection on sessions - trust discussion
 - Cast your mind back to the first session when we discussed your trust in the food supply chain.
 - How do you view things now - do you have more or less trust?
 - What could be done to build more trust?
- Presentation 4.2: Review of principles for food supply chains post-Covid-19
- Reflections on presentation - breakout groups

- Do they reflect the discussion we have had?
- How do they need to change?
- Looking forward to the future, what would the food system look like? Why is that important?
- Knowing what you know now about the Food supply chain, Who do you feel is responsible for keeping food safe along the food supply chain (e.g. government, businesses, consumers etc.)? – prompt if at different points in the chain, different people are responsible.
- Feedback and group discussion (plenary area)
 - Feedback from breakout groups

Appendix 2:

Questionnaires

Open Access Survey Questions

Q1 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q2 What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

Q3 In which region do you live?

- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- North East England
- North West England
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- South East England
- South West England
- Wales
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber

Q4 Which of the following best describes your occupation? If you are now retired with a private pension please state your previous occupation.

- Semi or unskilled manual work (e.g. Manual workers, all apprentices to be skilled trades, Caretaker, Park keeper, non-HGV driver, shop assistant)
- Skilled manual worker (e.g. Skilled Bricklayer, Carpenter, Plumber, Painter, Bus/ Ambulance Driver, HGV driver, AA patrolman, pub/bar worker, etc.)
- Supervisory or clerical/ junior managerial/ professional/ administrative (e.g. Office worker, Student Doctor, Foreman with 25+ employees, salesperson, etc.)
- Intermediate managerial/professional/ administrative (e.g. Newly qualified (under 3 years) doctor, Solicitor, Board director small organisation, middle manager in large organisation, principle officer in civil service/local government)
- Higher managerial/professional/ administrative (e.g. Established doctor, Solicitor, Board Director in a large organisation (200+ employees, top level civil servant/public service employee))
- Student
- Casual worker – not in permanent employment
- Housewife/Homemaker

- Retired and living on state pension
- Unemployed or not working due to long-term sickness
- Full-time carer of other household member

Q5 Which of these applies to you?

- Employed for wages - full time
- Employed for wages - part time
- Not employed for wages and looking for work
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - student
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - homemaker
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - retired
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - not able to work
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - other
- None of these

Q6 Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes
- No

Q7 What is your household income (that is, the total if you add up the income of everyone in your household)?

- Less than £20,000 per year
- £20,000 - £39,999
- £40,000-£59,999
- £60,000-£79,999
- £80,000-£99,999
- £100,000+
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q8 Which of the following best describes the highest level of educational qualification you have achieved?

- No formal qualifications
- 1-4 GCSEs, Scottish Standard Grade or equivalent qualifications
- 5 or more GCSEs, Scottish Higher, Scottish Advanced Higher or equivalent qualifications
- Apprenticeship
- 2 or more A-levels, HNC, HND, SVQ level 4 or equivalent qualifications
- Degree, professional qualifications or other higher education qualifications
- Other vocational/work related qualifications and non-UK/foreign qualifications

Q9 What is your ethnic group?

- White
- Mixed
- Asian/Asian British
- Black/Black British
- Other

Q10 How many people live in your home?

[insert number]

Q11 How many, if any, children under the age of 18 are you a parent or guardian to? If you are not a parent or guardian to any children under the age of 18, please answer 0.

[insert number]

Q12 How many, if any, adult dependents aged 18 or over do you have (that is, adults aged 18 or over who are reliant on you for physical or financial support)? If you have no dependents over the age of 18, please answer 0.

[insert number]

Q13 How did you vote in the 2019 UK general election, or did you not vote?

- Conservative
- Labour
- Liberal Democrat
- Brexit Party
- Green Party
- Scottish National Party
- Plaid Cymru
- UKIP
- Other
- I did not vote
- Prefer not to say

Q14 How did you vote in the 2016 EU referendum, or did you not vote?

- Remain
- Leave
- I did not vote
- Prefer not to say

Q15 During the pandemic, would you say you have done the following more or less than you did before?

Q15.1 Eaten healthy main meals

- More
- Neither
- Less
- Don't know

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q15)

Q15.2 Cooked at home

Q15.3 Eaten home-cooked meals

Q15.4 Eaten unhealthy snacks

Q15.5 Eaten together with the people you live with

Q15.6 Wasted food

Q15.7 Eaten food past its use by date

Q15.8 Shopped in smaller grocery shops rather than supermarkets

Q15.9 Grown your own food

Q15.10 Eaten meat

Q15.11 Eaten or drank dairy products

Q15.12 Eating takeaway food

Q15.13 Bought locally produced food

Q16. Please tell us how the pandemic has affected what you eat and your relationship with food. You can say as much or as little as you like.

[open text box]

Q17 Have you done the following during the pandemic?

Q17.1 Used a foodbank

- I have done this during the pandemic
- I have not done this during the pandemic

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q17)

Q17.2 Donated to a foodbank

Q17.3 Joined a mutual aid group

Q17.4 Shopped for food for someone who is self-isolating

Q18 What role, if any, do you think foodbanks and mutual aid groups should have in ensuring everyone is able to access essentials such as food? You can say as much or as little as you like.

[open text box]

Q19 Please tell us how the pandemic has affected your attitudes regarding, and relationship with, your local community. You can say as much or as little as you like.

[open text box]

Q20 Would you support or oppose the following?

Q20.1 The government spending money to provide financial support for cafes and restaurants in town and city centres affected by people working from home more often

- Support
- Neither
- Oppose

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q20)

Q20.2 The government encouraging employees to return to their normal places of work to help support cafes and restaurants in town and city centres

Q20.3 The government encouraging cafes and restaurants to move to more residential areas to provide for people working from home

Q21 Please tell us how you think the future of where people work – and in particular increased remote working during and after the pandemic – will and should mean with regards to food. You can say as much or as little as you like.

[open text box]

Q22 If you had to choose, which of the following would you prefer?

- The UK having lower food quality standards than it currently does, if it means cheaper food is available in the UK and UK food exports are more competitive in the global market
- The UK keeping the same food quality standards it currently has, if it means food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market

Q23 If you had to choose, which of the following would you prefer?

- The UK having lower animal welfare standards for meat and animal products, if it means cheaper food is available in the UK and UK food exports are more competitive in the global market
- The UK keeping the same animal welfare standards it currently has, if it means food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market

Q24 Please tell us how your views regarding food standards have been affected by the pandemic. You can say as much or as little as you like.

[open text box]

Q25. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences relating to the pandemic? If there's anything that's missing from the topics we've talked about, use this box to fill in any gaps. Or if you'd rather tell us your whole story, you can do it here.

[open text box]

Polis Statements

Seeded/Researcher-generated statements

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for government interventions to get people to eat more healthily
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for government support to ensure everyone can afford to eat healthy food
3. The COVID-19 pandemic means the government has bigger things to think about and shouldn't be prioritising getting people to eat more healthily
4. The COVID-19 pandemic means struggling businesses should not have to deal with further regulations to encourage healthy eating
5. It is the government's responsibility to get more people to eat healthily
6. People should be free to eat what they want, whether that's healthily or unhealthily, and the government should stay out of it
7. It is the government's responsibility to make sure no-one goes hungry
8. It should be up to individuals and their local communities to make sure everyone has enough food to eat, not the government
9. Developing new healthy and sustainable food products is the role of the private sector and the government should stay out of it
10. It would be better if foodbanks didn't have to exist
11. It is a good thing that foodbanks funded by private donations (rather than the government) play a role in feeding people who otherwise would go hungry
12. Businesses who sell food have a responsibility to get more people to eat healthily, even if they would make more money selling unhealthy food
13. Businesses who sell food have a responsibility to get more people to eat healthily, even if people want to eat unhealthy food
14. Businesses should be free to sell food people want to eat, whether it's healthy or unhealthy, and the government should stay out of it
15. The government should tax unhealthy food
16. The government should subsidise healthy food (that is, provide funding to make it cheaper)
17. The government should ban adverts for unhealthy food
18. It is not right for the government or businesses to discourage or make people pay more to eat unhealthy food if they enjoy eating it
19. Consumers have a responsibility not to eat a very unhealthy diet
20. It is the government's responsibility to ensure children have enough to eat, if their parents are not willing or able to do so
21. It is not the government's responsibility to ensure children have enough to eat, their parents are responsible and should be incentivised to work hard
22. Free school meals should be provided during school holidays during the pandemic
23. Free school meals should always be provided during the school holidays
24. Free school meals should be provided during term time, but not during school holidays
25. Free school meals are a bad way of ensuring all children get enough to eat, but government funding should be provided to ensure all children get enough to eat in other ways
26. The government should invest in developing new healthy and sustainable food products if the private sector is not

User-generated statements

[Note: as these are user-generated statements, some contain grammatical or spelling errors. Polis does not allow researchers to edit user statements, to ensure their integrity. Thus, some statements may contain small errors.]

27. Cooking lessons need to be part of the curriculum [sic]
28. Government already does more than enough on benefits. What government gives away for free it must first take from others.
29. The media and celebrities should take a lead in promoting healthy eating rather than the government
30. More education should be provided in schools for healthy eating. Healthy food should be cheaper too
31. The government should provide all families on low/no income with more benefits than they are to ensure better standards of living.
32. Children go hungry because parents spend money on other things [sic] instead of food
33. If families are struggling then government should be given food coupons or vouchers for the weekly food shop [sic]
34. It is cheaper and healthier to buy fresh, tinned or frozen fruit and veg than it is to splash out on junk food.
35. Government funding should be sufficient to enable people to feed their children, but not so much that it acts as a disincentive to work.
36. junk food should be banned
37. People who eat junk food and make themselves obese place extra pressures on the NHS
38. It is sad that food banks need charities to run them. This is what the government should do
39. The two people who create the child are responsible for looking after it however the government should provide well paid jobs for all
40. Government should enable communities [sic] to help each other, rather than being dependent on government [sic]
41. govt and private sector should promote veganism as a way of eating healthily and protecting the environment [sic]
42. Parents are responsible for feeding their children but government must step in for children whose parents are unable to do so
43. The government is elected to help people.
44. Everyonee [sic] should play a part in trying to eat healthily, goverment [sic], business and the consumer and just take accountability.
45. More often than not unhealthy food is more affordable and more easily attainable than healthy food.
46. School meals should be free for all students so that poor students are not stigmatised.
47. Businesses should be free to sell food people want to eat but Government should advise on health issues
48. I think it is everyones [sic] individual choice what to eat.
49. Minimising food waste is nearly as important as banning junk food.
50. I think benefits should be the same as minimum wage.
51. Advice should be provided for anyone who wants to be able to eat more healthily and cheaply.
52. Tax unhealthy food and give the extra tax raised to the NHS
53. We all need to pay more taxes to help these sorts of issues but we're selfish and won't vote for that.
54. Every child has the right to have a healthy meal at least once a day
55. reduce the price of all vegetables
56. The government would find ways around a ban, better surely to incentivise them to make their products healthier [sic]
57. Give tax concessions to people who stay healthy and put a levy on the unhealthy food outlets so that they and their customers pay extra
58. Yes definitely, create Bursaries and competitions, encourage innovation, reward enterprise and invention.

Poll Questions

Q1 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q2 What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

Q3 In which region do you live?

- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- North East England
- North West England
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- South East England
- South West England
- Wales
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber

Q4 Which of the following best describes your occupation? If you are now retired with a private pension please state your previous occupation.

- Semi or unskilled manual work (e.g. Manual workers, all apprentices to be skilled trades, Caretaker, Park keeper, non-HGV driver, shop assistant)
- Skilled manual worker (e.g. Skilled Bricklayer, Carpenter, Plumber, Painter, Bus/ Ambulance Driver, HGV driver, AA patrolman, pub/bar worker, etc.)
- Supervisory or clerical/junior managerial/professional/administrative (e.g. Office worker, Student Doctor, Foreman with 25+ employees, salesperson, etc.)
- Intermediate managerial/professional/administrative (e.g. Newly qualified

(under 3 years) doctor, Solicitor, Board director small organisation, middle manager in large organisation, principle officer in civil service/local government)

- Higher managerial/professional/administrative (e.g. Established doctor, Solicitor, Board Director in a large organisation (200+ employees, top level civil servant/public service employee))
- Student
- Casual worker – not in permanent employment
- Housewife/Homemaker
- Retired and living on state pension
- Unemployed or not working due to long-term sickness
- Full-time carer of other household member

Q5 Which of these applies to you?

- Employed for wages - full time
- Employed for wages - part time
- Not employed for wages and looking for work
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - student
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - homemaker
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - retired
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - not able to work
- Not employed for wages and not looking for work - other
- None of these

Q6 Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q7 What is your household income (that is, the total if you add up the income of everyone in your household)?

- Less than £20,000 per year
- £20,000 - £39,999
- £40,000-£59,999

- £60,000-£79,999
- £80,000-£99,999
- £100,000+
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q8 Which of the following best describes the highest level of educational qualification you have achieved?

- No formal qualifications
- 1-4 GCSEs, Scottish Standard Grade or equivalent qualifications
- 5 or more GCSEs, Scottish Higher, Scottish Advanced Higher or equivalent qualifications
- Apprenticeship
- 2 or more A-levels, HNC, HND, SVQ level 4 or equivalent qualifications
- Degree, professional qualifications or other higher education qualifications
- Other vocational/work related qualifications and non-UK/foreign qualifications

Q9 What is your ethnic group?

- White
- Mixed
- Asian/Asian British
- Black/Black British
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Q10 How many people live in your home?

[insert number]

Q11 How many, if any, children under the age of 18 are you a parent or guardian to? If you are not a parent or guardian to any children under the age of 18, please answer 0.

[insert number]

Q12 How many, if any, adults dependants aged 18 or over do you have (that is, adults aged 18 or over who are reliant on you for physical or financial support)? If you have no dependents over the age of 18, please answer 0.

[insert number]

Q13 How did you vote in the 2019 UK general election, or did you not vote?

- Conservative
- Labour
- Liberal Democrat
- Brexit Party
- Green Party
- Scottish National Party
- Plaid Cymru
- UKIP
- Other
- I did not vote
- Prefer not to say

Q14 How did you vote in the 2016 EU referendum, or did you not vote?

- Remain
- Leave
- I did not vote
- Prefer not to say

Q15 Had you accessed Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit in the 12 months before the start of the pandemic?

- Yes
- No

Q16 Had you accessed Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit since the start of the pandemic?

- Yes
- No

Q17 Have you received financial support from the government specifically relating to the pandemic, such as by being put on furlough or through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme?

- I have
- I have not

Q18 Do you have children eligible for free school meals at school?

- Yes
- No

Q19 Did you receive free school meals as a child?

- Yes
- No

Q20 Are you a key worker?

By a key worker, we mean someone working to provide an essential service who is unable to work from home, who was required to continue to work throughout the pandemic to keep the country running.

- Yes, I am a key worker
- No, I am not a key worker

Q21 Would you describe the area you live in as urban or rural?

- Urban
- Rural
- Neither
- Don't know

Q22 Which of the following applies to the place you live?

- I own it outright
- I own it on a mortgage
- I rent it from a private landlord
- I rent it from the local council or a housing association
- I live in a care home or assisted living facility

Q23 Have you been diagnosed with one or more long term health conditions?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q24 Have you been diagnosed with a mental illness?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q25 During the pandemic, would you say you have done the following more or less than you did before?

Q25.1 Eaten healthy main meals

- Much more
- Slightly more
- Stayed the same
- Slightly less
- Much less
- Don't know

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q25]

Q25.2 Eaten healthy main meals

Q25.3 Cooked at home

Q25.4 Eaten home-cooked meals

Q25.5 Eaten unhealthy snacks

Q25.6 Eaten together with the people you live with

Q25.7 Wasted food

Q25.8 Eaten food past its use by date

Q25.9 Shopped in smaller grocery shops rather than supermarkets

Q25.10 Grown your own food

Q25.11 Eaten meat

Q25.12 Eaten or drank dairy products

Q25.13 Eating takeaway food

Q25.14 Bought locally produced food

Q26 For each of the following, where you have changed the amount you have done them during the pandemic, would you say you do or do not think the behaviour change will remain after the pandemic is over?

Q26.1 Eaten healthy main meals

- I do
- I do not

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q26]

- Q26.2 Eaten healthy main meals
- Q26.3 Cooked at home
- Q26.4 Eaten home-cooked meals
- Q26.5 Eaten unhealthy snacks
- Q26.6 Eaten together with the people you live with
- Q26.7 Wasted food
- Q26.8 Eaten food past its use by date
- Q26.9 Shopped in smaller grocery shops rather than supermarkets
- Q26.10 Grown your own food
- Q26.11 Eaten meat
- Q26.12 Eaten or drank dairy products
- Q26.13 Eating takeaway food
- Q26.14 Bought locally produced food

Q27 For each of the following, where you have changed the amount you have done them during the pandemic, would you say you do or do not want the behaviour change to remain after the pandemic is over?

Q27.1 Eaten healthy main meals

- I do
- I do not

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q27]

- Q27.2 Eaten healthy main meals
- Q27.3 Cooked at home
- Q27.4 Eaten home-cooked meals
- Q27.5 Eaten unhealthy snacks
- Q27.6 Eaten together with the people you live with
- Q27.7 Wasted food
- Q27.8 Eaten food past its use by date
- Q27.9 Shopped in smaller grocery shops rather than supermarkets
- Q27.10 Grown your own food

- Q27.11 Eaten meat
- Q27.12 Eaten or drank dairy products
- Q27.13 Eating takeaway food
- Q27.14 Bought locally produced food

Q28 Would you say you have or have not done the following during the pandemic?

Q28.1 Eaten at a restaurant you have never eaten at before

- I have
- I have not

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q28]

Q28.2 Eaten a takeaway from somewhere you have never eaten from before

Q28.3 Shopped for groceries somewhere you have never shopped before

Q29 How much, if anything...

Q29.1 ...do you think the government is doing to encourage the public to change their diets to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly?

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not very much
- Nothing at all
- Don't know

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q29]

Q29.2 ...do you think the government should be doing to encourage the public to change their diets to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly?

Q29.3 ...do you think the government is doing to encourage the public to change their diets to be more healthy?

Q29.4 ...do you think the government should be doing to encourage the public to change their diets to be more healthy?

Q30 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

When I think about food, I think of...

Q30.1 A source of comfort

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q30]

Q30.2 Simply fuel for my body

Q30.3 A luxury to treat myself to

Q30.4 Unhealthy food as a dangerous temptation I'd rather avoid

Q30.5 Family time

Q30.6 Time with friends

Q30.7 An annoying necessity

Q30.8 A form of stress relief

Q30.9 Feeling lonely

Q30.10 A distraction from other things in my life

Q30.11 A hobby

Q30.12 A struggle to eat healthily

Q30.13 My culture and identity

Q31 For each of the following, do you think you have done them more or less during the pandemic than you did before?

Q31.1 Felt stressed in general

- Much more
- Slightly more
- Neither
- Slightly less
- Much less
- Don't know

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q31]

Q31.2 Worried about money

Q31.3 Worried about losing your job

Q31.4 Had free time

Q31.5 Worked from home

Q32 Would you say you have or have not done the following during the pandemic?

Q32.1 Shopped for food for someone who is self-isolating

- I have
- I have not

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q32]

Q32.2 Relied on someone shopping for food for you while self-isolating

Q32.3 Joined a 'mutual aid' group to support, and/or ask for support from, people in your local community

Q32.4 Helped someone in your local community with a problem related to the pandemic

Q32.5 Offered to help people in your local community

Q33 Which of the following best describes why you have not offered to help people in your local community during the pandemic?

[For respondents who answer Q32.5 with 'I have not']

- I don't think they would want my help
- I don't know how to
- I never thought about it
- It should be the responsibility of other organisations, such as charities or the government
- I don't want to

Q34 Would you support or oppose children who receive free school meals during term time getting free meals during school holidays...

Q34.1 During the pandemic?

- Strongly support
- Support
- Neither
- Oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q34]

Q34.2 Continuing after the pandemic?

Q35 How often, if ever, do you buy lunch from a restaurant, cafe or specialist food shop when you work from your normal place of work?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- My normal place of work is my home
- I do not work

Q36 How often, if ever, do you buy lunch from a restaurant, cafe or specialist food shop when you work from home?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- My normal place of work is my home
- I do not work

Q37 How often, if ever, do you think you would buy lunch from a restaurant, cafe or specialist food shop when you work from home if there were more options nearby?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- I do not work

Q38 Would you support or oppose the following?

Q38.1 The government spending money to provide financial support for cafes and restaurants in town and city centres affected by people working from home more often

- Strongly support
- Support
- Neither
- Oppose
- Strongly oppose

[N.B. These options are repeated for all variants of Q38]

Q38.2 The government encouraging employees to return to their normal places of work to help support cafes and restaurants in town and city centres

Q38.3 The government encouraging cafes and restaurants to move to more residential areas to provide for people working from home

Q39 If you had to choose, which of the following would you prefer?

- The UK having lower food quality standards than it currently does, if it means cheaper food is available in the UK and UK food exports are more competitive in the global market
- The UK keeping the same food quality standards it currently has, if it means food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market

Q40 If you had to choose, which of the following would you prefer?

- The UK having lower animal welfare standards for meat and animal products, if it means cheaper food is available in the UK and UK food exports are more competitive in the global market
- The UK keeping the same animal welfare standards it currently has, if it means food is more expensive and less competitive in the global market

Q41 Would you support or oppose policies to make the UK able to grow enough food to feed the population without importing food from other countries, even if it meant higher taxes and more expensive food?

- Strongly support
- Support
- Neither
- Oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

Appendix 3: Evidence Review

Part one: Evidence and sources

This section reviews the evidence regarding eating habits, dietary patterns, shopping, planning and preparing meals, our view of the food system and food trade, as well as food insecurity and the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, during the pandemic.⁷²

At the time of conducting the review, it was a new and evolving body of evidence. It was composed of research which can be planned and carried out at short notice, and data which can be captured and assessed quickly. This means the evidence in this review is primarily made up of survey data, supplemented by some qualitative insights in the form of interviews and food diaries. There is also some macro-level data related to food prices, supermarket footfall and basket analysis we draw on. The most fruitful sources of evidence was the FSA's Covid-19 Consumer Tracker, which carried out four waves of survey and qualitative research between April and July; Kantar's Nutrition Panel and World Panel; a study by BiteBack 2030 of 14-19 year olds' eating habits; ONS data on the business impact of Covid-19 (several waves); the Food Foundation's work on food insecurity during the pandemic; and the National Food Strategy (Part One), which has gathered a considerable amount of evidence.

Given the fast-moving, ongoing nature of the pandemic, it is also important to consider when data (in particular survey data) was gathered. Survey results regarding shopping habits in April look very different to those just a month later. Kantar has established a useful five-stage classification for the "pandemic period", which we will use in this review:⁷³

- Stockpiling
- Lockdown
- Transition (i.e. the gradual lifting of restrictions and transition back to normal behaviour patterns)
- Recession
- New embedded behaviours

We must also acknowledge that stages two and three will repeat themselves in line with the spread of the virus. It is inevitable that this cycle will continue for the foreseeable future, even as a recession (stage four) continues to unfold.

It is impossible to predict whether behaviours which were a temporary response to an unexpected situation will become ingrained, as they are sustained or repeated over many months or even years. Many of the surveys looking into consumer behaviours ask people whether they would want to continue with such behaviours in the longer term. This,

72 Please note that the evidence review was conducted in September 2020 to guide the design of our primary research - it has not been updated since.

73 Capelin, C. [How will lockdown and economic downturn affect our behaviour when it comes to nutrition?](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

combined with the economic forecasts of recession and the 'second wave', gives us some indication of how food behaviours and dietary habits might be shaped over the coming year – if not longer.

We present the evidence gathered between March and September 2020 first. We conclude by identifying gaps in the evidence and how these might be filled.

Part two: People's daily lives

Mealtimes and cooking

Many surveys carried out during the pandemic period have explored how the routines of daily life have been affected by most people working from or furloughed at home, and often home-schooling their children. One of the trends identified early on was how more families were participating in set family mealtimes and cooking from scratch – thanks to having more time to cook or in response to restaurant closure (or, as we will look at in more detail below, financial pressures). The rise of the family mealtime has been almost uniformly seen as a positive development, particularly among parents. For example, the FSA's Covid-19 Consumer Tracker found between 22 and 26% of the public were eating together more often in May, June and July.⁷⁴ 49% of families agreed that family mealtimes were rare or never happened pre-pandemic, but 91% reported in May that it was an important part of the day.⁷⁵ Another survey from June, of 14-19 year olds, found 33% reported they were eating more meals as

a family, and 60% felt that eating as a family had positively impacted their health and wellbeing in lockdown.⁷⁶

Preparing for family meals seems to have increased the prevalence of food planning and preparation behaviours – such as batch cooking and freezing. While frozen food sales doubled in the first three months of lockdown compared to pre-pandemic levels,⁷⁷ surveys throughout the lockdown period also found that the public were spending more time meal planning, batch cooking and freezing meals for later (surveys from April found 35% of the public said they were using their freezer more and 29% are freezing a wider variety of foods,⁷⁸ while between 23-25% of the public reported using their freezer more in the FSA's Covid-19 Consumer Tracker for May, June and July.)⁷⁹ Even at the end of August, when restrictions on shopping and eating out had almost entirely lifted, 22% of the public said they were batch cooking and freezing more – though a third admitted they were not confident about freezing or defrosting leftovers safely.⁸⁰ A study by WRAP found important knowledge gaps about food storage in particular: almost half of those surveyed did not know apples would last longer if stored in the fridge and almost 40% did not know that food such as chicken breasts could be frozen up until the end of the 'use by' date.⁸¹

These knowledge gaps – perhaps combined with financial pressures – means some consumers take risks with their food. The FSA found in April that 58% of households said they had eaten something past its 'use-by'

74 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

75 The Daily Brit. [Lockdown sees the return of the great British mealtime](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

76 BiteBack 2030. [Hungry for Change - giving children a food system that works for them](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

77 Perrett, T. Coronavirus: [Frozen food sales boom by £285m](#). Food Manufacture, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

78 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

79 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

80 Restorick, T. [Hubbub partners with Tesco to launch 'No Time for Waste Challenge'](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

81 Wrap. [Citizen responses to the Covid-19 lockdown - food purchasing, management and waste](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

date, and in July, evidence suggested sizeable minorities were eating high-risk food (such as bagged salad – 37%) past its use-by date. While the survey presented no comparable data to show that these behaviours have increased during the pandemic period, a separate survey by Hubbub found 16 % of consumers reported eating more out-of-date food than usual.⁸² One consumer said they had retrieved a can of beans from 1989 at the back of their cupboard, another used up a can of coconut milk six years past its sell-by date and a six-year-old bag of pasta.

The FSA also identified a trend in their wave surveys whereby people who reported being concerned about food affordability during lockdown were more likely to eat food that had passed use-by dates.⁸³ As we discuss in part four below, food insecurity has risen dramatically during the lockdown period. We may reasonably assume that risky food behaviours have increased during the pandemic period, in line with growing food insecurity.

We have also seen other negative mealtime habits emerge during the pandemic period, including increased snacking (discussed below), and poor quality lunches for homeworkers. Without the routine of lunch breaks and cafes to visit, people seem to be eating lunch at their desks and on the run, if at all. A survey released at the end of August (as restrictions started to lift and people were being encouraged to return to the office) found 34% of those working at home reported their lunches were worse now than when they were in the office, while 70% said they missed their office-based lunch options. 39% of people reported they now make do with a packet of crisps at lunchtime, 27% have

biscuits, while 13% skip lunch because they can't think of what to have.⁸⁴

Food waste

It seems a variety of factors - restaurant closures, families all at home for mealtimes, shopping restrictions and financial pressure due to furlough or redundancy - has led to a widespread 'waste not want not' approach. As mentioned above, freezing and meal preparation has become more widespread, with a knock on effect of reducing the amount of food we waste.

In April, for example, 48% of people said they were throwing away less food and only 5% said they were throwing away more. The reasons given for this were: planning meals more carefully (51%) and using leftovers (41%). A third said they were using their freezer more, and over a quarter claimed they were giving more accurate portion sizes and the same proportion said they are leaving less on the plate.⁸⁵ At the end of June, 35% of people reported they have been planning meals in order to reduce food waste, and 82% said they would carry on even after lockdown eases.⁸⁶ In July, the FSA's Covid-19 Consumer Tracker also found 30% of people reported they were wasting or throwing away food less often, after an initial rise in the early stages of lockdown (possibly as people had panic-bought supplies and had not yet started planning their shopping effectively).⁸⁷ Data from WRAP on four key foodstuffs (bread, chicken, milk and potatoes) confirms these reports, as it shows 13.7% of these foods were thrown away in April 2020, compared to 24.1% in November 2019 – a one-third reduction.⁸⁸

82 Smithers, R. [Brits cut food waste with 'lockdown larders' during coronavirus pandemic](#). The Guardian, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

83 Food Standards Agency. [The Covid-19 consumer research](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

84 Foad, D. [Crisps and cold beans - the lockdown lunches of Britain's home workers](#). Public Sector Catering, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

85 Sustain. [How and why are we eating differently during Covid-19?](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

86 Wells, L. [Consumers aim to shop locally after lockdown](#). Talking Retail, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

87 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

88 Wrap. [Citizens and food during lockdown](#), 2020. Available at [accessed 10/02/2021]

It is possible the experiences of lockdown may have changed our relationship with food in a more profound way. In April, 57% of the public in one survey said they valued food more than pre-pandemic,⁸⁹ while there was a 23% increase in people stating that food waste was an important national issue.⁹⁰ Research from Hubbub released at the end of August, found 67% of respondents said they felt differently about food. 38% said lockdown, and the difficulties it had brought, represented the single most important event in their lifetime when it came to their relationship with food and food waste.⁹¹

It is still too early to tell whether these shifting attitudes have, in fact, led to a wholesale change in the amount of food the UK wastes – analysis of local council collections and landfill volumes will take longer to carry out and trends needs to be assessed over a longer period of time to take into account seasonal anomalies. One journalist carried out a small survey of her own – recruiting 20 households to weigh their weekly food waste in July and comparing this to pre-pandemic averages. She found that the number of meals at home increased (from 16.8 meals at home on average pre-pandemic to 21 at home in July), but food waste decreased from 1.9kg a week to 1.57kg a week.⁹²

Our diet during lockdown

As we have seen above, research into our meal planning and preparation during the pandemic period uncovered some divergent

trends. Dinner times have improved, lunch times have worsened. More people are planning meals, but more are also taking risks with out of date produce. This divergence can also be found in what people are eating – both more and less healthy diets are being pursued. For example:

Kantar's April Worldpanel found one third of respondents were using the lockdown to eat more healthily and exercise more, but another third said they were eating less healthily. Another July survey found 44% of people had been trying to eat more healthily during lockdown, while 18% were eating more comfort food and takeaways than normal.⁹³ The FSA's Covid-19 Consumer tracker came to similar conclusions - their July data found 27% of people were eating more healthily (11% less), but 40% were also eating more unhealthy snacks (15% less).⁹⁴ Meanwhile in June, when young people were not at school, 50% of 14-19 year olds reported they were drinking more water, and that they were eating more fruit and vegetables, and eating more snacks and junk food.⁹⁵

Kantar's Nutrition Panel June data provides "less healthy" evidence: grocery shopping rose in volume by 13% in the 12 weeks to June, but calories purchased rose by 17% - so people were purchasing more calorie-dense items. The data found saturated fats increased by 4.7% while sodium increased by 6.2% in the average basket of goods between April and June.⁹⁶

However, Mintel reported in July that 12% of people (including 25% of 21-40 year olds and

89 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

90 Wrap. [Citizens and food during lockdown](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

91 Restorick, T. [Hubbub partners with Tesco to launch 'No Time for Waste Challenge'](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

92 Seal, R. [Reality bites: how the pandemic changed the way we eat](#). The Guardian, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

93 Foad, D. [UK vegetable consumption plummets over lockdown, according to survey](#). Public Sector Catering, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

94 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

95 BiteBack 2030. [Hungry for Change - giving children a food system that works for them](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

96 Capelin, C. [How will lockdown and economic downturn affect our behaviour when it comes to nutrition?](#) Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

22% of Londoners) claimed the pandemic had made “plant-based diets more appealing”.⁹⁷ It also found 23% of people said they were eating more fruit and vegetables since the start of the pandemic, including 31% of the under-20s, and 27% of 21-40 year olds. 37% of people said that the pandemic had prompted them to add more nutrients that support the immune system to their diet.⁹⁸

While it is possible that people are eating both more and less healthily simultaneously (e.g. a healthy home cooked dinner every night, but a more frequent biscuit binge), it is also the case that some people have used the pandemic to improve their diets. By contrast, others, lacking access, funds, or other factors, have seen a dietary deterioration. This could increase health inequalities – an issue we discuss further in part four.

Part three: Buying food

Eating out and take away

Most restaurants and cafes were closed in March, and did not start reopening until early July. Many consumers saved money in this period, and report using the savings to buy better quality food for home cooking, rather than swapping to more takeaways.⁹⁹ The FSA’s Consumer Tracker shows that in May, June and July, around a third of people surveyed were eating takeaways less often. However, younger respondents started to report in July that they were eating takeaways more often (38% of 16-24 year olds reporting that they ate takeaways more often in July compared to before lockdown, 23% reported doing this less often and 27% about the same).

This resonates with surveys of young people specifically, who reported in June that they were eating more takeaways than before.¹⁰⁰ Data from JustEat also suggests takeaway mealtimes are getting earlier, with the App’s busiest period for dinner moving from 7.30pm to 5pm, and lunchtime orders moving to before midday.¹⁰¹

The FSA’s Covid-19 Consumer Tracker asked those who reported eating takeaways less often than before lockdown why this was the case. The most popular reasons given were:

- cooking at home more (36% June and July)
- wanting to save money (35% June, 29% July)
- takeaways not being open (33% June, 25% July)
- concerns around Covid-19 (32% June, 36% July)

This last reason was given more often by older age groups.

As restaurants and cafes began to reopen in response to the easing of some restrictions, so the industry has been faced with considerable consumer fears – the FSA’s Covid-19 Consumer Tracker found a quarter of consumers felt they would not eat out for the foreseeable future in June, rising to 31% in July – the month most restaurants reopened. Older age groups were more likely to be concerned than younger age groups, with just 15% of 16-24 year olds saying they wouldn’t eat out in July, compared with 41% of people aged 55-75.¹⁰² Two thirds of 14-19 year olds also reported they missed eating out in usual social spaces.¹⁰³

97 Food Matters. [25% of millennials find plant-based diets appealing](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

98 Ibid.

99 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

100 BiteBack 2030. [Hungry for Change - giving children a food system that works for them](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

101 Hearn, A. [Coronavirus lockdown has unexpected impact on family mealtimes and eating habits](#). The Mirror, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

102 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

103 BiteBack 2030. [Hungry for Change - giving children a food system that works for them](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

The Government's "Eat Out to Help Out" subsidy scheme ran from 3 to 31 August. Restaurant reservations were up 216% on the August Bank Holiday 2020 compared to 2019.¹⁰⁴ There is some early data to suggest restaurant-going was still high in September, even after the scheme has ended – and many restaurants are extending the scheme themselves to encourage diners back. However, the ONS found that by mid-August, although 41% of the public said they would take part in the scheme, only 10% had done so at that point, with another 36% of the public saying they would not take part in the scheme – half of those because they feared catching Covid-19.¹⁰⁵

Grocery shopping

As we saw in part two, research into changes to daily life during the pandemic shows that families have been spending more on groceries to cook at home. However, the variety of restrictions placed on shopping and travel, and consumer concerns about going into shops, means how food is bought has changed dramatically.

Overall, grocery shopping has been transformed in the lockdown period by: a) online shopping and delivery from the main supermarkets, b) an increase in people shopping locally and smaller retailers (in response to shortages, queues and limited delivery slots in the larger retailers and also travel restrictions and people working/learning at home), and c) people shopping for other people who find themselves unable to do so.

Kantar's footfall and basket analysis provides highly accurate pictures of shopping behaviours. Their data shows that shoppers were going to the supermarket less often, but spending 50% more on each trip. Sales

peaked in the 12 weeks between 23 February and 7 May, with a 14.8% increase year on year (the fastest increase since records began in 1994). This period will have covered the early "panic buying" phase of the pandemic. Sales increased by 13.7% year on year in the 12 weeks to 14 June (which covers the full lockdown period), and 10.8% in the 12 weeks to 6 September (as restrictions eased and more people ate away from home). However, these data do not include "on the go" spending – essentially, sandwiches, drinks and snacks – which are worth £1 billion to supermarkets in any 12 week period, but which were almost entirely wiped out in the first few weeks of the pandemic.¹⁰⁶

The increase in online grocery sales is perhaps the "big story" of pandemic shopping trends. Online ordering and delivery increased by 75% in May, accounting for 11.5% of all grocery shopping – this was the biggest increase in 5 years. Sales were increasing even more sharply - by 91% in June – as large supermarkets (such as Tesco) increased their delivery capacity to meet demand, meaning nearly 20% of shoppers were getting online deliveries (1.6 million more people than June 2019).¹⁰⁷ At its peak, online sales accounted for 13.5% of all groceries bought in the UK, though this declined to 12.5% in September.¹⁰⁸

A second, parallel trend has been an increase in the sales of smaller retailers. The Co-op, for example, has done well, as people have tried to avoid the queues associated with large retailers – their sales were up by 30.8% in the 12 weeks to May, and remained up 13.4% in the 12 weeks to September, when most shopping restrictions had eased. Its sales were twice as high in the North of England, where a second wave of local lockdowns meant consumers were once again staying closer to home and away from large stores.¹⁰⁹

104 Elliott, L. [Eat out to help out sees diners claim 100m cut-price meals in August](#). The Guardian, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

105 Gillet, F. [Eat Out to Help Out: The highs and lows of the coronavirus discount scheme](#). BBC News, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

106 McKevitt, F. [UK grocery growth accelerates as retailers and shoppers look to next stage of lockdown](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

107 Ibid.

108 McKevitt, F. [Supermarket sales slow as UK shoppers Eat Out](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

109 McKevitt, F. [Supermarket sales slow as UK shoppers Eat Out](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Kantar's data shows that sales in independent retailers and convenience shops have also had a significant boost. Sales were up by 63% in the 12 weeks to May, and by 69% four weeks later, with the average price of a shop increasing by 17%.¹¹⁰ An ACS survey found two-thirds of convenience stores reported a sales increase between April and May, with one third reporting a decline (these tended to be city centre stores, losing out on commuter footfall).¹¹¹ This meant the sector had a market share of 2.5% at its peak – the biggest since 2009.¹¹²

Much of this footfall and basket data can be corroborated by surveys of the public, who similarly report that groceries now come through fewer, larger supermarket shops; increased online shopping; and increased local/independent shopping. During the lockdown period, 38% of people said they shopped locally for food, including 44% of 33-44 year olds.¹¹³ In April, a survey found 29% of people said they had used a convenience shop for the first time.¹¹⁴ Many of the factors pushing people to independent retailers (home working, concern about distancing in larger stores etc.) will continue for the foreseeable future, which could lead to a more sustained shift in shopping behaviours.

Shopping for others

Evidence suggests the lockdown period has encouraged a 'community spirit' of mutual aid as people help older neighbours and 'shielders' to access food. Shopping for neighbours; giving food to relatives or friends; cooking for neighbours; community food growing (i.e. allotment surplus being redistributed locally to those in need)¹¹⁵ have been the primary ways in which people have been helping each other access food during the lockdown periods. Often this has been facilitated by 'mutual aid' groups,¹¹⁶ set up in direct response to pandemic conditions at neighbourhood level, which manage local requests for help.¹¹⁷ These have been facilitated by Facebook and the Nextdoor app, but Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK has also worked as a national hub for local action.

The ONS weekly 'Social impacts of Covid-19' tracker included, from April until mid June, questions regarding helping neighbours. It found that in April, 50% of people reported they had shopped for a neighbour. By June 19, as access to food became easier, this had fallen to 33%.¹¹⁸ Another survey found that in April, 40% of people said they had a greater sense of community, with 10% saying they had shared food with a neighbour for the first time.¹¹⁹ In May, 56% of convenience stores said they were offering 'card not present'

110 Fortune, A. [Coronavirus to drive 8% growth in convenience sales in 2020](#). Convenience Store, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

111 ACS. [Covid Impact Survey Reveals How Stores Have Adapted Since Lockdown](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

112 Convenience Store. [Coronavirus: Will the boost to local shopping last after lockdown?](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

113 Ibbetson, C. [Could Covid-19 ultimately save the high street?](#). Yougov, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

114 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

115 Busby, M. [How coronavirus has led to a UK boom in community food growing](#). The Guardian, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

116 Mutual aid groups are local, community-led support networks made up of volunteers that come together to organise and distribute resources to those in need.

117 Forrest, A. [Help The Hungry: More than 4,000 'mutual aid' groups set up across UK to help struggling neighbours get food](#). The Independent, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

118 Vizard, T. [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#). Office for National Statistics, 2021. [accessed 10/02/2021]

119 Wood, V. [Britons enjoying cleaner air, better food and stronger social bonds say they don't want to return to 'normal'](#). The Independent, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

transactions, which allowed people to phone in and pay for their order and have it collected by a neighbour or friend.¹²⁰

Overall, evidence suggests food has become an important conduit for community action during the pandemic period. As many people have been unable to leave home, and/or access shops, the immediate and greatest needs (i.e. food, medication and other essentials) have become the most common vector for volunteering.

Part four: Changing attitudes

Are pandemic food behaviours increasing inequality?

Research into dietary and mealtime habits during the lockdown and transition phase have identified differences by socio-economic background. Those from higher social grades have reported better routines and better diets during lockdown compared to those from lower social grades, for example:

- 22% of ABC1 social groups reported they were eating as a family “much more” frequently, compared to 15% of C2DE groups.
- 57% and 22% of ABC1 young people report having more snacks and junk food respectively; compared to 63% and 34% of C2DE groups; 40% of ABC1 young people and 33% of C2DE young people report eating more fruit and vegetables.
- 19% of ABC1 young people are getting more takeaways compared to pre-lockdown, versus 25% of C2DEs.¹²¹

- 21% of vulnerable adults - defined as having a Covid-19 health risk, being obese, or living in low income/high deprivation circumstances - were also eating fewer vegetables in April compared to before the pandemic began.¹²²

This suggests the positive food effects are more muted, and the negatives more marked, for particular households. The BMJ reported on emerging academic studies regarding the falls in fruit and vegetable consumption among children during the pandemic. These have led to many health professionals worrying about the longer physical and mental health problems created by poverty and poor diet in the pandemic, as well as hunger-related impaired school performance (already unequally distributed due to school closures).¹²³

The sharp end of these food inequalities comes in the form of rising food insecurity.¹²⁴ The Food Foundation reported in September that 14% of households (4 million people, including 2.3 million children) had experienced moderate or severe food insecurity since lockdown began in mid-March, compared to 11.5% before March. Their data suggests a third of food insecurity was due to lack of access (getting food in shops), while two-thirds was due to a drop in income.¹²⁵ In June, a YouGov survey released by Co-operatives UK reported that 43% of people were worried about the extra cost of providing food for their household, which rose to over 50% of those aged 25 – 44.¹²⁶ 83% of low income families reported in August that they were struggling to pay for food.¹²⁷

120 ACS. [Covid Impact Survey Reveals How Stores Have Adapted Since Lockdown](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

121 BiteBack 2030. [Hungry for Change - giving children a food system that works for them](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

122 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

123 Baraniuk, C. [Fears grow of nutritional crisis in lockdown UK](#). British Medical Journal, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

124 Defined as: ‘the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.’

125 Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

126 Wells, L. [Consumers aim to shop locally after lockdown](#). Talking Retail, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

127 Howes, S. et al. [Poverty in the Pandemic: The impact of coronavirus on low-income families and children](#). Child Poverty Action Group, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Those experiencing food insecurity buy cheaper, less nutritional food, have more 'unbalanced' meals, and eat more food past its use-by date – impacting diet and health.¹²⁸ People with food intolerances may also be unable to afford particular products, such as gluten-free ones, which has had a negative effect on their physical and emotional wellbeing.¹²⁹ The Food Foundation also found that 12% of parents had skipped meals entirely, because they could not afford or access food since March, while 2% of children had done the same.¹³⁰

Food banks and free school meals

The rise in food insecurity has seen a rise in demand for food banks, but contributions to food banks have fallen in line with lower footfall in supermarkets.¹³¹ These two trends have led to an extremely challenging situation.

The Trussell Trust only reports statistics annually and so we only have data up until April 2020. It shows a 45% increase in food parcels handed out in March 2020 (compared to March 2019), and an 89% increase in April. There is reason to think this increase would have tailed off in the summer months – FSA analysis found food bank use peaked in June, with 10% of the population using one – in July, nearly a quarter (23%) of 16-24s

had used a food bank, and 18% of families with children.¹³² The Independent Food Network's¹³³ May figures show an almost 300% increase in demand¹³⁴ and, according to the Trussell Trust, half of those families needing food in April had never used a food bank before.¹³⁵ The Trust predicts that, without government intervention, demand for food parcels will increase by 61% between October and December – meaning it will be giving out 6 parcels every minute by Christmas.¹³⁶

However, that food bank use is not an adequate estimate for food poverty – the stigma associated with it has discouraged many from using a food bank, even if that means skipping meals. The FSA's qualitative study of food insecurity concluded: "Most of the participants we saw regularly skipping meals, or unable to feed regular meals to their children, had not used them [food banks].¹³⁷ While the Trussell Trust may have seen a dramatic increase in new food banks users, this is an obvious under-estimate of those experiencing food poverty during the pandemic period.

Around 15% of state school children receive free school meals (1.3 million children). The government's voucher scheme to replace these meals when schools closed in March was welcome, but some found using the vouchers inconvenient and stigmatising,¹³⁸

128 Taylor, A. [New Food Foundation Survey: five million people living in households with children have experienced food insecurity since lockdown started](#). The Food Foundation, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

129 Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

130 The Food Foundation. [14% of UK families with children have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

131 Cipriani, V. [Charities warn Covid-19 will hit vulnerable as some foodbanks struggle for supplies](#). Civil Society News, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

132 Food Standards Agency. [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

133 Representing non-Trussell Trust affiliated Food Banks.

134 National Food Strategy. [The National Food Strategy: Part One](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

135 Westwater, H. [Foodbanks could give out six food parcels every minute this winter](#). The Big Issue, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

136 The Trussell Trust. [New report reveals how coronavirus has affected food bank use](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

137 Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

138 Connors, C. et al. [The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19](#). Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

some experienced delays and problems with downloading them, vouchers failing at supermarket checkouts, and other issues.¹³⁹ This is likely to have exacerbated food insecurity for low income families with children. Under public pressure, the government agreed to continue the voucher scheme through the summer holidays,¹⁴⁰ though questions have now been raised as to whether children who have to isolate and miss school in future will have access to these vouchers.¹⁴¹

Are attitudes towards the UK food system changing?

It is possible that people's greater appreciation of food has translated into a greater awareness of the food system and where our food has come from?

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology concluded that stockpiling in the earliest phase of the pandemic and the slow reaction of retailers to ration in-demand items "exposed the limitations of cost-efficient and streamlined supply chains to be agile and adapt to unforeseen shocks."¹⁴² Insufficient domestic food production, combined with "lean" and "just in time" supply chains,¹⁴³ means the UK relies on a small number of international suppliers for a lot of our food. This makes our food supply highly vulnerable to disruption (whether that is a sudden spike in demand, or interruptions to international distribution). The UK supplies 55% of the

food consumed in the UK and imports food from over 180 countries, with the leading supplier being the EU (28%).¹⁴⁴ Africa, Asia, North and South America each provide a 4% share of the food consumed in the UK. Importing from more countries reduces the risk of shortages if a supply route is disrupted (e.g. due to Covid-19), but for some produce, the UK is highly reliant on a few key countries or regions. For example, 69% of all fresh vegetables are imported to the UK from Spain and the Netherlands.¹⁴⁵

Of course, the public may not be aware of these systemic weaknesses. Empty supermarket shelves and rationing will have been impossible to miss, but the FSA's qualitative research with consumers in August found the structural problems which lay behind this were much less widely understood. Indeed, most people blamed consumers for panic buying, rather than the UK food system having a lack of resilience to systemic shocks.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, many people are aware of the "Pick for Britain" scheme, launched to fill the shortage of 64,000 seasonal migrant workers that have been unable to come to the UK with furloughed and unemployed British workers.¹⁴⁷ This no doubt raised awareness of how reliant the UK food system is on foreign labour, but the FSA found that most people believed (incorrectly) that the problem had since been resolved.¹⁴⁸

Overall, the FSA concluded that these

139 Lawrie, E. Covid: [What free school meals are children supposed to get?](#). BBC News, 2021 [accessed 10/02/2021]

140 Burns, J. Coronavirus: ['Humiliation' as school meal vouchers fail at till](#). BBC News, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

141 Bury Council. [Free school meals will continue for children who have to isolate](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

142 Wentworth, J. [Effects of Covid-19 on the food supply system](#). The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

143 Garnett, P., Doherty, B. et al. [Vulnerability of the United Kingdom's food supply chains exposed by Covid-19](#). Nature Food, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

144 Defra. [Food Statistics in your pocket: Global and UK supply](#). HM Government, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

145 Wentworth, J. [Effects of Covid-19 on the food supply system](#). The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

146 Connors, C., Cohen, M. et al. [Consumers and the Food System Under Covid-19](#). Bright Harbour and Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

147 Barbulescu, R. and Vargas-Silva, C. [Seasonal harvest workers during Covid-19](#). UK in a Changing Europe, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

148 Connors, C., Cohen, M. et al. [Consumers and the Food System Under Covid-19](#). Bright Harbour and Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

food crises changed only a minority of people's views and behaviours regarding the sustainability of the UK food system and the need for wholesale reform. Most people had only made minor changes to their consumption, such as buying locally and seasonably and reducing waste.¹⁴⁹ Is there other evidence that might suggest people have a better understanding of the UK's food system and its lack of resilience?

Attitudes to food workers

Instances of abuse of supermarket staff have doubled during the pandemic, due to food shortages and staff having to enforce social distancing and mask regulations among shoppers.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, polling in May found 64% of food retail workers felt their work was appreciated during the pandemic, compared to 28% before the pandemic. This compares to 76% (during) and 44% (before) among healthcare workers, meaning food retail workers have noticed a more significant public appreciation for their work.¹⁵¹ Another survey in April regarding which foreign migrants should be given British citizenship is also informative. While 77% of people said that foreign healthcare workers should be automatically granted citizenship, 50% believed supermarket and agricultural workers should be given citizenship. Surprisingly, 40% of those who voted to leave the EU also felt the same about supermarket and farm workers – indicating a deep appreciation for these frontline services keeping the nation fed.¹⁵²

Public attitudes towards UK farmers have also improved significantly, with 75% of people having a positive view of UK farming in July - the highest figure since the Farm Favourability annual survey began in 2012 and

a 6% increase since 2019.¹⁵³ The majority of respondents cited the importance of farmers' work during the lockdown as a reason for their positive view.

The survey also found 89% of the public feel farming is important to the UK economy, while 88% feel it is important that Britain has a productive farming industry – the highest figure for three years.¹⁵⁴ This could suggest that the experience of food shortages and the growth in shopping locally has taught the average consumer the importance of domestic food supply.

Attitudes to food imports

Nonetheless, we cannot grow everything on UK soil. The Pick for Britain scheme was plagued by low uptake and low productivity, such that emergency flights of Romanian workers were arranged to prevent UK fruit rotting in fields.¹⁵⁵ Clearly, producing more than the current 55% of our own food domestically would not be an easy task. Global food imports are a necessity.

However, several factors may shape public attitudes to food importation. The pandemic is believed to have started in China, as a result of animal to human transmission in a 'wet market' - these are known for little or no food safety standards. While initial fears that Covid-19 could be transmitted through infected food were quickly dispelled,¹⁵⁶ there remains heightened consumer concern about the quality and safety of food given the context in which the disease first arose. This, coupled with a desire to protect British farmers, may well shape consumer views regarding food trade.

149 Connors, C., Cohen, M. et al. [Consumers and the Food System Under Covid-19](#). Bright Harbour and Food Standards Agency, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

150 USDAW. [Abuse, threats and assaults against shopworkers double during the Coronavirus emergency - Usdaw calls for action](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

151 YouGov. [YouGov Results - Key Workers](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

152 TruthLegal. [Covid-19's Complex Influence on Attitudes Towards Immigration](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

153 NFU. [Public backing of British farmers grows to record high](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

154 Speciality Food Magazine. [Public support for British farmers rises to record high amid Covid](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

155 Goodwin, H. [British fruit pickers 44% less productive than migrant workers](#). The London Economic, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

156 Food Standards Agency. [FSA publishes guidance for consumers on coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

This is all the more important in the context of Brexit. The possibility of new trade deals with countries with less rigorous food hygiene standards are now on the table. The most controversial of those discussed thus far has been with the US, where chlorinated chicken and hormone injected beef has captured the imagination of the media and the public. Will the pandemic make consumers even more averse to these lower food standards? Or will the memory of shortages and food insecurity mean we are more open to global food deals that make us less reliant on one or two sources?¹⁵⁷

Opinion surveys regarding food standards of imported food both before and after the pandemic are consistent: the vast majority of the public do not want imports of food produced under standards which would be illegal in the UK. This affects post-Brexit trade deals with the US, but also Australia and East Asia as it relates to animal welfare standards and the use of antibiotics. However, there have been some changes in opinion if we compare results from 2018/2019 to polling carried out in June 2020. For example:

- In June 2020, 74% of those questioned were opposed to importing food produced to lower safety standards. This is 10% lower than in September 2019, when 84% of people supported the view that imports should match British standards,¹⁵⁸ but 8% higher than in October 2018, when 66% of the public felt food from countries with lower standards should not be imported.¹⁵⁹
- In June 2020, 63% of people said chlorinated chicken and hormone-treated beef (61%) should not be allowed into the UK, even if labelled.¹⁶⁰ In 2018, 57% of

people said chlorinated chicken should not be allowed in the UK, even if labelled.¹⁶¹

Unfortunately, these surveys are not directly comparable, as the questions have been worded differently year on year. Differences in how the question was posed could affect the results, but it could also be the case that food insecurity during the pandemic has prompted (slightly) more people to be open to the prospect of lower food standards in return for improved food supply post-Brexit. Nonetheless, regardless of the year on year variation, the conclusion is clear: the vast majority of the public are opposed to food imports produced with lower safety standards.

However, if the recession we are inevitably facing means people are under greater financial pressures, and food insecurity persists, shoppers may sacrifice food quality for price. British producers are not known for their international competitiveness, but rather their high animal welfare and safety standards,¹⁶² so securing lower cost imports which also meet the public's expectations on safety standards will be key to future post-Brexit trade deals.

We reflect on possible "post-pandemic" scenarios below, but it is no doubt too early to make any definitive forecasts. As the IFS concluded in September 2020: "Whether the Covid-19 pandemic will have large and lasting effects on attitudes towards globalisation is still very much unknown."¹⁶³

157 Heron, T. [Covid-19 is a reminder of how deeply the UK's food security is dependent on the EU](#). London School of Economics, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

158 The Poultry Site. [Consumers think imported food should meet British production standards, research reveals](#), 2019. [accessed 10/02/2021]

159 Loth, S. [Which? Disagrees that fears around chlorinated chicken 'unfounded'](#). Which? 2019. [accessed 10/02/2021]

160 ITV News. [Majority of Britons oppose weakening of food standards under UK-US trade deal](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

161 Loth, S. [Which? Disagrees that fears around chlorinated chicken 'unfounded'](#). Which? 2019. [accessed 10/02/2021]

162 Heron, T. [Covid-19 is a reminder of how deeply the UK's food security is dependent on the EU](#). London School of Economics, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

163 Davenport, A. and Levell, P. [Public attitudes towards trade have grown more positive in developed economies over last decade](#). Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

Part five: The future

Will our food habits change permanently?

Surveys consistently show that the vast majority of the public want food-related behaviours established during the pandemic period to continue. Family meal times, home cooked meals from scratch, less food waste, higher fruit and vegetable consumption and more local shopping are all seen as positive developments to come from this situation. Just 9% of the public surveyed in June said they wanted everything to go back to the way it was before the pandemic.¹⁶⁴

However, there are two important caveats we need to consider.

The first is to do with timing. As outlined at the start of this chapter, we can categorise the pandemic period into five stages – stockpiling, lockdown, lifting restrictions, recession, then new embedded behaviours. It is very hard to predict the shape of stage five with data from stage one and two.

Much of the evidence about food habits was gathered during the (first) lockdown phase, where there were restrictions on leaving home and shopping. When people were asked about maintaining these new habits, often a future period of time was defined as “post lockdown” (i.e. the transitional phase as restrictions eased) and not “post pandemic” (i.e. when there is little/no risk of catching Covid-19). For example, a survey in April found 89% of people said they would continue to shop locally and use alternatives to supermarkets “once the restrictions have ended”.¹⁶⁵ This is entirely understandable, as fears over social distancing in supermarkets and taking public transport will persist long after restrictions have eased.

But we certainly cannot assume from this that consumers will continue with local shopping once the fear of contracting Covid-19 has passed. Indeed, there is already some early indications that pre-pandemic shopping and eating habits returned as restrictions have eased.¹⁶⁶

The second caveat is related to the recession, as the economy is hit by restrictions on working and falls in consumer activity. Kantar’s five stage categorisation places recession as stage four, before “embedded behaviours” emerge in stage five.¹⁶⁷ This reflects the fact that greater financial pressures may change some or all of the food habits formed during lockdown and transition phases.

Financial pressures combined with new lockdown restrictions may further boost home cooking, but this may also increase the consumption of lower quality/cheaper food and food past its use-by date. Certainly the pressure on food banks will increase, which may lead to fewer fresh food or healthy food choices. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) suggests there may be a return to “recessionary behaviours”, which it first reported on in the wake of the 2008 crash and in the run up to Brexit.¹⁶⁸ This includes more eating in, but also a growth in low cost and comfort food and snacks (and, in particular, confectionary) rather than healthy options. This could dampen sales in independent shops (like butchers and greengrocers), but still see convenience shops do well if people try to avoid supermarkets. It could also (as mentioned above) shape people’s opinions of post-Brexit trade deals, if affordable food (rather than sustainable or ethically-produced food) becomes a top priority.

164 Food, Farming & Countryside Commission. [YouGov Covid-19 public polling](#), 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

165 Restorick, T. [How has Covid-19 changed our eating habits?](#). Hubbub, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

166 Scott, C. [UK grocery growth slows as market eases out of lockdown](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

167 Capelin, C. [How will lockdown and economic downturn affect our behaviour when it comes to nutrition?](#). Kantar, 2020. [accessed 10/02/2021]

168 Avison, Z. [The return of recessionary behaviours](#). AHDB, 2019. [accessed 10/02/2021]

What don't we know?

The Covid-19 pandemic is an ongoing crisis. This limits what we know about its impact on our society and economy, as well as any conclusions we draw about its longer term effects. It also shapes the type of evidence we have – public surveys which are quick to arrange and provide snapshot data are currently the primary source, but they give a fairly one-dimensional understanding of a complex social and cultural event. Based on this evidence review, we have identified the following gaps in our knowledge:

- 1. The socio-economics of behaviours and opinions.** Currently, very little data has been broken down by income, socio-economic background or by ethnicity. There is some evidence to suggest lower-income households experience fewer positive food-related behaviours, and more negative ones, but this is far from definitive as it takes no account of ethnicity, occupation, or other cross-cutting variables. We know the pandemic is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities – food is one conduit for this, but has yet to be fully explored.
- 2. Regional variations.** We have very little data on how food behaviours and opinions might vary by region, or the experiences of rural versus urban consumers. We know that access to food and dietary habits usually varies between urban and rural locations so this is a significant omission.
- 3. The food experiences of shielders and other vulnerable groups, such as disabled people.** While we have some data regarding the scale and nature of community action and charity work around food insecurity, far less is known about the diets and food experiences of those on the receiving end of foodbank boxes or reliant on neighbours cooking for them. This is likely to have important implications for growing inequality and should be explored further.
- 4. Whether the pandemic has changed people's views of globalisation, food importation and the UK food system – our supply, sustainability and ethical practices.**

We have some limited insights but we need to know more - especially given the UK's unique position rewriting trade deals as part of the Brexit process while the pandemic unfolds.

Other evidence gaps exist primarily because at the time of writing we were only at the very beginning of the pandemic crisis. These are many aspects of people's food behaviours and opinions that are unknown, simply because it is too early to tell. These include:

- 5. Life in transition – how do people's diets, meal times and shopping habits change as they navigate the relaxation and re-tightening of different parts of daily life?** Most evidence to date focuses on the initial lockdown phase. We are likely to experience multiple phases of transition, so looking more closely at the transition phase(s) will be important.
- 6. The impact of recession.** We are now feeling the economic effects of the lockdown, with a sustained decline in GDP, employment and consumer confidence lasting potentially for several years to come. This could have a bigger impact on people's diets and shopping habits than the lockdown measures themselves, but evidence from previous recessions may only have limited application given the unique characteristics of this particular recession.
- 7. The long-term impact on food behaviours and opinions.** This is a critical question, and one we cannot answer with any certainty. We have data on people's intentions regarding sustaining certain food habits – these are interesting and useful for medium-term forecasting, but they may bear little or no relation to long-term outcomes once future events unfold.

In addition to knowledge gaps, there are also methodological gaps. Given time constraints, most research at the moment relies on polling, supplemented with a small number of qualitative insights. There is also some analysis of pre-existing macro data (e.g. on food prices or importation levels). With more time and resources, other approaches are needed:

- **More wave-surveys.** They are more useful and insightful than one-off polls in allowing for analysis of changes in habits and opinions. This is particularly important during such fast-moving events.
- **More complex data analysis.** With a larger number of comprehensive surveys and wave studies, analysis exploring relationships between ethnicity, income, occupation and other variables, food habits and opinions will become possible and provide far richer insights.
- **Larger qualitative studies.** Qualitative studies take time to organise and carry out, and the practicalities of social distancing are also a factor. For this reason, we only have a very limited set of qualitative insights into food habits, but this certainly needs expanding if we are to capture the lived experience of eating, cooking and shopping in the pandemic beyond top-line statistics.
- **More nuanced studies of beliefs and behaviours as they are shaped over time.** Studies which use conjoint analysis, diary-prompted case studies, observations and other methods would do much to enrich our understanding of (for example) how families balance affordability and quality of food, and how perceptions of risk regarding food and food shopping are weighed.

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