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# Food Security in Northern Ireland

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## Food and You 2: Wave 1



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# Introduction

## The Food Standards Agency: role, remit, and responsibilities.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent Government department working to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food in Northern Ireland, England, and Wales<sup>1</sup>. The FSA's overarching mission is 'food we can trust'. The FSA's goal and vision is to ensure that food is safe, and food is what it says it is, such that consumers can make informed choices about what to eat. In Northern Ireland, the FSA is responsible for nutrition policy and has the additional goal to ensure that consumers have access to an affordable diet, now and in the future.

Food and You 2 is designed to monitor the FSA's progress against these goals and inform policy decisions by measuring self-reported consumers' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to food safety and other food issues in Northern Ireland, England and Wales on a regular basis.

## Food and You 2

Ipsos MORI were commissioned by the FSA to develop and run a new biannual survey, 'Food and You 2', carried out primarily online. A postal version of the survey was sent to respondents who had not completed the online survey. Providing a postal version enabled those who were not able, or willing to complete the survey online, to take part in Food and You 2: Wave 1. The new methodology, known as 'push-to-web', allows the FSA to continue collecting robust data using a random probability sampling approach. This methodology also allows the survey to be run more frequently, to be more responsive to new and emerging issues, and for more people to take part.

Food and You 2 replaces the FSA's face-to-face Food and You survey (2010-2018)<sup>2</sup>, Public Attitudes Tracker (2010-2019) and Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) - Consumer Attitudes Tracker (2014-2019). Due to differences in the question content, presentation and mode of response, direct comparisons should not be made between

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<sup>1</sup> In Scotland, the non-ministerial office [Food Standards Scotland](#), is responsible for ensuring food is safe to eat, consumers know what they are eating and improving nutrition.

<sup>2</sup> The Food and You survey has been an Official Statistic since 2014.

these earlier surveys and Food and You 2. More information about the history and methodology can be found in Annex A.

## Food and You 2: Wave 1

Fieldwork for Food and You 2: Wave 1 was conducted between 29<sup>th</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020. A total of 9,319 adults from 6,408 households across Northern Ireland, England and Wales completed the survey (an overall response rate of 30%). In Northern Ireland, a total of 2,079 adults from 1,389 households completed the survey (an overall response rate of 26%).

Food and You 2 is a modular survey, with ‘core’ modules being included every wave, ‘rotated’ modules being repeated annually or biennially, and ‘exclusive’ modules being asked on a one-off basis. Modules included in the Food and You 2: Wave 1 survey report include ‘Food we can trust’ (core), ‘Concerns about food’ (core), ‘Food security’ (rotated), ‘Food shopping’ (rotated) and ‘Eating at home’ (full, rotated)<sup>3</sup>. Findings for Northern Ireland, England and Wales combined are presented in the [Food and You 2 Wave 1: Key Findings](#) report. This report presents key findings for Northern Ireland from the ‘Food Security’ module from the Food and You 2: Wave 1 survey. Full results are available in the accompanying [data tables and underlying dataset](#).

## Food Security

This report explores the level of food security in Northern Ireland and how food security varied between different types of people<sup>4</sup>.

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” *World Food Summit, 1996*.

Food and You 2 uses the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to measure food security at the level of consumers. [The United States Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) has created a series of questions which indicate a respondent’s level of food security. Food and You 2 incorporates the [10 item U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module](#) and uses a 12 month

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<sup>3</sup> Two versions of the Eating at Home module have been created, a brief version which includes a limited number of questions, and a full version which includes all related questions. The brief version of the module is expected to be reported in Wave 2.

<sup>4</sup> Food security in England and Wales are reported for country level comparison.

time reference period. Respondents are classified as having high food security, marginal food security, low food security and very low food security. Respondents classified as having high food security or marginal food security are referred to as food secure. Respondents classified as having low food security and very low food security are referred to as food insecure. More information on how food security is measured can be found in Annex A.

Food and You 2: Wave 1 data were collected between 27<sup>th</sup> July and 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic which had a significant societal and economic impact and an impact on the day-to-day lives of everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic had a widely reported impact on food security in Northern Ireland, England, and Wales. It is expected that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the level of food security reported by respondents in Food and You 2<sup>5</sup>.

- Findings are not reported where the total base size is below 100 (number of respondents who were asked the question) as this base size is not representative, e.g. number of respondents with an annual household income of more than £96,000. **A single asterisk indicates that a value is not reported as the base size is below 100 (\*).**
- Findings may be reported where the base size of a sub-group is below 50 (number of respondents in a sub-group who were asked the question) as this base size may not be representative and must be interpreted with caution, e.g. number of respondents with an annual household income of more than £96,000 who were classified as food insecure). **A double asterisk indicates that a sub-group base size is below 50 (\*\*).**
- To highlight the key differences between socio-demographic and other sub-groups, variation in response profiles are typically reported only where the absolute difference is 10 percentage points or larger and is statistically significant at the 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, **some differences between socio-demographic and other sub-groups are included where the difference is less than 10 percentage points, when the finding is notable or judged to be of interest. These differences are indicated with a triple asterisk (\*\*).**

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<sup>5</sup>The COVID-19 Consumer Research (2020), FSA. Food waste and COVID-19: Life in flux (2020). WRAP. The lived experience of food insecurity under COVID-19 (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust Network. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) expect to release the 2019/2020 Family Resources Survey (FRS) in 2021. The FRS asks respondents to report experiences of food insecurity in the last 30 days so responses cannot be compared with Food and You 2.

The report presents trends between some socio-demographic and sub-groups in the population. In some cases, it was not possible to include the data of all sub-groups, however these data are available in the [full data set and tables](#).

Key information is provided for each reported question in the footnotes, including: question wording in survey (question); a single asterisk indicates that value not reported as the base size is below 100 and therefore is not representative (\*); N.B. indicates important points to consider when interpreting the results.

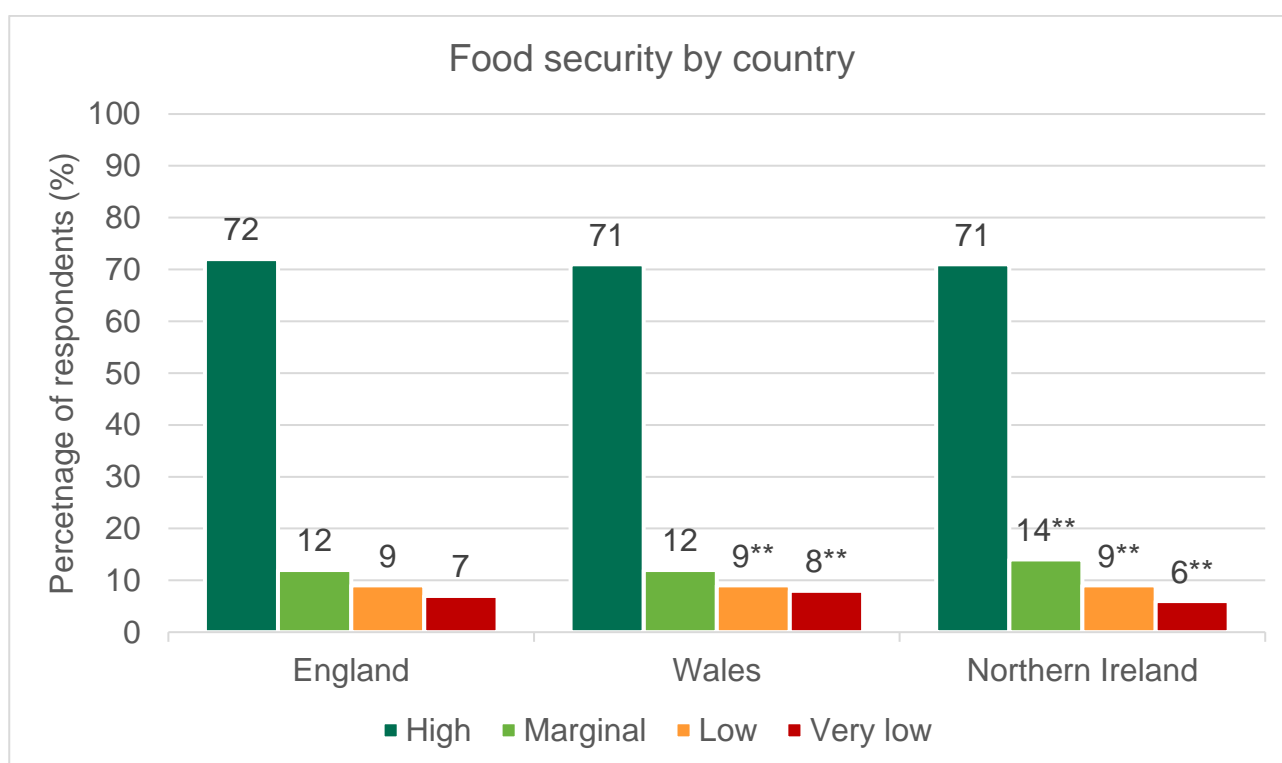
Further information about the response options, differences not shown in the main text and number of respondents presented with each question is available in the [full data set and tables](#).

# Findings

## Food Security: Northern Ireland, Wales, and England

Across Northern Ireland, England, and Wales, 84% of respondents were classified as food secure (72% high, 12% marginal) and 16% respondents were classified as food insecure (9% low, 7% very low)<sup>6, 7 \*\*\*</sup>.

**Figure 1. Food security was comparable across Northern Ireland, England, and Wales.**



Source: Food and You 2: Wave 1

Food security levels were comparable across Northern Ireland, England, and Wales<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. Over three quarters of respondents were food secure (i.e. had high or marginal food security) in Northern Ireland (85%), England (84%) and Wales (83%). Approximately one in six respondents were food insecure (i.e. had low or very low food security) in Northern Ireland (15%), England (16%) and Wales (17%), (Figure 1).

<sup>6</sup> Question/Responses: Derived variable, see [USDA Food Security guidance](#) and Technical Report. Base= 9319, all respondents. N.B. High and marginal food security referred to as food secure. Low or very low food security referred to as food insecure.

<sup>7</sup> A more detailed Food Security report is expected to be released 2021-2022.



# Food Security in Northern Ireland

## Food security between different types of people

The reported level of food security varied between different types of people<sup>8</sup>:

- Gender: food security did not differ by gender, 84% of male and 85% of female respondents were food secure \*\*\*.
- Children (under 16 years) in household: 87% of households without children (under 16 years) reported that they were food secure compared to 80% of households with children (under 16 years) \*\*\*.
- Children (under 6 years) in household: 86% of households with no children (under 6 years) reported that they were food secure compared to 77% of households with children (under 6 years) \*\*\*.
- Employment status: 93% of retired respondents reported that they were food secure compared to 86% of those who were working and 73% of those who were not working.
- NS-SEC: food security was more likely to be reported by respondents in some occupational groups (e.g. managerial, administrative, and professional occupations 90%) compared to those who were in semi-routine and routine occupations (73%)<sup>9</sup>.
- Relationship status: 90% of respondents who were married or in a civil partnership reported being food secure compared to 78% of those who were separated, widowed or divorced and 77% of those who were single, not living as a couple.
- NIMDM: food security was more likely to be reported by respondents who lived in a less deprived area (e.g. NIMDM 5 - 92%) compared to those who lived in a more deprived area (e.g. NIMDM 1 - 76%)<sup>10</sup>.

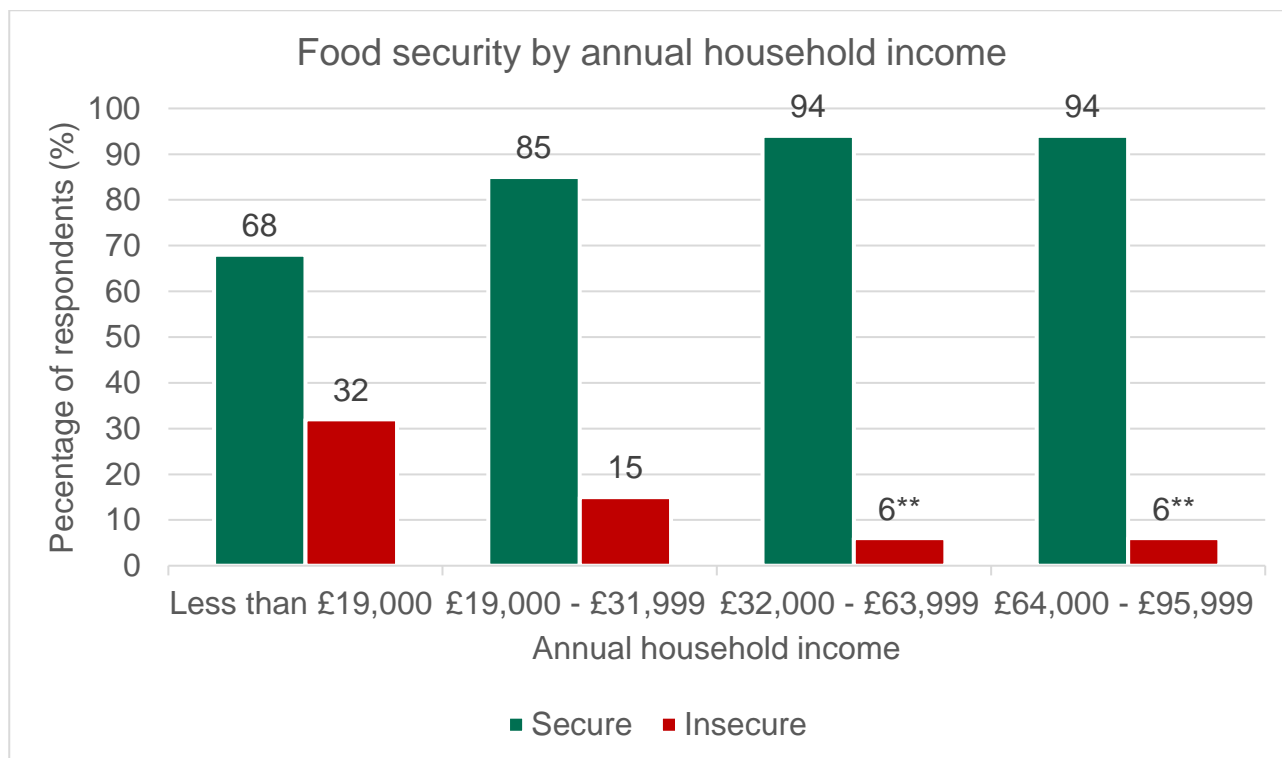
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<sup>8</sup> Question/Responses: Derived variable, see [USDA Food Security guidance](#) and Technical Report. Base= 2079, all respondents, Northern Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> **NS-SEC** (The National Statistics Socio-economic classification) is a classification system which provides an indication of socio-economic position based on occupation and employment status.

<sup>10</sup> [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures \(NIMDM\)](#) is the official measure of relative deprivation based on a geographical area. NIMDM classification is assigned by postcode or place name. NIMDM is a multidimensional calculation which is intended to represent the living conditions in the area, including income, employment, health, education, access to services, housing, community safety and physical environment.

**Figure 2. Food security was more common in households with a higher income.**



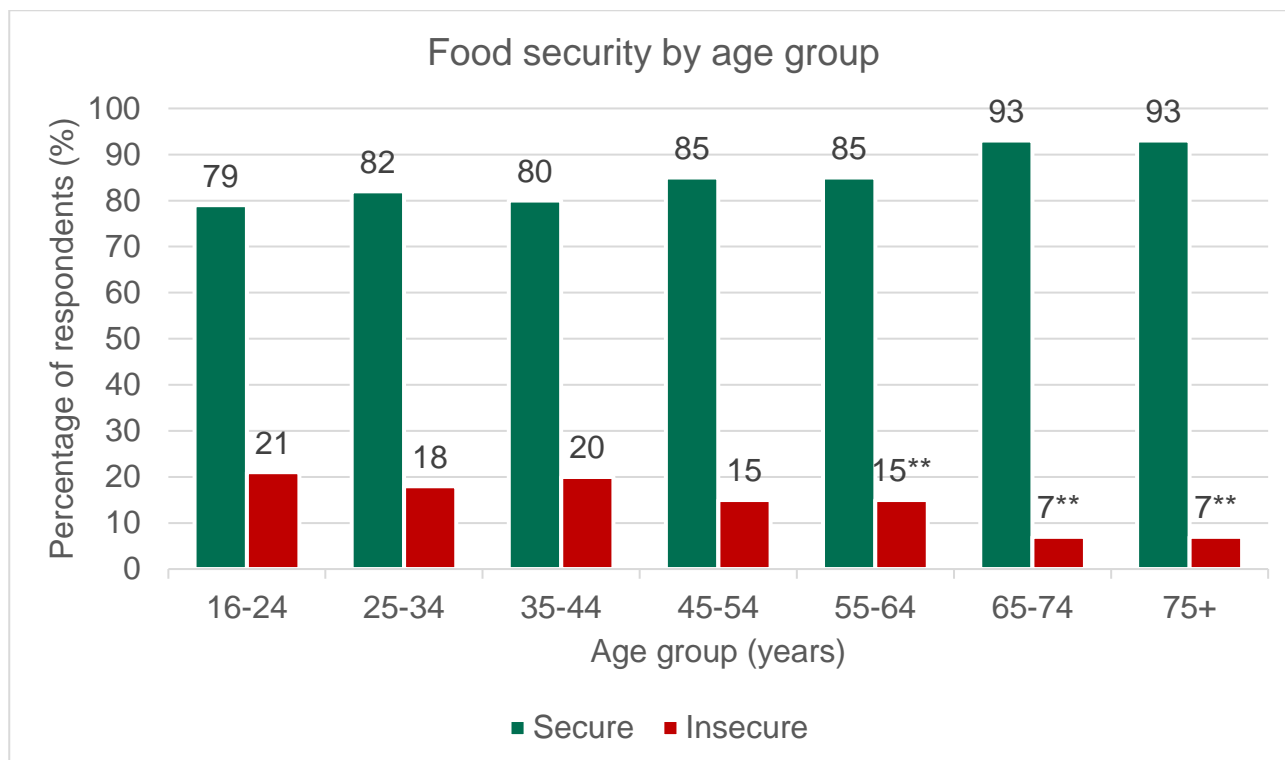
Source: Food and You 2: Wave 1

Over two thirds of respondents within each household income band were classified as food secure. More than 9 in 10 respondents with a household income over £32,000 were food secure. As expected, food insecurity was more likely to have been reported in lower income households. A third of households (32%) with an income below £19,000 reported that they had experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months compared to 15% of those with an income of £19,000-£31,999, (Figure 2)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Annual household income: More than £96,000\*

**Figure 3. Food security was more common in older adults.**



Source: Food and You 2: Wave 1

Food security varied by age group. Older adults were more likely to report that they were food secure than younger adults. Correspondingly, younger adults were more likely to report that they were food insecure than older adults, (Figure 3).

## Changes in eating habits

Respondents were asked to indicate if and how their eating habits had changed over the last 12 months. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact this has had on the day-to-day lives of consumers, it is expected that eating habits changed more in the last 12 months than in a typical 12-month period.

Eating habits had changed for most respondents with only 15% of respondents indicating that there had been no change in their eating habits. The most common changes related to what and where respondents ate (eaten out less 56%, eaten at home more 57%, cooked more at home 55%, eaten fewer take-aways 46%), reducing food costs (bought items on special offer 40%, changed where you buy food for cheaper alternatives 23%, changed the food you buy for cheaper alternatives 21%) and increased positive food

management behaviours (prepared food that could be kept as leftovers 21%, made more packed lunches 22%)<sup>12, 13</sup>.

Respondents who had reported a change in their eating habits in the last 12 months were asked to indicate why their eating habits had changed. The main cause of changes in eating habits were COVID-19 and lockdown (73%), health reasons (44%) and financial reasons (35%)<sup>14</sup>.

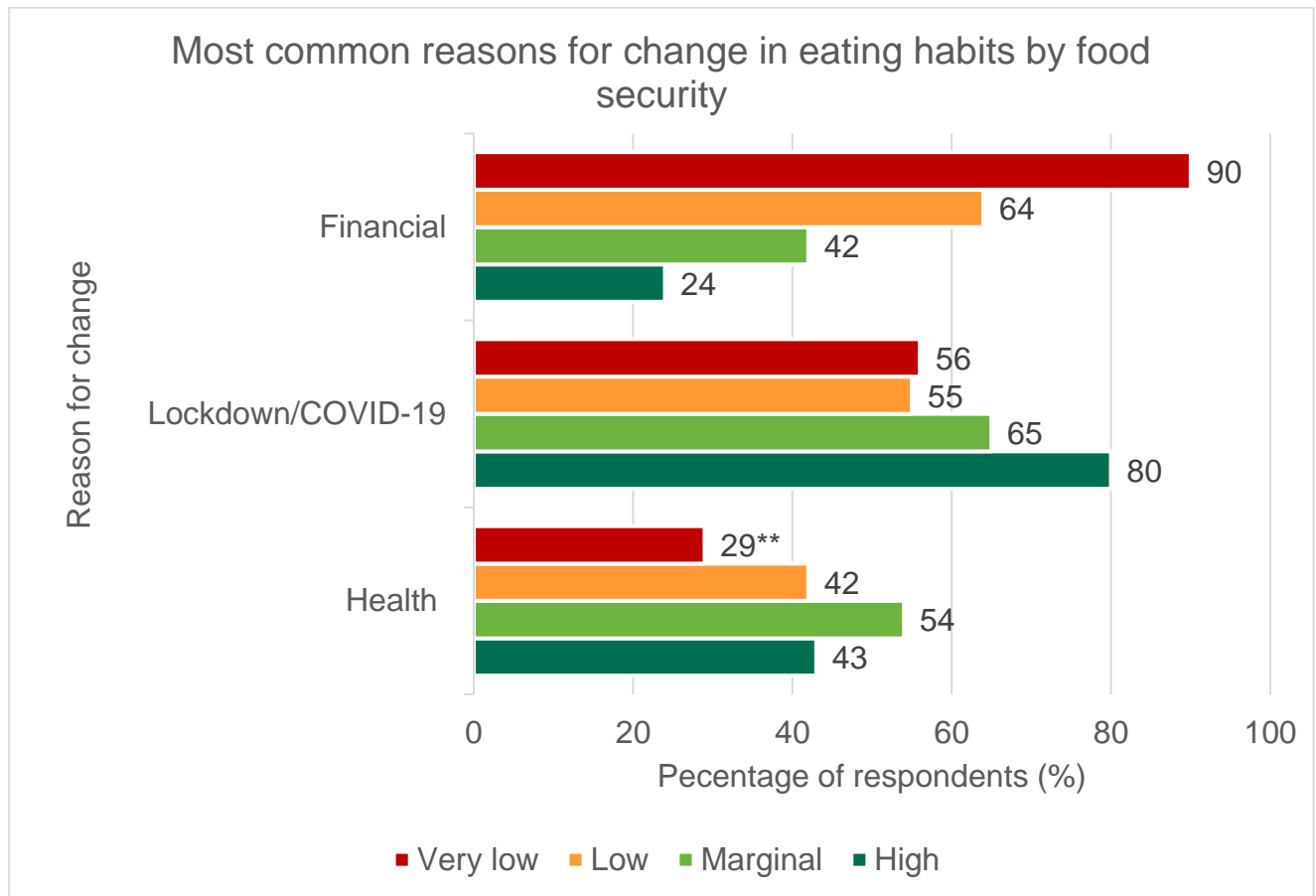
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<sup>12</sup> Question: Have you, or has anyone in your household, made any of these changes to your eating habits in the last 12 months? Responses (Additional differences): Eaten at home more, Eaten fewer take-aways, Eaten out less, Made packed lunches more (22%), Bought items that were on special offer, Changed where you buy food for cheaper alternatives, Changed the food you buy to cheaper alternatives, Prepared food that could be kept as leftovers more, Kept leftovers for longer before eating (5%), Eaten food past its use-by date more (6%), Bought food close to its use-by date more (14%), Used a food bank/emergency food (2%)\*\*, Other (1%)\*\*, No, I/we haven't made any changes. Base= 2079, all respondents, Northern Ireland.

<sup>13</sup> WRAP has reported [citizen changes in citizen food purchasing, management as waste behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

<sup>14</sup> Question: Thinking about the changes to eating habits that you have made in the last 12 months, why did you make these changes? Responses (additional differences): Financial reasons, Health reasons, Food safety reasons (4%), Due to the bad or unpleasant physical reaction that certain foods cause (2%)\*\*, Because of lockdown/covid-19, Other (4%), Prefer not to say (1%)\*\*. Base= 1737, all respondents who have changed their eating habits in the last 12 months, Northern Ireland.

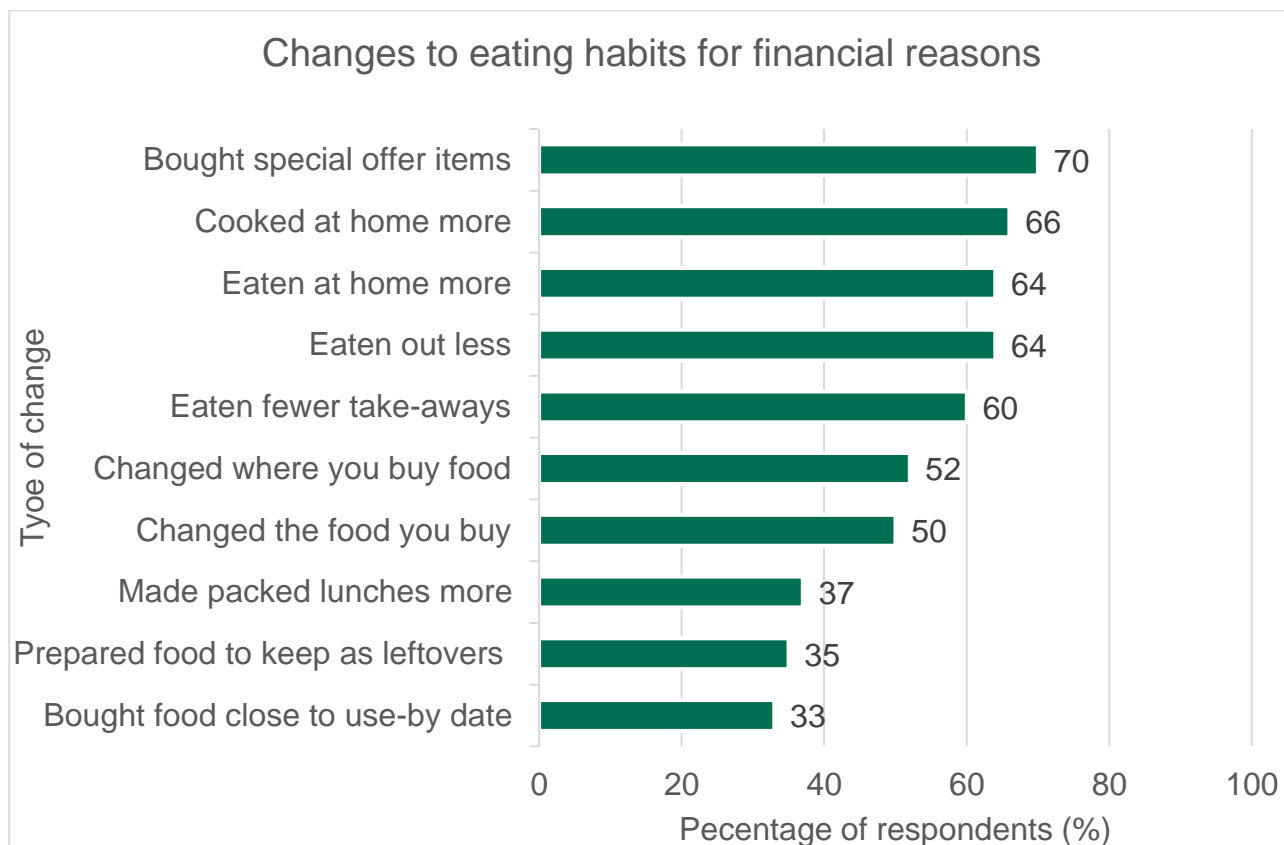
**Figure 4. Food insecure respondents were more likely to have changed eating habits due to financial reasons**



Source: Food and You 2: Wave 1

The most common reason for changes in eating habits varied by respondent food security classification. Respondents who were food insecure (i.e. very low and low food security) were more likely to have changed eating habits due to financial reasons than COVID-19 and lockdown, and were less likely to have changed eating habits for health reasons, (Figure 4).

**Figure 5. Ten most common changes in eating habits for financial reasons.**



Source: Food and You 2: Wave 1

Of the respondents who had changed their eating habits in the last 12 months for financial reasons, the most common changes related to what and where respondents ate (cooked more at home 66%, eaten out less 64%, eaten at home more 64%, eaten fewer take-aways 60%) and reducing food costs (bought items on special offer 70%, changed where you buy food 52%, changed the food you buy for cheaper alternatives 50%), (Figure 5). In addition, 13% of respondents reported that they had eaten food past its use-by date, 12% had kept leftovers for longer before eating and 6%\*\* reported that they had used a food bank or emergency food<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Question: Have you, or has anyone in your household, made any of these changes to your eating habits in the last 12 months? Responses (additional differences): Eaten at home more, Eaten fewer take-aways, Eaten out less, Made packed lunches more, Bought items that were on special offer, Changed where you buy food for cheaper alternatives, Changed the food you buy to cheaper alternatives, Prepared food that could be kept as leftovers more, Kept leftovers for longer before eating, Eaten food past its use-by date more, Bought food close to its use-by date more, Used a food bank/emergency food, Other (1%)\*\*. Base= 583, all respondents who have changed their eating habits in the last 12 months for financial reasons.

The prevalence of changes in eating habits for financial reasons varied between different types of people in the following ways:

- Age group: older respondents were less likely to have changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to those in younger respondents. For example, 26% of respondents aged 55-64 years changed their eating habits for financial reasons, compared to 44% of those aged 25-34 years.
- Household size: 29% of respondents in 2-person households had changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to 39% of those in 3-person households and 40% of those in 4-person households.
- Children (under 16 years) in the household: 44% of respondents with children (under 16 years) in the household changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to 30% of those with no children (under 16 years) in the household.
- Children (under 6 years) in the household: 41% of respondents with children (under 6 years) in the household changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to 33% of those with no children (under 6 years) in the household\*\*\*.
- Annual household income: respondents with a lower income were more likely to have changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to those with a higher income. For example, 47% of those with an income below £19,000 changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to 28% of those with an income of £32,000-63,999.
- Employment status: respondents who were not working (48%) or working (37%) were more likely to have changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to retired respondents (12%) \*\*.
- Responsibility for cooking: 36% of respondents who were responsible for cooking changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to 25% of those who do not cook.
- Relationship status: respondents who were single, not living as a couple (44%) were more likely to have changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to respondents who were married or in a civil partnership (31%).
- NIMDM: respondents who lived in more deprived areas (e.g. NIMDM 1 45%) were more likely to have changed their eating habits for financial reasons compared to respondents who lived in a less deprived areas (e.g. NIMDM 5 26%).

## Free school meals, meal clubs and Healthy Start vouchers

Over three-quarters (79%) of respondents who had children aged 7-15 years reported that their child/children do not receive free school meals. One in five (21%) respondents reported that their child/children do receive free school meals<sup>16</sup>.

Less than one in five (19%) respondents who had children aged 5-15 years reported in the last 12 months that their child/children had attended a breakfast club before school. Approximately one in 20 (5%)\*\* reported that their child/children had attended an after-school club where they received a meal, and 2%\*\* reported that their child/children had attended a lunch and activity club held during the school holidays. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents reported that their child/children had not attended any of these events in the last 12 months<sup>17</sup>.

Nine in ten respondents (90%) reported that they do not receive Healthy Start vouchers, and 4%\*\* of respondents reported that they do receive Healthy Start vouchers<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Question: Does any child receive free school meals? Responses (additional differences): Yes, No, Don't know (<1%)\*\*, Prefer not to say (0%). Base= 405, all respondents with child(ren) aged 7 - 15 in their household, Northern Ireland.

<sup>17</sup> Question: Did your child/any of the children in your household attend any of the following in the past 12 months? Responses (additional differences): A breakfast club before school, An after-school club where they also received a meal (tea/dinner), A lunch and activity club that ran only during school holidays, None of these, Don't know (4%)\*\*. Base= 453, all respondents with child(ren) aged 5 - 15 in household, Northern Ireland.

<sup>18</sup> Question: Do you receive Healthy Start vouchers for yourself or your children? Responses (additional differences): Yes, No, Don't know (6%)\*\*, Prefer not to say. Base= 350, all online respondents who are pregnant or have child(ren) aged 0 - 4 in household, and all those who completed the paper questionnaire and have child(ren) aged 0 - 15 years in household, Northern Ireland.

N.B Data were collected 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020, partly within the summer holiday period and during the COVID-19 pandemic which may have impacted responses.



# Annex A: Food and You 2: Wave 1

## Background

In 2018 the [Advisory Committee for Social Science](#) (ACSS) established a new Food and You Working Group to review the methodology, scope and focus of the Food and You survey. The Food and You Working Group provided a [series of recommendations](#) on the future direction of the Food and You survey to the FSA and ACSS in April 2019. Food and You 2 was developed from the recommendations.

The Food and You 2 survey has replaced the biennial Food and You survey (2010-2018), biannual Public Attitudes Tracker (2010-2019) and annual Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) Consumer Attitudes Tracker (2014-2019). The Food and You survey has been an Official Statistic since 2014.

## Methodology

The Food and You 2 survey is commissioned by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The fieldwork is conducted by Ipsos MORI. Food and You 2 is a biannual survey. Fieldwork for Wave 1 was conducted from 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Food and You 2 is a sequential mixed-mode ‘push-to-web’ survey. A random sample of addresses (selected from the Royal Mail’s Postcode Address File) received a letter inviting up to two adults (aged 16 or over) in the household to complete the online survey. A first reminder letter was sent to households that had not responded to the initial invitation. A postal version of the survey accompanied the second reminder letter for those who did not have access to the internet or preferred to complete a postal version of the survey. This helps to reduce the response bias that otherwise occurs with online-only surveys. This method is accepted for government surveys and national statistics. A third and final reminder was sent to households if the online survey had not been completed. Respondents were given a gift voucher for completing the survey. Further details about the methodology are available in the [Technical Report](#). Due to the difference in methodology between the Public Attitudes Tracker, FHRS Consumer Attitudes Tracker and Food and You survey (2010-2018) it is not possible to compare the data collected in Food and You 2 (2020 onward) with these earlier data.

The sample of main and reserve addresses was stratified by region (with Northern Ireland, England and Wales being treated as separate regions), and within region (or country) by district in Northern Ireland (or by local authority in England and Wales) to ensure that the issued sample was spread proportionately across the local authorities. National deprivation scores were used as the final level of stratification within the local authorities - Northern Ireland, the [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure \(NIMDM\)](#), England the [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\)](#), and in Wales the [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation \(WIMD\)](#).

Due to limited space and complexity of the survey design it was not possible to include all the questions asked in the online survey in the postal version of the survey. Two versions of the postal survey were created to increase the coverage of the questions. Food and You 2 is a modular survey, with some modules being asked every wave and others on a less frequent basis.

All data collected by Food and You 2 are self-reported. The data are the respondents own reported attitudes, knowledge and behaviour relating to food safety and food issues. As a social research survey, Food and You 2 cannot report observed behaviours. Observed behaviour in kitchens has been reported in [Kitchen Life](#), an ethnographic study which used a combination of observation, video observation and interviews to gain insight into domestic kitchen practices. This study will be updated through Kitchen Life 2, in progress now and due to report in 2023.

The minimum target sample size for the survey is 4,000 households (1,000 in Northern Ireland, 2,000 in England, 1,000 in Wales), with up to two adults in each household invited to take part as mentioned above. For Wave 1 a total of 9,319 adults from 6,408 households across Northern Ireland (2,079 adults), England (5,140 adults), and Wales (2,100 adults), completed the survey in. An overall response rate of 30% was achieved (Northern Ireland 26%, England 33%, Wales 30%). Sixty-four per cent of respondents completed the survey online and 36% completed the postal version of the survey. The postal responses from 47 respondents were removed from the data set as the respondent had completed both the online and postal survey. Further details about the response rates are available in the [Technical Report](#).

Weighting was applied to ensure the data are as close as possible to being representative of the socio-demographic and sub-groups in the population, as is usual practice in government surveys. The weighting applied to the Food and You 2 data helps to compensate for variations in within-household individual selection, for response bias, and for the fact that some questions were only asked in one of the postal surveys. Further details about weighting approach used and the weights applied to the Food and You 2 data are available in the [Technical Report](#).

The data have been checked and verified by six members of Ipsos MORI and two members of the FSA Statistics branch. Descriptive analysis and statistical tests have been performed by Ipsos MORI. Quantum (statistical software) was used by Ipsos MORI to calculate the descriptive analysis and statistical tests (t-tests). Exact results may vary by statistical method and analysis package used.

The p-values that test for statistical significance are based on t-tests comparing the weighted proportions for a given response within that socio-demographic and sub-group breakdown. An adjustment has been made for the effective sample size after weighting, but no correction is made for multiple comparisons.

Reported differences between socio-demographic and sub-groups typically have a minimum difference of 10 percentage points between groups and are statistically significant at the 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, some differences between respondent

groups are included where the difference is less than 10 percentage points when the finding is notable or of interest. Percentage calculations are based only on respondents who provided a response. Reported values and calculations are based on weighted totals.

## Technical terms and definitions

1. As mentioned above, statistical significance is indicated at the 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that where a significant difference is reported, there is reasonable confidence that the reported difference is reflective of a real difference at the population level. Statistical significance refers to the probability of obtaining the observed result or more extreme, assuming the null hypothesis is true, i.e. the smaller the p-value, the greater the statistical evidence is to reject the null hypothesis of no difference (e.g. between two groups). Not all significant differences observed in the data are stated in this report.
2. Food security means that all people always have access to enough food for a healthy and active lifestyle ([World Food Summit, 1996](#)). [The United States Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) has created a series of questions which indicate a respondent's level of food security. Food and You 2 incorporates the [10 item U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module](#) and uses a 12 month time reference period. Respondents are classified as having high food security, marginal food security, low food security and very low food security.
3. [NS-SEC](#) (The National Statistics Socio-economic classification) is a classification system which provides an indication of socio-economic position based on occupation and employment status.
4. Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM) is the official measure of relative deprivation based of a geographical area. NIMDM classification is assigned by postcode or place name. NIMDM is a multidimensional calculation which is intended to represent the living conditions in the area, including income, employment, health, education, access to services, housing, community safety and physical environment. Small areas are ranked by NIMDM; this is done separately for [Northern Ireland](#), [England](#), and [Wales](#).

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