

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

### Food and You Update

#### *Background*

1. Food and You is the FSA's flagship consumer survey measuring self-reported attitudes, behaviour and knowledge regarding food safety and other food-related issues (e.g. food intolerance, food security, eating outside the home). The survey is issued to a random probability sample of approximately 3,000 adults (over 16) living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and is currently administered via a face-to-face interview lasting 40-55 minutes. The survey has been conducted biennially since 2010 and since 2014 results have been published as an Official Statistic.

#### *Latest findings*

2. The latest wave of Food and You fieldwork (Wave 5) was conducted by NatCen between June and December 2018. The total achieved sample size was 3,069 (2,066 in England, 536 in Wales and 467 in Northern Ireland), a response rate of 48%. [Combined results](#) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland based on the core sample were published in April 2019. Subsequent reports presenting [country comparisons](#), and country-specific data for [Wales](#), and [Northern Ireland](#) (including a module on healthy eating) based on the boosted and reserve samples were published between May and July 2019. A [technical](#) and [questionnaire development](#) report were also published.
3. The key findings relating to food safety are presented in Annex A.

#### *Secondary analysis*

4. Following the publication of the Wave 5 reports, the FSA commissioned four secondary analysis papers exploring the following areas in more detail:
  - a. [Trust in food and the FSA](#)
  - b. [Consumers with food hypersensitivities](#)
  - c. [The current food landscape across England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#)
  - d. [The food landscape in Wales](#)

*The future of Food and You*

5. In April 2018 a new Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) was appointed, superseding the former Social Science Research Committee (SSRC).<sup>1</sup> A sub-group of the ACSS was established to review Food and You and make recommendations to the FSA on the future direction of the survey.
6. In line with the ACSS's [recommendations](#) and the Government's Digital Transformation (*digital by default*) programme, in 2020 the FSA will be launching a new Food and You survey ('Food and You 2') which will move away from traditional face-to-face interviewing towards a 'push-to-web' methodology (online survey with a paper follow-up)<sup>2</sup>.
7. Retaining a random probability sampling approach, this new methodology will be more cost-effective allowing the FSA to increase sample sizes in Northern Ireland and Wales to 1,000 households (500 in Wave 5) and the overall sample size to 4,000 households (3,000 in Wave 5). Unlike in previous waves, up to two adults in each household will be invited to participate and it is anticipated that the overall sample size will be c5,600 adults.
8. Another advantage of moving away from a face-to-face survey, where an interviewer is present, towards a self-completion mode is that respondents are less likely to respond in a 'socially desirable'<sup>3</sup> manner resulting in more accurate data being collected, particularly on food hygiene behaviour (e.g. hand washing) and sensitive topics (such as food insecurity).
9. Noting the benefits of this new methodology, the FSA will be incorporating the questions currently asked in the FSA's biannual Public Attitudes Tracker and annual Food Hygiene Rating Scheme Tracker into Food and You 2. Not only will this help to streamline the FSA's consumer research programme, it will also provide an opportunity to explore the relationship between attitudes and behaviours which are currently asked about separately.

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<sup>1</sup> The FSA established the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC) in 2008 to help the Agency strengthen its capacity for social science research and to provide advice to the Agency about how it gathers and uses social science evidence. In 2016 the FSA's Triennial Review of its Scientific Advisory Committees recommended that the future work programme and membership of the SSRC was reviewed to reflect the new priorities of the FSA as outlined in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and this led to the formation of the new Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS).

<sup>2</sup> A letter will be sent to randomly selected addresses inviting up to two adults to go online and complete the online questionnaire. Three reminder letters will be issued to non-responding addresses with paper questionnaires being included with the second reminder to ensure that off-liners are able to participate.

<sup>3</sup> Social desirability bias refers to the tendency for a respondent to answer questions so that they are viewed favourably by others.

10. To keep the online survey length to the recommended 20-30 minutes, a modular approach will be adopted with question topics rotated across survey waves. The frequency of surveying will be increased to 6 months to ensure full coverage of the FSA's areas of interest. This will also allow the FSA to be more flexible in responding to research needs and evidence gaps as they arise.
11. Due to the number of methodological changes and the challenges and costs associated with investigating mode effects, the FSA will be accepting a break in the time-series so that Food and You 2 can be fully optimised for this new mode.

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## Annex A

### Food and You Wave 5 – Key findings on food safety

#### *Index of Recommended Practice<sup>4</sup>*

- The mean Index of Recommended Practice (IRP) score was 67 (the same as in wave 4).
- Women had a significantly higher IRP score than men (69, compared with 64).
- The youngest respondents (aged 16 to 24) had a lower mean IRP score (62) than other age groups (between 66 and 69).
- Those who were married, in civil partnerships or living with a partner had a higher mean IRP score (68) than respondents who were not (64).
- Respondents of white ethnicity had a higher IRP score than other ethnic groups (68 and 62 respectively).
- Unchanged from Wave 4, respondents in Northern Ireland had the highest average IRP scores (72, compared with 69 in Wales and 67 in England).

#### *Cleanliness*

- The proportions of those who reported always washing their hands, both before starting to prepare or cook food and immediately after handling raw meat, poultry or fish have been consistently high across waves 1-5.
- Women were more likely to report always washing their hands than men.

#### *Cooking and reheating food*

- The proportions of respondents who reported that they never ate meat or meat products if the meat was pink or had pink/red juices, in line with recommended practice, was 88% for chicken or turkey, 79% for sausages, 73% for pork and 62% for burgers.
- The majority of respondents said that they would reheat food no more than once (80%) while 8% reported that they would reheat food twice or more.

#### *Chilling and defrosting food*

- Half (50%) of respondents thought their fridge should be between 0 and 5°C (the recommended temperature).
- Of respondents who had a fridge, 50% reported that they (or someone else) checked the temperature.

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<sup>4</sup> The IRP is a composite measure of food hygiene knowledge and behaviours within the home, which includes questions from each of the five food safety domains. Questions were selected for the IRP because they mapped onto practices that, if not followed, were more likely to increase the risk of foodborne disease. Each item scores 1 for responses in line with recommended practice or 0 for responses not in line with recommended practice. The overall score is then converted to a score out of 100 with a higher score indicating more reported behaviours that are in line with recommended food safety practice.

- Respondents in Northern Ireland were most likely to know the recommended fridge temperature (57% in Northern Ireland compared with 50% in England and 46% in Wales).
- The most common method used for defrosting meat or fish was leaving it at room temperature (which is not recommended) (54%).

#### *Cross-contamination*

- Less than half of respondents (45%) said that they always used different chopping boards for different foods, while 21% never did.
- The proportion of respondents who said they never washed raw chicken rose from 41% to 49% between Waves 3 and 4 and has stayed at the same level in Wave 5.
- Respondents in Northern Ireland were also most likely to say that they never washed raw chicken (62% of respondents in Northern Ireland never did this, compared with 58% in Wales and 49% in England).

#### *Assessing whether food is safety to eat*

- Respondents were asked how they would tell whether different types of foods were safe to eat or use in cooking. Respondents were most likely to say that they assessed the safety of these foods by how they smelt; specifically milk and yoghurt (73%), raw meat (66%), fish excluding shellfish (62%) and eggs (33%). In assessing whether cheese was safe to eat respondents were most likely to rely on how it looked (64%).
- The use-by date was mentioned by a minority of respondents as a way to assess the safety of milk and yoghurt (29%), raw meat (28%), eggs (25%), cheese (21%), and fish or shellfish (21%).
- Respondents in Northern Ireland were most likely to say that they checked use-by dates when about to prepare or cook food (78% always did so, compared with 64% in Wales and 62% in England).

#### *Information sources*

- The most common sources of information about food safety were family and friends (46%), product packaging (36%) and food TV shows and cooking programmes (30%).