

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

The consumer story in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

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Social science is integral to achieving the aims of the Food Standards Agency. They collect and analyse primary data to inform their policy making, risk assessment and risk management. During my internship,

I conducted a research project which aimed to paint a more complete picture of the public attitudes towards food related issues and food safety in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

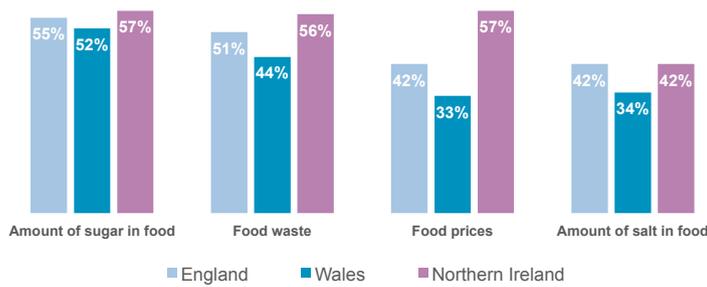
Objectives

The wider aim of my research project was to explore public attitudes towards food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by analysing data from the Public Attitudes Tracker Survey (2010-2018) and the Food and You Survey (2010-2016).

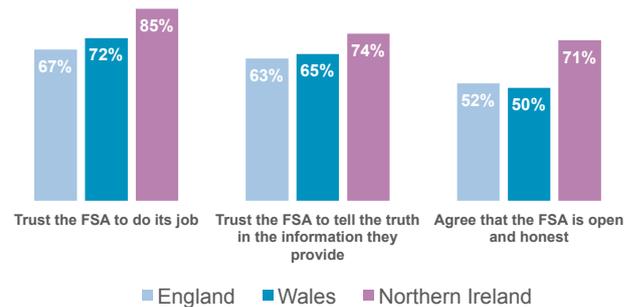
The project also aimed to identify country specific trends, changes in the attitudes over time and variation in attitudes among different socioeconomic groups. In particular, the project sought to examine

consumer's key food concerns, their awareness of food hygiene standards and their levels of trust in the food industry, food labelling and the Food Standards Agency itself.

The project was bespoke in that it was the first research project within the Food Standards Agency to combine the analysis of their two largest datasets.



Graph showing percentage of respondents concerned about key food issues in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Source: Public Attitudes Tracker Wave 16, May 2018



Graph showing the percentage of respondents who trust the Food Standards Agency in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Source: Public Attitudes Tracker Wave 16, May 2018

Method

I used SPSS to split the datasets to analyse the data on a country specific level. I also used SPSS to recode several variables to avoid small cell count. Lastly, I used SPSS and Excel to analyse the data using descriptive statistics such as cross tabulations.

One limitation of the data analysis was that the base sample sizes in Northern Ireland and Wales were smaller than that of England. As a result, the differences observed between the three different countries may be overstated. Secondly, the survey questions change over time to reflect the Food Standards Agency's changing priorities and responsibilities. Consequently, it was not possible to analyse changes in attitudes over time in all instances.

I also used 'Venggage' to produce infographics to present my data to fulfill the aim of 'telling a story'. This was a more accessible way of presenting the analysis to an audience which was not as familiar with data.

Results and Conclusions

My findings suggest that attitudes towards food related issues vary largely between each country. The data shows that respondents in Northern Ireland are more concerned about food issues than those in Wales and

England. The top food concern in Northern Ireland was animal welfare, whilst respondents in Wales and England were most concerned about the amount of sugar in food. Across all three different countries, females, those in top professional positions and 50-65 year olds were the most concerned about food related issues.

My findings also found that over time, concern about food prices has decreased in England but increased in Northern Ireland. One explanation of this may be that, compared to England and Wales, a larger percentage of respondents in Northern Ireland lived in low food security households.

Across all nations, respondents displayed a high awareness of food hygiene standards when eating out. The most common methods used to inform the standard of hygiene in a restaurant was the appearance of the food outlet, the appearance of the staff working there and food hygiene stickers. Food hygiene stickers were more effective in Wales than England.

Lastly, the data shows that those in Northern Ireland are the most trusting of food labelling, the food industry and the Food Standards Agency.

The most commonly cited reasons for lacking confidence in food labelling was not believing the ingredients on the label and the horse meat scandal.

As a result of lacking confidence in food labelling, respondents in all three countries most commonly took no action or read food labels more closely.