

# Brexit Consumer Research

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**Topic of focus: Food**

# Contents

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- This slidepack contains the results from our Brexit consumer research programme focussing on the topic of food. Results from both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research are included. The slidepack is divided into the following sections:
  - Consumer priorities when purchasing and consuming food
  - Consumer knowledge of the food sector
  - Perceived impact of Brexit on the food sector and subsequent priorities

## Summary of research

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- The Which? Brexit consumer research programme consists of a quarterly quantitative tracker survey and a series of online communities. The aim of the research is to understand how consumers feel about the impact of Brexit – what their priorities are in terms of rights, standards, safety and prices, and to gauge their views on a number of specific topics. The survey contains a 'core' section of questions that are tracked over time and also has a flexible section of 10 questions, which can be changed for every wave of fieldwork. Selected data from the tracker is available on the Which? Consumer Insight website: <https://consumerinsight.which.co.uk/brexit>
- The first wave of the Brexit tracker was carried out in September 2017, and will continue until July 2019.
- The first online community ran in November 2017 on the subject of food, and a second in April 2018 on travel & holidays. A further 3 will take place before July 2019.

# Methodology

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## *Qualitative*

- Which?, in conjunction with the research agency Populus, created an online community of 21 members from across the UK, focused on Brexit & food. The respondents came from across the UK, and were a mix of genders, ages and had varying attitudes towards the UK leaving the EU. This group ran for 10 days, from 20<sup>th</sup> November until 29<sup>th</sup> November. Each day had a specific theme – such as ‘food standards’ – with associated stimuli to read, such as news articles, videos and briefings. External stakeholder views were sought on the structure and content of the discussions to ensure balance.

## *Quantitative*

- Populus, on behalf of Which?, run a quarterly online survey. For the latest wave, they surveyed 2073 UK adults online between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Data were weighted to be demographically representative of the UK population. A subsection of bespoke questions on food were run on the second wave, conducted between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January 2018.



# Consumer priorities

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**Food**

# Key Findings

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## Importance of price

When asked to think about what issues they prioritise when food shopping, price is an important factor. 23% ranked price as their top concern when food shopping, whilst 51% ranked it in their top 3 priorities. When asked to describe their purchasing decisions in more detail, it is clear that price is not a factor working in isolation. Factors such as perceived quality, safety and taste play a role, with consumers trading off between them.

## Perceptions of quality

People's definition of quality is interchangeable – it depends on what and where they're eating. Price was often used as a heuristic to justify the quality of food, but other characteristics also played a role when assessing the quality of foods, such as: how it had been produced including animal welfare concerns, where it had been produced + perceptions of freshness and familiarity with brand/retailer.

# Key Findings

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## Importance of country of origin

Whilst only 11% of consumers put country of origin as a top 3 concern when food shopping, there are some products which consumers do feel are important to come from the UK. Milk, eggs, other dairy products and poultry all had three quarters or more of consumers saying it is important they are produced in the UK. When asked to describe purchases where they specifically look for non-UK produced food, the most common items suggested were fruit and veg that is either not produced in the UK or is out of season.

## Motivations for buying from the UK

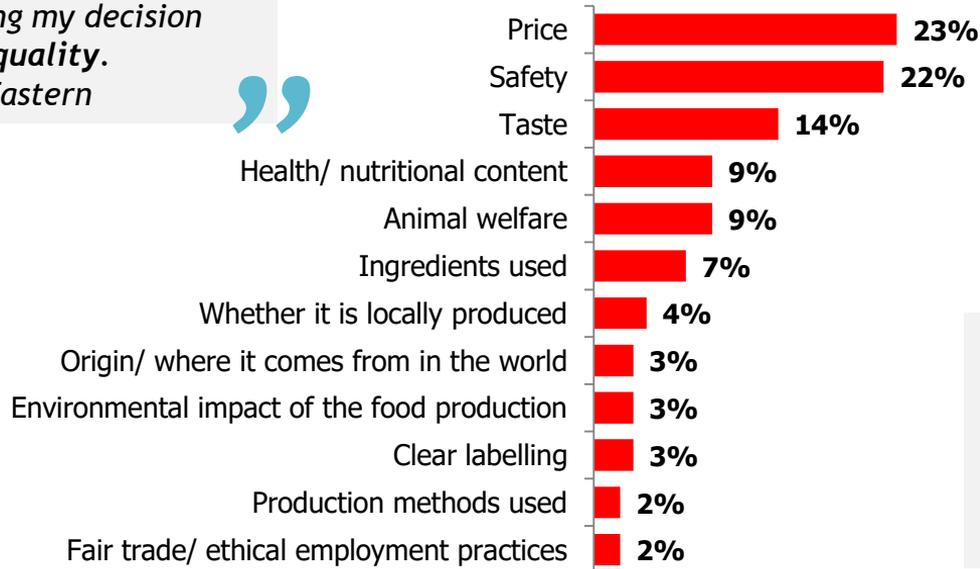
There are a variety of reasons why consumers want to buy products from the UK. For milk, an important consideration is that it is fresher and has travelled less than milk produced elsewhere, and purchasing supports British farmers. Supporting British farmers is also important when buying red meat/meat related products, alongside perceptions of increased safety; perceptions of freshness motivate buyers of UK eggs and vegetables.

# Price and safety of food come out as important issues for consumers when food shopping. 60% of consumers rank price in their top three issues

## Importance of issues whilst food shopping

*The most important things I look for when making my decision are price and quality.*  
- Female, 56, Eastern

### % of consumers ranking the issue first



*Price is a top consideration as long as quality is not compromised*  
- Male, 65, London

*On the whole I tend to lean towards lower price than higher quality but often there is a limit to how low I'll go on price in sacrificing any flavour whatsoever.*  
- Male, 34, Eastern

## When purchasing food price is important to consumers, but the majority balance this alongside quality

For nearly everyone cost was the main factor when purchasing food. However people noted a difference between food being cheap and food being good value, and most people were using offers to maximise the quality of what they were buying. There were also some items which people were prepared to spend more on, for example meat and free-range eggs, to ensure good quality and (sometimes) higher animal welfare standards.

*Price is one of our top priorities when grocery shopping but I try not to compromise on quality when possible and certainly wouldn't choose any products which I didn't think were following the food safety standards guidelines.*

- Female, 35, Scotland

*Price is very important but not when it compromises quality.*

- Male, 67, London

*Price is a big factor and I usually take advantage of items on offer... I would never buy the basic or smart price meats as I don't feel they are good quality... there was barely any meat content.*

- Female, 28, North West

*I always take price into account. Having said that, I do not automatically opt for the cheapest. If something more expensive offers better value for money then I will often choose that one.*

- Male, 70+, South East

*“There are definitely bargains to be had and no need to pay through the nose but bargains are different to cheap and nasty and that's what to beware of.*

- Female, 63, North East

*I tend to balance price and quality where possible.*

- Male, 34, Eastern

# Perceptions of quality vary by product and situation

Consumers view of the quality of food was changeable, and included many different factors. Price was often cited as a proxy for quality, with some exceptions.

*My perception of quality does change when I eat out compared to when I eat at home because when eating out [I] pay a premium for a meal that would be cheaper if I ate it at home. For this reason I expect the quality to be up to scratch.*

- Male, 19, East Midlands

*Quality for me means how well the food serves its purpose in that it must sustain life without harming me. It should also please me in that it tastes good and looks good.*

- Male, 70+, South East

*Price v. quality - On most occasions better price on fresh food/ing[r]redients does mean better quality - but as always shopping around and trying different stores can be rewarding. Lidl does the best potato croquets and really good lamb steaks, all lower priced than the same items from the big names.*

- Male, 63, Northern Ireland

*I think price [a]ffects the quality of almost all products, even if it is something like carrots where taste isn't going to vary much.*

- Male, 49, Scotland

*I think that in meat, chicken and eggs, and also, a lot of fish, quality is linked very much to the quality standards of products...Real quality for me is the quality of life animals have that are reared for food.*

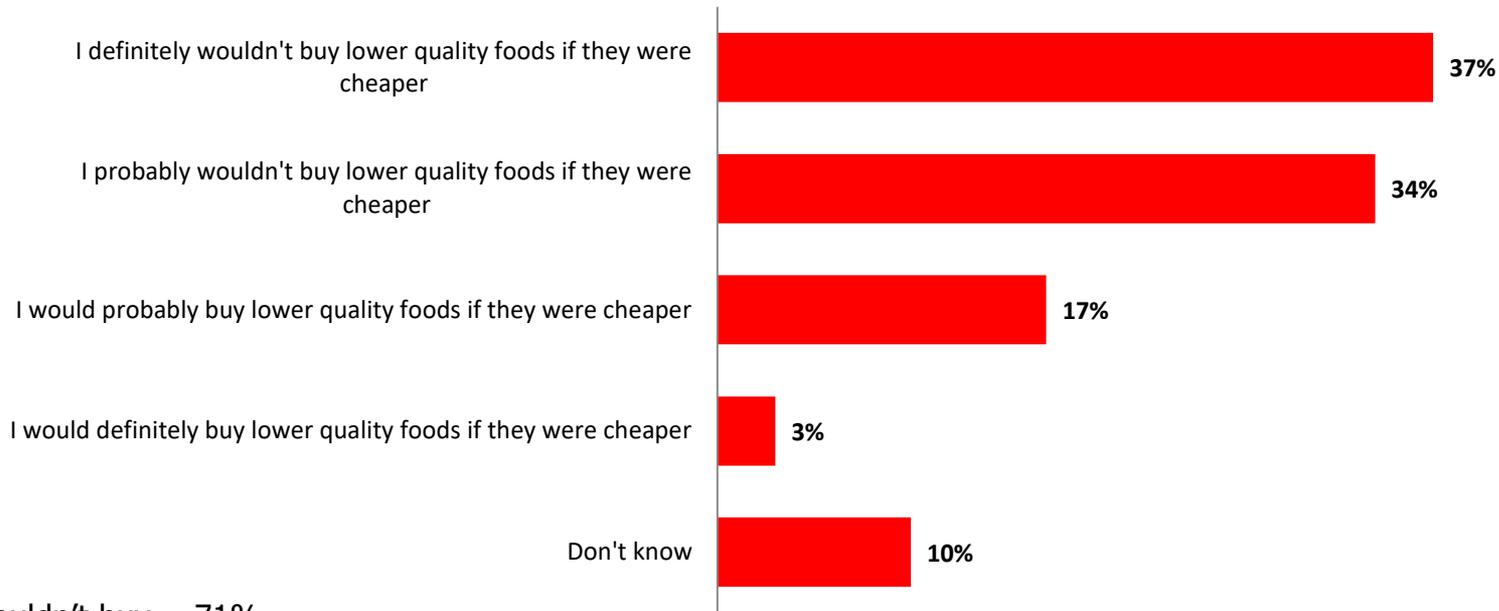
- Female, 61, Yorkshire & Humberside

*Quality in relation to food to me means that I am buying food which is not damaged, looks fresh and is not close to the use by date. If this is pre-packaged food I would also take a look at the label to check there are not too many red indicators*

- Female, 28, North West

## Consumers were unlikely to claim they would purchase food if it was cheaper but produced with lower quality standards

To what extent would you buy food items produced to lower quality standards if they were cheaper than they currently are? By quality standards we mean how the food has been produced and its ingredients.



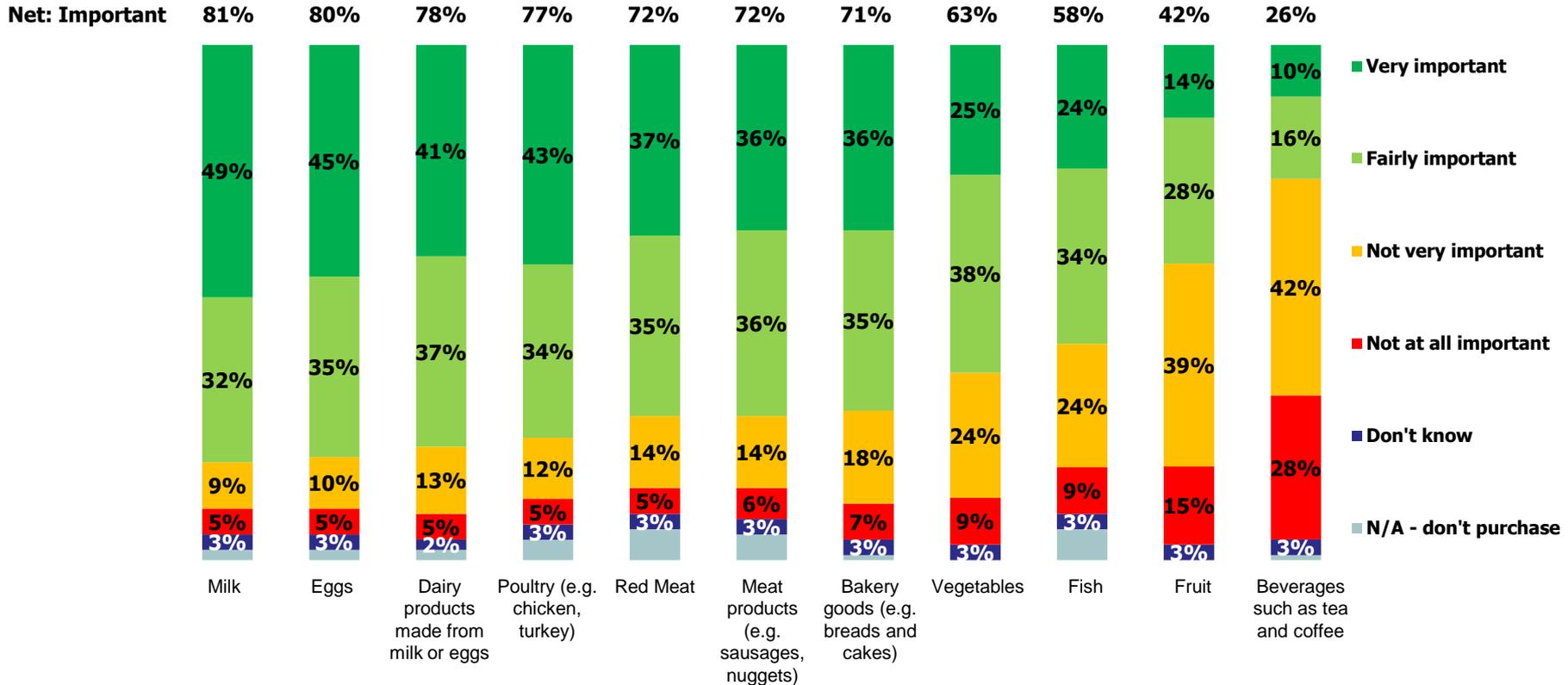
NET: wouldn't buy = 71%

NET: would buy = 19%

Source: January 2018 wave of the Which? Brexit tracker

Q41. To what extent would you buy food items produced to lower quality standards if they were cheaper than they currently are? By quality standards we mean how the food has been produced and its ingredients. Base: total (2107)

# For all food items, except fruit and non-alcoholic beverages, more than half of consumers said it was important it originated in the UK.



## Consumers were keen to support UK produced food where possible, and budgets permitted

Consumers liked buying British produce when they could afford to, especially for meat. There were a variety of motivations behind this, including presumed food safety and quality, environmental reasons and to support the local economy.

*I try to buy British where possible to support not only local businesses but also it contributes the progress of the British economy. However, in order to feed my family on a budget you often have to buy value items which are a lot cheaper and often come from another country.*

- Female, 46, Wales

*For foods that are commonly grown in Britain I try to buy British but cost can prevent this some weeks. This is based from a belief that products from Britain are likely to be safer than from abroad due to food standards and the fact that a shorter distribution chain is better for the environment.*

- Male, 49, Scotland

*I always...look for the British standard marks on meat.*

- Female, 56, Eastern

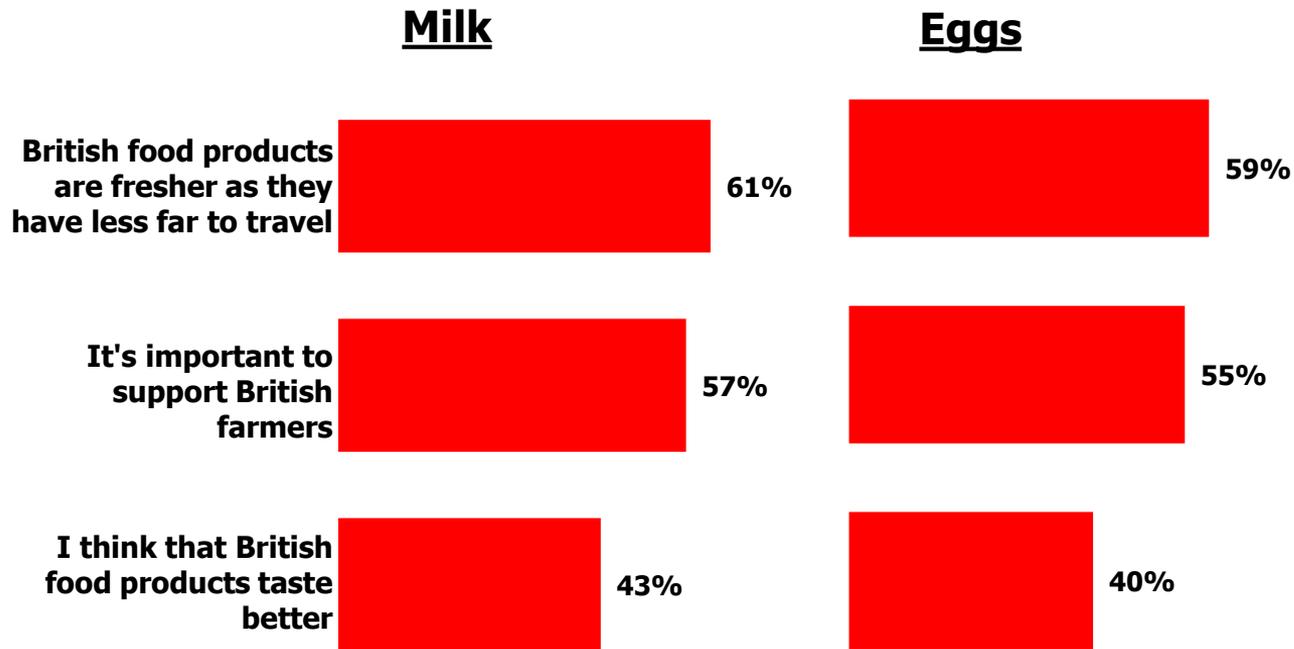
*I like to support Scottish/British producers. Also like knowing my food is coming from countries with good welfare standards for animals.*

- Male, 35, Scotland

*As the others have said I agree with them and always do prefer to buy British products as much as possible as I would be concerned [about] the freshness and dates of the products but to be honest sometimes it's not as big an issue for me as price still has an impact on my shopping budget and if something is on offer no matter which country it came from I would try it.*

- Female, 35, Scotland

# People preferred to buy milk and eggs in the UK for similar reasons – perceptions of freshness, better taste and the desire to help British farmers



# People preferred to buy British produced poultry because of perceived freshness and taste. British produced meat was thought to have higher welfare standards and people wanted to support farmers

## Poultry

British food products are fresher as they have less far to travel 53%

Buying British food has less environmental impact than buying imported food 41%

I think that British food products taste better 37%

## Red Meat

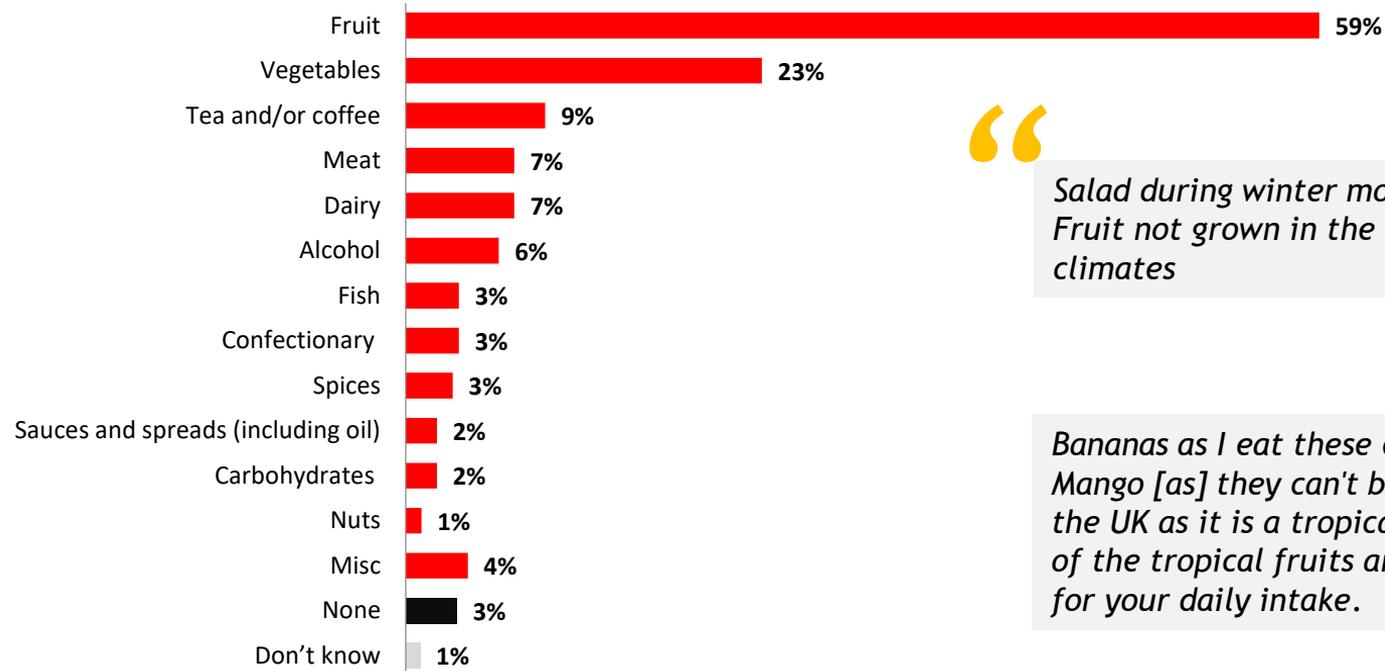
'It's important to support British farmers 57%

I think British food is produced to higher animal welfare standards than abroad 46%

I think that British food products taste better 46%

## Consumers looked for certain foodstuffs from outside the UK – primarily food, such as exotic fruits, that cannot be grown here.

Which food products from outside the UK, if any, do you actively look for during your normal shop?



“

*Salad during winter months-Spain. Fruit not grown in the UK-warmer climates*

*Bananas as I eat these everyday, Mango [as] they can't be grown in the UK as it is a tropical fruit. Most of the tropical fruits are very good for your daily intake.*

”

Source: January 2018 wave of the Which? Brexit tracker

Q39. Which food products from outside the UK, if any, do you actively look for during your normal shop (not special occasions)?

Base: total (760) Note: open-ended question, the verbatims are sourced from the answers

# Consumer knowledge of the sector

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Food

# Key Findings

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## **Uncertainty / Lack of knowledge**

Respondents noted how taking part in the online community was forcing them to think about food more than they had ever done before. This also was true of how the EU is involved in UK food standards and enforcement

## **Implicit trust in food sector and high expectations**

Despite low levels of knowledge, people implicitly trusted the food they eat to be safe and produced to high standards. Participants assumed there was a comprehensive and thorough regime of enforcement/checks in place. Consumers also put a great deal of faith in the trustworthiness of food labels

# Taking part in the group made participants think more about food than they had previously...

Throughout the community, respondents mentioned how the stimuli and tasks were making them consider the food sector in more detail – which made them realise how little they thought about the topic.

“

*I had never really thought about how long the foods we buy take to get to our plates...do we ever think about all the sheer amount of stages it goes through before we even buy and use them at home.*  
- Female, 46, Wales”

“

*It's such a big picture and I realise how little I know about our own import and export of food, never mind the global economy!*  
- Female, 61, Yorkshire”

“

*It's never really occurred to me to think about where my food comes from until I joined this panel, I have just taken for granted that it's there in the shops when I want it.*  
- Female, 63, North East”

”

”

*Before this group I personally didn't take too much notice of where the food was produced but did prefer it to be British where possible. Now after reading these articles I will definitely pay more attention.*  
- Female, 35, Scotland”

## ... which highlighted low knowledge about how their food is currently produced and the supply chain

When asked to describe the journey from 'farm' to 'fork' of an ingredient from their last meal, very few people were confident in the journeys they described. They used words such as "wasn't 100% sure", "presume", "I expect".

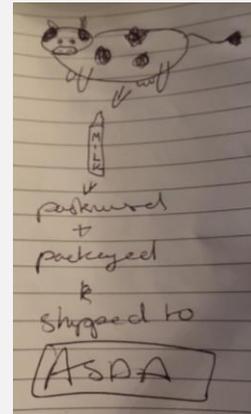
When thinking about food production techniques, many assumed high food standards were adhered to, rather than providing evidence behind this assumption.

*I blithely picked them [sausages] up thinking 'oh they're local', but really have **no idea about the process** than if it had been a Spanish chorizo ring.*

- Female, 69, South West

*Also the quality of milk I **would expect** to be of a certain standard as well. The packaging warehouse I **would hope** would be of a high standard of safety and hygiene as well but it does say from the UK so I **would hope** they are meeting all the correct guidelines.*

- Female, 35, Scotland



# There is a general assumption that existing food standards are high...

Consumers assumed UK had high existing food production standards – however there was little evidence behind these assumptions. There was a sense of pride in the (assumed) quality of British food.

“ I do tend to think that British grown and produced products are likely to be of a high standard but, to be honest, I have nothing to base this belief on. ”  
- Female, 48, South West

“ I feel safe that it will always be OK because of our high British food standards. ”  
- Female, 56, Eastern

“ I always think of products produced in UK as clean and fresh because we have such high standards and excellent farming facilities. ”  
- Female, 35, Scotland

“ [Buying food] in the UK doesn't need much thought if buying from a reputed store, owing to the good food safety standard we have. ”  
Male, 37, London

Some consumers also thought the UK had higher standards than the rest of the EU.

“ Nonetheless UK food standards are higher than most of our neighbours. ”  
- Male, 63, Northern Ireland

“ We have higher welfare standards than other countries in Europe. ”  
- Male, 19, East Midlands

# ...and trust that there is a comprehensive and thorough regime of enforcement / checks in place

Consumers assume there is a thorough regime of checks that ensure the standard and safety of the food they eat. This is based on trust rather than knowledge of the system.

*I trust that the supermarkets that buy these do regular checks to ensure that free range chickens are actually free range.*

- Female, 67, South West

*I believe there are checks in place to ensure animal welfare and to prevent bad meat from entering the food chain. Also there might be controls regarding the health of the animal that contributes to the food chain.*

- Male, 37, London

*The incident [egg contamination] certainly suggests that we need to tighten our standards on food importation and animal welfare and clearly this is a matter for central government...other incidents do suggest a need for more local inspection from city/ district councils.*

- Male, 63, Northern Ireland

Though when presented with specific examples – such as an article about the fipronil egg scandal – it prompted them to suggest the need for a more stringent regime.

*The FSA is more than adequate at fulfilling their responsibility....they already do an excellent job.*

- Female, 56, Eastern

*This [egg scandal] ...reinforces how vital these regulations are and that more inspections and tighter regulations are needed.*

- Male, 49, Scotland

# Consumers put a good deal of faith into the trustworthiness of food labels

People generally trust the content of labelling by default. Part of this trust is due to a belief that labelling is strictly monitored, with a strong threat of prosecution for non-compliance, so businesses are compelled to be truthful.

“ I probably haven't thought about whether I trust them or not before, but yes in the main I do.  
- Female, 69, South West ”

“ I don't believe most companies would lie on the packaging though, the consequences of getting caught are severe.  
- Male, 49, Scotland ”

“ I do trust this quite a lot as if they were to put false information, it might be illegal.  
- Male, 37, London ”

“ I do trust the information on the packaging as surely there would be huge consequences if they were misleading or incorrect.  
- Female, 35, Scotland ”

“ I believe that the retailer place these labels on the food following guidelines set by the FSA. I trust these labels as I believe that food labels are strictly monitored and regulated and for example you cannot label something organic if it is not.  
- Female, 22, North West ”

# Impact of Brexit and priorities

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## Food

# Key Findings

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## Perceived Impact of Brexit

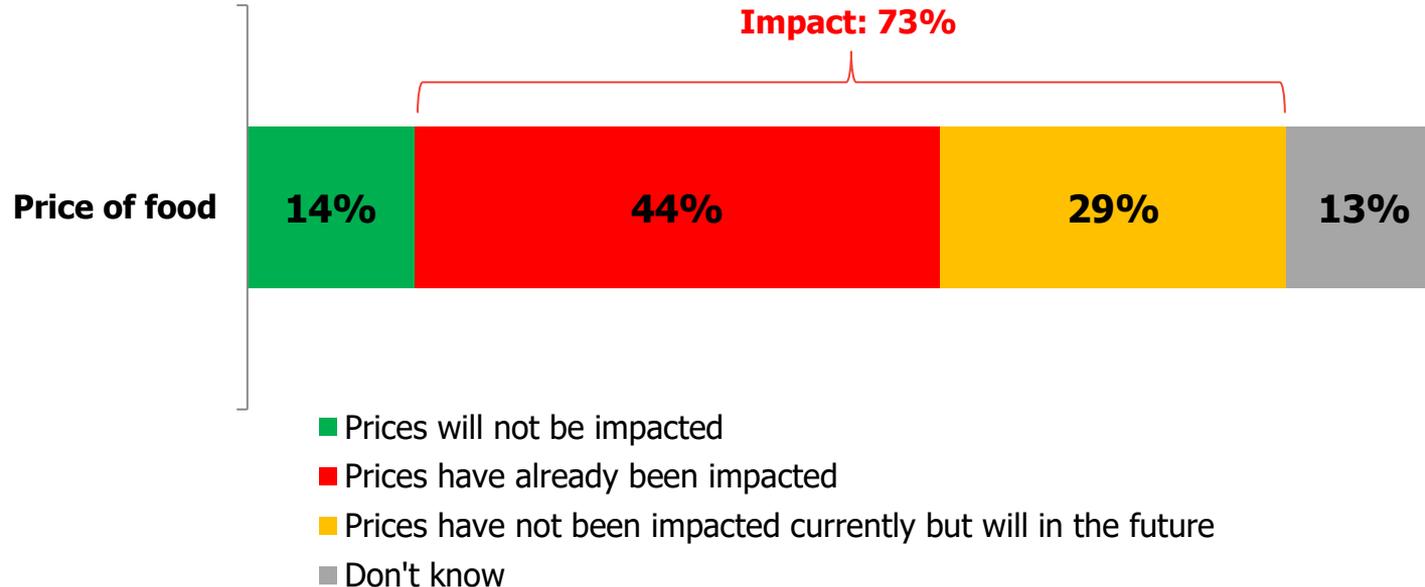
Beyond assuming that the price of food would be impacted, consumers had not previously thought much about how the food sector would change after Brexit. This was partly due to low awareness of how involved the EU is with UK food standards and enforcement. Many participants in the online community stated how reading about this through the group made them realise the complexities of Brexit for the food sector.

## Maintaining Food Standards is a Key Priority

Consumers felt it was very important to maintain food standards – and where possible, improve them – after the UK leaves the EU. This was their main priority. However, there was little evidence consumers knew what current standards actually entail. Animal welfare was one area consumers said they would like to see improved. Consumers did not want to see food produced in ways currently banned in the EU (e.g. growth hormones for cattle) on the shelves post-Brexit.

# Three quarters of consumers expect Brexit to have an impact on the price of food – with 44% saying this impact has happened already

In what way, if at all, do you think Brexit has or will have an impact on the price of the following?



Source: March 2018 wave of the Which? Brexit tracker

Q8. In what way, if at all, do you think Brexit has or will have an impact on the price of the following?

Base: total (2056)

## Aside from price, there was low awareness of how the UK leaving the EU would affect food

Stimuli in the group describing how the EU currently interacts with the UK food sector was mostly new information for respondents. Many noted how reading these stimuli made them realise the complexities of Brexit for the food sector, which they hadn't previously appreciated.

*This [newspaper article] does affect my view on food because it makes me **think more about how leaving the EU will change the way I think when I buy food** because of possible standard changes.*

- Male, 19, East Midlands



*I think I was at least a little aware of most of topics brought up in the community but had never really thought of them all together...which highlighted **just how much needs to be considered by the Brexit negotiators...**and I don't think there's enough time to carefully think about it all and get the best deal possible. I feel like it's all going to be a big rushed mess.*

- Male, 32, Scotland

*I feel this has **forced me to pay attention** to issues I had voluntarily turned a blind eye too. I was of the stance 'whatever the problem is the government will just fix it' **some issues I now see cannot be fixed without consequences.** Price increases I feel will be inevitable.*

- Male, 34, Eastern

*I've learnt that we have a **lot to think about if we leave the EU** and I'm not sure we have all the expertise to change quick enough...I was surprised at how depend[e]nt we are on imports from the EU.*

- Male, 53, South West

# Consumers assumed food standards would stay high after the UK leaves the EU

Consumers assumed UK food standards would remain the same after UK leaves the EU. However, there were a number of explanations behind this belief, such as:

- They don't see any reasons why they would decrease
- They see Brexit as an opportunity to strengthen existing standards
- It wouldn't be in the Government's interests to reduce standards
- An assumption that existing agencies such as the FSA will continue to do checks and this will ensure adherence to existing standards

*I can see no reason why, post Brexit, that **any of this should change**. We have all the systems in place, producers are used to it and in turn have their own systems.*

- Female, 69, South West

*I think the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland **should continue to do checks on standards** and can't see why this would change post-Brexit.*

- Male, 32 Scotland

*Post BREXIT **I think and would hope** that the food standards will **stay the same***

- Female, 35, Scotland

***I feel confident that standards will be maintained** and even enhanced but of course the Government have to ensure that proper procedures are put in place and sufficient staff employed to implement them to satisfy the public.*

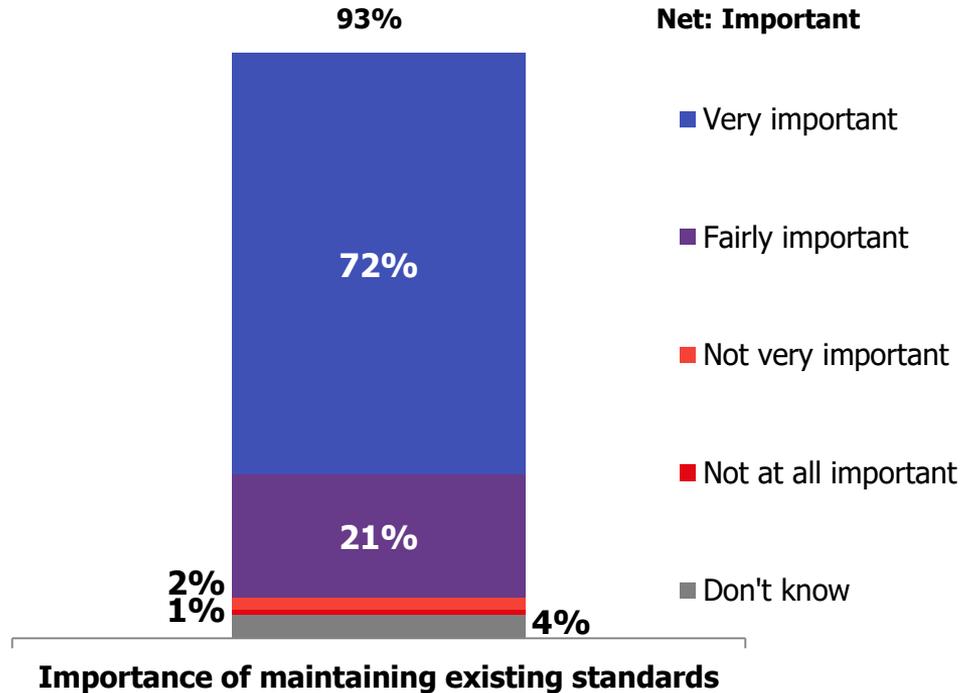
- Male, 67, London

*The standards are there to maintain our safety **we cannot afford for them to be lowered**. As for the government yes there may be temptation to lower standards to chase profit but I think the fear of consequences will prevent that.*

- Male, 49, Scotland

## Only 3% of consumers think it is not important to maintain food standards after Brexit. Around nine in ten (93%) think it is important

How important or unimportant is it to you that existing food standards are maintained?



Source: January 2018 wave of the Which? Brexit tracker

Q35. Food controls in the UK are closely linked with EU membership. When the UK leaves the EU, we need to decide what legislation to have that sets food standards. These standards determine how food is produced, as well as what standards food imports need to meet. How important or unimportant is it to you that existing food standards are maintained when the UK leaves the EU? Base: total (2107)

# Maintaining/ improving food standards after Brexit was mentioned by all 21 members of the community

Maintaining/Improving food standards was so important to consumers that every participant mentioned it as a post-Brexit priority.

“*Establish a new set of food safety standards that are higher than the current ones, thus ensuring that the food we eat is safe and not influenced by appearance. This protects the public and establishes the UK as a premium producer of foodstuffs, encouraging exports to profitable high end markets.*  
- Male, 49, Scotland”

“*Food Standards and Food Safety. The present food standards should be maintained until higher ones can be put in place, thus ensuring that all food stuffs, whether home produced or imported are safe for the consumer to eat and have been humanely reared, not genetically modified or given growth hormones or other unnecessary chemicals or antibiotics.*  
- Female, 73, Eastern”

“*My first food priority for after we leave the EU is to create a new panel/organisation that ensures that all food imports entering the UK are fit for human consumption and meet all relevant regulations that we expect in our food. This will consist of hiring people that will check all imports coming from ports such as Dover to take samples and ensure that the food is fit for purpose. This means that as we leave the EU our standards will be maintained as our imports will become more varied.*  
- Male, 19, East Midlands”

# Consumers wanted food standards not only to be maintained – but to be strengthened where possible

Alongside the assumption that food standards will stay the same is the recognition that this maintaining food standards is important. Many consumers also suggested we should use Brexit as an opportunity to improve existing standards. Some see high standards as a future positive vision for the UK after Brexit.

*Our biggest opportunity when we leave the EU is to introduce the most stringent food safety and standards in the whole world. We could then justify the higher prices of the goods we produce due to the tariffs because our food would have a unique selling point.*

- Male, 53, South West

*“I think our biggest opportunity when we leave the EU is to not only have food safety laws to match those the EU have in place, but to surpass them. In the areas where the UK currently only has voluntary guidelines in place, for example, country of origin labelling on dairy and meat, these could be made legal requirements when we are no longer bound by what the EU have agreed.*

- Female, 61, Yorkshire

*I would like the food safety standards not only to remain in place following brexit but also improve. I do not wish for standards to drop following brexit and want to ensure that we recruit further to improve these standards*  
- Female, 22, North West

*My first priority after Brexit would be to make sure proper systems are put in place to ensure the safety of all food produced in the UK and be fit and safe for human consumption. I know that rules are adhered to at the moment under EU guidelines but the UK will have to implement their own and if possible supersede these to the highest possible standards to ensure this great nation of ours is completely protected.*

- Male, 58, Scotland

# This was especially the case with animal welfare standards

A number of consumers mentioned animal welfare standards as something the UK should look to improve after Brexit. Perhaps because of its more emotional connotations, it was one area where people were most expressive about their desire to improve quality of life, and not to trade with other countries which had lower standards.

*I think that welfare standards and quality standards should change for the better because we will have more control over legislation and we will have an opportunity to see if we can make conditions better for animals with our own freedom with food laws.*  
- Male, 19, East Midlands

*As for animal welfare standards I see no justifiable reasons to allow them to be lowered...I agree we need to improve the way some people raise the animals [though] not all farmers are guilty by any means.*  
- Male, 49, Scotland

*Animal welfare in particular still needs more doing and I think that will happen quite quickly, after all we are known throughout the world to be a Nation of animal lovers!*  
- Female, 67, South West

*We need to ensure that any meat comes from animals that have been humanely kept and slaughtered, we must not lower our animal welfare standards and in fact should tighten and strengthen them, ideally to the standards [another participant] has written about.*  
- Female, 63, North East

# A specific area mentioned for improvement was food labelling

Consumers were very positive about the traffic light system of labelling. They liked the visual focus, which allowed them to make an instantaneous judgement on an item.

***The "traffic light" ones are probably the best and most easy to understand.***

- Female, 56, Eastern

***"The traffic light label is my favourite as it makes it easy to understand what the particular food is high in and can decide based on my preference.***

- Male, 37, London

***I like the traffic light style info, it's clear at a glance and not too complicated, I wish it was used across more foodstuffs and in a standard location.***

- Male, 49, Scotland

Some consumers said they would like the government to make traffic light labelling mandatory after the UK leaves the EU. There was also desire to standardise food labelling to make it easier to assess packaging.

***The [colour] coding system should be standardised throughout the grocery trade. I cannot think of anyway that the present labelling system can be improved other than on an insistence for manufactures use a traffic light colour coded system.***

Male, 70+, South East

***I believe we should standardise food labelling with traffic lights and country of origin on the front of the product and full nutritional information, allergy alerts and a full list of ingredients list on the back of the product...this would help consumers to more easily find the information they need to make informed choices about the food they purchase.***

- Female, 48, South West

# Improvement to country of origin labelling was also mentioned by some as an opportunity

Respondents were informed that country of origin labelling is currently voluntary, and many saw leaving the EU as an opportunity to make this mandatory. Consumers wanted more information on where products come from, especially with meat products.

*The country of origin plays a different role with meat compared to different foods when I'm deciding on purchasing because the welfare standards differ greatly in other countries in Europe. This makes me usually not considered buying meat that isn't produced in the UK. For other foods this is different so I won't take this extra consideration.*  
- Male, 19, East Midlands

*Yes I think it is vital that the country is put on the packaging it is then up to the customer to decide whether they want to purchase that item dependent on how they feel about that country's food standards.*  
- Female, 46, Wales

*First thing I noticed was that it wasn't clear exactly where the products came from. To be honest I wouldn't have inspected so closely before but upon taking part in this online community I have started to pay more attention. For the bacon it said origin of pork - EU which is not specific enough...I think the important information such as where a product is from should be bolder and more noticeable.*

*Female, 35, Scotland*

*I do not believe some of the Brexit scaremongers who think standards will be reduced across the board - we all want safe food, including politicians. For example - we could make country of origin label mandatory once we are out of the EU, rather than the current voluntary labelling.*  
- Female, 48, North West

*I can also see the product is made in the UK and I expect to be told the origins of food I buy, now more than ever.*  
- Female, 61, Yorkshire & Humberside

## Importing food produced in ways currently banned in the EU – such as chlorinated chicken – was very unappealing

When presented with information on labels specifying food production practices currently banned, there was an immediate, generally negative, response towards these products being on sale in the UK.

*If [we are going to have food such as chlorinated chicken] imported from the US, I think people will be choosing alternatives...it's not exactly a selling point and shouts lower standards to me.*  
- Female, 61, Yorkshire

*These items in my opinion should not be on our shelves, they may be ok in other countries but I myself would never buy them.*  
- Male, 58, Scotland

*Disgust, why would anyone want to eat anything with growth hormones. Please let nature take its course and let the animal grow at the right time. Consumers should be made aware that by eating this products, they have digested the hormones.*  
Female, 73, Eastern

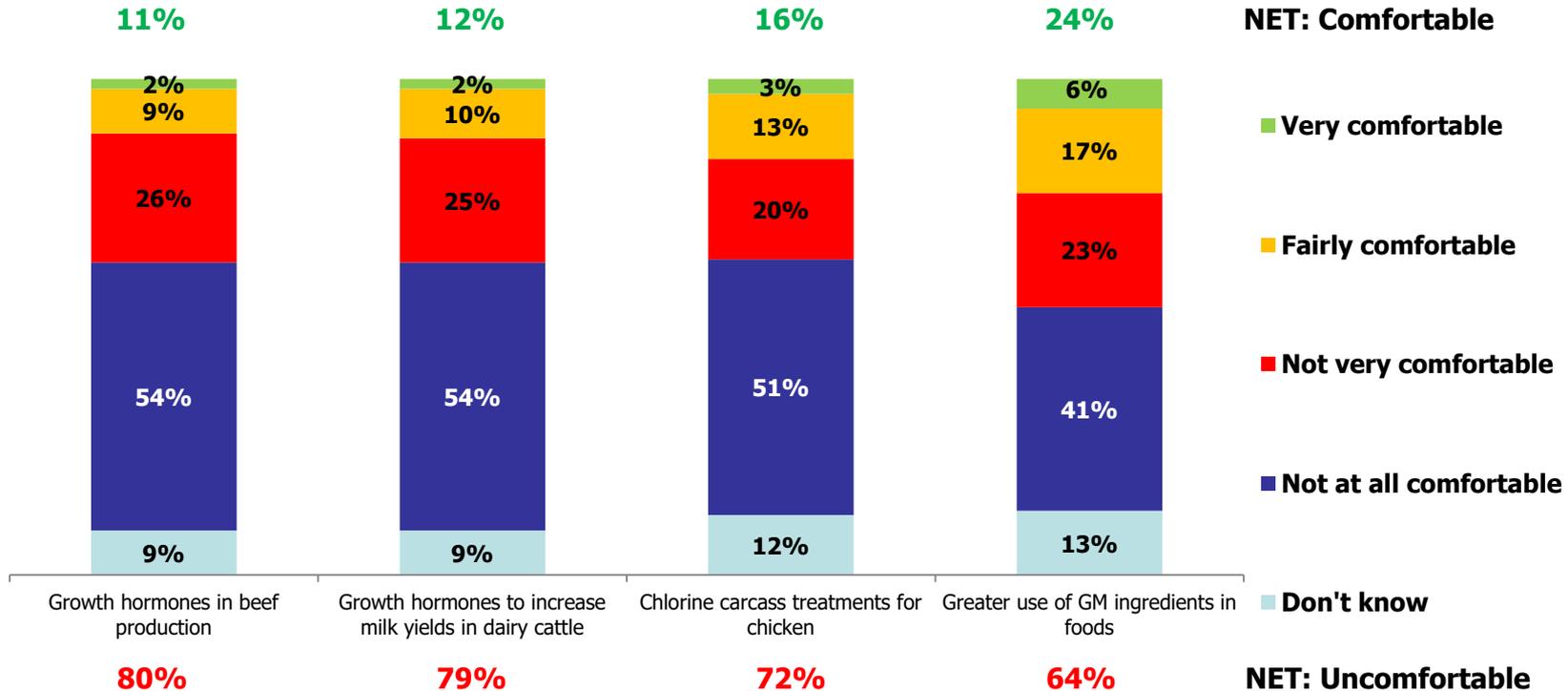
*Chlorinated chicken sounds terrible. Chlorine belongs in the swimming pool and not in our food.*  
- Female, 22, North West

Regardless of their personal views on whether they would eat it themselves, most consumers said it would be important to label food clearly if it was for sale in the UK after Brexit.

*If the decision is made to sell these products in the UK, as long as the label clearly states the modifiers, I would not purchase them. It should be compulsory for such information to be prominently displayed on packaging, similar to the health warning on cigarette packaging.*  
- Male, 63, Northern Ireland

*I would be actively put off buying these products but it is good that these important statements have been put on the labels.*  
Male, 19, East Midlands

## Consumers would not be comfortable eating food produced to lower standards than currently in place, such as beef using growth hormones



Source: January 2018 wave of the Which? Brexit tracker

Q43. Some countries produce foods to different standards to the UK and some of the production methods have been scrutinised in relation to Brexit. The products described below are not currently allowed to be sold in the EU, and in the UK. How comfortable, if at all, are you eating food produced using the following methods? Base: total (2107)

## Post Brexit priorities

- At the end of the 10 day community, participants were asked to outline their top three priorities for the UK food sector during Brexit negotiations.
- As the previous section has outlined, maintaining (if not improving) food standards was the most common priority for consumers. Consumers did not want standards to be weakened.
- Consumers also recognised the importance of increasing enforcement in order to maintain food standards compliance and ensure imports are checked appropriately.
- Some consumers wanted changes to UK food production. There was a desire for the UK to produce more food (with an assumption this would be possible), with a desire for more 'efficient' farming.
- Some food priorities were not linked directly to Brexit, but were concerns consumers had about problems such as waste and healthy eating. A dominant theme in the manifestos was the need to reduce waste
- Agreeing trade deals was also mentioned by some consumers as a post-Brexit priority. Trade deals were seen as important for some for combatting any potential price increases, whilst other recognised the importance of our export market.

## Many of those who wanted standards to be maintained (or increased) recognised that increased enforcement will be needed

Most consumers acknowledged that we will need to increase enforcement resource after we leave the EU in order to maintain existing standards (or increase them).

“ Ensuring that standards are raised not relaxed, there will be a temptation to lower them so production and processing is cheaper. We need to be certain no corner cutting occurs and **that may have to include funding more inspections for UK producers and for importers.** ”

- Male, 49, Scotland

“ In order to maintain the existing high standards of food inspections a new branch of specialists be employed to oversee imports and exports from our ports that are now free of EU inspectors. This department will manage and raise standards as set by the UK. For all countries who wish to trade with GB these rules to be followed. ”

- Female, 46, Wales

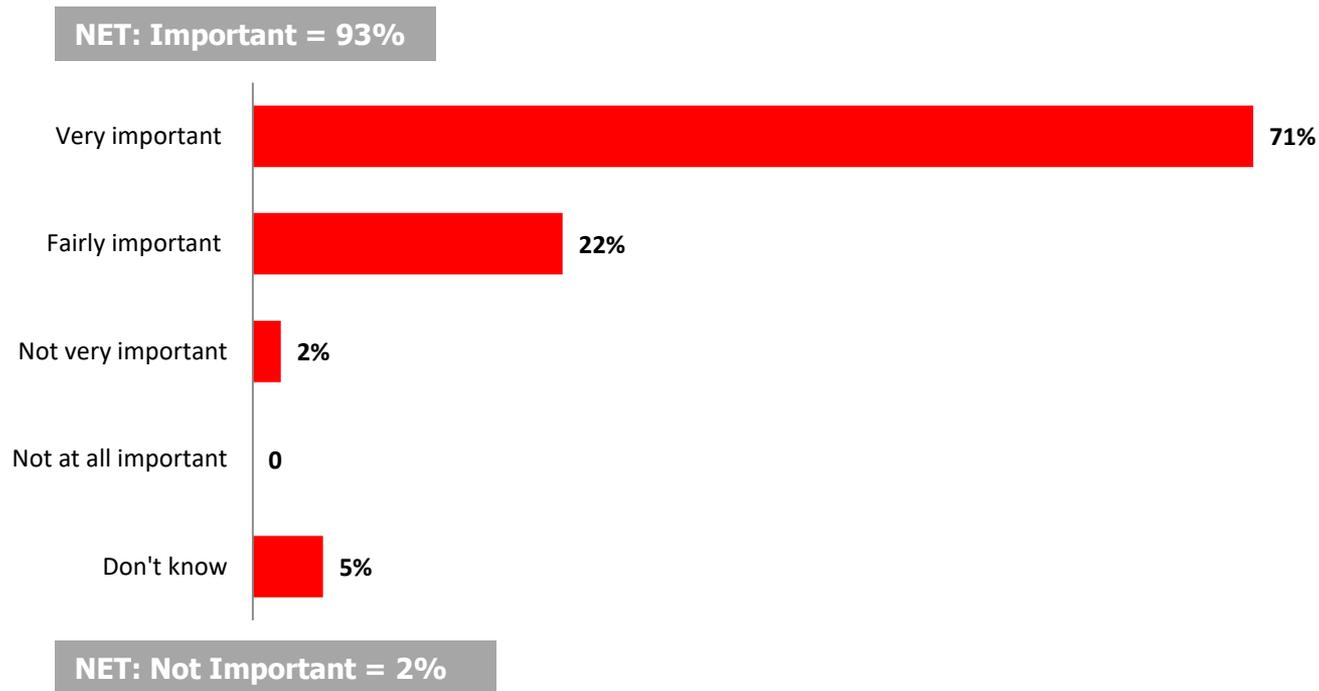
“ A new ministry for food import - as discussed at present many food stuffs are inspected and tested in places such as Rotterdam upon entering the EU. As this will no longer be relevant to us **we need new facilities placed at all major UK ports for testing and quality control.** ”

- Male, 34, Eastern

“ If we are to keep our high food standards at a continuously good level [I] feel its **very important to implement the right level of staffing for each new area** especially for the inspections at the entry ports. **I would want stronger and more frequent checks at each entry point** to ensure all products & produce entering and leaving the UK were not being compromised in any way for the sake of more profits. ”

- Female, 35, Scotland

**It is seen as very important for food safety and standards to be overseen by independent bodies by 71% of people, and 93% of people see this as important.**



Source: January 2018 wave of the Which? Brexit tracker

Q42. How important or unimportant is it, if at all, that food safety and standards issues are over-seen by an independent body that is focused on consumer interests? Currently this is the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which is an independent government agency, and has a specific remit to protect public health and other consumer interests in relation to food. Base: total (2107)

# Respondents thought reducing food waste was important

Some of the manifesto priorities were not directly linked to the impact of Brexit, and dealt with perceived wider food issues. Reducing waste was a common theme. Some thought reducing waste would also help to counter rising food prices and/or reduce reliance on imports.

*Food waste has become a major problem and it is not sustainable or economically sensible for households to overall be wasting one third of our food. We will redouble our efforts on work with supermarkets, manufacturers, farmers and importers to help households waste significantly less. I will set up an independent advisory body to research, advise and introduce clear and practical ways to **dramatically reduce food waste**.*  
- Male, 54, London

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***Reduce waste and the need to import.** (I've squeezed two into one here) If there's food that we can produce here, then we should be looking to produce it here if possible. With waste; both the amount of food and packaging, we throw away far too much. Not sure the best way to achieve it, but I'd like to see us focusing on producing the food we need, and lowering (or exporting) the excesses of food that we don't.*  
- Male, 35 Scotland”

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*The issue of food waste has become untenable. We have more children living in poverty than ever, Food Banks are growing in number, we have to look at this as a matter of urgency...Issues such as packaging and labelling could play a role as many people are still confused about what the information really means...**Less waste must mean cheaper prices** and thus more availability for those on limited budgets.*  
- Female, 69, South West”

”

## Encouraging healthy eating habits was a common theme, and consumers also saw this as a way to reduce food waste

Improving consumption habits, such as healthy eating and reducing waste, was another common theme. Education was a common channel through which participants thought this could be achieved.

“Healthy food is essential for our overall physical and mental well-being. I will launch education programmes across schools, coll[e]ges, universities and work places to advise on eating healthy well balanced food. This will instil good eating habits within our young people and allow others to take a look at their current food eating habits and make changes as they feel appropriate.

- Male, 54, London

Education. More education in schools regarding the food we eat and what exactly is in it. Promote healthy eating to lower obesity as this will save millions for the NHS.

- Female, 56, Eastern

[Priority] 2.it's to build the labelling of food and nutrition of it into mainstream education so more people understand the labels and take an interest in their health.

I would build food education into the national curriculum to teach about all the issues we have dealt with in this focus group and build this into the teaching of cooking and food preparation and PSHE. I would introduce a taxation system that would progressively increase taxation on products according to their sugar content and including most artificial sweeteners.

- Male, 53, South West

Food education. I would like to see more education into food as I myself have learnt so much from this process. I would like there to be a focus on food waste, how to read food labelling correctly such as the difference between display until and best before. I would also like to see healthy eating be more of a focus in schools, GP surgeries and information on ways to eat healthy on a budget.

- Female, 22, North West

## Some consumers wanted the UK to more self-sufficient in terms of food production by improving the efficiency of UK farming

Some consumers included improving the efficiency of UK agriculture so the country could be more self-sufficient. There was no evidence of how this could be done, but there was an assumption it would be possible.

*Increased support for food producers in the UK. The [C]ommon [A]griculture [P]olicy has provided subsidy to farmers in the past and it needs replaced for UK farmers after Brexit...As has been demonstrated previously, globally we need more space to produce the food needed for the ever increasing world population - we are no different in the UK - importing more food is not the answer, we need to produce more of our own, which will require some clever thinking to get more from the av[a]ilable space for food production.*

- Male, 63, Northern Ireland

*My second priority would be to get all our top scientists and in[n]ovators to come up with a plan to make the farming industry more productive and more environmentally friendly at the same time in order to confront the issue of climate change which ultimately affects all of us.*

- Male, 57, Scotland

*We will endeavour to discover and implement more efficient farming methods. Here technology will find the solution. It will be the government's task to encourage science and ensure it a clear path. Our technology will no longer be confined by tortuous EU bureaucracy.*

- Male, 70+, South East

*My third and final food priority for when we leave the EU is for a panel to be created that is responsible for putting together ideas to make farming and food production in the UK more efficient. This is very important in the future as we become more reliant on producing more of our own food and as demand increases. Important points for this need to be utilising existing land, using better farming techniques to reduce waste and ensuring that the right amount of food is produced.*

- Male, 19, East Midlands

# Others recognised the importance of agreeing trade deals in order to ensure food prices remain stable

Some consumers wanted to ensure trade deals were made (with both the EU and non-EU countries) to ensure food prices don't increase for consumers.

“My third and most important priority would be the UK consumers and **ensuring we get the best trade deals** and food standards to keep our consumers safe and healthy. Our economy and spending is the most important issue [I] feel post BREXIT going forward and as previously mentioned **if not handled correctly and if major price increases happen** then it could lead to people in to poverty which should never happen to anyone as a result of [Brexit].  
- Female, 35, Scotland”

“There needs a strong government in power who is comfortable dealing with trade deals. A specialist negotiating department that **can work together to get the best deals for Britain**, covering all aspects, not just food, to ensure British people are offered the **best choices at a price that is affordable**.  
-Female, 67, South West”

“Agree effective trade deals with the EU and beyond **to allow us to import food that we need without costs increasing too much for consumers**, and so we can export our goods without producers being restricted too much by tariffs. Not having a deal would hit us both ways **with British consumers having to pay more** for foreign foods, and exporters struggling to compete when selling goods that the UK is famous for such as salmon and whisky.  
- Male, 32, Scotland”

# Others recognised the importance of agreeing trade deals for British exporters

Some consumers wanted to ensure trade deals were made (with both the EU and non-EU countries) to ensure food prices don't increase for consumers.

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*I would introduce a new British standard and a Premium British standard for food that exceeds all standards anywhere in the world. It will be a simple logo on all qualifying **food...the intention is to send a message to the world that we have the best standards so boosting exports** and our image in the food world. Throughout the late 90's and early 2000's we began to build a strong UK brand in many areas of business and we need to do that with food now.*

- Male, 53, South West

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*So on that point I would like the government to come up with a plan to promote UK food, produce all over the world as top quality and safest in the world for the purpose of the export world in all aspects of the food industry. **Export is a vital part of the food industry** for our country, without this a lot of people in the food industry will be out of a job, also a lot of farms, production facilities would be unable to survive without exports.*

- Male, 57, London

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***Ensure that there is a market for British products** and look for alternatives if surplus amounts are produced after consumption which could then be exported into other non EU markets. These could also be processed whenever possible to make it long lasting and better return for investment.*

- Male, 35, London

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# Conclusion

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Food

## Our research has identified the following insights

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- The price of food is important to consumers - but alongside high expectations of safety and quality.
- Consumers have high expectations and confidence in UK food safety and quality standards. They assume that they will be maintained after Brexit - and, if anything, see Brexit as an opportunity to strengthen existing standards (eg. on animal welfare).
- Many people want to buy UK-produced food products. This is for a variety of reasons including perceptions of relative freshness, safety and quality, depending on the product.

# There are clear consumer priorities for the post-Brexit food sector

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- The majority of people would be uncomfortable about consuming foods produced using production methods that are not currently permitted in the UK/EU, including use of growth hormones for beef and milk production and chlorine treatments on chickens.
- There is an assumption that there is a comprehensive and thorough regime of enforcement checks and controls in place which the Government will enhance after Brexit if necessary. Independent oversight is also important.
- Brexit is seen as an opportunity to improve some aspects of food labelling, most notably, country of origin labelling.

## Further information

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- For further information on Which? policy regarding the UK's exit from the EU, please visit: <https://www.which.co.uk/policy/eu-exit> and <https://campaigns.which.co.uk/brexit/>