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Consumer Attitudes to Food in the UK

Introduction

Where do most of us go to do our shopping? What are we buying and who's cooking it? Who's trying to lose weight and who's going out for a pizza instead?

The UK is full of supermarkets, fast food chains, those who like to cook, those who don't, and a lot of people on a diet. Consumer attitudes to food are as fascinating as they are varied and this resource is packed full of information and questions designed to help your students get to grips with the current trends of the UK.

How to use the worksheets

The following worksheets include key data, questions and longer tasks that are suitable for both group and independent work. Use them as class-based tasks, homework or as part of a coursework investigation/project. Each worksheet also provides reference to the section of research from where the additional facts originate.[1]

Curriculum links

The worksheets have been created for use with AS/A2 Food Technology students. They could also be used to assist the delivery of:

AQA AS – Module 1 – The Consumer and Society
AQA AS – Module 2 – Food Science and Technology
AQA AS – Module 3 – Food Product Assessment and Analysis
AQA A2 – Module 6 – The Consumer and Consumer Protection
AQA A2 – Module 7 – Food Science and Technology
AQA A2 – Module 8 – Food Product Assessment and Design

Sociology AS

Module 1 – Health
Module 2 – Poverty, Wealth, Income.

Social classes

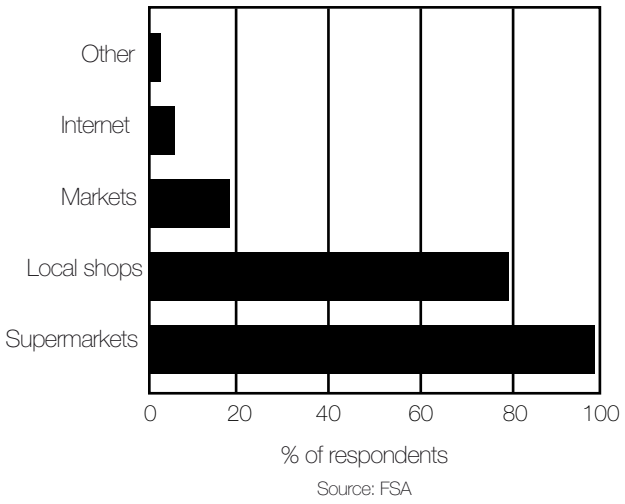
The following worksheets use the standard NRS social grade definitions.

Social grade	Social status
A	Upper middle class
B	Middle class
C1	Lower middle class
C2	Skilled working class
D	Working class
E	Those at lowest level of subsistence

1 The support material in this article was produced by Taylor Nelson Sofres for the Food Standards Agency in 2004. Visit www.food.gov.uk and enter Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4 in the search box to download a copy of the research document.

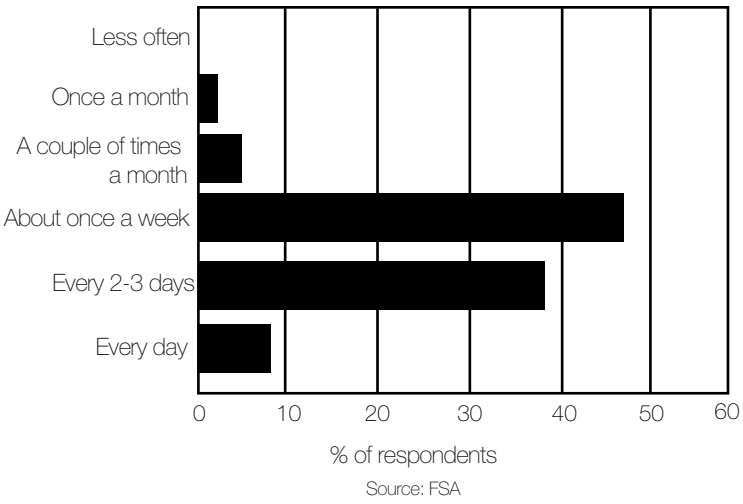
Shopping Habits

Source of food shopping, 2003



Source: FSA

Frequency of food shop, 2003



Source: FSA

Facts

- Most people shop at supermarkets and do their shopping once a week.
- 95% buy most of their food from a supermarket.
- Only 4% buy most of their food from local shops compared to 79% who buy some of their shopping from local shops.

Additional Facts (Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4, page 12, source section 3.2)

- 17% of respondents from a white ethnic origin use markets for some food shopping compared to 31% of black and minority ethnic groups.
- 5% use the Internet for some of their shopping.
- People in the AB social group are most likely to use the internet for food shopping.

Questions

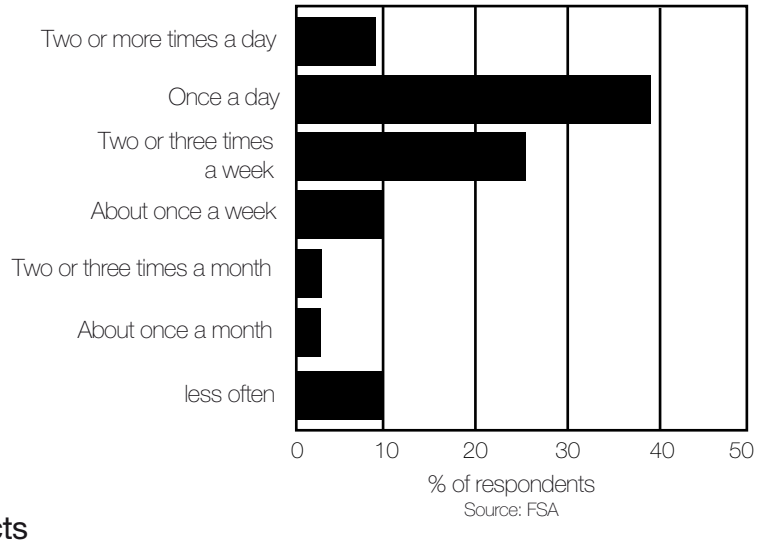
1. Discuss the reasons why most people shop at supermarkets.
2. Which groups of people are most likely to buy most of their food from local shops?
3. Why are minority ethnic groups most likely to use local markets?
4. Why are the AB social groups most likely to use the internet to do their food shopping?

Tasks

1. Consider how *where* food is purchased influences its nutritional content. In particular, consider food purchased from a market versus food purchased from a supermarket.
2. How might *how often* food is purchased influence its nutritional content? In particular, consider the stability of specific nutrients and the time that they are stored, ie vitamins.

Using Fresh Ingredients

How often meals are prepared/cooked from raw or fresh ingredients, 2003



Source: FSA

Facts

· Almost 50% of respondents prepare a cooked meal from raw or fresh ingredients at least once a day, 25% do this 2 or 3 times a week and 10% do this only once a week.

Additional Facts (Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4, page 18, source section 3.5)

· Significantly more women (51%) than men (27%) prepare or cook a meal from raw/fresh ingredients once a week.
· Fewer of the youngest age group (1-25 year olds) use fresh ingredients.
· People from social group AB are most likely to prepare a meal from fresh ingredients at least once a day (59%).
· The most common reason given for not cooking with raw/fresh ingredients every day is lack of time.

Questions

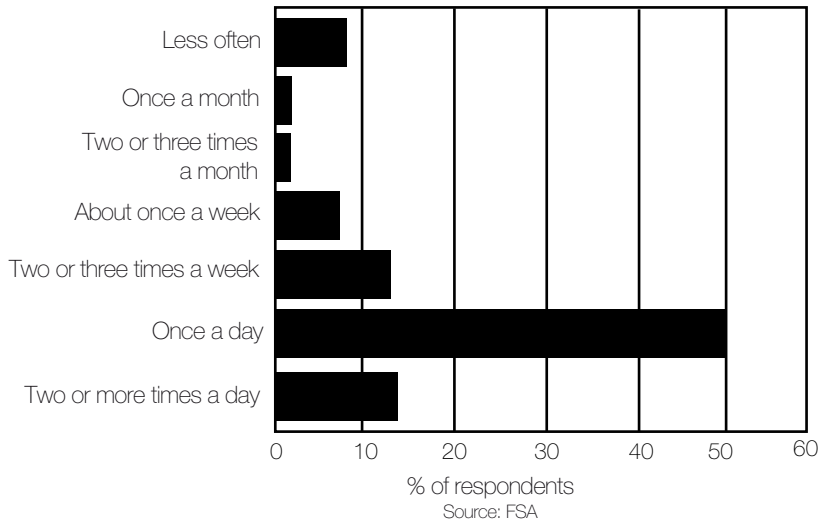
1. Give reasons why nearly twice as many women as men cook from raw/fresh ingredients on a daily basis.
2. Does this confirm or contradict the view that women and men are equal partners in the home? Argue the case for and against.
3. Discuss the reason why more of the social group AB cook with fresh ingredients on a daily basis compared with other social groups.
4. What are the nutritional implications of using raw/fresh ingredients rather than processed ingredients?
5. What would be the long-term effects of such implications?

Tasks

Devise and carry out a fair test to compare (nutritionally) a dish prepared, cooked and served using fresh/raw ingredients, with the same dish pre-made, ie shop bought. To do this, use data taken from a nutritional computer program or food tables and compare it with the nutritional data on the food label. With 'lack of time' cited as the main reason why raw ingredients aren't used to prepare meals, also make particular reference to the preparation of each dish in your findings.

Eating With Family

Frequency of sitting down for a main meal
at home with all the household members, 2003



Source: FSA

Fact

· Approximately half of the population eats a meal with their own family on a daily basis and the majority (85%) eat with the rest of their household at least once a week.

Additional Fact (Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4, page 19, source section 3.6)

· 70% of the social grade DE eats once a week or more with their family compared with 86% of C1C2s and 91% of ABs.

Questions

1. Why is it important that different family members have the social contact that eating with their family provides?
2. Suggest possible reasons why group AB eat with their family over 20% more frequently than group DE?
3. Produce a simple bar chart to show the differences between the social groups for the frequency of eating main meals with the family.

Task

Design a two-course meal which could be eaten and enjoyed by all your family members as a 'sit down' meal. Ensure that it is balanced to meet the nutritional needs of those eating it and that it follows current healthy eating guidelines.

Who's On A Diet?

Households with special diets, 2003

Source: FSA

* eats fish but not meat
** eats neither fish nor meat

Fact

· 13% of respondents claim that either they or a member of their household is dieting to lose weight.

Additional Facts (Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4, page 15, source section 3.7)

· Slightly more women (18%) are dieting to lose weight than men (17%).
· Those in the higher social groups are most likely to mention that they are on a weight reducing diet (ABs 23%, C1 and C2s 17%, DEs 13%).

Questions

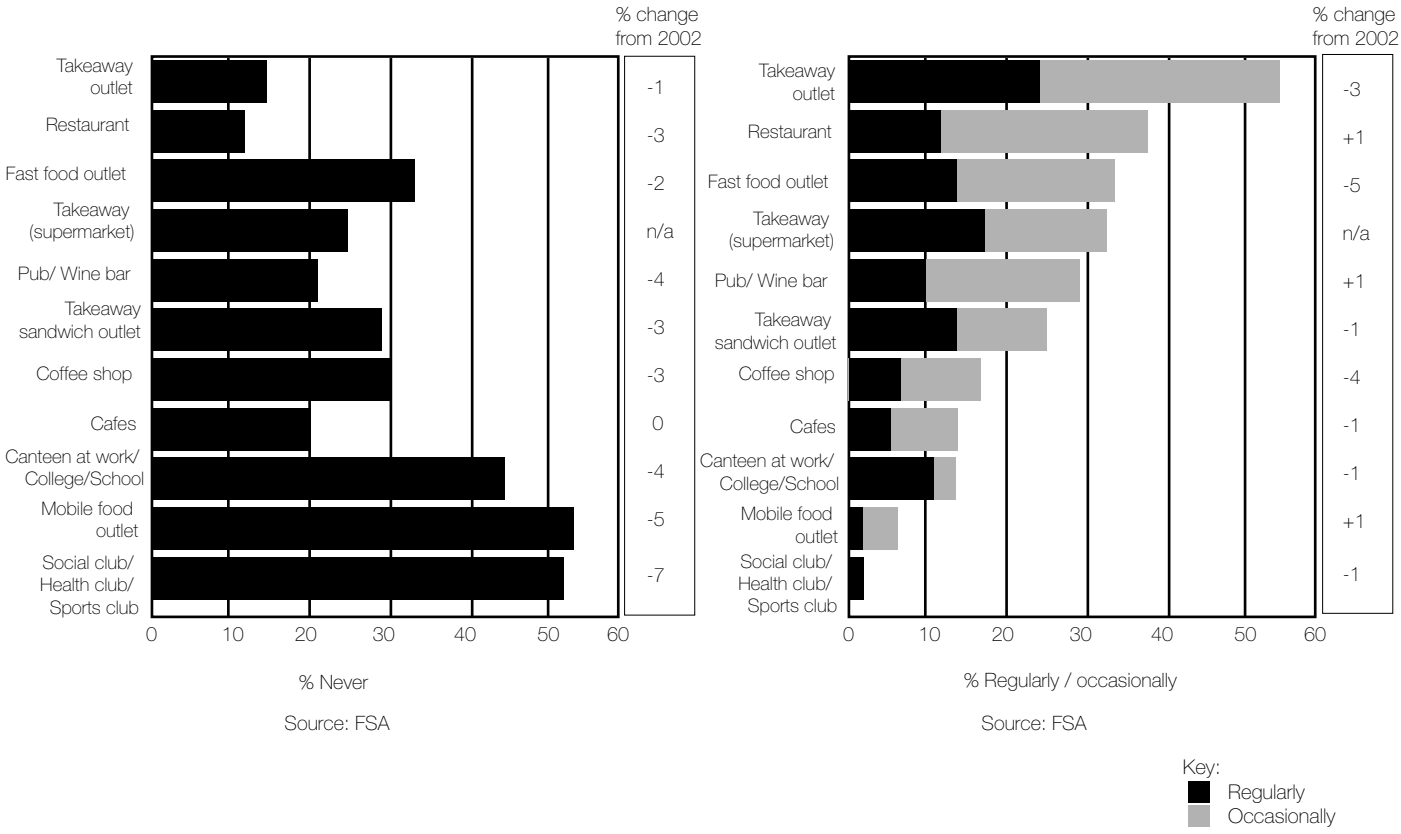
1. Discuss the percentage differences between the social groups for those on a weight loss diet.
2. Give reasons for the differences.

Tasks

Choose one of the groups identified in the above chart. Investigate the specific dietary requirements of your chosen group. As far as possible, carry out a case study for your chosen group. Use the 'Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?' approach to report your findings. Compare your case study to someone as similar as possible without a special diet. Present your findings imaginatively.

Eating Out

Catering outlets used, 2003



Facts

- Takeaways are currently the most popular type of out-of-home eating; over 50% of respondents claim to purchase a meal from a takeaway either regularly or occasionally.
- Restaurants are the second most popular place to eat out at (used by 37%).
- The number of people using fast food outlets and coffee shops has decreased significantly over the last few years.

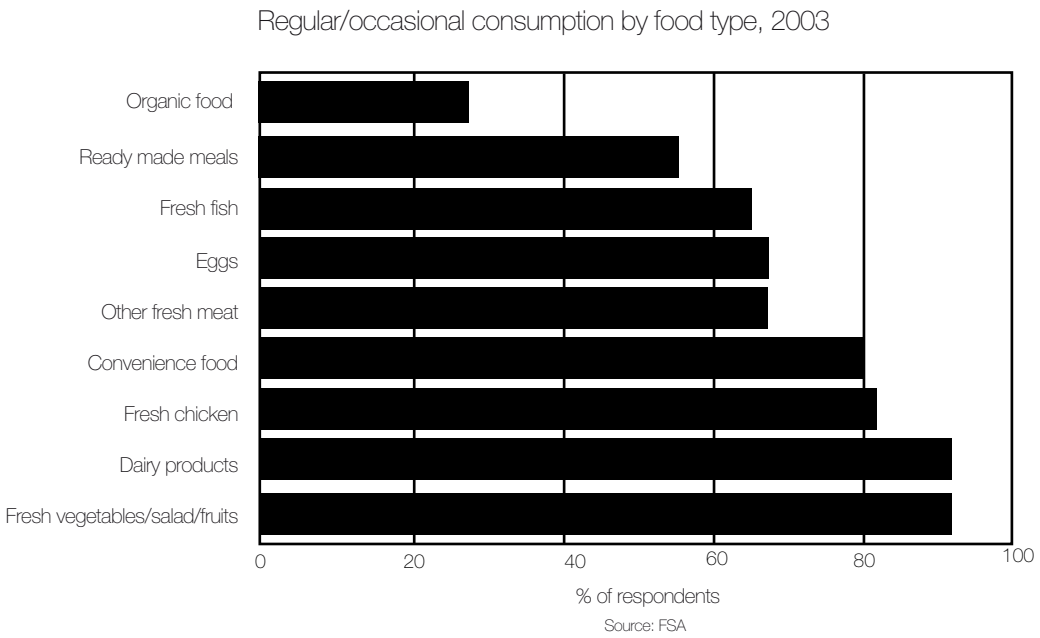
Questions

1. Discuss the difference between a takeaway outlet and a fast food outlet. Give examples of each (some outlets will probably fit into both categories).
2. Give reasons why the use of fast food outlets, coffee shops and takeaway outlets has decreased. Link this answer to the information about ready-to-eat takeaway food from supermarkets.

Tasks

For each of the outlets identified in the chart, find a variety of sample food menus. Use each menu to analyse the nutritional content of what is on offer. What are the similarities and differences? Is one outlet nutritionally better than another? Where do takeaways feature in your analysis? Think about how you could improve the nutritional value of the food on offer at the outlets identified.

What Are We Eating?



Facts

· 87% of respondents claim to consume dairy products regularly.
· 84% claim to consume vegetables/salads/fruits regularly.

Additional Facts (Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4, page 29, source section 5.2)

· ABs and C1C2s are significantly more likely to eat fresh vegetables/salads/fruits, dairy products and fresh chicken compared to DEs.
· DEs are more likely to eat convenience food compared with ABs.
· 41% of the population claim not to eat organic food.
· 27% of ABs claim to eat organic food regularly compared with 9% of DEs.
· Significantly more women (16%) than men (12%) claim to eat organic food regularly.

Questions

1. State which social groups are most likely to eat fresh vegetables, salads and fruits on a regular basis.
2. State which social groups are most likely to eat convenience foods on a regular basis.
3. Give as many reasons as possible for these differences.
4. Compare the percentages of the AB social group who eat organic food on a regular basis with the percentage of the DE group. Give reasons for this difference.
5. What are the health benefits of eating organic food versus non-organic food?

Tasks

Look at a basic menu for a two-course meal, eg beef stir-fry followed by a fruit yoghurt. Assume you are making the first course from basic ingredients, and not a ready-made version. Look-up and write the recipe for the first course. Either visit a supermarket or use an internet shopping site to cost the meal using: a) the cheapest ingredients, b) organic ingredients. Compare the total cost of each meal. Discuss your findings with the rest of the group, including the availability of organic ingredients.

Food Labelling

Information reffered to on food lables by age group, 2003

	16-25	25-35	36-49	50-65	66+
Use by/ best before date	50	70	65	70	62
Country of origin	15	27	26	29	23
Amount of sugar	26	37	36	41	36
Additives	24	39	41	42	33
GM ingredients	12	20	21	23	13

Base: All who refer to food labels

% of respondents
Source: FSA

Facts

· 16-25 year olds are less likely to look at food labels than any other group.
· 26-35 and 50-65 year olds are most likely to look at food labels.

Additional Facts (Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 4, pages 56-59, source section 8.1/8.2)

· Women are significantly more likely to refer to food labels than men.
· Only 29% of respondents could correctly identify the main ingredient when shown a typical food label.

Questions

1. Why do you think 16-25 year olds are less likely to look at food labels?
2. Why are the 26-35 year olds and the 50-65 year olds more likely to read food labels?
3. Why is there a significant difference between the numbers of men and women who read food labels? Think of as many reasons as possible. Why do you think more people are looking for the amount of salt in food? Try to make a connection with demographic trends and your answers to question 2.

Tasks

1. Why might consumers be concerned to check the sugar content of a product?
   Collect a variety of food labels from a range of different foods:
   -Analyse the sugar content of each product.
   -How easy are the labels to read?
   -How could the labels be improved?
   -What additives have been used and why?
   -How has salt been identified on the label?
   -Why do you think more and more consumers are looking for information regarding salt on the label?

2. Devise and carry out your own investigations into consumer awareness and food labelling. Do your findings match those of 2003?