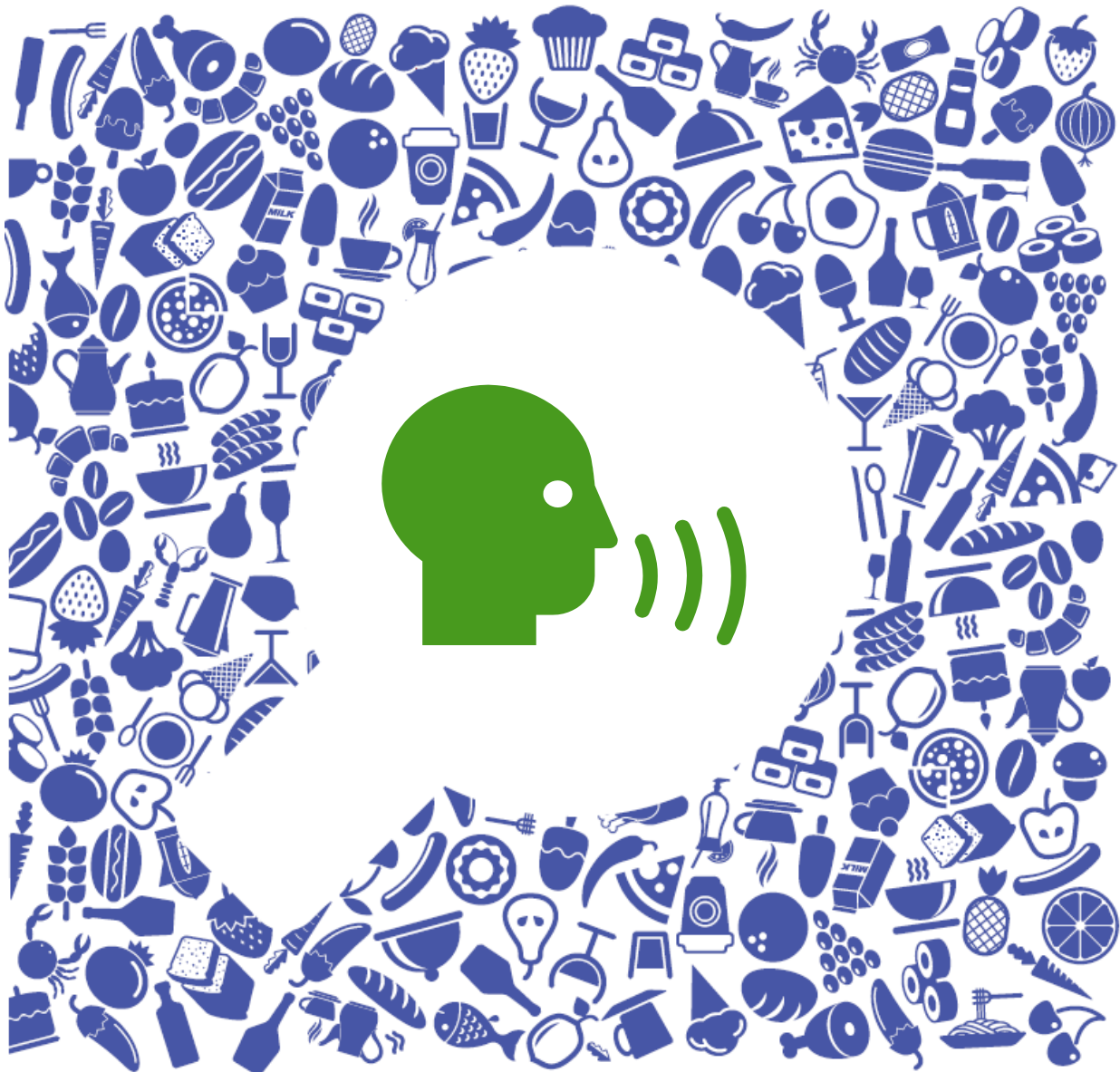# Food Standards Agency –

Understanding NI Consumer Needs Around Food Labelling

TNS BMRB Research

July 2016

Executive Summary

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned TNS BMRB to conduct research with members of the public in Northern Ireland about their understanding of retail food labelling information, how this influences their behaviour, and their concerns and priorities around labelling information.

The research involved a combination of eight focus group discussions (part of the FSA's programme of 'Citizens' Forums'); eight accompanied shops, and a survey using the FSA online panel.

Key Findings

Overall, participant attention to labelling information appeared to be driven by a particular need; for example, if participants were following a specific diet or had specific dietary or allergen requirements. Outside of these circumstances, participants tended only to use labels to check the "use by" or "best before" dates, and occasionally checked labels when buying new or unfamiliar products.

Reasons for not checking labelling information included participants routinely buying familiar products, and therefore not considering it necessary to check product information. A further barrier related to comprehension and interpretation of current labels, with people perceiving them to be overly numerical or requiring complex calculations.

In spite of these barriers, there was a general overall appetite for increased provision of labelling information, especially nutrition information and portion size as a consequence of current social trends towards maintaining a healthier diet. Participants expressed a need for greater visualisation and simplification of data which could encourage more informed, habitual usage of labelling information going forward.

Shopping and cooking habits

- Participants in the qualitative research tended to describe their shopping behaviour both online and in-store as routine and repetitive, i.e. buying a repeat list of products to prepare similar meals. Consequently, propensity to check labelling was low across repeat purchases, which were regarded as "tried and tested" products. This behaviour was also observed amongst allergen groups.

- Online shoppers were less likely than in-store shoppers to consult food labelling due to the importance placed on the convenience and speed that these online shopping platforms offered. Interestingly, there was also very low awareness of the availability of labelling information in the online space.

- As in-store shoppers were obviously able to pick up physical products and make comparisons with alternatives in terms of quality and freshness, this in turn led to a higher likelihood to consult labels than online shoppers.

- Across all socioeconomic groups, participants in the qualitative focus groups stated that they preferred to buy meat products from local sources such as butchers to ensure freshness and to support the local economy. Participants also stated that they increasingly preferred to "cook from scratch" and were less likely to buy processed foods. However, the accompanied shops revealed a considerable difference between reported interest in shopping for healthier produce, and actual behaviour. The research findings concluded that there was a strong tendency for participants to over-report their behaviour towards buying non-processed produce when in fact they often chose processed products following a comparison of fresher alternatives.

Awareness and usage of labels

- Most participants stated that to actively and routinely consult food labels they needed to have a specific reason for doing so. Common reasons included searching for allergen information, checking the

fat/sugar content if they were undertaking a healthier diet or checking for salt following health problems.

- For those on a diet, product categories that were either known or believed to contain higher quantities of "unhealthy" ingredients were those which participants were more likely to examine closely. Participants actively sought quick indicators that food was healthy on labels, looking out for nutrition claims such as low-fat, reduced salt/sugar, calorie information, and other nutrition information on the front of pack.

- Participants were less likely to consult labels in the following scenarios:

  o **Repeat purchases** - products bought repeatedly became trusted products which needed little scrutiny before being purchased.
  o **Occasional treats** - participants often made an active decision not to consult labels based on "not wanting to know" the potential "calorie damage" with infrequently purchased "treats".
  o **Fresh produce** - there was a sense that fresh products such as fruit and vegetables warranted less scrutiny.
  o **Branded products** - "big name brands" were often used as a "short cut" for quality – as participants tended to trust that brands they recognised would be more likely to abide by regulation or governance mechanisms.

- Low usage of labelling information was also driven by a lack of understanding and ability to process often inconsistent information, across all research phases. Over half of participants (58%) from the online survey stated that "size of text" made food labels difficult to read or comprehend with a further 44% stating that "too much numerical data" could lead to confusion. Participants in the qualitative research said they wanted to avoid having to calculate complicated equations in the food aisle and expressed a need for more visualisation of data in clearer terms.

- Participants had limited knowledge about the regulation of labels, whether these should be trusted as official information sources, and whether they should be interpreted as more than general guidance.

This was partly driven by a perceived lack of consistency in labelling conventions (e.g. variable and inconsistent usage of the front of pack information).

Food labelling priorities

- "Use by/best before" dates were the most frequently used information on labels across both research phases. Information about when to eat food by was sought spontaneously whilst shopping by one in four survey participants (26%), and used more frequently again after purchasing, at home (31%).

- Allergen information was the top priority for those with an allergy or serious food intolerance, as this necessitated very careful scrutiny of ingredients. For those with mild intolerances or no allergies, this information was redundant unless cooking for a specific person with allergies.

- Nutrition information was also valued highly by participants. Many participants across the focus groups commented that they aspired to use this information more regularly when shopping but felt that they may lack the knowledge and/or awareness of what to "look out for" to maintain a healthy diet.

- Country of origin was appealing but in terms of priority tended to hold less importance when compared against price or brand. For example, while participants were concerned about where their food was coming from, this was more in line with social desirability factors and often more of a "preference" than a "need". Participants tended to over-report the influence this had on actual purchasing behaviour, with price and promotions taking precedence following observations from the accompanied shop research.

Conclusions – Recommendations for raising awareness and encouraging usage

1. **Due to "split second" decision making, participants need more accessible visualisation of labelling information:** There was a common finding across all phases of the research that participants often only allow seconds to consult a food label before

purchasing and therefore any information presented should facilitate a "snap" decision in the food aisle. Participants particularly found numerical information presented on labels challenging in terms of speed and ease of comprehension. As such, there is potential to increase usage of labelling information if it is presented in a more visually appealing format, which requires minimal cognitive effort.

2. **Participants value consistency to create habitual use:** There is a need for greater consistency of labelling in terms of format, positioning and language which could encourage more regular usage e.g. country of origin not always displayed, allergen ingredients not always bolded or lack of consistency in colouring of the traffic light system. There was particular appetite for usage of nutrition and health information in line with current social trends towards healthier eating habits. For participants, the ability to use this information rests on finding information instantly understandable and accessible and this can only be achieved when it is presented in recognisable, repeated formats which can facilitate "at a glance" decision making.

3. **Participants were using "Use by/best before" dates most often and there is a need for greater clarity around what these constitute:** The most consistently noticed participant issue with labelling information was a lack of consistency and clarity around "use by/best before" dates. As this was a key priority for the majority of participants when checking labelling information, it is recommended that there is a need for greater understanding of the difference between these two terms and when these should be used as a strict instruction or alternatively as guidance.

4. **Participants were generally unaware that labelling information was available on online platforms and further promotion of its availability may empower more people to use it:** Online shoppers had little awareness that labelling information was available to them, and there is potential to raise knowledge levels to encourage usage in this area. Despite, as previous research has shown, that participants may be unlikely to

click through or scroll down to view this information[1] there may be a need to consider providing this without shoppers having to seek it out (e.g. via hover-over on a main product description page).

5. **Participants' key concern when interpreting labelling data was the size of font and having uniform regulation of this may encourage uptake**: Ensuring labelling information is visible and is written in plain English is key to ensuring participants are able to access labelling information quickly, easily and without confusion. Participants recommended using large and bold fonts to highlight key facts.

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[1] "Understanding Northern Ireland Consumer Needs around Food Hygiene Rating Scheme Information in Online Retail Environments", TNS BMRB, May 2016

Contents

1.   Introduction

1.1 Background

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent Government department set up to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food. It has a strategic requirement to support consumers to make informed choices about the food they eat.

The EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation brings together EU rules on general food labelling and nutrition labelling into one piece of legislation. The transition process to replace the current food labelling regulations has begun. The majority of the requirements have applied from December 2014, with nutrition labelling requirements becoming mandatory as of December 2016.

A number of food labelling requirements are summarised as follows:

- For pre-packed foods, allergen information must be emphasised in the ingredients list. Allergenic ingredients must be presented in a way which clearly distinguishes it from the rest of the ingredients by means of font, style or background colour.
- Nutrition labelling will be required for most pre-packed foods from December 2016 and this must be presented in a prescribed format. One notable change is salt replaces sodium.
- Voluntary repetition of nutrition information on front of pack. This includes information per 100g/ml and/or per portion on amount of energy, fat, saturates, sugars and salt with 'at a glance' colour coding – red, amber and green.
- A minimum font size for the mandatory information on food labels (e.g. name of the food, ingredients lists, date marks etc). This also extends to voluntary front-of-pack (FOP) nutrition information.

In light of the review and updating of all labels by industry to comply with the Food Information for Consumers Regulations (FIR), the FSA in Northern Ireland has commissioned TNS BMRB to conduct primary research to understand and establish current consumer awareness and understanding of food labelling on retail packs.

This research will feed into a future communications plan that addresses any gaps in consumer understanding or misunderstandings of current

labelling which will aim to support the use of labels for empowered consumer decision making.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the research was to gather evidence from consumers in Northern Ireland about their understanding of retail food labelling information when purchasing food, how this influences their behaviour, and their concerns and priorities around labelling information.

Specifically, this research will:

A. Explore consumer awareness, understanding and views of retail food labelling and how this currently affects purchasing decisions. Specifically the research explores the following components of labelling:

   i.   Country of origin
   ii.   Allergen information (including precautionary allergen labelling)
   iii. Nutrition information
   iv.   Products on promotions
   v.   Instructions for use
   vi.   Date of minimum durability (use by or best before)

B. Understand consumer views about the importance of information on labels.

C. Provide insight around the drivers of consumer views, and sources of any misconceptions/misunderstandings.

D. Explore any issues regarding the user-friendliness of food labels in relation to font size, colour, layout and language.

E. Provide a baseline understanding of consumer knowledge and understanding of labelling and support the FSA's ability to provide future consumer education and support campaign around labelling that meets consumer needs.

1.3 Methodology

In order to achieve the aims and objectives, TNS BMRB undertook a mixed-method approach comprising qualitative research to explore current knowledge, attitudes and perceptions in detail, and quantitative research to establish measures for each of the objectives with a larger sample of consumers.

Each stage of our approach is detailed as follows:

Qualitative Research – Focus Groups and Accompanied shops

Overall, the qualitative research provided a detailed understanding of:

- Consumer awareness, understanding and views of food labelling and how this currently affects purchasing decisions
- Consumer views about which information is most important to include on labels, and which is least important
- The sources of consumer views, and of any misperceptions/misunderstandings
- Any issues regarding the user-friendliness of food labels in relation to font size, colour, layout and language

Research comprised:

- 8 x 1.5 hour focus groups of 8 people each, across 4 locations in Northern Ireland (Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Glengormley, and Portrush) – with a total of 64 participants. In the focus groups, participants were presented with a range of stimuli food packaging and asked to prioritise information.

- 8 x accompanied shops (4 x online shoppers and 4 x in-store shoppers) followed by face-to-face interviews with these individuals. These helped to understand the drivers of decision making in depth, as it was important to observe the decision making process first hand - i.e. the customer journey leading up to the point of purchase in this instance. Participants were observed doing a 'normal shop' and a follow-up interview of around 45 minutes was then conducted to help understand their purchasing decisions and use of labelling information across their shop.

Participants were recruited to include a mix of those who primarily do their shopping online and those who primarily shop in supermarkets (conducting both large weekly shops and smaller more regular shops) and included a mix of:

- Demographic variables – including a mix of socioeconomic groups, age and life-stage (e.g. younger/older children at home; adult children out of home)
- Whether people suffered from allergies

A breakdown of the overall sample is detailed below;

Focus Groups Sample:

Group	Belfast	Portrush	Glengormley	Derry/Londonderry
1	ABC1 20-34 No children No allergies Primarily shop online			
2	C2DE 35-49 Children age 5-15 yrs They or their partner or child have food allergies Primarily use shops			
3		ABC1 30-49 Children age 5-15 years They or their partner or child have food allergies Primarily use shops		
4		C2DE 50+ Children older than 15 yrs / no kids at home No allergies Primarily use shops		
5			ABC1 50+ Children older than 15 yrs / no kids at home No allergies Primarily shop online	
6			C2DE 20-34 Children less than 5 yrs	

				No allergies Primarily use shops
7				ABC1 20-34 Children less than 5 yrs No allergies Primarily use shops
8				C2DE 35-49 No children No allergies Primarily shop online

All research participants recruited had primary/joint responsibility for their household shop.

Further details on the Citizens' Forum programme are attached at Annex D.

1.4 Quantitative Research – Using the FSA Panel

In parallel with the qualitative research – but informed by early findings from the focus groups – quantitative measures were developed for each of the research objectives, to gain a 'scaled up' view on how some key kinds of labelling information were understood and (reportedly) used in practice.

Working alongside the FSA team a 10 minute questionnaire was developed which was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 201 Northern Ireland consumers from the FSA Consumer Panel and is attached at Annex C. This questionnaire aimed to uncover:

- Consumer awareness of food labelling
- Use of food labelling when making purchasing decisions
- Perceptions of which information is most important to include on labels.

The FSA Consumer Panel is operated by TNS BMRB and is comprised of a subset of the Lightspeed GMI panel, which consists of members of the general public, aged 16+ and living in the UK. This panel offers a fast, convenient and cost-effective way for the Food Standards Agency to survey large representative samples of members of the general public in the UK.

The online survey was conducted with a representative cross-section of consumers which was monitored by collecting house and demographic information for every panellist. The data was weighted by age, gender, whether participants were responsible for their household shops and whether they were cooking or preparing foods for someone with an allergy.

Further details of the quantitative method used are displayed in Annex E.

This data was then analysed alongside the qualitative data to cross-reference findings across the phases, ultimately integrating both phases of the research to provide holistic, robust insight into participant views.

1.5 Structure of the report

For ease of reference, the remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 covers participants' shopping habits in detail and the impact this has on their ability and propensity to use labels
- Section 3 addresses current usage and awareness of food labelling across both the qualitative and quantitative elements of the research
- Section 4 provides a more in-depth breakdown of food labelling priorities and preferences
- Section 5 explores any potential confusion with food labelling in current formats
- Section 6 provides a number of recommendations and conclusions which should help raise awareness of food labelling and encourage further uptake and usage of this information to inform consumer choice

Further information about sampling and recruitment, research materials, and the Citizens' Forum approach are contained in the Appendices.

2. Shopping and Cooking Habits

In this section, participant shopping and cooking habits are examined across the qualitative focus groups, accompanied shops and quantitative consumer panel.

Key findings:

- Participants across both online and in-store shops described their shopping behaviour as routine and repetitive and their propensity to check labelling was low across "tried and tested" products.
- As in-store shoppers were obviously more likely to pick up physical products to check for freshness/quality, they were therefore more likely to consult labels. Online shoppers in comparison were less likely than in-store shoppers to consult food labelling, in part because there was low awareness of the availability of this information online but also due to speed and convenience over-riding information needs.
- Influenced by current social trends, a considerable number of participants claimed they were cooking more frequently "from scratch" and as a consequence preferred to buy their meat products from their local butchers to ensure freshness and support the local economy. However, the research found considerable differences between participant reporting in the focus groups and behaviour in accompanied shops, with over-reporting of buying healthier foods when compared with actual purchasing decisions.

2.1 Shopping Patterns

Shopping patterns were similar between online and in-store shoppers in that all tended to do one "big shop" either weekly or monthly, and then opted to do a number of supplementary "top up" shops (in-store, locally or coming from/going to work) a couple of times a week. A minority of participants, typically male and typically single, shopped daily in store.

> *"I'd rather just go out and get what I need and eat it rather than ending up with a fridge full of stuff that you might not eat."* (Male, Derry-Londonderry,C2DE,35-49)

Another noted similarity was in how online and in-store shoppers described their shopping behaviour – they perceived it as routine and repetitive. This perception centred on the potential for participants to have a standard repertoire of meals, which led to a repeat range of products on their shopping lists. This had an impact on participants' habits in that they were often only checking labelling information on first purchase of a product. Consequently, they stated that on repeat purchasing they did not feel the need to refer back to this information with a familiar item.
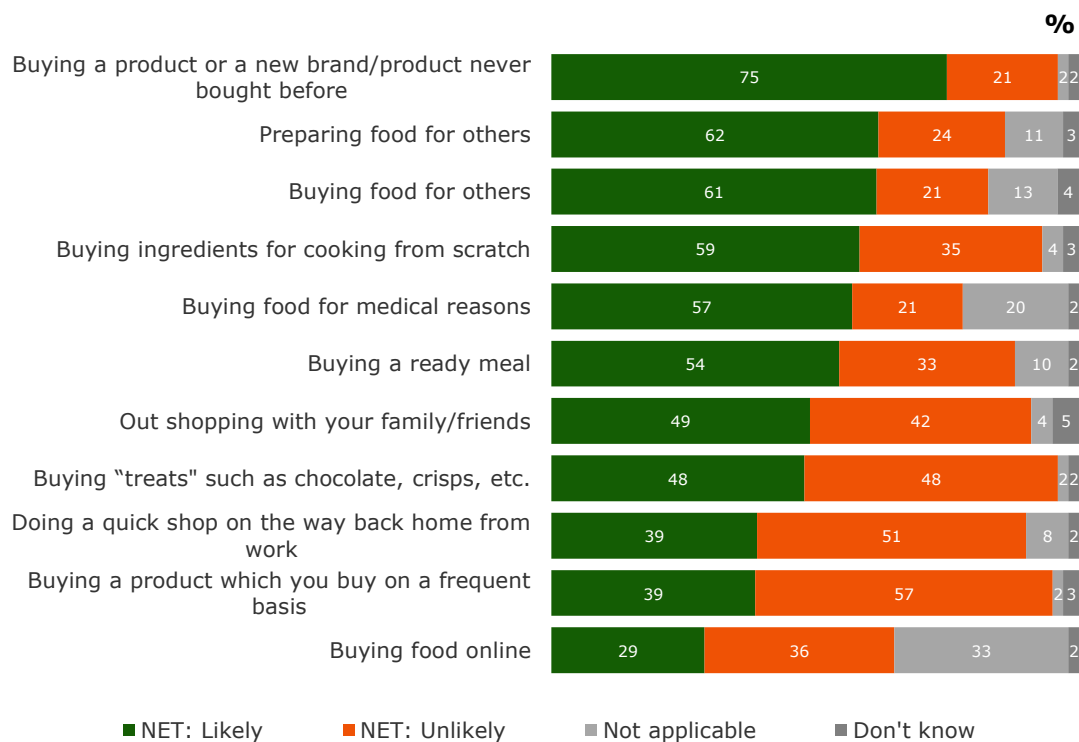
2.2 Online Shopping Habits

Online shoppers chose online platforms for reasons relating to a) *convenience* (e.g. shopping at any time of the day or night, and availability of home delivery) and b) *speed and ease* e.g. saved shopping lists. Price and budgeting were also important factors, and many scanned the special offers pages for items they knew their family would enjoy. Most had become accustomed to online food shopping across a range of supermarkets and ongoing, repeat usage had increased confidence in both the process and in the retailer brand.

Out of all the shopping environments, participants were least likely to check labels when online, with only 29% of the participants stating they did so, as demonstrated in the figure below (Fig 1).

Data arising from both the focus groups and accompanied shops demonstrated that few participants checked food labels in the online space, but claimed to go by their own offline experience of products. They suggested that when buying online they chose items that had previously been "tried and tested" and that this therefore eliminated any need for more information. Importantly, most were actually unaware that such information was available and accessible to them online.

> *"If it's online, you have to trust the product."* (Male, Glengormley ABC1, 50+)

Figure 1: Percentage of participants that agree/disagree with statements about when they use food labelling.

%

Statement	NET: Likely	NET: Unlikely	Not applicable	Don't know
Buying a product or a new brand/product never bought before	75	21	2	2
Preparing food for others	62	24	11	3
Buying food for others	61	21	13	4
Buying ingredients for cooking from scratch	59	35	4	3
Buying food for medical reasons	57	21	20	2
Buying a ready meal	54	33	10	2
Out shopping with your family/friends	49	42	4	5
Buying "treats" such as chocolate, crisps, etc.	48	48	2	2
Doing a quick shop on the way back home from work	39	51	8	2
Buying a product which you buy on a frequent basis	39	57	2	3
Buying food online	29	36	33	2

■ NET: Likely   ■ NET: Unlikely   ■ Not applicable   ■ Don't know

SOURCE: Q003. How likely or unlikely would you be to read the information on food labels in the following situations?
Base: All Participants (201)

2.3 In-store Shopping Habits

Some participants preferred shopping in-store as they wished to physically hold and compare items before buying them, allowing them to check for quality and freshness. Participants relied on visual cues (i.e. a visual signal or reminder immediately recalling knowledge of a previous experience) such as the colour of meat or the condition of vegetables, as well as seeking the longest "use by/best before" dates.

> *"I wouldn't tend to buy anything fresh online and pick it yourself rather than someone else picking it for you."* (Female, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35-49)

> *"There's something about that contact with another human being when you're buying fresh products."* (Accompanied Shop, Male, Glengormley, ABC1, 20-34)

As a result, in-store shoppers were more likely to examine labels than those in the online space.

In addition to supermarkets, local butchers featured in several participants' outlets as the preferred place to buy meat – they tended to be more likely to trust the quality and freshness of meat purchases from local sources and believed this was an easy route to supporting the local economy.

> *"I go to the butchers to buy my meat. I like to support local."* (Female, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

> *"Sometimes on a Sunday we go to the Belfast fresh fish market literally because we enjoy the morning out."* (Accompanied Shop, Female, Portrush, ABC1, 50+)

There was also a considerable difference between perceived interest in shopping for healthier products held in the focus groups in comparison to the accompanied shops conducted. During group discussions, it was found that participants could be swayed by potential "social desirability bias" (i.e. sharing "what they should be saying" as opposed to what they were eating and purchasing). Interestingly, we found during observed accompanied shops that often those participants who stated that they were interested in healthy eating and checking labelling rarely did so in practice while they were in store and were more likely to pick processed foods when confronted with a choice of price over healthier alternatives.

2.4 Cooking Habits

Cooking habits varied, with many participants stating that they now cook everything from scratch. There was a general sense across socioeconomic groups and age that the cultural trend towards the importance of eating a healthier diet had been the main driver for attempting to reduce processed foods from their diets.

Aside from those on specialised diets, male participants tended to have less concerns around healthy eating than female participants, especially in the older life stage groups where some deemed this to be the responsibility of their female partner/spouse.

Those participants who had a family member with allergies also tended to prefer cooking from fresh ingredients, although other family members

would still at times eat a microwave meal, so allergies didn't necessarily exclude ready meals from the family shopping basket.

> *"I like to cook from scratch. I wouldn't be fussed with microwave meals or ready meals and to know what ingredients are going in. Apart from my treats."* (Female, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35–49)

> *"Having an allergy – you tend to cook more like your granny would cook anyway – more from scratch not so much processed or package bought foods."* (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 20-34)

> *"Everything has to be done from scratch because my daughter is lactose intolerant."* (Male, Portrush, ABC1, 20-34)

Most participants were planning their meals from a fairly standard weekly, or monthly cooking repertoire and would buy ingredients specific to pre-planned meals, while others bought ingredients that they were able to "do something with" and planned their meals after point of purchase. Within this space of planned, repeat purchases there seemed to be a loyalty to specific products with low potential to check labelling.

> *"Sometimes it can be pots of stew but sometimes it can be throw in the oven – it depends what you've got on that day."* (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 20-34)

> *"We're so set in our ways; we know exactly what we're looking for."* (Accompanied Shop, Female, Portrush, ABC1, 50+)

Consumption of convenience meals was more evident among younger and older single individuals who were also less likely to plan their meals ahead. There was also higher usage in busy households with children where individual members' likes and dislikes, or dietary constraints led to different types of meals needing to be prepared with very little time to devote to them. There was notable confusion and frustration around the lack of labelling consistency with these types of processed foods, with many participants suggesting that they struggled with "information overload". This sometimes led to a total disconnect with the label and unwillingness to engage with information.

The following section will explore levels of awareness and usage of food labelling across the research, exploring the situations and scenarios wherein participants were more or less likely to use these.

3. Labelling – Awareness and Usage

In this section, participants' awareness and usage of food labelling of the food they purchase is examined across the qualitative focus groups and accompanied shops supported by findings from the quantitative consumer panel.

Key findings from this section:

- All participants were aware that labels should carry information about ingredients for each product and that this should usually be set out on the back of the product packaging/label.
- Participants stated that to actively and routinely consult food labels they needed to have a specific reason to do so, such as searching for allergen information, checking the fat/sugar content if they were embarking upon a healthier diet or checking for salt following health problems.
- For those who had specific dietary needs or who were making an effort to be healthy, product categories that were either known or believed to contain higher quantities of "unhealthy" ingredients demanded closer scrutiny outside of "treat" purchases.
- Interestingly, those in the allergen groups stated that they also prescribed to the "tried and tested" products theory and repeat purchased items which they had become familiar with.
- Participants were less likely to consult labels on repeat purchases, occasional treats, fresh produce or branded products.
- Low usage of food labelling was also driven by lack of understanding and inability to process often perceived inconsistent information.

3.1 Participant Awareness

All participants were aware to a greater or lesser degree that product labels carry information about ingredients and most expect to find this information in very small print on the back of physical product packs.
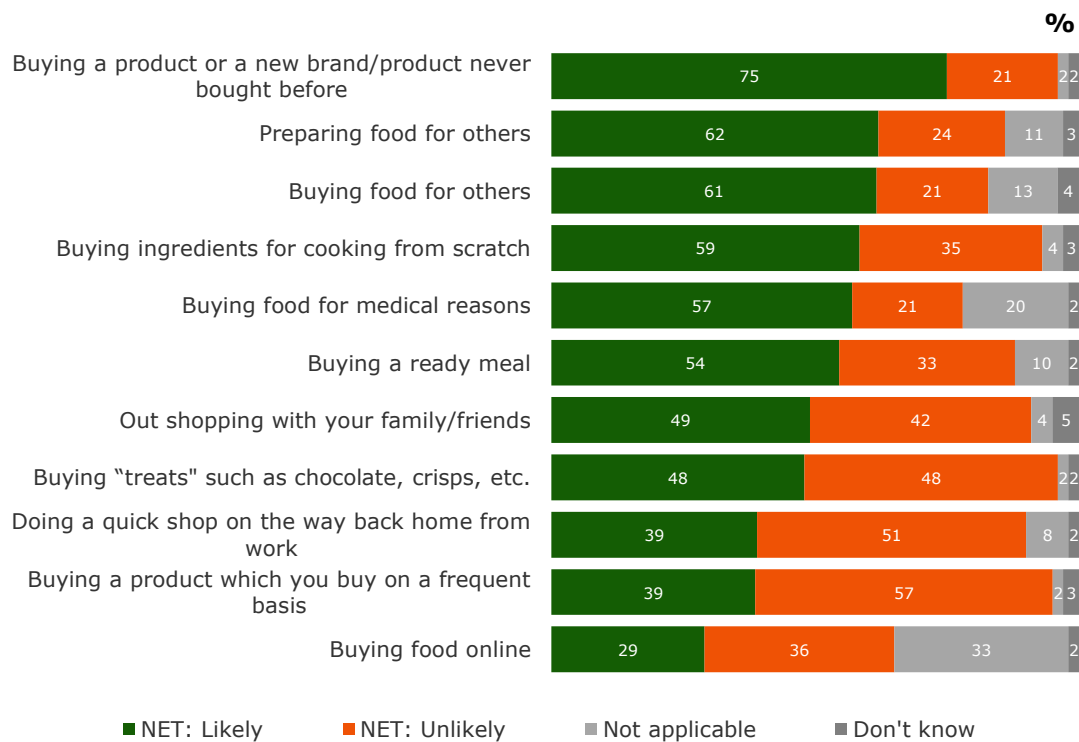
Overall, there was a general awareness of a mandatory system for reporting information on packaging, but not a clear understanding from participants as to if this was government monitored or regulated. Awareness of front of pack nutrition information was high but again lack of knowledge and inconsistency in terms of colouring and positioning created confusion for participants.

3.2 Food Label Consulting and Usage

For most participants consulting labels was very much a "needs-based behaviour" that informed and facilitated choice. Participants stated that to actively and routinely consult food labels they needed to have a specific reason to do so.

The online survey showed that participants were most likely to check labelling information when they were either buying a new product or brand, buying certain food for medical reasons, or when buying or preparing food for others (see Figure 1 below from the previous section).

Figure 1: Percentage of participants that agree/disagree with statements about when they use food labelling.

	NET: Likely	NET: Unlikely	Not applicable	Don't know
Buying a product or a new brand/product never bought before	75	21	2	2
Preparing food for others	62	24	11	3
Buying food for others	61	21	13	4
Buying ingredients for cooking from scratch	59	35	4	3
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Out shopping with your family/friends	49	42	4	5
Buying "treats" such as chocolate, crisps, etc.	48	48	2	2
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Buying a product which you buy on a frequent basis	39	57	2	3
Buying food online	29	36	33	2

SOURCE: Q003. How likely or unlikely would you be to read the information on food labels in the following situations?
Base: All Participants (201)

From the focus groups and accompanied shops, this seemed to be triggered by an awareness of an underlying need which prompted participants to start scrutinising product labels for very specific ingredients.

"My son has a nut allergy so it's kind of important when it says it's produced in a factory that's free from nuts." (Male, Belfast, C2DE, 34-49)

"I do a lot of training, so I'll be checking calories." (Male, Glengormley, C2DE, 20-34)

"If I'm going through one of my phases of eating well, I'd keep an eye on saturated fat and sugar as well." (Male, Glengormley, C2DE, 20-34)

For these participants, awareness of a need can be created both by an actual situation (such as a medical problem which meant they had to eat less salt), or even a perceived one (from media campaigns, social trends), that affected them (or a close family member) directly.

"Over the last 6 months, the cereal thing…it's the first thing that everybody started talking about when the whole labelling thing came out." (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

These participants were more likely to look at labelling information but were focused on particular information i.e. a person with a recent heart problem specifically sought out salt information or a person on a strict diet specifically sought out calorie content. They were not usually understanding the label as a whole or looking/observing other labelling information outside of this.

3.3 Nutrients of Most Interest– Fat, Sugar and Salt

As behaviour outlined in the previous section was based on very specific needs this meant that it also became associated with very particular nutrients - the most common of which were sugar, salt and fat/saturated fat. These three components seemed to take on far more importance than any other nutrients and some participants were exclusively looking for this information and ignoring other details.

With these "needs based" participants, product categories that are therefore either known to, or believed to contain higher quantities of unhealthy nutrients demanded higher scrutiny e.g. processed and pre-packaged foods (pasta sauces, pizzas, oven meals, biscuits, children's snacks and fruit juices and drinks), but typically not fresh foods like vegetables, fruit, meat and fish.

"I generally think that anything that's kind of packaged and has got loads of colour and stuff in…I kind of know what to stay away from." (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

"[I would look for information] with the pre-packed pasta sauces. If you're making them from scratch you know exactly what's going into them." (Male, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

3.4 Usage of labels by people with a food allergy

For participants with food allergies, such as nuts, milk, wheat/gluten, and dependent on the severity of the allergy, entire food groups, product categories and in some cases retailers were avoided outright.

Label scrutiny was stated as being an unreasonably time-consuming and difficult exercise for those in the allergen groups so avoidance was often the norm. Unsurprisingly, with greater accessibility of increasingly broader product categories in "free-from" supermarket aisles, several participants opted to use these specialist products rather than having to take the time to read ingredient labels.

"Marks and Spencer's have [precautionary nut allergy] on everything so I don't shop there." (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

"I don't need this but I have to look at this as a grandparent. You have to learn 'X needs this' and 'Y needs this' and so our age group are doing this." (Female, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

However, interestingly, those in the allergen groups in both the accompanied shops and focus groups expressed that they also prescribed to the "tried and tested" products theory with repeat purchase items which they had become familiar with. Participants claimed that at point of diagnosis of an allergy that shopping was particularly time-consuming but that this eased over time when they had identified a "list" of "safe products" which they repeat purchased.

3.5 Drivers for low usage of checking labelling

In the absence of specific reasons to check, participants stated a number of reasons for not engaging with food labels:

- o Perceived "healthiness" of a product

o Using brands as "short cuts" to trust and legitimacy
o Active disconnection or "not wanting to know" what is in perceived unhealthy food when this is a treat/occasional purchase

Perceived "healthiness" of a product

Those who cook fresh food from scratch stated that as they knew exactly what went in to their meals, they felt they had no reason to check labels for nutrition information in particular. Although they may be using some preserved ingredients like tinned tomatoes, tinned fish, stock cubes etc., they considered labelling information as irrelevant to them because the core of their meals were freshly cooked food.

> *"I don't tend to [look at the label] because if you cook everything from fresh you don't need to. If you're adding salt, you're putting the salt in, if you're adding the fat, you know."* (Female, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35-49)

Participants were also less likely to check labels on those items which were bought locally such as milk that was known to come from Northern Ireland and meat bought from local butchers. These products were primarily perceived as healthy produce as they were purchased "close to the food source" and produced positive trusting emotions with participants that they were receiving the best, highest quality items.

Occasional Treat/Usage

Those who would normally shun convenience food and ready meals as "rubbish", but who may occasionally resort to one such meal, also didn't typically engage with food labelling. Some participants stated that they made an active decision not to consult labels based on "not wanting to know" the potential "calorie damage" with infrequently purchased "treats".

> *"The only reason I would be buying this is because there's been a meal in the middle of the day that I didn't go to and that would happen once every three or four weeks…I wouldn't even look at the package I would just grab and say 'that's okay' I would never go and buy that as a meal and study it because that would be called 'rubbish' in our house."* (Male, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

It was stated that there was a lack of need to check labels when it came to treat occasions or when allowing oneself something that was desirable

albeit unhealthy. This belief was based on the presumption that as this was an occasional as opposed to a regular choice, it would not have long-term health implications. Such treats were more likely to be sweet (e.g. biscuits, cakes, soft/fizzy drinks), but not exclusively.

> *"I kind of know it's bad for me so I don't bother checking."* (Male, Belfast, C2DE, 35-49)

> *"Not really [I don't look at the labels] because I know if I've been good or otherwise then I can allow myself the sugary treats."* (Female, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35-49)

Routine/Repeat Purchases

Products and brands that were bought and consumed routinely and on a regular basis were also unlikely to warrant regular label-checking. Familiarity with a product created a "comfort zone" in which participants' solely relied on their personal experience for information. On the other hand, new and unfamiliar products were more likely to invite scrutiny; especially those in product categories that were thought of as potentially worrying i.e. meat products were there was a higher likelihood of food poisoning or potential contraction of disease.

> *"I don't need the extra information because most of the things are familiar to me. You assume they haven't changed since the last time so you don't need to go further."* (Accompanied Shop, Male, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 50+)

Brand Loyalty

Participants also used brand loyalty as a reassurance mechanism. They often were more likely to believe health claims and nutrition information on branded products and tended to repeat purchase these for ease and convenience. There was also lower likelihood to check labelling information when purchasing well–known brands as participants associated these with quality and expected high standards for compliance with labelling regulations.

> *"It's the brands you've grown up with."* (Accompanied Shop, Male, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35-49)

User-friendliness of labels

Lack of engagement with labelling information due to inconsistent and often confusing formats and lay-outs was also a key barrier for participant usage. Participants were often confronted with numerical data which was difficult to "work out" and required a lot of effort to process to inform choices. Participants highlighted that they were often under time constraints in the food aisle or when online shopping. Therefore, the time needed to "work out" these mental calculations was not available and as a result participants tended to either ignore numerical information outright or use other indicators on the packaging as a "short cut", such as brand reputation, etc.

Some participants commented on being "overloaded" with information and then faced the additional difficulty of "weighing up" which information to use. For example, health claims were often bold and bright on packaging but when participants viewed nutrition information on both front and back of pack found that these were often "at odds" with initial claims. This tended to frustrate participants and lowered trust in a product.

3.6   Online Shopper Usage

Awareness that labelling information is available and accessible for products on online shopping websites was almost non-existent. On one occasion customer comments and product reviews were mentioned as a source of information and this was cited as an alternative to checking labelling information;

> *"Sometimes you look at what other participants have said about it - like wine just to see what participants think of it"* (Accompanied Shop, Male, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 50+)

This echoes previous research undertaken by TNS BMRB for the FSA[2] in terms of a disconnect with food in the online space, where online shoppers value convenience and speed first and foremost. As such, the time needed to check a label negated the speed at which an online shopper could complete their shop – representing a further barrier to using labelling information online.

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[2] "Understanding Northern Ireland Consumer Needs around Food Hygiene Rating Scheme Information in Online Retail Environments", TNS BMRB, May 2016

In the next section, we will delve deeper into participants' labelling priorities to gauge an understanding of the types of information participants found least and most useful on food packaging.

4. Food Labelling Priorities

In this section, we examine participants' food labelling priorities when purchasing food across all phases of the research. In the focus groups, participants were presented with a range of food packaging stimuli and asked to prioritise the labelling information and this was presented as a discussion point to draw out views and opinions.

Key findings from this section:

- "When food should be eaten by" was the most frequent use of labels whilst shopping for just over a quarter (26%) of participants, and also the most frequent use of labels after purchasing and at home (31%) from the online survey. However, there was confusion over how to interpret these.
- Within the shopping context participants were primarily looking at cost information to make quick decisions. They used established signifiers to support this i.e. relying on brand and past experiences as "short cuts" to healthiness and quality.
- Some participants had learned to quickly scan the front of packs for other information shortcuts specifically nutrition and health claims like 'No added Sugar', 'Low Fat', 'Reduced Salt' etc. as well as the voluntary front of pack (FoP) nutrition labelling system. However, this was complicated by low understanding of the FoP system due to perceived inconsistency of layout i.e. non-colour versus colour coding.
- Labelling priorities differed significantly between those who have to take specific allergies into account when buying food and those who don't.
- Country of origin was appealing but in terms of priority tended to hold less importance when compared against price or brand. Participants tended to over-report the influence this had on actual purchasing behaviour, with price and promotions taking precedence following observations from the accompanied shop research.
- Participants only used instructions for use with those products which they were unfamiliar with or when they were buying items for the first time.

4.1 Date of minimum durability

In the qualitative research, the most important information that many participants looked for spontaneously was "use by/best before" dates. This information was particularly important when buying multiple products on special offer to avoid wastage

> *"When I'm in-store I will look obviously for the best date."*
> (Accompanied Shop, Female, Belfast, 20-34, C2DE)

The importance of minimum durability dates was also confirmed by the online panel (see Fig 2 below). 'When food should be eaten by' was the most frequent use for labels whilst shopping for just over a quarter (26%) of participants, and also the most frequent use of labels after purchasing and at home (31%).

Figure 2: How frequently do participants use each of the following when checking labels either in retail premises or at home?

In retail premises

When the food should be eaten by	26
Detailed nutrition information	18
Cooking instructions	12
Presence of ingredients people may avoid	11
A list of the ingredients	11

At Home

When the food should be eaten by	31
Storage instructions	27
Cooking instructions	11
Detailed nutrition information	9
The country it was produced in	6
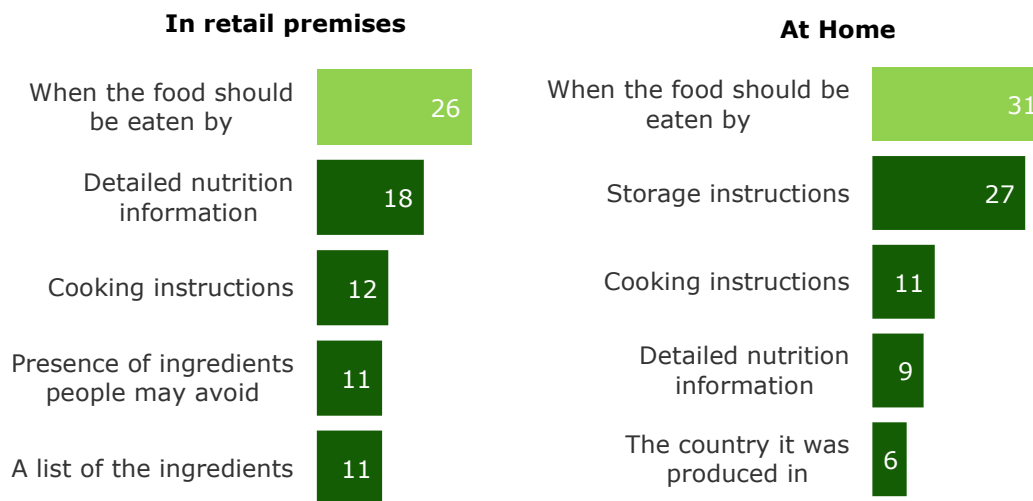
Sources:
Q005. How frequently you use each of them when choosing food in retail premises? *Top 5 responses shown
Q012. How frequently you use each of them when storing, meal planning and preparing food at home? *Top 5 responses shown
Base: All Participants (201)

Dates were deemed to be less relevant for fresh produce like fruit and vegetables, where participants felt able to gauge freshness for themselves. Participants were also aware that supermarkets stack shelves with the oldest (shortest dates) at the front and the freshest (longest

dates) at the back and many claimed to automatically search the back of shelves for the longest dates. Despite knowing this, many participants still checked the label to ensure they had picked a product with an appropriate date.

Participants were not always clear about the difference between the various dates displayed. Some assumed all dates were the same in that they provided *guidance* rather than an absolute instruction and therefore questioned the usefulness and even the validity of having one date that says "use by" and another that says "best before".

> *"I have to say I thought they were the same. I always thought use by and best before were exactly the same. I wouldn't tend to have anything over the date."* (Male, Glengormley, C2DE, 20-34)

> *"The "sell by" date, you've probably got about 2-3 days but the "use by" date means use by or you're risking food poisoning."* (Male, Belfast, C2DE, 35-49)

> *"Best before is to get the best taste out of whatever it is by this time. They can't really guarantee anything better after this date. I think it's more just to cover their tracks."* (Male, Glengormley, C2DE, 20-34)

There was also a general sense of conflict between not wishing to take chances and jeopardise family health by disregarding dates and not wanting to waste food, or even at worst fall victim to the 'marketing ploys' of supermarkets to throw away good food.

> *"Hummus for example that will keep for an extra 2 weeks after the label says."* (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

Some participants also felt that they trusted their own judgement when judging whether food was "out of date" or still fit for consumption.

> *"It depends on the actual product. Some things, I just use my nose. I reckon a lot of it is just made up to make you throw the thing out and buy another one."* (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

> *"I usually just whack it in the oven for a bit longer or microwave it for a bit longer. It does the job."* (Male, Glengormley, C2DE, 20-34)

Additionally, participants treated specific food groups differently to others, for example while not directly alluding to food poisoning, participants were generally wary of eating items such as eggs or meat after their "use by/best before" date. They were then obviously more likely to check "use by/best before" dates with these food groups.

> *"You're not going to risk it with the likes of eggs or chicken."* *(*Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

> *"Meat, 2 days after the use by date and you know it's gone."* (Male, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

4.2 Nutrition Information

There was uncertainty across participants as to the difference between nutrition information on the back and front of pack and which of these the consumer should consult. Nutrition information was also something that was much more difficult to understand than other components on a label beyond the presence of salt, sugar, fat and calories. Few participants were confident as to how to interpret nutrition information in order to meaningfully inform their choices. Participants particularly struggled to understand the significance of percentages without explanation of the context, especially when these are expressed as per 100g which then required mental effort to work out the value for the whole pack.

> *"Why don't they just say how many calories are in the pot*?" (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

> *"Maybe participants who are on diets look at that but I've never looked at [the nutrition information] it's just percentages, there's too much information because I just don't understand it."* (Female, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35-49)

Some participants (particularly those who don't regularly use ready meals) were of the opinion that nutrition information was relevant only in the context of ready meals or processed produce and so would be of interest only to those who buy and consume them. They seemed to not consider the various other products and ingredients that they themselves may also be buying e.g. tinned, packaged, or frozen, let alone express any interest in finding out about their nutrition value.

Some other practical reasons that deterred participants from reading such information were the size, quantity, density and colour of the text which was often too small and too detailed for participants to make out and was often compounded by artificial light in the supermarket aisle.

The Front of Pack Nutrition Labelling System

Overall, awareness of the system was not universal, although many were beginning to use this as quick indicator for the healthiness of a product.

> *"I do [use it] for salt and sugar. It's quick. The red, orange, green thing. I don't want them to have too much salt and sugar. It's just a very quick way."* (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

> *"That tells you – here's a snapshot of this is good, this is bad. By the time I've got to the back I'm done with looking for information. If it's red then no I won't buy it."* (Female, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35 - 49)

However, not everybody understood the Front of Pack (FoP) system. Participants were also unclear as to who had developed it, what authority they had, and whether it was something they could actually trust. They were of the general opinion that the system was potentially government-led but held the belief that due to inconsistency that this wasn't a highly regulated area.

> *"If they're using that colouring for the labels, can I trust them? On every brand, is there standardisation? So if it's green, it's deemed OK by the Food Standards Agency? It's standardised and it's legal? That educates me."* (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

> *"I just think that maybe participants need to be educated by the Food Standards Agency. Advertising saying there is criteria, we've standardised this, it is OK to rely on that colour coding."* (Female, Belfast, ABC1, 20-34)

Also for any participants who might be inclined to try to achieve a nutritionally balanced diet, especially those using pre-packaged food and ready meals, it became very difficult and confusing as one pack may contain low fats (green code) and low salt (green code), but actually be very high in sugars (red code);

> *"There's a lot of confusion. The saturated fat goes against the sugar and you're trying to be balanced in your diet then it's really hard to know which is which and which is the lesser of the two evils because it doesn't make sense at all"* (Female, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

> *"It's a quick look if you see the traffic light system if it's flashing up high for sugar or salt you're not even going to bother to read the list of ingredients."* (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

However, despite there being a general overall confusion on how the FoP system operated there was a sense that participants would like to make more use of this information in future if they held better knowledge on interpreting it.

4.3 Allergen Information & List of Ingredients
Unsurprisingly allergen information and list of ingredients, was top priority for those with an allergy, but was redundant for those with no allergies unless they were cooking for a specific person.

> *"That's the only one that could mean death immediately, if you got that one wrong."* (Male, Belfast, C2DE, 35-49)

In terms of current usage, allergen participants checked lists of ingredients and precautionary information when first buying a product. Interestingly, as with non-allergen participants, they then built up a list of "safe for consumption" products which they purchased regularly and reduced the need to check for allergen ingredients across every shop. These allergen participants however, were of the opinion that inconsistencies in terms of the presentation of allergen information were frustrating (i.e. ingredients being emphasised on some product lists of ingredients but not others).

Allergen participants also displayed dissatisfaction with the placing of precautionary information on packaging which was often presented in different formats which sometimes led to purchasing unsuitable products and then discovering an allergen ingredient at home.

Participants also expressed that reading through small dense text of ingredients was both time-consuming and could lead to mistakes. Therefore, the ideal way to deliver allergen information would be on the front of packs in the form of a repeated recognisable icon, or symbol that participants can quickly and easily identify as signifying the presence of allergens.

4.4 Promotional Information

Unsurprisingly, participants in general, though especially those from lower socioeconomic groups, were interested in and motivated by offers and promotions when food shopping. Those participants in the lower socioeconomic groups expressed a willingness to purchase items in "deals" or in "discount" sections of the supermarket and for some this remained key priority when undertaking the weekly shop due to lower disposable income available. As such, on-pack promotion information captured attention and was considered valuable. However, participants thought it could also result in wastage from purchase of items that were more than participants actually needed. On balance participants wanted this information readily available in spite of the potential to over-buy.

> *"If you see a jar and it's 2 for 1 then happy days – it's very rarely that I'd look at the nutrition information because I don't know what I'd do with it."* (Male, Derry-Londonderry, C2DE, 35-49)

> *"It depends on the product. I wouldn't just buy it for the sake of it. If it was something that I actually wanted…"* (Male, Glengormley, 20-34)

4.5 Country of origin

Country of origin was both interesting and appealing but in terms of priority tended to hold less importance when compared against price or brand. For example, while participants were concerned about where their food was coming from this was more in line with social desirability factors and often more of a "preference" than a "need". Participants tended to over-report the influence this had on actual purchasing behaviour, with price and promotions taking precedence following observations from the accompanied shop research.

When discussing country of origin, participants tended to spontaneously think of "local origin" produce as referring to food produced in Northern Ireland, rather than Britain. For some this was due to seeing local

produce such as milk and meat referred to in this way at their local butchers or greengrocers. For participants, "Irish" and "British" labelled products were deemed as having travelled a large distance from their source and therefore were not considered "local" when compared, in terms of freshness and quality, to those with the "Northern Irish" label.

This association was echoed in the online consumer panel research (see Fig 3), where 78% of survey participants stated that they considered produce labelled "Northern Ireland" to be local, compared to 28% and 26% feeling the same about "British" or "Irish" respectively.

Figure 3 : Participants opinion on local produce

%

Label	Value
Food labelled "Northern Irish"	78
Food labelled "British"	28
Food labelled "Irish"	26
Food labelled "Island of Ireland"	12
None of these	8
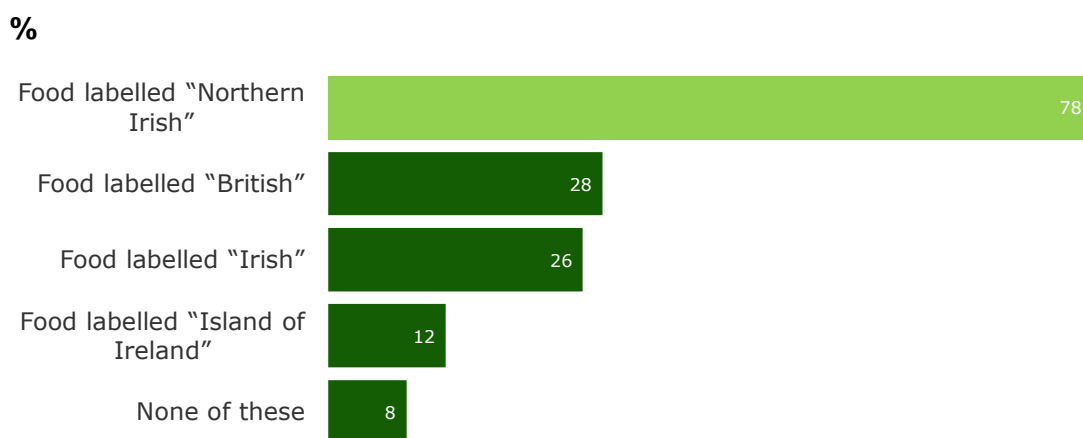
Source: When shopping for food, which of the following would you consider to be "local produce"?
Base: All participants

For some participants, choosing to shop at a local shop, e.g. the butcher was in itself a "country of origin" choice (i.e. perceived as only offering local produce) with these outlets being largely perceived as having higher food safety standards.

"I go to the butchers to buy my meat. I like to support local." (Female, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

"I think it's quite important to support local farmers as much as we possibly can. In such a rural country, where so many participants here depend on farming…if you can, I think you should." (Female, Glengormley, ABC1, 50+)

> *"It also creates confidence in food safety. Ireland and Britain have a reputation for quality in agriculture and animal welfare standards."* (Male, Glengormley, ABC1, 50+)

However, in spite of all the arguments in favour of paying more attention to country of origin, most acknowledged that in reality when making actual product choices it comes lower down their list of priorities. This was mainly due to price and budgeting considerations, as local products were thought to be more expensive. Some participants had also actively compared local and non-local produce in the food aisle at the supermarket but found that it was often the less expensive non-local produce that they placed in their basket, highlighting that when faced with a choice, price seemed to outweigh intentions of supporting the local economy.

> *"I still buy a frozen leg of lamb from New Zealand–so there is a price point as well."* (Accompanied Shop, Female, Portrush, ABC1, 35-49)

4.6 Instructions for Use and Storage Instructions
Participants only used instructions for use with unfamiliar products or when they were buying items for the first time. Participants expressed that they were likely to use this information with pre-packaged convenience foods which had particular microwave or oven instructions which they deemed important to follow correctly. In terms of less processed foods, such as fresh vegetables they tended to trust their instincts following repeat cooking.

There was a general feeling that the more unfamiliar the product, the more unsure the participant tended to feel about trusting instincts when preparing food. Participants therefore sought out information for reassurance that they were cooking food correctly and most importantly for the correct period of time if there was a risk of food poisoning and affecting the welfare of their family/partner.

Storage instructions were often seen as low priority as this was often linked to perishable goods and many participants failed to understand the difference between the need for this and "use by/best before" dates. Again, this fed into the overall theme that participants were trusting their instincts when it came to gauging whether food was safe to consume or not. Relying on these instincts was sometimes a habitual behaviour, for others it was a behaviour passed down generationally by observing older

family members and for others this instinct arose due to lack of awareness on whether this information should be viewed as guidance or strict instruction. There was a general consensus that participants matched storage with the "area" they had purchased the food, i.e. if they had purchased it from the frozen aisle, they would store it in their own freezer, etc.

> *"If I buy it from the fridge section, it goes in the fridge. If it's off the shelf it goes in the cupboard."* (Accompanied Shop, Female, Portrush, ABC1, 35-49)

The next section examines potential areas of confusion for participants which we have briefly mentioned in earlier sections to highlight key opportunities to increase confidence and therefore empower participants to use food labelling more frequently.

5. Potential Areas of Confusion

This section considers areas of confusion for participants across the research and how this potentially affected not only their engagement with information presented, but also their ability or inability to use this information to inform their purchasing choices.

Key findings from this section:

- Over half of participants (58%) from the online survey stated that "size of text" made food labels difficult to read and a further 44% stated that "too much numerical data" could lead to confusion.
- Numerical information was seen as a key barrier to use, with participants wanting to avoid having to "work out" complicated equations in the food aisle. Participants wanted greater visualisation of labelling data.
- There was a general sense from across the accompanied shops and focus groups that consistency in terms of formatting, layout and language would increase confidence in the legitimacy of information and lead to a potential increase in participant usage.

5.1 What is a "Label"?

There was some indication from the accompanied shops and focus groups that participants were unsure about what "labelling" was supposed to achieve e.g. is the purpose of a list of ingredients to help participants pick out elements they may be allergic to, or is it in fact a list of allergens? Given the wealth of information available to participants on food packaging, participants stated that it was often difficult to "wade through" or "make sense" of what was being presented and to what degree they should be inspecting or using information to inform their purchasing choices.

Also, given that there are usually a number of claims and icons sign-posting consumers on the front of packs (e.g. "no added sugar", "suitable for vegetarians", "low salt" and even "Use By and Best Before" dates) some participants questioned the need for more detailed labelling.

Many were unaware of the legal requirements or regulatory framework which governed food labelling but believed that "a governing body" on both a national and international scale was looking out for their interests.

Participants also expressed some frustrations around what exactly was the role of labelling, and how was it distinguishable from other marketing information. Again, these opinions seemed to emerge from lack of awareness of regulatory systems in place around food labelling. Participants particularly displayed confusion over governance of labelling information and whether food manufacturers were able to place claims on packaging at their own discretion or whether there was oversight of this area by an official body. There were also some concerns around how different countries may regulate food to differing standards and how this was managed in terms of regulation when food was imported into the U.K.

5.2 Confusion and Barriers to Usage

When asked about what makes food labels difficult to understand, over half (58%) of the online consumer panel identified the "size of the text" on food labels as making them hard to read or interpret. Additionally, 44% of the consumer panel thought that there was too much numerical data on labels, and 39% that labelling information was difficult to find on the packaging as highlighted below (see Figs 4 & 5).

Figure 4: What makes it difficult to understand food labels?

%

Category	%
The text is too small	58
There is too much numerical data	44
It's difficult to find this information on the packaging	39
The language used is difficult to understand	30
Other	4
Don't know	3
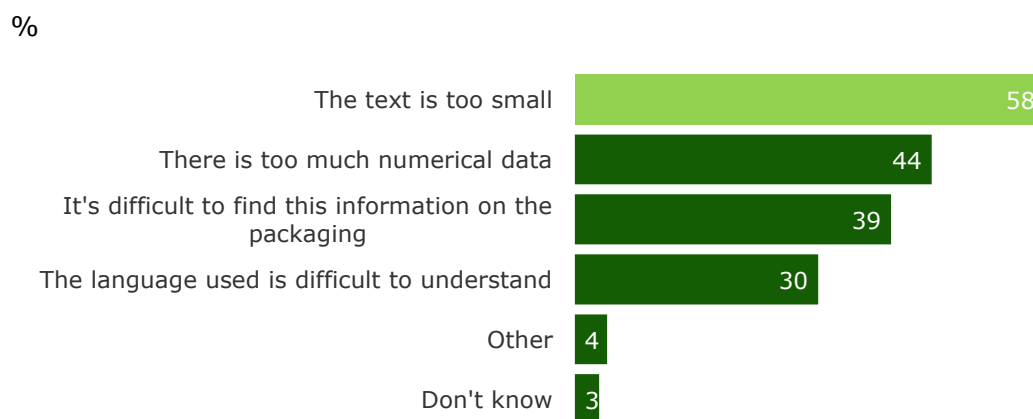
Q007. What is it about this information that makes it difficult for you to understand?
Base: All who find information on food labels difficult to understand (71)

Figure 5 : Understanding food labels

%

	NET: Agree	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	NET: Disagree	Don't know
The graphics used on food labels to display nutrition information are difficult to understand	29	29	40	2
The font size used on food labels makes it difficult to read the information provided	51	28	19	1
There are too many graphics on food labels	30	38	30	2

■ NET: Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree (3) ■ NET: Disagree ■ Don't know

Source: Q008. To what extent do you agree or disagree that... - Summary Table
Base: All Participants (201)[3]

Reasons for these survey responses above are further explored below, drawing insight from the qualitative phases of the research.

Numerical Information does not facilitate quick decisions

Numerical information was seen as a key barrier to use, with participants wanting to avoid having to "work out" complicated equations in the food aisle. There was a clear desire towards increased visualisation of data i.e. presenting information in a more accessible, visual format to enable easy, fast, comprehension of information. Some participants for example, stated that they would like the inclusion of "nutrient pie-charts" and more effective use made of colour-coding on Front of Pack.

Nutrition information was confusing to many participants who simply didn't understand it or its significance. For many, it was simply a list of ingredients with values and percentages that they can't interpret or indeed work out to make it relevant and meaningful e.g. exactly who do these recommended daily amounts refer to?

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[3] Graphics in Figure 6 refer to icons and symbols on the front and back of pack e.g. front of pack nutritional panels

"You have to concentrate on the actual percentage. If it was a pie-chart you could see which was bigger." (Male, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

"It's a percentage of your guideline daily amount, but everyone's daily amount must be different so I think that's misleading…it's almost designed to confuse us." (Male, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

As illustrated above, when confronted with information that participants struggled to engage with in a meaningful way, participants tended to feel mistrust or disillusionment with labelling presented and this was a key driver for low usage. A number of participants stated that they often found that food labelling was purposefully designed to confuse the consumer in the interests of selling produce which again drove levels of confidence and purpose of usage down.

Additionally, portion size and "per 100g" values confused participants, because they were often seen as insufficient for an adult. Therefore, participants struggled to work out the whole pack value, or the value of a portion that was bigger or different than the one given. There was a general dislike of numerical data on packs that did not facilitate a snap purchase decision.

Consistency is key

Across all phases of the research, participants had issues with the consistency of the information provided on food labels in terms of wording and presentation. When asked about what improvements they would make to the way in which information is displayed on food labels, the most common response was 'The information displayed in a consistent way across all products' (36%) (see Fig 7).

Figure 6: Improvements to food labels

%

Pie chart segments:
- The information displayed in a consistent way across all products — 37%
- Information written in a larger font — 26%
- Information shown in a more visual way — 13%
- Only the most important information should be shown — 8%
- Less numerical information — 5%
- Other — 0%
- Don't know — 11%
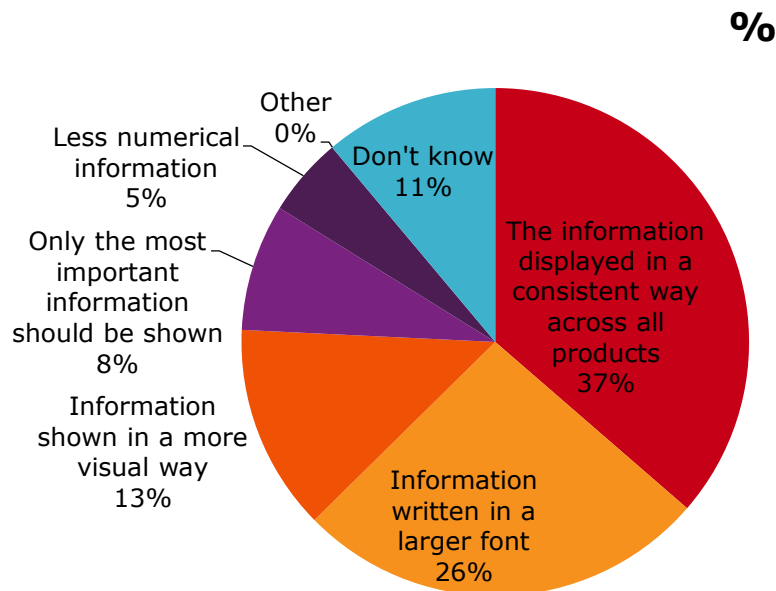
Q009. If you could make one of the following improvements to the way in which information is displayed on food labels, which would it be?
Base: All Participants (201)

Lack of consistency was a recurring theme across the research, e.g. How does one choose a 'balanced' meal/diet if on the same pack some nutrients are in the red and others are green?

The lack of consistency in front of pack information also presented a barrier to participants processing information in a meaningful way. Some commented that often companies used a single block colour (i.e. all bars on a traffic light system displaying one consistent colour instead of the expected red, amber and green) on their front of pack labels which led to distrust at "hiding" high percentages of salt, sugar and fat.

Lack of consistency in wording was also confusing which can create suspicion (e.g. salt vs. sodium) and led some participants to believe that consumers may be at risk of being deliberately misled by the food industry into buying potentially unhealthy products. Also lack of understanding around the difference between even the most common elements (e.g. fat vs. saturated fat) and the relationship between sugar and carbohydrates made participants feel frustrated.

"They use different words for things – if they used one word. They've got sodium in the nutrition facts but then they've got salt down twice in the list of ingredients. Why? Why can't it be all sodium or all salt?" (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

There was a general sense from across the focus groups and accompanied shops that consistency in terms of formatting, layout and language would increase confidence in the legitimacy of information. This in turn could have the potential to increase participant usage to encourage habitual as opposed to occasional use.

In terms of consistency, participants preferred uniformity across food packaging regardless of food type with Front of Pack (FoP) labelling. For example they expressed a desire for nutrition information to be displayed in the same format and position on food packaging to avoid having to lift a product and "actively look for" this information. They stressed that by giving consistent information in terms of language, format and positioning that they could potentially be persuaded to change their behaviours and use labelling information in a more habitual manner.

Use By and Best Before Dates

These were generally misunderstood and created confusion and even suspicion that led to stress for participants. This was because on the one hand participants tried to abide by this information while on the other questioning its honesty and validity.

"It's confusing – sometimes it's a date that says best before and if the date has gone then I'll throw it in the bin." (Female, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

"It just means the same thing – best before and use by – it means the same thing." (Male, Portrush, ABC1, 30-49)

"I don't take them too seriously – I always think they've got another couple of months in them." (Male, Portrush, C2DE, 50+)

Participants agreed that there is a gap in terms of understanding what each of the terms "use by" and "best before" constitute, the differences between these and when these should act as guidance as opposed to an absolute instruction (i.e. participants wanted to know when they should "take these seriously").

There was general consensus that even though these were used as a reference point at the point of purchase, when participants were using food items at home, there was a tendency to trust their own instincts and many felt they were routinely making decisions to "toss or keep" food based on often limited previous knowledge. Many participants welcomed further educational information in this area so that they did not feel they were consistently taking risks.

In the next section of this report, we will explore potential suggestions and recommendations for raising awareness and consequently usage of labelling information taking into consideration some of the concerns outlined in previous sections of this report.

6. Recommendations for Raising Awareness and Conclusions

This section explores the overall conclusions from this research, and outlines recommendations to encourage the public to check and use labelling information.

Overall conclusions

Participants' awareness, understanding and views of food labelling and how this affected purchasing decisions: Overall usage of labelling information was low for repeat purchases. The majority of labelling was being used in situations where there was a specific need and this was often a need to identify a specific ingredient due to following a particular diet or allergen requirement. Outside of this food labelling information was only important for new purchases which warranted further scrutiny.

Peoples' views about which information was most important to include on labels, and which is least important: "Use by/best before" and "nutrition information" were overall the most highly consulted information on food labels. However, there was still confusion over how to interpret this information to enable smarter choices in the food aisle. In terms of lower usage, online shoppers, including those in the allergen groups, were often not aware that labelling information was available on online platforms.

Drivers and sources of consumer views, and sources of any misperceptions/misunderstandings: Overall, participants viewed labelling information as too inconsistent or numerical to be interpreted in a meaningful way and therefore inform their choices. There was often confusion around when information should be used, and whether information should be interpreted as guidance or as strict instructions for use. Participants sought out "short-cuts" for healthiness and quality or relied on their own instincts when confusion arose. This drove a tendency to ignore information presented.

Issues regarding the user-friendliness of food labels in relation to font size, colour and layout and language: The perceived lack of consistency, confusion over the naming of potential ingredients and font size had a major impact on participants' ability to absorb labelling

information and in turn use it to make more informed choices. Their main concern across the research related to font size with many struggling to read food labelling information. There was also a drive towards increased visualisation of information and a need for less numerical data, which would facilitate quick, easy decision-making "at a glance".

Recommendations for raising awareness

1. **Due to "split second" decision making, participants need increased visualisation of information at point of sale:** There was a common finding across all aspects of this research that in-store shoppers often only allow seconds to consult a food label before purchasing and participants relayed that any information given should facilitate a "snap" decision in the food aisle. As such, there is potential to increase usage of labelling information if it is presented in a more visual format, requiring minimum cognitive effort.

2. **Participants' value consistency to encourage habitual use:** There is a need for greater consistency of labelling in terms of format and positioning on pack which could encourage more regular usage e.g. country of origin not always shown, allergen ingredients not always emphasised. There was particular appetite for usage of nutrition and health information in line with current social trends towards healthier eating habits. For participants, the ability to use this information rests on finding information instantly understandable and accessible and this can only be achieved when it is presented in recognisable, repeated formats which can facilitate "at a glance" decision making.

3. **Participants are using "Use by/best before" dates interchangeably and there is a need for greater clarity around what these constitute:** The most consistently noticed issue with labelling information for participants was lack of consistency and clarity around "use by/best before dates". As this is top priority for the majority of participants when checking labelling information, it is recommended that greater understanding of what these mean would be beneficial.

4. **Participants were generally unaware that labelling information was available on online platforms and further**

promotion of its availability may empower more people to use it: Online shoppers had low awareness that labelling information was available to them, and there is potential to raise knowledge levels to encourage usage in this area. Although as previous research has shown participants may be unlikely to click through or scroll down a webpage to view this information[4] there may be a need to consider providing this without shoppers having to seek it out e.g. via hover-over on a main product description page.

5. **Participants key concern when interpreting labelling data was the size of font and having uniform regulation of this may encourage uptake**: Ensuring labelling information is visible and is written in plain English is key to ensuring participants are able to access labelling information quickly, easily and without confusion. Participants recommended using large and bold fonts to highlight key facts.

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[4] "Understanding Northern Ireland Consumer Needs around Food Hygiene Rating Scheme Information in Online Retail Environments", TNS BMRB, May 2016

Appendices

Appendix A
Qualitative Discussion Guide - Accompanied Shops

Appendix B
Qualitative Discussion Guide - Focus groups

Appendix C
Quantitative Questionnaire

Appendix D
Citizens' Forum Research

Appendix E
Quantitative Consumer Panel

Appendix A

**FSA Northern Ireland Food Labelling
Discussion Guide for Accompanied Shops v0.1**

Aim and objectives

The overall aim of the research is to gather evidence from NI consumers about their understanding of retail food labelling information when purchasing food, how this influences their behaviour, and their concerns and priorities around labelling information.

Specifically, this research needs to:

- Explore consumer awareness, understanding and views of food labelling and how this currently affects purchasing decisions. Specifically the research needs to explore the following components of labelling:

    - Country of origin
    - Allergen information (including precautionary allergen)
    - Nutrition information
    - Products on promotions
    - List of ingredients
    - Instructions for use
    - Date of minimum durability (use by or best before)

- Understand consumer views about which information is most important to include on labels, and which is least important.

- Provide insight around the drivers of consumer views, and sources of any misperceptions/ misunderstandings.

- Explore any issues regarding the user-friendliness of food labels in relation to font size, colour and layout and language.

- Provide a baseline understanding of consumer knowledge and understanding of labelling and support the FSA's ability to provide a targeted consumer education and support campaign around labelling that meets consumer needs.

The accompanied shops in particular aim to:

- **Observe consumer behaviour in practice** – allowing us to understand the extent to which labelling is a factor in decision making in practice.
- Conduct more detailed, tailored discussion regarding drivers of food purchasing choices, for example:
    - **Using explicit examples from consumers' own shopping behaviour** to prompt discussion of specific choice moments and the role of labelling within these;
    - **Using observed behaviour to challenge consumer report** (e.g., around reported versus intended importance of various label types versus promotions or other drivers).

■ **Assess in the moment emotion** – In terms of driving label use or non-use, or in terms of signalling points of positivity/confusion/frustration/etc. For example, seeing how a consumer manages to interpret a label to get the information out that they are interested in – and if anything angers or pleases them about that process.

Note: The guide below acts as guidance through the accompanied shop. Researcher to determine order in which issues are covered and ensure coverage of all issues over interview and accompanied shop to allow for natural flow and an opportunity to observe natural behaviours.

Key Questions	Materials	Approx timing
1. Welcome and Introduction		**5 minutes**
Researcher: To meet and explain purpose of accompanied shop i.e. that researcher will accompany respondent whilst shopping online / in-store (as appropriate). To inform respondent there may be questions whilst shopping and more in-depth questions at the end of their shop. • Introduce TNS-BMRB – independent research company • Research is being carried out on behalf of FSA • Introduce purpose of research o As you are aware, I am here today to observe your shop/observe you go about your on-line shop. I am working on behalf of the Food Standards Agency NI and we're interested in how people make purchasing decisions while they shop in store/online. I want this to be as relaxed as possible so there is no need to behave any differently than normal. I will just be asking you a few questions as we go around/as you do your (on-line) shop – this isn't a test so please try and shop as you normally would and please make your normal purchases as I won't be remarking upon any of the items you buy as that's not part of my research objectives. We will have a short conversation after this to discuss the shop. • Confidentiality – their views will be used, but not identifiable • MRS guidelines • Seek permission to record interview • Length of post-shop discussion: 30 minutes		
2. Observations during shopping		
*Researcher to allow respondent to move around store/online shop at their leisure and browse for their shopping and compare labels without disruption. Researcher to refer to "Observation Checklist" throughout shop and note; • Deliberations while respondent is buying food. (length of selection process, impact of packaging on decision, use of labelling, brand loyalty)		

• Time taken over purchasing decisions and any frustrations/positive comments around information shown on packaging		52
3. Opening discussion – Exploring behaviours		**5 minutes**
Aim: To explore the shopping habits and background/context to respondent's shop and how this influences their decision-making processes. **Warm up** • How often do they shop for groceries? How many times during the week? • Do they usually shop at this supermarket/this online shop? Where else do they buy groceries? • Who prepares the meals/sets the menu in their house? What kinds of meals do they like to cook? • What sorts of things would influence their purchasing decisions? (*Spontaneous responses at first and then prompted by the list below*); - Finances – price, affordability per household - Healthy product - Tastes of the people in their household – cautious of introducing new foods for cost reasons - Brand loyalty - Family situation e.g. age of children/term time - Deals or promotions - Time of year e.g. holidays/seasons - Whether they are shopping alone or with family - Habit i.e. "I always buy this" - Special Dietary Requirements - Tempted by the packaging		5 minutes
4. Discussion around shop – Exploring behaviours		**15 mins**
Aim: To gain insight into consumer awareness of labelling and their usage during the shop. To gauge the information needs of the consumer and how this impacts on their purchasing behaviour. **Discussion around the shop** • How often do they consult food labels while they are shopping? • How often did they consult food labelling during this particular		

shop?

- How easy/difficult do they find trying to locate the information they need on food packaging?

- Are they more likely to consult labelling on products they buy regularly or products they buy occasionally? If there is a difference, why?

  Researcher to note any differences in behaviour

- Is there any particular information on labelling which is important to them*? (Spontaneous responses and then to probe on the following in terms of importance)*

  o Country of origin;

Researcher: to probe on would participants consider food labelled as "Irish" to be from Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland or anywhere on the island of Ireland? Is it important for participants to know where the food they are buying is sourced from?/Is locally sourced food a priority?

  o Allergen information in ingredients list – including precautionary allergen labelling;
  o Nutrition information on back of pack in mandatory format and voluntary information noted on front of pack;

Researcher: to probe on how important nutrition information is and how often participants use this to make food choices/do they pay attention to the colour bars and do these affect what they buy?(calorie intake/salt intake)? What particular nutrition information is important to them?

  o Products on promotions;
  o Instructions for use

Researcher: to probe on how participants adhere to storage and usage information e.g. use within x number of days/do they follow instructions for use of product when preparing a meal/do they stick to recommended portion size?
  o Date of minimum durability (use by or best before)

Researcher: to ascertain what participant's understandings of "best before" and "use by" dates are and whether there is any confusion

- Were there any particular products during the shop were they actively looked at the labelling? Can they remember what these products were?

Researcher to probe on specific products during the shop where respondent checked labelling info

- Why was it important to check the labelling on this product/these

products in particular?		54
• Did they find what they were looking for? Was it easy to locate this information?		
• If not, do they know how the presentation of this information could be improved?		
• How do they feel when products they wish to purchase do not have the information they need on the packaging? Frustrated? Angry?		
• Why was this a frustrating process? - Overcrowding? - Overshadowing? - Font too small? - Confusing information?		
• Do they try to find this information from elsewhere?		
• Do they continue to purchase the item without this information?		
• Were there any particular product labels during their shop which they used and found information easy to find? What did they like about the labelling that made this process simpler?		
• Are there any particular food items wherein they are **more likely** to look at labelling before purchase? What types? Why?		
• Are there any particular food items wherein they are **less likely** to look at labelling? What types? Why?		
• Why do they need this information? How do they ascertain it?		
• What do they do with it?		
• Would they hesitate to purchase something if the packaging did not have information they needed? Why?		
• Do information requirements differ for different types of foods / meals? Different occasions? How? Why? Why not?		
Researcher: to note any misunderstandings/misperceptions throughout discussion. Why do consumers hold these views? Where do they come from? How could they be addressed?		
Wrap up		**5 mins**
• Any further comments/questions? • Thank respondent, inform of next steps and close		

Appendix B

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to gather evidence from NI consumers about their understanding of retail food labelling information when purchasing food, how this influences their behaviour, and their concerns and priorities around labelling information.

Specifically, this research needs to:
- Explore consumer awareness, understanding and views of food labelling and how this currently affects purchasing decisions. Specifically the research needs to explore the following components of labelling:
    i. Country of origin
    ii. Allergen information (including precautionary allergen labelling)
    iii. Nutrition information
    iv. Products on promotions
    v. List of ingredients
    vi. Instructions for use
    vii. Date of minimum durability (use by or best before)
- Understand consumer views about which information is most important to include on labels, and which is least important
- Provide insight around the drivers of consumer views, and sources of any misperceptions/ misunderstandings
- Explore any issues regarding the user-friendliness of food labels in relation to font size, colour and layout and language.
- Provide a baseline understanding of consumer knowledge and understanding of labelling and support the FSA's ability to provide a targeted consumer education and support campaign around labelling that meets consumer needs.
- To provide evidence-based robust recommendations to FSA on how best to present HYGIENC information which strikes a practical balance between mandatory reporting and the potential resource burden on commercial providers/businesses.

Materials:

Materials

Material	Aim	Section
Example shopping pages slide	To allow participants to explore food shopping habits	2
Example labels slide	To allow participants to provide their top mind views on how labelling is presented	2
Example food packaging / menu / image of cafe displaying food (4 different stims)	To allow participants to comment on how they use labelling information in different situations (e.g. in	3

	supermarket, when ordering from a menu, when ordering food in a cafe)	
Respondent labelling information priorities pack of cards	Each piece of labelling information listed on a separate card to allow participants to map out food labelling priorities. Blank cards to be included to allow additional priorities to be added.	4
Researcher definition sheet	Definition of parameters of labelling information (e.g. country of origin, allergen information, nutrition information, product on promotion, instructions for use, date of minimum durability) to allow research to understand and challenge consumer misunderstandings.	Use throughout

Key Questions	Materials	Approx timing
5. Welcome and Introduction		**5 mins**
1.1 Introduction • Introduce TNS-BMRB – independent research company • Research is being carried out on behalf of FSA in Northern Ireland • Introduce purpose of research 　○ Today we are going to explore your information needs when you are shopping. We are interested in all your views so please share in the discussion. There are no right or wrong answers, this is not a test so don't be worried about saying what you feel. We are just interested in what food information is important to you and how it should be presented to make it easier to find and easier to understand. • Introduce FSA representative(s) 　○ Individual introductions, explaining their role for the group • Confidentiality – their views will be used, but not identifiable • MRS guidelines • Ground rules • Length of discussion: 90 minutes • Those of you who are involved in the vox pops section would you please wait behind for a few minutes at the end of session • Any other housekeeping (fire exits, loos, etc)		

6. Food Labelling attitudes and awareness		20 mins

Aim: To establish participants' initial attitudes and behaviours towards food labelling. To establish the context in which participants view food labelling information and make decisions in this area.
 	
General food purchasing habits
 	
Food Shopping
• How often do they shop for food? / How many times? What sorts of foods?
• Who prepares the meals in their house hold?
*Researcher to note mentions of home-cooked vs. convenience foods
 	
• Do they shop online/in store?
• Who plans the menus in their household?
• What kinds of outlets do they use;
   ▪ Supermarkets
   ▪ Apps
   ▪ Catering services
   ▪ Amazon/Ebay
 	
• What do they want from this experience?
 	
General attitudes towards labelling
 	
Researcher to show mock up slide of standard labels to probe for "top of mind" responses
 	
• Ask group how aware they are of food labelling?
• Do they use food labelling when purchasing food? Why do they use it? Why not?
• When do they consult labelling/when do they not?
• (Unprompted) What kinds of information do they particularly look for on a label?
• Why is that information important to them? (Researcher to examine particular examples that are prompted by group)
 	
Researcher to note any spontaneous mention of country of origin, allergen information – including precautionary allergen labeling, nutrition information, products on promotions, instructions for use ,list of ingredients, date of minimum durability (use by or best before).
• If they need this information, what do they do with it?
 	
• Could this information be presented in a different way? (Researcher to listen for spontaneous mention of font size, colour, layout and language before prompting on these points) What would this add? How important is this? Why? Why not?
  Researcher to note any spontaneous mentions of colour, font size, layout, language)
	==Show mock up slide of different food outlets==
	
	==Show a mock up slide of standard labels==	

- Do information requirements differ for different types of foods / meals? Different occasions? How? Why? Why not? - If not mentioned, researcher to prompt for any differences or similarities when purchasing food to eat at home / purchasing food when eating out. *Researcher: to note any misunderstandings / misperceptions throughout discussion. Why do consumers hold these views? Where do they come from? How could they be addressed?* - In what circumstances would they not look at food labelling? (unprompted) (Prompted) - Too much time to check - Information they need is not easy to find - There is too much information on label(overcrowding/overshadowing) - Layout of information - Language wasn't clear - Readability (font size too small)		
7. Understanding of food labelling information		**30 mins**
Aim: *To understand consumers' views of food labelling in detail both in and outside of the home. To provide insight around the drivers of consumer views, and sources of any misperceptions/ misunderstandings. To start to explore any issues regarding the user-friendliness of food labels in relation to font size, colour and layout and language.* ***Researcher:*** *to explain we would like participants to imagine they are shopping for food in store / online (as appropriate)...* - Researcher: to share example 1 with participants (subject to rotation) - Do they actually look at any of the labelling information? Which pieces of information? Why? Why not? - Researcher to note differences from responses in previous section. What is driving these differences? - What do they understand from the information provided? What does it tell them? Is this important? Why? Why not? - Could this information be presented in a different way? (Researcher to listen for spontaneous mention of font size, colour, layout and language before prompting on these points) What would this add? How important is this? Why? Why not? - Is there anything that would make participants less likely to read the information (probe on font size, over-crowding, over-shadowing, bad layout, too much information, confusing information) ***Researcher:*** *To repeat above questions with examples 2,3 and 4 (subject to*	==Example packaging== (Stims 1-4)	15 mins

rotation)

- Led by the order in which mentioned by participants, researcher **to** elicit answers to above questions specifically related to:
  - Country of origin;

Researcher: to probe on would participants consider food labelled as "Irish" to be from Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland or anywhere on the island of Ireland? Is it important for participants to know where the food they are buying is sourced from?/Is locally sourced food a priority?

  - Allergen information in ingredients list – including precautionary allergen labelling;
  - Nutrition information on back of pack in mandatory format and voluntary information noted on front of pack;

Researcher: to probe on how important nutrition information is and how often participants use this to make food choices/do they pay attention to the colour bars and do these affect what they buy?(calorie intake/salt intake)? What particular nutrition information is important to them?

  - Products on promotions;
  - Instructions for use

Researcher: to probe on how participants adhere to storage and usage information e.g. use within x number of days/do they follow instructions for use of product when preparing a meal/do they stick to recommended portion size?

  - Date of minimum durability (use by or best before)

Researcher: to ascertain what groups understandings of "best before" and "use by" dates are and whether there is any confusion

- Researcher: to ensure full coverage of above information, particularly in food allergy groups.
- Researcher: to note any misunderstandings / misperceptions throughout discussion. Why do consumers hold these views? Where do they come from?
- Do information requirements differ for different types of foods / meals? Different occasions? How? Why? Why not?
- Does prior experience of using a product influence whether or not they consult the label? If yes, how and why?
- If not mentioned, researcher to prompt for any differences or similarities when purchasing food to eat at home / purchasing food when eating out.

8. Consumer Priorities – Assessment of consumer's labelling needs		**25 minutes**
Aim: To understand consumer views about which labelling information is most important to include on labels, and which information is least important	<mark>Hand out</mark>	

Researcher to split group into two sub-groups. Researcher to hand each group a 'respondent pack of labelling priorities' (7 separate cards, listing labelling information). Researcher to add any additional priorities that have emerged during discussions on extra blank cards and add to the pack. Allow participants five minutes to do this. *Researcher to ask each group to layout cards in priority order. What labelling information is most important? Which labelling information is least important?* *Researcher to ask sub-groups to share their priorities with other group.* - Why are certain pieces of information more important to each group? - Why are other pieces of information less important to each group? - Are there differences between the priorities of groups? What is driving these differences? - Do information requirements differ for different types of foods / meals? Different occasions? How? Why? Why not? - If not mentioned, researcher to prompt for any differences or similarities when purchasing food to eat at home / purchasing food when eating out. **Researcher:** to ask groups to collaborate and devise one list of priorities if possible from most important to least important overall, noting reasons driving any changes to sub-group priorities. **Researcher:** to observe and note how participants have come to their decisions within the group	<mark>each category on paper slides</mark>	
9. FSA Questions		**5 mins**
Aim: To allow participants to pose outstanding questions to FSA representative - Researcher to invite FSA representative to pose questions about expectations / presentation needs in the area. - Researcher to invite participants to ask outstanding questions to FSA. - Researcher to moderate level of detail in answering questions and capture any unanswered questions which are out of scope.		5 minutes
• Wrap up		**5 mins**
- Thank participants, inform of next steps and close - Ask participants taking part in Vox pops to stay behind		

Appendix C

CAWI

Questionnaire

Name of survey
FSA Northern Ireland Labelling

Not back

> We are carrying out research on behalf of Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland (FSA in NI). This survey is about the way in which food is labelled.

Q002 - Mainshopper:	Single coded

Not back

> Thinking about food/grocery shopping, which of these best describes the level of responsibility you have for the shopping in your household? Are you...

Flipped

1   ❍   Responsible for all or most of the food/grocery shopping

2   ❍   Responsible for about half of the food/grocery shopping

3   ❍   Responsible for less than half of the food/grocery shopping

4   ❍   Not responsible for any of the food/grocery shopping

99   ❍   Don't know *Position fixed *Exclusive*

Q011 - Allergy:	Single coded

Not back

> Is there any food that you (or anyone that you buy or prepare food for) are allergic to?
>
> A food allergy is a fast and potentially serious response to food by your immune system, triggering symptoms such as a rash, wheezing and Itching.

Normal

1   ❍   Yes

2   ❍   No

3   ❍   Don't know

Q003 - ReadInfo:	Matrix

Not back | Number of statements: 11 | Number of Scales: 6

Random

	Very likely	Fairly likely	Fairly unlikely	Very unlikely	Don't know	Not applicable
buying a product or a new brand of product which you have never bought before	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying ingredients for a recipe you are cooking from scratch	○	○	○	○	○	○
out shopping with your family and/or your friends	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying a ready meal	○	○	○	○	○	○
doing a quick shop on the way back home from work	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying "treats" such as chocolate, crisps, etc.	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying a product which you buy on a frequent basis	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying food online	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying food for others e.g. children	○	○	○	○	○	○
preparing food for others e.g. children	○	○	○	○	○	○
buying food for medical reasons e.g. diabetics, high blood pressure	○	○	○	○	○	○

Not back | Number of statements: 12 | Number of Scales: 12

<div style="border: 1px solid red; color: red;">

There are different types of information included on the labeling of food, we would like you to rank these in order of **how important you think it is that retailers provide this information**.

Please click and drag the most important information into the boxes and carry on with each until all twelve are placed in your preferred order.

</div>

Please use the arrows to move options across if you are unable to click and drag.

Random

	1 Most important	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12 Least important
Storage instructions, such as if the food needs to be refrigerated, how long it can be kept for once open, etc.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
When the food should be eaten by (e.g.use by or best before dates)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The number of portions/servings included	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Presence of ingredients people may avoid (e.g. due to allergy, religious reasons, vegetarianism, intolerances, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The country it was produced in	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Cooking instructions, such as oven temperature and how long it should be	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

cooked for

A list of the ingredients	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Promotional information, such as if there is a special discounted price or a buy one get one free offer	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Colour coded information (red, amber and green) on the front of packs showing a summary of the nutrition information	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Detailed nutrition information on the back of packs which show the quantity of calories, salt, fat, sugar per 100g and per portion	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Information on how the product was produced (e.g. free range or organic)	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Health claims (e.g. high in fibre, low fat, etc.)	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Not back | Number of statements: 12 | Number of Scales: 12

<div style="border: 2px solid red; color: red;">

We would now like you to rank the different types of information according to **how frequently you use each of them when choosing food in retail premises.**

Please click and drag the information you use the most frequently into the boxes and carry on with each until all twelve are placed in your preferred order.

</div>

Please use the arrows to move options across if you are unable to click and drag.

Random

	1 Most frequently used	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12 Least frequently used
Storage instructions, such as if the food needs to be refrigerated, how long it can be kept for once open, etc.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
When the food should be eaten by (e.g.use by or best before dates)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The number of portions/servings included	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Presence of ingredients people may avoid (e.g. due to allergy, religious reasons, vegetarianism, intolerances, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The country it was produced in	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Cooking instructions, such as oven temperature and how long it should be	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

cooked for

A list of the ingredients	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Promotional information, such as if there is a special discounted price or a buy one get one free offer	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Colour coded information (red, amber and green) on the front of packs showing a summary of the nutrition information	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Detailed nutrition information on the back of packs which show the quantity of calories, salt, fat, sugar per 100g and per portion	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Information on how the product was produced (e.g. free range or organic)	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Health claims (e.g. high in fibre, low fat, etc.)	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q012 - UseOfInformationHome:	Matrix

Not back | Number of statements: 11 | Number of Scales: 11

Please use the arrows to move options across if you are unable to click and drag.

Normal

	1 Most frequently used	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11 Least frequently used
Storage instructions, such as if the food needs to be refrigerated, how long it can be kept for once open, etc.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
When the food should be eaten by (e.g.use by or best before dates)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The number of portions/servings included	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Presence of ingredients people may avoid (e.g. due to allergy, religious reasons, vegetarianism, intolerances, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The country it was produced in	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Cooking instructions, such as oven temperature and how long it should be cooked for	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
A list of the ingredients	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Colour coded information (red, amber and green) on	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

the front of packs showing
a summary of the
nutrition information

Detailed nutrition   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
information on the back
of packs which show the
quantity of calories, salt,
fat, sugar per 100g and
per portion

Information on how the   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
product was produced
(e.g. free range or organic)

Health claims (e.g. high in ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
fibre, low fat, etc.)

Still thinking about the different types of information typically shown on food labels.

How easy or difficult do you find it to understand...

Random

	Very easy	Quite easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Quite difficult	Very difficult	Don't know
Storage instructions, such as if the food needs to be refrigerated, how long it can be kept for once open, etc.	○	○	○	○	○	○
When the food should be eaten by (e.g.use by or best before dates)	○	○	○	○	○	○
The number of portions/servings included	○	○	○	○	○	○
Presence of ingredients people may avoid (e.g. due to allergy, religious reasons, vegetarianism, intolerances, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
The country it was produced in	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cooking instructions, such as oven temperature and how long it should be cooked for	○	○	○	○	○	○
A list of the ingredients	○	○	○	○	○	○
Promotional information, such as if there is a special discounted price or a buy one get one free offer	○	○	○	○	○	○
Colour coded information (red, amber and green) on the front of packs showing a summary of the nutrition information	○	○	○	○	○	○

Detailed nutrition information on the back of packs which show the quantity of calories, salt, fat, sugar per 100g and per portion	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Information on how the product was produced (e.g. free range or organic)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Health claims (e.g. high in fibre, low fat, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Ask only if **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=1 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=2 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=3 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=4 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=5 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=6 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=7 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=8 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=9 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=10 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=11 & SC=4,5 or **Q006 - EaseToUnderstand** ST=12 & SC=4,5

Q007 - HardToUnderstand:	Multi coded

Not back | Min = 1

What is it about this information that makes it difficult for you to understand?

Normal

1 ❑ The text is too small

2 ❑ There is too much numerical data

3 ❑ The language used is difficult to understand

4 ❑ It's difficult to find this information on the packaging

96 ❑ Other, namely... *Open *Position fixed*

99 ❍ Don't know *Position fixed *Exclusive*

Not back | Number of statements: 6 | Number of Scales: 6

To what extent do you agree or disagree that...

Normal

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
It is difficult to find the information you are looking for on food labels	○	○	○	○	○	○
The graphics used on food labels to display nutrition information are difficult to understand	○	○	○	○	○	○
The font size used on food labels makes it difficult to read the information provided	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is too much information provided on food labels	○	○	○	○	○	○
There are too many graphics on food labels	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is too little information provided on food labels	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q009 - Improvement:	Single coded

Not back

If you could make one of the following improvements to the way in which information is displayed on food labels, which would it be?

Normal

1 ○ Information written in a larger font

2 ○ Less numerical information

3 ○ Information shown in a more visual way

4 ○ The information displayed in a consistent way across all products

5 ○ Only the most important information should be shown

96 ○ Other, namely... *Open *Position fixed*

99 ○ Don't know *Position fixed *Exclusive*

Q010 - Q010:	Multi coded

Not back | Min = 1

When shopping for food, which of the following would you consider to be "local produce"?

Please select all that apply

Normal

1 ❑ Food labelled "British"

2 ❑ Food labelled "Irish"

3 ❑ Food labelled "Northern Irish"

4 ❑ Food labelled "Island of Ireland"

5 ○ None of these *Position fixed *Exclusive*

Appendix D

Citizens' Forum Work Programme

In December 2005, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Board agreed to develop more creative and experimental ways of engaging directly with individual consumers and to construct a new model for consumer engagement. Central to this aim was the establishment of a nationwide series of consumer forums to enable the FSA to establish an ongoing dialogue with the public on food standards.

The Citizens' Forums typically use a deliberative method, whereby during the sessions, expert witnesses or educational materials provide context and in-depth information to the group, informing participants' discussions. These forums therefore provide a deeper understanding of attitudes than traditional focus group discussions.

Outlined below are some of the previous Citizens' Forums conducted by TNS BMRB for the FSA:

Citizens' Forums: Communications Research (2014)

http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/food-safety-message.pdf

Citizens' Forums: FSA Strategy 2015-2020 (2014)

http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsa-strategy-research-report.pdf

Citizens' Forums: Acceptability of Trace DNA in processed meats (2013)

http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/tracedna-viewsc.pdf

Citizens' Forums: Research with consumers and staff delivering official controls (2013)

http://www.foodbase.org.uk//admintools/reportdocuments/871-1-1614_FINAL_Consumers_Report_260111460_FSA_RDOC.pdf

http://www.foodbase.org.uk//admintools/reportdocuments/871-1-1615_FINAL_Professional_Report_260111460_FSA_RDOC.pdf

Citizens' Forums: Expanding Food Hygiene Information (2012)

http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/citizens-forum-report-2012.pdf

Citizens' Forums: Nanotechnology in Food (2011)

http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/publication/fsacfnanotechnologyfood.pdf

All Citizens' Forum discussions are structured using a topic guide. This is an aide memoire that indicates the range of topics and sub-topics to be covered in the Forum. Topic guides are used flexibly, guiding the discussion so that it feels more like a conversation, but using probing techniques to elicit the required information, and heading off any tangential or irrelevant issues that may arise.

Qualitative Analysis

Following the Citizens' Forums, qualitative analysis of the data collected drew on a range of evidence sources, including: materials produced during the group research; researchers' recall of the research sessions; audio-recordings of the group sessions; and researchers' in-session notes.

Our qualitative analytical approach is iterative and inductive – building upwards from the views of respondents – incorporating elements of 'grounded theory' analysis. Analysis initially took place informally during fieldwork itself; as our research team worked closely together throughout the fieldwork period, feeding back headline findings to each other as groups were conducted.

Our formal analytical process then began with researchers' individual analysis of their own research sessions against a set pro-forma. In this document, researchers summarised their data from each group (including verbatim quotes) against key research objectives, and began to form initial overarching hypotheses and insights.

Following individual-level analysis, we held a group brainstorm session, led by the project manager and including the full research team.

In this session, we interrogated findings across the full data-set to identify points of commonality and difference; discussed and debated any initial hypotheses around audience differences and key findings; and

considered the implications for the subsequent stages of research. From the Citizens' Forums analysis session we refined and developed the messages for testing in the Consumer Panel.

Appendix E

FSA Consumer Panel

Introduction

The FSA Consumer Panel is an online panel of around 30,000 members of the UK general public that provides a flexible methodology for conducting fast turn-around research. The panel is operated by TNS BMRB using the Lightspeed GMI panel. The FSA Consumer Panel is made up of a subset of this panel, all of whom have been profiled with the FSA consumer segmentation.

Sample Sources and Recruitment

The Lightspeed GMI panel is composed of people who have made a conscious decision to participate in online surveys through a double opt-in registration process. The activity of the each panellist is closely monitored to ensure effectiveness and usability.

Several methodologies are used by Lightspeed GMI to recruit panellists in order to build a high quality panel and remove any bias that could result from using one or a few recruiting sources by ensuring a diversified panel composition. Lightspeed GMI monitors the composition of their panel regularly and take action to recruit panellists of specific demographic profiles to replace any key groups which are becoming under-represented. Methods used for recruitment depend on who is being targeted but include opt-in email, co-registration, e-newsletter campaigns, and traditional banner placements, as well as both internal and external affiliate networks. Lightspeed GMI measures recruitment sources on multiple metrics to track both activity and engagement by demographic group, which contributes to the quality of data from panellists.

The Lightspeed GMI panel is used solely for research purposes.

Sample Validation

Technology-driven quality programs are used to prevent fraudulent respondents joining the panel. Lightspeed GMI uses a panellist verification process, Lightspeed RealRespondents, which comprises of a series of real-time checkpoints that new panel registrants pass through

while completing the panel registration survey. Registrants who fail these checks are unable to join the panel.

Checkpoints at the recruitment stage include:

- Proxy detection: detects a proxy server used to mask the registrant's true IP address and past fraudulent activity
- IP Geo-Fencing: locates the registrant's country location via their IP address and determines their eligibility for registration based on country-specific rules
- CAPTCHA: prevents automated programs from joining the site through challenge-response tests
- Email address verification: queries a database to ensure the email address is unique (all registrants must verify their email addresses through a double opt-in registration process)

In addition, registrants' postal address and post code are verified against a current local address directory.

Furthermore, there are a range of approaches in place which are used to minimise the risk of 'professional respondents':

- Whilst incentives are used to encourage the participation of panellists, these are pitched at such level as to not make it worthwhile to try to 'game' the system.
- In the invitation text for surveys and the question wording used to screen for surveys, care is taken to not give too much detail away to potential respondents. This minimises the risk of panellists entering incorrect information in an attempt to qualify for a survey which they should not be eligible to take part in.
- Technological tools are used to identify and remove potential 'professional respondents.' For example, multiple registrations from one household are identified through:
  - Proxy detection: detects if a proxy server is used to mask the registrant's true IP address;
  - Unique MachineID: this is a calculated alphanumeric string based on more than 25 data points collected from a survey respondent's computer and identified by technology systems. This ensures only one registrant per computer can join the panel.

Sampling and Project Management

Lightspeed GMI monitors the panel composition and variables needed for sample selection by collecting household and demographic information from every panellist. When the criteria for a study are defined, Lightspeed GMI selects panellists based on stored demographic information collected during the registration survey and ongoing profiling surveys. Panellists are invited in batches and during the fieldwork, the batches are closely monitored so that invitations to additional panellists are minimised whilst to completing fieldwork on time.

Panellists who are selected to take part in a survey will be sent an email to the address that they provided when they registered to ask them to participate. Panellists invited to a survey must visit the survey website and enter their email addresses and passwords before accessing the link to the survey. This is more secure than sending the survey link in an email, which could be opened by anybody with access to that mailbox.

Panellists do not need to check their email inbox to see which surveys are currently open to them. They can also login to the main Lightspeed website (www.mysurvey.com) to see what they are currently invited to participate in.

For participation on the panel, Lightspeed GMI offers an incentive of 'Reward Points'. Upon completion of a survey, points are deposited immediately into a panellist's account, which gives instant gratification for survey completion. The number of points awarded for survey completion is based on survey length, complexity, and incidence rate. Once a points threshold is reached, panellists may redeem their points for online gift certificates, merchandise, and PayPal cash deposits.

Panel Management

The panel is maintained through regular 'panel cleaning'. Lightspeed define their panellists based on the International Organization for Standardization definition which states, "An active panel member is one who has participated in at least one survey, or has updated his/her profile data, or has registered to join the panel, within the last 12 months." If a panellist falls outside of the definition, they are removed from the panel.

To ensure that panellists remain engaged and active, Lightspeed GMI uses panel-specific tools, such as frequent polls, featuring an interesting

or topical question, which provides panellists with the opportunity to compare their views with the entire panel.

Poor survey data is automatically identified and removed through a series of quality checks. Panellists who consistently provide poor survey data are removed from the panel.

The checks that are in place include:

- Survey speeding: respondents who rush through the survey are identified by comparing survey completion times to the norm
- Grid speeding: respondents who rush through grid questions are identified by comparing grid completion times to the norm
- De-duplication: blocking survey respondents who attempt to complete the same survey multiple times either within a single panel or across multiple panels
- 'Honesty' detector: a unique combination of high and low probability statements as well as a benchmark question to identify 'over-reporters' who are assumed to be dishonest and are blocked from entering surveys

The Lightspeed panel demographic profiling program is ongoing, and the frequency of data refreshment is dependent on the time sensitivity of the data. Most data is systematically updated annually to ensure relevance. The panel demographic profiling information is validated in the screener section of subsequent surveys.