



Shifting diets: Methods to encourage consumers in the UK to eat healthier, more sustainable meals

Contents

Executive summary | 3

① Introduction | 4

② Drivers of consumer behavior and barriers to adopting healthier options | 6

2.1 Focus consumer segments | 6

2.2 Immersion research methodology | 8

2.3 Drivers and barriers for consumers | 12

2.4 Consumer definition of “healthy food” | 12

③ Our future vision | 13

④ Areas of action | 14

⑤ Takeaways for business | 16

Executive summary

Global diets have the potential to either hasten the destruction of planetary resources and exacerbate negative health outcomes or serve as a solution to slowing climate change and improving our wellbeing. "Shifting Diets" by FReSH (Food Reform for Sustainability and Health) provides food companies with four action areas to shape their marketing strategies and shift consumer food choice towards improved health and sustainability. Changing food consumption patterns (and thereby production) is a crucial part of the urgent and broader systemic transformation needed to sustain people, businesses, and the planet by 2050.

However, changing eating habits is hard. Food choice is an emotionally charged decision, driven by an individual's personal taste, social spheres of influence, level of education, and financial situation. The prioritization of these factors in making a choice may differ by consumer group or segment. In addition, shifting consumer behavior often requires collective and coordinated action from a wide range of stakeholders, such as food companies, governments, NGOs and others. Yet, a common view of consumer segments and adoption barriers is typically missing, leading to actions that lack alignment and scale.

To overcome these obstacles, we set out to:

- Establish a common understanding of consumer choice in terms of healthy and sustainable food options that is meaningful to all stakeholders
- Create a shared view of diet-driving factors and adoption barriers
- Agree on specific areas of action (individual and collective)

From this research we identify four priority areas of action:

TARGET ACTUAL CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Food positioning should not necessarily highlight "health" as the main attribute, but instead what matters most to each segment.

BUILD CREDIBLE KNOWLEDGE OF HEALTHY ALTERNATIVES

Increased credibility of health/sustainability information sources is needed to make an impact.

OFFER GUIDANCE AND CONVENIENCE

Make healthy diets easy to structure, easy to find and simple to prepare.

LEVERAGE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Use social circle and influencers (such as gym instructors and celebrity chefs) to induce eaters to try healthy foods and to build the credibility of healthy offerings.

Adjusting marketing plans to incorporate these priority areas of action may help companies shift consumer diets towards improved health and sustainability, so that consumers:

- Clearly understand how diet impacts their lives and the environment
- Have access to transparent and trustworthy food-related information
- Have a wider variety of healthy, sustainable food options that fit their taste
- Can balance calorie intake
- Can conveniently and affordably integrate healthy and sustainable options into their diet

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a global, CEO-led organization of over 200 leading businesses working together to accelerate the transition to a sustainable world. Our FReSH (Food Reform for Sustainability and Health) project aims to provide concrete actions to successfully shift consumer food choices and eating behaviors to healthier and more sustainable options.

1 Introduction

We are living in an age of unprecedented consumption in the developed world. Alongside increased urbanization and growing wealth, experts expect caloric intake per person and the share of resource-intensive foods in diets to continue to increase.¹ Moreover, consumers lead busy and hectic lives, which considerably reduces the time they have to prepare food, inciting a switch to frozen foods, dried and canned products, and ready-made meals.

Ready-made meals in particular are increasing in both availability and variety (such as various forms including microwave meals, pot noodles, etc.) and experts project that the ready-made meals market will grow more than two times faster than the rest of the food market in Europe between 2020 and 2025.² While these foods are not inherently unhealthy, it is not always easy for consumers to distinguish between those that are nutritionally dense and those that are not, which could contribute to further public health challenges in the future.

In some parts of the world, obesity has reached epidemic status in part due to this increase in caloric intake and a lack of physical activity. In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults were overweight, 650 million of whom were obese,³ and the prevalence of obesity nearly tripled between 1975 and 2016 worldwide.⁴ According to Francesco Branca, director of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, "all forms of malnutrition have a common denominator – food systems that fail to provide all people with healthy, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets."⁵

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has cast a stark light on the immediacy of the need to change unhealthy consumption patterns. Evidence suggests excess weight is associated with increased risk of requiring hospitalization and advanced treatment, and ultimately dying from virus-related complications.⁶ In the UK, where almost two in three citizens are above healthy weight, the increased risk from COVID-19 on the population prompted the government to launch a new "obesity strategy" focused on empowering overweight citizens to lose weight and slow the rate of COVID-19 deaths.⁷

The correlation between excess weight and disease risk is not unique to viruses such as COVID-19. In 2019, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that a 20% reduction in calorie content in energy-dense foods could lead to the avoidance of 1.1 million cases of noncommunicable diseases, savings of USD \$13.2 billion yearly in healthcare expenditure, and a 0.5% increase in global GDP.⁸

In addition to these health concerns, there are also substantial environmental benefits that come alongside a shift away from overconsumption in general and the high consumption of animal-based proteins in particular. Current global diets have negatively impacted climate, biodiversity, forests and land.⁹ If the world is to meet globally agreed efforts, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change,¹⁰ and shape the health of generations to come, it is necessary to facilitate a substantive, speedy shift in consumption patterns to a healthier and more sustainable mix of proteins, increased consumption of a diversity of nutrient-rich plants and whole grains, reduced consumption of salt, fat and sugars, and minimized food waste.

“Unilever has an ambitious plan to grow the business in a way that helps improve people’s health and well-being, reduces environmental impact and enhances livelihoods. Inspiring consumers to adopt new, healthy and sustainable products and behaviors is central to this.”

Liesbeth Zandstra,
Science Leader, Reward
& Behavior, Unilever

“Part of Bel’s mission, ‘Healthier and more responsible food for all’, is to contribute to improving products and consumers’ diets. We are willing to collaborate with other food companies and retailers to inspire healthier food behaviors for a high impact.”

Caroline Chesneau,
Nutrition Director, Bel Group

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a global, CEO-led organization of over 200 leading businesses working together to accelerate the transition to a sustainable world.¹¹ Our FReSH (Food Reform for Sustainability and Health) project aims to provide concrete actions to successfully shift consumer food choices and eating behaviors to healthier and more sustainable options. However, changing eating habits is hard. A variety of factors drive diets,¹² such as taste, culture, social influence and cost, and the prioritization of these factors in making a choice may differ by consumer segments.

In addition, shifting consumer behavior often requires collective and coordinated action from a wide range of stakeholders, such as food companies, governments, NGOs and others. Yet, a common view of consumer segments and adoption barriers is typically missing, leading to actions that lack alignment and scale.

The objective of this report is to motivate and enable companies to successfully shift consumer diets to healthy and sustainable options. We place a particular focus on personal health as research suggests that this is the primary consumer concern and that a shift to healthier diets will most likely also help with environmental goals.¹³ We adopt a definition of “healthier and more sustainable” that is in line with the [FReSH dietary shift goals](#):

- Improve nutrition of processed foods (reduce sugar, salt, saturated fat, industrial trans-fat levels)
- Reduce total calorie intake
- Transition to plant-based proteins
- Consume more plants (fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, pulses and seeds)
- Choose animal proteins from sustainable sources
- Reduce food waste



② Drivers of consumer behavior and barriers to adopting healthier options

Within the context of this research, we set out on a journey to understand how consumers in the UK purchase, cook and eat food. We used ethnographic research to understand what participants might not share using other research methodologies (such as contradictions between what they say and what they do). Ethnography also provided an in-depth view of the driving factors and barriers consumers experience and encouraged participants to connect emotionally with food, shopping and cooking.

We have focused our research on the UK market, since it is one of the biggest markets for consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies. It is also the sixth largest economy in the world and the country with the second highest prevalence of obesity among adults.¹⁴ Moreover, we were able to use existing quality data, such as the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS),¹⁵ to quickly develop initial insights into specific consumer segments of interest.

2.1 FOCUS CONSUMER SEGMENTS

The NDNS uses a representative pool of around 1,000 people each year, collecting individual and household data on:

- Diet, via food diaries (recorded intake of all food and drinks for >4 days);
- Biometric health measurements (blood pressure, body mass index (BMI), etc.);
- Other (demographics, economic data, behaviors while eating food).

Despite limitations due to survey size, the NDNS is the most robust and reliable source of data on what people across the UK eat.

We used three types of NDNS markers to define the consumer segmentation for this research:

- Health condition (such as obesity (BMI), diabetes, cholesterol, blood pressure);
- Diet characteristics (such as overconsumption of sugar/fat/alcohol and underconsumption of fruits, vegetables, fish as % of total protein);
- Demographic/ socioeconomic factors (such as age, equalized household income, household size).

The consumer segmentation used in this work primarily focuses on health outcomes/ conditions, which sets it apart from other commonly used, demographic-focused segmentations (such as those based on purchasing power). We completed and ranked several iterations of latent class analysis¹⁶ according to model significance and the actionability of the segments.

Table 1: Overview of consumer segments

<p>Snack Pack 13% of UK population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% overweight and obese • no consistent health conditions 	<p>Food Rich, Time Poor 17% of UK population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% overweight and obese • high blood pressure & hypertension 	<p>Health Poor 19% of UK population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% overweight and obese • 2x more likely to have diabetes
<p>WHO: young adults, who often still live at home and are in full-time education, or young families</p>	<p>WHO: married, middle aged with high levels of education and income and high % working full time</p>	<p>WHO: lower income, education and % in work than average, all ages</p>
<p>WHAT: low-variety diets high in sugar and salt, low in fruits/vegetables and protein</p>	<p>WHAT: diets high in meat, salt and alcohol and low in fruits/vegetables and fish, some dieting</p>	<p>WHAT: diets low in healthy food (fruits/vegetables, fish) but also low sugar and alcohol; high red meat intake</p>
<p>HOW: either out at fast food restaurants or at home watching TV</p>	<p>HOW: frequent restaurant-goers</p>	<p>HOW: alone at home while watching TV</p>
<p>Leisurely Home Cooks 24% of UK population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% overweight and obese • high cholesterol and high blood pressure 	<p>Refuelers 14% of UK population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39% overweight and obese • some hypertension 	<p>Rainbow Eaters 13% of UK population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22% overweight • normal blood pressure and blood sugar
<p>WHO: older empty-nesters, many retired; high education levels and mid-high income</p>	<p>WHO: low-income and single person households; either young adults or 75+</p>	<p>WHO: 25-44 year-old working people with kids at home and high levels of both income and education</p>
<p>WHAT: varied diets high in fruits/vegetables and fish, but also high in alcohol; meets the most Eatwell recommendations on average</p>	<p>WHAT: diets high in sugar but low in fruits/vegetables and very low in protein</p>	<p>WHAT: varied diets with high fruits/vegetables and fish and low sugar, but high in calories and fat</p>
<p>HOW: at the table at home</p>	<p>HOW: alone at home</p>	<p>HOW: at the table (very infrequently while watching TV)</p>

We decided to focus our follow-up research on the three segments with the relatively poorer diets, namely: Health Poor; Food Rich, Time Poor; and Snack Pack. In each of these segments, we identified three to five individuals and proceeded to do ethnographic research with them, as described in the next section.

2.2 IMMERSION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this work, we used ethnography as the primary consumer research method. We chose this approach because, although it has relatively small reach (compared to surveys or other broad coverage methods), it allowed us to go beyond broad averages and understand at a deeper level how real humans make choices and analyze tradeoffs, and how their dietary habits develop.

The ethnographic research consisted of:



Shop-alongs: shopping receipts to see what they bought and where (to prompt questions about why); self-filming while shopping



In-person, in-depth interviews: semi-structured conversations about participants' lives and the role that food plays in them



Kitchen and storage tours: guided "virtual tour" of their kitchens to see what is really in the fridge/cupboards



Eat-out-alongs: photos and videos of what they order (understand eating habits when out of home)



Cook-alongs: how participants cook food; what ingredients, tools and techniques they used (shared pictures and videos)

We aimed our research at determining the driving factors behind the interviewee's diets and habits and the barriers that prevent them from eating a healthier diet. We identified seven diet-driving factors¹⁷ and tested their relevance for each segment during the ethnographic research:

- **Skills and confidence:** such as cooking skills, shopping skills, confidence to try new things.
"I know **how to shop/cook** x"
- **Financial constraints:** such as higher cost of healthier diet, bulk buying restrictions, access to/cost of transport.
"I can **afford** x"
- **Need for convenience:** such as time to shop and prepare food, multi-tasking while eating, frequent small/unplanned food purchases.
"I **have time** for x"
- **Food choices available:** such as prevalence and/or prominence of food retail outlets, takeaway/restaurant options, state-provided options, in-store marketing and promotions.
"x **is available** in stores I visit"
- **Social relationships:** such as peer influence, partner/family support, social practices.
"My **friends eat** x"
- **Preferences, needs:** such as social/cultural norms, preferences shaped in childhood, religious or belief-based preferences, health-driven needs.
"I **want** to eat x"
- **Knowledge:** such as food/nutrition knowledge, knowledge about immediate/long-term impact of dietary choices.
"I **know** about x"

The ethnographic research led to clear, segment-specific factors driving diet and eating habits.

Table 2: Snack Pack



Driving factor		Participant testimonies
<p>Need for convenience</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek guidance and support to build/maintain routines – food is a secondary priority • Willing to spend time cooking and when they do, they go “all in” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I wish I could have a meal planner; I would then be able to just pick those little cards up and stick them on my weekly plan.”</i> • <i>“Alcohol, drinking, going out take precedence over eating.”</i> • <i>“I really like doing everything from scratch [...] making the curry paste myself.”</i>
<p>Social relationships</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly influenced by social circle (e.g., friends, internet, “tribes”) • Willing to “outsource their thinking” for inspiration and recommendation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“All your friends are getting fast food, then that is what you do when you are drunk.”</i> • <i>“If I go to a friend’s place and she cooks something different which I like, then I take the recipe from her.”</i>
<p>Preferences, needs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek energy-rich food and prefer strong taste (“sweet tooth”) • Are “transitioning” in their life (e.g., from parents to independents) and are refining preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I should be better with my sugar intake [but] I really feel like I need the energy from it.”</i> • <i>“Normally my mom and dad do the shopping. Whatever they buy I will eat.”</i>
<p>Financial constraints (secondary factor)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotions drive trial but are not the primary criteria in all purchases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I usually go shopping in the evening to get half-priced stuff.”</i>

Table 3: Food Rich, Time Poor








Driving factor		Participant testimonies
<p>Preferences, needs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy variety and have a refined taste but “fatty tooth” • Seek counterarguments to “sense of guilt” (e.g., sustainability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“One of my favorite things is the skin of the chicken.”</i> • <i>“We’d rather have a small amount of the good stuff than lots of the artificial stuff like sweeteners and what have you.”</i>
<p>Knowledge</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek credible information on product provenance and impact on sustainability/their health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Communication is misleading – packaging may suggest that chickens are fluttering around in the field, but that’s definitely not their free-range stuff.”</i> • <i>“If you’re supporting a local farm or local business [...] might be one thing I think of.”</i> • <i>“How what I am doing is creating a benefit both to the welfare of the animals, but also [...] the environment, that might sway my food choice.”</i>
<p>Need for convenience</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a strong drive for convenience, i.e., prepare quick and easy meals to fit long working hours/other priorities • Spend time cooking occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I don’t have the head to slow myself down and prepare a proper meal.”</i> • <i>“I think the complex [meals], I always just leave to a Saturday because I always got more time on a Saturday.”</i>
<p>Social relationships (secondary factor)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenced by friends when eating/drinking out or when learning new recipes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Eat more and drink more, especially with friends. You know, I guess because you’re in a social setting.”</i>

Table 4: Health Poor

Driving factor		Participant testimonies
<p>Preferences, needs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food is on their mind – seek foods that give them comfort and fill them up • Seek taste, especially meat and sweets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"[My ideal dinner] is definitely pasta. Pasta is filling, [has] nice flavors and [is] warm and comforting."</i> • <i>"It's just the flavor, I just like the texture of [fast food] and the chips are quite tasty."</i>
<p>Knowledge</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar only with basic healthy products (vegetables, fruits) • Struggle to understand the true implications of not eating healthy food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"I bought [brown rice] trying to think that I was going to be healthier [...] I didn't really like it – we haven't really used it."</i> • <i>"I'm not very educated when it comes to vegan food and the flavors with regards to vegetables."</i>
<p>Financial constraints</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a tight budget and look for promotional/reduced products • Make impulse purchases based on promotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"If there's something with a good saving, 50% off or something, I'll look at it."</i> • <i>"The first [aspect I would like to change about the shopping experience] is healthy food being cheaper."</i>
<p>Skills and confidence (secondary factor)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not confident to experiment with new or complex recipes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"I like the flavor [of grilled peppers], but how could I take that and mix it into a whole meal [with more vegetables]."</i>
<p>Need for convenience (secondary factor)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go for ready-to-eat/fast food due to physical/mental fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"If you had a hectic day, it's just easy to go along and get something that is already done."</i>

2.3 DRIVERS AND BARRIERS FOR CONSUMERS

The ethnographic research led to clear, segment-specific factors driving diet and eating habits.

Our research confirms that diet driving factors and adoption barriers differ by consumer segment.

Snack Pack eaters desire energy-filled food and convenience. They are looking for the guidance to structure, build and maintain food routines. Their social circle highly influences this segment. Although food is not a top priority in their lives, they are

sometimes willing to spend (significant) time cooking and truly go “all in” when they do.

Food Rich, Time Poor eaters have a similar strong drive for convenience. We found that this segment has stronger preferences for cutting down on quantity rather than completely cutting out specific options (for example, they will consider eating less red meat, rather than completely cutting out meat). Additionally, consumers in this segment pay close attention to product provenance and sustainability, but do not always find currently available information trustworthy.

Health Poor eaters emphasize taste and seek foods that give them comfort and fill them up. In addition, they lack familiarity with healthy products beyond fruits and vegetables, and they struggle to understand the true implications of an unhealthy diet.

2.4 CONSUMER DEFINITION OF “HEALTHY FOOD”

Our first goal was to understand what drives consumer diets. However, we also inquired about their understanding of what healthy food means for them. The outcomes below highlight once again the different perspectives of the featured consumer segments.

Table 5: What healthy food means to target consumer segments

	Reduce total calorie intake	Improve food health (reduce sugar, salt, fat)	Transition to plant-based proteins	More fruits and vegetables
Snack Pack	“low calorie meals”, “less sweets for breakfast”	“dairy free is better”, “better with my sugar”	“more vegetarian”	“want to eat more salad”, “try to eat fruit and vegetables”
Food Rich, Time Poor	“drink less”, “cut down portion size”	“less of the good stuff”	“tried it, not interested”	“more veggies”, “more salads and vegetables”
Health Poor	“doesn’t fill me up”	“less sugar”, “less salt”	“try vegetarian”, “more vegetarian”	“more vegetables”

● Find goal irrelevant ● Associate goal with health/sustainability factor

Note: Anonymized quotes from ethnography participants and legend

3 Our future vision

Based on the research conducted and the diet driving factors identified, we can start outlining a vision for the future of consumption where a transformative movement lifts the barriers standing between consumers and healthier and more sustainable diets.

Below we detail the barriers individuals experience today and the world we envision for the future. To reach this vision and sustainably shift consumer behavior, we will have to simultaneously act on multiple levers and lead coordinated efforts with a broader set of

stakeholders in the public sector and other industries.



Table 6: Vision for the future

Today, individuals in this study	In the future, these individuals
Do not find healthy food fitting their tastes, whereas calorie/salt/sugar-rich foods are available in large portions	Will find it easy to come across healthy food fitting their tastes and to make informed decisions on products and portion sizes
Find that food-related information (e.g., label, provenance) is unclear, not trustworthy and hard to find	Will find that food-related information (e.g., label, provenance) is clear, trustworthy and easy to come by
Lack guidance and support on how to structure their diets and find it complicated to integrate healthy products	Will feel confident they can structure their own diet using credible guidance and can integrate healthy products into their diet
Follow recommendations from social relationships when given during specific occasions (e.g., gym, restaurant)	Will proactively engage with their social circle, brands and other stakeholders on food-related topics





4 Areas of action

To structure our efforts in the initial phase, we aligned on specific areas of action.

Looking at the prevalence of diet-driving factors and at the consumer segment pain points for each of these driving factors,

we believe that action is needed along the following four areas:

Table 7: Opportunities for action

<p>Target actual consumer preferences</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack Pack/Health Poor Adapt positioning/messaging of healthy and sustainable to better match consumer preferences (e.g., strong taste, energy) • Food Rich, Time Poor Reduce size of portions offered for foods high in fat, salt and or sugar (e.g., red meat burger sizes) to stimulate overall reduction of calorie intake ("cut down rather than out")
<p>Build credible knowledge</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Rich, Time Poor Enhance credibility of sustainability and health information sources to gain consumer trust (e.g., through independent labels and clarity for food labelling standards) • Health Poor Increase impact of existing information by stimulating consumer engagement (e.g., through interactivity)
<p>Offer guidance and convenience</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack Pack Support consumer shift to healthier and more sustainable routines by offering guidance (e.g., structuring your meals) • Snack Pack Make recommended products easy to find (e.g. navigation) • Food Rich, Time Poor Simplify products and preparation of healthy and sustainable options by proposing accessible and time-efficient options (e.g., ready-to-eat/cook) and increase availability
<p>Leverage social relationships</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack Pack Leverage social circle and specific influencing opportunities (e.g., recommendations at restaurant or gym) to reinforce the shifts above

Targeting actual consumer preferences is relevant for all consumer segments (energy-rich and strong taste for Snack Pack, variety for Food Rich, Time Poor, and comforting, filling options for Health Poor). However, other areas of action are more relevant for certain segments:

- Building credible knowledge aligns with Food Rich, Time Poor (credible labelling on sustainability and impact on environment and their health) and Health Poor (building knowledge on alternative healthy options beyond just fruits and vegetables);
- Offering guidance and convenience is particularly important for Snack Pack and Food Rich, Time Poor (making healthy and sustainable options available in ready-to-eat formats to fit their busy schedules or other activities that take precedence over cooking).
- Leveraging social relationships is mostly relevant to Snack Pack (garnering support and guidance to structure their diets through recommendations or inspiration from their social circle).

Based on the areas of action we identified, there are several solutions business could implement to start shifting consumer behaviors to healthier and more sustainable options. These ideas would need further market testing to assess the scale of their potential impact on consumer behavior, but preliminary consultations with companies indicate further testing is warranted.

- What if consumers had an app that would make meal selection and preparation simple, while quickly identifying the right meal based on the ingredients they have on hand or suggesting healthier, more sustainable alternatives to try?
- What if in-store signage/online banners supported consumers in finding healthy food by speaking and appealing to consumers' inherent preferences (e.g., energy/comfort) rather than purely functional health claims?

- What if, when consumers looked at product packaging, the label spoke in a credible way to the health and sustainability issues that are on their mind, thus helping them make informed choices more easily?
- What if smaller portion sizes were the default, helping consumers eat more balanced quantities and reducing the likelihood of food waste?
- What if consumers had an easier way to learn how to prepare healthy foods, either from online tutorials, in store demonstrations, or community and peer resources?
- What if more brands communicated a clear purpose on sustainability and health, such that consumers could more easily choose brands that align with their personal values and mission?



5 Takeaways for business

This research gives a first indication about consumers' understanding, motivation and willingness to eat healthier alternatives for three consumer segments in the UK. Based on this work, the natural next steps to support the effort of shifting consumer behaviors to healthier and more sustainable options would be to focus on the four areas of action uncovered and develop and implement tools, training programs and/or test concepts for concrete actions.

Alongside the development of the specific individual and collective measures suggested above, we encourage companies to sign on to the [Responsible Business Pledge for Better Nutrition](#) in the context of the 2021 Nutrition for Growth Summit.

The pledge aims to find innovative ways to drive progress collectively, generating clear and meaningful commitments and actions to tackle the global challenge of malnutrition – undernutrition, overnutrition, obesity, overweight, and micronutrient deficiencies.

Food companies have the potential to lead the way in shifting consumer choices to healthier, more sustainable diets, but behavior change isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition and requires tailored and coordinated action. By understanding the levers that influence choice for different consumer segments, companies can develop and implement tactics to meet the needs of each group, individually and collectively.

Finally, note that efforts to shift consumer behaviors directly should be part of a broader basket of actions that all serve the same goal. For example, shifting diets towards healthier and more sustainable options will likely require actions along the entire value chain: developing new products that meet consumers' health needs and/or environmental values, producing those products in an environmentally sustainable manner, positioning and marketing the products in a way that clearly fits within consumers' varied lives, and ensuring those products are convenient and accessible to all who want them. It will be crucial to engage marketing executives and their teams throughout this process to ensure that the proper messaging is in place to facilitate consumer choice, using the levers identified within this report to craft messages tailored to different consumer segments.



Endnotes

- ¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019). The Heavy Burden of Obesity: The Economics of Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2LD5BxP>
- ² Mordor Intelligence (2020). Europe Ready Meals Market – Growth, Trends and Forecast (2020–2025). June 2020. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3a9VkJDu>
- ³ World Health Organization (2020). “Obesity and overweight”. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>
- ⁴ World Health Organization (2020). “Obesity and overweight”. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>
- ⁵ Boseley, S., (2019). “Malnutrition and obesity now a global problem, say experts”. The Guardian. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3r1b7ub>
- ⁶ Public Health England (2020). Excess Weight and COVID-19: Insights from new evidence. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3oT62IP>
- ⁷ Department of Health & Social Care (2020) Tackling Obesity: Empowering Adults and Children to Live Healthier Lives. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-obesity-government-strategy/tackling-obesity-empowering-adults-and-children-to-live-healthier-lives>
- ⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019). The Heavy Burden of Obesity: The Economics of Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/chafea/health/newsroom/news/09012020/documents/67450d67-en.pdf>.
- ⁹ Ritchie, H. & Roser, M. (2020). “Environmental impacts of food production”. Our World in Data website. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food>
- ¹⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2015). The Paris Agreement. Retrieved from: <https://cop23.unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.
- ¹¹ WBCSD website at <https://www.wbcd.org/>
- ¹² World Resources Institute (WRI) (2016). Shifting Diets for a Sustainable Future. April 2016.
- ¹³ FAOSTAT (2013). “World food and agriculture”. FAO Statistical Yearbook 2013. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- ¹⁴ World Health Organization (2020). “Obesity and overweight”. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>
- ¹⁵ Public Health England (2016). National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey>
- ¹⁶ Latent class analysis is a statistical method for identifying unmeasured class membership among subject using categorical and/or continuous observed variables.
- ¹⁷ Hawkes, C. (2019). “What do we need to do differently to tackle obesity, equitably? New Thinking for Next Steps” Glasgow Centre for Population Health seminar. 28 May 2019, p. 28. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3gObh3k>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their inputs into the development of the “Shifting Diets: Methods to encourage consumers in the UK to eat healthier, more sustainable meals” publication.

CONTRIBUTORS

Members of the FReSH Consumer Behavior Change Workstream: Bain & Company, Bel Group, Tesco, Unilever

COORDINATION

WBCSD: Diane Holdorf, Emeline Fellus, Emily Grady, Camilla de Nardi, Michelle Zackin, Sylvain Maibach

Bain: Stavros Tzavidas, Hannes Braendli, Alan De Riz, Jenny Davis-Peccoud, Raluca Suciu

DISCLAIMER

This report has been developed in the name of WBCSD. Like other WBCSD publications, it is the result of a collaborative effort by members of the secretariat and senior executives from member companies. A wide range of members reviewed drafts, thereby ensuring that the document broadly represents the perspective of the WBCSD membership. Input and feedback from stakeholders listed above was incorporated in a balanced way. This does not mean, however, that every member company or stakeholder agrees with every word.

ABOUT FRESH

Food Reform for Sustainability and Health (FReSH) is a WBCSD project aimed at providing healthy, enjoyable diets for all, produced responsibly within planetary boundaries through: A systemic approach covering health and nutrition,

the environment and socio-economy; A theory of change starting at the consumer level, whereby changing consumer habits and diets will pull the whole food value chain.

FReSH facilitates the pre-competitive collaboration of over 30 member companies on the development of business solutions relating to healthy and sustainable diets, which is one of the four direct pathways to food system transformation laid out in the [CEO Guide to Food System Transformation](#).

To that aim, FReSH coordinates work streams addressing four transformational goals:

Healthy and Sustainable Diets, Food Loss and Waste, True Value of Food; and Policy and Advocacy.

ABOUT BAIN & COMPANY

Bain & Company is a global consultancy that helps the world’s most ambitious change makers define the future. Across 59 offices in 37 countries, we work alongside our clients as one team with a shared ambition to achieve extraordinary results (economic, environmental, and social), outperform the competition and redefine industries. We complement our tailored, integrated expertise with a vibrant ecosystem of digital innovators to deliver better, faster and more enduring outcomes. Our 10-year commitment to invest more than \$1 billion in pro bono services brings our talent, expertise and insight to organizations tackling today’s urgent challenges in education, racial equity, social justice, economic development and the environment. Since our founding in 1973, we have measured our success by the success of our clients, and we proudly maintain the highest level of client advocacy in the industry.

Learn more at www.bain.com and follow us on Twitter [@BainAlerts](#).

ABOUT WBCSD

WBCSD is a global, CEO-led organization of over 200 leading businesses working together to accelerate the transition to a sustainable world. We help make our member companies more successful and sustainable by focusing on the maximum positive impact for shareholders, the environment and societies.

Our member companies come from all business sectors and all major economies, representing a combined revenue of more than USD \$8.5 trillion and 19 million employees. Our global network of almost 70 national business councils gives our members unparalleled reach across the globe. Since 1995, WBCSD has been uniquely positioned to work with member companies along and across value chains to deliver impactful business solutions to the most challenging sustainability issues.

Together, we are the leading voice of business for sustainability: united by our vision of a world where more than 9 billion people are all living well and within the boundaries of our planet, by 2050.

Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

www.wbcسد.org

Copyright

Copyright © WBCSD, January 2021.

**World Business Council
for Sustainable Development**

Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2B
CP 2075, 1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland
www.wbcsd.org

