



The Consumer Council

The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

Key statistics looking at the impact of rising food costs for NI consumers

Consumers worried about the cost of food and groceries

Almost 9 in 10 consumers in Northern Ireland (87 per cent) reported being worried about the cost of their food and grocery shopping.

Price increases

96 per cent of householders reported noticing an increase in food prices over the past 12 months. 64 per cent said they thought food was much more expensive.

Changes to shopping and eating

In response to rising food costs, 82 per cent of households report making less impulse buys (34 per cent) and have stopped buying as much (29 per cent).

Other significant changes included eating out less (29 per cent) and planning meals more carefully to avoid waste (28 per cent).

Buying less represents the single biggest change in people's purchasing behaviour, especially in the case of those aged over 60 (21 per cent) and lower income households (20 per cent).

Special offers

Whilst 45 per cent of households say they look out for special offers, only 29 per cent of households agreed special offers help keep the cost of their shopping down.

Ability to compare prices and get the best deal

When asked how easy or difficult consumers found it to compare offers, two thirds (67 per cent) interviewed in the household survey said they found it easy (14 per cent very easy and 53 per cent fairly easy).

However, when presented with picture cards¹ showing loose apples and the same apples pre-packed, just less than half (48 per cent) thought it was easy to work out which option offered the best deal.

Ability to eat well and healthily

¹ Using photographs taken in-store at a major supermarket

The research found a widespread perception amongst consumers that special offers generally apply more to convenience, processed, high fat/salt/sugar foods and that it is much more costly to buy healthier choices and fresh produce.

We also heard from a number of consumers with specific health requirements, or caring for someone with a dietary requirement, who expressed concerns about their ability to afford fresh produce.

Cooking skills and meal planning

Some consumers attributed cooking skills and an ability to plan meals as a way of ensuring better value for money on food and groceries.

This is an area where there are already so many resources and initiatives. The challenge is clearly how to make these resources more accessible to those who need them most. This includes second or third generations of people who have missed out on cooking skills in the home or who lack the disposable income to take a risk on cooking a meal from scratch that may not be liked and eaten by the family.

Attitudes towards food retailers and supermarkets

More than half (61 per cent) of people taking part in the household survey felt supermarkets and food retailers could do more to only charge a fair price. The main reason for this assertion was a belief that supermarkets and large food retailers are only interested in making a profit (33 per cent).

Online, 84 per cent of survey respondents felt supermarkets and food retailers could be doing more.

Support for local farmers and producers

The online survey highlighted considerable consumer support for local farmers and producers. Some consumers want to see more local produce stocked because they (often wrongly) assume local produce will cost less than goods which are imported.

Next steps

The Consumer Council has welcomed the insight and expertise received from food retailers, farmer's representatives and food industry experts in helping to assess the viability of the draft recommendations coming out of this research and due for publication later this month.