Sustainable Food Survey 2016
Summary
A national online survey looking at attitudes, awareness and behaviours linked to sustainable food issues was completed by over 3000 students studying in further and higher education across the UK. The research was completed in September 2016 as part of NUS’ Student Eats which helps students to develop their own growing sites and food enterprises, embedding sustainable food production across campuses, curriculums and communities.

**Food purchasing**

- Over half of respondents (54%) of respondents are responsible for buying all their own food.
- The vast majority (87%) of respondents report that they use supermarkets in a town/village to do their food shopping at least once a month.
- Price (78%) and location/convenience (73%) are the two main factors which influence where respondents decide to do their food shopping.
- Food to cook or prepare at home represents the biggest weekly spend for respondents with approximately two fifths (39%) spending £31 or more on average per week.
- Price is also reported as the strongest influence on what food respondents buy with 85% saying they consider this when buying food.

**Sustainable food and food poverty**

- Almost two fifths of respondents say they make a conscious effort to buy Fairtrade products (38%) and a third say they try to buy food that is in season in the UK (34%).
- Respondents perceive locally produced food / food products to be a way of purchasing food that is as fresh as possible (42%) and also a way of supporting the local economy (34%), however only around a quarter say that these products are worth paying a bit extra for (23%).
- Only 6% of respondents say that how animals are reared is not important to them.
- 76% agree that it’s better for the environment to eat local fruit and vegetables grown in season.
- 52% agree that they have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local and seasonal produce.
- 25% have been hungry but did not eat because of a lack of money or other resources in the last 12 months.

**Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- I think it’s important that animals bred for food are treated as humanely as possible (n=3265)
  - Strongly agree: 58%
  - Agree: 28%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 9%
  - Disagree: 9%
  - Strongly disagree: 2%

- It’s better for the environment to eat local fruit and vegetables grown in season (n=3264)
  - Strongly agree: 34%
  - Agree: 42%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 17%
  - Disagree: 2%

- Where possible I try to support British producers (n=3262)
  - Strongly agree: 21%
  - Agree: 42%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 27%
  - Disagree: 5%

- I have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local / seasonal produce (n=3257)
  - Strongly agree: 15%
  - Agree: 37%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 25%
  - Disagree: 13%
Introduction
Objectives

Student Eats puts sustainable food at the heart of universities and colleges across the UK. We work with students to develop their own growing sites and food enterprises, embedding sustainable food production across campuses, curriculums and communities.

Together, we produce loads of low-carbon, fresh, healthy food on campuses across the country. With more and more students growing their own food, we make a hugely positive impact on campus life – across enterprise, community, wellbeing, education and sustainability.

This survey gathered data on student attitudes, awareness and behaviours linked to sustainable food issues.

Methodology

The online survey was promoted to NUS’ database of NUS Extra cardholders in September 2016. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete and was incentivised with a cash prize draw. 3274 respondents completed the survey.

Within the report, a number of questions have been broken down for particular types of respondents. Where there are any statistical significant differences between answers, they are reported where applicable and to large enough base size (n>30) and are valid at confidence level of 99%.
The respondents...

- 70% are in higher education
- 28% are in further education
- 44% live with their parents
- 55% live in private rented accommodation
- 22% live in self-catered halls of residence
- 78% are from the UK
- 11% are from within the EU
- 27% live with their parents
- 23% live in private rented accommodation
- 10% are from outside the EU
- 22% live in self-catered halls of residence

Full demographic data can be found in the Annex at the end of this report.

Image credit: Globe icon – Yu Luck @ Noun project
Research Findings
Food purchasing
Over half of respondents say they are responsible for doing the main food shopping where they live (54%). A fifth of respondents say their parents are responsible for food shopping.

- Respondents who are women are more likely to say they buy their own food (59% compared with 48% men).
- Respondents who are men are more likely to say they sometimes share food shopping with the people they live with (16% compared with 12% women).

Q. Who is responsible for doing the main food shopping where you live? 
(Base: 3274 Balance: No response)
The vast majority (87%) of respondents report that they use supermarkets in a town/village to do their food shopping at least once a month. Two fifths (39%) use convenience stores and a quarter (26%) use small independent shops for their food shopping at least once a month.

Q. At which of these types of shop do you do food shopping at least once a month? (Base: 3273  Balance: No response)

- Supermarket in town/village: 87%
- Convenience store / corner shop: 39%
- Small independent shops (e.g. Greengrocer / Butcher / Fishmonger / Bakery): 26%
- Out of town supermarket: 21%
- Via the internet: 20%
- Market: 17%
- Farmers market / Farm shop: 8%
- Health food shop: 7%
- Have vegetable box delivered: 1%
- Other type of shop: 0%

International respondents are more likely to say they shop at markets at least once a month than UK respondents (25% EU respondents and 29% non-EU respondents compared with 14% UK respondents).
Price (78%) and location/convenience (73%) are the two main factors which influence where respondents decide to do their food shopping. The offers and deals available (again linked to price) influence where two fifths (40%) of respondents do their food shopping.

- UK respondents are more likely to say they are influenced by offers and deals than international respondents (41% UK respondents compared with 35% EU respondents and 32% non-EU respondents).
- International respondents are more likely to say they are influenced by the quality of produce than UK respondents (39% EU respondents and 40% non-EU respondents compared with 31% UK respondents).

Q. What factors influence where you decide to do your food shopping?
(Base: 3272  Balance: No response)
Food to cook or prepare at home represents the biggest weekly spend for respondents, relative to other items, with approximately two fifths (39%) spending £31 or more on average per week. Toiletries, non-alcoholic drinks and cigarettes represent the lowest weekly spend on average (61%, 61% and 75% spending less than £10 per week).

- Respondents who are women are more likely to say they spend over £50 on average per week on food to cook or prepare at home (16% compared with 11% men).
- International respondents are less likely to say they spend over £50 on average per week on food to cook or prepare at home compared with UK respondents (9% EU respondents and 6% non-EU respondents compared with 16% UK respondents).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Less than £10</th>
<th>£10 - £20</th>
<th>£21 - £30</th>
<th>£31 - £40</th>
<th>£41 - £50</th>
<th>Over £50</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food to cook or prepare at home</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport / travel</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating out at cafes, pubs and restaurants</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social activities (e.g. films, sport, clubs and societies)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course books</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other equipment linked to your course</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other food (e.g. take-away, home delivery)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet / wifi</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic drinks</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other course costs (e.g. stationery, printing, photocopying)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toiletries</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-alcoholic drinks</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes / e-cigarettes</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. Now thinking about what you spend your money on, how much is your weekly average spend on the following items?
(Base: c. 3240  Balance: No response)
Milk (83%), bread (82%) and fresh fruit and vegetables (81%) are the most commonly reported food items that respondents tend to buy. Prepared food, such as ready meals, tinned vegetables and fruit and ‘ready to cook’ kits are less likely to be purchased by respondents (20%, 25% and 5% respectively).

Q. Which of these things do you tend to buy? (Base: 3265 Balance: No response)

- Women respondents are more likely to say they tend to buy fresh fruit and vegetables (86% compared with 75% men).
- UK respondents are more likely to say they tend to buy fresh meat and fish than international respondents (68% compared with 59% EU respondents and 52% non-EU respondents).
- UK respondents are more likely to say they tend to buy ready-made cooking sauces than international respondents (44% compared with 31% EU respondents and 30% non-EU respondents).
- Women respondents are less likely to say they tend to buy ready meals (26% compared with 35% men).
As well as influencing where respondents do their shopping, price is also reported as the strongest influence on what food respondents buy (85% say they consider this when buying food). Quality/freshness (74%) and taste (62%) are also important considerations, however very few respondents report considering the environmental impact of their food (10%).

Women respondents are more likely to say they consider the quality or freshness of food (75% compared with 72% men).

Non-EU international respondents are more likely to say they are influenced by foods they know how to cook or prepare (70% non-EU compared with 60% EU and 59% UK respondents).

Women respondents are more likely to say they consider what special offers are available (53% compared with 50% men).

EU respondents are most likely to say they consider where food is grown / produced (16% compared with 14% UK respondents and 8% non-EU respondents).
Research Findings
Sustainable food habits and attitudes
Almost two fifths of respondents say they make a conscious effort to buy Fairtrade products (38%) and a third say they try to buy food that is in season in the UK (34%). A third of respondents report that they do not make a conscious effort to buy food with any of the environmental or ethical accreditations or characteristics (32%).

- **Fairtrade products**: 38%
- **Food that is in season in the UK**: 34%
- **Locally produced or grown food products**: 30%
- **Organically produced or grown food products**: 22%
- **Fish from sustainable sources (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council certified)**: 21%
- **Red tractor meat**: 15%
- **Freedom food**: 9%
- **LEAF marque food**: 2%
- **None of these**: 32%

**Women respondents are more likely to say they make a conscious effort to buy food that is in season in the UK (36% compared with 32% men).**

**UK respondents are least likely to make a conscious effort to buy organic food (20% compared with 33% EU respondents and 31% non-EU respondents).**

**Women respondents are less likely to say they don’t make a conscious effort to buy red tractor meat (14% compared with 17% men).**

**Women respondents are less likely to say they don’t make a conscious effort to buy any food that has ethical or environmental credentials (29% compared with 35% men).**

Q. Which, if any, of these do you make a conscious effort to buy?
(Base: 3223 Balance: No response)
Respondents perceive locally produced food / food products to be a way of purchasing food that is as fresh as possible (42%) and also a way of supporting the local economy (34%), however only around a quarter say that these products are worth paying a bit extra for (23%).

**Q. Which, if any, of these statements matches how you think about buying locally produced food / food products?**

(Base: 3266 Balance: No response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want food I buy to be as fresh as possible</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to support the local economy / local businesses</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like knowing where my food has come from</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m happy with the products I buy already</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive for my budget</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want a wide choice of products</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are worth paying a bit extra for</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s difficult to find information on where things are produced</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is too much of an inconvenience to find local produced food</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How food is produced is not important to me</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is inconvenient to check the origin of products</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not an option where I shop</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no benefit in the taste</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UK respondents are most likely to say they want to support the local economy / businesses through locally produced food (36% compared with 28% EU respondents and non-EU respondents).

Non-EU international respondents are more likely to say how food is produced is not important compared with UK respondents (12% compared with 8%).
When thinking about higher welfare meat and animal products, only 6% of respondents say that how animals are reared is not important to them and around a third (31%) report that higher welfare products are worth paying extra for.

UK respondents are most likely to say they think we have a duty to rear animals according to higher welfare standards (38% compared with 28% EU respondents and 20% non-EU respondents).

Non-EU respondents are most likely to say it's inconvenient to check the welfare standards of animal products (12% compared with 5% EU and UK respondents).
The majority of respondents agree to some extent (86%) that it is important to treat animals bred for food humanely. There is also strong agreement that it is better for the environment to eat locally grown fruit and vegetables that are in season (76%), however just half (52%) of respondents say they have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local / seasonal produce.

**Bar Chart**

- **I think it’s important that animals bred for food are treated as humanely as possible (n=3265)**
  - Strongly agree: 58%
  - Agree: 28%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 9%
  - Don’t know: 1%

- **It’s better for the environment to eat local fruit and vegetables grown in season (n=3264)**
  - Strongly agree: 34%
  - Agree: 42%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 17%
  - Don’t know: 2%

- **Where possible I try to support British producers (n=3262)**
  - Strongly agree: 21%
  - Agree: 42%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 27%
  - Don’t know: 9%

- **I have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local / seasonal produce (n=3257)**
  - Strongly agree: 15%
  - Agree: 37%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 25%
  - Don’t know: 13%

UK respondents are most likely to agree that they have a good understanding of the issues surrounding local and seasonal produce (54% compared with 46% EU respondents and 44% non-EU respondents).
Research Findings
Students and Food Poverty
38% of respondents report being unable to eat healthy and nutritious food in the last 12 months due to a lack of money or other resources, and a similar proportion (36%) have been worried they would run out of food for the same reason. A quarter report having been hungry but did not eat because of a lack of money or other resources and 13% say they have gone a whole day without eating for this reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>UK Respondents</th>
<th>EU Respondents</th>
<th>Non-EU Respondents</th>
<th>International Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of money or other resources?</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were worried you would run out of food because of a lack of money or other resources?</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You ate less than you thought you should because of a lack of money or other resources?</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were hungry but did not eat because of a lack of money or other resources?</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of affordable food retailers locally?</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You went without eating for a whole day because of a lack of money or other resources?</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of access to sufficient cooking facilities?</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of access to sufficient cooking facilities? (Base: c. 3260 Balance: No response)
Research Findings
Pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours
The majority of respondents report doing at least one or two things that are environmentally-friendly (93%). 4% say they don’t really do anything to help the environment.

Q. Which of the following statements best describes you? Please pick one (Base: 3265 Balance: No response)
Half of respondents (51%) say they would be willing to make changes to the food they buy to reduce their impact on the environment if they knew more about the subject.

Q. Please read the statement below and tell us which of the options best applies to you. If I had a better understanding of the environmental impacts of how food is produced...
Please select one only
(Base: 3254 Balance: No response)
Using a segmentation model of environmental attitudes and behaviours, a quarter (26%) of respondents are categorised as Concerned Consumers. This group hold broad pro-environmental concerns but not as strongly as Positive Greens, who make up 21% of survey respondents.

- **Concerned Consumers** (26%):
  - Hold positive pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs but with less conviction
  - Likely to think they are doing more to live in a more environmentally-friendly way than actually are
  - Likely to cite money-saving and inconvenience as the reasons for not doing more

- **Positive Greens** (21%):
  - Hold the most positive pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs
  - Most likely to want to live in a more environmentally-friendly way than they currently do
  - Most willing to pay for environmentally-friendly products

- **Sideline Supporters** (18%):
  - Agree that there is an environmental crisis, but cynical about our ability to tackle it
  - Pro-environmental behaviour is likely to be focused on actions in the home but these behaviours are not a natural fit with their self-identity
  - Any behaviours they do need to fit with their current lifestyle and habits

- **Honestly Disengaged** (16%):
  - Hold positive pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs but with less conviction
  - Likely to think they are doing more to live in a more environmentally-friendly way than actually are
  - Likely to cite money-saving and inconvenience as the reasons for not doing more

- **Cautious Participants** (12%):
  - Hold the most positive pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs
  - Most likely to want to live in a more environmentally-friendly way than they currently do
  - Most willing to pay for environmentally-friendly products

- **Stalled Starters** (5%):
  - Agree that there is an environmental crisis, but cynical about our ability to tackle it
  - Pro-environmental behaviour is likely to be focused on actions in the home but these behaviours are not a natural fit with their self-identity
  - Any behaviours they do need to fit with their current lifestyle and habits

- **Waste Watchers** (2%):
  - Hold positive pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs but with less conviction
  - Likely to think they are doing more to live in a more environmentally-friendly way than actually are
  - Likely to cite money-saving and inconvenience as the reasons for not doing more

The segmentation model, developed by Defra in 2008, is built around strength of agreement or disagreement with 17 statements focused on attitudes and behaviours towards environmental issues locally and globally. Further detail can be found [here](#).
Over three quarters (78%) of respondents say they would like to do either a bit more, or a lot more to help the environment.
Annex
Full Demographics
I would prefer not to say
2%

I am an international student from within the EU, studying...

I am an international student from outside the EU, studying...

I am a UK citizen, studying in the UK
78%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80%
Nationality

0.20%
Prefer not to say
0.40%

Man
44%

Woman
55%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80%
Gender

My parents' home
27%

My own home
27%

Privately rented accommodation
23%

University / college / privately owned self-catered accommodation
22%

Other
2%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30%
Accommodation type
Respondent demographics

**Subject (all)**
- Other: 24%
- Business & administrative studies: 14%
- Creative arts & design: 9%
- Engineering and Technology: 9%
- Education: 7%
- Subjects allied to medicine: 2%
- Physical Sciences: 6%
- Maths & computer sciences: 6%
- Historical & Philosophical studies: 3%
- Law: 3%
- Medicine & Dentistry: 3%
- Languages: 2%
- Written arts: 1%

**Level of study**
- Further education: 28%
- Higher education: 70%
- Apprenticeship: 2%
- Graduated in the last year: 1%

**Year of study (HE)**
- Undergraduate 1st year: 78%
- Undergraduate 2nd year: 12%
- Undergraduate 3rd year: 7%
- Undergraduate 4th year: 9%
- Undergraduate 5th year or more: 0.3%