

# UK F&B Digest

August 2021

Unmissable insight for  
F&B brands and retailers

The Healthy Eating Issue



# From the CEO



Jeremy King  
Attest

**O**besity in the UK is a big fat problem. More than half of over 45 year olds are now living with diet-related health conditions, while poor diet contributes to 64,000 deaths per year in England. The pressure this context puts on the NHS is massive - especially when adding the vast complications and catastrophic impact of COVID.

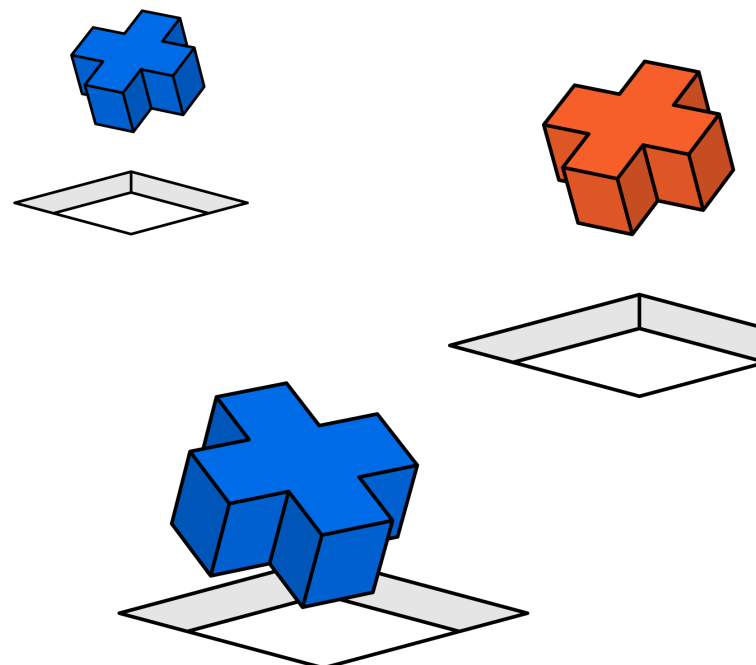
According to a Public Health England (PHE) study, individuals classed as medically obese have a 40% higher risk of death from coronavirus. These statistics make it clear that action needs to be taken - now and in the long-term - not just by us as individuals, but by the food industry as well.


The National Food Strategy, led by food entrepreneur Henry Dimbleby, sets out a number of initiatives, like the world's first sugar and salt tax, aimed at motivating manufacturers to make the foods they sell healthier, and for consumers to make healthier choices. Then there's the pre-

watershed advertising ban for high fat sugar salt (HFSS) food and drink.

Naturally, tough measures such as these will send shockwaves through the industry, with ramifications for many manufacturers.

The question is, will they work? We recently hosted a roundtable discussion with a number of food-related brands, focused on "breaking the cycle of junk food". Here's a little of what was said on the night:





“Taxes and pricing are easy to change... but habits, convenience and flavour/satisfaction are much, much harder to shift across wide and diverse populations.”

“Few brands are against taxes on unhealthy foods, but many brands do want a level playing field with similar products grouped and taxed accordingly, based on relative healthiness - not binary good/bad categories, where every ‘unhealthy’ choice is identically ‘bad’ and identically penalised.”

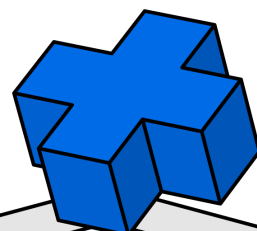
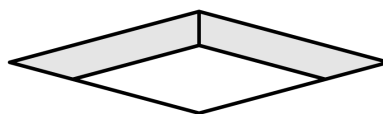
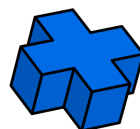
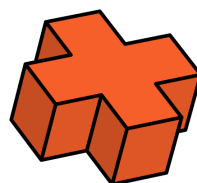
“It’s easy to imagine healthy trade-offs being easy to make... but in reality, not every consumer has the expendable time, expendable income or kitchen equipment to actually consistently make healthier choices (even where there are visible reasons and incentives to do so).”

For this issue of the F&B Digest, we wanted to uncover more realities about how likely The National Food Strategy measures are to change consumer behaviour, and if there are other, more positive steps brands can take to encourage healthy eating.

We also spoke with F&B brands to find out what kind of impact the government’s crackdown on HFSS will have on them (hint - it’s not all bad news!). And for further insight, there’s a detailed interview with Oddbox, looking at how they’re expanding their waste-reducing vegetable box subscription business across the country.

We hope you enjoy this food for thought. If you have any comments, feedback or alternative takes on any of the content/data, we’d love to hear from you.

Drop us a line at  
[hello@askattest.com](mailto:hello@askattest.com)



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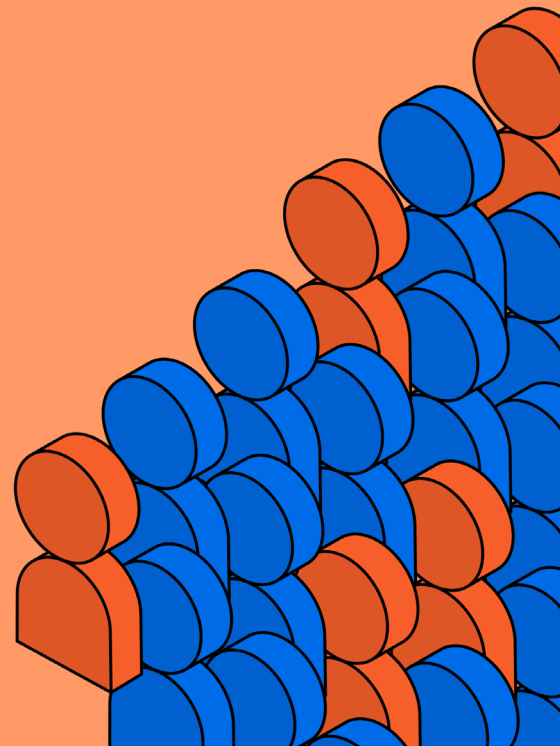
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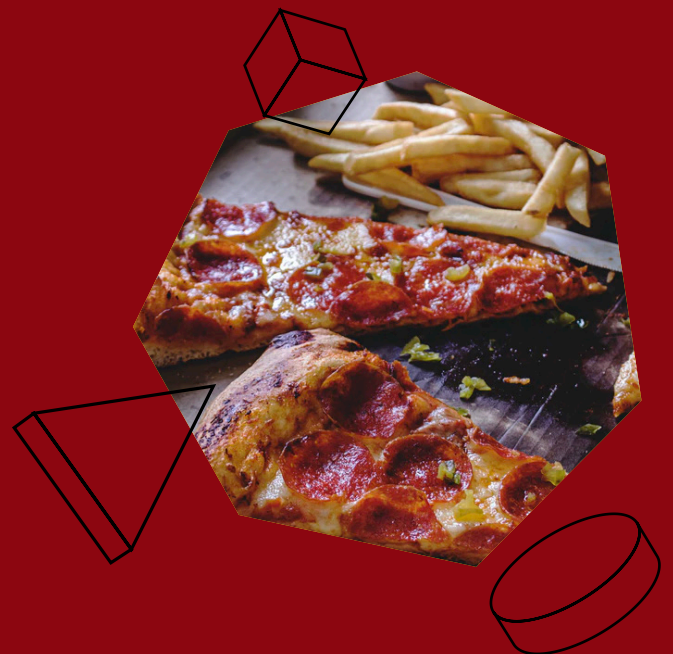
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What do UK consumers think about the government's anti-obesity plan?



01

# Taxing unhealthy food is not the answer to nation's obesity problem

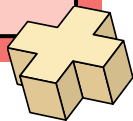


# UK consumers believe making healthy food more affordable will change their purchasing behaviour.

Government plans to tackle the UK's obesity crisis with tactics like taxing unhealthy foods and banning advertising may not work, new data shows.

In a survey of 1,000 working age UK consumers, we found lower support for the more heavy-handed measures outlined in the National Food Strategy.

Which of the following government proposals to tackle obesity do you support?



Taxing unhealthy foods to make them more expensive was the least popular of the eight proposals, supported by 26% of Brits. Banning the sale of energy drinks is supported by 27% of people, while banning ads for unhealthy foods between 6pm and 9pm gets the thumbs up from less than a third (30.5%).

By contrast, making healthy food more affordable is supported by 71% of respondents, indicating that encouragements to eat healthily are likely to be more effective than deterrents. Gen Z (aged 18-25) are most opposed to prohibition-style measures, with only 14% supporting banning energy drinks and 20% in favour of banning junk food advertising.

Older Brits, on the other hand, are more on board with strong tactics; 44% of Boomers (aged 56-65) support the advertising ban and 59% want to see food manufacturers forced to reduce salt and sugar in their products.

When it comes to putting calorie information on restaurant menus, though, it's the Millennials who most want to see this. 40% of respondents aged 26 to 40 are in support of the measure, which has been criticised for the negative impact it could have on people with eating disorders.

**70.7%**  
Making healthy foods more affordable

**39.9%**  
Forcing manufactures to reduce salt and sugar content

**38.5%**  
Improving front-of-pack nutrition labelling

**36.4%**  
Improving the nutrition quality of infant food

**35.7%**  
Calorie labelling on restaurant menus

**30.5%**  
Banning ads for unhealthy foods between 6pm and 9pm

**27.4%**  
Banning the sale of energy drinks

**25.6%**  
Taxing unhealthy foods and making them more expensive



# Do we need (yet) another front-of-pack labelling system?

Debate around the best type of front-of-pack nutrition labelling has been going on for more than a decade. Currently there's a variety of different labelling being used on food packaging, including the Traffic Light system, Daily Guideline Amounts and Reference Intakes.

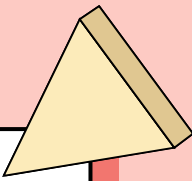
The government wants to see improved front-of-pack labelling - and the industry does too. Danone is one brand putting its weight behind Nutri-Score, a colour coded scale from A to E, each signalling the nutritional value of a product.

Each product is scored based on a scientific algorithm that considers the nutrients to reduce, like sugars, saturated fat and salt, and the nutrients to increase, such as fibre, protein, fruit, vegetables and nuts.

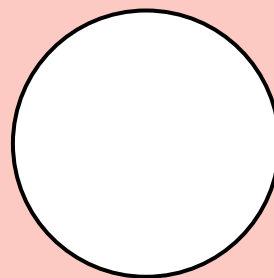
The Nutri-Score is said to be easier for consumers to understand and has been officially recommended by health authorities in France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Spain. But how confusing do Brits find existing nutrition labels?

We found that 39% of people believe they are able to make informed choices from looking at current front-of-pack labelling, while 44% find the labels confusing (including 14% who subsequently don't bother to look at them). A further 17% don't look at nutrition labels because they're not interested - respondents in this camp are most likely to be Gen Z.

Most likely to be in favour of improving front-of-pack labelling are the Boomers, 44% of this demographic support the move. Gen Z are least bothered about it, with 27% showing support.

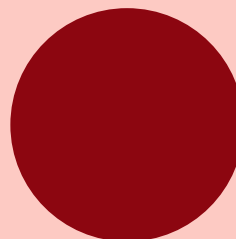


How much are your food choices influenced by front-of-pack nutrition labelling?



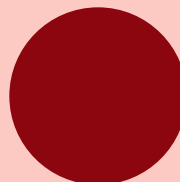
**39%**

I look at the labels and feel confident about making an informed choice



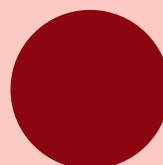
**29.9%**

I look at the labels but don't always understand if I'm making a good choice



**17.2%**

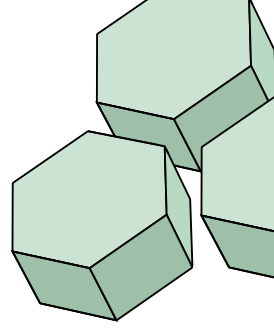
I don't look at the labels because I don't care



**13.8%**

I don't look at the labels because I find them confusing

# Reformulating could boost profits

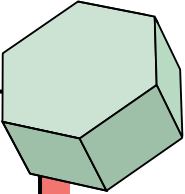


While reformulating products to reduce salt and sugar content is desirable, it's not always easy to do without a change in taste. Changing the way a popular product tastes is a big risk for manufacturers, but are consumers becoming more open-minded to reformulation in pursuit of healthier foods?

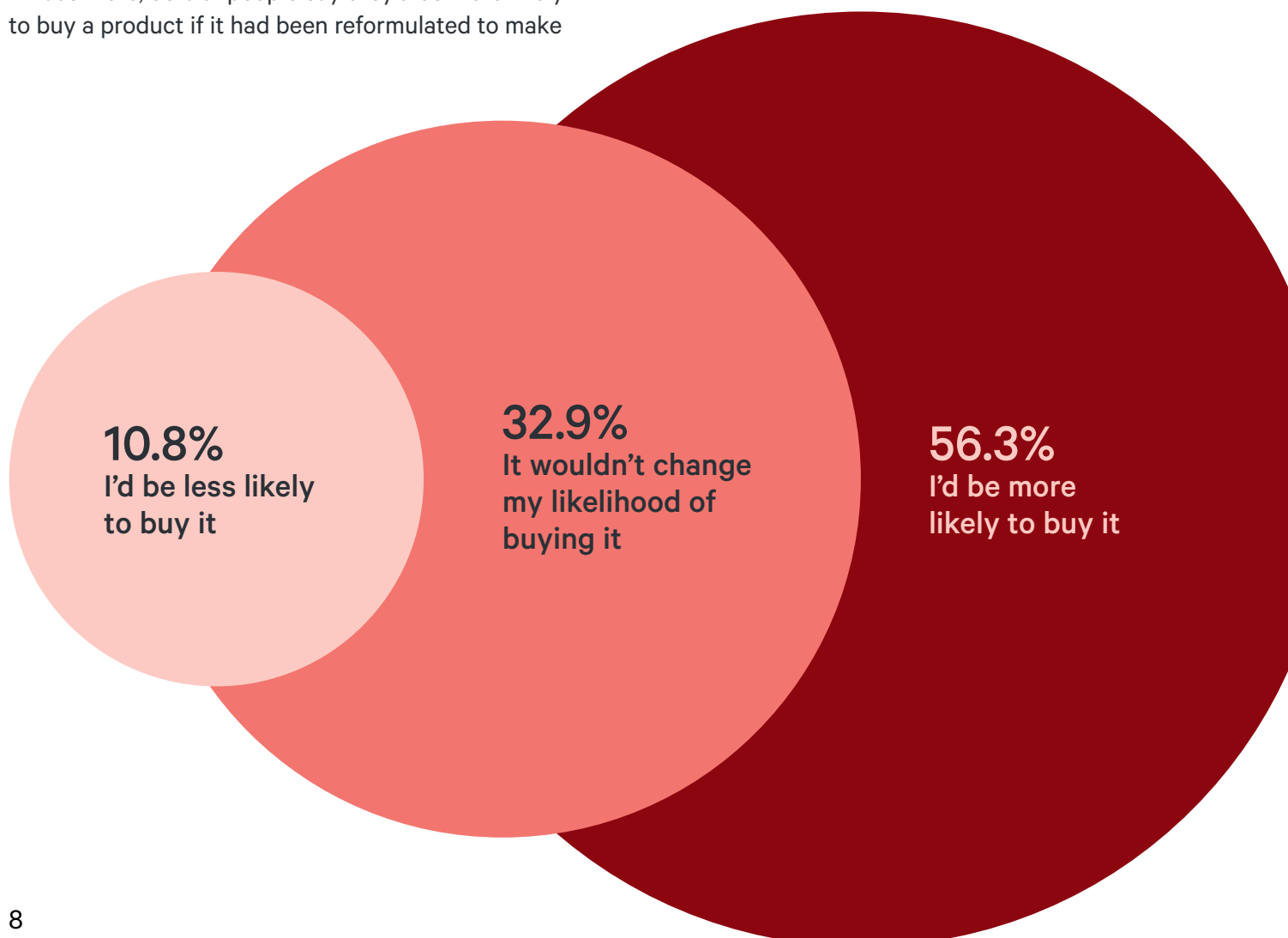
Encouragingly, 70% of Brits agree they're willing to accept some change in taste (including 24% who strongly agree). Boomers show the most resistance to taste change, but 60% still say they're willing to accept it.

What's more, 56% of people say they'd be more likely to buy a product if it had been reformulated to make

it healthier. Only 11% would be less likely to buy it. This suggests, as the government puts more pressure on brands to reformulate, it could have a positive impact on sales.



If a manufacturer reformulated a product to make it healthier, would it change your likelihood to buy it?

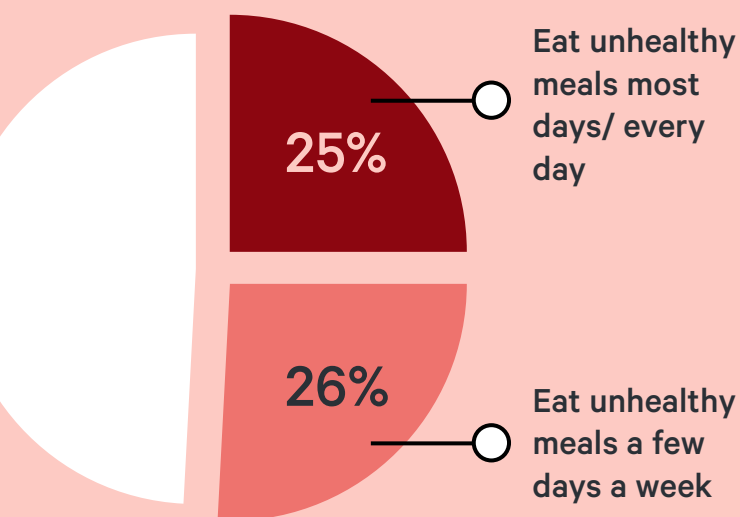




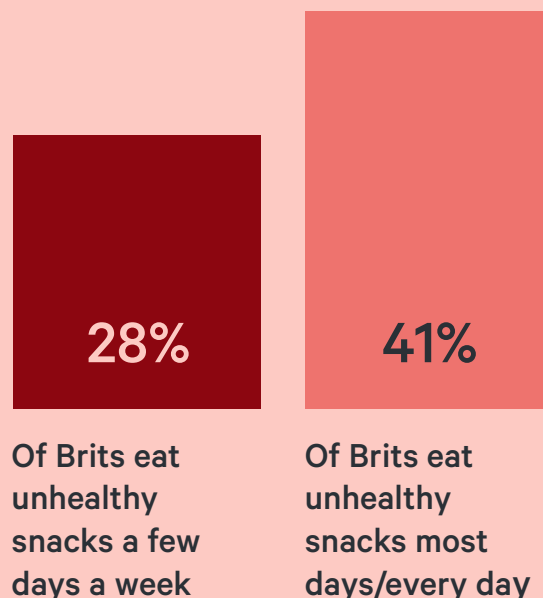
# Are our diets really that bad?

Identified as a key risk factor for severe COVID-19, obesity has been thrown into the spotlight. But the problem had already reached crisis point way before the pandemic; there were more than a million hospital admissions for obesity-related treatment in England in 2019-2020.

Our research shows that there's definitely room for improvement in British people's diets. A quarter of the population are eating unhealthy meals most days/ every day, and a further 26% eat unhealthy meals a few days a week - that's more than half the population frequently eating badly.

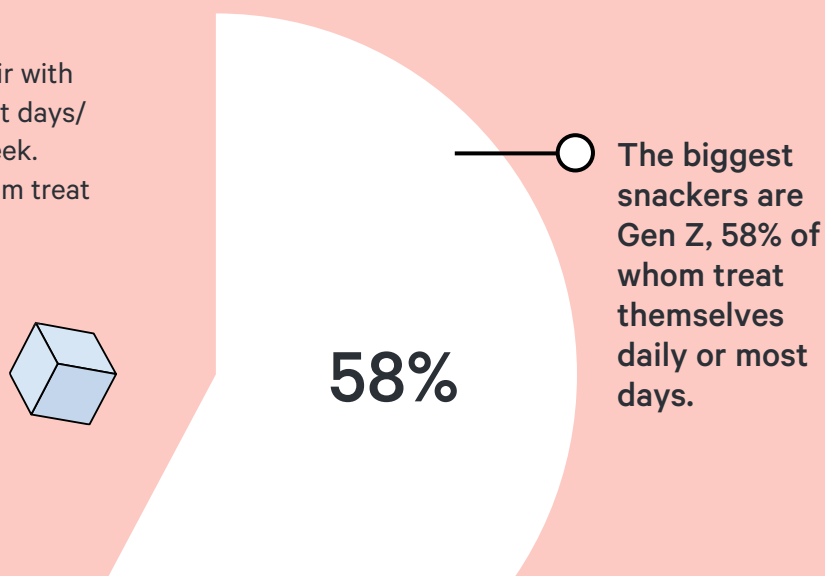


Further underlining the issue is our love affair with unhealthy snacks; 41% of Brits eat them most days/ every day and 28% eat them a few days a week. The biggest snackers are Gen Z, 58% of whom treat themselves daily or most days.



Dr Chris van Tulleken illustrated recently just how quickly a diet of ultra-processed food can have an impact on the body. In four weeks, he put on a stone, developed man-boobs, piles, anxiety and heartburn (even more disturbingly, an MRI showed his brain had re-wired itself).

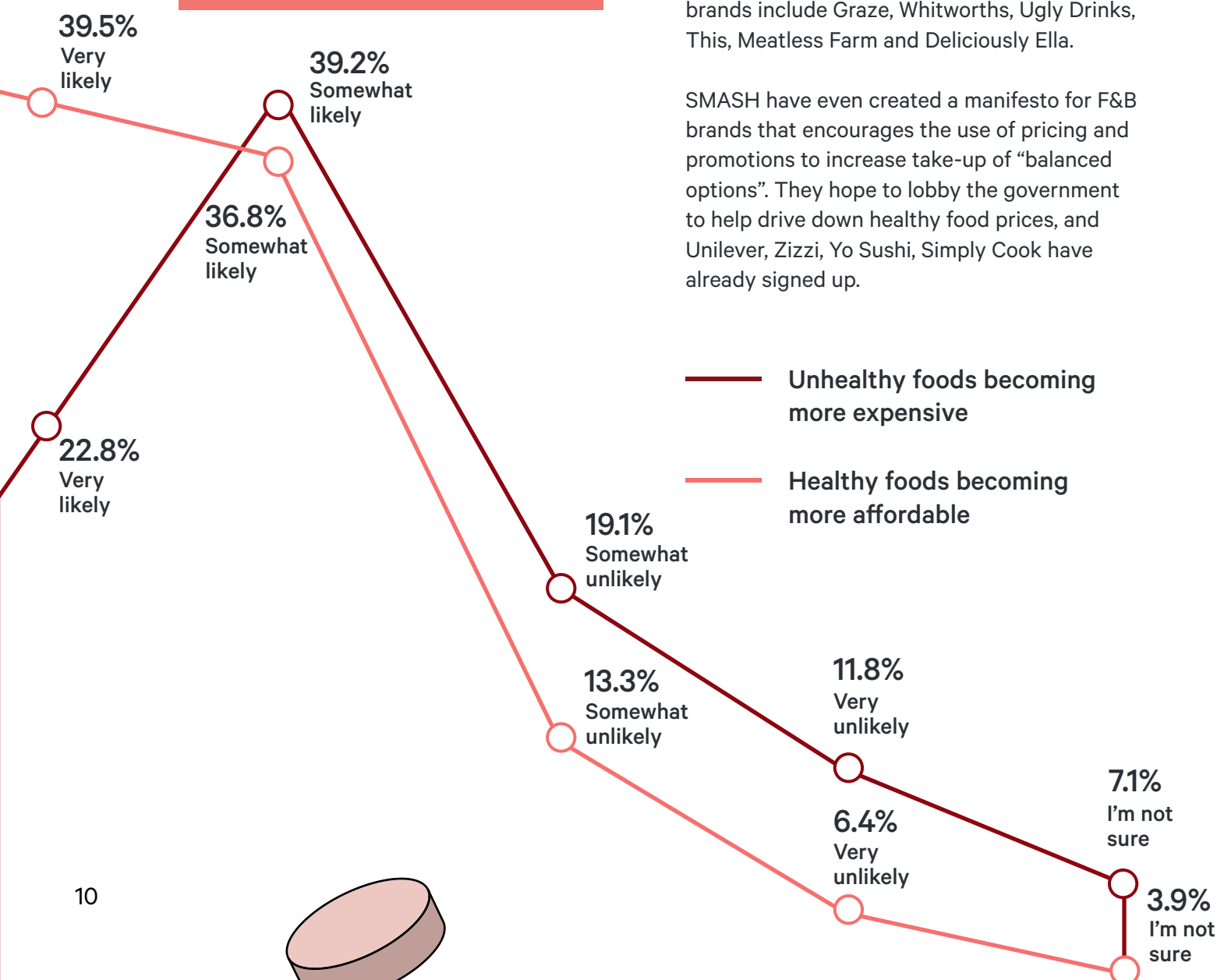
But on the other side of the coin, Brits are certainly not adverse to cooking from scratch. Nearly 60% of us cook daily/ most days, and a further 24% do it a few days a week. Even the youngest demographic show commitment to home cooking, which is a trend that brands should take note of.



# Don't make unhealthy food more expensive, make healthier food cheaper

It worked with cigarettes, but will making unhealthy food more expensive stop people from buying it? 62% of Brits agree taxing junk food is likely to affect their purchasing behaviour....but a larger 76% think healthy foods becoming more affordable would make an impact. This belief is seen across all the demographics.

How likely is changing the cost of food to effect purchasing behaviour?



Promotions for healthy foods are part of the PM's anti-obesity plan and it appears this could really move the needle when it comes to reducing our waistlines. 84% of respondents agree that offers and promotions would encourage them to buy healthy foods, with Gen Z and Millennials particularly in favour.

Hoping to prove that young people want more affordable healthy food is SMASH, an app that provides 13 to 24-year-olds with money-off vouchers and promo codes on hundreds of healthy food products in the UK. Participating brands include Graze, Whitworths, Ugly Drinks, This, Meatless Farm and Deliciously Ella.

SMASH have even created a manifesto for F&B brands that encourages the use of pricing and promotions to increase take-up of "balanced options". They hope to lobby the government to help drive down healthy food prices, and Unilever, Zizzi, Yo Sushi, Simply Cook have already signed up.

# Supermarkets must take action against **obesity**

It's not just manufacturers of unhealthy products that need to accept responsibility for the UK's health crisis; it's also the supermarkets that promote them. In fact, our data shows that consumers are more likely to agree that supermarkets must take action against obesity than food manufacturers. Nearly 76% of people believe supermarkets need to act, versus 67% who say the same about manufacturers.

A government study found that high-sugar foods and drinks are more likely to be promoted in-store than healthier products, as well as being more deeply promoted. And these promotions really influence what we buy - putting soft drinks on an end of aisle display can increase sales by more than 50%.

It's not just consumers who want supermarkets to change their ways; shareholders do too. Responsible investment charity ShareAction recently wrote to Morrisons chairman Andy

Higginson, along with seven investors, calling on the supermarket to set stronger targets to increase sales of healthy products.

Regardless of what F&B brands might think about the government's proposals for tackling obesity, what this ultimately shows is that it makes good business sense to help Brits be healthier.

**It makes good business sense to help Brits be healthier.**

**Nearly 76% of people believe supermarkets need to act, versus 67% who say the same about manufacturers.**



02



Weetabix, Eatlean  
and SMASH  
explain why the  
HFSS crackdown is  
a big opportunity

# F&B brands that set out on a journey to make their products healthier can enjoy all sorts of benefits, say brand leaders.

Tough new legislation around HFSS food and drink might seem like a blow to the industry but, according to brands like Weetabix and Eatlean, it's actually a not-to-be-missed opportunity.

The brands were speaking at a webinar hosted by Attest and The Grocer, discussing the proposals outlined in the UK Government's National Food Strategy. While these include restrictions on being able to advertise products deemed unhealthy and might require manufacturers to reformulate their products to reduce salt and sugar, these brands believe there are many positives to be had.

Barrie Saxby, Business Unit Director at Eatlean said the crackdown represents an opportunity for manufacturers to engage with retailers and get better in-store promotion - especially for brands working to bring healthier products to market.

“Some retailers are positively discriminating around feature space, to make sure that 10% of brands on that end are healthier or plant-based, to support brands in getting that message out there. I think it's an opportunity for suppliers of any size - particularly smaller suppliers - to engage with retailers about the journey they're about to go on and try to use that to solicit additional support.”

Mark Perry, Head of Category and In-Store at Weetabix, agrees that the new proposals are opening up conversations between brands and retailers. Our own research found that British consumers think it's supermarkets, not manufacturers, who have the most responsibility for tackling obesity, so these are conversations retailers need to have.

British consumers think it's supermarkets, not manufacturers, who have the most responsibility for tackling obesity.

“Retailers very much realise it's going to be a huge part of their planning for the next 18/24 months and we've spent quite a lot of time looking at that with them,” he says.

“In terms of reformulation, most of our products are on the right side of the line. So what we can spend our time doing is working with our retail customers to upskill them a little on legislation, what that could mean for the cereal category, what they can promote, what it might mean for their online sites, all of that kind of stuff. And we can do it in a really confident way because we know we can continue to invest in the category and support the plans that we're taking to them.”



# Education is key

**For brands to thrive in this new environment, finding ways to educate both consumers and retailers about their products will be key.**

“There’s a broader piece about engagement; we need to be talking to people about what these products do and why they are right for people,” notes Saxby.

“The first thing we get asked a lot is, ‘well, if you’ve got a product that’s 90% lower in fat than standard cheese, what have you done to it? Are there nasties in it?’ And actually, no, our ingredient list is milk with some starter cultures and a pinch of salt, that’s it. I think as an industry we’ve got to make sure we manage those misconceptions.”

Weetabix’s Perry adds that engaging with retailers on the grounds of product education could help them to remember ‘forgotten’ suppliers.

“Education is really important,” he said. “You’d be surprised how many buyers and buying teams are maybe not actually clear what they have got at their disposal in their category already and the benefits of those.

“It can be really difficult to get feature for products that are startup or are smaller. But this legislation and the focus on health is going to mean that retailers are going to have to take a slightly different approach to

how they’re allocating feature space, how they’re backing startup brands and how they’re backing healthy brands that they’ve already got in their category. It might mean rediscovering some of them.”

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# The digital shop window

Despite its drawbacks, The National Food Strategy comes at a good time because it follows the shift to online grocery shopping seen during the pandemic. This means brands and retailers have increased opportunities - and much more space - to engage with consumers.

Weetabix saw online sales grow from 10% to 30% since the start of the pandemic, while Eatlean witnessed 300% growth in their ecommerce business.

10%

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30%

“Creating clear health navigation and signage and segmentation online is a million times easier online than it is in store,” says Perry.

“So suddenly you’ve got this opportunity to be able to have shoppers on the website being able to filter by high fiber or wholewheat, or wholegrain or added protein or reduced sugar. Online is just an enormous opportunity to help people make better, more informed decisions and put products in front

of them that they wouldn’t normally see and create those basket opportunities.”

# 300%

**Eatlean witnessed 300% growth**

Eatlean’s Saxby adds that demand from consumers for greater transparency around products could also be met much more easily online.

“

“People want not just more detail around what’s in the product but also **the process** that goes into making it. To get that on a point of sale fixture is pretty tricky when you’ve limited space. But if we’re talking about retailer websites or ecommerce websites, you’ve got a whole platform there to bring it to life.”





# The carrot not the stick

The challenge of getting consumers to adopt healthier products will ultimately be won by incentivising them to do so. This includes motivating them about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Weetabix cite their partnership with the FA as a great example; providing a seamless link between a healthy start to the day and activity.

Meanwhile, SMASH - another brand speaking at the event - are incentivising young people with discounts on healthy food and drink from 80 brand partners. They're working with social media influencers to promote the deals, and it's a concept that's really working.

“Angie Allgood, Chief Marketing Officer, SMASH said: “We're working with money saving influencers who mainly focus on fast food deals and then we're sprinkling in our discounts on healthier food and we've seen a significant increase in downloads of the app when they post about us. So we can see that desire is there if we can just increase the amount of messages from influencers that young people trust.”

Our own data shows that 86% of Brits think offers and promotions on healthy food would change their purchasing behaviour. SMASH now hope to accumulate a body of data that can prove that financial incentives motivate behaviour - something they plan to use to help influence reforms in the VAT system.

Beyond making healthier food more affordable, Allgood says it's all about changing the way these products are viewed, especially among younger people.

“We really need to go to the platforms where these young people are, like TikTok, Twitch, YouTube and ensure that our messaging around healthy eating isn't what it has been in the past where healthier products haven't been seen as aspirational. We need to change the narrative.”

One way F&B brands can engage with consumers on the topic of healthy eating is by tapping into our love of cooking. The number of people dedicating time to cooking grew massively during lockdown and it seems it's a habit that's stuck. Our research finds that nearly 60% of Brits cook daily/most days, and a further 24% do it a few days a week.

24%  
cook a few  
days a week

60%  
cook daily/  
most days

Says Allgood: “There are loads of TikTokers and Instagrammers that are making scratch cooking more entertaining and easy, and many focus on healthy dishes that are quick and easy to whip up.”

Brands that work with such influencers will be able to show how their products can be used in scratch cooking and marry the all-important factors of taste, health, convenience and affordability.



03

# How Oddbox mastered national expansion while cutting campaign costs



# Getting a handle on existing brand awareness made launching into three new UK regions cheaper and more effective.

## Entering new markets generally requires a hefty marketing budget - but what if you could significantly cut your spend with a few key insights about the local consumers?

When they expanded into three new UK regions, veg box brand Oddbox used consumer data from Attest to tailor their strategy so it would deliver maximum impact for minimum outlay.

Liz Yates, Head of Growth at Oddbox, says: “We’ve recently expanded into the Midlands, the Southwest and Wales. Through our brand tracking, we discovered we actually had quite high brand awareness in those regions, despite the fact that we weren’t operating there.”

According to Yates, this proved to be invaluable insight for the team building the campaign plan for launching into those areas.

“We probably would have gone a little bit more aggressively with upper funnel activity were it not for the fact that we were fairly confident there was a decent level of awareness in these regions already,” she reveals.

“It actually had quite a significant impact on our overall campaign costs. And I think it enabled us to plan a much more efficient campaign.”

Beyond helping them understand how much they needed to spend on ads in each region, Oddbox also used Attest data to identify the best type of media to buy.

“We could see there were quite big differences between the different geographies. For example, we realised that people in the Midlands were

probably more open to product recommendations from influencers and also that they were more likely to take up a product if they received a leaflet about it.

“Whereas down in the Southwest and Bristol - which is one of the key markets we’re moving into - we were able to see there was more of a resistance to advertising in general and probably slightly more skepticism.”

**“Through our brand tracking, we discovered we actually had quite high brand awareness in those regions...”**

**Oddbox also used Attest data to identify the best type of media to buy.**

**“It actually had quite a significant impact on our overall campaign costs.”**



# A bespoke media mix

Rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach to marketing, Oddbox employed a distinct media mix across the different UK regions.

Says Yates: “We did some leafleting activity in the Midlands and have looked at using influencers. Obviously these aren’t geo targeted but we’ve tried to find some local influencers there. In Bristol, on the other hand, we’re taking a much more grassroots approach.”

Now, Yates plans to localise Oddbox’s marketing even further by using Attest to craft and test campaign messaging.

“We know that the attitudes are quite different across the two audiences,” she says. “So the evolution of that is beginning to have a more localised approach to our messaging. We are gearing up for another push later in the year. And as part of that, we’ll also be using the tool to test our messaging ahead of it going out.”

The planned ‘push’ also includes expansion into the north of England. Yates adds that staying responsive to changing consumer behaviour as the UK comes out of lockdown will be important.

“We’re conscious of what the impact of lockdown lifting might be like because, the truth is, people probably don’t want to stay in and cook quite as much now everything’s opening up over the summer. Part of our next push later in the year is understanding what people’s behaviors are likely to be as we get further through lockdown easing.

“One of the key things for us is going to be understanding if people will be staying in a little bit more in September. Typically September is a reset period; that kind of back to school moment, where you get into the headspace of, I’m going to cook, eat my five a day and make sure that I don’t buy a sandwich every day for lunch. So we want to get ready for that.”





# Discovering hidden gems in the data

This isn't the first time Yates has made interesting discoveries in consumer data. She first started using Attest in her previous role as Head of Marketing at flatfair, where she used insight to help the tech startup pivot its value proposition.

She explains: "flatfair is a service for landlords and tenants, offering an alternative to a traditional deposit. So a tenant can pay a one-off membership fee and they don't have to fork out thousands of pounds up front in order to move house.

**“The big learning I had there is the whole product had been geared to giving landlords double the protection that a normal deposit would, which is capped at five weeks. So we were doing 10 weeks of protection. And, actually, it was through speaking to landlords and then validating with Attest I was able to find out that landlords didn't really care about 10 weeks of protection at all, which is what we used to consider our core selling point of our product and was our lead message.”**

As it turns out, most deposit claims are quite small; around £100 to £200, so the amount of coverage wasn't the challenge for landlords. What they did care about is the speed of payouts.

**“Not having to wait for a deposit to be released was actually the main frustration and time-consuming thing for them, which is why we pivoted our product to focus on faster payout. We'd pay out within one day, which was much more appealing to landlords. It was quite a huge shift from a product point of view.”**

# Getting stakeholder buy-in

Yates believes consumer insights are vital for marketers, and now uses Attest any time she has a business question that needs answering. It also plays an important role in validating findings from her smaller scale research projects.

“Rather than getting into a discussion or building a case for why we should do something a certain way, it’s just very simple. We say, ‘well, let’s just run a survey and ask them and find out’. And then you can’t really deny what the data says. So it makes decision-making much easier and can give you confidence that you’re making the right decision.”

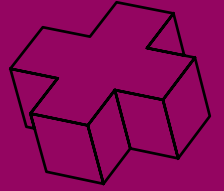
She adds: “One of the challenges you always get from internal stakeholders is, ‘well, how do you know you didn’t just have six people in a room who just happened to have these particular insights?’ But if you then go out and survey 2000 people and they all say the same thing, that was probably not a coincidence; that is probably real insight. So for me, being able to validate those qualitative findings with quant is super important - it’s about getting stakeholder buy-in.”

**“It makes decision-making much easier and can give you confidence that you’re making the right decision.”**





05



What do UK  
consumers  
think about the  
government's **anti-  
obesity** plan?





26%

support taxing  
unhealthy food

Attest surveyed 1,000 working age Brits on the proposals put forward by the Office for Health Promotion (OHP)..



3 in 10

support pre-watershed  
junk food ad ban



44%

are confused by front-  
of-pack nutrition labelling

40%

want manufacturers to  
reduce salt and sugar in  
products



7 in 10

willing to accept some  
change in taste for  
healthier products



84%

say offers and  
promotions would  
encourage them to buy  
healthier foods



8 in 10

think supermarkets  
need to take action  
against obesity



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