

## **A Comparative Review of International Food Safety and Nutrition Consumer Surveys**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In many countries, public authorities rely on public food and safety agencies (e.g. the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in EU, or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in US) to protect better the health of their community (Wendling, 2014). Such agencies periodically collect survey data among a representative sample of citizens on a wide variety of factors which determine food choices.

Our research analyses a number of consumer surveys commissioned by national and international agencies, to monitor citizens' awareness and risk perception, level of label understanding, main information channels, trust and other factors regarding food safety and nutrition.

The aim of this study is to examine in detail the structure and content of these consumer surveys, highlighting the pros/cons of different methods/approaches. The final objective is to compare how these surveys differ and identify best practices in terms of designing and implementing consumer's questionnaires, and analysing/interpreting the data.

### **METHODOLOGY**

We analysed survey data from nine national public food and safety reports: (1) Dataset Special Eurobarometer 2019 'Food safety in the EU (28 EU member states), (2) 2014 FDA Health and Diet Survey, (3) 2016 FDA Food Safety Survey (US), (4) 2019 FDA Food Safety and Nutrition Survey (5) UK FSA The Food and You Survey Wave 5 2018, (6) UK FSA Food and You 2 Survey 2020 ; (7) FSANZ Consumer Attitude Survey 2007 (8) FSANZ Consumer Label Survey 2015, and (9) Foodbook Report. Protecting Canadians from illness 2007. For each country/area of data collection, we carried out an evaluation of the main elements of the survey, including country and year of data collection, number of interviews, the interviewing method, and the sample description.

## RESULTS

We found some common topics and subtopics in all the different surveys, namely: risk perception, food trust and awareness, eating and shopping patterns and information label search. This means that the main area of interest/research is taken into consideration no matter the geographical and cultural differences between the different countries investigated.

We also found that the most common socio-demographic variables were referring to gender, age group, household size, presence of children in the household, income, and working status.

We identified over 50 keywords that link the various surveys and that can be used by researchers to compare questions used to investigate consumers' attitudes to food safety globally.

## DISCUSSION

We believe that when developing consumer surveys on food safety and nutrition issues, public entities should integrate the expertise of nutritionists and food scientists with social and behavioural scientists. Lessons from this comparative review showcase that such an integrated approach results in surveys that provide a comprehensive insight useful to develop tailored, fit-for-purpose food and nutrition policies and regulations, as well as accompanying communication campaigns.

In addition, we found that having an online repository of consumer questions available to social scientists working in the realm of regulatory food science would be a useful reference tool for designing future surveys.