A national online survey looking at attitudes, awareness and behaviours linked to sustainable food issues was completed by c. 1500 students studying in further and higher education across the UK. The research was completed in September 2018 as part of NUS’ Student Eats programme which helps students to develop their own growing sites and food enterprises, embedding sustainable food production across campuses, curriculums and communities.

**Food purchasing**

- Half of respondents (50%) are responsible for buying all their own food.
- The vast majority (88%) of respondents report that they use supermarkets in a town/village to do their food shopping at least once a month.
- Price (80%) and location/convenience (75%) 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 a third (35%) spending £31 or more on average per week.
- Price is also reported as the strongest influence on what food respondents buy with 87% saying they consider this when buying food.

**Sustainable food and food poverty**

- Two fifths of respondents say they make a conscious effort to buy Fairtrade products (42%) 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 (36%) and also a way of supporting the local economy (35%), however only around a quarter say that these products are worth paying a bit extra for (22%).
- Only 5% of respondents say that how animals are reared is not important to them.
- 78% agree that it’s better for the environment to eat local fruit and vegetables grown in season.
- Half (52%) agree that they have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local and seasonal produce.
- 32% have been hungry but did not eat because of a lack of money or other resources in the last 12 months.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s important that animals bred for food are treated as humanely as possible (n=1480)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s better for the environment to eat local fruit and vegetables grown in season (n=1486)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where possible I try to support British producers (n=1481)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local / seasonal produce (n=1480)</td>
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<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction
Research objectives and methodology

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 2018. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and was incentivised with a cash prize draw. 1561 respondents completed the survey.

Within the report, a number of questions have been broken down for particular types of respondents and compared with a similar survey conducted in 2016. 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 a confidence level of 99%.
The respondents...

67% are in higher education
24% are in further education
24% are in further education

43% live with their parents
56% live in private rented accommodation
15% live in self-catered halls of residence

89% are from the UK
6% are from within the EU
3% are from outside the EU

Significant decrease on 2016

Significant increase on 2016

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
Half of respondents say they are responsible for doing the main food shopping where they live (50%). 1 in 6 respondents say their parents are responsible for food shopping.

Q. Who is responsible for doing the main food shopping where you live? (Weighted base: 1496 Balance: No response)

- Respondents who are women are more likely to say they buy their own food (59% compared with 55% men). International students (69%) are also more likely than UK respondents (54%) to do their own shopping,
The vast majority (88%) of respondents report that they use supermarkets in a town/village to do their food shopping, at least once a month. Over a third (39%) use convenience stores and just under a quarter (22%) use small independent shops for their food shopping, at least once a month. 7% use farmer’s markets or farm shops.

International students are more likely than students from the UK to say they do their food shopping at markets at least once a month.

Q. At which of these types of shop do you do food shopping at least once a month? (Weighted base: 1498 Balance: No response)
Price (80%) and location/convenience (75%) 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 (39%) of respondents do their food shopping.

UK respondents (41%) are more likely to say they are influenced by offers and deals than international respondents (31% EU and 38% non-EU respondents).

International students from within the UK are most likely to say the quality of products available influences where they decide to do their food shopping.

Q. What factors influence where you decide to do your food shopping?
(Weighted base: 1498 Balance: No response)
Food to cook or prepare at home represents the biggest weekly spend for respondents, relative to other items, with approximately a third (35%) spending £31 or more on average per week.

- Respondents who are men are more likely to say they spend less than £20 on average per week on food to cook or prepare at home (37% compared with 33% women).

- 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 (10% EU respondents and 5% non-EU respondents compared with 13% UK respondents).

Q. Now thinking about what you spend your money on, how much is your weekly average spend on the following items:
(Weighted base: c. 1472 Balance: No response)
Bread (83%), milk (81%), pasta (81%) 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 (33%, 29% and 15% respectively).

Q. Which of these things do you tend to buy?  
(Weighted base: 1488 Balance: No response)

- Women respondents are more likely to say they tend to buy fresh fruit and vegetables (86% compared with 73% men).
- UK and EU respondents are more likely to say they tend to buy fresh meat and fish than international respondents (62% and 61% respectively) compared with 48% non-EU respondents.
- Female and UK respondents (45% of each) are more likely to say they tend to buy ready-made cooking sauces than males (40%) and international respondents (30% EU and 36% non-EU respondents).
- Women respondents are less likely to say they tend to buy ready meals (27% 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 (87% say they consider this when buying food). Quality/freshness (75%) and foods they know how to cook or prepare (66%) are also important considerations, however very few respondents report considering the environmental impact of their food (12%).

Q. What factors do you take into consideration when buying food? (Weighted base: 1494 Balance: No response)

- International respondents are more likely to say they consider the quality or freshness of food (82% EU, 81% non-EU respondents compared to 70% UK respondents).
- Non-EU international respondents are more likely to say they are influenced by foods they know how to cook or prepare (75% non-EU compared with 69% EU and 65% UK respondents).
- Women respondents are more likely to say they consider what special offers are available (56% compared with 51% men).
- EU respondents are most likely to say they consider where food is grown / produced (16% compared with 14% UK respondents and 10% non-EU respondents).
Research Findings
Sustainable food habits and attitudes
Over two fifths of respondents say they make a conscious effort to buy Fairtrade products (42%) 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%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairtrade products</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food that is in season in the UK</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally produced or grown food products</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organically produced or grown food products</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish from sustainable sources (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council certified)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red tractor meat</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom food</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAF marque food</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q. Which, if any, of these do you make a conscious effort to buy?**
(Weighted base: 1470 Balance: No response)

- 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 29% men).
- UK respondents are least likely to make a conscious effort to buy organic food (19% compared with 38% EU respondents and 31% non-EU respondents).
- UK respondents are more likely to say they make a conscious effort to buy red tractor meat (16% compared with 4% EU and 9% non-EU respondents).
- Women respondents are less likely to say they don’t make a conscious effort to buy any food that has ethical or environmental credentials (30% compared with 36% men).
Respondents perceive locally produced food / food products to be a way of purchasing food that is as fresh as possible (36%) and also a way of supporting the local economy (35%). However, only around one in five say that these products are worth paying a bit extra for (22%) and a third think they’re too expensive for their budgets (34%).

<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>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to support the local economy / local businesses</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive for my budget</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m happy with the products I buy already</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like knowing where my food has come from</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want a wide choice of products</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are worth paying a bit extra for</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s difficult to find information on where things are produced</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is too much of an inconvenience to find local produced food</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is inconvenient to check the origin of products</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How food is produced is not important to me</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no benefit in the taste</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not an option where I shop</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. Which, if any, of these statements matches how you think about buying locally produced food / food products?
(Weighted base: 1488 Balance: No response)

- UK respondents are most likely to say they want to support the local economy / businesses through locally produced food (36% compared with 30% 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 5% of respondents say that how animals are reared is not important to them. Around a third (30%) report that higher welfare products are worth paying extra for. A over a third (35%) say we have a duty to rear animals according to higher welfare standards.

Q. Which, if any, of these statements matches how you think about buying meat, dairy and other animal products (e.g. eggs) that have higher welfare standards? Please select all that apply
(Weighted base: 1487 Balance: No response)
The majority of respondents agree to some extent (89%) 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 (78%), however just half (52%) of respondents say they have a good understanding of the issues surrounding buying local / seasonal produce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement                                                                abei</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• UK respondents are most likely to agree that they try to support British producers where possible (63% compared with 53% EU respondents and 55% non-EU respondents).
Over half (55%) of respondents say they avoid eating meat for ethical or environmental reasons. Two fifths (42%) avoid eating fish for the same reasons.

Female respondents are most likely to say they avoid eating meat for ethical or environmental reasons, compared to men (57% compared to 43%). EU respondents are also significantly more likely to say they avoid eating meat (67%) compared to UK (50%) and non-EU (49%) respondents.

Q. Do you avoid eating any of the following foods for ethical or environmental reasons?
(Base:1561 Balance: No response)
Research Findings
Students and Food Poverty
Two fifths of respondents (42%) 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 (38%) have been worried they would run out of food for the same reason. A third (32%) report having been hungry but did not eat because of a lack of money or other resources and 15% say they have gone a whole day without eating for this reason.

- Female respondents (39%) were more likely than male respondents (33%) to say they were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of money or other resources.

- International respondents are more likely to say they have been unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of access to sufficient cooking facilities in the last 12 months (26% non-EU and 17% EU respondents compared 10% UK respondents).

Q. Now we’d like to ask some questions about your food consumption in the last 12 months. During the last 12 months, was there a time when:

Please pick one for each statement
(Weighted base: c. 1480 Balance: No response)
Over half of respondents (58%) say they haven’t been involved with foodbanks. Over a quarter (29%) have donated food or other items to a foodbank in the local community where they study.

Q. Which of the following statements applies to you?

- Female respondents are most likely to have donated food or other items to a foodbank in the community where they study (27% women compared to 21% males)

- International students are least likely to have done any of these charitable actions (74%) compared to UK respondents (65%).
Research Findings
Pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours
The majority of respondents report doing at least one or two things that are environmentally-friendly (94%). 2% say they don’t really do anything to help the environment.

Q. Which of the following statements best describes you? Please pick one
(Weighted base: 1490 Balance: No response)

- I'm environmentally-friendly in everything I do: 2%
- I'm environmentally-friendly in most things I do: 16%
- I do quite a few things that are environmentally-friendly: 39%
- I do one or two things that are environmentally-friendly: 37%
- I don't really do anything that is environmentally-friendly: 2%
- Don't know: 4%

- Female respondents (38%) were more likely than male respondents (35%) to say they do one or two things that are environmentally-friendly. UK respondents (39%) are more likely than EU (31%) and non-EU (26%) respondents to do one or two things.
Half of respondents (52%) say they that if they knew more about the environmental impacts on how food is produced they would be willing to make changes to the food they buy, to reduce their impact on the environment. For 15%, their food shopping behaviours would not change even if they understood the environmental impacts on how food is produced.

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...

- I would still buy the food I usually buy (15%)
- I already make changes to the food I buy to reduce my impact on the environment (9%)
- I already make changes to the food I buy to reduce my impact on the environment and I’d like to do more (14%)
- I would be willing to make changes to the food I buy to reduce my impact on the environment (52%)
- I would be willing to take action such as growing my own food (5%)
- Don't know (4%)

Female respondents (54%) would be more likely than male respondents (46%) to make changes to the food they buy to reduce the impact on the environment.
Using a segmentation model of environmental attitudes and behaviours, over a quarter (28%) of respondents are categorised as Positive Greens. This group hold the most positive pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs.

- **Positive Greens**: 28%
  - 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

- **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

- **Sideline Supporters**: 16%
  - 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**: 11%
  - Likely to say that they are doing more to live in a more environmentally-friendly way than actually are

- **Cautious Participants**: 11%
  - 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

- **Stalled Starters**: 5%

- **Waste Watchers**: 3%

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 four fifths (82%) of respondents say they would like to do either a bit more, or a lot more to help the environment.

Q. Which of these best describes how you feel about your current lifestyle and the environment? Please select one only
(Weighted base: 1480 Balance: No response)

Female respondents are most likely to say they would like to do a lot more to help the environment (35% compared to 30% males). International students would like to do a lot more than their UK counterparts to help (51% non-EU and 42% EU compared to 30% UK).
Over half (58%) of respondents gave a score of 7 or above to rate their level of satisfaction with their life nowadays.

Q. On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied, overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? (Weighted base: 1487 Balance: No response)
Slightly fewer (51%) gave a score of 7 or above to express how satisfied they were with their happiness yesterday.

Q. On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied, overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? (Weighted base: 1485 Balance: No response)
Annex
Full Demographics
**Respondent demographics**

### Nationality

- I am a UK citizen studying in the UK: 90%
- I am an international student from outside the EU studying in the UK: 3%
- I am an international student from within the EU studying in the UK: 6%
- I would prefer not to say: 2%

### Gender

- Woman: 56%
- Man: 43%
- Prefer not to say: 1%
- In another way: 1%

### Accommodation type

- My parents' home: 31%
- Privately rented accommodation: 30%
- My own home: 18%
- University / college/ privately owned self-catered accommodation: 15%
- University / college/ privately owned catered accommodation: 4%
- Other: 2%
Respondent demographics

### Subject (all)
- Other: 19%
- Creative arts & design: 13%
- Business & administrative studies: 9%
- Engineering and Technology: 9%
- Social studies: 8%
- Subjects allied to medicine: 8%
- Physical sciences: 7%
- Maths & Computer Sciences: 6%
- Education: 6%
- Law: 4%
- Medicine & Dentistry: 3%
- Historical & Philosophical studies: 3%
- Written arts: 3%
- Languages: 2%

### Level of study
- MA / MRes / MSc / MEd / MPhil / MBA / PGCE / other postgraduate qualification: 14%
- BA / BSc / BEd / Foundation Degree / HNC / HND / other equivalent Level 4...: 55%
- Apprenticeship (Intermediate / Advanced / Higher): 4%
- A / AS-levels / NVQ 3 / BTEC National / Access course / equivalent Level 3...: 19%
- GCSEs / NVQ 2 / other equivalent Level 2 qualification: 5%
- Foundation / Level 1: 2%
- Entry-level (e.g. Skills for Life or ESOL): 1%

### Year of study (HE)
- Undergraduate 1st year: 37%
- Undergraduate 2nd year: 33%
- Undergraduate 3rd year: 26%
- Undergraduate 4th year: 3%
- Undergraduate 5th year or more: 1%