Indicators

Coronavirus COVID-19

Early clues on the post-crisis consumer & market realities
April 22nd

#12 Waste Not...

Consumers are using strategies to make their food go further and cut down on waste



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BORD BIA Thinking House

#12 WASTE NOT….

Consumers are making their food go further…..

Food Security according to the FAO is when we have sufficient, safe and nutritious food that is in line with our dietary needs and preferences. For much of the developed world this is the state in which we live everyday. However, Covid-19 has been a psychological jolt to many consumers prompting a reassessment of value of food; a study by Hubbub found that 57% of people in the UK now valued food more than they did before the restrictions kicked in.

"Now that more consumers are stuck at home for longer stretches of time …… the public is highly motivated to waste less food so that their groceries can last for a longer duration," (Forbes). This Food Anxiety is something that was widely reported in the 2011 economic downturn too. The antidote is to take "confidence from being prepared" (John Wooden)

Perceived Scarcity can be a powerful behavioural motivator. In the retail environment the manifestation of this in hoarding is well documented. However, this same powerful motivation underpins a number of interesting cooking and consumption behaviours at home that minimise waste and focus on getting more from less. For instance, a recent feature in the Guardian claims that 1 in 6 are now paying less attention to use by dates to make food go further.

We have called this indicator of behavioural change WASTE NOT…

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#12 WASTE NOT….

What drives consumer behaviour around food waste?

The drivers behind food waste are complex and can include food pricing, logistical and storage issues.

There are been plenty of research amongst consumers that has measured the degree and volume of food wasted. There also is evidence from research completed in Sweden in 2018, that Community Based Social Marketing combined with '**Nudging**' increased food waste recycling (brown bin usage).

However, the behavioural science around how consumers navigate food waste in the home is rather thin on the ground. Much of the work done on food waste tends to focus on Social Norms and the degree to which wastage of food is unacceptable amongst peer groups. This doesn't really help us in a world under-lockdown where food waste is a very hidden phenomenon.

The **Theory of Planned Behaviour** may help us understand how consumers and food waste a little more. The theory suggests that behaviour is directly determined by **intentions**, which in turn are predicted by **attitudes**, **subjective norms**, and **perceived behavioural control.**

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#12 WASTE NOT….

Food waste & intention

It would appear that one of the biggest shifts in behaviour around food waste centres on **INTENTION**. 75% of Irish consumers reducing their trips to the supermarket, the need to do this and make food go further is clear.

Some 54% of Irish shoppers claim this behaviour of ‘minimising’ trips to the supermarket is happening more often now. And of those 40% think its is likely to continue into the future.

With the need to reduce trips to the supermarkets, it is even more pertinent that consumers make their food go further.

There are numerous resources dedicated to helping us reduce our food waste during the Coronavirus “lock down”, with guidance ranging from the use of broccoli stems in cooking and making chips from vegetable peel through to making stock, reviving stale bread and freezing leftovers (which we discuss in an earlier “indicator”).

Indeed, banana bread has been making something of a renaissance since the onset of the Coronavirus restrictions as a tasty way to use bananas that are past their best.

75%

of Irish shopper have reduced their trips to the supermarket since Covid 19.

Source: Bord Bia Indicators Barometor

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Food Waste & Behavioural Control

Another big driver of behaviour is consumers' desire to remain in control. **Illusion of Control** is the belief that we have influence over random events or events in which we are powerless, is an extremely common mental heuristic.

We know from Indicator #6 Stocking-In, that consumers have rationalised the need to have at least 14 days worth of food 'on-standby', a classic 'control' heuristic. But how does having a full pantry square with the need to 'stay in control' of food waste?

Our own research based a national survey of 1,000 consumer in Ireland identifies managing food waste as one of the "stickiest" of all consumer behaviours.

34% are consciously Reducing Food Waste in response to Coronavirus restrictions, with 2 in 3 of these expecting to continue this "waste-less" approach after the restrictions are lifted. This phenomenon is significantly higher among younger cohorts.

On this evidence we are moving into a world where consumers will seek out foods that provide that ability to control waste.

34%

of Irish adults are consciously reducing food waste as a result of Covid 19.

Source: Bord Bia Indicators Barometor

66%

of these expect to continue this "new" behaviour after Covid 19.

Source: Bord Bia Indicators Barometor

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And what about the money?

With 1 in 5 shoppers setting a grocery budget for the first time or doing so more now that Covid-19 has arrived a more frugal mindset is emerging. For half of those who are new to the world of budgeting, they intend to keep up this behaviour when the virus has passed.

The notion of frugality is currently de-rigeur for sure, with Jame Oliver's latest hit "Keep Cooking & Carry On" focussing on low cost cooking.

An National Recruitment Federation survey of people working from home in Ireland due to Covid-19 reported that for 7 in 10 their overall household outgoings had decreased due to the "lock down". Will a more conscious spender emerge from this crisis?

It will take time for consumers to re-assess their value paradigm and settle back to a new normal post-Coronavirus reality when it comes to their spending.

Budgeting is just another aspect of consumers finding ways to stay 'in-control' during this most uncertain of times in all our lives.

32%

of Irish adults have started or increased saving for a rainy day in response to Covid-19

Source: Bord Bia Indicators Barometor

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Implications for Irish food and beverages

- Brands be part of the solution & help consumers make their food go further
- There may be an increased emphasis on the shelf life of produce
- 'Waste-Less' may be a way to demonstrate value beyond price
- Packaging innovations may well have to focus on storage solutions
- Sustainability messaging may well have to shift into 'making food last' messages
- Consumers may need creative ways to elevate our product's leftovers

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