



FOOD WASTE: ETHNOGRAPHIC DIGITAL DIARY RESEARCH 2023

EPA Circular Economy Programme and Ipsos B&A

CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Overview of research

Behavioural insight is a foundation of the EPA's Circular Economy Programme, providing evidence to inform policy, to inform behavioural change interventions and to inform awareness campaigns.

The EPA contracted Ipsos B&A to conduct research to understand the role and reality of food consumption in Irish households - identifying behavioural patterns of food waste and at the core understand the root causes for food waste in Irish households. Importantly, this research also sets out to identify opportunities in terms of intervention design for reducing food waste.

To achieve these research objectives, an innovative approach was required that would provide us with a 'fly on the wall' perspective. A digital diary ethnographic approach was considered as the best option to provide a deeper layer of understanding into how food is managed and how food waste emerges in Irish homes. This research approach also enabled participants to communicate with the research team on a one-on-one basis which resulted in a transparent and honest assessment of food waste management in their homes.

28 participants representing a cross section of Irish society were invited to take part over a weeklong digital diary ethnography project. It is important to note that the researchers also recruited participants based on the EPA segmentation profile. This includes some groups who are somewhat 'better' at food waste management (one third of the study sample), and other groups who tend to be 'worse' or 'average' at food waste management (two thirds of the study sample).

The outputs of this research provide a deeper understanding of what people actually do rather than what they say they do in terms of food waste behaviours at home, as well as direction on the development of future interventions.



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Ethnographic digital diary research – participants' task list

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project in November 2023 that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and food waste at home.

Each day had a thematic focus and the participants were asked to send video diaries on:

Day 1: Telling about themselves and their household

Day 2: Telling about their grocery shopping

Day 3: Telling about how they prepare food at home

Day 4: Doing a fridge audit and showing what is in there

Day 5: Putting in place a plan on reducing food waste

Day 6: Telling about their attitudes to disposing of food

Day 7: Recap the week.

Each day participants were also instructed to send an image any time they threw away any food during the day. This included food thrown in the waste bin, brown bin or home compost, and included any products not eaten, that go out of date, get damaged or any food that is thrown away before, during the preparation of, or after finishing meals.



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Table of contents

Section 1: Food needs and mindsets

Section 2: Grocery shopping and food waste

Section 3: Food management in the home

Section 4: Key learnings from the study

Section 5: Opportunities for interventions



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Section 1: Food needs and mindsets



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

From this ethnographic digital diary research, four key ‘food need states’ that drive behaviour emerge

To tackle the problem of food waste, we need to first understand the role food plays in peoples’ lives.



Eating to sustain



The key ‘need state’ here is control.

Generally focused on preparing food that will keep them going throughout the day, and to provide nutrition.

Making healthy choices is often top of mind (especially during the weekday).



Eating to connect



The key ‘need state’ here is bonding.

Communal meals and nurturing the social and emotional connections formed through food consumption. Attention to volume of food prepared is often overlooked as the priority is showing care and love.



Eating to reward



The key ‘need state’ here is release.

Using food as a source of pleasure, gratification, or comfort. Often triggered by factors such as stress relief, mood enhancement or celebrating achievements.



Eating to signal



The key ‘need state’ here is identity.

What individuals choose to eat can reflect their cultural background, personal beliefs, dietary preferences, and lifestyle choices. Making food choices that align with one's sense of self and values.



Food Mindsets - Over the week, priorities and expectations shift

Insights

This research found a stark difference in mindset and behaviour towards food depending on whether during the working week or the weekend.

During weekdays, the participants tend to adopt a mindset of 'control' regarding food choices, often sticking to familiar meals that they rotate during the week. They are in the mindset of "being good".

- Health considerations are prominent, especially earlier in the week.

However, on weekends, the focus tends to shift to a 'reward' mindset where participants appear more likely to overindulge and opt for convenience options like take aways or frozen meals from the freezer.

- Concerns around food waste appear to diminish somewhat during the weekend, when people are in a more relaxed and indulgent mindset.

For example, serving sizes appears to become less of a concern as the mindset shifts from 'control' (i.e. being good) to 'reward' (i.e. treating myself and/or others).

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What participants say...

Weekday vs the Weekend

"We try and keep it healthy during the week....but on the weekend they can have whatever they want really"

Release mindset on weekend

"On the weekends we have different foods, eggs, croissants"



Section 2: Grocery shopping and food waste



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Grocery shopping behaviours range from the more 'planned' to 'spontaneous'

Insights

When it comes to grocery shopping, the participants displayed a range of more 'planned' behaviour to more 'spontaneous' behaviour.

- Personality traits and lifestage often place 'restrictions' on how planned or spontaneous one can be.

Younger 'pre-family' age groups tend to do one large weekly shop with more frequent top ups during the week. The broader essentials tend to be picked up biweekly.

- They are also often buying on impulse; highly susceptible to special offers, promotions and launch of new products.

For family lifestages, there tends to be one highly ritualized 'main shop' each week. With the 'shopper mission' revolving around kids' needs (e.g. school lunches)

- That being said, they often need to pop to the shops to pick up items they run out of each week ("we are out of bread again!")

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What the participants say...

Buying on impulse

"I wish we could say that we stick to everything on the list and that's all we buy but in reality, you kind of see things when you're there, you're attracted to deals. You always end up getting more than I bargained for."

Planned, structured buying

"During that (Covid) time, I learned to make a list, stock the presses and the fridge because I only went shopping once a week. But now obviously it's (Covid) gone, thankfully, I would I still have the habit of making the list going on a Friday afternoon."



A busy shopper mindset – Consumers consider many priorities during the grocery shop

Insights

The research shows that consumers have a 'finite capacity of attention' that they can allocate to decisions and problems when they are doing their grocery shop.

When grocery shopping, top of mind for the participants is getting value, and buying products that meet the needs of the household. With the recent spike in costs due to the cost-of-living increases, attention to 'getting value' has increased even more.

They are also thinking about intrinsic aspects of the food they are purchasing such as product quality, product taste, and product longevity.

Thinking about food waste can 'fall through the cracks' during the grocery shop as there are many other factors that shoppers are 'computing' during the decision-making process.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Cost conscious

"Definitely in the last few years with the kids getting older, you have to watch the pennies...the main thoughts going around the shop is getting healthy and nutritious food and not breaking the bank either."

"That everything has gone really expensive...And if other members of my household are going to like it and eat it and not complain."

"I am looking for their offers and I'm looking for what specials they have on and so some things like cereals, I would tend to try and buy them only when they're on specials."



Shopping lists are not consistently used, with impulse and inertia purchasing often steering decision making

Insights

Most of the participants noted that they regularly go to the shops without making a shopping list. Being consistent is a challenge for most.

- Instead, many appear to 'work from memory'.
- Often need prompts of products/aisles in the store to help them remember what they need.

Participants outlined that a significant amount of their purchasing occurs on impulse.

- Most are very open to special offers, especially in the current economic climate with price inflation - 'promotional fishing' is a common behaviour when it comes to consumer decision making.

The research highlights a pattern of 'purchasing inertia' that occurs during the grocery shop. There are products that shoppers just habitually purchase assuming these items are needed at home for the week (e.g, packs of ham, sliced pan of bread).

- Results in buying items they already have at home and contributing to food waste – inertia steers much of what shoppers actually do

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Work from memory

"Do I make a list...no I never do...it's just too much effort. I just go and have it in my head. I've never ever worked off a list. I tend to know what I need as I go round, and I'll be prompted to buy things as I see them."

Unplanned shopping

"When I'm shopping, I pick up stuff and throw it out a week later....I'm useless...I should probably have a list because when I go down there, I am just blank."



Better grocery shopping behaviour helps reduce food waste in the home

Insights

A proportion of participants displayed 'good' grocery food shopping practice.

- Tend to approach shopping thoughtfully and intentionally.
- Appear to consistently plan and buy with the end in mind.
- Check what is and what is not needed in the home – e.g. often checking cupboards before they go grocery shopping.
- Use a grocery list and keep to it for the most part.

This more intentional approach to grocery shopping appeared to have a positive effect on reducing food waste in the household.

However, even amongst those who display the best food management behaviour, unplanned items still end up in their shopping basket due to special offers and promotions.

- Particularly attractive during current period of price inflation.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Stick to the list

"We always make a list. We never deviate and we always check inventory on the shelves and the deep freeze for meat. Unplanned items would be bread, milk purchased as needed, fresh during the week. If items are on special offer, we could buy them more than needed when we're doing the shop. But in general, top priority stick to the list."

"Yes, we operate Alexa in the kitchen and whenever we need to add something, we'll just show that Alexa, Alexa add milk, butter, whatever the case may be to the shopping list. We would have the apps on our phone so that when we do go to the shop, we know what's to be got and we'll try stick as rigidly as we can to that."



Section 3: Food management in the home



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Cooking and preparing food – the need for speed is back

Insights

This research found a wide variety of mindsets when it came to cooking and preparing food.

For many participants, especially those at the 'pre-family' and 'family lifestages', efficiency and speed are key priorities when preparing food.

- They have a set of 'win-win' meals that they rotate during the week - meals that everyone likes and take no more than 20-30 mins to be ready.
- Shortcuts are frequently sought out. Be it choosing a night to do convenience meals or purchasing cooking equipment such as an air fryer or slow cooker.

There are some participants who have a more exploratory and leisurely approach to cooking.

- During the pandemic and when they are less time poor (e.g. on weekend).
- However, this research found that the need for convenience and consequentially quick and easy meals has made a strong comeback post pandemic.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Convenience is key

"For me it's firm favourites, what do I know how to make, that I know that I like, and I will eat and that won't take me too long to make. I like to put something in the airfryer and walk away so that I can do 50 other jobs around the house."

Quick and easy

"I feel that we kind of go for simple foods that you can make within maybe 20-25 minutes and rather than having to cook for, you know, maybe the guts of an hour, 40 minutes."



Use of measuring devices for portion control appears low

Insights

During the research, participants provided insights on the different approaches that they have towards cooking.

There appears to be relatively low use of specific measuring devices for portion size during the cooking process.

Instead, most participants appear to determine what is required for portion sizes from past experience.

- Most use visual estimation as an approach to determine portion size.

Some participants appear to have a more formal approach, using a household object such as a cup or glass for rice or pasta for example.

- Particularly for more routinised meals that they make (often the rotation of 'midweek meals').

Poor portion control appears to contribute to higher levels of food waste in the home. Encouraging the use of a measuring device would appear to be an important action to encourage a reduction in food waste.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Unsure of portions

"When my husband cooks, he actually does a lot more pasta, and a lot more rice...the carb bit...it's probably a bit more waste."

"Porridge, making too much porridge and that's very hard because you don't always know how much to make"



Fridge organisation doesn't follow First In First Out for storing and rotating food

Insights

During the research, participants shared photos and videos of how they manage and stock their food at home.

The majority of participants organized their fridge by food type, rather than rotating older food to the front in fridge and storing new items at the back or have an area in the fridge for food that needs to be used up.

The most used food items tend to be placed to the front of the fridge for quick and easy access. This also happens to items that have been most recently purchased.

- As a result, there are occasions when food, including leftovers, are forgotten about in the back of the fridge.
- Many avoid mixing food types on same shelf (e.g. meats and veg) due to food safety concerns and inability to find what they are looking for.

Many like the idea of an 'eat me' section in their fridge, but in practice most who tried this during the fieldwork period found this hard to maintain:

- As it reduces ease of finding products and many fear cross contamination.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...



"These are out of date. Full packet of bagels, I actually forgot they were there."



The majority are not making the most of their freezer

Insights

Some participants were using their freezer effectively as a solution for reducing food waste.

- Freezing meats and dinners for use at a later date.

However, most participants were not. With many not even instinctively thinking of the freezer as a solution for better food management and minimising food waste.

Even amongst those who do view the freezer as a solution for reducing household food waste, an unorganized freezer reduces participants' capability to locate food easily and use it.

Psychologically, the freezer is often used as a 'get out of jail' card.

- Food can be 'shoved' into the freezer without much thought to when it will be eaten.
- Food waste is postponed rather than reduced i.e. thrown out at a later date.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Binned rather than freeze

"That technically could be frozen for it's been made two days ago so I won't freeze it. I'll probably give the baby one more portion and then the rest will go in the bin and everything else. There's nothing really else in there that we would freeze whatever is not used will go in the bin on Saturday."

Freezer not front of mind

"Possibly using the freezer more. I don't think of the freezer, to be honest."



Section 4: Key learnings from the study



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

There is a lack of consensus on what 'food waste' actually means

Insights

The research found there are different starting points on what food waste actually means. Different individuals hold varying perspectives on what constitutes food waste, shaping their behaviours and attitudes towards it.

For some participants, food waste encompasses any uneaten food discarded into the black (general) or brown (organic) bin – essentially food that is not consumed.

However, some participants minimise their reported food waste by excluding food placed in the brown bin; they don't consider food placed in the brown bin as waste since it is composted.

- This exclusion reflects a unique mental framework where food waste is redefined within the context of composting.

An important objective of any communications campaign is to bring clarity to what food waste actually means. Food waste is currently vague in many shoppers' minds and communications need to make it more concrete with specific examples. There needs to be a focus on bridging the gap in understanding and foster more responsible consumption habits.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Compost is not waste...

"It goes in the compost bin. To be completely honest with you, I wouldn't consider that food waste. It's getting composted."

Unavoidable waste

"Unavoidable wastes I call tea bags and shavings from carrots and prep food."



For many, tracking reveals a surprising reality of their food waste

Insights

Interestingly, most participants in the research study feel that they only waste a small amount of food

- Both those who are *actually* doing well and those who are *actually* not.
- Many often rationalise their food waste by claiming that they are 'not as bad as others'.
- Often referred to as 'overconfidence bias' in behavioural science – most people feel they are *probably better than average*.

However, once participants were asked to track their food waste for the week of research, there was surprise from many who realised they wasted more than they thought they were.

- This visceral response from participants highlights that challenging people to track their food waste does appear to lead to a 'point of recognition' into how much food they actually waste.
- This highlights how it can be an important first step on the path to behaviour change, and also a potential component of food waste intervention strategies.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Better than they thought

"We're a hell of a lot better at this than we thought we were going into it."

A bit of a surprise

"I am surprised with how much food we have thrown out over the last few days. It's only now that I have realised how much stuff I am not using, particularly leftovers, they stay in the fridge for a while and get forgotten about a lot of the time"



This research highlights multiple key culprits when it comes to food waste

To tackle the problem of food waste, we need to understand the ‘triggers’ and ‘reasons’ why these frequent food waste items tend to be disposed of:

Fruit and veg



Triggers for disposing of items:

- Appearance and ‘feel’ triggers disposal (e.g., bananas turning brown or going soft).

Reasons for disposing of items:

- Items appear to be frequently purchased ‘by default’, without checking if previous stock has been used.
- Perceived as not very expensive so throwing them away is felt to be more permissible.
- Dinner plans changing during the week.

Milk and bread



Triggers for disposing of items:

- Visual inspection – e.g. mould.
- Past use by/best before dates – especially milk.

Reasons for disposing of items:

- Items appear to be frequently purchased ‘by default’, without checking if previous stock has been used.
- Perceived as not very expensive so throwing them away is felt to be more permissible.

Leftovers



Triggers for disposing of items:

- Duration of time in fridge felt to be too long
- Visual and sensorial inspection.

Reasons for disposing of items:

- Cooking too much (e.g. pasta)
- Items forgotten about in the fridge
- Items put in fridge without intended use for the future (‘prolonging’ eventual food waste)



Food waste motivations

Insights

This research finds that for most the financial impact of food waste would appear to be the most substantial motivator for encouraging a reduction food waste.

- This suggests that people are more responsive to the immediate and tangible effects of wasting food, such as the impact on their wallets, rather than the broader environmental implications.

Overall, there appears to be a weaker link between food waste and environmental concern as a motivator.

- This finding underscores the potential need for increased awareness and education regarding the environmental consequences of food waste.

Those who are more clued into food waste on a daily basis are more likely to view it as a 'moral duty'

- Feeling guilty when throwing out 'good' food and noting that there are those who are without food. A strong motivator to keep their food waste low.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Financial impact

"Generally speaking, we don't tend to waste because I don't particularly like to lose money"

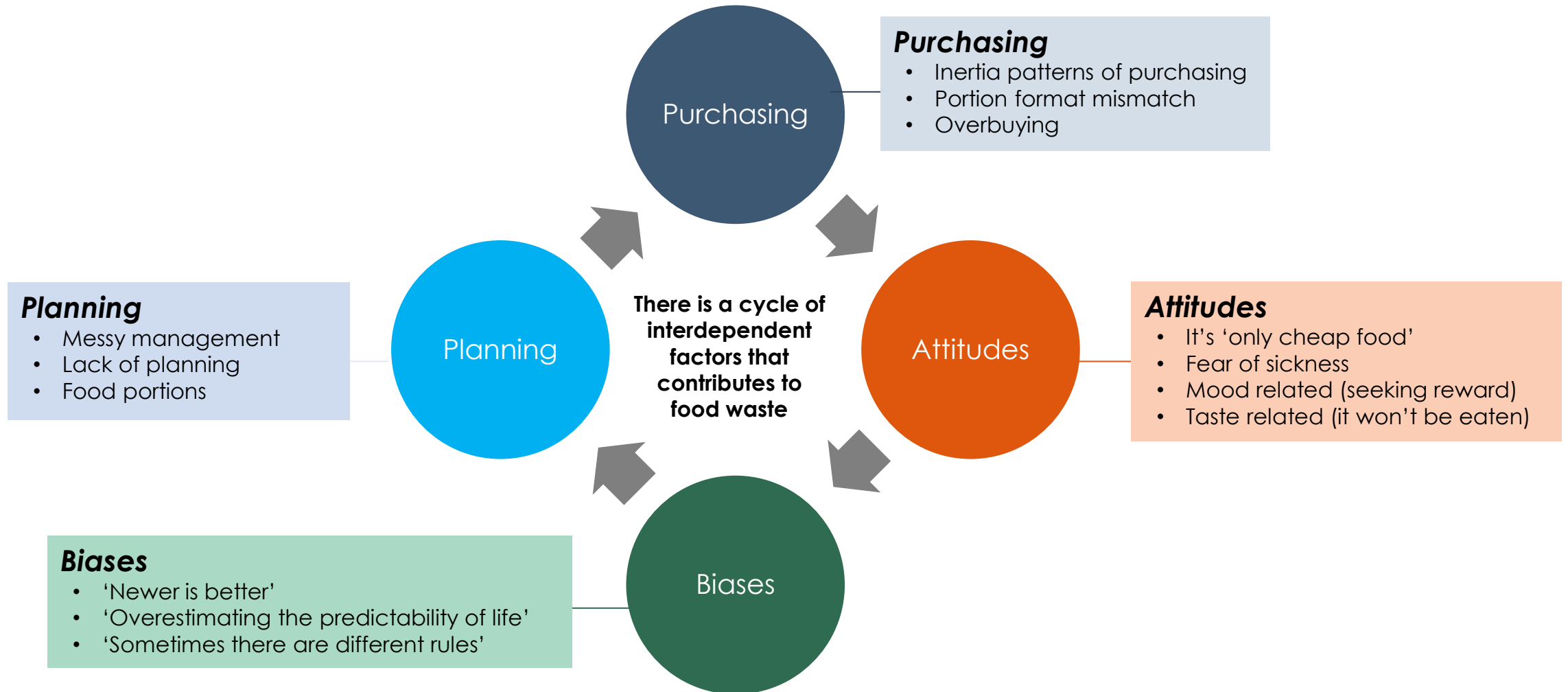
Moral obligation

"Eat all your dinner, there are starving kids in Africa."

"But you know, there's a lot of wars on at the moment, people fleeing situations and having to live without. And so, kind of the arrogance of having stuff that we throw out really bugs me."



From this ethnographic digital diary research, four key areas that contribute to food waste emerge



Purchasing

Insights

Inertia patterns of purchasing

Many are in a poor pattern of purchasing behaviour. Purchasing based on habit, rather than considered thought. This results in frequently purchased items (e.g. milk, packets of packaged ham) being overstocked in the home – ultimately resulting in food waste.

Portion format mismatch

Packaging formats provided by grocery retailers can have a knock-on effect to poor portion control and items going past their best before/use by dates (e.g. large jars of sauce, large tubs of soup).

Disrupting inertia patterns of purchasing and working closer with retailers should be a key priority.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Inertia patterns of purchasing

“Just the usual stuff every week, ham, chicken, raspberries and strawberries, they were just going off and I was throwing them out.”

Portion format mismatch



16 Nov 2023 · 12:22 🗑️ ☆
Food lunch waste and small recycle waste



20 Nov 2023 · 13:06 🗑️
Throwing out leftover sauce



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Planning

Insights

Messy management

Poor control of cupboards, fridge and freezer makes good food practices in the household more challenging. For example, a cluttered freezer reduces peoples' ability to use it as a food waste reduction option. Additionally, poor organisation means items can become hidden in the back of cupboards, fridge and freezers.

Lack of planning

Not preparing a list or taking stock of items already in the household prior to shopping can result in having too much perishable produce in the home.

Food portions

When cooking there is often a lack of planning in terms of portion control – particularly for novel meals or when preparing for a group or 'reward' focused occasions.

Encouraging people to set their kitchen up for success and highlighting the importance of planning should be a key area of concern.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Overbuying

"There are some unplanned items I buy from time to time...if on offer...I do find I buy more if the kids are with me...my husband is terrible for that!"

Lack of planning

"Now I didn't buy the sour cream, my husband did, but yeah its out of date on the 9th of November so that isn't going to be used. I will throw that out shortly."



Attitudes

Insights

It's 'only cheap food'

Some categories are less scrutinised when it comes to food waste as the financial consequences of food waste are felt to be lower, especially fruit, vegetables, bread, pastas, etc.

Fear of sickness

The fear of becoming sick due to eating something that is close to or past its best before/use-by date is often enough to trigger food waste.

Mood related

Detours from the food that is available in the household due to seeking reward during the week. For example, craving a takeaway over cooking something in the home or having leftovers.

Taste related

Throwing something out because it is not liked by the members of the household. Often for a newer purchase that is trialled. Can lead some to avoid taking risks with new products.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Fear related

"Even if I see a few bits of mould on the bread, the whole thing is going..."

Mood related

"I was ordering takeaway for the babysitter, and we opted for that instead of leftovers."

Taste related

"Throwing out this protein pot as Kevin didn't like it."

Important for communications to target peoples' existing attitudes that are contributing towards food waste.



Biases

Insights

'Newer is better'

Ingrained assumption that 'newer is better'. For example, throwing out older potatoes, onions or fruit as they 'won't taste as good as new ones'.

'Overestimating predictability of life'

People appear to overestimate how similar each week will be and purchase food accordingly. Often failing to adequately communicate with each other on days they won't be in the house for dinner, etc. Often leading to over purchasing and over cooking and ultimately food waste.

'Sometimes there are different rules'

For some food occasions the rules and expectations of food waste are different. For example, when preparing baby food, consideration of food waste is often diminished as focus is on getting some food into their child. Likewise, if a Friday night takeaway or if having friends over, attention towards food waste can slip through the cracks as occasion is focused on excess and reward.

Study

28 participants took part in a weeklong ethnographic digital diary project that delved into their attitudes and behaviours towards food management and waste at home.

What our participants say...

Newer is better

"They (potatoes) won't taste as good as the fresh ones."

Overestimating predictability of life

"Say if I have salmon for dinner and the kids then don't show up."

Exposing biases that exist is important to make consumers aware of more unconscious pitfalls.



Section 5: Opportunities for interventions



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Opportunities for Interventions

Stop Food Waste, as the national campaign to reduce household food waste in Ireland, run awareness-raising initiatives on how we can make the most of our food and avoid food waste.

The outputs of this ethnographic digital diary research, provide a deeper understanding of what people actually do - rather than what they say they do - in terms of food waste behaviours at home, as well as providing direction on the development of future interventions.

The following slides identify opportunities for interventions, and these will inform prevention activities undertaken by the Stop Food Waste programme and can also be used to inform the food waste prevention activities by other organisations.





CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy





Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Qualitative conclusions – Interventions for ‘purchasing’

 DEFINE What are the behaviours that we wish to change?	 DESIGN What does an intervention look like?
Inertia patterns of behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food audit ('quick check of stock') before purchasing to avoid ritualistic and unnecessary items entering the home. 'Think before you buy'. • Disrupt inertia by linking to cost savings from buying only what you need.
Overbuying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent usage of a shopping list when in store and to stick to it. • Highlight downsides (consequences) of purchasing too much to shoppers. • Consider online shopping as a way of avoiding temptation when in store.
Portion format mismatch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage shoppers to consider what portion format suits them best (e.g. a smaller 500ml of milk versus buying a 1 Litre carton). • Work with retailers on which portion formats 'fit' shoppers' consumption habits most. • Provide shoppers with tips and tricks on how best to store opened items to get the most of out them (e.g., refrigerate, wrapping etc.).





Qualitative conclusions – Interventions for ‘planning’

 DEFINE What are the behaviours that we wish to change?	 DESIGN What does an intervention look like?
Lack of planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight importance of doing a meal plan for at least a number of days (ideally for the week) – again linking it to cost savings for the household. Consistent usage of a shopping list based on this meal plan. Simply put, those who meal plan and who do a shopping list waste less. • Designate a specific purpose for "leftover meals" – suggest labelling to prompt a 'commitment to consume'.
Messy management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips and tricks on how to manage storage units. Show what good looks like. Provide examples of how food can be repurposed. • Guide on how shoppers can 'design' their households for success. e.g., meal plan and shopping list noticeboard on the fridge. • Audit of fridge and freezer on a regular basis to see what food there is to eat (in a weekly challenge?) For example, someone can't use their freezer optimally if it is not fit for purpose.
Food portions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage usage of measuring devices (either specific tools or consider household options they already own (e.g. a cup). • Link better portion control as a cost saver to boost motivation to engage over the longer term.



Qualitative conclusions – Interventions for ‘attitudes’

 DEFINE What are the behaviours that we wish to change?	 DESIGN What does an intervention look like?
It's 'only cheap food'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make shoppers aware that perceptually 'cheaper food' is one of the most significant contributors to food waste nationally – shock value. • Lean into 'moral duty'. It's not 'only cheap food'.
Fear of sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further understanding on best before dates. Highlight repurposing for those who are more 'squeamish'! • Highlight better shelf management to reduce food reaching out of date status.
Mood related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate a specific purpose for "leftover meals" – suggest labelling to prompt a 'commitment to consume'.
Taste related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage shoppers to communicate with other household members before purchasing new items. Run new dinner, lunch ideas by family before preparing to reduce risk of rejection.



Qualitative conclusions – Interventions for ‘biases’

 DEFINE What are the behaviours that we wish to change?	 DESIGN What does an intervention look like?
‘Newer is better’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrupt and reframe shoppers’ bias by emphasising quality of all food. • Tips and tricks on how to better repurpose food close to expiry.
‘Overestimating the predictability of life’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage shoppers to engage with wider family in meal planning for the week. • Highlight the unpredictability of life. How plans change and how our meal planning needs to adjust to this. ‘Don’t get caught out’. Freeze it when plans change.
‘Sometimes there are different rules’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite having moments of desire (e.g., “I want a takeaway tonight”) it is important for shoppers to consider potential food waste. Encourage shoppers to prevent food waste even in these moments. • Guidance on best practice for managing food waste with kids, parties, weekends.





FOOD WASTE: ETHNOGRAPHIC DIGITAL DIARY RESEARCH 2023

TO FIND OUT MORE:

Email us: cep@epa.ie

Check our website: www.epacirculareconomy.ie

Follow us on Twitter and Instagram: @EPAIreland

Follow us on LinkedIn

CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

