

OUR FOOD, OUR FOOD'S SYSTEM

What **Generation Z** wants from a healthy food system



Introduction by Andy Zynga, CEO of EIT Food



The current state of our food system is the leading cause of some of the biggest challenges that our world is facing: be it climate change, pollution, waste, malnutrition, disease, or obesity.

Sustainable, healthy food production and consumption is essential for the world to meet its [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#). The scale and complexity of these challenges is immense, and not something that can be solved by any country, company or individual alone. 2021 is a landmark year for addressing these issues, with the first ever United Nations Summit dedicated to food systems.

It's essential that we include the future food generation as engaged and enabled agents of change.

If we are to rise to meet these challenges head on, we need to radically rethink how our food system operates. As part of this, it's essential that we include the future food generation as engaged and enabled agents of change.

Despite its huge power and influence, the food sector today leaves many young people unable to access healthy and affordable food. At a time when the Covid-19 pandemic has already exacerbated inequalities in this generation with unprecedented disruption to their education and lifestyles, across Europe, 'Generation Z' are the most at risk of poverty.

This generation of young people born after 1995/96 are also amongst the most active citizens on social and environmental issues. However, it will be nearly 15 years before 'Gen Z', along with the 'Millennials' born between 1981 and 1995/96, form the majority in the voting age population across the EU, and their views, expectations and attitudes are taken into consideration when designing policies.

The first step to involving the younger generation in the changes we need to make to the food system is to understand what they want, need and expect from it. That is why EIT Food commissioned new research with 18-24 year olds across Europe, to better understand how Gen Z view and interact with healthy food.

The evidence is compelling. Across Europe young people are taking a keen interest in eating healthily – yet the majority say that healthy food is more expensive, harder to access while on the go, and that they are in need of more advice on making healthy food choices. In fact, Gen Z are commonly turning to each other via social media for information, an entrepreneurial spirit that many young people would like to take on to a career in innovating new food products or addressing food inequality.

In response to the views of young people, we have launched a new initiative 'Our Food, Our Food System', which will recruit 10 young 'FutureFoodMakers' to spearhead a call for change in the food sector to improve access to healthy, sustainable and affordable food.

As the world's largest and most dynamic food innovation community, we believe it is overdue to pay attention to the future food generation.

Generation Z: their health, their food

Research commissioned by EIT Food, and conducted via Opinium, surveyed over 2,000 18-24 year-olds across the UK, France, Germany, Poland and Spain. The findings clearly demonstrate a generation that is keenly interested, knowledgeable and engaged when it comes to their eating habits, and especially how this links to their wellbeing and mental health.

Young people see healthy eating as an integral part of their physical and mental health.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Generation Z – or ‘Gen Z’ – say they see healthy eating as an integral part of their physical and mental health, with seven in 10 (71%) making an effort to eat healthy food whilst at home.

While the proportion of young people trying to eat healthily reduces when they are out and about (to 55% when eating out for convenience, and 45% when eating out for fun), Gen Z are so engaged with their eating habits that over half of 18-24 year olds (52%) on average across Europe track their food consumption in some way. Interestingly, when the data is analysed by country this shows 65% of young people in Germany track their food consumption compared to just 38% of young people in France. The majority of this tracking (36%) is focused on counting calories, however a quarter of all young people (24%) also track the macronutrients (or “macros”) of the food they eat.

These savvy Gen-Zers prefer whole, organic and plant-based foods as some of their healthiest options, and are put off by processed foods, which 79% consider unhealthy.

58% said the pandemic has made them more aware of eating healthily.

This focus on healthy habits has been amplified by ongoing attention to health amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, with over half of young people (58%) across Europe on average saying the pandemic has made them more aware of eating healthily – a figure that rises to 62% in the UK, and 67% in Spain. Meanwhile, two-thirds (67%), say that healthy food is simply fashionable at the moment.



Advice gap leads Gen Z to rely on each other for healthy eating tips.

Despite this keen interest and engagement with healthy eating, young people aren't getting the support they need from educators, industry and policy makers to do so. Three-quarters (75%) of young people say they need clearer advice on how to eat a healthy, balanced diet, with two-thirds (65%) reporting they didn't get enough education on how to eat healthily while at school.

Having a trusted, reliable source of information was identified as being vital by many respondents, with just under two thirds (61%) saying it can be hard to know how to eat healthily as there is so much conflicting advice.

Young people are taking things into their own hands and attempting to fill this advice gap themselves, with two-thirds (67%) reporting they regularly look at social media content (such as TikTok or Instagram) for healthy food and recipe ideas. Meanwhile, over half (52%) say they rely on social media or their friends for advice on eating healthily.



Young people want healthy eating advice that considers – and doesn't harm – their mental health.

As part of this advice, young people want a narrative around healthy eating that doesn't risk being harmful to their mental health – such as by focusing too much on calories alone.

In fact, the majority of young people (55%) think that printing calorie counts on food labels and menus can be detrimental to people's mental health – a figure that rises to six in 10 in the UK (62%), France (60%) and Germany (61%).

What's more, young people don't necessarily see low calorie foods as automatically healthy: just 54% do, while a third (34%) consider them to be unhealthy.

77% say young people need better advice on the link between what they eat and their mental health.

Instead, nearly eight in 10 (77%) say young people need better advice on the link between what they eat and their mental health, a figure that rises to 82% of young women.

Creating change: promoting access, affordability and transparency

Access to healthy food and affordability are key to promoting healthy eating.

When it comes to how to encourage young people to eat healthily, Gen Z identified discounted or subsidised healthy food as the most impactful option (43%) – which is little surprise given that two-thirds (67%) think that healthy food is more expensive than unhealthy food. In France, this figure rises to 72%, pointing to an even greater gap between the affordability of healthy versus unhealthy options.

Having access to healthier food was also key for a third of respondents (37%), whether for home delivered food (such as through Uber Eats or Deliveroo) or at school, college and university. This is being driven by a lack of existing options, with seven in 10 young people (73%) finding it difficult to eat healthily while on the go, or at their place of education or work.

Young people want transparency, evidence-based information and support from food brands and governments.

Gen Z are taking it upon themselves to learn about and share advice on healthy eating – yet they cannot, and do not, expect to be solely responsible for promoting healthy eating habits across Europe.

Instead, four in 10 young people think the EU should be responsible for ensuring that our food is healthy, closely followed by consumers (37%), farmers or food manufacturers (both 36%) and national governments (35%). However, this attitude differs across Europe, with half (53%) of young people in Poland placing this responsibility with the EU, compared with just under a third (32%) in France.

75% think food brands need to be more transparent with consumers about their ingredients and processes.

Young people also want food brands to step up and be clearer with consumers about the health impacts of their products in much more detail than they are doing currently. Nearly eight in 10 (78%) would like food labels to have clearer information on the way food is processed, not just the ingredients, while three-quarters (75%) think food brands need to be more transparent with consumers about their ingredients and processes.





Self-starting Gen Z look to careers in food innovation.

When considering careers in the food sector, their interest in healthy eating is leading many young people to pursue jobs in food education, innovation, and equality over more traditional routes such as hospitality or farming. Two-thirds of young people would consider taking a job in food education (66%) or food innovation (64%), the highest ranking of all roles across the food sector.

Just under two thirds (61%), meanwhile, would be interested in taking a role that improved equality of food access.



A better than average salary would be the factor most likely to encourage young adults into the food sector (40%), along with a good work/life balance (39%) and having a positive environmental impact or being challenging or rewarding work (both 33%).

61% would be interested in taking a role that improved equality of food access.

However, there are notable differences across Europe, with better than average salary only remaining the top factor in Poland (54%). Across the UK, Germany and Spain, a good work/life balance comes out on top (43%, 36% and 44% respectively), whilst in France challenging or rewarding work would be the top consideration (43%).

What Generation Z wants from a healthy food system

TRACK EATING HABITS

52%

of young people are knowledgeable about healthy eating and track what they eat



MENTAL HEALTH INFO

82%

of young women wanted advice on the link between food and mental health



MORE TRANSPARENCY

78%

of young people want transparency and support from food brands and governments



EASIER ACCESS

67%

of young people said access to healthy food and affordability were key barriers



GUIDANCE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

67%

of young people lack the support and advice they need to eat healthily

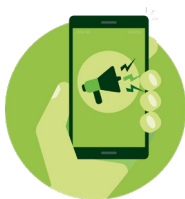


TO BE ACTIVE AND INVOLVED

64%

of young people want to pursue a career to improve food innovation





EIT Food launches campaign championing the voices of young people.

In response to these findings and to give young people a voice during a landmark year, which will see the first ever United Nations Summit dedicated to food systems, EIT Food is launching a new campaign, 'Our Food, Our Food System'. The campaign will recruit 10 young 'FutureFoodMakers' to spearhead a call for radical change in the food sector to tackle access to healthy, sustainable and affordable food.

FutureFoodMakers will have the opportunity to learn about the food system and the innovations at the forefront of positive change. As part of the role they will get the chance to talk to and meet a wide range of people from across the food sector and develop a manifesto for the industry with ideas to shape the future of the food system and call for change in this crucial Decade of Action.

Find out more about 'Our Food, Our Food System' and FutureFoodMakers.

eitfood.eu/projects/become-a-futurefoodmaker



About EIT Food.

EIT Food is the world's largest and most dynamic food innovation community. We accelerate innovation to build a future-fit food system that produces healthy and sustainable food for all.

Supported by the EU, we invest in projects, organisations and individuals that share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system. We unlock innovation potential in businesses and universities, and create and scale agrifood startups to bring new technologies and products to market. We equip entrepreneurs and professionals with the skills needed to transform the food system and put consumers at the heart of our work, helping build trust by reconnecting them to the origins of their food.

We are one of eight innovation communities established by the European Institute for Innovation & Technology (EIT), an independent EU body set up in 2008 to drive innovation and entrepreneurship across Europe.





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About the research



EIT Food gives its thanks to Opinium, which conducted the research on behalf of EIT Food. The sample consisted of 2,055 adults aged 18-24, equally split across the UK, France, Germany, Poland and Spain. The sample was nationally representative of the demographics in each country. Fieldwork was conducted as online interviews between 30 June – 5 July 2021.

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