

The Processed Puzzle: Unpacking perceptions of UPF and health

Facilitator: Emma Harvey-Lawrence

Although there is no strict definition of Ultra Processed Foods (UPF) or a policy, it is estimated that 50-60% of the UK diet is an ultra-processed diet. There is Eat Well Diet Guidance yet 0.3% follow this guidance. It doesn't get implemented.

What is the biggest challenge regarding UPFs through the views of the delegates?

Discussions were held between pairs, then two pairs, then in larger groups to decide which are the dominating challenges. Attendees decided:

- 1) *Cheap, affordable, accessible food* – so many people cannot afford it. A baker shared the example of sourdough she produces. Nutritionally it is incredibly healthy and made with natural ingredients which are good for our gut. However, this bread is £4 a loaf which for many is unaffordable, compared to the packaged supermarket sliced bread. She doesn't have a slicing machine – it would be expensive, yet understands that by her offering sliced bread may make it more attractive.
- 2) *False Health claims* – Low sugar is often a myth as it is replaced with additives including sweeteners (which may be linked to cancer). The group debated “what is the evidence of what is healthy and what is not?”
- 3) *Lack of general information about additives* - E.g. where is the scientific evidence behind it? Additionally, the combination of these additives could be a health risk.
- 4) *Maintaining moderation* - Some members felt that everything ‘should be in moderation’ - if people need a quick and easy solution to daily life. Society has changed and is busier, so having convenience foods to help with this a little could be acceptable occasionally. In the past Sunday dinner was a British tradition, whereby life was slower, perhaps a nice time of life. Now society is in a rush. Many don't want the food police or have no space for moderation
- 5) *Affordable farming* – Farmers do and can give better grain to livestock to help process yield making meat a bit healthier (although was a mention that one could give grain to humans directly e.g. roasted green peas, grains that we had at the event by our supplier, and not consume meat).
- 6) *Power of Marketing* – Currently sells and promotes ‘bad’ ‘processed foods. Could marketing be used as a reset to healthier foods?
- 7) *Life stages* – these have an impact on UPF consumption whether it be through bereavement, single households, job losses, older male who lost their wife who cooked or isn't motivated to cook for one person after a busy day at work.
- 8) *Time* – it takes time to prepare food from scratch and takes time to chop and peel windfall apples and pears etc.

Actions and asks for community, the partnership and local government:

- Continue funding, encouraging and enabling our Suffolk cookery workshops to teach people how to cook from fresh, simple ingredients, as well as healthy ingredients at our food banks and on the Be Well Bus.
- Research community bulk buying schemes like CAS do with oil?
- Subsidise and help bakers like above to buy bread slicing equipment and other equipment so that they can reduce their costs, making products healthier and affordable.
- Work in partnership with Clare Frewin and the SCC team strategy to continue their work in tackling misinformation and false health claims. Claire has a steering group working on this. The public would appreciate non-judgemental, easy-to-understand infographics or workshops explaining common misleading health claims and what to look for on food labels.
- Engage local nutritionists and University researchers to translate evidence into actionable tips for the community to identify healthy options. Raise awareness about additives too with scientific evidence behind it.
- Push for better regulation and transparency in health claims on food packaging through and local councillor and cabinet member engagement with SCC Public Health colleagues such as Deborah Sage.
- For our older, bereaved, and other groups of people, revive traditions like group meals or Sunday dinners in community centres like Salvation Army currently offer, to promote shared, slower-paced, healthier eating experiences. Add a more exciting vibe – doesn't have to be roast, what about curry, Italian, Mexican etc.
- At the farming events such as at Trinity Park and at Suffolk Rural College, farmers could too educate the community about consuming diverse grains, legumes, and other affordable, sustainable options.