



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Changing Families,
Changing Food.

Food choice and family context

Researchers

Paul Bissell, School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield
Elizabeth Goyder, School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield
Lindsay Blank, School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield

Summary

This project examined the food practices and choices of a small number of families living in a rural area of South Yorkshire. Using qualitative research techniques, the project explored the diverse meanings and various roles that food plays within families living in a rural area, and

the changing nature of food consumption within these families. In addition, the project sought to situate these data within an overall understanding of how families living in rural areas respond to changing public and policy discourses about food.

Contact:

Lindsay Blank
School of Health and Related Research
University of Sheffield
Email: l.blank@sheffield.ac.uk



The Leverhulme Trust

www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood

Research questions

- How do families in rural areas understand and speak about the changing role of food in everyday family life?
- How do families in rural areas position themselves in relation to dominant discourses about food consumption?
- To what extent are food choices shaped by social, psychological and other factors, in addition to 'tastes and personal choices'?
- What influence do different family members have over food choices and how is this influence negotiated in practice?

Research design

The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with families conducted in the family home.



Key findings

The rural context is important to most families although how important this is varies between those who have grown up and continued to live in the same area and the 'in-movers' from both urban Sheffield and further afield. Parents feel that living in the area is a positive lifestyle choice and beneficial to their children, although they generally do not think that the rural environment affects the way they shop and think about food. The farming community themselves have much stronger feelings about food and issues such as supporting local producers, avoiding the main supermarkets and educating their children. Food and mealtimes fit around the family – the day is not regimented by strict mealtimes and there is little pattern to the meals that are eaten on a week to week basis. Many people speak of choosing to buy specific items which have been produced locally – namely meat and animal products. This is due to a mixture of supporting local producers and a feeling that local meat is somehow safer and of better quality - although this is generally not based on specific knowledge about its production. These motives are linked

to concerns about food scares, factory farming and poor quality meat provision in supermarkets. Shopping locally is less linked to environmental considerations such as food miles and reducing packaging; but these issues were mentioned by some.

Taste, personal choice and quality – along with health – were mentioned as the main reasons for choosing foods. Everyone was aware of the government's messages around healthy eating to some extent and all stated that eating healthily and providing their family with a balanced diet was important – although the definitions of healthy eating varied somewhat. Nearly all interviewees denied being influenced by advertising and the media although interestingly most went on to mention a brand name or TV programme at some point during their interview. Cost was not important and most people said they did not have to worry about the cost of food. Only organic food was considered too expensive for everyday and opinions on organic food varied considerably.

Most parents stated that they were 'lucky' that their children ate most foods and were not picky. Generally the mother was responsible for cooking and shopping and children did not get much say in the food that was provided. Some parents provided a packed lunch for their children as an additional way of managing what they ate. Others allowed school meals either because they were not concerned about their quality or to allow their children to fit in with their peers. Children were generally excluded from shopping; partly this was their preference and partly parents did this consciously to avoid being pestered for products which they considered to be unhealthy, or of poor quality.

Publications

Blank L, Bissell P, Goyder E and Clark H (2009) 'I don't go in for all that scaremongering': perceptions of and strategies to manage food safety risk, in P Jackson ed. *Changing families, changing food*. Palgrave-Macmillan, in press.