

# Sustainable Food Consumption in Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities


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Lifestyles and Life-courses Workshop  
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## Structure

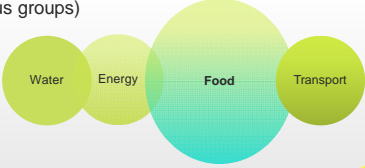

- Consensus Project
- Food Consumption: Key Issues
- Challenges Sustainable Food Consumption
- Food Consumption: Motivations & Practices
- The Visioning Approach
- First Results: Evaluation and Scenario Development



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## Consensus Research

- ConsEnSus: **C**onsumption, **E**nvironment, **S**ustainability in Ireland ([www.consensus.ie](http://www.consensus.ie)) 4 years: 2009-2013
- Trinity College Dublin & NUI Galway, all-island, multi-disciplinary, multi-method (lifestyle survey , visioning, focus groups)

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## Food Consumption – Key Issues


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## 5 Key Global Challenges

### Foresight Food and Farming Futures Report 2011

results from project with 400 experts and stakeholders in 35 countries (led by UK)

- Balance future supply and demand → **affordability**
- Ensure **stability in food supply**
- Achieve **global access** and **end hunger**
- Manage contribution of the food system to mitigating **climate change**
- Maintain **biodiversity** and **ecosystem** services while feeding the world



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## Worldwatch Institute Report 2011

- Global examples of innovations in sustainable agriculture & food systems:  
Projects: Urban farming, combating climate change, reducing or preventing food waste
- **Waste prevention strategies & promoting self-sufficiency as key to feeding fast-growing population**
- “Practical vision of the innovations that will allow billions of people to feed themselves, while restoring rural economies, creating livelihoods, and sustaining the natural resource base on which agriculture depends.”




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## What is “Sustainable Food Consumption”?

**Definition** - SERI (Sustainable Europe Research Institute):  
Sustainable food consumption = preference for:

- **Food with high resource efficiency**
- **Regional, instead of imported, food**
- **Organically produced food**
- **Lower amounts of bottled beverages**
- **Meatless or reduced meat diets**  
(based on the specific emissions in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents per food category as a proxy for the environmental effects of different vegetable and meat categories)

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## Ethical Dimensions of Food Consumption

Tim Lang 2010: From 'value-for-money' to 'values-for-money'? Ethical food and policy in Europe (Environment and Planning A 2010, volume 42)

**Five core features of 'ethical' food:**

- place (local or national)
- **animal welfare**
- organic
- **fair-traded**
- sustainable (IGD 2008, food industry research body)

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## Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Food Consumption in Ireland

- **Economic Crisis: Challenge or Opportunity?**
- **Focus on Price?**
- **But: Emerging Trends / Rising Awareness** about where food comes from, how it was produced? Examples:
  - Growing market for organic products / artisan products sold on farmers markets, small shops, etc
  - Growing literature on alternative food networks
  - Organisations like Good Food Ireland, GIY, Slow Food Movements: growing members and profile

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## Food Consumption: Motivations

**Strong Connection:**

– Wellbeing, health, quality of life, lifestyles → **food consumption: what, when, why and how we eat**

- **Emotions important in relation to food consumption**
- **Why:** to fulfil which needs? E.g. hunger, boredom, habit, routine, to treat yourself, frustration, politeness...
- **What matters when you buy food?** E.g. price, taste, quality, health, convenience, citizenship, environment?

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## Food Consumption as a 'Practice'

- **Meanings and practices of eating, cooking, shopping and wasting are interconnected and depend on space, time, culture and social norms**

• **Practices can for example depend on:**

- Lifestyles / life stages
- Family life, roles
- Identity, culture
- Time and place
- Systems of provision

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## Food Consumption - Trends

**Trends include movements and counter-movements:**

- Emergence of fast food → slow food movement
- Globalisation / international trade / food miles → calls for/ promotion of buying local
- Emergence of supermarkets → increasing amount of farmers markets, vegetable box schemes, community gardening


→ **Indicators of broader societal patterns/movements?**

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### Barriers Sustainable Food Consumption

Shopping	Cooking	Wasting
Invisibility of carbon/water footprint of food	Invisibility of energy used for cooking, storing, preparation of food	Invisibility of food waste amounts / impacts
Low level of awareness of how and where food is produced	Low level of awareness of energy efficient cooking methods	Low level of awareness of problem / amount of food waste
Social norms and habits about food purchasing	Social norms and habits about food preparation	Social norms and habits about food wasting
Affordability of 'sustainable' food (e.g. organic, fair-trade, animal welfare)	Lack of information on & supply of energy efficient kitchen appliances & cooking methods	Lack of information and infrastructure for avoidance and reuse of waste (e.g. composting)

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### Innovation Needed!

- Current response: supply-side focus on food production, regulation, information campaigns, promotion of (local/ organic) food
- How could we develop new ways of fulfilling the needs of food consumption in a sustainable way in the future?
- Could solutions integrate social, technological and organisational changes?

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### How?...Visioning Techniques


- Visioning is part of a family of future-oriented research (e.g. forecasting)
- Desirable future vision - 'backcast' not forecast; 2050: Liberation from constraints: develop creative ideas
- *"The world will not evolve past its current state of crisis by using the same thinking that created the situation"* (Albert Einstein)

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### Why use this approach?

**Visioning is suitable when:**

- Problem is complex
- There is a need for major change
- Dominant trends are part of the problem
- The market alone cannot deal with the problem
- Time horizon is long enough to allow scope for deliberate choice (Dreborg, 1996)


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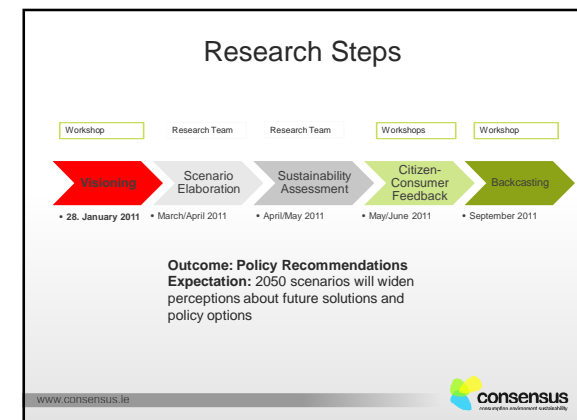
### Strengths of Visioning Workshops:

**Think 'Outside the Box'**  
Come up with (as many) creative, 'crazy' ideas as possible to make food consumption more sustainable in the year 2050

**Provide 'imaginative spaces' for communication, creativity and learning**


- Bring together people from different areas who normally would not talk to one another
- Brainstorming, interaction, networking

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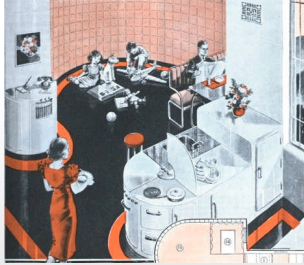
## The Future 2050


**How can we fulfill the needs of food  
consumption more sustainably in the  
future?**

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### ‘Future Visions’


‘The Electric House of the Future’ 1939




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### ‘Future Visions’

‘Dream Kitchen of Tomorrow’ 1957




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### ‘Future Visions’


**‘The Kitchen of the Future’ 1967**  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFgVTUle\\_EM&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFgVTUle_EM&feature=player_embedded)

- “The future sure isn’t what it used to be. Back in 1967 we were promised computerized kitchens where all the food was prepared and frozen, then microwaved in two minutes to order. Dishes were disposable, everyone got what they wanted and our diets were carefully calibrated for nutrition.”
- Futuristic Kitchen Scenarios – partly materialised?
- Role Models ‘Kitchen’: Significant changes over time!

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## The Workshop Process


- **3 brainstorm groups:** focus on practices: shopping, cooking, wasting (6-7 stakeholders + 1 facilitator/note taker)
- **Stakeholder types** (RoI and NI): public (BordBia; Teagasc; EPA; Comhar; SDC NI); private (NGOs; researchers; organic farmer); business (kitchen designers; food writers/journalists; retailers)
- **Process:** Brainstorming: 1hour; coffee break & networking; discussion of ideas in group (feedback of groups); rating of ideas; evaluation

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## Brainstorm: Guide Themes

How might the **needs** of food consumption and disposal be delivered more sustainably in 2050?



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### Brainstorming



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### Feeding back of ideas



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### Ideas



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### Rating of Ideas



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### Evaluation of Workshop

- Questionnaire at end of workshop: some examples!
  - 13 responses/18 participants
  - All want to stay involved in the project
  - Positive evaluation especially of brainstorming groups and ‘thinking outside the box’

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Did the visioning workshop prompt you to think in different ways about approaching sustainability problems?


- “Absolutely. Others’ perspectives really opened my mind to think of factors I haven’t thought about” (Researcher SC)
- “Yes, I haven’t previously thought about sustainability in terms of innovation and technology...but from self-sufficiency perspective ... Now I see the need to combine both ” (Researcher Food)

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Might you consider applying similar visioning techniques in your own work?

- Yes: 8; already using: 4; maybe: 1
- "I will definitely bring this technique into my workplace" (IKEA Dublin)
- "Already do! But I also learned ways I could do this even better so thanks!" (Design 21)
- "Yes, if appropriate - really think it's an effective technique" (researcher food TCD)

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Has the workshop opened up any new perspectives for how we could live in the future, or given you any new ideas?

- "Yes - makes you think outside the box ...such as possible new technologies or completely different ways of doing things" (Retailer)
- "Yes, I particularly enjoyed the more radical suggestions which came up. Many of them may not be implementable, but they certainly encourage thought about the current ways of doing things" (Designer)

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Which aspects of the event did you enjoy the most / least and how would you improve on these?

- "I enjoyed the entire process. I especially liked the brainstorm session" (IKEA Dublin, interior design/communications)
- "The level of contribution from the participants was refreshing and honest" (Organic Farmer)
- "The ideas-generation/discussion groups. Make them longer and perhaps more formally "guided" (NGO, Slow Food Ireland)

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Would you like to remain involved?

- **All** participants want to stay involved
- Various forms:
  - Newsletter (10)
  - Online forum (9)
  - Further Workshops (11)
  - Exchange / emailing over email list (12)

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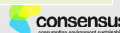
### Scenario Development

- Aim: 3 distinct scenarios based on high levels of change of:
  - Lifestyles, technology, organisation
- Categorisation of ideas:
  - 3 groups of ideas: from shopping, cooking and wasting practices brainstorm groups
- Identification of underlying dimensions
- Formulation of 'stories' based on ideas

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### Categorisation of Ideas

People	Technology	Organisation
<b>Shopping Group</b> Ideas e.g. 'Make GIY sexy'; localization	<b>Shopping Group</b> Ideas e.g. 'Mobile Phone/Info-scan products'; 'online ordering'	<b>Shopping Group</b> Ideas e.g. 'connect consumer and producer; cut out middle man'
<b>Cooking Group</b> Ideas e.g. 'edible parcs'; community kitchens, food festivals, re-valuation of food	<b>Cooking Group</b> Ideas e.g. 'Closed loop systems kitchen'; 'intelligent fridge'; 'food waste → liquid fuel'	<b>Cooking Group</b> Ideas e.g. 'education: cook, grow; tax highly processed food'
<b>Wasting Group</b> ideas e.g. 'meat as a treat'; re-educate!; communal composting; GM humans to eat food waste	<b>Wasting Group</b> ideas e.g. 'Alarm telling when food is going off'; 'use of waste – closed loop, more innovation'	<b>Wasting Group</b> ideas e.g. 'no such thing as waste – no by-products'; 'carbon food budget'

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## Interesting first findings:

- About 100 ideas in total: most in category organisation (43), people (30), least in technology (22); interconnectedness of practices recognised
- Some broad topics emerging:
  - **Innovative ways for information sharing** (intelligent fridge, mobiles, toolkits for food safety, carbon footprint on receipts)
  - **Re-valuation of food**; reconnection with source of food
  - **New 'systems of provision'** for food practices (e.g. provide new spaces for cooking, eating, growing food: living walls in kitchens, edible parcs, community and work kitchens, food festivals...)
  - **Regulation for 'sufficiency'** / alternative food consumption (education to cook, grow, experimental learning, twinning projects; carbon food budgets; taxes and subsidies)

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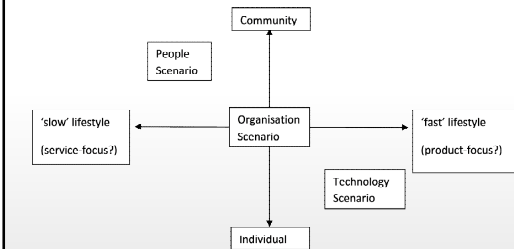
## Identification of Dimensions

- 'slow' versus 'fast' lifestyles; reversal of future kitchen scenarios
- 'community' versus 'individual'
- 'product' versus 'services'
- 'high' versus 'low' personal responsibility (versus 'outsourcing' to state/technology)
- level of consumer choice: high, low, different?

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## Scenario Dimensions



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## Scenario 1: People

“Come together to eat” – Community Kitchens, food festivals, farmers markets, slow food events (**high lifestyle change**)

### “Slow Lifestyle”:

- Re-valuation of food
- More time for cooking rather than more technologies

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## Scenario 2: Technology

“Smart Kitchens” – closed loop systems; integrate all practices (growing, wasting, preparation of food) (**low lifestyle change**)

### “Fast Lifestyle”:

- Technology / products as information / convenience device
- Keep current lifestyles: convenient 'green' fast foods; technologies for more efficiency/ to save time

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## Scenario 3: Organisation

“Educate and incentivize” – making sust food consumption easier – choice editing, taxing, subsidies, information and education (**lifestyle change supported by governance**)

### “New systems of provision”

- infrastructure investment,
- urban and land use planning
- (economic) incentives for more sustainable food consumption

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## “Come together to eat”



“In 2050, a re-valuation of food has taken place. A higher value is placed around food rather than technology and ownership of appliances. ‘Grow it yourself’ has become a major trend, for example by having living walls in the kitchen edible parks, sharing gardens and allotments with other people to come together and enjoy gardening, growing and sharing food. **Lifestyles have become ‘slower’ instead of ‘faster’** – people spend more time for all aspects of food consumption (shopping, growing, cooking) with friends, colleagues and neighbours.”

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## “Smart Kitchens”



“In 2050, technology and products are increasingly used as information and convenience devices. **Current ‘fast’ lifestyles are still dominant**; technologies are more energy efficient and save time by providing information about the environmental, social and individual costs of food consumption. ‘Smart (closed loop) kitchens’ are the norm and are subsidized by the government. The ‘intelligent fridge’ provides information on leftovers and gives menu suggestions which avoids food being wasted and unnecessary trips to the supermarket. The food waste processor produces liquid biofuel and vegetables are grown on the living wall”.

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## “Educate and Incentivize”



“In 2050, **new systems of provision are in place to make sustainable food consumption easier** through infrastructure investment, urban and land use planning, education programmes and economic incentives for more sustainable food consumption. The amount of energy to be used in food consumption practices is regulated: There is a ‘carbon food budget’ for every household, which implies that people have the choice to either use this budget on imported food (food miles), or on a certain amount of meat. There are rations for energy to be used in the home and smart kitchens are subsidized”.

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## Next Steps:

- Refinement of Scenarios: Include Feedback Participants Workshop
- Environmental Assessment (qualitative, based on Seyfang indicators SC)
- Citizen-Consumer Workshops (focus groups with green, dynamic, mainstream individuals)
- Backcasting Workshop (regulators)

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## Thank you for your attention!

For more information on the Consensus project, please go to:

[www.consensus.ie](http://www.consensus.ie)

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