

Sustainable Food Consumption in Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities



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Introduction

Promoting more sustainable consumption patterns globally and locally is one of the major challenges the world is facing today. The impact of food consumption has been recognised as one major factor impacting on environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability. Which policy designs can be effective in a given national and cultural context is an important question in this regard. The use of innovative methodologies including various stakeholders is important to come up with policy recommendations which 'work' in a given national context towards more sustainable food consumption in the future.

The aim of the Consensus food research is to examine technological and social factors that have an impact on the shopping, cooking and eating behaviour of household members and to create normative scenarios that might be realisable by 2050. The ultimate goal is to elaborate strategies to bring about the most promising environmental, economic and culturally acceptable solutions for more sustainable food consumption in Ireland. To this end, visioning workshops have been conducted with public and private stakeholders in the area of food consumption and production, where innovative ideas for more sustainable food consumption in the future were generated. Based on these ideas, three scenarios have been developed (see on the right) which are based on different degrees of organisational, technological and social change. First results from citizen-consumer workshops which are currently conducted to test the acceptability of these ideas can be seen in the textboxes of the scenarios on the right (green = popular ideas; red = unpopular ideas; blue = overall favourite scenario).

This research is part of the Irish Consensus project: Consensus (consumption, environment and sustainability) is a four-year collaborative research project involving Trinity College Dublin and the National University of Ireland, Galway. It examines four key areas of household consumption that currently impact negatively on the environment and inhibit our ability to achieve sustainable development across both Northern Ireland and the Republic: energy, water, food and transport. The focus of Consensus is on four key themes:

1. How to measure and evaluate consumption
2. How incentives for sustainable behaviours can be developed
3. Identifying the links between consumption, health and wellbeing
4. How matters of household consumption are being governed through institutional practice and participation.

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Methods

With the help of stakeholders from industry, government, universities, and public interest groups, the Consensus project has formulated normative scenarios of possible developments of shopping, cooking, and eating for the year 2050 focusing on the necessary technological and cultural innovations that contribute to the sustainable household. The scenarios have been evaluated whether they decrease the overall environmental burden, whether they are economically credible and whether they are acceptable to Irish consumers. The starting point is that a combination of technological, cultural and structural changes is necessary to achieve more sustainable food consumption for the year 2050. In a next step, 'promising practices' identified in the citizen-consumer workshop will be taken back to regulators, designers and other stakeholders in order to develop transition plans and policy recommendations.



On the left you can see the first citizen-consumer workshop in Galway where the three food scenarios were discussed and rated. On the right, you can see first results from this workshop: the three scenarios including the feedback by participants. Everybody had 10 green and 10 red stickers to distribute (green for popular, red for unpopular ideas) and one blue sticker for the most popular scenario overall.

Results

'Come together to eat' Scenario 5 from 10 voted this as favourite Scenario

Green = popular ideas; red = unpopular ideas

'Educate and Incentivize' Scenario 4 from 10 voted this as favourite Scenario

Green = popular ideas; red = unpopular ideas

'Smart Kitchens' Scenario 1 red

Green = popular ideas; red = unpopular ideas