

# Exploring local availability and price of fruit and vegetables Scotland, Summer 2022



In summer 2022, the Our Right to Food project worked with volunteer Community Researchers to explore, compare and make sense of the **availability** and **price** of fruit and vegetables in different parts of Scotland.

Volunteers set out to find a mixture of fruits and vegetables from an example weekly shopping list for a family of five. The list was developed by a group of Community Advisors who had worked together to identify a balance of foods that would fit the needs and aspirations of a large family living in Scotland today (the 'Robinson Family'<sup>1</sup>).

After looking for the items and recording their results, Community Researchers came together online to reflect on what they had learned and discuss what could be done to overcome barriers to accessing healthy foods in their community.

## Key findings:

- Community Researchers were **able to find most items** on the list in their local areas. The shopping list contains a reasonable variety of fruit and vegetables that are available **in most areas**.
- It was **much more difficult to find every item on the list in corner shops or convenience stores** than small or large supermarkets. This shows that families need to travel to large supermarkets or go to multiple shops to access the variety of fruits and vegetables Community Advisors believe are part of reasonable balance of foods.
- Researchers found **clear differences in price and quality** of the items depending on the type of shop they visited. Higher prices were found in small supermarkets, corner shops and convenience stores than large supermarkets.
- Looking for food items in multiple shops can create **additional barriers** for people due to the added time and cost of travel in both rural and urban locations.



<sup>1</sup> The 'Robinson Family' is one of four case study families that were co-developed as part of the Our Right to Food project in 2021: <https://www.nourishscotland.org/projects/our-right-to-food/>

# What we did

In June and July 2022, 53 volunteer Community Researchers from across Scotland set out to explore the availability and price of a variety of fruit and vegetables in their own communities. The research focused on the 17 fruit and vegetable items that Community Advisors agreed a large family – the ‘Robinson Family’ – would need for their breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks.<sup>2</sup>

FRESH	
Apples (5 pack)	Cucumber (1 whole)
Bananas (5-6 bunches)	Leeks (2 whole)
Strawberries (225g box)	Mushrooms (485g pack)
Oranges (5 pack)	Onions (1kg bag)
Carrots (1kg bag)	Peppers (3 pack)
REFRIGERATED	
Orange Juice* (1 litre)	Fruit smoothies* (4 pack, 150ml each)
FROZEN	
Broccoli (900g bag)	Mixed vegetables (1kg bag)
PANTRY	
Sweetcorn (200g tin)	Chopped tomatoes (227g tin)
* Only 150ml counts towards one of your 5-a-day	Tomato pasta sauce (500g jar)

Figure 1: The Robinson Family’s weekly fruit and vegetable shopping list

Volunteers looked for these items in their local area and completed either an online or paper survey to record the items and prices that they found. They also recorded their views on what the Robinsons would do if an item was not available.

Community Researchers visited a total of 113 shops in 81 locations across Scotland. This included large supermarkets, small supermarkets, corner shops / convenience stores and greengrocers in both urban and rural areas. Overall, 71% of researchers categorised their area as urban, 20% as small town, and 9% as rural.

The research aimed to gather information about the additional costs that transport would contribute to the shopping list, so the Community Researchers were asked to record how they got to the shops and what they thought the Robinsons would do. Most researchers travelled either by car or on foot. Only a few took a bus or taxi or got a supermarket delivery.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The list includes the types of fruit and vegetables that would be needed across the week, in the package size and form that the Community Advisors agreed would be most acceptable. Note that items in larger packages may not be used in one week (e.g. 1 kg of onions, 900g frozen broccoli would be eaten over multiple weeks), but these package sizes were included as the basis for price comparison with Tesco online.

<sup>3</sup> One main reason for traveling by car was the ability to carry the shopping back home, but many researchers recognised access to a car as a luxury which many families in Scotland do not have.

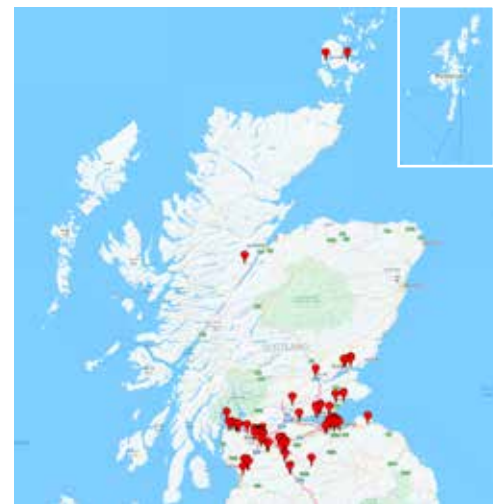


Figure 2: Location of Community Researchers

# What we found

## Most items on the Robinsons' shopping list were available

In the places where this research was conducted, Community Researchers were able to find most items on the Robinsons' fruit and veg shopping list either exactly as specified or in slightly different amounts or packaging sizes. Some items were easier to find<sup>4</sup> than others. Nine out of the 17 items, for instance, were found by at least 75% of researchers and 3 items were found by fewer than half:



For Community Researchers who only looked for items in corner shops / convenience stores,<sup>5</sup> the picture was quite different: only sweetcorn (85%), chopped tomatoes (90%) and pasta sauce (95%) were 'easy to find' in these locations. Apples, bananas, carrots, cucumber, onion, peppers and frozen veg were fairly easy to find, while fewer than half of the researchers found the remaining items.

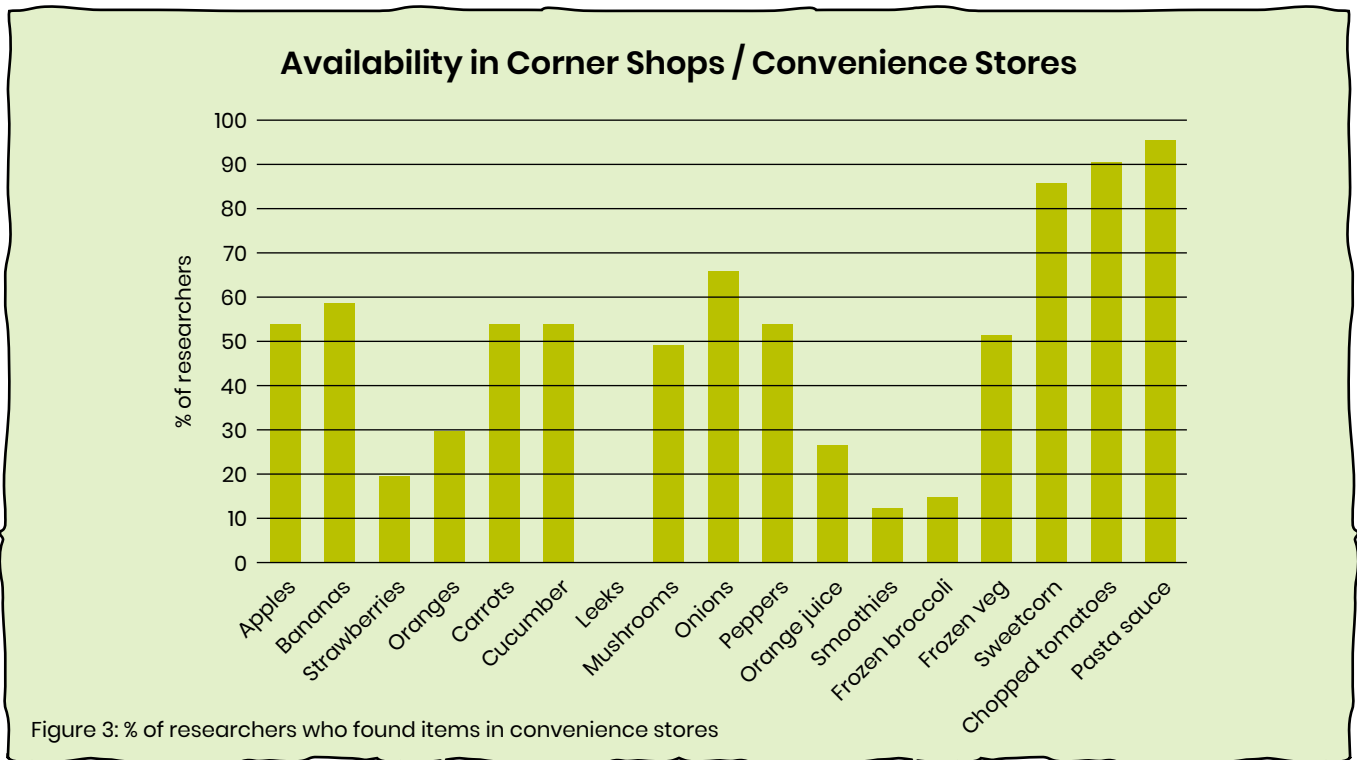


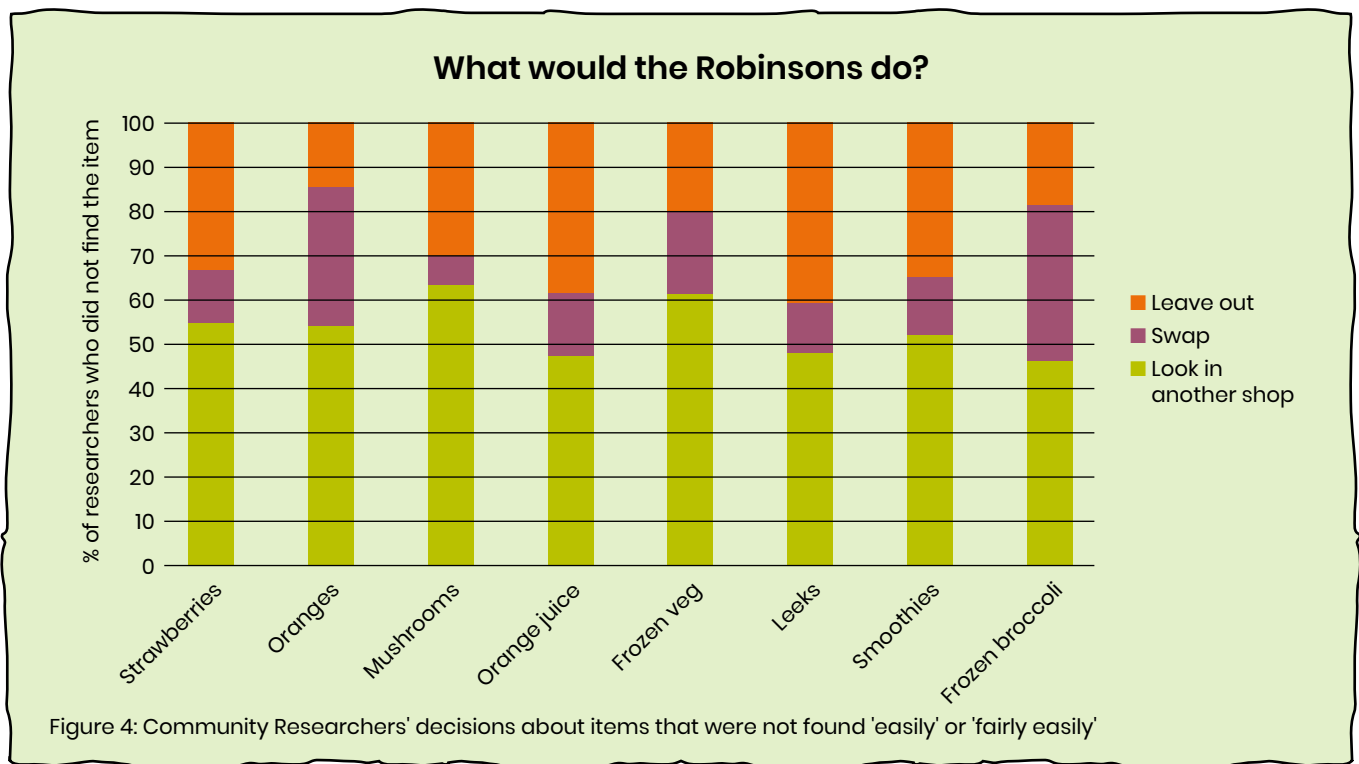
Figure 3: % of researchers who found items in convenience stores

<sup>4</sup> 'Easy to find': >75% of researchers found this item, 'Fairly easy': between 50% and 74% of researchers found this item, 'Not so easy': < 50% of researchers found this item.

<sup>5</sup> 41 responses were submitted by staff members of the Healthy Living Programme (HLP) who looked for items in corner shops/convenience stores and did not go on to other small or large supermarkets to find items that were not available at their first location.

If an item was unavailable, Community Researchers were asked to consider what the Robinsons would do (find an alternative, look in another shop or leave it out). Most researchers thought that the Robinsons would 'look in another shop' to find most items on the list. Some also suggested swapping items for something else, while considering how this would affect the Robinson Family's weekly meal plan. Oranges were easily swapped for satsumas, for instance, but researchers thought it was more difficult to find an acceptable alternative for leeks or mushrooms when bearing in mind the family's preferences about how they would use this in their meals or snacks.

Items that were more likely to be 'left out' than swapped included orange juice, strawberries and individually packed smoothies. Researchers explained that for these items, it was at times difficult to find suitable alternatives. In some places, for instance, orange juice was only available from concentrate with a higher sugar content than the Community Advisors had specified.

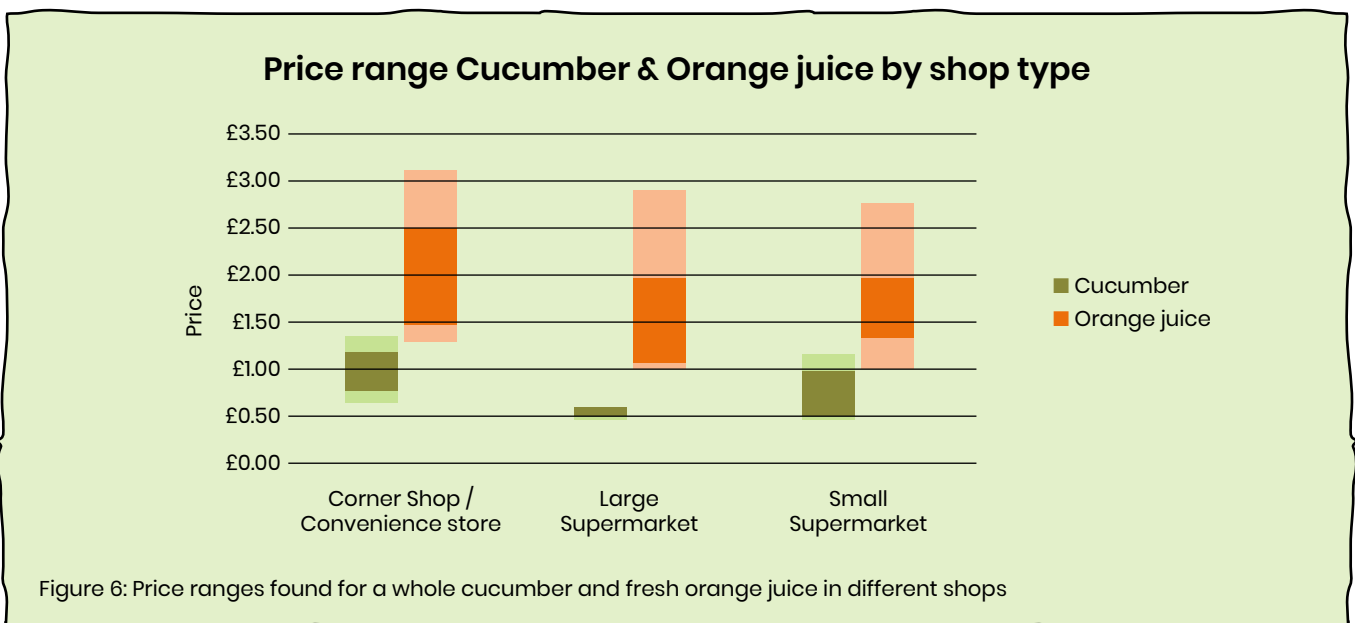


# Prices and quality differed considerably between shops

Community Researchers found a range of prices for all items across different shops, though the price disparities for some items were larger than for others.



Looking across shop types, researchers found higher prices in corner shops / convenience stores and small supermarkets than in large supermarkets. The price for fresh orange juice, for instance, varied across all three shop types with the highest prices – more than £3 – paid in corner shops. A whole cucumber was priced with little variation in large supermarkets, but a wider range of costs was encountered in small shops and convenience stores.





## Effect of availability and price differences on shopping practices

Community Researchers were asked to consider how differences in availability and prices would influence whether the Robinson Family would go on to purchase and eat each of the items. Over time, these decisions would affect the family's ability to enjoy the balance of fruit and vegetables Community Advisors had agreed would meet the family's needs.

- ▶ Most researchers considered it unlikely that the Robinson Family would look in a corner shop / convenience store for their fruit and veg due to limited selection and higher prices in those stores. They thought the family would instead compromise convenience and time to travel to a larger shop. This was true in both urban and rural areas.
- ▶ On a low budget or without access to transport, having to travel to a larger supermarket could mean that the family would be limited to buying fruit and vegetables less frequently or relying on more expensive choices locally.
- ▶ High quality produce was thought to taste better, last longer and reduce the family's need and associated travel costs of shopping for fresh produce frequently.
- ▶ Researchers agreed that if the price for a particular fruit or vegetable was too high, they believed a family would be more likely to leave it out – especially if it were thought to be consumed quickly in the household.

*“Like, one cucumber was £1.12. I just about had a heart attack when I saw that. Especially (...) if I buy a cucumber, it is gone in this house, my kids will eat it in like two seconds. So there's no way I'd be spending £1.12 on a cucumber!”*

**Community Researcher, Fife**



# Conclusion and next steps

Community Researchers have established that the fruit and vegetables on the example shopping list are generally available across Scotland, however not without potential costs of time and transport to either travel to an affordable shop or go to several different shops to find everything. In both urban and rural areas this may either significantly add to the cost of the shop or limit the choices available to the family.

Ensuring that families can afford a variety of good quality produce is an important way to support people to buy and eat more fruit and vegetables. This could include actions that improve the availability of a wider variety of fruits and vegetables in smaller supermarkets, corner shops and convenience stores so that people do not need to travel to larger supermarkets to find the foods they would choose. It also could include actions that support smaller retailers to offer a more affordable selection of fruit and vegetables, especially ones that children and families enjoy but may leave out if too expensive locally. Wider actions, such as improving affordable transport links for people without cars or making delivery options more accessible to everyone, would also help to overcome some of the barriers identified by Community Researchers.

Proposals to restrict promotions of 'unhealthier food and drink', including those that are high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) will, if effective, impact significantly on the sales of corner shops and convenience stores.<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Government already provides support to the sector to promote fruit and veg – however, in this context, further support to improve local availability and affordability could help to widen access as well as sustaining these important components of local communities.

During the next stage of the project, we will be exploring how the affordability of a balance of foods that meets people's needs and preferences in today's Scotland can be measured. This will help us understand if Scotland is making progress towards becoming a Good Food Nation, where everyone can access and afford the food that keeps them healthy and well.

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<sup>6</sup> In July 2022, the Scottish Government launched a Consultation on Restricting Promotions of Food and Drink High in Fat, Sugar or Salt: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/consultation-restricting-promotions-food-drink-high-fat-sugar-salt>