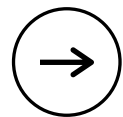


Food and Me

We Are Family's trend report on tweens and food



Report Outline

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Introduction and Methodology

This report is the result of in depth qualitative research conducted in Q3 2022 that aimed to get a deeper understanding of tween's relationship with food. It consisted of 20-25 minute online qualitative research sessions with tweens in seven markets (Germany, UK, Spain, USA, France, Italy, and Singapore) that were comprised of both text-based and video-based questions in order to get nuanced and detailed responses.

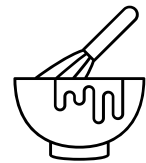
Key Themes



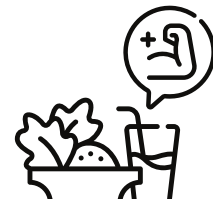
Regional diet variation



Tween influence on the food shop



Cooking Skills



Health



Sustainability



Food futures

Markets



Singapore



Germany



Italy



Spain



United Kingdom



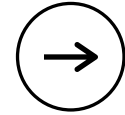
France



United States



Key Insights



These tweens are part of a global food system

The spread of food cultures means that tweens eat a hybrid of cuisines that is influenced by, but in no way limited to, the traditional food of their region.

And they have a big influence on the family food shop

Tweens are influential in the kitchen; and have a say over almost every meal, in the household meal plan, and in the food shop!

They are aware of the environmental impact of food

Across markets, tweens are familiar with the concept of sustainability and know that what they eat has an effect on the planet.

But they're not necessarily willing to change their diets to help the planet

An overwhelming majority of the tweens we spoke to were not vegetarian or vegan and didn't intend to become so.



It's a melting pot

The food that most tweens eat everyday is a cultural hybrid of local favourites and Americanised versions of international cuisine like hamburgers, “dino nuggets”, fries, pizza, and pasta.

But tween’s food consumption patterns aren’t just about American foods spreading around the world. Instead, they’re multi-directional and regionally specific based on immigration patterns, trade relationships, and existing societal tastes. For example, when we asked our participants what they would choose to eat if they could only have one food for the rest of their lives, an 11 year old French girl said she’d only eat sushi, an 11 year old girl in Singapore chose to live off mac and cheese, and a 10 year old American girl picked tacos!

Tweens aren't scared to try new things

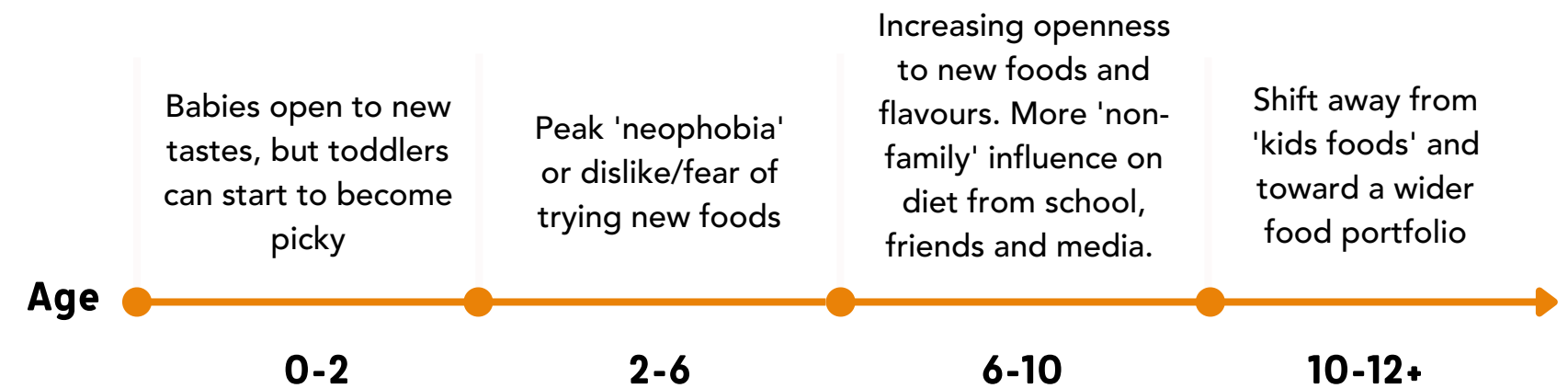
With the sprawling array of different foods available at supermarkets and restaurants, it's no surprise that most tweens are keen to try (at least some of) them

This openness represents a generational shift. A 2021 study 72% of parents said that their children are a lot more open minded about trying new foods than they were at the same age (though they still sometimes need some convincing)!

The 'new foods' tweens try can be separated into two categories:

- Ingredients - fruit/veg/meats that they might not have tried before e.g. beetroot, kiwis. These are more likely to be tried at home.
- Dishes - these usually come from different cultures (sushi, and Japanese food generally, being the most frequently mentioned). These are more likely to be tried on holiday, at a friend's house, or at a restaurant.

Openness to new foods by age



The 4 occasions tweens try new foods

When they're at a friend's house

When they travel/go on holiday

When parents (or other family members) cook new foods at home

When they're taken out to eat at restaurant

Tweenfluence

Though most tweens rely on others to prepare the majority of their meals and are still novices in the kitchen, they exert an enormous influence on how their family shops and what they eat

Many families (across all markets) will create a 'menu for the week' with their kids, giving tweens input over what is bought at the supermarket. But while tweens enjoy forming the shopping list, they think there are ups and downs to helping with the actual food shop!

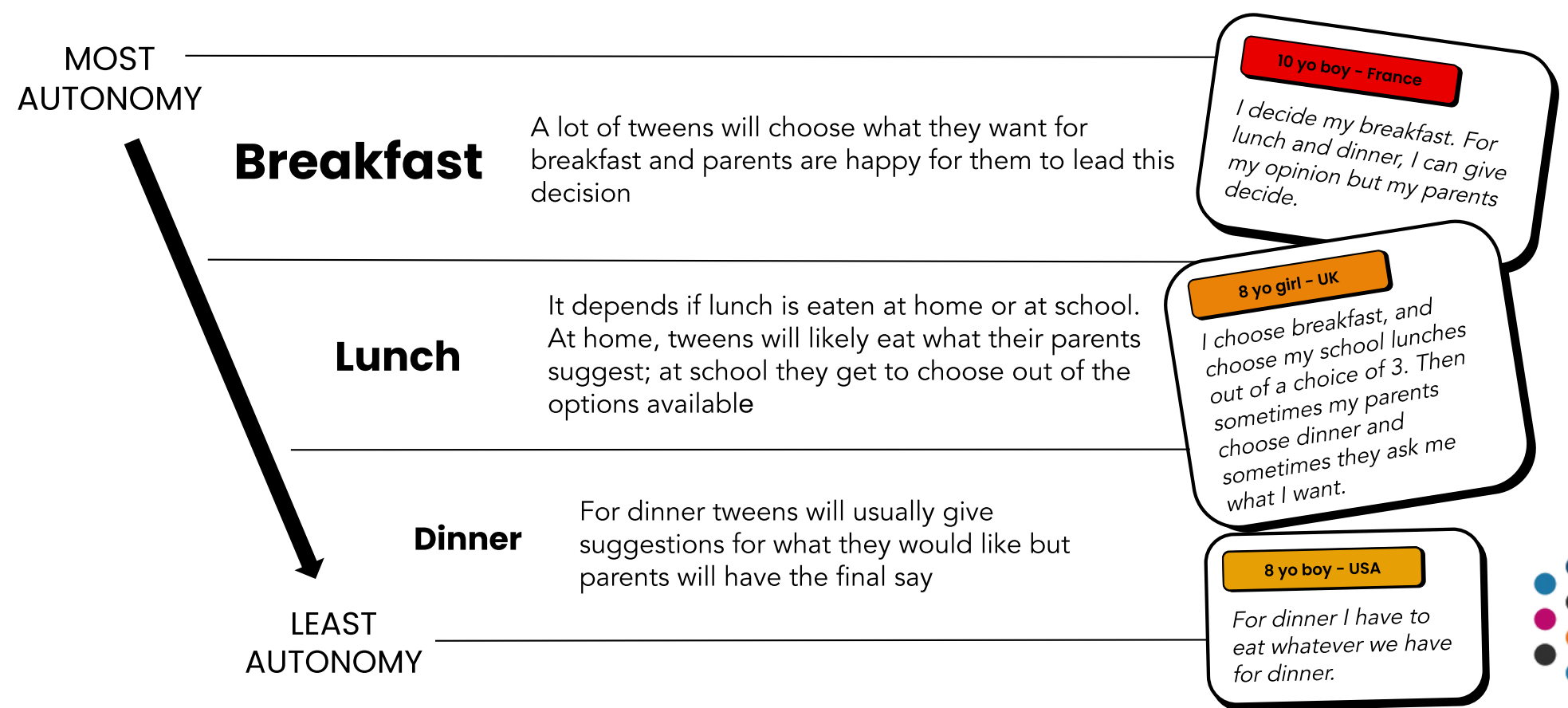
Many like helping with practical tasks like ticking things off the shopping list and calculating the price of the shop as they go, and they also go along in hopes that they might get a treat for themselves. But others think it's boring, time consuming and would rather be left at home. There was a small age and gender skew in our results—younger tweens and girls are more likely to want to go along to the grocery shop, while older tweens and boys are more likely to say they'd rather skip it.

The 'Ask' Pattern

Tweens are not shy when it comes to asking their parents to buy them things at the supermarket. Usually, they get what they want. But HOW? Tweens are smart and will assess the likelihood of parents buying what they ask for, so usually asking for a combination of things—some 'healthy', some not—in the hope that at least one of them will be bought.

- They ask for things they know they are likely to get, like fruit, snacks for school, and cereals
- They ask for things that parents have bought for them previously
- They ask for things they know are treats, like sweets and sugary drinks

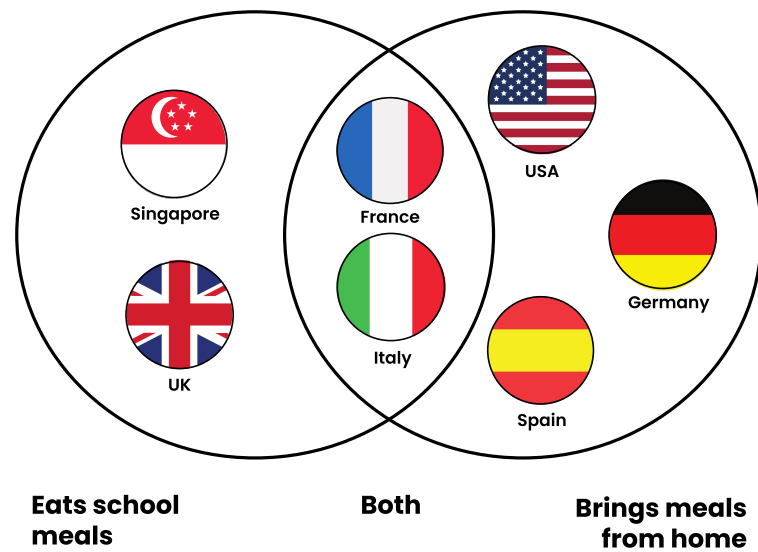
At every meal tweens have some say over what they eat. Typically, their role in the decision making process decreases from breakfast through to dinner



Lunch O'Clock

For most markets (and most tweens) lunches are either school meals OR a packed lunch box brought in from home / eaten at home. In France and Italy, it was more equally split between these two options.

Where do tweens get their lunch from?



Lunch time meals for tweens vary by market and within markets. Italy had the most clear pattern of lunchtime meal choice, pasta with tomato sauce (even though one Italian tween said this was their worst school meal ever!)

Lunch brought from home is most often something that can be eaten without heating it up. Sandwiches, deli meats, cheese, and fruit are common options.

As many tweens eat school lunches regularly, they were not shy with suggestions for how to make them better. Across markets the most common improvement tweens had for school meals was increasing the variety of options on the menu. This was closely followed by having higher quality foods, fresh fruit and veg, and the ability to go back for seconds!

Though tweens usually prefer home cooked food to the school's prepared lunch, school lunches often win out over packed lunches because kids like that they serve hot food!



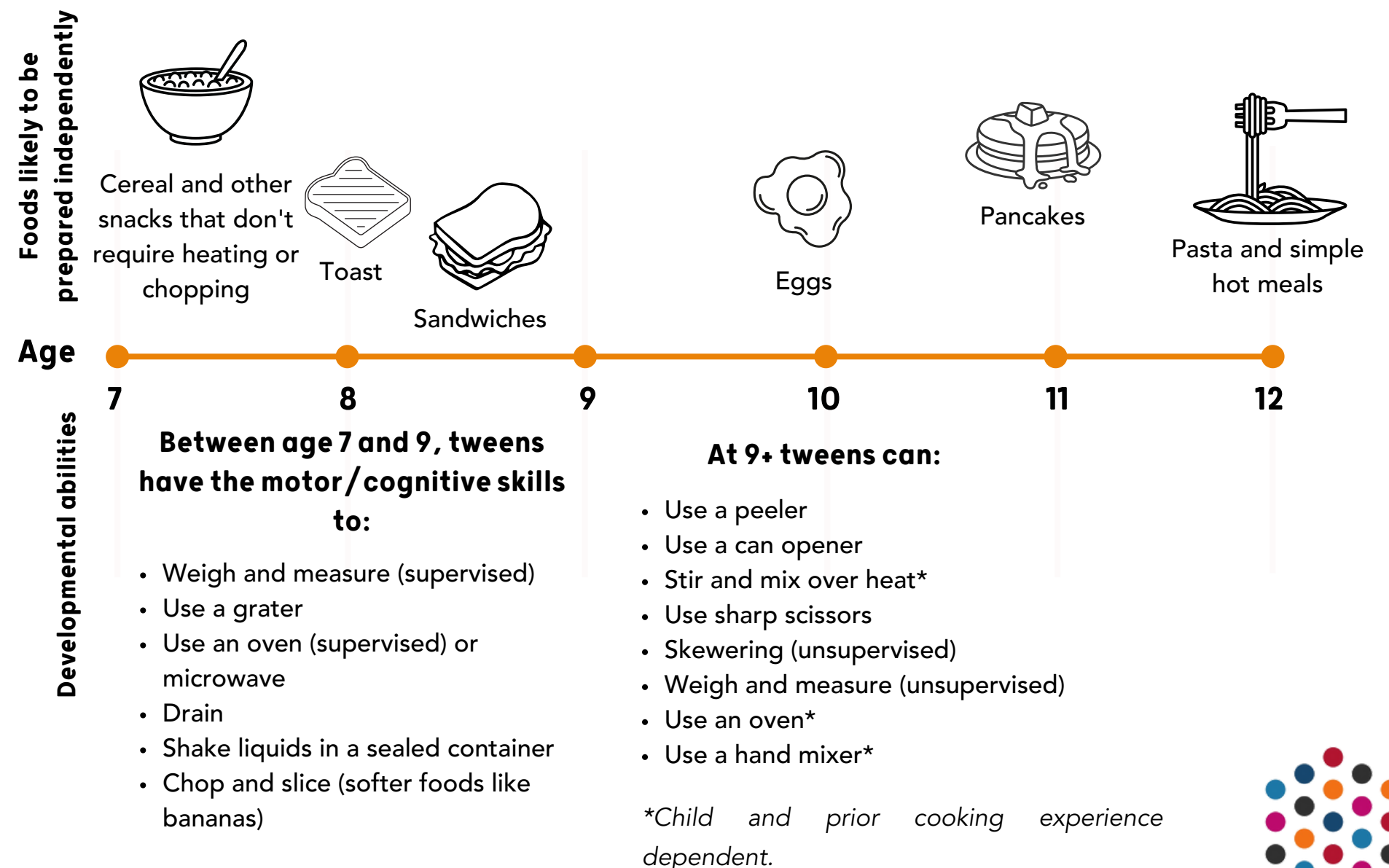
Cooking Skills

It's rare that tweens have the knowledge and skills to cook a full meal but that doesn't mean they aren't getting in the kitchen. From basic tasks like chopping vegetables to helping their parents bake, tweens are beginning to get more independent with cooking.

But there are differences in tween's cooking abilities and their interest in it by market. For example, nearly all tweens in UK and Spain prepared at least some of their meals themselves and tended to enjoy the process of cooking, whereas tweens in Italy and Germany were more likely to say that they helped their parents cook, but didn't (or didn't want to) cook themselves!

And as we've seen, tweens have the most decision making power at breakfast, so it's no surprise that breakfast foods—from the simple act of making toast to scrambling eggs—are often the starting point of their culinary skills.

So how, when and what do tweens learn to cook?



A Holistic Approach to Health

For tweens, this means everything in moderation.

Tweens don't think that any one food group should be restricted from their diets in order to eat healthy. Instead, they will refer to the 'healthy food plate' and '5 a day' to make sure that they are fueling their bodies with 'a little bit of everything' to ensure that they:

- Get all the vitamins needed to be healthy
- Build up their immune system
- Grow big and strong
- Have a healthy, functioning brain
- Feel good inside

But they still know which foods are healthier than others.

They are able to identify what to eat more of, and what to eat less of in order to be more healthy. They know they should eat more fruit and vegetables, and less sugar, fats, and red meat but the tastiness of these foods makes them hard to resist.

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In addition to taste there are other factors that tweens think are barriers to eating healthy...

Biggest barriers for tweens

Snacking a lot in between meals makes it difficult to maintain a healthy diet. Tweens are conscious that they snack often, and on 'unhealthy things' (sweets, chocolate and biscuits!). They are aware that by making small changes such as snacking on fruit, will help them live a healthier lifestyle

Foods that are typically unhealthy are more convenient such as fast food and processed 'ready meals'. Tweens are very aware of the lack of nutritional benefits these foods offer and should be consumed on a less frequent, 'treat' basis (but many eat them anyway)

Tweens think that how much consistency healthy eating requires makes it difficult to stay on track. This is because you have to think about what you're eating for every meal, everyday, which some tweens don't have the time or energy for

Some tweens have a perception that 'healthy food' is too expensive which means they are less likely to ask for it, and parents are less likely to buy it



Tweens and their foodprint

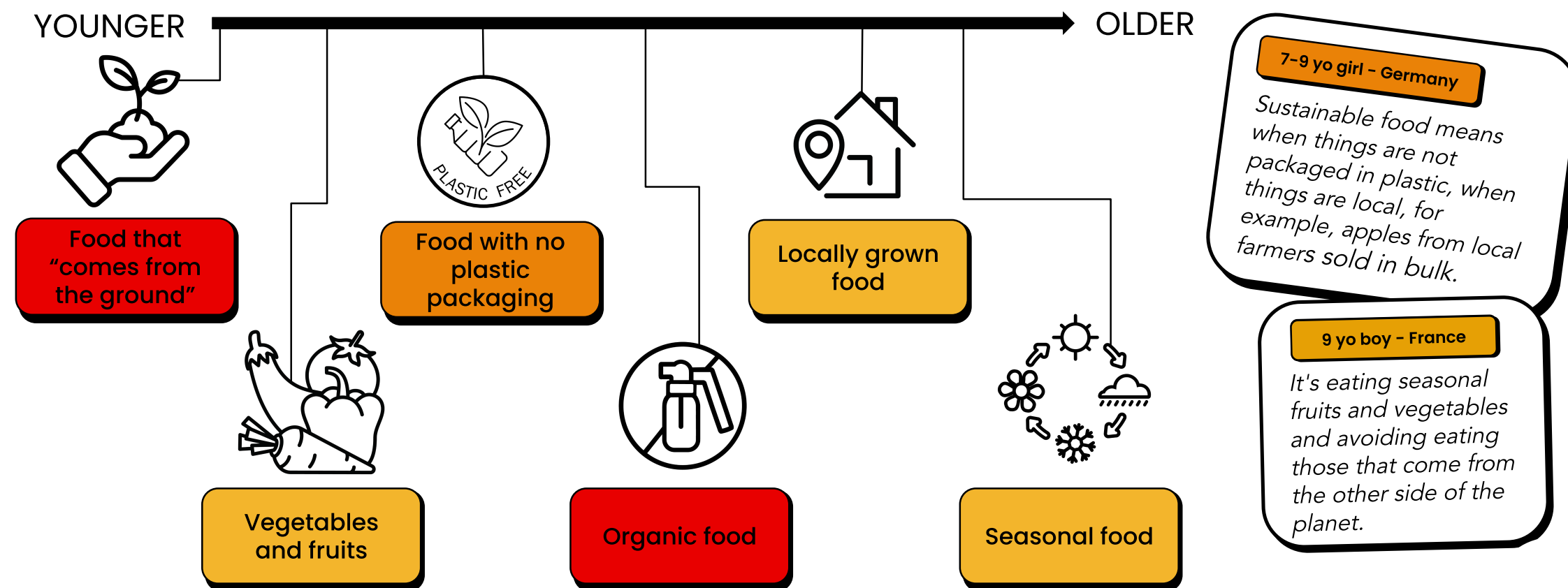
Many tweens, particularly those between 10-12, understand that certain foods can have a negative impact on the environment, from the way they are produced to the way they are packaged.

These older tweens are slightly more sophisticated in the way that they define sustainable foods, commenting on organic and free range produce, regional or national food systems and endangering animals. In contrast, some of the younger tweens describe sustainable food as 'healthy food'; they may also be more likely to mention plastic packaging.

But what do tweens think sustainable food really is?

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The chart below shows what tweens think 'sustainable food' means at different ages, but there is some market variance within this. For example, French and Italian tweens are more likely to say eating seasonally is key to sustainability (even when they are 9-10 years old), while German and British tweens are more aware of local food systems



Almost all tweens understand the positive impacts of a meat-free lifestyle, but the vast majority are NOT vegetarian or vegan

They know going vegetarian or vegan has benefits, not only for the environment, but also for personal health and to save animals. This is why they think more people will become vegetarian or vegan in the future.

But despite this, most don't see themselves giving up meat and dairy. They tend to talk about a shift in eating habits as though other people will change and not themselves.

The Future of Food

Tweens think that climate change might cause food systems to change in the future. When we asked them to think about whether the food people eat will be different in 50 years, tweens got creative, and gave us all sorts of ideas; from the discovery of golden apples that make you 10% healthier to the creation of pills that mean you only need to eat twice a week. Their answers generally clustered around three main themes:

Food from the Garden

Some tweens think that in future more people will be growing their own food, and because of this, food will have a lower carbon footprint. According to these agriculturally-minded kids, our diets will contain more fruit and vegetables and less meat than they do now. Some also think we'll eat be snacking on farmed insects like crickets!

Food from the Factory

Tweens think there will be an increase in manufactured and processed food, and that this will happen in two different ways. First, there will be more processed vegetarian proteins (fake meats), and second, more mechanisation because, in the words of a UK-based 12 year old boy "that's just the way the world is going".

Food from the Laboratory

The tweens we interviewed think that science and technology have a big role to play in the food of the future. According to them, nutritional tablets might replace meals, bioengineering will make food more nutritious, and scientists will invent both new foods and new, improved versions of existing ones!

Get in touch

We are the world's biggest and most experienced full service agency group that specialises in children, young people, and families.



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