Food Aid Quality Review Phase III:
Quarterly Technical Report No. 18

April 2020-June 2020

Acronyms

ACF	Action contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)
ASN	American Society for Nutrition
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID)
DFSA	Development Food Security Activity (USAID)
FACET	Food Assistance Cost-Effectiveness Tool (FAQR Decision Support Tool)
FAQR	Food Aid Quality Review
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FBF	Fortified Blended Food
FFP	Office of Food for Peace (USAID; now part of BHA)
FY 2020	Fiscal Year 2020
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
OY2	Option Year 2 (FAQR Phase III)
PI	Principal Investigator
REFINE	Research Engagement on Food Interventions for Nutritional Effectiveness
SNF	Specialized Nutritious Food
SNFP	Specialized Nutritious Food Product
TraceAID	Interagency Traceability Working Group (organized by USAID)
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Phase III:
Quarterly Technical Report Summary

I. Summary

Covering the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2020 (hereafter FY 2020), this report documents the progress of FAQR overall, as well as detailing outputs and impacts of FAQR Phase III work.

Since its inception, the goal of the Food Aid Quality Review project has been to support the U.S. Government's humanitarian agenda by establishing evidence-based information systems, tools, and data-gathering and evidence-sharing platforms on food aid for nutrition. FAQR's activities and outputs will enable government-wide actions and public/private engagement around food aid to achieve greater cost-effectiveness for decades to come. For a detailed overview of all FAQR activities, see Annex I.

This quarter, the team advanced FAQR objectives in the following areas:

1. The FAQR team participated in a series of meetings with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP; now part of the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance or BHA) to provide updates on, and plan for, Option Year 2 activities for several workstreams and for the upcoming Evidence Summit II.

2. The supply chain optimization team engaged in a series of meetings with USAID/BHA and partners to present the global warehouse location and inventory positioning model and to discuss interface options to present the results of the model visually.

3. The Food Assistance Cost-Effectiveness Tool (FACET) team began meeting regularly with USAID/BHA, including the data and technology team, to prepare for the handover of the tool and plan for a launch webinar, a series of training sessions, and materials to aid in those events.

4. The FAQR team launched three data mining activities during the reporting period, including 1) additional analyses of data collected as part of previous FAQR field studies, 2) an activity to pool baseline and endline data from previous FFP-funded development food security activities (DFSAs) and recommend further analyses that could be conducted with these pooled data, and 3) an activity to gather datasets associated with articles included in the Research Engagement on Food Interventions for Nutritional Effectiveness (REFINE) database to explore pooling data and recommending further analyses to USAID/BHA.

5. The final reports associated with the *Four Foods MAM Treatment Study in Sierra Leone* and associated sub-studies were completed in May and sent to USAID/BHA for review.

6. The FAQR team hosted the 13th Inter-Agency Harmonization Meeting in May, which included discussions related to specifications for specialized nutritious food products, food safety and quality assurance, and programming and research.

7. *The Future of Food Assistance for Nutrition: Evidence Summit II* was officially announced in June and is scheduled to take place live online in October.

8. FAQR team members participated in and presented two posters at the American Society for Nutrition (ASN) Nutrition 2020 conference relating to the *Burkina Faso Prevention of Stunting and Wasting Field Study* and FACET.

FAQR Reports and Manuscripts Published April 1, 2020-June 30, 2020

1. Wrabel, Maria, Kristine Caiafa, Beatrice Lorge Rogers, and Patrick Webb. *Food aid for nutrition: A landscape review of current research and implications for future studies*. Field Exchange 62 (April 2020): 38-40. www.ennonline.net/fex/62/foodaidfornutrition
2. Caiafa, Kristine, Maria Wrabel, Devika Suri, Ye Shen, Shelley Walton, Beatrice Lorge Rogers, and Patrick Webb. *A review of research methods used to study specialised nutritious foods*. Field Exchange 62 (April 2020): 41-43. www.ennonline.net/fex/62/specialisednutritiousfoods

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II. Key Activities for the Period April 1, 2020-June 30, 2020

The activities listed below are selected to showcase some of the major accomplishments during the quarter. All workstreams had ongoing activities during this quarter.

A. Option Year 2 Kickoff Meetings

FAQR team members met remotely on April 1-2 with representatives of USAID/FFP to discuss Option Year 2 activities for several workstreams. These meetings included a brainstorming session to determine possible research themes or questions to explore as part of the FAQR field study data mining activity; a planning meeting to begin to identify themes to be highlighted as part of *The Future of Food Assistance for Nutrition: Evidence Summit II*; a meeting to discuss the new direction of the food safety and quality assurance workstream to conduct a review of the business process engaged in by USAID and partners such as United States Department of Agriculture and the World Food Programme (WFP) when incidents related to commodities are reported; an update on the supply chain optimization team's efforts to build a global warehouse and inventory positioning model, as well as to conduct various studies of port locations in Ethiopia and Eritrea; and a meeting to discuss the finalization of the FACET interface and accompanying user manual, as well as preparations to hand these deliverables over to USAID/BHA to host within their network.

B. Supply Chain Optimization Activities

The FAQR supply chain team participated in a series of meetings with USAID/BHA during the reporting period to explain the workstream's overall goal and to provide an overview of ongoing and future efforts related to the global warehouse location and inventory positioning model and the East African port case studies. At the request of USAID/BHA, the team finalized the port case studies and organized a call to present the warehouse location optimization model and to provide a technical overview of the proposed Excel-based interface for that model and the potential graphical output of such an interface. Discussions were also initiated with USAID/BHA related to the development of a more user-friendly data visualization tool to present outputs from the model as an alternative to the Excel-based interface.

C. FACET Activities

The FACET interface was updated to include features to visualize and compare calculated results across saved scenarios at the request of USAID/BHA. USAID feedback on the FACET user manual was received in late June and has been incorporated into the final draft to the extent possible. A new two-page infographic has been developed and is currently under revision. This visual will be included in the user manual and also will function as a standalone reference for FACET users. The FAQR team has also started to seek data for the purposes of creating demonstration case studies.

In order to help prepare these case studies, develop training materials, and conduct trainings after FACET is launched in October, the FAQR team hired a new research assistant. The FACET team began meeting with two designated contacts from USAID/BHA on a bi-weekly basis in May to ensure the smooth handover of FACET and to finalize the Option Year 2 workplan for FACET.

The FAQR team has also started holding discussions with the USAID data and technology team about transitioning FACET to a USAID server. Since this process might be delayed until the end of the calendar year, an interim solution was agreed upon of continuing to host the tool on the RShiny application server while upgrading to a professional service plan to allow for additional users to engage with the tool during the FACET launch event and training sessions.

D. Data Mining Activities

The FAQR field study data mining activity revolves around the data collected during the FAQR-implemented field studies in Malawi, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone. During the reporting period, the data mining team identified several thematic areas that could be explored using available field study data and, after consulting with USAID/FFP during the Option Year 2 kickoff meetings, began to develop a series of potential research questions related to those themes. The team then began to explore the feasibility of using available data to answer those questions, as well as to finalize the codebook for analyzing the qualitative data from in-home observations, explore the follow-up survey and IYCF indicators, and merge or clean datasets into a workable form.

Two additional data mining activities also began during the third quarter, and three new research associates were hired to conduct this work. The first of these activities will review monitoring and evaluation (M&E) datasets and reports associated with baseline and endline evaluations for a selection of DFSAs conducted over the past 10 years for which USAID/FFP directly contracted these M&E activities. The FAQR team has been working closely with the USAID/BHA M&E team to identify and obtain these datasets and associated baseline, midterm, endline, and annual reports, as well as program proposals and other relevant materials. The FAQR team will seek to pool various M&E datasets and produce a final report to be delivered alongside the pooled dataset(s) with recommendations for analyses that could be conducted on these data to draw further conclusions related to USAID/BHA food assistance activities.

The second new data mining activity involves reviewing the published studies housed within the REFINE database to identify which of these studies use underlying data that are available to the public. For those studies for which data are not readily available, the FAQR team will reach out to the corresponding authors of articles to determine whether these data can be made available or will be in the near future. Similar to the previous data mining activity, the FAQR team will then seek to pool various datasets that we are able to obtain and produce a final report to be delivered alongside the pooled dataset(s) with recommendations for analyses that could be conducted on these data to draw further conclusions related to food assistance for nutrition research and programming.

E. Sierra Leone Field Study Reports

The final reports associated with the *Four Foods MAM Treatment Study in Sierra Leone* and associated sub-studies were completed in May and sent to USAID/BHA for review. These reports include *Comparative Cost-effectiveness of Four Supplementary Foods in Treating Moderate Acute Malnutrition in Children 6-59 Months in Sierra Leone: Section 1 – Effectiveness Study*; *Section 2 – Body Composition Sub-Study*; *Section 3 – Environmental Enteric Dysfunction Sub-Study*; and *Section 4 – Neurocognitive Sub-Study*. These draft reports represent the culmination of years of effort by FAQR team members and partners in Sierra Leone and throughout the world. In addition to these reports, the FAQR team has taken the lead on drafting several manuscripts to further share the results of the main study and sub-studies with other researchers and practitioners. Data collected as part of this field study are also being further analyzed as part of the FAQR field study data mining activity.

F. 13th Inter-Agency Harmonization Meeting

The FAQR team hosted the 13th Inter-Agency Harmonization Meeting of the International Inter-Agency Working Group for Specialized Nutritious Food Products (SNFPs) via Zoom from Tuesday, May 26 through Thursday, May 28. The virtual meeting was attended by representatives of each member agency, including USAID, WFP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and Action Against Hunger (ACF), as well as invited guests from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and USDA. Topics of discussion included: next generation product innovations and new SNFP formulations; an update on the Codex Alimentarius process; naturally occurring contaminants in humanitarian foods; food safety and quality supplier remote auditing; traceability; a review of the action points from the 12th Inter-Agency Harmonization Meeting in 2019; the *Global Action Plan on Child Wasting* and areas of overlap between product use and guidance; research coordination and the links between program and supply discussions; and next steps for collaboration. The working group members agreed to organize another virtual meeting in January 2021.

G. Evidence Summit II Announcement

The Future of Food Assistance for Nutrition: Evidence Summit II was officially announced in June and is scheduled to be held live online October 5-8. This event, intended to build upon the first Evidence Summit held in 2018, will bring together practitioners, policymakers, industry professionals, program funders, and researchers to share and discuss new evidence from the past two years, prioritize future evidence needs, and consider how we can collaborate to support more cost-effective programming aimed at improving nutrition in the context of food assistance interventions of all kinds. Comprised of presentations, panels, discussion breakouts, and working sessions, this Summit will promote collaboration among participants by including ample time for discussion, as well as working sessions to begin to lay out a plan for addressing gaps identified in the current evidence base and facilitate coordination to move the agenda of food assistance for nutrition forward.

Sessions are anticipated to include five plenaries exploring new research related to food assistance for nutrition; integrated and simplified approaches to treating and preventing wasting and stunting; implications of treatment and prevention malnutrition strategies for food assistance programming; protecting food assistance logistics in future pandemics and other global crises; and gaps in the current food assistance for nutrition evidence base. Concurrent panels are also planned on topics related to the intake of micronutrients and animal source foods for nutrition outcomes; packaging of food assistance products; alternative formulations of SNFPs; food safety and naturally occurring contaminants in food aid products; supply chains and traceability; and non-food interventions. In addition, special sessions related to new tools and resources and emerging evidence, an online poster session, and a keynote address are being organized.

H. ASN Nutrition 2020 Posters

FAQR team members participated in and contributed posters to the ASN Nutrition 2020 Live Online conference held June 1-4. The posters included [Temporal Patterns in Linear and Ponderal Growth Velocity among Children 6-23 Months in Burkina Faso](#), which was created and presented by former Burkina Faso Field Research Director Ilana Cliffer and which detailed additional findings of the *Burkina Faso Prevention of Stunting and Wasting Field Study*, and [Integrating Cost-Effectiveness into Nutrition Programming Decisions of Specialized Nutritious Foods: An Evidence-Informed Interactive Tool,](#) which was created by Cost Specialist Ye Shen and presented a visual overview of FACET.

III. Plans for the Coming Quarter (July 2020-September 2020)

The matrix below highlights some of the key planned activities for the coming quarter:

A. Commodity Incident Reporting/Traceability

• Commodity Incident Reporting Business Process:
   o Continue to conduct key informant interviews and other research to help USAID/BHA map out the existing commodity incident reporting business process.
   o Begin to draft a report laying out the current commodity incident reporting process and highlighting any gaps or other issues identified during the research phase, including recommendations for how USAID/BHA can improve this process based on the key informant interviews and reviews of the incident reporting processes used by other humanitarian organizations and private sector partners.
• Traceability:
   o Support TraceAID working group.

B. Supply Chain Optimization

• Scenario Building and Analysis:
   o Improve global warehouse and inventory positioning model network by using more realistic warehouse data and adding new commodities to the supply chain operations in the scenario.
   o Continue to build scenario-based, stochastic planning algorithms to include emergency onset demand into the global warehouse network.
   o Extend the Eritrean port study by adding South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and Kenya to the inland distribution network.
• Tool Development:
   o Continue conversations with USAID/BHA related to developing a data visualization tool to add value to the model developed by the supply chain team.

C. Cost-Effectiveness

• Food Assistance Cost-Effectiveness Tool (FACET):
   o Develop promotional video with narration from USAID to debut at the Evidence Summit II.
   o Finalize visual outputs on the FACET interface.
   o Add a section to the FACET user manual to describe the interface's visual outputs and finalize the user manual for copyediting.
   o Work with USAID/BHA to schedule and determine the format of the FACET launch webinar and to plan training sessions to be conducted after the FACET launch.
   o Continue to develop demonstration case studies and training materials.

D. Data Mining

- FAQR Field Study Data Mining Activity:
    - Continue to refine research questions applied to existing data collected from FAQR field studies.
    - Complete analysis of field study data related to these research questions.
    - Begin drafting outlines of report(s) describing findings.
- BHA/M&E Data Mining Activity:
    - Create pooled dataset from BHA/M&E datasets.
    - Begin drafting final report recommending analyses of pooled dataset(s) and additional research.
- REFINE Data Mining Activity:
    - Reach out to researchers of studies included in REFINE database to determine public availability of data and/or obtain data.
    - Create pooled dataset from REFINE datasets.
    - Begin drafting final report recommending analyses of pooled dataset(s) and additional research.

E. Interagency Harmonization

- Domestic Interagency Technical Working Group on Food Assistance Quality:
    - Continue discussions with working group members on product specifications, packaging, food safety and quality assurance measures, and research.
    - Complete and submit sustainability report to document collaboration and achievements of working group to date and provide recommendations for sustaining efforts going forward.
- International Inter-Agency Working Group for SNFPs:
    - Continue discussions with working group members to share updates.
    - Continue holding monthly calls to encourage collaboration on priority areas related to programming, food safety and quality assurance, and traceability of specialized nutritious food products.
    - Continue discussion of secretariat transition with working group members.

F. Knowledge Sharing

- REFINE:
    - Disseminate quarterly Resource Review.
    - Update REFINE website with new resources on a monthly basis, and regularly tweet about those resources from REFINE Twitter account.
    - Continue sustainability planning for REFINE website.

- Communications:
  - Maintain and update FAQR website and Twitter account.
  - Share reports and information about events on FAQR website and Twitter.
  - Assist FAQR team members with report formatting and graphics.

- *The Future of Food Assistance for Nutrition: Evidence Summit II*:
  - Refine event agenda and finalize list of presenters.
  - Launch event website and registration via Accelevents.
  - Continue to promote the event on websites and through Twitter account, as well as through partner organizations.
  - Produce materials for event, including an updated resource book.

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Annex 1.
Overview of the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Phase III Activities
For more information on FAQR Phase III, please visit the [FAQR website](#).

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I. Background

The Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) provides the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and its partners with actionable recommendations on ways to improve nutrition among vulnerable people for whom the direct distribution of food aid can make a significant impact. FAQR Phase I recommendations were published in *Delivering Improved Nutrition: Recommendations for Changes to U.S. Food Aid Products and Programs*. This report led to FAQR Phase II's focus on reformulating fortified blended foods (FBFs), the inclusion of lipid-based products in BHA's commodity list, and testing new products under field conditions. A full summary of FAQR Phase II accomplishments is highlighted in the *Food Aid Quality Review Phase II Closeout Report*.

FAQR Phase III[1] focuses on generating links between research on food product formulation and recommendations on cost-effective programming and policy-level action among national and multilateral institutions engaged in food assistance. Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy is working closely with several domestic and international collaborators, including USAID, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and United Nations (UN) partners, all of whom are committed to strengthening the evidence base for the use of specialized nutritious foods (SNFs) for targeted nutrition goals. The work of FAQR Phase III is framed under three major topics related to food aid: **1) Products, 2) Programming,** and **3) Processes**.

Products

With a view to making actionable recommendations to USAID, Tufts is examining a number of priority issues, such as how food matrices ("the nutrient and non-nutrient components of foods and their molecular relationship to each other"[2]) affect bioavailability of nutrients and digestibility of products; the potential for thermal/non-thermal processing technologies to improve food matrices; potential roles for existing products which are rarely used today, as well as new products (which may include fortificant powders) and novel packaging technologies to improve resistance to infestation, shelf life, and efficiency of handling; dual-use products for emergency response; and completion of the data collection, analysis and reporting on field studies which assess the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of newly-formulated food products for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition in children.

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[1] Contract awarded to Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy for the period covering Feb. 1, 2016-Jan. 31, 2019 with two option years.
[2] Source: United States Department of Agriculture: National Agricultural Library (https://agclass.nal.usda.gov)

Programming

One important focus of FAQR field research and statistical modeling is the cost-effectiveness of various products used in operational settings. This includes strategy development for pre-positioned SNFPs, guidance on options for their use, elaboration of a strategy for responding to food needs in the initial stages of a sudden onset emergency, and dissemination of cost and cost-effectiveness calculation tools. FAQR is generating improved technical guidance, sharing details on research protocols used in testing new food aid products in the field, and making further progress in harmonizing product specifications among food aid donors.

Processes

FAQR Phase III provides recommendations to USAID on institutional and industry processes for capacity building, including the institutionalization and strengthening of interagency technical collaborations and mechanisms to ensure greater policy and product harmonization domestically and internationally. This work provides recommendations for enhanced supply chain oversight, establishes stronger and more user-friendly quality assurance feedback loops, and promotes food safety and quality standards which can also be applied to local and regional food procurement.

FAQR Phase III organizes its ongoing activities into the following workstreams:
(Additional information is available on the FAQR website)

A	Commodity Incident Reporting/Traceability
B	Supply Chain Optimization
C	Cost-Effectiveness
D	Research: Data Mining
E	Interagency Harmonization
F	Knowledge Sharing

Annex 2. Meetings and Events during the Period April 1, 2020-June 30, 2020

Select meetings include the following:

- **Option Year 2 Kickoff Meetings (April 1-2, 2020)**

  The FAQR team participated in a series of planning meetings related to Option Year 2 with representatives of USAID/FFP and partners. A full description of these meetings can be found in Section II above.

- **13th Inter-Agency Harmonization Meeting (May 26-28, 2020)**

  The FAQR team helped to host the 13th Inter-Agency Harmonization Meeting, which consisted of a series of three half-day calls with working group members and invited guests. A full description of this meeting can be found in Section II above.
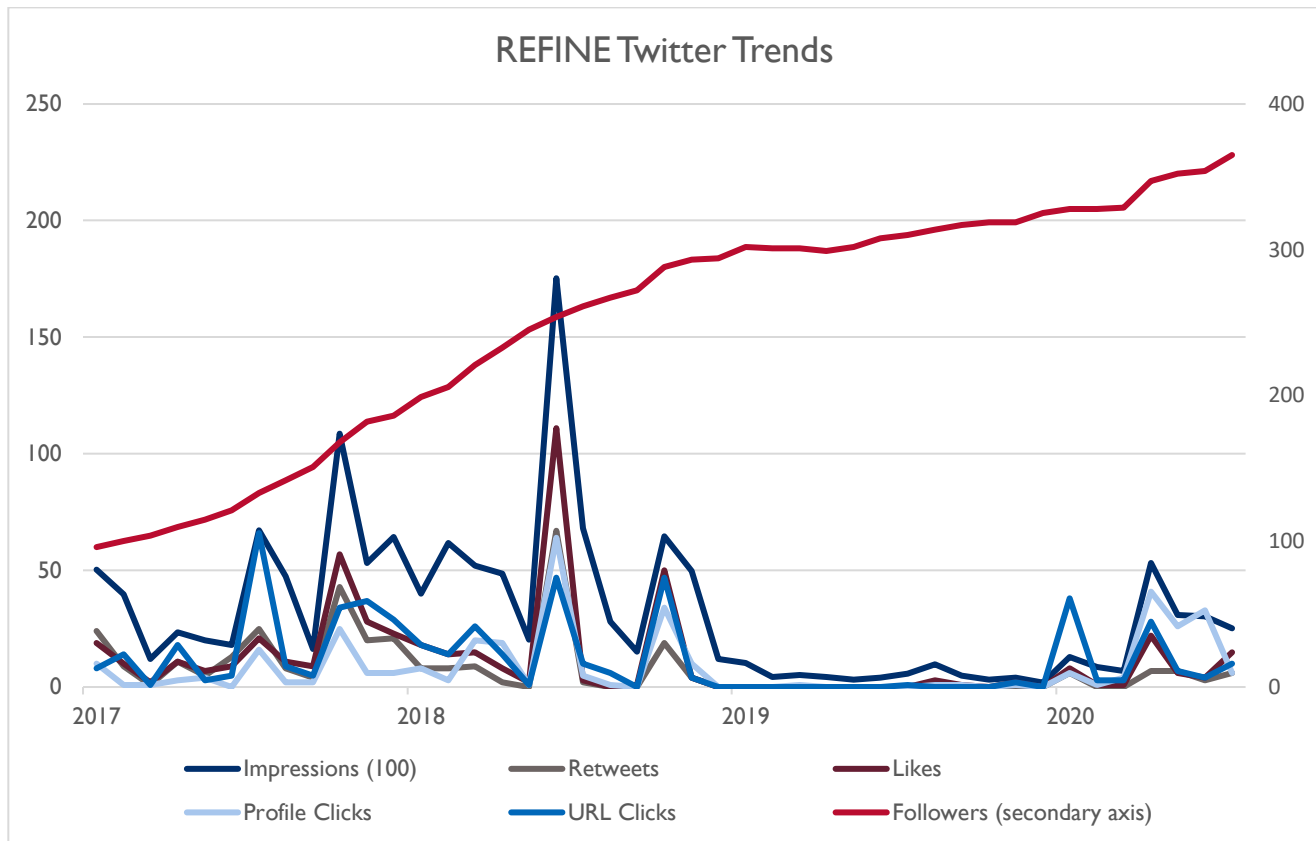
- **ASN Nutrition 2020 (June 1-4, 2020)**

  FAQR team members participated in and prepared posters for the American Society for Nutrition's 2020 conference. A full description of the posters can be found in Section II above.

Annex 3. REFINE Twitter and Website Analytics

@REFINEnutrition Twitter Analytics (January 2017- June 2020)

Total Followers: 359

www.refinenutrition.org Google Analytics (FY2020 Q3):

	Total Number of Sessions[3]	New Sessions[4]	Average Pages Per Session[5]
April 2020	451	344	2.13
May 2020	215	169	3.56
June 2020	199	151	4.71
TOTAL	865	664	3.47
January-March 2020	841	671	2.02

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[3] "Session:" a user's interaction on the site from the time a user logs onto the site until they are inactive on the site for 30 minutes.
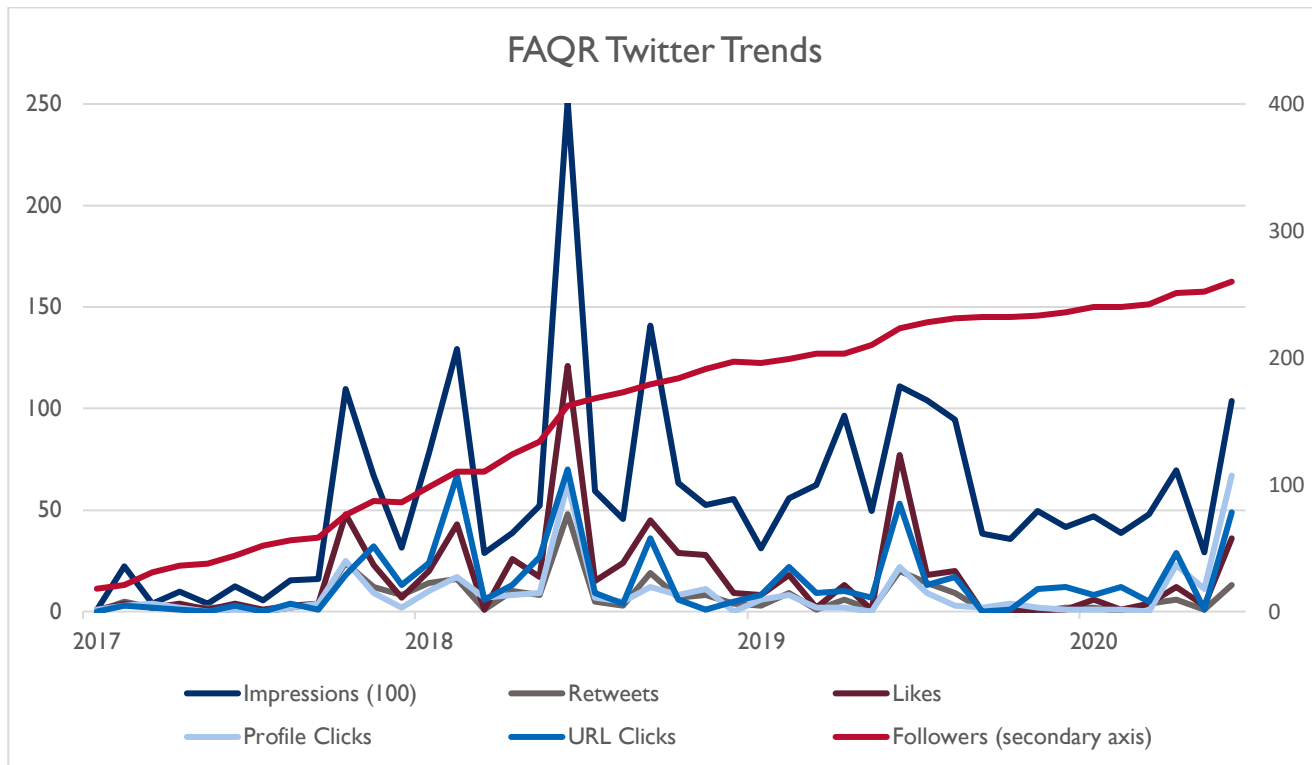[4] "New Session:" a user's first visit to the site during that period of Google analytics.
[5] "Average Pages Per Session:" average number of pages visited by a user during one session.

Annex 4. FAQR Twitter and Website Analytics

@foodaidquality Twitter Analytics (January 2017- June 2020):

Total Followers: 260

FAQR Twitter Trends

Legend: Impressions (100), Retweets, Likes, Profile Clicks, URL Clicks, Followers (secondary axis)

www.foodaidquality.org Google Analytics (FY2020 Q3):

	Total Number of Sessions[6]	New Sessions[7]	Average Pages Per Session[8]
April 2020	459	277	2.95
May 2020	320	250	1.99
June 2020	383	204	2.64
TOTAL	1,162	731	2.53
January-March 2020	1,252	983	1.77
January 2017- June 2020	12,494	8,355	2.51

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[6] "Session:" a user's interaction on the site from the time a user logs onto the site until they are inactive on the site for 30 minutes

[7] "New Session:" a user's first visit to the site during that period of Google analytics

[8] "Average Pages Per Session:" average number of pages visited by a user during one session