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## **New Transparency Research Reveals What Consumers Want From Food and Ag to Earn Their Trust**

### **The Public Holds Food Companies Most Responsible for Transparency**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Tues., Nov. 17, 2015 – A new study proves that improved transparency increases consumer trust in food. The Center for Food Integrity’s (CFI) latest research, *A Clear View of Transparency and How it Builds Consumer Trust*, provides proof that transparency builds trust and identifies the most effective practices for building consumer trust.

“Transparency works,” said Charlie Arnot, CFI CEO. “We have statistical data to show that increasing transparency in farming, food production and processing will increase consumer trust.”

The 2015 research focused on areas that are important to consumers:

- Impact of Food on Health
- Food Safety
- Impact on the Environment
- Human/Labor Rights
- Treatment of Animals Raised for Food
- Business Ethics in Food Production

An online survey of 2,000 people explored which attributes are most important to consumers when it comes to trust-building transparency – policies, practices, performance or verification.

“The survey shows an organization’s practices are most important in five of the six topic areas,” said Arnot. “Consumers want to know more about what you are actually doing in these important areas. They also want the ability to engage by asking questions through the company website and they expect straight answers in a timely fashion.”

The practices include such things as the information provided on product labels, offering engagement opportunities through company websites, making results of third-party audits publicly available and protecting whistleblowers.

“Practices are a demonstration of a company’s values in action, and our research shows shared values are the foundation for building trust.” said Arnot. “Third-party audits of animal well-being and food safety practices are the minimum level of investment for transparency, but because it’s somebody from outside an organization reporting on its performance, a third-party audit doesn’t reflect the organization’s values and therefore is not as powerful in demonstrating transparency.”

Survey respondents were also asked who they hold most responsible for transparency – food companies, farmers, grocery stores or restaurants.

“This study clearly shows consumers hold food companies most responsible for demonstrating transparency in all six areas,” Arnot said. “Even when it comes to on-farm animal care, an area one might assume people look to farmers to provide, consumers told us food companies are most responsible. This could lead to food companies requiring more information from their suppliers and reporting more information to consumers when it comes to the treatment of animals raised for food.”

CFI has explored the concept of increased transparency for three years and is developing a transparency index to give companies and organizations the tools needed to effectively demonstrate transparency. A beta test of the index was recently conducted by Campbell’s Soup, ConAgra, Hershey, Kroger, Smithfield Foods, Tyson Foods, DuPont, Monsanto and Phibro Animal Health.

“We believe in being more transparent because people want assurance their food is produced responsibly,” said Dr. Christine Daugherty, vice president, sustainable food production for Tyson Foods, Inc. “The research by CFI helps us understand what consumers expect and want to know.”

The beta test results revealed strengths as well as opportunities for companies to better provide information important to meeting consumer expectations on transparency.

Companies received high marks for providing information about the impact of food on health, food safety, environment and business ethics via company websites. Areas of opportunity include companies’ performance in responding to consumer inquiries and providing information about how they have verified their practices.

The index will continue to be refined and specific criteria developed for food companies, farmers, restaurants and retailers.

Consumers in the study were also asked if the U.S. food system is headed in the right direction or down the wrong track – the fourth year the question has been posed. Forty percent said “right direction” – a slight dip from a year ago but up significantly from 30 percent in 2012. Those who believe the food system is on the wrong track has dropped by 11 percent in the last two years.

Survey participants were also asked to rate their level of concern on a list of 12 life issues including broad areas such as healthcare costs, unemployment, personal financial situation, global warming/climate change, food safety and food availability. Two of the top five were food related. Nearly three-quarters rated healthcare costs as the top concern, followed by the rising cost of food, the economy, keeping healthy food affordable and rising energy costs. Consumers are generally less concerned about most of the top issues than they were a year ago.

CFI’s annual survey is intended to help the food system better understand what it takes to earn and maintain consumer trust. Providing insight that increases consumer engagement will help consumers make informed decisions and help align food system practices with consumer values and expectations.

The 2015 CFI research report offers highlights of the research and is available at [www.foodintegrity.org](http://www.foodintegrity.org). CFI members have access to the full results, as well as guidance for applying the research. Those interested in learning more can contact CFI at [learnmore@foodintegrity.org](mailto:learnmore@foodintegrity.org) or (816) 880-5360.