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Most Consumers Say They Lack Access to Information about Food How Can the Food Industry Satisfy Their Appetites?

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Sept. 27, 2016 – More of today’s consumers crave information about food and how it’s produced – but the latest consumer trust research from The Center for Food Integrity (CFI) shows that most are hungry for more.

Only 28 percent – or slightly more than one in four – strongly agree with the following statement: “I have access to all the information I want about where my food comes from, how it’s produced and its safety.”

“Having posed this question for eight straight years, we see that food system efforts are paying off as the long-term trend shows more consumers agreeing, but the overall number must rise if the goal is to earn consumer trust,” according to Charlie Arnot, CEO of CFI. “The industry still has work to do.”

“Consumers have a right to know what is in their food and where it comes from,” said Deb Arcoleo, director of product transparency at The Hershey Company. Hershey is one company that has stepped up its transparency efforts, including being the first company to begin executing the new SmartLabel™ program last year. “What’s clear from CFI’s research is that transparency is the key to earning trust. It’s about creating an authentic dialogue and meeting consumers where they are.”

The results show that consumers want transparency in very specific areas, including impact of food on health, food safety, animal well-being and the environment.

So how do the food and agriculture industries satisfy their appetites?

Consumers are crowdsourcing knowledge and relying on various sources, said Arnot, so there really is no “one-size-fits-all” approach. Using a variety of ways to reach consumers consistently and for the long haul is important – through websites, social media, promotional campaigns and videos. The key is to make the information accessible and easy to understand, and to actively engage.

“If a consumer has to click several times to get to important information on your website, for example, if it’s too complex or if you fail to respond to consumer questions quickly, you’re falling short of their expectations.”

In other words, if consumers can't easily access the information they're looking for in language they understand, it may appear that either you don't have a positive story to tell or you have something to hide.

"They simply want balanced, credible information so they can decide for themselves," Arnot said.

Specifically, consumers want to see concrete examples of "practices," which the research shows are most important to demonstrating transparency. Practices are a reflection of internal motivation, demonstrating values in action, and [CFI's trust model](#) shows that demonstrating shared values is the foundation for building trust.

Consumers also want to know about challenges and corresponding efforts for continuous improvement. "They want the good, the bad and the ugly, and to know that you're working to resolve issues important to them," said Arnot.

The research shows that highlighting third-party verification is important, particularly when it comes to animal well-being and food safety. "Consumers feel a higher level of comfort knowing that a credible, objective third-party confirms your practices," said Arnot.

To satisfy consumers' growing appetites, examine your communication and engagement strategies to determine if they are consistent, values-based and honest, and promote timely engagement. It's an approach that has a powerful influence on your ability to earn consumer trust.

For more detailed information on transparency and trust, download CFI's latest research: "[A Clear View of Transparency and How it Builds Trust](#)." To learn how your organization can apply CFI's research, contact CFI at learnmore@foodintegrity.org.

The Center for Food Integrity is a not-for-profit organization that helps today's food system earn consumer trust. Our members and project partners, who represent the diversity of the food system, are committed to providing accurate information and working together to address important issues in food and agriculture. The Center does not lobby or advocate for individual companies or brands. For more information, visit www.foodintegrity.org.