

Consumers Trust Food Makers, Grocers More than Officials

By ACSH Staff — March 28, 2016



[1] Grocery shopping via

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We at the Council, and other science-based organizations, have been trying for years to increase the public's acceptance of accurate, scientific information about their food. A new survey, though, seems to indicate that we're not successful enough.

Sullivan Higdon & Sink is a marketing agency that specializes in food- and agriculture-related issues that are important to the food industry. It recently conducted, then released, an email [survey](#) [3] of over 2,000 Americans who were 18 or older and had primary or shared responsibility for food decisions in their households. This is SHS's third such survey — others were done in 2012 and 2014, thus allowing the firm to track changes in consumer attitudes over the past four years.

The people who were most likely to believe that learning about food production processes is very or somewhat important were those who considered themselves "organic" shoppers (86 percent), followed by those who labeled themselves good cooks (73 percent). Those who were least likely to consider such learning important were those who said they were bad cooks (48 percent).

In response to a query about which sources of information consumers found most trustworthy for food production information, the leading source was friends and family — reaching 68 percent of those responding; this represents a 2 percent increase over 2012.

Farmers/ranchers were the second most-trusted sources — 60 percent found them most trustworthy in 2016, compared to 53 percent in 2012. Surprisingly, trust in the medical community (57 to 54 percent), USDA (59 to 52 percent), FDA (57 to 60 percent) and the academic community (51 to 44 percent), all of which would be expected to present unbiased, science-based information, decreased over the four-year comparison period.

Conversely, trust in food companies/manufacturers, and bloggers/social media, increased over that period — by 17 and 15 percent respectively. Even trust in information from political leaders/government had increased — from 8 to 19 percent (though not an overwhelming vote of confidence!).

As one might expect, the sources most trusted differed across generations and consumer type. For example, those under the age of 45 trusted blogs/social media much more than did the over-45 group.

And, a query about the importance of various food label claims elicited the information that 69 percent of respondents considered "fresh" to be extremely or very important. Other label claims (e.g., natural, non-GMO, no artificial sweeteners) were much less likely to reach that level of importance; all were under 50 percent.

While this collection of consumer attitudes is likely to be informative for those in various aspects of the food industry, it is also a little depressing from the point of view of those who are interested in having consumer decisions based on science. One positive outcome may be that the information about which consumers trust will allow more precise targeting of those populations that should be encouraged to look to more scientific sources for their information.

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