

Perception Is Everything

Lindsey Jahn, Associate Editor



More Americans are concerned about where their food comes from and how it is produced. As more shoppers search for food free from chemicals and lengthy, hard-to-pronounce ingredients, it is more important than ever for food companies to carefully consider how they market their products and communicate with shoppers.

A recent survey by the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFR) revealed Americans' perceptions on food production. According to the findings, Americans believe that food production is improving, but many still hold misperceptions about how food is grown and processed. In fact, 27 percent of Americans surveyed indicated that they often are confused about the food they are purchasing.

From where does this confusion stem? Myriad labels have taken over the grocery aisles, with shoppers being bombarded with packages featuring claims like “all natural” and “non-GMO.” Combine that with lengthy ingredient lists featuring unpronounceable words and there is a recipe for confusion.

When it comes to fresh produce, the confusion can deepen even further. For example, when it comes to eggs, consumers often have questions such as, “What is the difference between cage-free and free-range?” And at the meat counter, shoppers may wonder how the food was raised. Were hormones used? What about antibiotics?

The USFR survey indicates that 59 percent of Americans would like to know more about how food is grown and raised, but don't feel they have the time or money to prioritize this information when grocery shopping. Many food producers have realized this concern and have taken the initiative to begin communication on their end.

Commercials and social media have become common ways food companies

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communicate with their customers, and some businesses are using these tools to create a more transparent dialogue with their audience. For instance, [Perdue Farms](#) [1] last year launched a series of commercials with the theme, “We believe in a better chicken.”

The commercials take a “documentary-style approach,” explaining to viewers how Perdue Farms raises its chickens through USDA process-verified programs, which allow companies to make marketing claims in areas such as raising and feeding animals. Such claims made in the Perdue Farms ads include that chickens are fed an all-vegetarian diet and are always raised cage-free.

Perdue Farms chief marketing officer John Bartelme says that is important for consumers that food companies be transparent. “They want to know a lot more about the company behind the product,” he says.

The Perdue ad campaign reaches beyond commercials into print and digital ads, as well as social media like Facebook. Such campaigns are evidence that the food industry realizes the importance of proactively communicating with consumers, and that is key to improving consumer understanding of the food production process as well as the overall perception of the industry.

Whether consumers decide to purchase a particular company’s products will often depend on the communication shoppers receive from the company. Because of this, it is more important than ever for food businesses to take a proactive approach, initiating positive, honest communication with their customers.

How has your company incorporated transparency into its communication processes? Let me know at lindsey.jahn@advantagemedia.com [2].

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[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/27/business/media/27adco.html>

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