Consumer Trends: Misconceptions About Food Production

CHESTERFIELD, Mo. (PRNewswire) — Today, the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) released findings of a new survey about Americans' perceptions on food production. The survey, released in conjunction with The Food Dialogues[SM]: New York, revealed Americans increasingly believe food production is heading in the right direction. However, the survey also found Americans still have widespread misperceptions about how food is grown and raised.

According to the survey, 53 percent of Americans believe food production is heading in the right direction — an increase from the 48 percent who believed the same in a benchmark 2011 USFRA survey. Yet the survey reveals a gap between how Americans feel about their food and what they really know about their food. More than one in four Americans (27 percent) admit they often are confused about the food they are purchasing. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) do not believe that 95 percent of all U.S. farms are in fact family-owned[1]. While two-thirds of Americans (66 percent) correctly believe that pesticide use decreased from 956 million pounds in 1999 to 877 million pounds in 2007[2].

"I am encouraged to see that Americans are becoming more confident in our food supply and that they believe farmers and ranchers are improving," said Bob Stallman, chairman of USFRA and president of the American Farm Bureau Federation. "We are doing something right, but we still have a long way to go in talking with American families and consumers, and answering their questions about food. That's why America's farmers and ranchers are continuing a dialogue with consumers."

Factors When Making Decisions About Food
In addition to perceptions on food production, the survey also revealed what and who influences American consumers purchasing decisions, whether at the grocery store or while dining out:

Americans Admit Confusion about Food Purchases

- More than one in four Americans admit they are often confused about the food they are purchasing (27 percent).
- Three in five 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 (59 percent).
- Young adults (18-29 years old) are more likely than any other age group to say they are often confused about food purchases (38 percent).

Cost and Quality Top Factors for Purchase Decisions at the Grocery Store and While

Dining Out

- Americans are more likely to report that how food is grown and raised will impact their purchase decision in the grocery store than impact their decisions when dining out (86 percent versus 76 percent).
- When it comes to purchasing groceries, Americans prioritize cost (47 percent), quality (43 percent) and healthiness/nutrition (21 percent).
- Dads are 16 points more likely than moms to prioritize quality (53 percent versus 37 percent), while moms are more likely than dads to prioritize healthiness/nutrition (31 percent versus 20 percent).
- When it comes to dining out, Americans prioritize quality (48 percent), cost (42 percent) and taste (38 percent).

Doctors and Spouses Influence Food Choices

- While Americans want to learn about organic farming and ranching (27 percent), nearly all report that it's most important there are healthy choices available, even if they're not organic or local options (91 percent).
- While doctors and nutritionists are Americans' top influencers regarding their opinion of food overall (73 percent), only 31 percent report their doctor influences their decision to buy types of foods based on how they are grown and raised.
- However, when given a broad list of options ranging from their doctor to their grocer, Americans said they are more likely to be influenced by their spouse or partner when making purchasing decisions (51 percent).
- One in 10 Americans says they'd rather not pay attention to how their food is grown and raised, and instead just enjoy it, while 40 percent report they do not pay attention.

Consumers, Farmers and Ranchers Share Insights on Food Knowledge and Information Sharing

The survey also asked consumers, farmers and ranchers about their knowledge on food and desire to either receive or share information:

Cost and Income Contribute to Food Knowledge

- While only one in five Americans overall strongly agree that knowing a lot about food has become a social status symbol (21 percent), 30 percent of Americans in lower to middle income households (<$50k) say food knowledge is a status symbol.
- Lower income households are particularly likely to say they would like to know more, but don't have the time or money to do so (68 percent among HHI < $30K).

Farmers and Ranchers Want Dialogue with Consumers

- The survey found that 51 percent of farmers and ranchers would like to see more emphasis on communication with consumers and customers, and half of Americans (50 percent) think farmers and ranchers are missing from the media conversation around food these days.
- Three-quarters of farmers and ranchers believe that the average consumer has very little to no knowledge about food production in general in the United States (76 percent), and only 47 percent of Americans have visited a farm or ranch in the past year.
- In fact, nearly three out of five farmers and ranchers believe consumers have an inaccurate perception of modern farming and ranching (59 percent).
- Americans overall (84 percent) believe that farmers and ranchers in America are committed to improving how food is grown and raised.

The survey findings were released by USFRA in conjunction with The Food Dialogues: New York. This event is taking place on November 15 at The TimesCenter in Midtown Manhattan from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time. This event will also stream live online at www.fooddialogues.com [1] . For additional information about the surveys released today, USFRA and The Food Dialogues: New York, visit www.fooddialogues.com [1], or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/USFarmersandRanchers [2]. Follow USFRA on Twitter @USFRA using #FoodD.

About the Survey Methodology

Ketchum Global Research & Analytics designed and analyzed a phone survey of 1,250 consumers nationwide, with an oversample of 236 consumers in the New York City designated media area. The survey was fielded October 22nd through 28th 2012 by Braun Research Inc. and has a margin of error of +/-2.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Additionally, Ketchum Global Research & Analytics designed and analyzed a phone survey of 501 farmers and ranchers nationwide, including 36 who opted in for participation through the USFRA site. The survey was fielded October 23 rd through 29th, 2012 by Braun Research Inc. and has a margin of error of +/-4.4% at the 95 percent confidence level.

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