

Consumer Trends: Americans Consider Health, Sustainability When Shopping for Food

BOSTON (PRNewswire) — Americans are willing to sacrifice variety and dollars in order to eat more consciously, according to the [2014 Cone Communications Food Issues Trend Tracker](#) [1]. Although family satisfaction reigns supreme (97%), shoppers consider health and nutrition (93%) and sustainability (77%) important factors when deciding what to buy.

A number of specific health and sustainability issues rose to the top as most important when hitting the grocery aisles, including food safety (93%) and nutritional value (92%). But at least two-thirds of Americans prioritize a variety of other issues as significant factors in deciding what makes it into the shopping cart, including:

- 74% locally produced
- 69% sustainable packaging
- 69% animal welfare
- 67% non-GMO
- 65% protects and renews natural resources

Consumers Are Willing to Pay More to Eat Local

Nearly nine-out-of-10 Americans (89%) consider where a product is produced when making food purchasing decisions, and two-thirds (66%) would pay more for food that is produced close to home. Although locally sourced food provides environmental, economic and health benefits, consumers state supporting local businesses (64%) is the primary reason for buying local. Other motives include:

- 39% believes the taste and quality of the product is better
- 31% has more trust in the standards for locally produced foods than other regions or countries
- 28% believes the products are healthier
- 26% thinks it's better for the environment when food doesn't travel as far

Americans' convictions are so strong in their commitment to purchase locally produced foods that nearly half (46%) would sacrifice variety to do so.

"As the local food movement goes mainstream, it's not just about the 'mom and pop shop' or farm stand. Even large companies have a role to talk about where they source food and the respective impacts on local communities," says [Alison DaSilva](#) [2], executive vice president, [Cone Communications](#) [3]. "Using local as a broader value proposition helps companies of all sizes talk about the social and

environmental benefits of responsible sourcing."

Americans Seek Sustainable Food Options to Help the World and Themselves

More than eight-in-10 Americans (83%) consider sustainability when buying food and would like to see more options available that protect the environment (81%). Their motivations span from the altruistic to the self-serving, including:

- 43% of Americans want to do their part to protect and preserve the environment
- 39% believes the quality/taste is better
- 38% wants to show their support for companies who are doing the right thing
- 27% believes the products are healthier

Consumers look to companies to help them understand the broader implications of their food purchasing decisions, with nearly three-quarters (74%) stating they want companies to do a better job explaining how their purchases impact the environment.

"Although consumers are shopping with an eye toward sustainability, they are equally motivated by personal needs and a desire to improve society," says [Liz Gorman](#) [4], senior vice president – [Sustainable Business Practices](#) [5], Cone Communications. "Messaging must be two-fold. Companies must clearly demonstrate the impact consumers' purchases are having on the environment, while reinforcing health, taste and quality attributes."

GMO Confusion Persists - Consumers Look to Companies for Information

Eighty-four percent of consumers want companies to disclose information and educate them on GMOs in products because more than half (55%) say they don't know whether GMOs are good or bad for them. Despite this confusion, three-in-five Americans are on the lookout for non-GMO-labeled foods when shopping. Reasons include:

- 39% believes non-GMO foods are healthier
- 32% worries about the effects on the environment
- 24% questions the ethics behind the use of GMOs

"The GMO debate is dominating media and social channels," says Gorman.

"Consumers are confused and the onus is on companies to help them understand GMOs and be transparent about if and how GMOs are used in the products they are buying."

Americans Rely on Friends and Family in Making Food Purchase Decisions

It's no surprise Americans are most influenced by those closest to them when it comes to food purchasing decisions, with spouse or partner (45%), friends (27%) and kids (19%) topping the list. Yet, food companies and healthcare providers (16%) are close behind as the next most influential sources of information. Americans are not only choosing who they listen to but also when they access information, with 43 percent of consumers accessing information online throughout the day.

"Today's food and beverage companies have an opportunity to connect with consumers on the issues they care about, with the people they trust, in the channels where they are," DaSilva says. "The days of empty claims and blanketed approaches to marketing to consumers are over; consumers want to know their favorite food brands understand their unique needs and what matters most to them."

Women and Millennials Take a Stance on Food Issues

There's no question women are the most thoughtful and empathetic consumers on a variety of health and sustainability issues, and although both men and women are shopping with sustainability and local in mind, women are more likely to do so for selfless reasons:

- Women are more likely to consider sustainability because they want to do their part to protect the environment (50% vs. 36% of men), while men are more motivated by taste and quality (41% vs. 38% of women).
- Women are more passionate about local food options. They are more likely to pay more (73% vs. 60% of men) and will sacrifice variety to eat local (52% vs. 38% of men).

Millennials, ages 18-24, have a somewhat different take on the most important health and sustainability food issues. Beyond food safety and nutrition, other priorities include:

- 72% protect and renew natural resources (vs. 65% U.S. average)
- 66% organic (vs. 52% U.S. average)
- 66% supports a social issue and/or charity (vs. 49% U.S. average)
- 61% locally produced (vs. 74% U.S. average)

"Grocery shopping decisions no longer hinge on price and taste alone. Consumers worry about where their food is made, what's in it and how it affects the environment," says DaSilva. "The stakes are higher for companies to not only provide food options that meet consumers' modern needs but communicate attributes in a clear and transparent way."

About the Research

The 2014 Cone Communications Food Issues Trend Tracker presents the findings of an online survey conducted February 3-6, 2014 by ORC International among a demographically representative sample of 1,003 adults, comprising 500 men and

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503 women 18 years of age and older. The margin of error associated with a sample of this size is +/- 3% at a 95% level of confidence. Some figures may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

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