Messages that resonate

By ROD SMITH

In its fourth annual look at consumer trust in the U.S. food system, the Center for Food Integrity (CFI) has identified the “messages that matter” to consumers.

The latest study targeted “early-adoption consumers” — who make up about 13% of the U.S. population — because of their influence on other people, CFI executive director Terry Fleck said. Although these consumers are more concerned about food issues, they are information seekers who are willing to consider credible information from diverse sources, he said.

They were “tested” on their attitudes and behaviors regarding four specific food issues — farm/animal welfare, food nutrition, food safety and food production technology — to determine the messages and programs that would be most successful in changing their views, he said.

Fleck emphasized that the center’s research shows that these messages and programs must come from “platforms of shared values” with consumers.

Messages that align an individual producer or organization with the ethical expectations and values of consumers are three to five times more effective in building consumer confidence and trust in today’s food system, he said.

Once consumers realize that agriculture and food producers share their values, they will be more open to accommodating additional information supported by economics and science (Figure), he said.

CFI provided the following example of such messaging on the animal welfare issue:

“Creating a values-based foundation: “The care and well-being of animals is very important to me, and my family and I have an ethical obligation to make sure that the animals on our farm are treated well.”

Providing scientific support: “That’s why we are following the latest technology on our farm to house our animals in a climate-controlled environment in which they are provided with the inclusion of live yeast.

Key Points

- Study targets consumers who influence other consumers.
- Messages must be based on more effective in building consumer trust in the food system, he said.
- Effective messages reported for animal welfare plus food nutrition, safety and technology.

Communicating a commitment to key consumer values — compassion, fairness, truth, respect and responsibility — establishes the foundation on which other messages can be communicated to build trust in the food system, he said.

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