TRANSPARENCY IN FOOD LABELING

72% of consumers consider transparency — being able to tell what is in their food and how it was made — to be important or extremely important. While product labeling is regulated by national authorities, there are many topics that are a source of consumer confusion and could benefit from greater focus by food manufacturers.

“Chemophobia” or the fear of chemicals refers to an exaggerated or irrational distrust of certain foods, including food additives. According to Michigan State University, 42% of consumers say concerns or uncertainties about chemical additives affect their food purchasing decisions while 36% say not being able to pronounce an ingredient affects their food purchasing decisions.

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Food and beverage companies can help combat chemophobia by talking more about the components of their products and explaining why certain ingredients — including food additives — are not only needed but desired.

Label Claims are increasingly used by food companies to highlight the presence or absence of certain ingredients. As a result, claims such as “clean,” “healthy” and “natural” permeate the market and can confuse consumers by suggesting products that lack these labels are unhealthy. According to the International Food Information Council, 39% of consumers regularly buy products labeled as “natural” while 27% regularly buy products labeled as containing “clean ingredients.”

However, as food manufacturers well know, the presence or absence of food additives does not make a product any more or less “natural”, “artificial”, healthy, or “clean.”

Manufacturers should consider the claims they are making and how these could impact consumer perceptions around food additives which have been thoroughly vetted by regulatory agencies and determined to be safe.

Sustainability continues to be a topic of great interest for consumers, with 83% of U.S. consumers taking environmental impact into account when purchasing food products and 64% saying they would switch from a brand they usually buy to another that provides more in-depth product information, such as brand social responsibility.

Although food additives are not at the forefront of most sustainability discussions, they are a crucial element to reducing food waste based on their ability to extend the shelf life of products and the fact that many additives are produced as byproducts of other processes that would otherwise result in wasted material.

Source
1 FMI. (2022). Transparency, Health & Well-being in an Evolving Omnichannel World
3 IFIC. (May 2022). 2022 food and Health Survey.