

Closing the Consumer Trust Gap Through Oil and Protein Choice

According to recent research, consumers' trust in a food brand is second only to taste in influencing their purchase decisions; ahead of factors such as price and clean labels¹. Although consumers want to trust the brand names behind the food they provide to their families, there appears to be a gap in that delivery. Only 52% of consumers say they trust the food industry and only 42% say they trust large food brands to do the right thing².

As marketers, we focus heavily on building and maintaining this trust through heightened transparency. According to Hartman Group, reducing environmental impact is the most important factor in building consumer trust (40% of consumers), followed closely by which ingredients a company uses (34%) and where it sources those ingredients (31%)³. Consumers want to recognize the ingredients, know where their food comes from and how it's made. Unfortunately, the transparency box is often checked with a blanket avoidance of GMOs and allergens or a shortened ingredient list. We encourage food brands to take a more engaged look at transparency to ensure they build consumer trust.

Selecting oils and proteins that minimize environmental impact

Production relative to necessary inputs is an excellent way to measure crop sustainability. Among protein sources, soybeans are the most efficient source of protein production with 350 pounds of edible protein per acre, approximately 75% more than corn and other legumes, and 600% more than meat⁴. Similarly, soybeans require 62% less water than eggs, 72% less than nuts and 84% less than beef per tonne of production. Further, only 10% of soybean acreage requires irrigation, compared to as much as 27% for dry beans and 37% for peanuts⁴.

From an oil output perspective, canola at 454 tonnes per acre, sunflower at 202, and soybean at 139 are the most efficient sources of oil production⁵; though it's important to note that sunflower and canola's limited geographic footprint add significant transportation mileage to their use. As soybean acreage outnumbers other oilseeds by 4 to 1, the maximum distance from point of production to use for soybeans is approximately 1260 miles, or 25% less than canola or sunflowers⁶.

The recognition of soil health is a core facet of sustainability that is quickly gaining traction with food companies. Conservation tillage practices like cover cropping and no or low tillage help protect the soil's ability to retain water, positively impact water and soil health, and reduce greenhouse gases⁷. On a percentage basis, canola, corn and soybeans are leaders in acres under conservation tillage; though when total acreage is considered, soybeans are the clear leader in conservation tillage use⁸.

Aligning food businesses with U.S. farmers helps build trust and transparency

Reinforcing your brands' connection to agriculture may help your company build trust with consumers. While consumer trust in food and agriculture has been on the rise in the past few years, trust in agriculture needs to be

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established first. Seventy percent of people who work in the agriculture industry indicate a high level of trust in the food they consume compared to 60% of consumers with parents that are connected to ag and 50% who are not connected to ag⁹. In short, the more consumers know about the agriculture practices behind a brand, the greater their knowledge about the food they consume, and in turn the greater trust they'll have in the brand.

Aligning with U.S. farmers is also good for business. Seventy-three percent of consumers believe it's important to support domestic agriculture by buying products grown by U.S. farmers and 63% say they'd be more likely to purchase products labeled as "100% U.S. Grown."¹⁰ More specifically, consumers show strong support for U.S. grown soy, as 48% of consumers recognize U.S. grown soy as a sustainable crop and 51% are more likely to purchase products made with soybean oil from U.S. grown soybeans if made aware of that fact¹⁰.

Take Action

Plant-Based Food Facts is dedicated to helping packaged foods and foodservice companies sustainably meet the demands of a growing food marketplace while supporting U.S. soybean growers. To learn more about the sustainability of various oilseeds and protein sources and what U.S. grown soybean oil and protein can do for your business, contact David Miller at info@plantbasedfoodfacts.com.

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1. Int'l Food Information Council, "2019 Food & Health Survey" page 13,
 2. "Trust in Food", FoodThink from Signal Theory 2018, page 5
 3. Hartman Group, Sustainability 2019: Beyond Business as Usual report
 4. USDA; FAO/WHO/UNICEF Protein Advisory Group 2004
 5. Calculation from known oil content of crops and production stats from USDA Quickstats Database.
 6. Qualiso.com; calculations based on counties with production to furthest
 7. UW Extension, Fox Demo Farms.
 8. USDA NCRS
 9. "Trust in Food", FoodThink from Signal Theory 2018, page 23 and 25
 10. USB Consumer Attitudes and Nutrition Study 2019,