

Fine-Tuning Food Safety

Home-delivered fresh meal kits, locally grown foods, a move toward minimal processing, and restaurant hydroponic gardens are among the emerging industry trends that present food safety challenges. Moreover, consumers have redefined food safety to include free from potentially hazardous residues (e.g., antibiotics, hormones, and artificial chemicals) as well as information on production, ingredients, and sourcing.

Savvy food processors like Dean Foods, for example, are highlighting food safety expertise as part of their marketing messaging. Dean Foods' *DairyPure* milk achieved first-year sales of \$1.2 billion, per IRI, driven by a "Five-Point Purity Promise" that guarantees no artificial growth hormones/antibiotics; continuous purity testing; cows that were fed a healthy diet; and milk that was cold chain monitored/shipped fresh.

There's a new hierarchy of safety. Last year, confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply dipped slightly; more than a third (35%) of Millennials and nearly a quarter (24%) of Baby Boomers said they were not confident about it, according to the International Food Information Council's (IFIC) *2017 Food & Health Survey*. IFIC also reports that four in 10 consumers changed their eating habits due to a food safety issue.

Three-quarters of consumers cite foodborne illness as posing the greatest food safety risk, followed by residues, cited by 68%; product tampering, 62%; terrorists, 57%; antibiotics/hormones, 56%; food from China, 51%; biotechnology/GMOs, 45%; and eating food past its use by date, 39%, according to the Food Marketing Institute's (FMI) *U.S. Grocery Shoppers Trends* report.

Foodborne illness is a frequent occurrence; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Burden of Foodborne Illness Findings* estimate that 48 million Americans experience it each year. In 2016, norovirus, *Salmonella*, *Clostridium perfringens*,

Campylobacter spp., and *Staphylococcus aureus* were the top five culprits.

Food safety issues can have a lasting impact on consumer confidence. When they are aware of a food recall, two-thirds of consumers check to be sure they don't have that product, and one in six never purchases the product again, according to FMI's shopper study.

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One-third of adults rank food additives/ingredients as an important food safety issue, per IFIC. The number of those who prefer to eat foods that are free from artificial additives is at an all-time high of 50%, according to Packaged Facts' 2018 *Organic and Clean Label Food Consumer in the U.S.* report.

New age beverages posted the highest dollar gains for clean labels for the year ending Dec. 9, 2017. Fresh meat, salad dressings, pizza, sweet goods, and lunch meat under index for clean labels, per Nielsen data.

Consumers want more attention paid to monosodium glutamate, sulfites, phosphate, gelatin, carrageenan, casein, tree nuts, and sesame ingredients, per Mintel's 2017 *Free-from Food Trends—U.S.* report. Bisphenol A, parabens, and nitrites/nitrates are topics of concern.

Sales of foods and beverages with a "nothing artificial" claim rose 3.6% for the year ending May 20, 2017; "all natural" product sales increased by 7.8%; and sales of products labeled "free of additives and artificial ingredients" were up by 8%, per Nielsen.

After fresh produce, household organic purchases are highest for eggs, followed by milk, meat/poultry, yogurt, and juices, per Packaged Facts. Forty-six percent of consumers are seeking out non-GMO foods; 58% are concerned about the safety of genetically

modified organisms, according to the Packaged Facts clean label report.

Transparency is most important for fresh foods, led by dairy, produce, and meat, and closely followed by frozen foods, bread/bakery, canned/jarred foods, and drinks, per Label Insight's 2016 *Transparency ROI Survey*.

Seven in 10 adults say food safety/contamination is a worry for them when buying

fresh meat/poultry. Over half are also concerned about the use of hormones/steroids/antibiotics, according to FMI's 2018 *Power of Meat* report.

Increasingly, consumers are linking animal welfare issues with the safety of meat. Nearly half (45%) of those who buy cage-free, free-range, or pasture-raised chicken consider it more likely to be contamination free; 40% of those who buy grass-fed/pasture-raised beef and 39% of those who buy cage-free or free-range eggs think that way, per Packaged Facts.

In recent years, most food safety recalls have been due to the undeclared presence of allergens. With 5% of children and 4% of adults suffering from an allergy to milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, or soybeans, per the CDC's *Food Allergy Among U.S. Children* report, allergen risk remains a high priority for consumers.

Eighteen percent of parents with kids/teens seek out gluten-free products; 16% look for dairy-free; and 12% seek allergen-free foods, according to Packaged Facts' 2018 *Kids Foods & Beverages* report. **FT**



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