

Whole Foods, Walmart, Target viewed as ‘most transparent’

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Whole Foods Market, Walmart and Target are among the companies that consumers consider to be the most transparent about their business practices, according to research from The Hartman Group.

The Bellevue, Wash.-based consulting firm found that nearly 70% of the 1,500 U.S. adult consumers surveyed expressed a desire for more transparency from companies about their sustainability practices. The results are included in the firm's Sustainability 2017: Connecting Benefits With Values Through Purposeful Consumption report.

“Consumers associate transparency with how authentically committed a company is to ethical action,” said Laurie Demeritt, CEO of The Hartman Group. “Transparency ... is a way for companies to reveal details about production and sourcing that enable consumers to find higher quality distinctions otherwise concealed in conventionally marketed branded commodities.”

Consumers evaluate a company's transparency in terms of access to its values, policies and practices, and the openness of communication between a company and its customers, according to The Hartman Group.

In addition to Whole Foods and Walmart, other companies that consumers cited as being transparent included Coca-Cola, Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, Amazon, Apple, Google and Microsoft.

While transparency alone is rarely a primary driver of purchase, The Hartman Group said, it can “potentially settle a competitive draw” among otherwise similar products.

Among other findings in the report:

- 87% of adult consumers said that sustainability-related concerns impact their values, attitudes and actions in at least some measure;

- Boomers link sustainability more strongly with environmentalism, while Millennials are more likely to see it through the lens of personal responsibility, and see attributes such as organic and all-natural as relating to both sustainability and quality;
- More consumers seek out information about sustainability than in the past, and labor issues and environmental contamination have gained prominence; and
- Consumers rely on retailers as arbiters of sustainability standards and curators of sustainable products.