



Consumers name top 10 'transparent' food cos.

Hartman Group report says highly engaged consumers desire 'all-encompassing sustainability certification'

by Sustainable Food News

November 7, 2017



Nearly 70 percent of U.S. consumers desire more transparency from companies about their sustainability practices, according to a new report by [The Hartman Group](#).

The report, "[Sustainability 2017: Connecting Benefits With Values Through Purposeful Consumption](#)," which is based on a survey of 1,500 U.S. adults conducted in August, who said they want more information about a company's economic, social and environmental practices.

"When it comes to communicating transparency, it is not about the quantity of the information, it's about the quality of the information," said the Bellevue, Wash.-based market research and consulting firm. "It is also the content of the information and the manner in which it is given."

The 111-page report found that the strongest transparency attribute on packaging is "how it was made."

"Although concern about packaging materials appears to be declining, this may be due to the increasing availability of sustainable products," said the report. "Packaging remains connected to many higher-level issues that consumers prioritize, such as conserving resources, recycling, and avoiding toxins."

Consumers across the board scrutinize packaging for attributes they prioritize. Millennials show a preference for reusable and non-existent packaging, and women are more likely than men to scrutinize packaging materials.

Third-party certifications are key for engaged sustainability consumers, who look primarily for seals showing organic, fair-trade, and non-GMO, and indicating animal welfare.

"Among highly engaged consumers, there is a desire for some kind of all-encompassing sustainability certification. Many feel that the environmental piece is lacking in the most common certifications," the report said.

Openness and honesty are becoming the currency of trust for consumers who care about sustainability. They want to see corporate responsibility efforts that indicate an authentic commitment to ethical action - especially on-pack.

Transparency is particularly key for retailers, whom consumers view as arbiters of sustainability standards and curators of sustainable products. Retailer context thus makes a big difference in building trust with sustainability consumers.

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, the report said.

"Consumers associate transparency with how authentically committed a company is to ethical action," said Laurie Demeritt, CEO of The Hartman Group. "Most consumers, 73 percent of those surveyed in our new report, understand what transparency means when it comes to business practices."

So, what companies do consumers consider most transparent? Without being prompted, consumers named these top 10 companies:

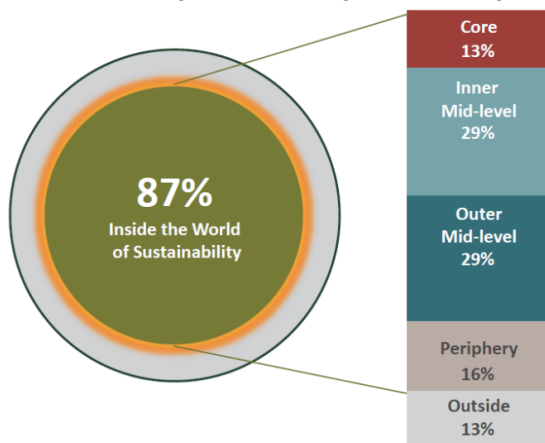
- Whole Foods Market
- Walmart
- Amazon
- Apple
- Google • Target
- Microsoft
- Starbucks
- Chick-fil-A
- Coca-Cola

"Transparency is more than enabling a moral evaluation of trustworthiness for brands; it 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," said Demeritt.

While it's rarely a primary driver of purchase, transparency attributes on a product can potentially settle a competitive draw in otherwise identical products where what is being communicated makes sense.

Sustainability World Model

87 percent of consumers are inside the world of sustainability. Those inside the world are impacted in their attitudes and behaviors by sustainability in some way.



The new Sustainability 2017 report tracks and investigates how consumers understand, prioritize and connect four zones of responsibility: personal, social, environmental and economical.

The report explores differences between consumer demand for, and actual purchasing of, sustainable products, and attitudes toward corporate transparency issues.