

DISPATCHES FROM FOOD VISION USA 2017

What 'clean' food cues are shoppers looking for? Hartman Group weighs in

By Elaine Watson [↗](#)

21-Nov-2017 - Last updated on 21-Nov-2017 at 15:02 GMT

**TOPIC RELATED SPONSORED LINK**

Keep your label clean with Chr. Hansen's wide range of oil soluble natural colors that consumer demands for more natural ingredients... [Click here](#)

Consumers are looking for cues signaling 'clean' and 'natural', but they don't necessarily expect to see those words on food labels, and may even be suspicious of brands that use them on pack, says Hartman Group.

Speaking at **FOOD VISION USA** in Chicago last week, Hartman Group SVP Shelley Balanko, PhD, said clean and natural food should be self-evident through multiple cues, not seen purely as marketing terms.

"Our research shows that the downside of the term 'clean' in consumer communications is that some people think it's a bit pretentious and neurotic. There's also a sentiment that it's like 'natural,' potentially a marketing gimmick, so we would probably recommend against putting it on pack.

"When seen on-pack, 'natural' continues to be regarded with skepticism. Four in five consumers have clear ambivalence or outright distrust of the 'All Natural' label."

Shopping the perimeter

Consumers, she said, are looking for less processed foods *"that intuitively retain the integrity of the original ingredients,"* products that are *"made simply and grown naturally without unnecessary chemicals, processing or cooking stages... it's about products that look, feel, and taste like they should, things that are as close as possible to their original form, that haven't been shape-shifted, that have visible, whole ingredients."*

So cues for clean/natural might be the absence of red flag ingredients (anything that sounds unnatural or artificial), a short, recognizable ingredient list, distinctive flavors, locally sourced, markers of high quality production or sourcing, premium and so on, she said, noting that terms such as 'authentic,' 'real,' 'simple,' and 'fresh' are often used interchangeably with 'clean,' again suggesting that clean labels are about more than just avoiding 'artificial' ingredients.

"Shopping only the perimeter is one simple strategy consumers use" to eat cleaner, more natural foods, she added. *"They are also looking for deliciousness, interesting new flavors."*

"The perceived goodness of fresher, less processed food goes much deeper than the nutrition panel. It's about vitamins, minerals, enzymes, probiotics, and other things in nature that nutritional science may not yet be able to quantify."

For some more 'progressive' consumers, the conversation around clean food now encompasses GMOs, pesticide residues, antibiotics, sustainability, animal welfare, farming methods and food technologies, she added. Some consumers are even beginning to question 'natural flavors' on an ingredients list, she said.

Clean also means premium, she said, which is about *"upgraded food experiences,"* high quality sourcing and production methods, products created by passionate people, and culinary traditions. *"It's about pleasure."*

Organic v local

While organic *"remains a resonant symbol of food quality,"* its expansion into processed food categories has diluted some consumers' perceptions about the label, while others also believe 'local' trumps organic, if there is a hierarchy, she claimed.

"Why eat foods and beverages flown in from half-way around the world? 80% of consumers say they are buying more local than they did a year ago. Local implies freshness, seasonality, sustainability, and trust.

"Organic is becoming a bit tarnished among more progressive consumers. They see it in cookies, candy and soda and they also see that big brands have embraced it."

Natural, "less processed" foods are those that intuitively retain the integrity of the original ingredients

Processing definition

Identifying a 'less processed' food

Changed from its original form



Close to original form of ingredients: Looks, tastes, feels like it should

Unfamiliar chemical additions, e.g. colors, preservatives, flavors



Short, pronounceable and recognizable ingredients
Ingredients that make sense for the product
Colors appropriate to primary product ingredients

Known "unnecessary" flavoring additions, e.g., sugars, salts, fats



Sugars, salts low on ingredient list
Appropriately low amounts of sugar, sodium on nutritional facts panel

Grinding, shape changing, reformulating



Visible whole ingredients
Culturally appropriate shape

Repeated heating and cooling, diluting, evaporating



Narratives and vocabulary of careful or minimal production e.g., handmade, high-pressure processing, raw.

**Consumers believe less processed products are *self-evident*.
They are *not* looking for a "less processed" label.**

Premium is also about upgraded experiences



Premium is *not*...

- Price alone
- Reserved for the “elite” or sophisticated
- Only for special occasions
- About “low fat,” “low sodium,” or “low calorie”
- Communicated via words alone



Premium *is*...

- People, places, and traditions
- Real distinctions in quality
- Expressed through values and experiences
- About intentionally making things better
- Transparency and trust
- Pleasure and discovery

Copyright - Unless otherwise stated all contents of this web site are © 2017 - William Reed Business Media Ltd - All Rights Reserved - Full details for the use of materials on this site can be found in the Terms & Conditions

RELATED TOPICS: Markets, FOOD VISION USA, Clean label, Organics, Food labeling and marketing, Natural claims, The GM debate, GMO Labeling, Health & Wellness