



HIGH PROTEIN

LOW CARB

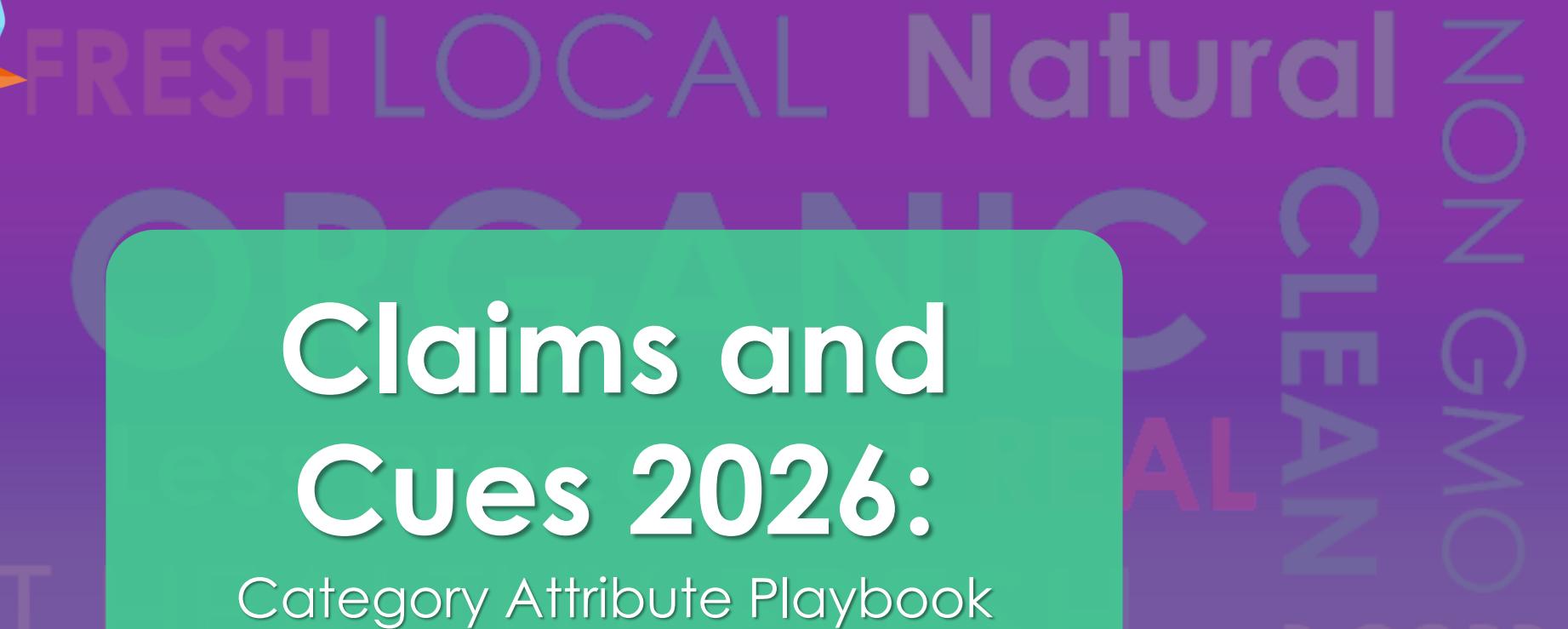
GLUTEN FREE

GUT

CLEA

LOW CALORIES

SIMPLE INGREDIENTS



# Claims and Cues 2026:

Category Attribute Playbook

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A Hartman Group syndicated research study

Fielding January-February 2026  
U.S. market coverage

# Claims and Cues 2026 will uncover the evolving standards shaping consumer choice—revealing the attributes that define relevance in a value-driven marketplace

In today's competitive landscape, food and beverage companies are tasked with identifying which product attributes add meaningful value and which are less compelling, and then skillfully communicating resonant cues to consumers. **Understanding how consumers navigate product distinctions is crucial for staying competitive, effectively engaging with consumers and future-proofing your brand in a fast-moving market.**

From the rise of fresh convenience to the mainstreaming of organic as a benchmark of quality, Hartman Group has tracked the evolution of distinctions in purchase attributes for the last 30 years.

In recent years, organic has lost some of its resonance as other attributes have gained prominence in food culture. Hartman Group's *Beyond Organic 2024* syndicated report revealed how consumer priorities have shifted in new directions and vary across categories. *Claims and Cues 2026* expands upon this research and will uncover evolving distinctions at the category level, identifying where consumers are placing heightened scrutiny within specific categories while tracking shifts in relevance for key product signals over time. It will also examine the growing importance of sourcing and production attributes in shaping consumer trust and preference. Notably, organic continues to remain relevant, while other quality distinctions are gaining share:

VERY important food and beverage characteristics\*

**41%** Simple ingredients

**24%** Organic/USDA Organic

**Uncover what today's consumers value most with *Claims and Cues 2026*. Recommendations for brands, retailers and foodservice providers will be grounded in key insights on:**

- CULTURAL CHANGE:** Explore how shifting consumer values, needs and priorities are reshaping expectations in today's value-conscious marketplace.
- ATTRIBUTES DRIVING PURCHASE:** Understand how brand positioning and marketing intersect with the ways consumers assess product quality and value.
- BRAND EXPECTATIONS:** Discover how consumers want—and expect—brands and companies to demonstrate differentiation at the product level.

This playbook will deliver actionable guidance—showing how cultural shifts, on-pack cues and brand expectations shape trust, choice and loyalty.

# Understand how to activate on the evolving category attributes shaping consumer perceptions

Drawing on a national online survey, qualitative interviews and benchmarks from prior Hartman Group studies, the report explores how consumer perspectives and engagement have evolved. These changes are actively shaping food culture and the marketplace across the following topics:

- **In the broader cultural context of how consumers make food and beverage choices, how have product attributes evolved over time?** What is the perceived relevance of specific quality attributes—such as minimal processing and ingredient transparency—across a range of key food and beverage categories (with trend comparisons to 2024 in most categories)?
- **How do market forces (e.g., inflation) intersect with consumer values and ultimately influence food and beverage purchase decisions?** Where do consumers continue to seek assurance through standards like organic, and how do those preferences shift under economic pressures?
- **How are consumer expectations around sourcing, production methods and certifications evolving?** How do priorities for safety, health and sustainability cues differ across specific food and beverage categories?
- **Which attributes are gaining traction—and which are losing resonance—among today's increasingly discerning shoppers?** What is the influence of sourcing and production values in both retail (including private brands) and foodservice environments?



**The playbook will provide tactical guidance for optimizing on-pack cues and claims, including:**

- High-level insights on what consumers value most
- Attribute-level clarity on which attributes drive trust and purchase intent
- Category-specific best practices for what to highlight on-pack
- Identification of the most essential categories where consumers seek claims

**These insights will strengthen your product development, packaging strategy and communications approach across key food and beverage categories.**

# Gain primary qualitative and quantitative insights with actionable guidance to inform your sales strategy—without the financial or time investments of custom research

## Robust integrated methodology

**Quantitative research:** Nationally representative online survey of U.S. food shoppers aged 18-79, with a minimum total sample of n=2,000 and readable samples of demographic audiences such as age cohorts, race/ethnicity and income tiers. Select data will be trended against similar questions fielded in 2024.

**Qualitative research:** Multi-day engagement (journaling, prompts, photos and videos) with demographically and regionally diverse consumers. Research will involve a dynamic online qualitative research platform paired with in-depth, virtual interviews with a subset of participants.

**Cultural analysis:** Literature review of marketing, consumer publications and discourse in food and beverage sourcing; engagement with writings/podcasts by cultural informants; social listening on key consumer platforms.

Final report available March 30, 2026

Report Price: \$12,500 (until December 31, 2025; \$15,000 starting January 1, 2026)

An **in-depth PowerPoint** report will include an executive summary, implications and strategic recommendations, with a complete analysis of relevant data supported by robust charts and visuals. Consumer quotes throughout will add real-world context.

Detailed **Excel data tables** will accompany the report, enabling flexible analysis with key demographic breakdowns.

Proprietary categories, questions and/or custom data cuts may be available. Requests are handled on a first-come, first-served basis. **Contact us by 12/5/2025 for a quote and feasibility assessment.**

## Turning insights into action: Activation Sessions

Please contact Melissa Abbott to learn more about how you can take your strategy to the next level with the insights from the *Claims and Cues 2026* report: [melissa@hartman-group.com](mailto:melissa@hartman-group.com).



#### ABOUT HARTMAN GROUP

Our mission is to translate consumer behavior and food culture into strategic growth opportunities for our clients.

Since 1989, Hartman Group's anthropologists, social scientists and business analysts have been immersed in the study of American food and beverage culture, using ethnographic observation, quantitative tracking surveys and deeply studying trends. What we have learned and continue to uncover allows us to upend many notions of our traditional American eating and drinking patterns, identifying unique opportunities and winning strategies for our clients.

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Pre-order the ***Claims and Cues 2026*** report now

**Crack the code on what drives purchase today**  
Discover how cultural change, on-pack communication, and brand credibility intersect to shape consumer choice—and how your brand can stay ahead of the curve.

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**Report Price: \$12,500 (until December 31, 2025; \$15,000 starting January 1, 2026)**

To purchase, please email: [melissa@hartman-group.com](mailto:melissa@hartman-group.com)

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