

What's Next After Clean Label?

Clean label isn't going away any time soon, but as processors clear that hurdle what will they have to proclaim or avoid next?

May 4, 2018

Food companies have been hit with a "big is bad" bias that often makes it difficult to earn consumers' trust. While the growth of clean labels has started to rebuild relations with consumers, what else can food and beverage companies do to regain trust?

After an era of secrecy – where co-manufacturers were never named, company plants were identified by some inscrutable code and country origins of ingredients were shrouded – food and beverage processors increasingly are parting the curtain, as well as showing their social conscience. Farmers' names appear, charitable works are trumpeted and the Earth is being cared for by large and small processors alike.

And they're showing extreme concern for the consumer. Companies promise they're protecting consumers from GMOs, allergens, pesticides, carcinogens, synthetic colors, hormones and any other issue that could be a hot button for millennial moms or aging hippies.

"Whether rewarding a company's fair-trade labor practices or zero-waste policies, millennials are the most serious about ethically sourced grab-and-go foods," says **Chicago-based Culinary Visions Panel**. From environmentally friendly business practices to cage-free eggs to fair-trade coffee, "this generation does not want its dining choices to have unintended negative consequences," says the panel's executive director Sharon Olson.

"Sales of conventional products are declining, while sales of products touting simple, clean, sustainable and free of artificial ingredients are on the rise," Nielsen (www.nielsen.com) reports. Millennials and Gen Xers are more likely to seek organic, non-GMO and hormone-free labels, as are households that make more than \$100,000 annually, the firm adds.

"Today's consumers want to be better informed," explains the Hartman Group (www.hartman-group.com). "They want to know what's inside, how it was made and who made it before they buy. Consumers increasingly view sustainability and corporate responsibility — from organic ingredients to animal welfare to company treatment of employees and energy conservation — as aspects of quality."

Each consumer seems to evaluate different, often multiple, attributes to determine if a product meets their personal purchase preferences.

Food manufacturers are telling more in-depth product stories on their websites, blogs, packaging, advertising, social media, mobile apps and via the digital SmartLabel. The SmartLabel platform uses an on-package QR code, read by a shopper's cellphone, to take the consumer to the web to share detailed information on ingredients, sourcing and other issues that could be relevant to the consumer.