

PERSPECTIVES

BY CRYSTAL MACKAY



Public trust and social license

Half of Canadians are unsure about whether our food system is going in the right direction. It's with this as the backdrop that the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) launched last summer. Its goal is to help Canada's food system earn trust through research, dialogue and forums.

Understanding consumer concerns and questions is the important base everyone in the food system needs to set benchmarks for success in communicating with Canadians about our food and how it's produced.

Success will only happen if there are shifts between consumer expectations and industry practices – the two must be more closely aligned.

New public trust research by CCFI aims to help bridge that gap. It shows the rising cost of food and access to healthy, affordable food as two top concerns for Canadians, above concerns for health care or the economy. But with 93 per cent of Canadians saying they know little or nothing about farming, determining fact from fiction about our food continues to be a growing issue.



Ninety-three per cent of Canadian consumers say they know little or nothing about farming.

Canadians' top food system concerns

35% Affordability of food in Canada	22% The overall health of Canadians	20% The safety of the food Canadians eat
20% The Canadian environment, such as soil, air and water	3% The welfare of farm animals in Canada	

Source: CCFI Public Trust Survey

The study, which polled 2,510 Canadians, shows two-thirds want to know more about how their food is produced. Overall impressions of agriculture and trust in farmers and researchers are high.

However, when asked specific questions on topics like antibiotics, environmental stewardship or GMOs, the support shifts significantly from positive to close to half being unsure.

When people are unsure, it's easiest to be against something. Advocating for scientific advancements in general requires significant planning, strategy and resources to be effective. Advocating for scientific advancements related to food requires *even more* effort and investment.

After studying lessons from losing social licence and public trust in other sectors like oil and gas and forestry and agri-food sectors in other countries, we

clearly need to be proactive and transparent about how our food is produced in Canada. The CCFI research shows it's an opportune time to open up more dialogue with Canadians. Let's bridge the gap between farm gates and dinner plates!

Crystal Mackay is president of the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, which represents a coalition of farmers and associated food and agri-businesses proactively working together to provide credible information on food and farming. She is a dynamic presenter who has delivered hundreds of presentations to a broad range of audiences from farmers to university students to CEOs across North America. Visit www.foodintegrity.ca for more information on the organization's work and a summary of key research findings. Look for new work on public trust in food and transparency to be released at the CCFI Public Trust Summit Sept. 18-20, 2017 in Calgary. ■