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By Michael Barker

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Farmers 'trusted by consumers'

New AHDB report shows high degree of trust among UK public, but stresses more can still to be done to engage



Responsible farming provides a foundation for building trust across the entire food chain, but continuous improvement is vital to maintain shopper support.

That was the conclusion of a new report from the AHDB, revealed at the levy body's second annual Consumer Insight Conference in Warwick this week.

The new research, entitled 'Trust, Transparency and Traceability in Agriculture: The Consumer Perspective', offers an in-depth look at the public's attitude and opinions on food and farming in the UK.

It explores how engaged consumers are with food production issues, which elements of the food system are most trusted and where consumers get their information.

Among the key findings is the potential to provide clearer on-pack labelling to improve transparency, allow consumers direct access to farms and farmers to develop trust and for industry to build

emotional connections with the public, whether it's face-to-face or through social media.

AHDB senior consumer insight analyst and co-author of the report, Susie Stannard, said the findings show that the majority of consumers have a great deal of trust in industry and farmers – but more can be done to build on this.

She explained: "Trust is an extremely valuable commodity, but it is fragile. Industry cannot rest on its laurels, every effort must be made to continue to innovate and invest in new technology and scientific research.

"As the industry applies new learnings, as farming works to become more efficient and sustainable, we should not forget that consumers are interested in what we do. Being open and transparent should help us in the long run."

The report also reveals that environmental issues have grown to rank among the most top-of-mind concerns for consumers, with more than 40 per

cent expressing concern. However, while policy makers and media currently focus on carbon and climate change, the biggest issue for shoppers right now relates to plastic and packaging.

The research also shows that 71 per cent of consumers agree that farmers are trustworthy. They are respected for their expertise because they care about animals, people and the environment. Consumers also feel that farmers deliver on their promises.

Stannard added: "We can understand why some farmers may feel much-maligned, seemingly the target for a host of simplified criticism on single issues. However, the reality is consumers have an overall good impression of British agriculture, with 62 per cent of consumers feeling positive and only five per cent actively feeling negative – although it varies slightly by sector.

"While farmers are trusted by the general public, an area where they can do better is 'communicating with consumers'.

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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“Agriculture is trusted, but that trust is not blind. As an industry, we must drive out instances of bad practice, engage with consumers and constantly strive to improve our ways of working. Being trusted and transparent is crucial and this report explores how we can deepen

that trust for the benefit of industry and the consumer.”

AHDB conducted the study with consumer research organisation Blue Marble, interviewing 1,500 people to see how their views can be used to deepen

trust in agriculture and where improvements can be made.