

Qualitative Research on Consumer Perceptions of Sustainability-Oriented Food Assurance Systems



Methodology

January 23 to 25, 2023

12 focus groups with Canadian adults (18+) who have joint/sole responsibility for grocery shopping in their household.

Qualitative research results are not representative of all consumer and producer opinions, but bring more depth to research findings.

Trust in Canada's agriculture and food sector

"I tend to **trust the small and local farmers** more, and less the big production stuff."



Overall, most participants **trust in Canada's food system**, which largely extends to producing foods sustainably



Trust in producers is often tied to how "corporate" participants feel the producer is. **The smaller the producer is assumed to be, the more trustworthy** they are assumed to be



To **build trust** in the sector, some suggested more **transparency and information on regulations**

Environmental sustainability



The term "**sustainable**" was **not universally understood** and meant different things to different participants



Most were unable to say if Canadian food is **produced in an environmentally sustainable way**, but many assumed it was



Many were unsure how sustainability related to their own purchases

Many participants deemed a product as environmentally sustainable by:

- Less packaging, recyclable or biodegradable packaging
- Non-GMO
- Locally produced
- Pesticide free

"I'm geared toward the price but also the packaging. **If they have a lot of single-use plastic, I probably won't go that way.**"



Food assurance labels

Impressions



Unaided recall of food assurance labels was limited. After showing examples many said they **had seen at least one of the labels**



Credibility of existing food assurance labels **varied widely**



Trust in assurance systems was **related to level of experience, knowledge or information** participants had about each label



Roughly half felt assurance labels were **helpful to varying degrees**. A few were strongly in favour of assurance labels, others described them as "better than nothing", or marketing tools

Purchase intentions



Few said assurance labels have impacted their purchasing behaviours, often saying **price outweighs the assurance claims**



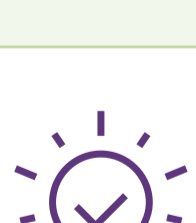
Price, lack of understanding and trust in what the assurance label claimed, were **common barriers to purchase intentions**

"We need **more information to understand them**, otherwise it's just a slogan."



A common assurance label

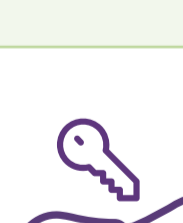
Participants appreciated the idea of a single, common assurance label that credibly indicates the food is produced with standards that meet their expectations



The **desired role for government** was around subsidization, public awareness/education, regulation, inspection and enforcement



Preference for oversight was for a partnership between industry, farmers, consumers, scientists, nongovernment organizations, and government officials



Proper oversight of an assurance system is key to gaining confidence and instilling value



Most participants clearly indicated that **it would be beneficial to have a common assurance system and labels** in Canada, similar to the U.K.'s Red Tractor system

"I love the concept; I think it's great. **The only concern for me is the transparency.**"

