

Consumer confusion: The truth about food

According to a new study from the ENOUGH movement, carried out in 11 countries globally, including countries in Europe, families find it difficult to make smart choices about nutrition and health due to conflicting sources of information about how food is produced.



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The consumer survey measured understanding and knowledge of popular food and nutrition topics including product labels, farming methods, nutritional value and environmental impacts.

Among the key findings in Europe:

Although food and nutrition is a frequent topic of discussion for more than 93% of the respondents, there is a lot of uncertainty of what food claims and labels mean. A majority of consumers report choosing foods labeled "all-natural" or "organic" despite not knowing what the labels mean in terms of environmental impact, animal welfare, and other metrics commonly associated with healthy food choices.

"The farm-to-table movement has revealed that we all want to know what's in our food and where it comes from," said UK-based Livestock Sustainability Consultant Dr Jude L. Capper. "But it's hard to separate fact from fiction when it comes to food labels, farming practices, and other food production topics. Distinguishing myth from reality can make a big difference in the choices families make about nutrition, household budgets, and environmental impact."

Based on the results of the survey, the ENOUGH Movement is sharing the [Truth About Food](#), a digital and media driven program to put accurate, fact-based information in forums to spark discussion to dispel misunderstanding.

Key findings from the survey and the Truth About Food programme include:

Food labels are one of the most confusing topics for consumers

- Although many people (66 percent) buy "all natural" foods thinking they are healthier and safer, most survey respondents don't really know what labels like "natural" and "organic" actually mean.

- Organic is a type of farm management and food production that only allows natural products to be used, but it doesn't mean pesticide free. For example, the use of a certain number of organic (i.e. derived from natural sources and processed lightly if at all before use) pesticides is allowed in EU organic farming.
- Further, an analysis done by Stanford University on more than 237 studies concluded the quality, safety and nutrition content of organic and conventionally produced foods to be equal.
- When it comes to "natural", in the UK, for example, it means that a product consists of natural ingredients, i.e. ingredients produced by nature, not the work of humans or interfered with by humans.

Consumers are confused about modern agriculture, farming, and food production

- 85 percent of survey respondents believe that more organic production globally is one of the top three solutions to feeding the growing population.
- In fact, [organic farming produces less food](#) – about 25 percent on average globally. It requires significantly more land and resources to produce the same yield as modern farming methods.
- If Europe would try to feed itself exclusively through organic agriculture (at constant consumption), it would need an additional 28 million hectares, equal to all the remaining forests covering France, Germany, Denmark, and Great Britain combined.
- While organic methods use less fertiliser, herbicides, and energy, [modern farming methods](#) resulted in less soil erosion with better yields. In fact, modern farming practices are often the most environmentally sustainable, using innovation to decrease the amount of land, feed, and water to raise meat, milk, and eggs. Today's conventional chicken production in Europe saves the equivalent of the CO₂ emission of 250,000 cars/year in Europe (2% of total). Thanks to continuous improvement less feed are needed, the carbon footprint impact is reduced by half, while producing the same quantity of meat.

Food waste and loss is a top concern among survey respondents

- 91 percent of people surveyed believe that the number one way to eliminate hunger globally is to eliminate food waste.
- Food waste is a significant challenge we must address, but it's only part of the problem. And we also have to look at food waste across the entire production system. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 30 to 40 percent of food is lost in production each year.
- In animals, more than 20 percent of production is lost to death and disease. Best management practices and tools that help keep animals healthy are critically important to this challenge.
- Veterinary medicines and vaccines lead to 20% resource waste reduction.

When it comes to what we eat, globally, consumers are most concerned about hormones, antibiotics, and generally food safety. With so much conflicting information, it's no wonder. But we can put these fears to rest. **Did you know:**

- All living things contain hormones – people, plants, animals and therefore also the food we eat.
- There are no hormones used in livestock production in Europe. Yet 73% of consumers believe there are.
- All animals have the right to be free from pain, injury or disease. If an animal is sick, it should be treated. However, regardless of whether an animal was sick and treated with an antibiotic at some time in its life or was raised antibiotic free, the food you buy is free from any harmful residue.

“The survey results underscore just how critical it is for more people to understand what goes on behind the scenes with their food,” continues Capper. “As a farmer, animal health and wellbeing is a top priority and we do everything we can to ensure that our animals are healthy.”

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