Environmental, Social, Humane and Health Concerns: Shaping Consumers’ Perception of the Food Marketplace

5th National IPM Symposium, St Louis, MO

Urvashi Rangan, PhD
Senior Scientist and Policy Analyst
Consumers Union, Consumer Reports
Typical Questions Asked--

Where does my food come from?

How far did it travel?

What are the effects of producing food with chemicals, drugs and heavy metals?

Do we know if all farming practices are safe for the environment, for animals or for people?

Can nutritional quality vary depend on how my food is produced?

What is “feed efficiency?” Is it the most efficient way to raise animals?

Why should I care?
Environmental
- chemical, drugs, heavy metals, sewage sludge, animal feed, antibiotics, synthetic growth hormones--from farm to ground to water

Social Responsibility
- wages, safety protection, basic rights, local production, small scale farms

Humane Treatment of Animals / Animal Welfare
- space, treatment, physical alterations, animal feed, pesticide and other toxic exposures (e.g. crude motor oil)

Public Health
- safety, health and nutrition concerns
Enviro-Humane

- Animal feed: grain vs grass fed
- By products
- Growth hormones
- Daily antibiotics
- Heavy metals
- Animal Treatment: confinement
- Forced molting
- Pesticides

Public Health

- Grain has less vit E, CLAs, omega 3, good fats
- Associated with transfer of Mad Cow protein
- Emerging studies showing residues of other growth factors (IGF-1)
- Bacterial resistance to abs (antibiotic resistance)
- Mercury residues in fish
- Arsenic residues in liver
- Poor hygiene controlled with antibiotics and metals
- Increases pathogen levels
- Residues accumulate
- Children at higher risk for problems
Labels That Do and Don’t Help in Making Better Choices

Biodynamic

Organic

Integrated Pest Management
  e.g. Food Alliance
  Protected Harvest
  Rainforest Alliance

Fair Trade Certified

Free Farmed

Certified Humane
CU’s Advice for Effective Labeling:

- Be specific about type of pesticide control
- Be clear about system used
  - e.g. pesticide use reduced over time
certain types of pesticides prohibited
- Be truthful and not misleading

Examples of Specific Explanations / Claims
- no pesticides
- no synthetic pesticides
- no dirty dozen pesticides (citing PANNA etc)
- least toxic pesticides (e.g. citing EPA List 4)

Examples of Vague Claims
- no toxic pesticides
- no toxic chemicals
- non-toxic pesticides used

Sustainable Forestry Initiative

- Claim: Chemical Use Managed
- Standard: Up to each forester to decide what
  type of management to use or not
Biodynamic-above organic?

Adding most value to organic…
Fair Trade
Certified Humane / Free Farmed
100% Grass Fed
Meaningful -- Verified -- Consistent -- Indpdt -- Public Input

Adding secondary value…
No synthetic substances used
Never fed antibiotics
Continuous access to pasture

Eco-labels that could be helpful
Locally produced
Small scale family farms
US based fair trade
Pathogen / Heavy Metal Tested
Certified pasture or free range
Certified grass fed
Mad Cow prion tested
Claims with little or no meaning
- natural
- no chemicals
- animal care certified/united egg producer
- free range on poultry
- uncertified fair trade claims

Govt Standards Delayed Since 2002
-- “for meat not poultry”
- grass fed
- free range / pasture raised
- no antibiotics
- no hormones
- no growth promotants

Somewhat Meaningful But Unverified Claims
- no pesticides used
- no antibiotics
- no animal by products
- no synthetic ingredients