

“Consumer associations’ opinion on the desirable kind-amount of food traceability information accessible to the individual consumer”

Eleni ALEVRITOU

Consumer Association the Quality of Life - EKPIZO,
Valtetsiou 43-45, Athens,GR-106 81, Greece
Email: eleni.alevritou@ekpizo.gr

Consumers have always shown an interest in where their food comes from, how it is produced, and if it is healthy and safe. Nowadays, increasing consumer socio-economic, safety-health concerns and preferences relating to the origin of food, have resulted in the need for traceability to be implemented in the food and feed sector. Legislative measures are continually being put in place, and relevant research projects have been or are dealing with food traceability.

TRACE is one of these projects, funded through the Food and Quality Priority of the EU Framework VI research programme and aims to deliver a traceability infrastructure that can trace and confirm the origin of food. This infrastructure will be directly beneficial to food producers, retailers and authorities, while consumers benefit indirectly. A direct benefit for individual consumers would be the possibility of verifying by themselves the origin and other claims on the label when buying foods.

The objective of this study was to decide the amount and kind of traceability information consumers would really need and should have access to when buying foods, according to consumer associations’ perception - experience from contacts with consumers and other sources.

The questionnaire, consisting of 3 main questions and 16 sub-questions was sent out to approximately 200 different organizations based in 100 different countries, which are members of the European Consumer Organization and/or Consumers International and/or Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue.

About 13.5% of consumer organizations from 21% of countries responded.

The results show that the large majority of consumer associations believe that consumers want, when buying foods, to have direct access to traceability information regarding the origin, main ingredients, ways of production-treatment, freshness, and the environmental-social aspects of foods. They also want to know whether certain substances, banned at EU level but used in the country of origin, are present irrespectively of threshold or MRLs (GMOs, hormones, pesticides, residues, or other); to rest assured that food is safe and is really what it claims to be; that food control systems are working sufficiently. And, finally, to be able to readily and easily verify the above by themselves .

In conclusion, consumer demand for traceability information in developed countries is almost identical. However, although European consumers enjoy the highest protection level (compared to the USA) in terms of food-feed legislation in place (particularly for GMOs, hormones), they seem to be very demanding, especially those of the old member states.

Key words: food traceability, traceability information, consumer access, consumer associations

