Consumers of the future: What will drive their food choices?

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ABARES 2018 Outlook Conference – Canberra – 6 March 2018
Everything Old Is New Again....

Key consumer trends are likely to continue into the future:

• Focus on ‘ethical’ food categories
• Complex calculus of trade-offs between different food values (including cost)
• Use of proxy values to guide food choices
• Segmentation into groups that are pro-technology and those that hold overly romantic idealisations of the ‘natural’
Our Food Values Research Group

Understanding not just what people buy, but how food-related attitudes are influenced by society, culture, history:

• Reactions to GM foods
• Gene editing in agriculture
• Attitudes toward the grain industry
• Understanding ‘ethical’ food choices
• Attitudes toward halal foods
• How families talk about meat production
• Perceptions of farm animal welfare
What did you vote for today?

LABOUR
Wages & conditions for clothing, sports balls, coffee & chocolate. Choose certified fairtrade.
www.fairlylocal.com.au

GENETIC ENGINEERING
Unknown health risks, crop contamination, multinational control. Choose GE free food & drink.
www.truefood.org.au

NUTRITION
Safe & healthy for you. Choose low salt, sugar, fat; no questionable food additives.
www.fedup.com.au

MANUFACTURE
Transport kms, energy use, carbon footprint; local jobs & community. Choose “Product of Australia” or “Made in Australia” items.
www.onlyoz.com.au

CHEMICALS
Toxic ingredients in body care & cleaning products. Avoid nasties!
www.cosmeticsdatabase.com
www.safer-solutions.org.au

PACKAGING
Resource use & waste reduction. Minimise, choose recycled & recyclable.
www.recyclingnearyou.com

ANIMAL TESTING
Animal welfare. Choose ‘cruelty free’ cosmetics & cleaning items.
www.caringconsumer.com
www.ccf.org.au

ORGANIC
Soil degradation, chemicals, pesticides & artificial fertilisers. Choose certified organic fruit & veg.
www.organicchoice.com.au

FACTORY FARMING
Animal welfare, pollution. Choose ‘free-range’ chickens, eggs, pigs.
www.freerangepork.com.au
www.voicematters.org.au

COMPANY RECORD
Environmental, social & governance track-record. Boycott companies involved in damaging practices.
www.ethical.org.au

HABITAT LOSS
Deforestation, animal homes (orangutans), biodiversity. Choose palm oil free products.
www.orangutans.com.au

OWNERSHIP
Jobs & community. Choose Australian-owned brands to keep dollars in Australia.
www.fightbacknews.com.au

Find out about the issues at www.ethical.org.au
But Is It Really about the Ethics?

• ‘Ethical’ categories often serve as proxies for other values including perceptions of quality and of food safety
  ➢ No genetically modified ingredients
  ➢ Organic (more generally ‘natural’)
  ➢ Local

• Consumers often rely on these categories rather than any more complex understandings of food or production processes

• Trust hence relies on labels for these categories, but also the narratives attached to them
Uncertainty and Strong Negative Associations

I wouldn’t [buy GM foods] but it’s because I don’t know enough about it at the moment and it’s scary.

I associate GM as being not as good for me and I don’t know why, I just, that’s just how it is.
GM Opposition is not just about ‘the science’

A bit about this:

More about this:
Preferences for ‘Organic’ Foods

• Frequently noted as more expensive
• However less chemicals = less risk to health

Because you’ve got less chance of getting cancer if you buy organic than if you don’t.

• 83% of organic food consumers buy them because they are “chemical-free” (AOM report 2017)
• Infrequent mention of effects on the environment, and then only in together with personal health/nutrition concerns

• Similar findings with reference to ‘natural’ food products (consider the raw milk debates)
Local as Valued

• Focus on the local as a proxy for healthier or even more nutritious food

• Local also as a way to control risk and get safer food

*I only buy local [fish]. Why? Because I’m quite concerned about the amount of chemicals in the water, especially around Asia and Northern Australia, so I try and buy the fish that swim in the bight.*
Nationalistic or Xenophobic?

Many explicit mentions of avoiding ‘foreign’ products:

“I went to buy garlic and there was only Chile[an] garlic and so I decided I wouldn’t buy garlic unless it’s Australian or local.”

“….so I thought oh well if it’s, if there’s some Aussie garlic— I knew I was getting low on garlic—but there wasn’t, so I will do it next week.”
Relation Between Trust and Information?

• Given problems and complexities of labels, participants resorted to buying from people/places they trusted, and hence that counted as ‘local’:

_For most of the food I eat at the moment, my roommate’s a butcher so he just does it himself and brings it home and he works at the Central Market..._

...you know that they don’t use bad chemicals and things on it you know you build a relationship with the person you buy it from and you’re supporting a local farmer which is kind of nice you know.

• But bottom line:

_I don’t know. Maybe I don’t trust them, what they put in there. I think everything we eat or we buy, I don’t know why but we like to have it made in Australia, Australian products, everything. It’s a lot safer than ... imported. **Whatever country it is imported from, I don’t trust them.**_
Summary

• Consumer motivations differ from what they appear to be on the surface: various ‘ethical’ categories often are proxies for other values
• It’s not a matter of education: there will always be a ‘knowledge’ gap
• People need tools to evaluate credentials and claims: transparency is key
• Encourage people to understand the ‘trade-offs,’ and who bears the risk and who gets the benefit
• Need for ‘high level’ engagement on new food technologies, and establishment of shared values between modern agriculture and current community values
• The future is likely to continue in a similar way—thus need to focus our efforts away from information and onto values
Acknowledgments

• Dr Heather Bray, Senior Research Fellow and key collaborator
• Funding from the Australian Research Council grants including “What Shall We Have for Tea? Toward a New Discourse of Food Ethics in Contemporary Australia” (DP110105062, 2011-14)
• Assistance in performing pilot surveys and research support work from Susie Chant, Joanne Givens, Liza Huston, and Kelly McKinley
• Inspiration and conceptual input from our postgraduate students, especially Susie Chant, Jessica Loyer, and members of the Food Ethics and Food Choice class

Relevant recent publications:

• Rachel A. Ankeny and Heather J. Bray, “If We’re Happy to Eat It, Why Wouldn't We Be Happy to Feed It To Our Children?’: Articulating the complexities underlying women’s ethical views on genetically modified food,” International Journal on Feminist Approaches to Bioethics 9: 166-91, 2016