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such factors as order size, produce weighing at checkout, check cashing, coupon handling. A cooperative effort by all of us will pave the way for increased productivity in the food industry.

SATISFIED? CONSUMERS RATE THE FOOD INDUSTRY

by
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Are consumers satisfied with food products purchased for their households? To a surprisingly high degree, the answer is yes. In a nationwide survey, consumers generally expressed a very high level of satisfaction with food products and food stores. Furthermore, this high level of satisfaction was fairly evenly distributed across all regions of the country although there were significant differences between some demographic groups. When asked, "All in all, how satisfied are you with the food products you buy for your household?", two-thirds of the respondents said they were either always satisfied or almost always satisfied. And when asked, "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the food stores where you do most of your shopping?", 70% said they were always or almost always satisfied.

In view of much evidence of widespread consumer unrest, this finding is indeed surprising. But probing beneath this deceptively tranquil surface, several areas of frustration and dissatisfaction became apparent. Consumers evidently separate specific sources of dissatisfaction from their general attitudes or feelings toward food products and the food industry. Price, of course, is the most obvious source of dissatisfaction, but even here, there are significant differences in satisfaction across products.

Consumers also were quite dissatisfied with the availability and reliability of product and shopping information. Further, there were significant differences in satisfaction across demographic groups.

To gain a more accurate reading of the level of consumer satisfaction with food products, stores, and marketing services, a national survey of persons primarily responsible for buying food for the household was completed in March 1974. Questionnaires were completed by 1,831 households, or 72% of the eligible number. Probability methods were used at each stage of sample selection. Interviewers had no choice in the selection of households for the survey. Since the respondent was the primary food purchaser for the household, 87% were female.

Satisfaction was recorded on a five-point scale ranging from: (A) always satisfied; (B) almost always satisfied; (C) sometimes satisfied; (D) rarely satisfied; to (E) never satisfied. Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with: the food products they buy, the food stores where they most often shop, various forms of product or shopping information, seven product groups, and with 31 individual food products including up to seven product attributes. This report presents only a brief

summary of the findings. The complete report is in preparation and will be published by the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Consumer satisfaction with food products, food stores, product information, and the seven product groups is summarized in Table 1. The first five columns record the frequency distribution of responses. The average dissatisfaction scores in the last column were computed by assigning a score of "1" to "always satisfied" and a score of "5" to "never satisfied". Thus, the higher the score, the greater the dissatisfaction. Respondents are clearly more satisfied with food products and food stores in general, than with product or shopping information.

In contrast to all food products, only 23% say they are always or almost always satisfied with "the reliability and truthfulness of information in ads sponsored by food manufacturers". This difference is reflected by the higher average dissatisfaction score for food manufacturers' ads (3.12) than for all food products (2.32). In addition, almost half the respondents were only sometimes satisfied, rarely satisfied, or never satisfied with nutritional labeling, ingredient labeling, and information about freshness of food products available in food stores (open dating).

Average dissatisfaction scores indicate that consumers are most dissatisfied with the convenience foods product group (average dissatisfaction score of 2.46) and are most satisfied with the dairy products and eggs product group (average dissatisfaction score of 1.96). Indeed, Table 1 identifies two fairly distinct categories. Of the seven product groups, consumers express greater satisfaction with: (1) dairy products and eggs; (2) bakery and cereal products; and (3) processed fruits and vegetables. They are less satisfied with: (1) fresh fruits; (2) meat and poultry; (3) fresh vegetables and (4) prepared or convenience foods. Price was the only attribute with which consumers consistently

expressed strong dissatisfaction across all products. But even here, dissatisfaction varied considerably, being much higher for products such as beef and milk than for processed fruits and vegetable products.

Even though consumers generally express satisfaction with food products and stores, most participants in the survey (70%) reported instances of dissatisfaction. But only a small percent of those dissatisfied apparently complain directly to food manufacturers or public officials. Only 7% of those who had been dissatisfied said they had complained to the manufacturer, while 3% indicated they had complained to a government agency, congressman, or a consumer protection agency. Consumers are much more likely to complain to food stores--55% said they had done so. In addition, 12% of those indicating dissatisfaction reported boycotting a food store or product. By far the most widespread outlet for venting dissatisfaction (88% said they used this channel) is simply complaining to friends and family members. Thus in the food industry, it may be somewhat misleading to rely only on records of written complaints as an indicator of consumer dissatisfaction, since apparently only a small percent of those who say they have been dissatisfied actually write letters of complaint. Only selected highlights have been presented here; additional details can be obtained from the full report.

Table 1. Consumer Satisfaction with: (A) All Food Products, (B) Product Information Supplied by Food Manufacturers, (C) Food Stores, (D) Product Information Supplied by Food Stores, (E) Groups of Food Products, for 1,831 Respondents.

Variable	Always Sat.		Almost Always Sat.		Some-times Sat.		Rarely Sat.		Never Sat.		No. of Observations*	Average Dissatisfaction Score
	1	2	3	4	5	Percent.	Percent.	Percent.	Percent.			
A. All Food Products	6.2	60.0	29.5	3.5	.7						1,811	2.32
B1. Nutritional Labeling	12.0	37.4	34.1	14.3	2.1						1,812	2.57
2. Ads Sponsored by Food Manufacturers	5.6	17.1	43.0	26.9	7.4						1,806	3.12
3. Ingredient Labeling	13.7	40.2	32.9	10.8	2.5						1,765	2.48
C. Food Stores	16.0	54.1	23.3	5.2	1.4						1,821	2.22
D1. Price Information	17.4	42.9	25.4	10.6	3.6						1,817	2.40
2. Ads Sponsored by Food Stores	17.2	44.5	27.7	8.7	1.9						1,809	2.34
3. Information Concerning Freshness	14.4	39.0	30.1	13.4	3.1						1,819	2.52
E1. Meat and Poultry Products	13.0	46.5	30.0	8.4	2.1						1,817	2.40
2. Dairy Products and Eggs	28.4	53.4	13.9	2.9	1.5						1,820	1.96
3. Bakery and Cereal Products	26.7	52.0	16.2	3.9	1.3						1,819	2.01
4. Fresh Fruits	18.1	45.0	28.8	6.6	1.5						1,816	2.29
5. Fresh Vegetables	13.8	42.5	34.5	7.4	1.8						1,821	2.41
6. Processed Fruits and Vegetables	24.8	53.5	17.0	3.5	1.2						1,810	2.03
7. Prepared or Convenience Foods	17.1	40.5	26.6	10.6	5.2						1,776	2.46

* Due to some respondents' failure to answer all questions, the number of observations differs from the total number of respondents (1,831).
