Caterers and restaurants see boost in public trust following pandemic

08 December 2021

Caterers and restaurants saw a significant boost to public trust in the past year because of the pandemic, according to a new survey of trust in the food industry-funded by EIT Food.

- Caterers and restaurants see an increase in public trust due to COVID-19 outbreak across 6 project countries, including the UK
- Food manufacturers also see increased trust due to COVID-19 outbreak among the public as they help avoid pandemic supply chain issues
- UK see an overall increase in trust in food system actors due to COVID-19, with farmers once again topping the list
- Public hungry for initiatives to improve trust in the food industry, with blockchain-driven transparency tech topping list of suggested options

The results of the EIT Food-funded Increasing consumer trust and support for the food supply chain and for food companies project show that trust in different actors in the food industry has increased due to COVID-19 outbreak. EIT Food is an innovation community supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union. The survey was carried out across six countries: the UK, Spain, Italy, Finland, Poland and Israel. The change was most pronounced for caterers and restaurants followed by food manufacturers.

In the latest survey of UK consumers conducted in October 2021, caterers and restaurants improved their public trust scores to 4.74/7 from 4.48/7 in 2020. Asked specifically about how COVID-19 has affected trust in the British food industry, restaurants and caterers, and food manufacturers saw the biggest increases in scores compared to 2020.

The catering sector has been one of the most affected by COVID-19, with measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus meaning that outlets closed their doors to customers during national and local lockdowns. The resulting innovation, from takeaways and delivered food to street market food, has enabled many businesses to continue to trade, and the researchers believe that this innovation has contributed significantly to increasing public trust.

Professor Richard Bennett, Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Reading who led the project, said:

“Consumer trust in the food supply chain, as a result of people's experiences during COVID-19, has increased in 2021 especially in relation to trust in restaurants and caterers.

“Necessity is the mother of invention and we’ve certainly seen this be the case with the catering sector during the pandemic. Across the country, caterers went to extra efforts over the last year to provide food and drink to consumers in a COVID-safe way, and this has been much appreciated by consumers.”
Alongside caterers, food manufacturers have also seen an increase in public trust scores for 2021, as the whole sector continues to improve its standing in consumers’ minds.

In the UK, trust in farmers is the highest (5.12/7) followed by retailers (4.87/7), restaurants and caterers (4.74/7), food manufacturers (4.72/7) and authorities (4.33/7). This is largely in line with the 2020 survey which also found trust in farmers (5.15/7) to be the highest followed by retailers (4.6/7), restaurants (4.48/7), food manufacturers (4.45/7) and authorities (4.12/7).

On the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on trust in different actors by country, UK consumers said that the experience of COVID-19 increased trust mostly in farmers (4.79/7) followed by increased trust in retailers (4.55/7), food manufacturers (4.53/7) and restaurants and caterers (4.49/7). The 2020 survey also found trust in farmers (4.45/7) to have been impacted the most, followed by trust in retailers (4.18/7), with trust in restaurants (4.01/7) and food manufacturers (3.99/7) not changing. The higher scores in the 2021 survey indicate a higher positive impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on consumer trust in food actors and the food supply chain in 2021 compared to 2020.

Innovative solutions to increase trust

Consumers were also asked to rate innovations that could potentially increase public trust.

Blockchain-enabled technology that verifies the traceability of food products was the most popular among four proposed solutions to increase trust according to consumers across the six countries. This innovation was also the most popular with UK consumers. Blockchain technology can ensure that promises made to consumers are true.

Dr. Oana Tanasache, a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Reading, said:

“Consumers were asked to state their level of support towards four different initiatives that could be implemented by food actors to increase trust. Each initiative was built around offering consumers easy access to information about the origin and traceability of their food, their healthiness, or animal welfare.

“Our survey found that consumers are in general supportive of these types of initiatives. The top-rated innovation was one that increases the transparency of the food system through blockchain technology, and further underlines that consumers these days care a lot about the journey that their food is taking before it gets to their plates.”

For more information, please contact:

Tim Mayo
University of Reading
+44 (0)118 378 7110 / t.p.mayo@reading.ac.uk
About the research

1,220 consumers across six countries (UK, Finland, Spain, Italy, Poland and Israel) took part in the survey to assess consumer trust in actors in the food industry across Europe.

More information about the project can be found at: https://www.eitfood.eu/projects/increasing-consumer-trust-and-support-for-the-food-supply-chain-and-for-food-companies-2020

About EIT Food

Increasing consumer trust and support for the food supply chain and for food companies is a project under the support of EIT Food. EIT Food is the world’s largest and most dynamic food innovation community supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union. EIT Food accelerates innovation to build a future-fit food system that produces healthy and sustainable food for all.

EIT Food invests in projects, organisations and individuals that share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system. We unlock innovation potential in businesses and universities, and create and scale agrifood startups to bring new technologies and products to market. We equip entrepreneurs and professionals with the skills needed to transform the food system and put consumers at the heart of our work, helping build trust by reconnecting them to the origins of their food.

We are one of eight innovation communities established by the European Institute for Innovation & Technology (EIT), an independent EU body set up in 2008 to drive innovation and entrepreneurship across Europe.

Find out more at www.eitfood.eu or follow us via social media: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram.