



The New Values of Food

More than half of consumers think food brands should engage in key social issues

THERE IS FAR MORE TO FOOD than its calorie content or nutritional value. Both consumers and foodservice operators are driven by inherent values that steer the way they eat and the food they serve, according to Datassential's *New Food Values* keynote report.

Most consumers claim that their values and deeply held beliefs about the world shape the way — and from whom — they shop, both for food brands and retailers. And more than 90 percent of operators say their values influence how they run their businesses, and most engage in a number of practices to uplift their employees, patrons and community.

This shapes everything about the foodservice chain in both big and subtle ways.

What Consumers Want From Foodservice

Consumers are split when it comes to whether brands should engage with key social or global issues. More than half think it's a good idea for food and restaurant brands to tackle key issues, but that leaves half who are indifferent to the idea.

More than a fifth of consumers believe it's a bad idea for brands to engage in issues, mostly because they feel these companies should stay away from heated topics, and they worry brands may alienate them. Unsurprisingly, this varies greatly by generation. Younger consumers are significantly more interested in seeing brand engagement in issues, in contrast to their older counterparts.

The next generation to approach adulthood is the most enthused at the prospect of brands and food retailers

addressing the key issues they care most about. In fact, more than a third of Gen Z consumers believe food brands and restaurants should take a stand and voice their opinions on crucial issues such as human rights, healthcare, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Pick Your Battles Wisely

Of course, taking a stand on social issues can be a huge risk for food brands or any business, as it wades into contentious territory. That is why authenticity is key.

This means not just posting comments on social media or being vocal about a certain topic. For businesses, it means actively engaging in causes that one cares about, sharing the related work you've done for a certain cause, and sharing with your customers actionable ways to get involved.

Making it part of the fabric of your business, rather than a rotating menu item, will bring the biggest reward from consumers.

A Cause We Can All Get Behind

Wearing one's heart on their sleeve can feel vulnerable and lead to worry about the impact on the business. If a business wants to get involved and be vocal about it, but is reticent about consumer reaction, battling food insecurity is a way to show that a business cares about its community without taking the risk of delving into issues that are more contentious.

Food companies have enormous potential in positively shaping society, and combating food insecurity is the value that has the most widespread consumer appeal. **CSN**

Datassential, a Chicago-based food and beverage industry research and consulting firm, brings clients real-world insights on flavor trends, foodservice and consumer packaged goods, globally. Learn more at datassential.com.