

## Survey Finds Consumer Distrust of Food Industry

by [Dan Flynn](#) | May 02, 2011

Distrust between the food industry and consumers is growing, according to a recently released [Deloitte survey](#), which provides one of the first measures of how the public feels about new food safety legislation.

The annual survey was commissioned by Deloitte, but conducted by an unnamed independent research company. It sampled opinion from 1,050 consumers.

One of the questions asked got directly to the misgivings many consumers have about the food they eat: "Are you more concerned than you were five years ago about the food you eat?"

Seventy-three percent of the respondents said "yes," up 8 percentage points from 2010, when 65 percent answered the same question affirmatively.

The Deloitte survey also asked consumers about their opinion of the Food Safety Modernization Act, signed into law by President Obama early in January. Unlike some of the "push poll" surveys being done by advocacy groups prior to the law's passage, the Deloitte survey gave consumers a realistic range of choices.

Here's how they broke down:

- 8 percent: The system in place prior to Jan. 1, 2011 was sufficient; no additional regulation was necessary.
- 25 percent: The system in place prior to Jan. 1, 2011 need to be updated; this Act sufficiently addressed that need.
- 17 percent: The system in place prior to Jan. 1, 2011 needed to be updated; this Act did not go far enough or does not address the right issues.
- 3 percent: The system in place prior to January 1, 2011 represented over-regulation; the Act should have scaled-back regulation regulations; not expanded them.
- 47 percent: Don't Know/No Opinion

While 32 percent of consumers surveyed said they were somewhat or very familiar with the Food Safety Modernization Act, 68 percent had never heard of it.



Deloitte found 47 percent of consumers thought the number of food recalls increased during 2010, up by six points when the same question was asked about 2009. All of the increase came from consumers who previously thought the number of recalls stayed about the same.

Only 10 percent said the number of recalls decreased in 2010, the same number who said so for 2009.

An indication that consumers are more concerned about food than non-food items are the results for the same questions about non-food items. Only 33 percent of those surveyed said the number of non-food recalls had increased, and 59 percent said they'd stayed about the same. Nine percent of consumers said the number of non-food recalls had decreased.

Interestingly, the survey found the number of consumers reading country-of-origin labels split almost evenly into five groups: 19 percent said they read them all the time; 19 percent said they read them almost all the time; 18 percent said they read them frequently; 26 percent said they read them once in a while; and 18 percent said they never read them.

Asked if they avoid foods from certain countries, 38 percent of those surveyed said "yes" and 62 percent said "no." And 59 percent said they would pay more for an item that provided traceability information, while 41 percent said they would go with a lower-priced item that was not traceable.

Five consumer concerns about food -- healthiness, safety, processing, chemicals, and contracting a foodborne illness -- were all up in the 2011 survey over the year earlier. Concern about contracting a foodborne illness was cited by 23 percent of consumers, up seven points from the year before.