



Agriculture and  
Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et  
Agroalimentaire Canada

# 2019 Survey on Consumer Perceptions of Food

## (Wave V)

### Summary

**Prepared for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada**

**Supplier:** EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

**Contract Number:** 01B68-190716/001/CY

**Contract Value:** \$79,965.02

**Award Date:** September 26, 2018

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For more information on this report, please contact [aafc.por-rop.aac@canada.ca](mailto:aafc.por-rop.aac@canada.ca)

*Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français*

Canada

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This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The research study was conducted with 3,031 Canadians 18 or older between February 13 and March 1, 2019.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre Sondage de 2019 sur les perceptions des consommateurs à l'égard des aliments (Vague V) - Sommaire

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## Summary

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) supports the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry through initiatives that promote innovation and competitiveness. The activities of the Department range from the farmer to the consumer, from the farm to global markets, through all phases of producing, processing and marketing of farm, food and bio-based products. Agriculture is also a shared jurisdiction in Canada, and the Department works closely with provincial and territorial governments in the development and delivery of policies and programs. To support its mandate, the Department regularly conducts public opinion research to determine the opinions and attitudes of Canadians and agricultural producers and agricultural processors. The Department uses the results of the research it commissions to develop policies, services and programs, and communications planning. Results are shared internally, as well as with provincial and territorial counterparts, and the Canadian public.

AAFC has commissioned five waves of the Survey of Consumer Perceptions of Food. The first wave was conducted in 2004, with further iterations of the survey conducted in 2006, 2010, and 2014. Each wave was modified to reflect current issues, while retaining some indicators to track the perceptions of consumers over time. The 2019 Survey on Consumer Perceptions of Food consisted of a sample of 3,031 completed cases with Canadians 18 years of age or over who have at least half of the responsibility for grocery shopping in the household. The survey was conducted between February 13 and March 1, 2019.

## Key Findings

### **Awareness and Information:**

- Most Canadians have low awareness of some initiatives such as the new Safe Food for Canadians Regulations (20% are aware) or A Food Policy for Canada (25% are aware).
- All respondents were subsequently asked about their impressions of the new Safe Food for Canadians Regulations, including a description of the policy for those who were previously unaware of it. More than half of Canadians (55%) indicated a positive impression of the new Safe Food for Canadians Regulations.
- Canadians rely on many sources of information to make decisions about food and nutrition. Forty-eight per cent (48%) of Canadians said they rely on doctors, nutritionists, or other health professionals to make decisions about food and nutrition. Other popular sources of information include family and friends (40%), news media (32%), Canada's food guide (32%) and food-specific websites (30%).

- Awareness of the updated Canada's food guide is high, with 76% indicating they are aware of the new guide launched in January 2019. Of those aware of it, 23% said the updated food guide will influence their purchasing decisions

## Purchase Decisions about Food

In terms of key attributes Canadians look for when purchasing food:

- Most Canadians (84%) seek food items that are considered to be the best value for the money spent as was also the case in 2014. Nutritional value is also key (76%); up from 68% in 2014.
- Many look for items that say "Product of Canada" or "Made in Canada" on their product label (69%), or are locally produced (63%). Both of these have increased since 2014; from 52, and 48%, respectively.
- Country of origin is also important to more than half (57%, up significantly from 38% in 2014), and about half are concerns with convenience (49%, on par with 2014).
- More than half of Canadians look for organic products at least some of the time (55%).
  - The main barrier to purchasing organic, among those who do not look for organic at least some of the time is the cost (73%).
- 91% of Canadians look for locally grown food at least some of the time.
  - Of these individuals, 62% always or often purchase locally grown food items. Among those who at least sometimes purchase locally produced items 70% rely primarily on labels specifying the location of farm, grower, or processing company the food came from.
- 71% of consumers look for food produced using environmentally sustainable practices.
  - Reasons for not looking for food produced using environmentally sustainable methods are lack of confidence in the accuracy of labelling (44%) and cost (41%).
- 66% of consumers look for food produced using humane animal treatment.
  - Canadians who often purchase products produced under conditions related to the humane treatment of animals rely most (68%) on labels making a claim such as "free range" or "traditional" (up from 58% in 2014).
- The two most influential aspects of food for most Canadians are the cost of food (77%) and the nutritional value (65%).
- More than two in three (70%) have avoided or boycotted a particular food product because of concerns about the safety of the food; up from 58% in 2014. Slightly fewer have boycotted a particular company (66%) or country (63%).

## Use of Technology for Information

- Survey results indicate that 26% of Canadians have used a mobile device to scan a barcode for information on a food or retail product.

## Impressions-Confidence

When measuring attitudes about food, the cost of food remains the most important issue to Canadians.

- Most (85%) agree that the price of food affects their food purchasing decisions, and they are careful about the way they buy and prepare food to minimize food waste (83%).
- Sixty-eight per cent (68%) report that they consider the environmental impact in terms of plastic and packaging when making food purchasing decisions.
- More than half of Canadians (56%) believe the Canadian agriculture and food industry are transparent about how food is produced, whereas relatively few believe in the transparency of other countries (18%).
- Most Canadians (89%) believe the quality of food produced in Canada is either excellent quality (36%) or good quality (53%). Significantly fewer (50%) rate the quality of imported foods as excellent (6%) or even good (44%).
- The majority are confident in the system regarding issues such as animal diseases (74%), bacterial contamination (66%), or hormones, antibiotics, and chemicals in plants and animals (52%). Survey results suggest that confidence is generally up considerably from 2014.
- Half to just over half of Canadians expressed confidence in the accuracy of labelling in terms of indicating locally produced (58%), ingredients list (53%), nutrition facts (52%), net weight (51%), and nutritional content (50%).

## Government Role in Public Trust

The survey identified many factors that Canadians believe are important in building or maintaining the public's trust in food produced in Canada's agricultural and agri-food industry.

- Ensuring food safety (84%), accurate labelling (82%), or informative and truthful food product labelling (80%) are each rated as very important in building trust.
- Affordability of food (72%) or compliance with government regulations (71%) are also seen as very important in building or maintaining trust. Transparency about how food is produced and processed was mentioned by 66%.
- When asked about efforts the government should make to build, improve, and maintain consumers' trust in food products there is no consensus. Half of Canadians (50%) believe the government should ensure Canadian food standards meet or exceed those of other countries, and that the industry is

supported by a strong regulatory system (49%). Ensuring product labelling includes product information is also seen as useful by many (43%).

- The most effective way for the government to share information with consumers would be through social media (32%) or a Government of Canada website (28%).

The contract value for the POR project is \$79,965.02 (including HST).

**Supplier Name: EKOS Research Associates Inc.**

**PWGSC Contract Number: 01B68-190716/001/CY**

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To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail [aafc.por-rop.aac@canada.ca](mailto:aafc.por-rop.aac@canada.ca).

## Political Neutrality Certification

This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.



**Signed by: Susan Galley (Vice President)**