

IPC: Consumer Confidence In Global Food Supply A Must

WASHINGTON, D.C. — With public attention around the world focused on outbreaks of hoof and mouth disease, regulation of biotechnology and mad cow disease, international trade officials must take steps to build confidence in the global food system if they want to maintain an open, global trading system.

Negotiators planning to launch a global round of trade reform talks this fall in Qatar must realize that a lack of consumer confidence in the global food system jeopardizes free trade.

Achieving consumer confidence therefore is not just a luxury — it is a necessity in

today's global trade environment. This is the main message from the International Policy Council on Agriculture, Food and Trade (IPC) in its latest position paper, Achieving Public Confidence in the Global Food System. The paper makes recommendations for the WTO talks aimed at bolstering consumer confidence in the global food system.

"In recent years, the public has exercised an increasing influence on international trade," said IPC Chairman Robert L. Thompson. "And as our food system becomes more global, consumer interests are more often spilling over into the trade

arena. Maintaining public confidence in the global food system without jeopardizing the benefits that can be derived from a more liberal trading system is a critical issue." The IPC is an independent, international group of agricultural leaders and experts promoting an efficient and open global food and agricultural system.

The most basic consumer interests relating to food are its safety, price and availability. The IPC believes that satisfying these needs is the fundamental role of public policy. Domestic and international regulations that are science-based, transparent and predictable are the best ways to address consumer expectations about food safety.

Governments must ensure that industry claims are not false or misleading to consumers. With their basic needs met, the personal preferences of consumers in such areas as production methods can and should be met by the market.

Policies implemented in response to consumer expectations should distort international trade as little as possible, the IPC paper said. This is because an open trading system addresses the most important consumer concern of all — an adequate supply of affordable food.

Trade plays a crucial role in generating economic growth, which provides consumers around the world with access to affordable food supplies. Moreover, a global food system based on open trade and guaranteed access to food supplies allows countries to survive domestic production shortfalls and other food crises, without expending precious resources in support of unsustainable production.

The key recommendations of the IPC paper were:

- Consumers' needs for food security, product safety and product integrity must be accommodated. These needs should not be suppressed or ignored, even if they are not based on solid evidence.

- Given the crucial role trade plays in generating economic growth and in providing consumers with access to affordable food supplies around the world, specific consumer expectations should be accommodated in ways that do not distort trade, or which distort trade as little as possible.

- When consumer concerns can only be met with trade measures, the measures should be proportional to the objective pursued and restrict trade as little as possible.

- Measures should be taken

strictly within existing trade rules — any unilateral or discriminatory action should be ruled out.

- Measures should neither be arbitrary nor used as a pretext for protectionism.

- Consumers must have adequate information to make informed choices. Mandatory labeling is called for when consumer health and safety are at issue. Voluntary labeling is preferred for products that cater to consumer demands for particular methods of production.

- Governments must ensure that the information provided to consumers is truthful, accurate, verifiable and not misleading in any way.

- Consumer expectations should be considered on their own merits and not be confounded with producer concerns, or society's concerns about globalization.

- Precaution is warranted when dealing with food safety, human health and safety, and with the protection of flora and fauna. Such precaution should be included within the limits set by the SPS Agreement.

- There is no satisfactory alternative to scientific evidence as a basis to address consumer concerns about the global food system.

Co-op's New Molt-Inducing Feed Aids Poultry Industry

RICHMOND, Va. — Southern States Cooperative's poultry-producing patrons are in prime position to have store markets for their eggs and broilers. That's because the co-op, under the auspices of CRF, has been at the forefront of animal welfare research for years, accurately anticipating market demands for a better-treated bird.

"McDonald's has recently gotten a lot of press for its stance on the conditions under which its McNuggets or Egg McMuffins were raised," says Dr. Lance Minear, manager of poultry research services. "While we can't ensure birds are given the mandated 72 square inches of personal space, the co-op can provide molting-season feeds that don't starve the birds, as required by the giants of the food-service industry."

Minear adds that the formula, dubbed "low ME" for low metabolizable energy, is easier for producers to manage and lowers overall feed costs. It may even slow the shedding of Salmonella Enteritidis, dovetailing with Southern States' research in lowering risk of farm-gate-to-dinner-plate food contamination.

Rather than put layers through a fortnight-long hard molt by starving the birds, Minear and his team developed a "loned" oat that provides a high-fiber, low-energy diet. The

birds molted and, likewise, began production in the same environment right on schedule.

He had similar success during the soft-molt phase, which is typically produced by greatly restricting the birds' diet. And, because producers didn't bear the tedious task of weighing and measuring portions, they saved time and money. Moreover, mortality rates were 75 percent less than the losses expected from both molts.



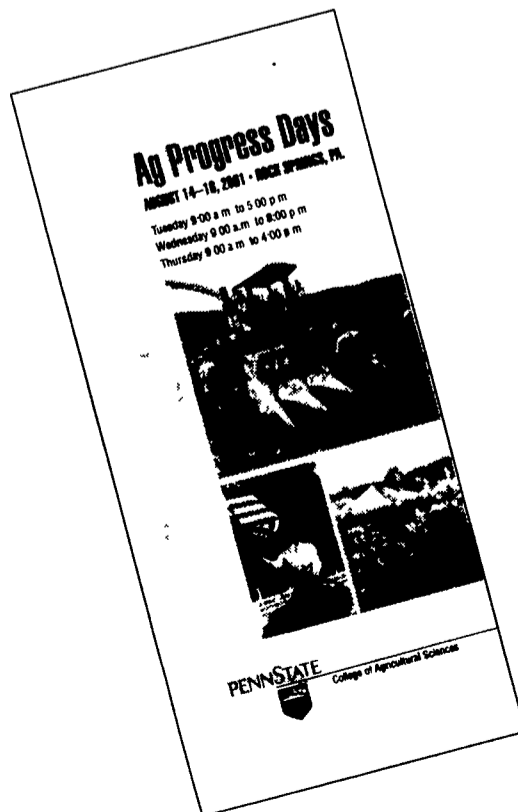
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