



Europeans and Traceability: a survey by GS1 Executive summary

The Global Office, GS1 France and the *Salon Traçabilité* (the most famous traceability convention in Europe) have conducted a survey on the European consumers' perceptions of traceability. The results of this innovative study highlight various national approaches regarding this matter. Among the outstanding points, the notoriety of traceability is stronger in Germany and in France. Besides in France, this notoriety has progressed by 9 points, when compared to the study that was carried out by GS1 in 2005.

More than other Europeans, the French consumers define traceability as "the tracing of a product from the manufacturer to the consumer", and also as "the origin of a product". The French are also the only Europeans to quote the concept of "quality approach". In the statistics, the priority of a good traceability is first the ability to withdraw dangerous products, the executives have voted the priority to reassure consumers about the quality of the products. The fields considered to be priority are all those concerning food.

The risks the French perceive about traceability are especially related to bureaucracy: too much control and complexities that may lead to misinformation. Except in Germany, the Europeans have more confidence in the type of business such as hypermarkets and supermarkets. As the principal guarantors of traceability, the French are the only one to put the public authority at the same level as the manufacturers.

Logically, the latter should be considered to be more responsible for traceability, than the distributors. Though, France and United Kingdom consider, more than other countries, the distributors are somewhat more responsible for traceability.

Should a problem occur with a product, France is the country which claims the most information and the possibility of directly contacting the manufacturer to have a privileged interlocutor. French consumers, as three-quarters of the Europeans, would like to have direct information on the packing of the products. They reveal that they are ready to pay an extra cost (approx. EUR 0.02) to be informed about the traceability of a product.

Finally the RFID (radio frequency identification) is generally poorly known by the European consumers. Its principal asset, especially in France, for women and high professional group is "a certainty of quality and freshness". If the technology does not frighten the majority of the people polled - especially in France and in Germany, they consider however that this system should be controlled.





“The study reveals that German consumers consider traceability in terms of product quality and as a guarantee against counterfeiting. They also want more information. GS1 Germany’s recent activities allow us to hope for increased awareness of this issue in the near future.

Advantages of traceability are especially evident in the food industry. German consumers are especially attentive to the risk of defects in products or damaged goods.

GS1’s activities in this area address this issue. They make it possible to increase product quality and to facilitate the recall of defective goods. This responds to the expectations of German consumers. Finally, it is very interesting to note that recent food crises have certainly had an impact on the perception of traceability amongst German consumers. Their purchase habits have changed and they now prefer markets and small/medium-sized shops to supermarkets.”

GS1 Germany

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In the last ten years, Italian consumers have become more knowledgeable about food safety. They are aware of the importance of food quality and its impact on consumer health and well-being.

Traceability is normally considered as a “given” for consumers in South Europe. That’s why Italian consumers don’t identify a clear and direct benefit linked to traceability and don’t make a clear difference between traceability and product identity or origin. Advantages of traceability for services and people are not clearly perceived.

Adoption of traceability systems has actually been required by law in the production and distribution process. Companies, not consumers, have been the primary communication target about the law. The new regulatory prescriptions don’t say anything about additional product information even though this is exactly what consumers are demanding.

Among the main perceived risks, “new constraints on manufacturers” gets a higher score than “increased prices”. Maybe this is a proof of the strong trust the Italian consumers already have in manufacturers while mandatory regulations are mostly perceived as leading to increased bureaucracy rather than increased safety.

GS1 Italy

“We can compare the results of the study with the one conducted in Spain by the Catalan Food Safety Agency entitled “The perception of food safety by the consumer”.

This study reveals that consumers are worried about food safety, product origin, quality, flavour and colour. Spanish consumers don’t differentiate between traceability and food safety. However, though they have difficulty defining exactly what traceability is, when understood as food safety, it is amongst their concerns”.

GS1 Spain

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For further information about Traceability: <http://www.gs1.org/productssolutions/traceability/>