

Consumer desires greatly influence the demand of an industry, with the agriculture industry being no exception. The ability of an industry to adapt to a changing world determines the success or failure. The core of the consumer goals stands the test of time – purchasing a safe, healthy, nutritious product. However, the overarching influence over consumers as well as agriculture is the introduction and evolution of technology. Technology has grown exponentially within the last 20 years in all areas of life. As a result of technological advances, cost, convenience and traceability have been and will be at the forefront of consumer buying decisions.

Approximately 20 years ago, there was not a large distinction in socioeconomic status between lower-, middle- and high-income consumers. There was a large middle-class population with drove consumer trends to be more cost conscious. Consumers in the past put more value on a dollar because a greater percentage of their income was going toward food. This became challenging for the industry with the major advancements in technology. The information boom began and perhaps has had the greatest influence in recent history impacting on both the consumer and agriculture. With more information came a shift in nutritional guidelines from the USDA the food pyramid to MyPlate, simplifying and influencing consumer eating choices.

Today, while price is still a factor in consumer decision-making, convenience seems to be a driving force in consumer trends. The convenience trend can be seen in new meal delivery service companies such as Hello Fresh, and Home Chef, among others. These services package everything needed to create a meal at home. Additionally, meal planning trends including fitness plans such as Tone it Up and Beach Body have become popular. These services and plans are monthly subscriptions that will renew and deliver automatically with little or no input required from the consumer. These prepared at-home meal options are convenient for the busy on-the-go

lifestyle of millennials. Non-GMO, locally grown, natural sources are some buzzwords that are currently effecting consumer decisions and heavily influenced by Millennials and Generation Z as a result of the information boom.

In the future, consumers will expand the need for convivence and continue to evolve with technology. Future consumers will have never lived life without technology at their fingertips. As a response to technological advancements, traceability of consumer products will be valuable. Interaction of food source will go beyond the grocery store clerk and straight to the farmer. This transition has already started with advanced marketing technologies. Agricultural production is transitioning or has transitioned into fully integrated systems operating with advanced technology which makes complete food traceability achievable. The power of technology will shift future consumers to make more educated, research-based decisions because they can find the information and will want answers to the where and how. The challenge for future generations includes an expanding population.

Finally, it is important as an industry that we help influence future consumers. The agriculture industry must have a voice in the media and a hand in the decisions when communicating with consumers. The true challenge is the consumers of today and the test will be the consumers of tomorrow. Accommodating consumers that want low-cost, convenient products and want to know where food comes from is a great challenge for the agriculture industry. The current consumer market spans many generations with different motivation for buying. While this is a great challenge, the consumers of today provide a great opportunity to learn, adapt and provide solutions to anticipate consumer needs and provide for a growing world.