Food Consumer Observatory

Co-funded by the European Union

Who do consumers believe?



Part four of the EIT Food Consumer Observatory Trust Report Series 2026

September 2026

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Trust as the foundation for change

Achieving a healthier and more sustainable European diet requires more than good intentions and innovative products - it requires trust. Consumers will be more likely to adopt ground-breaking innovations and believe the information provided about them, if they trust the people and institutions behind the food system, and if they can trust that producers act with integrity, that technologies are safe and that information is transparent and evidence-based. As Europe moves towards dietary transformation, trust remains the essential ingredient that connects innovation, communication and consumer acceptance - and ultimately determines whether healthier and more sustainable eating can become the norm.

Food innovations will only be embraced by consumers if they believe that these innovations are safe and actually good for them as well as the planet.

Over the past eight years,* the EIT Food Consumer Observatory has tracked the trust Europeans have within the food system - and how this trust influences what they eat, how they make food choice and how open they are to innovation.

The 2026 edition marks an important new step: instead of one comprehensive Trust Report, the findings are now presented across four focused reports. This change reflects the growing depth and diversity of the data, as well as our ambition to make insights more relevant and actionable for different audiences - from policymakers to food companies and researchers. Together, these four reports provide a complete picture of how trust, knowledge and behaviour interact to shape the future of Europe's food system.

The framework on the following page summarises all the elements related to trust in the food system and how they interact to shape food choices.

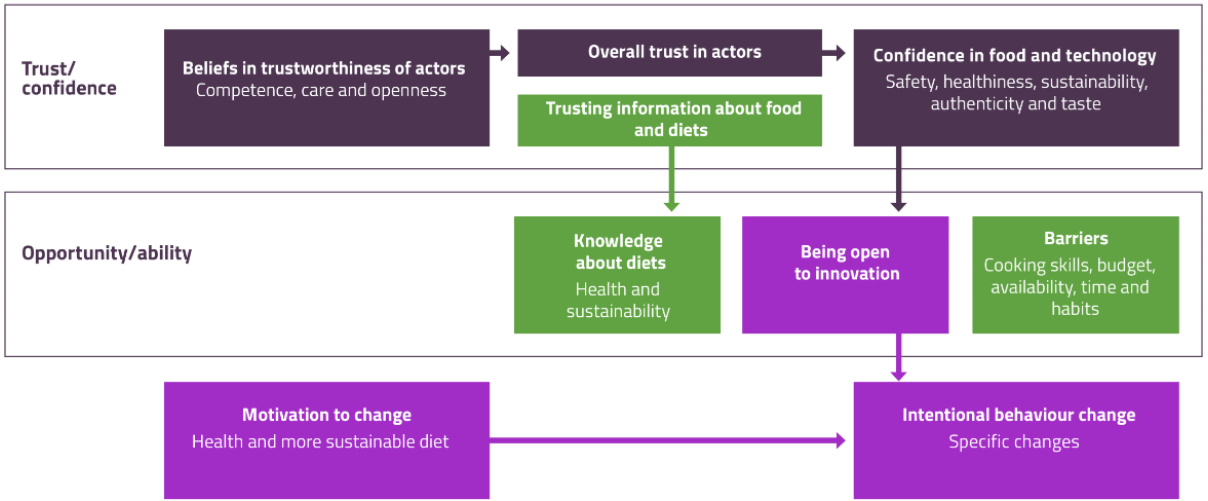
This report combines the past eight years of insights on trust through in depth-qualitative and quantitative research in the EIT Food TrustTracker® study.

- Consumers were surveyed across 18 European countries (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Israel and the UK).
- Fieldwork for this year's study was conducted in July and August 2025. 19,954 European consumers over 18 years old, and nationally representative in terms of age and gender, participated in the study.
- The TrustTracker® study has run every year since 2018.
- Since 2018, around 140,000 consumers have been surveyed.
- The TrustTracker® was originally developed by EIT Food partners University of Reading (project lead), the European Food Information Council (EUFIC), Aarhus University, KU Leuven and the University of Warsaw.

** Some of the elements of the study have only been included in the 2024 edition, so we have no data from before that year.*

What is part of the TrustTracker® Framework?

The model below summarises the theoretical framework that forms the foundation of EIT Food's TrustTracker®. The four 2026 Trust Reports all highlight one or more elements of this framework.



Report 1: What Europeans eat and what they want to change

A deep dive into Europeans' diets, intentions and barriers to change – highlighting trends in health, affordability and sustainability.

Report 2: The state of trust in the food system

An overview of how trust is evolving across actors in the food chain – from farmers to authorities – and what drives or erodes this trust.

Report 3: Trust in innovation: Between familiarity and fear

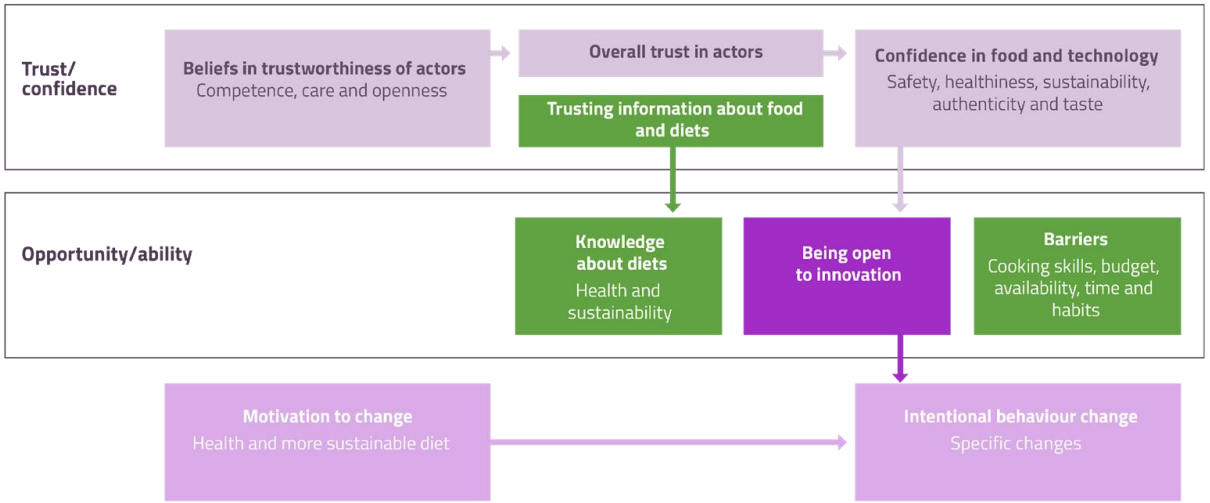
Insights into consumer openness toward new food technologies – from personalised nutrition to cultivated meat – and the cultural factors behind acceptance.

Report 4: Who do consumers believe?

Analysis of food literacy, trusted information sources and transparency expectations shaping consumer decision-making.

What is this report about?

This report explores food literacy, trusted information sources and what influences consumer decision-making.



Report 4: Who do consumers believe?

Analysis of food literacy, trusted information sources and transparency expectations shaping consumer decision-making.

Who do consumers believe?

What to expect in this report

- Trust in the food system does not only shape what consumers buy, but also **who they believe, which information they act upon, and how confident they feel making food choices**. As consumers navigate a complex information landscape - filled with labels, claims, media coverage and online voices - trust determines whether information is seen as credible, relevant and actionable.
- This fourth report in the Trust Series focuses on **food literacy, perceived knowledge and trusted sources of information**. It examines how confident Europeans feel about judging the healthiness and sustainability of food, how well they believe they can assess the reliability of food information, and which actors they turn to for guidance. The findings show a paradoxical picture: while consumers increasingly believe they are capable of making good food choices, scepticism about information sources is widespread and growing.
- The report also explores how trust in the food system conditions perceived knowledge and confidence. Consumers who trust the food chain feel better informed, particularly about sustainability, while those with low trust are more likely to feel uncertain and disengaged. Together, these insights reveal how **trust, knowledge and information credibility interact** - and why strengthening trust is essential for enabling healthier and more sustainable consumer behaviour.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Who do consumers believe?

Key takeaways

- **Younger consumers are less confident than older consumers in their food choices.**
  Consumers aged 55+ report the highest confidence (70%), while only 62% of those under 35 feel positive about their choices. This mirrors broader age differences in diet satisfaction observed in earlier Trust reports.
- **Confidence in knowledge about healthy diets is high and increasing.**
  Over 70% of Europeans believe their knowledge of healthy diets is sufficient, and 62% say they can assess how healthy food is. The share struggling to do so has declined from 18% to 15%.
- **Knowledge about sustainable diets is improving but remains weaker than health knowledge.**
  Just over half of consumers (52%) consider their sustainability knowledge sufficient, and fewer than half feel able to judge how sustainable food is. Lower perceived knowledge correlates strongly with less sustainable diets.
- **Older consumers feel less knowledgeable about food sustainability.**
  While understanding of healthy diets is evenly spread across age groups, fewer than half of consumers aged 55+ feel knowledgeable about sustainability, indicating a growing generational gap.
- **Consumers are becoming more confident in judging information reliability - despite widespread scepticism.**
  Confidence in discerning reliable food information increased from 43% to 49%, and 53% say they know where to find reliable information. Nevertheless, fewer than half consider food information itself to be reliable.
- **Consumers feel increasingly confident about their own food choices.**
  Related to the increasing knowledge on health and sustainability of food, the share of consumer that feel they are able to make good food choices has risen from 60% to 66% between 2024 and 2025. Only around one in ten consumers are dissatisfied with the food choices they make, reflecting generally high perceived control and satisfaction.
- **Trust in the food system amplifies perceived knowledge.**
  Consumers who trust the food chain are far more likely to feel knowledgeable, particularly about sustainability (65% vs. 37%). Trust appears to be a precondition for feeling well informed.
- **No single food-chain actor is widely trusted as an information source.**
  Even farmers - the most trusted actors overall - are not broadly trusted for health and sustainability information. Medical professionals and scientists remain the most trusted sources, but trust in them is declining.

Who do consumers believe?

Implications

Overall implication

- European consumers feel increasingly confident in their food choices but remain sceptical about information sources. Trust in the food system is a critical enabler of perceived knowledge, literacy and informed decision-making. Strengthening credibility, clarity and transparency is essential if information is to translate into healthier and more sustainable consumer behaviour.

For policymakers, public institutions and universities

- Strengthen food literacy with every opportunity, including in the introduction of new regulation.
- Confidence in food choices does not guarantee accurate understanding. Clear, accessible public guidance remains essential – particularly on sustainability.
- Declining trust in scientists and health professionals risks undermining evidence-based guidance. Visibility, independence and transparency of scientific work are critical.

For innovators, manufacturers, and food brands

- Make sure information is understandable and easily accessible.
- Consumers value clear ingredient lists and origin information but only engage when that is easy to access and interpret. Overly complex tools can reduce trust and backfire.
- Earn credibility through third-party validation and certification.
- Given low trust in commercial actors, collaboration with credible external organisations (like NGOs) strengthens perceived reliability.

For communicators, including NGOs and civil society

- Assume scepticism, not blind trust.
- Most consumers approach food information with doubt. Clear sourcing, balanced framing and evidence-based messaging are essential to credibility.
- Avoid information overload.
- Short, visual cues and concise explanations outperform detailed disclosures for most audiences.

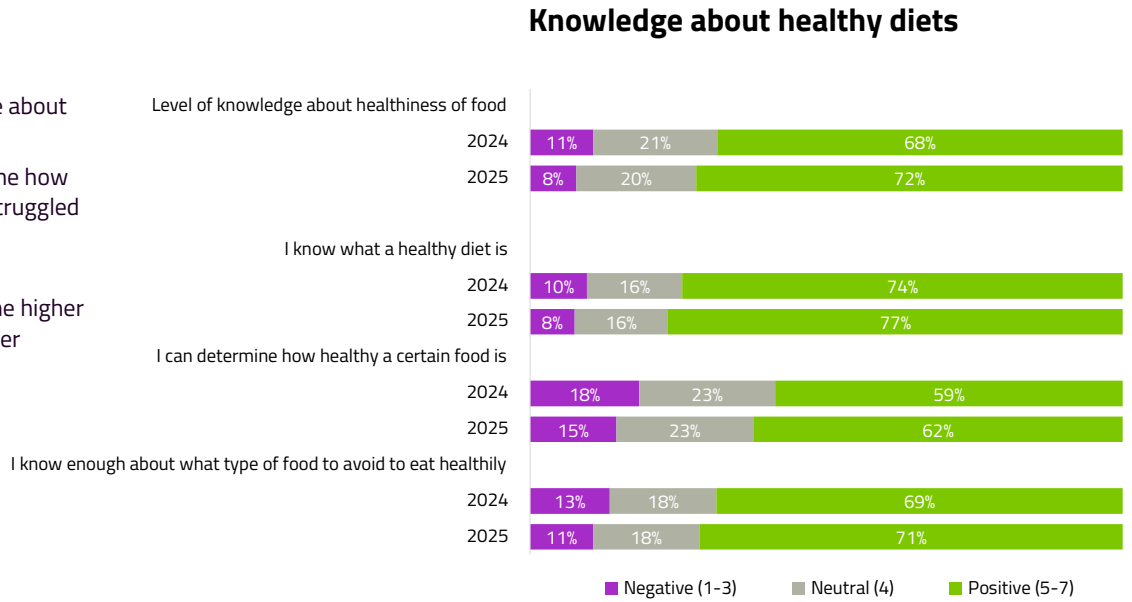
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FINDINGS

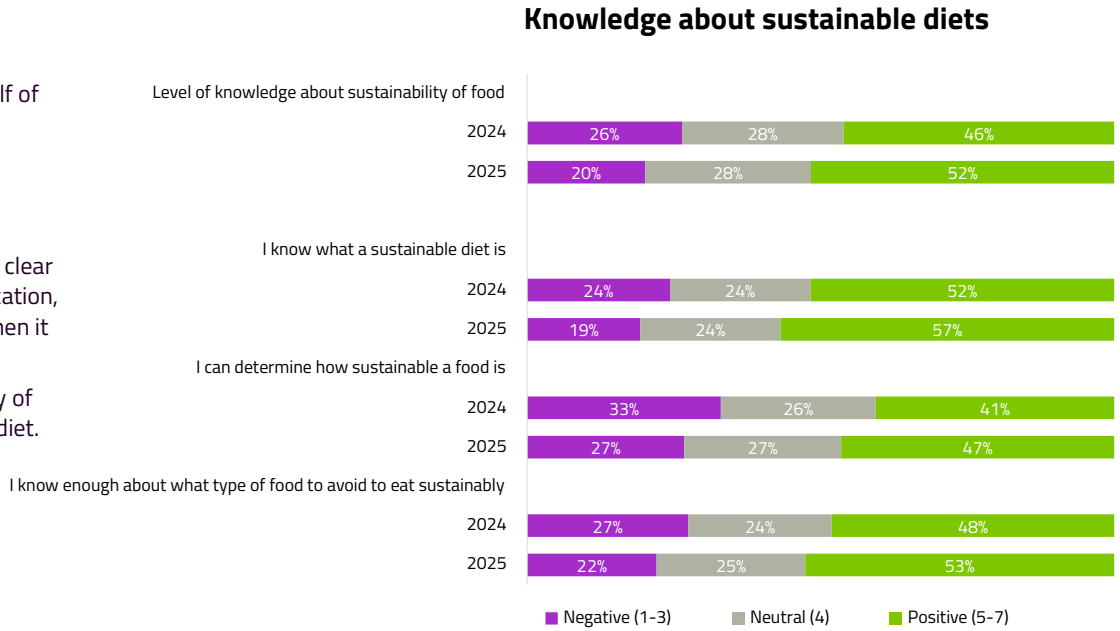
A growing majority of consumers is confident about their knowledge of healthy diets

- 72% of European consumers consider their knowledge about the healthiness of food to be sufficient.
- Approximately two-thirds (62%) say they can determine how healthy a certain food is. In 2024, almost one in five struggled to determine this, whereas in 2025 this number has decreased slightly, from 18 to 15%.
- There is a clear link with social class and education. The higher the education, the better-informed consumers consider themselves.



Consumers have become more knowledgeable about sustainable diets

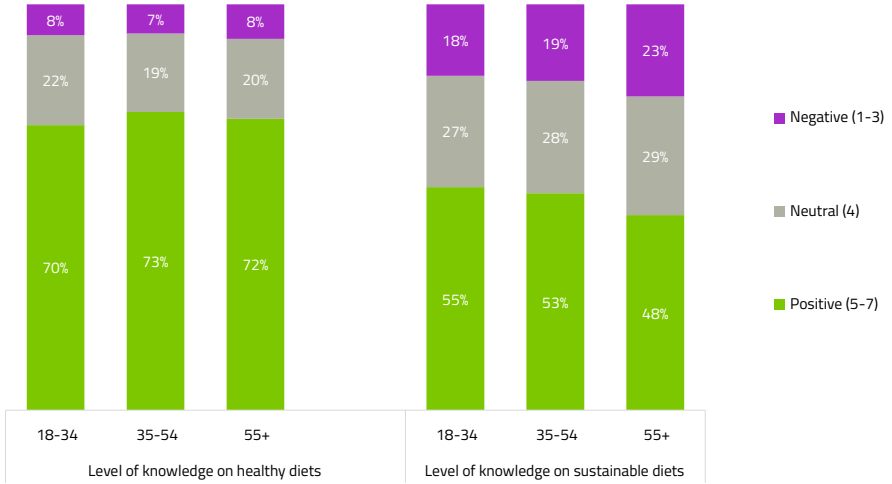
- While increasing from 46% in 2024, in 2025 just over half of Europeans (52%) consider their knowledge of the sustainability of food sufficient.
- Fewer consumers (47%) say they can determine how sustainable a certain food is.
- As with the knowledge of healthiness of food, there is a clear link with social class and education. The higher the education, the better informed consumers consider themselves when it comes to how sustainable their diet is.
- There is also a link with the (self-reported) sustainability of diets. The less knowledgeable, the less sustainable the diet.



Older consumers are less confident about their knowledge of sustainable diets

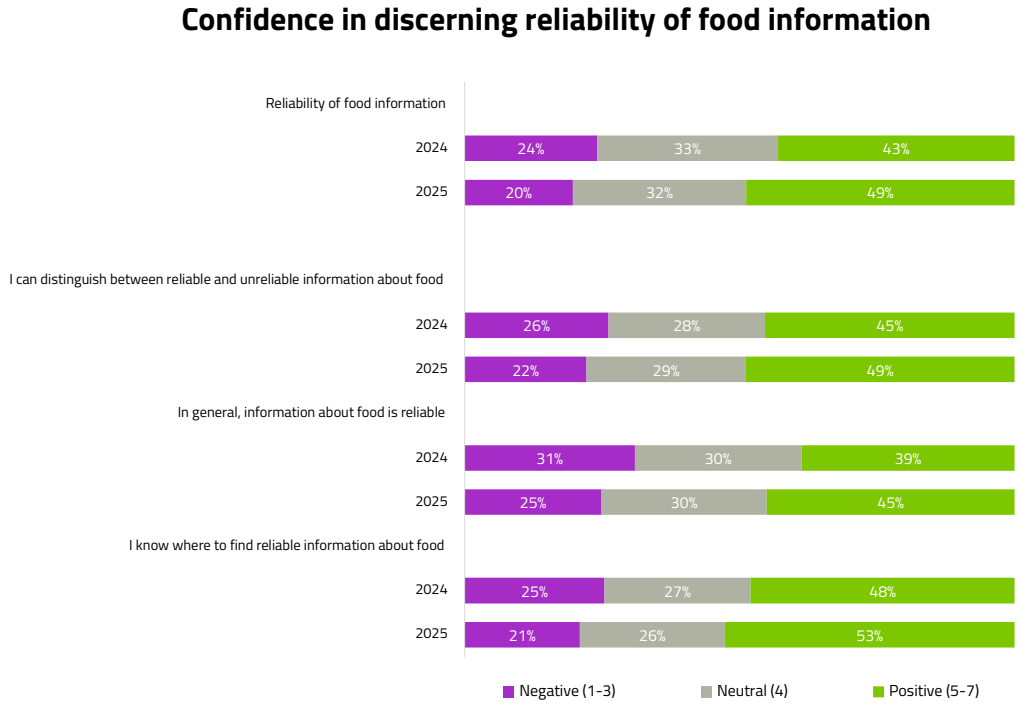
- The level of knowledge about what constitutes a healthy diet is evenly distributed across the three age groups.
- Older consumers are substantially less confident about their level of knowledge on the sustainability of food. Less than half of 55+ consumers (48%) rate their knowledge on this matter as sufficient.

Relationship between the level of food knowledge and age



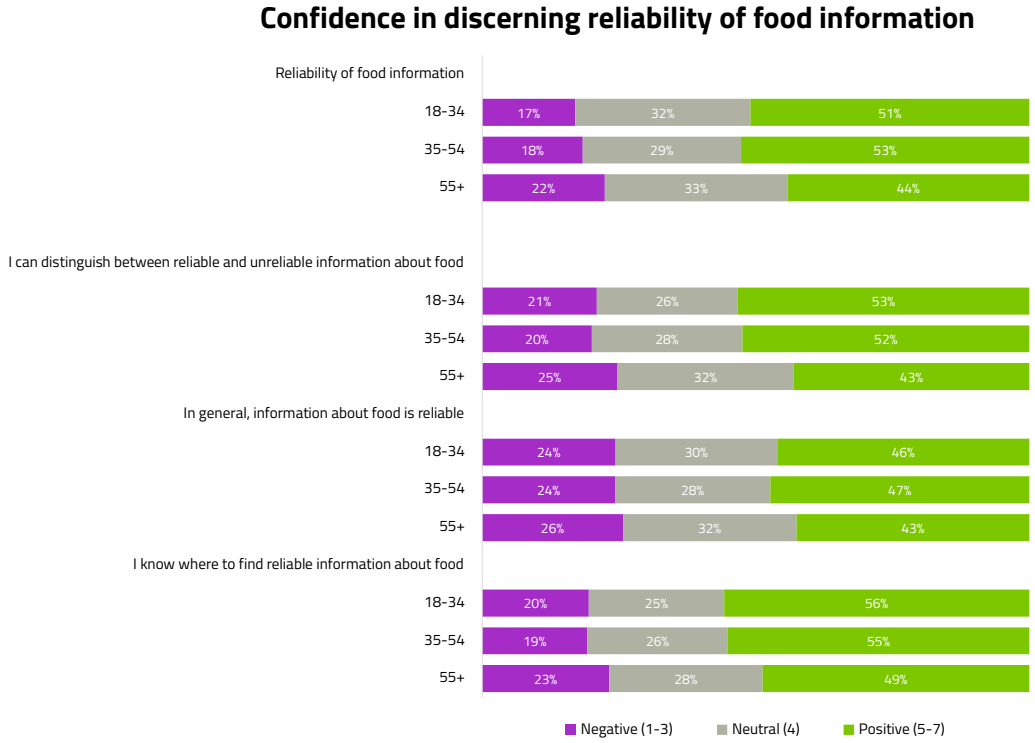
Consumers have become more confident in their ability to discern the reliability of food information

- Europeans are rather sceptical about the information they have on food. Less than half consider information about food to be reliable.
- But they have grown more confident over time about their own ability to understand what is reliable and what is not. From 2024 to 2025 the overall score has grown from 43% to 49%.
- In 2025, just over half (53%) say they know where to find reliable information about food.



Older consumers are less confident in their ability to discern the reliability of food information

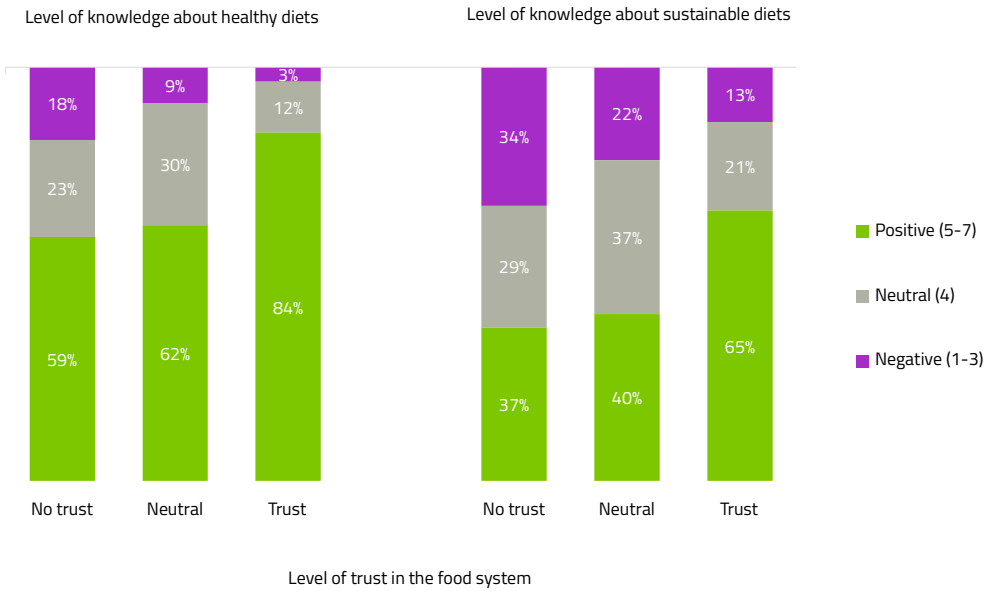
- Less than half of 55+ consumers (44%) express confidence in their ability to discern the reliability of food information.
- Across all age groups, less than half feel that information about food is reliable.
- Merely around half of European consumers believe they can distinguish reliable and unreliable information about food.
- Just slightly more believe they know where to find reliable information about food.



Those who have more trust in the food chain consider themselves more knowledgeable on food

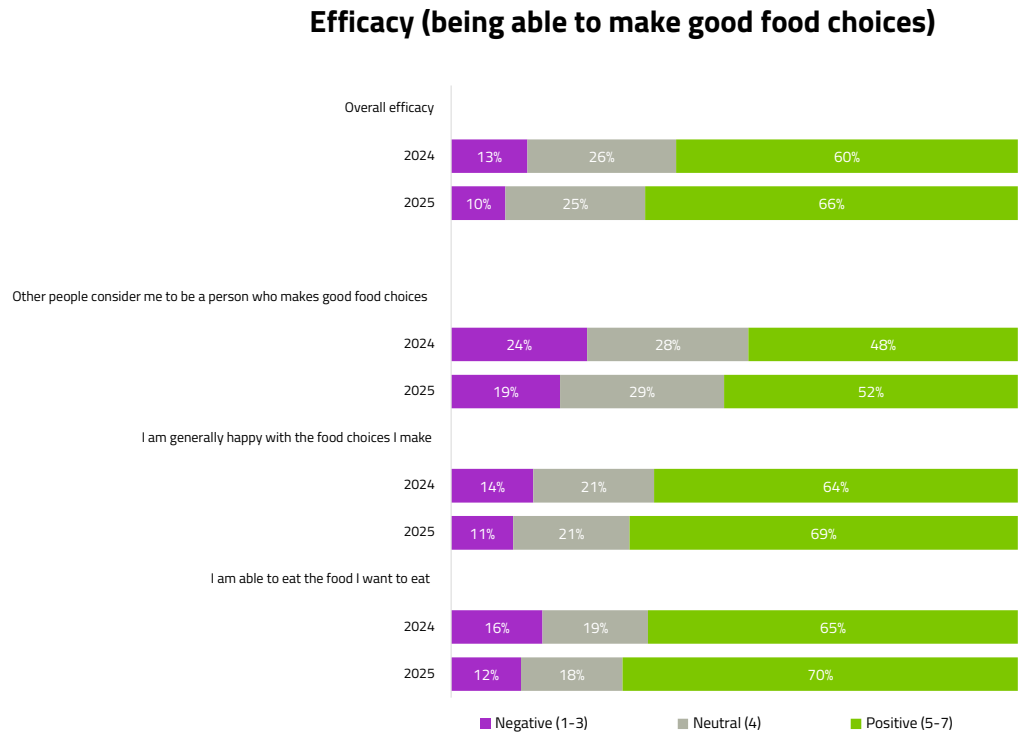
- Having trust in the food system is strongly related to being well informed.
- Consumers who have trust in the food chain feel more knowledgeable about food. In particular, the difference is big when it comes to the sustainability of food.
- Of those who have a low level of trust, only 37% believe they are able to determine the sustainability of food, compared to 65% of those who do have trust.

Relationship between trust in the food chain and the level of knowledge



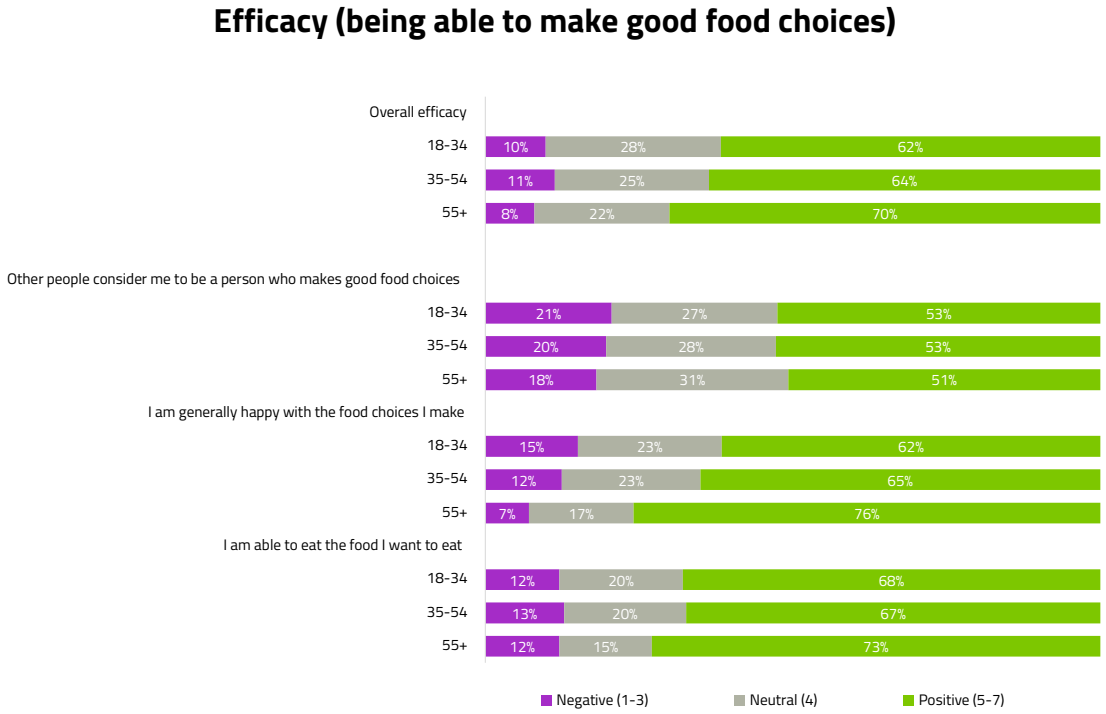
An increasing number of consumers believe they are able to make good food choices

- Consumers on the whole are more positive about their food choices compared to 2024. Overall efficacy has grown from 2024 to 2025 by 6%, to a total of 66%. It's likely related to the increasing overall level of knowledge on healthy and sustainable diets.
- Approximately just one in ten are unhappy with the food choices they make, consistent with the high overall satisfaction with their diets.



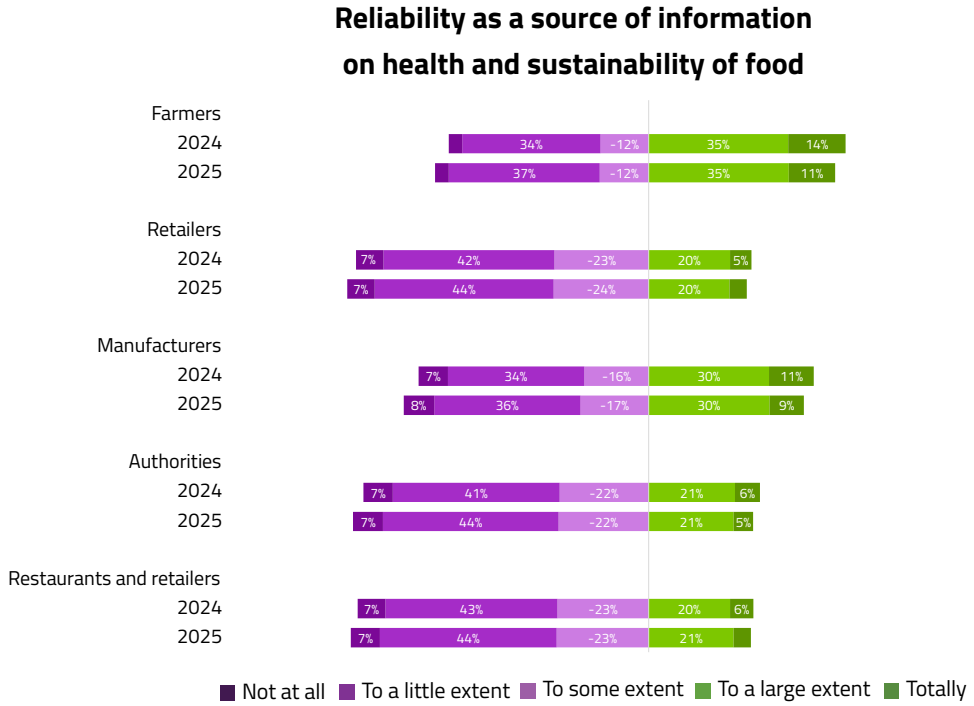
Younger consumers are generally less positive about their ability to make the right food choices

- Consumers aged 55+ tend to be more satisfied with the food choices they make: 70% are positive about this versus only 62% of the consumer under 35.
- This correlates with an overall higher satisfaction with their diet (see Trust Series part 1).



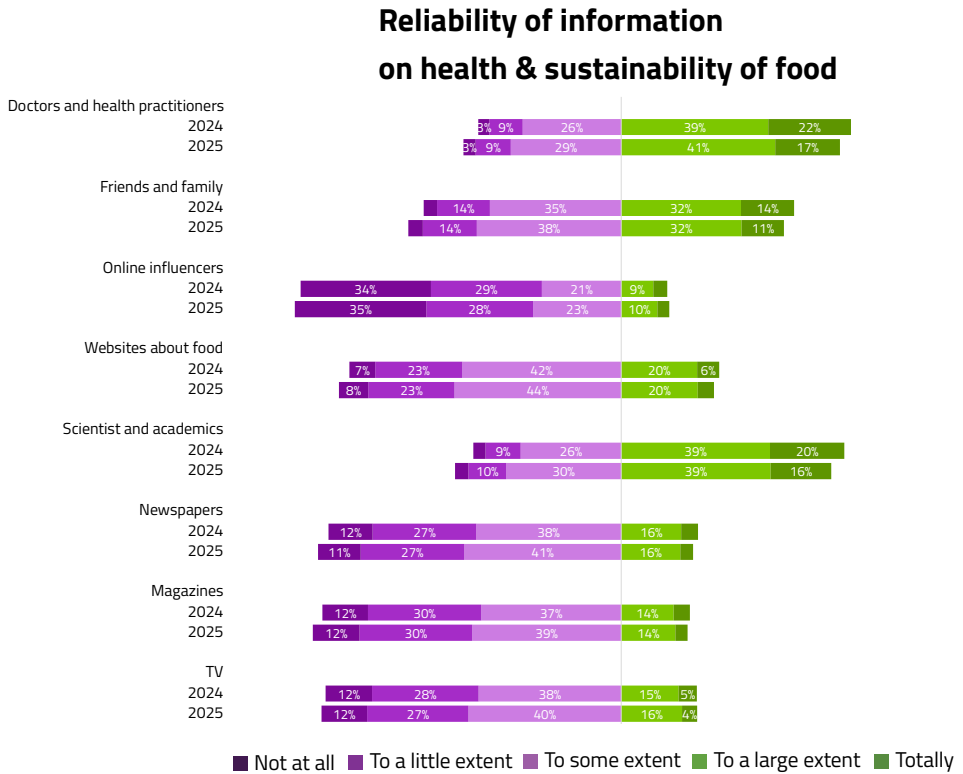
Even farmers - the most trusted food chain actors – are not widely trusted as a source of information on health and sustainability of food

- There is growing scepticism about the reliability of food chain actors as a source of reliable information on food. In particular, farmers (from 49% down to 46%) and manufacturers (from 41% down to 39%) are less trusted to provide reliable information.
- Retailers, authorities, restaurants and caterers have a long way to go. Less than a third of consumers consider them a reliable source of information on healthiness and sustainability of food.



Medical professionals and scientist are more trusted as a source of food information, but trust is declining

- Scepticism on the reliability of sources of food information is widespread and increasing. While doctors and health practitioners as well as scientists and academics are trusted by more than half of consumers, not everyone is convinced of their reliability.
- Most consumers are sceptical of the media as a reliable source of information. Television, magazines, newspapers and online sources are considered untrustworthy by most.
- Online influencers are considered the least reliable source of information on food, with more than a third claiming they see them ‘not at all’ as a reliable source of information.



The transparency project: How to communicate transparency and make it a reason to buy your product

In 2025 EIT Food's Consumer Observatory conducted research investigating how consumers engage with transparency in the food system. The findings confirmed that trust in food companies is low. People are sceptical of health and sustainability claims because they believe that profit often outweighs consumer interests.

- Previous research has established that while the availability of transparent information does not generally influence consumers' food choices, transparency gains value when health is at stake. Due to their lack of trust in food manufacturers, consumers scrutinise labels when they have concerns about the healthiness of a product.
- There are two main types of information consumers want access to:
    1. Accessible ingredient lists: consumers see clear ingredient lists that they can understand as a basic right - even if they don't always read them.
    2. The origin of ingredients and place of processing: shoppers value supporting European farmers and see regional sourcing as both safer and more sustainable. They use location as a litmus test to evaluate quality.

- Low-effort communication works best. Only the most motivated consumers will scan a QR code or look up a website. Some consumers perceive these tools as a barrier to information – this view degrades trust in the source and information.
- Logos and short videos are most effective for delivering credible, engaging transparency information.
- Collaboration with credible third parties also strengthens trust in the information provided.

Learn more about the transparency project

About the EIT Food Consumer Observatory

Powered by EIT Food, the Consumer Observatory brings together experts and consumer insight organisations from across the food system to curate and produce consumer insights, trend analysis and research tools.

By combining research expertise, sector knowledge and the green transition behaviour change perspective, the Consumer Observatory aims to maximise the availability of consumer insights on agrifood topics, delivering greater knowledge, strategy and guidance to agrifood stakeholders – helping to bring about positive change in the food system.

This platform puts consumer knowledge and behaviour at the heart of the conversation on food sector trends, driving forward innovative solutions that will help to achieve EIT Food's three missions:

- A Net Zero Food System
- Healthier Lives Through Food
- Reducing Risk for a Fair and Resilient Food System

To access the latest insights or to discuss your specific insight needs, visit **eitfood.eu/projects/consumerobservatory**
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Thank you