

Magdalena Niewczas-  
Dobrowolska<sup>1</sup>

Tadeusz Sikora

Anna Prusak

## ETHICS AND TRUST WHILE FOOD SAFETY CRISIS

***Abstract:** Ethics and trust should be significant values for the food market actors. Firstly, these values will be shortly characterized. Then, the authors describe the role of ethics and trust in food quality and safety assurance and the role of ethics and trust when food hazards appear. The main weak points, the areas of possible problems in keeping ethics and trust will be indicated. The main aim of this paper is to find answer to the question if there is the same importance and role of ethics and trust while food crisis and under normal condition. What should be done to avoid panic among consumers and what should be done to protect the brand of the product. Another key issue is the role of the various participants of the market – producers, distributors, consumers as well as the food control institutions. Each food safety crisis result in big loss – what can be done to reduce these loss.*

***Key words:** ethics, trust, food safety*

### 1. Introduction

Trust is the value in a food chain, from farm to fork. Consumers trust the authorities having responsibility for food quality and safety. Consumers also trust food producers and food distributors and food sellers. Consumers making their buying decision do not have full information about products. They trust in the information on food labels, and they trust that food is safe. For this reason when food hazard appears consumer feel unsafe, especially when it is hard to identify a particular producers. According to many research, when hazard appears consumers stop buying the product, what is a big loss for the producer. Of course, not all food hazard are revealed because producers are afraid of big loss. To reduce the feeling of lack of safety consumers mainly trust the brand, country of origin, or they buy product the usually buy.

Trust between actors along food chains is important for food systems to function. In current food valuechains, there is often a big disconnect between those producing food and the public.

According to Food ethics councilil [[https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/uploads/publications/171031%20Trust%20technology%20and%20beyond%20certification\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/uploads/publications/171031%20Trust%20technology%20and%20beyond%20certification_FINAL.pdf), 13.04.2019] there are many important questions about trust in food systems:

- 1) Who do people trust, and who should they trust?
- 2) Can technologies be effective in a world where people seem reluctant to trust brands and governments?
- 3) How can we measure trust unless trust exists in the first place?
- 4) What level of assurance do people need?

In the simple way ethics can be defined as the recognition of good and evil. Ethics refers to the values, principles and codes by

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Magdalena Niewczas-Dobrowolska  
Email: [niewczam@uek.krakow.pl](mailto:niewczam@uek.krakow.pl)

which people live. Acting ethically means taking values seriously and asking ‘what should I do, all things considered? Ethics is not just a part of philosophy, it is also a regulator in our society which defines the limits of acceptance in various issues. It is often needed to take ethical decisions with relevance to food, and especially concerning safety [Pieternel, P. et al., 2006]. Food and ethics are intimately connected [Food Ethics Council, www.foodethicscouncil.org (15.05.2013) ]. Ethics of food is very important because we must consume food to live, and that’s why we cannot prevent the risk connected with food [Kozioł J., 2006], Kozioł, J., Koziołowa, A., 2006]. Food is essential for the survival of human beings. What is also important, we cannot be self sufficient in the production of food, and we have to trust the food producers and the authority. According to R. Early [Early, R., 2002] food ethics should be a tool for decision making within the food industry, for the benefit of people and society, and the food industry itself.

The relation between quality and ethics is very interesting. It is commonly believed that high quality cannot be achieved without ethics. Low quality is both the cause and the result of unethical activities. Low quality encourages unethical behavior, i.e. paying for quality being hidden from consumers, food of low quality being accepted by the supply specialist [Budgol, M.,2007]. According to Peter Drucker [Drucker, P. 1999]. without ethic and ethical behaviour nothing can work.

Ethics is defined as the philosophical study of the moral value of human conduct and of the rules and principles that ought to govern it. Ethics refers to standards of behaviour that tell how human beings ought to act in the many situations in which they find themselves – as friends, parents, children, citizens, businesspeople, teachers, professional food producers, consumers, and so on [Olsen N. V., Bánáti D.].

For consumers, trust is a way for reducing

the complexity and uncertainty they are faced with in engaging with modern food systems. Food incidents, both food safety incidents or food fraud cases are a big challenge for trust in food standards [Tonkin E. et al., 2019].

## 2. Strategies while food safety crisis

When food hazard appears it results in panic and the feeling of being unsafe among consumers. In that situation a proper communication plays an important and key role. There are three main “actors” responsible for dealing with panic and informing. These are Media (TV, Internet, radio, newspapers etc.), food industry and food regulatory.

Authors [Annabelle M. Wilson et al. 2017] elaborated a model for rebuilding consumer trust in the food system. This model consists of 10 strategy statements and tips for food industry, food regulatory and media who all have a big impact on informing consumers.

10 strategy statements:

- 1) Be transparent.
- 2) Have protocols and procedures in place.
- 3) Be credible.
- 4) Be proactive.
- 5) Put consumers first.
- 6) Collaborate with stakeholders.
- 7) Be consistent.
- 8) Educate stakeholders and consumers.
- 9) Build your reputation.
- 10) Keep your promises.

As it comes to the first strategy statement “Be transparent” the role of Media is: Cite information sources, Present a balanced story to the public, e.g. not frighten or lull people into a false sense of security.

The role of food industry is: Communicate with consumers (e.g. enquiry lines and social media), Inform consumers what has occurred and what is being done to rectify the situation. The role of Food regulatory is:

Report to consumers what is being done to ensure food is safe, Respond to consumer queries.

In the second strategy statement “Have protocols and procedures in place” the role of Media is: presence of and compliance to standards of conduct. The role of food industry is: Incident management plans and where applicable trained crisis management personnel, Script for consumer help line to manage consumer calls during an incident. The role of food regulatory is: evidence-based audits of industry to check adherence to standards and codes, Baseline studies to verify the effectiveness of the regulations, Crisis management system in place in the event that a food incident occur.

In the thirs strategy statement “Be credible” the rol of Media is: Use accurate and well researched information, Cite references and information sources, Interpret scientific information correctly. The role of Food industry is Use of credible,independent expert to speak to the media during or after anincident,e.g.food regulation agency spokes person,physician,etc. The role of Food regulatory is: Publish the evidence (e.g.resultsoftests, statistics), Use of independent experts,e.g.doctor, health professional,etc. to provide explanation.

As it comes to the fourth strategy statement “Be proactive” the role of Media is: Check credibility of information sources prior to disseminating (including social media such as tweeting). The role of food industry is: Publish findings of reports, Withdrawal of products if any chance of risk. The role of Food regulatory is Review and update standards and regulations to ensure they remain relevant.

In the fifth strategy statement “Put consumers first” the role of Media is: Keep consumers safe by informing them of food incidents,e.g.details of recall,foodsunder investigation,etc. The role of Food Industry is: Consumer safety is a major priority and protocols and procedures are centred around this, Modify products in accordance with

consumer demand. The role of Food Regulatory is: Demonstrate that consumers’best interest is apriority, Listen to consumers and understand their needs and expectations and respond accordingly.

In the sixth strategy statement “Collaborate with stakeholders” the role of Media is: Establish trusted contacts in food industry and food regulation, Reiteration of messages from foodregulation body. The role of Food Industry is: Use the media to disseminate information following an incident, Build reliable media contacts to draw on. The role of Food Regulatory is: Keep in regular contact with industry so that they know what is being done on their behalf, Maintain on-going partnerships between industry and policy (e.g.industry test results published by policy), Involve media in communication with he public.

In the seventh strategy statement “Be consistent” the role of Media is: Provide consistent messaging to reaf firm messages,e.g.safety of a product post incident, Always use credible information sources. The role of Food industry is: Information for consumers and professionals is consistent (although language may differ), Consistency of products, Message consistency amongst stakeholders. The role of Food regulatory is: Provide consistent messaging to the public and stakeholders.

As it comes to the eighth strategy statement “Educate stakeholders and consumers” the role of Media is: Inform consumers about details regarding food investigation process and results. The role of Food Industry is: Build the knowledge base of consumers (e.g.how food is produced). The role of Food Regulatory is: Provide industry and consumer information in appropriate language (e.g.via website).

In the ninth strategy statement “Build your reputation” the role of Media is: Provide timely,consisten tinformation, Provide good public relations prior,during and after a food incident. The role of Food Industry is: Quality products, Good public relations

prior, during and after a food incident. The role of Food Regulatory is: Show that you are reliable and provide credible information.

In the tenth strategy statement “Keep your promises” the role of Media is: Provide timely, quality information, Keep audience well informed. The role of Food Industry is: Maintain commitments and claims made. The role of Food Regulatory is: Investigate consumer concerns and respond to the inquiries. Well implemented strategy helps to rebuild consumer trust. It is important because appearance of hazard in food causes big loss for the food companies.

### 3. Conclusion

Consumer have less knowledge about food than experts and Food industry and Food Regulatory. When a hazard in food appears consumers start to panic and feel unsafe, unsure. Usually they decide to stop buying a particular product and remember the situation of hazard appearance for a long time what causes big loss for the company.

When hazard in food appears the Media, Food industry and Food regulatory have a very important role. They should to implement the proper-elaborated strategies to deal with panic and to inform consumers.

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**Magdalena Niewczas-Dobrowolska**

Cracow University of Economics,  
Kraków,  
Poland  
[niewczam@uek.krakow.pl](mailto:niewczam@uek.krakow.pl)

**Tadeusz Sikora**

Cracow University of Economics,  
Kraków,  
Poland [sikorat@uek.krakow.pl](mailto:sikorat@uek.krakow.pl)

**Anna Prusak**

Cracow University of Economics,  
Kraków,  
Poland  
[prusaka@uek.krakow.pl](mailto:prusaka@uek.krakow.pl)

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