

# Filling the sustainability knowledge gap

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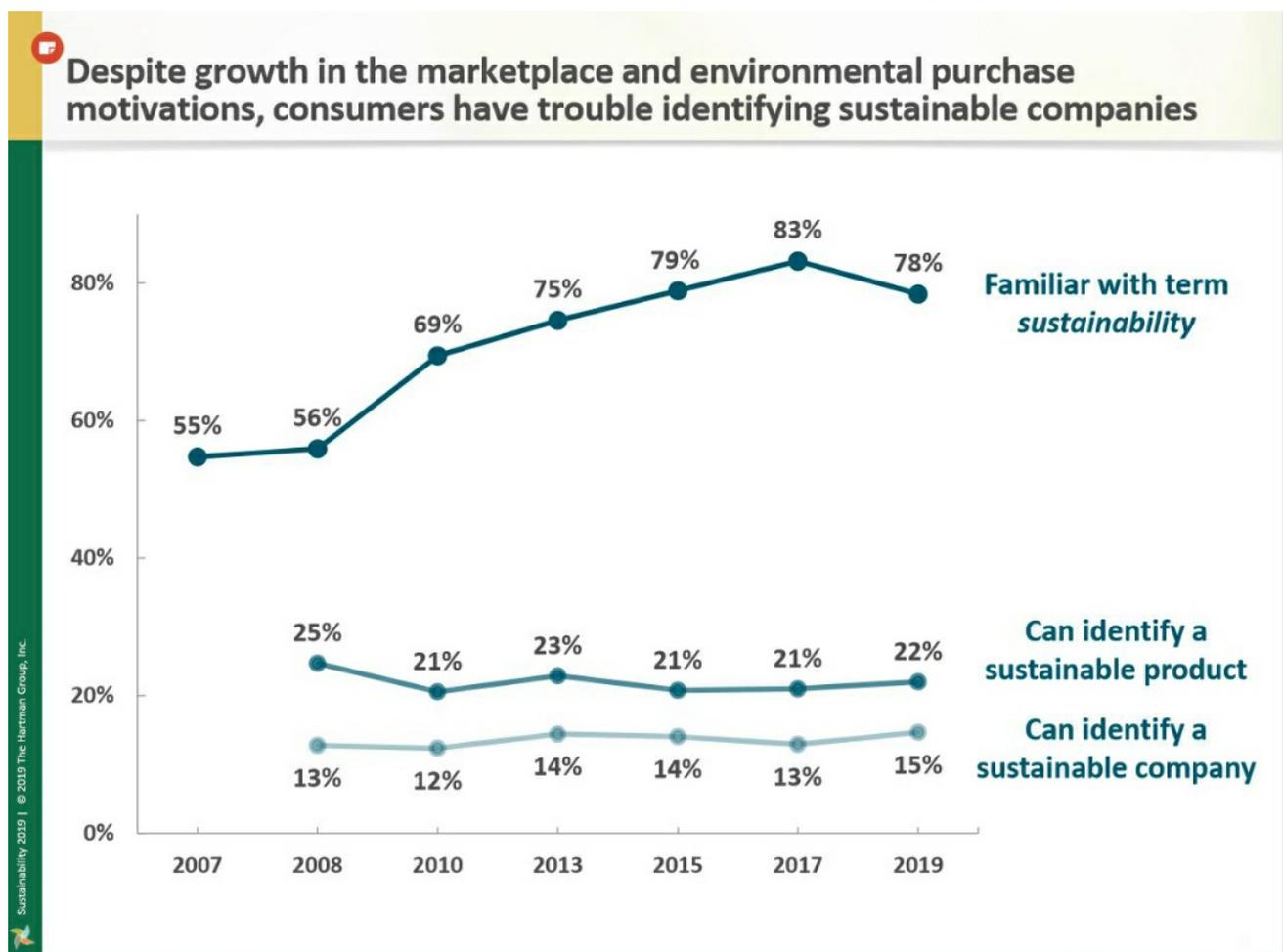
BELLEVUE, WASH. — Americans are showing more interest in sustainability issues, and food and beverage companies could do a better job of promoting the specific attributes of their products, according to a 2019 survey from The Hartman Group.

The survey of 1,697 people ages 18 to 73 conducted in July found 78% said they were familiar with the term sustainability, which was down from 83% in 2017 but up from 56% in 2008. When asked whether they could identify a sustainable product, 22% said they could, which was up from 21% in 2017 but down from 25% in 2008. When asked whether they could identify a sustainable company, 15% said they could, which was up from 13% in 2017 and 13% in 2008.

“Most consumers can at least explain what (sustainability) is and what it means to them, but we’ve seen consistently this real gap between this familiarity and then this ability to actually name a product or company,” said Laurie Demerritt, chief executive officer of The Hartman Group in a Nov. 14 webinar. “Even though this marketplace as a whole has expanded and

there's many more products out there, consumers are in an unaided way having difficulty pointing to and identifying some of the changes that are being made. What we believe this provides is a great opportunity to be one of those products or companies that become more associated with sustainability since consumers are now more engaged in the space."

The survey, which had a sampling error of plus-or-minus 2.4%, asked respondents to name the top three issues that companies should address. The most popular answer was addressing air/water/soil pollution with 32% listing it among their top three choices. Other issues above 20% were decreasing waste such as single-use plastics at 29% among the top three choices, minimizing impact on climate change at 27%, switching to renewable energy at 27%, creating jobs with good pay/benefits at 24%, addressing plastic pollution in the oceans at 21% and preventing labor abuses at 21%.



Companies should decide what issues most impact their business and then promote those specific sustainability claims, Ms. Demerritt said.

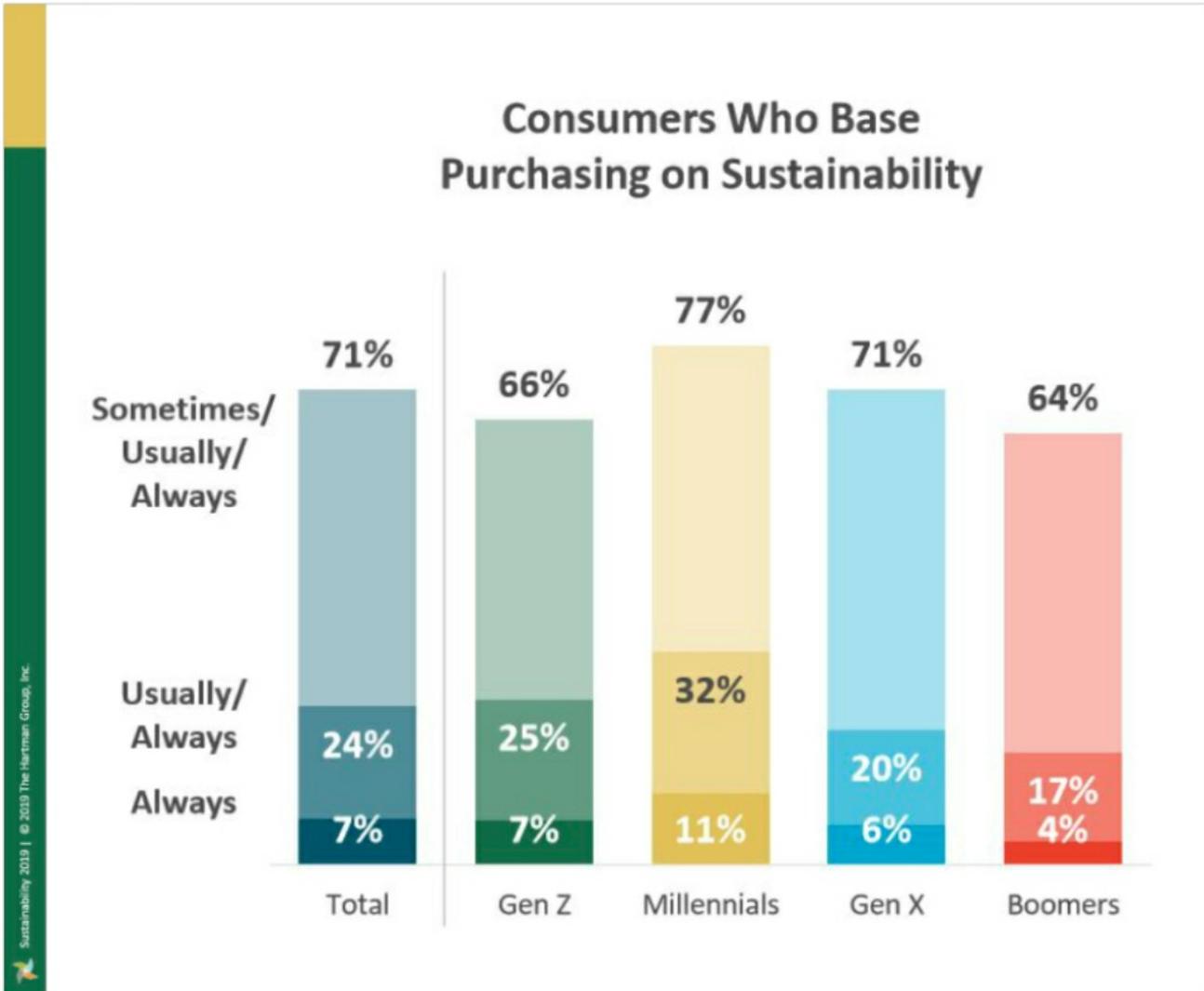
"If you have more of a human element, if you're a retailer, you might want to think more about labor issues because that's going to be much more top of mind for consumers," she said. "If you're packaging something that's meant for single use, you might want to be very

thoughtful about decreasing waste. If you're a company that's well-known for production processes, you're going to want to think about climate change."

Millennials are a prime target for sustainable claims. When asked how sustainability affects their purchases, 7% of the total survey respondents said always, 24% said usually/always, and 71% said sometimes/usually/always. Among age groups, millennials (ages 22 to 40) led the way at 11% always, 32% usually/always and 77% sometimes/usually/always. Other age groups were Generation Z (ages 18 to 21) at 7%, 25% and 66%; Generation X (ages 41 to 54) at 6%, 20% and 71%; and baby boomers (ages 55 to 73) at 4%, 17% and 64%.

People have become more environmentally conscious over the past two years. When asked their main reason for purchasing sustainable products, 51% of total respondents said the earth/environment in 2019, which was up from 32% in 2017. Me/my family came in second at 31%, although it was down from 51% in 2017.

Packaging is another area of concern. Sixty-one per cent said it was either important or very important for packaging to be recyclable, which trailed only designed to protect the product, with 65% saying that was either important or very important.



“Clearly the issue with straws especially has been on the minds of many consumers,” Ms. Demerritt said. “It remains to be seen where that is going to move next, but that does seem to be something that is not going to go away.”

People view animal welfare claims favorably, too.

“We are certainly not becoming a nation of vegans or vegetarians by any stretch,” she said. “In fact, meat consumption is going up in the United States. However, when they see callouts for animal welfare, it’s an indicator to them that it actually might be healthier for them and/or might taste better.”

Other recent Hartman data showed all demographics listing managing stress or anxiety as a top concern in 2019, overtaking weight management for the first time.

“This idea of stress and anxiety across all elements of life has been something that has been very impactful on consumers, but we know the sustainability issue is playing into it,” Ms. Demerritt said.

People know they are not perfect in their sustainability efforts, and they understand companies are not yet perfect either, she said.

“What they are looking for are metrics, measurements, milestones, criteria by which they can judge how these companies are doing,” Ms. Demerritt said. “So rather than hide what you’re doing, since you’re not yet perfect, make (consumers) part of the journey; make them part of the plan for how you’re going to reach these goals.”

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