The consumer view on food innovation

DG SANTE Conference on Innovation in Food – EXPO Milan
Milan, Italy
10th October 2015
Food innovation – What’s in it for consumers?

Novel foods (‘exotic’ products, functional ingredients, etc.)

Reformulation

New technologies (GMOs, nanotechnologies, animal cloning)

New modes of grocery shopping

Consumer information

Per 25g:

- 586kJ / 140 kcal
- 7%

Per 100g:

- 2343 kJ / 560 kcal
Innovation for whom? – Consumers’ expectations

- **SAFETY** (independently assessed by a trusted authority)
- **CONVENIENCE** (e.g. easy to prepare; resealable package; longer shelf life)
- **HEALTHINESS** (e.g. reduced fat/salt/sugar levels without compromising taste)
- **NATURALNESS** (no ‘E-numbers’ and chemicals)

  72% Europeans very or fairly worried about pesticides in food
  66% very or fairly worried about additives and flavourings in food

  *Source*: Special Eurobarometer 354 on food-related risks, November 2010

- **SUSTAINABILITY** (e.g. better for the environment or animal welfare ... but still affordable; less food waste)
Innovations that worked ... or not

- "Beauty" yoghurt
- GM food
- Innovative Packaging
- Omega-3 enriched eggs
No new food/ingredient should reach consumers’ plates unless proven safe

- **Thorough safety risk assessment** by the European Food Safety Authority followed by EU-level **pre-market authorisation**

- **“No data, no market”**. EU food legislation puts the onus on industry to prove its products/ingredients are safe.
  
  *e.g. recent withdrawal of five flavouring authorisations after industry missed legal deadline to provide requested toxicity data to EFSA.*

- **Precautionary Principle** to ensure a high level of consumer protection in case science is inconclusive on safety.
  
  *e.g. food applications of nanotechnologies*
Are EU consumers innovation-averse?

- 2010 Eurobarometer on biotechnology Europeans’ attitude towards animal cloning, nanotechnology and genetic engineering

- Consumers feel they lack information on these technologies. They are unsure of safety & environmental risks and do not perceive clear benefits for themselves or their families.

- Acceptance of biotechnology for food applications generally lower than for other types of applications e.g. new drug developments

- Which?/UK Government Office for Science’s research Food System Challenges Consumers prefer solutions that are low-tech, natural or focused on behaviour change. Hi-tech solutions not rejected out of hand but need for independent safety evaluation, clear benefits and absence of low-tech alternatives which would be publicly acceptable and achieve similar outcomes.
Innovation that has advantages and benefits for consumers ...

• Demonstrated technological need: preserving nutritional quality, enhancing shelf life, facilitating production processes, etc.
  ➢ the case of fruit waxes and sweeteners

• Consumers’ acceptance of innovation is influenced by perceived benefits for themselves
  ➢ Nano-sensor to detect meat spoilage vs. “interactive” drinks containing nanocapsules that can change colour and flavour
  ➢ Algae and insects as alternative, more sustainable protein sources?
... and does not mislead them

- **“Glued” meat**
  labelled as “formed meat” if sold prepacked ... but what if sold in restaurants?

- **Flavourings used to replace quality ingredients**
  e.g. flavourings used to make up for tiny fruit amounts in a yoghurt; concentrated dairy flavours replacing butter

- **Preservatives (sulphites) used to make minced meat look fresher**

  Consumentenbond, 2011

  Test-Achats, 2013

  OCU and DECO, 2015
Not so “clean” labels

- 72% of households willing to pay more for naturally-produced foods
  

- “Processing aids”: not on the label!
  
  e.g. produce washes that make fruit salad looks fresh for longer ...without consumers knowing; food enzymes used in bread claiming to be ‘free from additives’

- “Functional” ingredients: no E-number ... but only used to serve a technological function (and save money?)
  
  e.g. potato proteins providing volume and texture to gluten-free bakery products; colouring foodstuffs; citrus pulp used in meat preparations to retain water

Source: Article published in The Guardian in Feb 2015
Transparency in food innovation

• **Engage** with consumers on benefits ... and risks! of new technologies

• **Respect** consumers’ low acceptance of certain technologies/products
  - “Educating” consumers too often synonymous of forcing them to accept food they don’t want
  - Consider alternatives
    - *e.g.* chemical decontamination of meat vs. rapid surface chilling
  - Allow for informed choices via labelling
    - *e.g.* GM, nano, cloning labelling

• **Acknowledge** consumers’ voice and take it into account
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