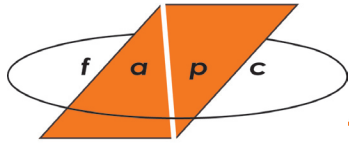


# Food and Agricultural Products Center



## FLASH!!

January 15, 2004

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## What Consumers Look for in New Products

STILLWATER, Okla. – Thousands of new food products are introduced each year to supermarkets throughout the country.

Food labeling and packaging plays a key role in establishing a product in the consumer's mind, said Chuck Willoughby, business planning and marketing associate for the Oklahoma Food and Agricultural Products Research and Technology Center.

An article in the November issue of *Food Technology*, entitled "What Consumers Want – and Don't Want – on Food and Beverage Labels," addressed this issue saying shoppers interested in trying new products placed taste at the top of the list.

According to the *Food Technology* article, Information Resources, Inc.'s annual "Pacesetter" reported labels with the buzzwords: taste, flavor, texture or recipe benefit, were the year's most successful food products.

The article also reported that a study by HealthFocus showed the most desirable food label claim was "fresh." The best-read pieces of information on food labels are the "Sell-by" and "Use-by" dates.

"Consumers use this information to judge a products freshness and quality," Willoughby said.

Buzz words indicating freshness on labels include fresh, handpicked, flash frozen in the field, fresh frozen for fish and seafood and hand cooked. Packaging also can give the appearance of freshness. Many companies, such as Campbells and Del Monte, have added glass packaging for a fresher appearance. They also have changed their graphics to include fresh looking graphics.

According to the article, a critical impulse purchase motivator for consumers is quality. Topping the list of rea-

sons shoppers purchase new products or unplanned items include looks appetizing, low price, realization that it could be used in something and an attractive display.

Convenience also has become a large factor for consumers, Willoughby said.

According to the article, home cooking is at its highest level, while cooking literacy is at an all-time low. Studies show brands that use words such as preparation time, reduce the hassle factor, ready-to-eat, fully cooked and heat-and-eat, stay top-of-mind with consumers.

Speed and ease of preparation has become critically important for dessert manufacturers. According to the article, Sara Lee's *Mrs. Smith's Flip It* cakes and *Cobbler Anytime* thaw-and-go desserts, account for half of the desserts eaten in-home.

Another fast growing trend among consumers are food kits. Kits that include dishware, instructions with pictures and all ingredients have gained tremendous support among time-pressed consumers.

Health is a continuing factor in food purchases by consumers, Willoughby said.

According to the article, two-thirds of consumers say it is important stores carry foods and beverages naturally high in vitamins and minerals. This means labels with "contain" claims could bring big rewards.

With one-third of consumers admitting they are overweight, weight-directed messages have seen renewed interest. Labels with lite, lean or less than have rebounded in the food market.

Food shoppers also are looking for specialty foods to reduce the risk of developing diseases or treating a current

problem. Coca-Cola Co. released *Minute Maid Premium Heart Wise*, the first juice product for lowering blood cholesterol. Additionally, 30 to 80 million Americans are suffering from insulin resistance leading to a growing market directed toward diabetic sufferers.

Consumers are becoming more educated about nutritional labeling, genetically modified organisms and irradiation. They still avoid artificially flavored foods, but a high percentage of consumers believe “grown in the U.S” and “processed in the U.S.” is of high importance. They believe U.S. grown food tastes better, is fresher and more nutritious.

According to the *Food Technology* article, regional and local foods, state names and farms are among the latest generation of descriptive labeling terms. Seventy percent of American consumers said they would pay more for locally produced products. Consumers say local farmers are among the most trusted sources for information about food quality.

Another way to inspire trust in your product through the label is by endorsements of quality. Kosher certified foods, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “certified” and graded

meat seals, “Certified Angus,” and even the Good House-keeping Seal of Approval make a difference to consumers.

Larger labels and bigger print size may be used to target a demographic segment. More than 70 million boomers are aging and looking for food products that address their changing needs.

Another growing demographic segment is ethnic minorities. Ethnic wellness products represent a major untapped opportunity, according to the article. Dual language labels also have shown increasing popularity in this market.

“As thousands of new food products role into a grocery store near you, an effective label can help your product rise above the rest,” Willoughby said. “Use these helpful tips when designing this essential part of your product.”

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