Consumer Trends: Top 10 Functional Food Trends

CHICAGO (Newswise) — The April 2014 issue of *Food Technology* magazine published by the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) features Contributing Editor A. Elizabeth Sloan's insights on the top 10 functional food trends for 2014. Sloan gathers data from a multitude of industry resources to come up with the following trends.

Specialty Nutritionals: Consumers who once relied heavily on nutritional supplements are switching to fortified and functional foods instead. Nearly nine in 10 adults made a strong effort to consume more nutrients, vitamins, minerals, herbs/botanicals and include more fish/oil/omega-3s in their diets. Maintaining a healthy digestive system and immune health also are top health priorities and probiotics will play a key role in 2014 (Sloan, 2014).

Get Real: Six in 10 consumers look for ingredients they can recognize while shopping for food and seek out foods made with simple, real and natural ingredients, (Hartman, 2013a). Just over half of consumers look for foods absent of artificial ingredients while one quarter of adults buy organic foods/beverages. The majority of consumers strongly like the idea of getting their nutrition from foods with naturally occurring health benefits (IFIC, 2013b).

Hispanic Health: America's 52 million Hispanics spent an estimated $6.9 billion on functional foods in 2012 and $9.4 billion on natural/organic foods/drinks (NBJ, 2013d). Hispanics are also the number one users of energy drinks/shots, sports beverages and 100 percent juice/juice drinks (Packaged Facts, 2013b). Hispanics are about twice as likely as the general population to spend whatever it takes to look younger and are often the first to try a new health food, nutritional product or diet (Packaged Foods, 2013c).

The Protein Evolution: The protein market is still center stage with 57 percent of consumers, especially between the ages of 18-34 and above age 65, seeking protein sources. These consumers are seeking more protein to maintain healthy bones/joints, strengthen immune systems, and build muscle strength/tone while maintaining energy throughout the day.

Kid-Specific: Almost half of America's 32 million moms who say they always buy health foods/drinks for their kids are looking for a wider range of healthy, convenient, kid-friendly foods/drinks with nutrient and calorie levels specific to kids. Research shows 44 percent of children under age 12 consume organic foods/drinks at least once a week and moms are less likely to seek out organic as their children age (Packaged Foods, 2012b).

Pharma Foods: Eight in 10 consumers believe that functional foods can help prevent or delay the onset of heart disease, hypertension, osteoporosis and Type 2 Diabetes, while six in 10 associate it with benefits linked to age-related memory

loss, cancer and Alzheimer's disease (MSI, 2012a). Last year, 56 percent of consumers bought foods or beverages that targeted a specific condition while cholesterol-lowering foods/drinks were the most purchased condition-specific food or drink (Packaged Facts, 2013c).

Alternatives: Eighty percent of households now eat meatless meals for dinner on occasion and eggs are the most popular alternative followed by beans/lentils/legumes (FMI, 2014). Dairy-free milks including soy, rice and almond, ranked fifth and coconut water ranked eighth among the popular nonalcoholic beverage trends in restaurants for 2014.

Performance Nutrition: The explosive sports nutrition category targets not only athletes and body builders but recreational sports participants, casual athletes and gym exercisers. Nearly six in 10 adults used a sports nutrition product in 2012 (MSI, 2012f) and the combined consumer sales of sports nutrition supplements, nutrition bars, and energy drinks topped $24 billion in 2012, up 11.2 percent (NBJ, 2013e). Kids play a major role in this category, with three-quarters of kids between the ages of six-11 and 71 percent of teens ages 12-17 using sports drinks (Mintel, 2014), with some moms using sports nutrition powders for their children. Half of the users of protein drinks believe they help them perform better during exercise.

Weighing In: Consumers looking to shed a few pounds have avoided the deprivation-style weight loss campaigns and instead simply eat healthier while adding specific real food components and nutrients to their diet (Hartman, 2013a). Whole grains, fiber, and vitamin D topped the list of ingredients that two-thirds of those trying to manage their weight added to the diet while others added more calcium, protein, antioxidants, or omega 3/fish oil. An estimated 60 percent of adults believe that protein works for weight loss (IFIC, 2013a), and one-third believe protein boosts metabolism and aids in fat burning.

Gen Zen: Today's Millennials between the ages of 14 and 33 view their food choices as healthier, more expensive, more natural/organic, less processed, better tasting and fresh (Hartman, 2013c). Millennials are also the most likely to believe that functional foods/beverages can be used in place of some medicines (NMI, 2012) to relieve tiredness/lack of energy, retain mental sharpness with aging, stress, and eye health. Millennials and Gen Xers read nutrition labels for calories, vitamins/minerals, serving size and protein. They also drink a wider range of beverages than other generations including ready-to-drink coffees and sparkling drinks.

Read the full Food Technology article here [1]

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