



SEAFOOD^{TOMMORROW} - Nutritious, safe and sustainable seafood for consumers of tomorrow

Consumers' attitudes to nutritious and eco-innovative seafood products in Hungary

Context

Consumer habits are changing, health, variety, convenience, value for money, ethics, sustainability, and safety are becoming increasingly more important.

Seafood can be a good solution to meet these needs, as it is an important source of high-quality protein and naturally-rich in nutrients, such as vitamin D, omega-3, selenium, vitamin B12, and iodine and can be part of varied diet. Most Central European consumers, especially children, young adults, and older people do not meet dietary recommendations for two portions of fish per week, therefore approach for engaging these target groups needs to be identified.

In addressing challenges to meet the need for nutritious, safe, and sustainable seafood, the SEAFOOD^{TOMORROW} project will generate new knowledge to develop commercially viable eco-innovative solutions for improving the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of European seafood production, and the processing industry.

Within SEAFOOD^{TOMORROW} researchers want to have a better understanding of consumers' opinion, beliefs, and reactions to seafood in three EU-regions, each representing different seafood consumption traditions and habits, specifically West (Belgium), Central (Hungary), and South (Italy).

Method

In Hungary, two focus group discussions were organized in Budapest. Among the groups of consumers were individuals who consumed seafood regularly and other who eat these products rarely. They were asked about their habits, expectations, and opinion of seafood consumption, sustainability, and eco-innovative solutions of SEAFOOD^{TOMORROW} products.

Results

Key consumption drivers and differences between low- (consuming seafood products less than once a month) and high- (consuming seafood products at least once a week) frequency consumers were identified.

Key drivers of seafood consumption in Hungary:

- Healthiness
- Taste and smell
- Contribution to a balanced diet
- Price



Perceived healthiness of seafood in Hungary

Generally, seafood was perceived by the participants to be a healthy, in both low- and high-frequency consumption groups but strong and distinctive smells are not liked. Scepticism about the health benefits of seafood were shown, i.e. Consumers believe that other (and cheaper) foods are just as good for disease prevention (e.g. reducing the risk of heart disease).

Nutrients including vitamin D, omega-3 including DHA specifically, selenium, salt, vitamin B12, and iodine were listed for the consumers as potential ingredients to be used in new SEAFOOD^{TOMORROW} products. Omega-3 fats were perceived as the most important ingredient/nutrient in terms of health benefits for children, pregnant women and the elderly.

In terms of processed products, participants agreed that the use of different nutritional additives and reduced salt content can be considered healthy, but a low salt claim would have a limited role in their purchasing decision.

Traceability and origin of seafood products were very important in influencing purchasing decisions in Hungary. Products from countries known to have environmental pollution were less desirable.

Sustainability

Generally, participants, especially in the low consumption group, had limited knowledge about sustainability as related to seafood products. Sustainability was not a priority for most participants, but frequent seafood consumers were more likely to pay more for sustainably-produced products.

High frequency consumers stated that key to sustainable seafood products are setting of quotas and regulations on fishing. Others said that seafood should be kept in clean water, in their natural habitat, or conditions improved for seafood-farming. Participants agreed that providing natural feeds is a positive thing, but high frequency consumers do not trust feeding practices in aquaculture.

Next steps to engage consumers with seafood products

These results suggest that education of consumers (e.g. about sustainability and the benefits of seafood), improved communication, and tailored products (e.g. for demographic groups) are essentials for promoting seafood and fish products in low consumption countries, like Hungary. The new solutions developed by SEAFOOD^{TOMORROW} will help to overcome these difficulties only with further studies, improved understanding of attitudes, and targeted product development.

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