Consumer Perceptions of Functional Foods: Results from a Qualitative Study

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Aims & Objectives

The increasing incidence of obesity and metabolic syndrome among Europeans demands intervention at all levels of society (Goldberg, 2003; Buttriss and Nugent, 2005); and development of lipid altered functional foods may help to reduce associated ill health risks. This research aims to explore consumer attitudes to:

- new technologies in food production
- acceptability/ barriers to the uptake of novel functional foods

Sampling

Consumers domiciled in the U.K. (n = 58) and Portugal (n = 52) took part in:

- focus group discussions (n = 14)
- individual interviews (n = 20)

Procedure

Individual qualitative interviews and focus group discussions

Guided by topic list including technological, economic and psycho-social aspects

Grounded theory approach

Dialogue recorded, transcribed verbatim and content analysed

Catalogued using computer software MaxQDA® and QSR Nud*ist®

Resulting Themes

Results were similar between Portuguese (PT) and Northern Irish respondents

Perceptions of Functional Foods

- More expensive than standard foods
- Heard of ‘good/ bad’ fats
- Scientific terms confusing
- Scepticism of claims on health foods
- Available in supermarkets or health food shops / herbal shop (PT)

G.M. Foods

- Lack of information/knowledge on GM issues; knowledge status would not prevent purchase; interest in informed public debate
- Negative media coverage regarding GM foods
- Functional food made with GM reduced perceived acceptability
- Worries about GM included: labelling; public safety/ health; environmental impact /biodiversity
- Perceived benefits included: Food quality/ safety/ variety /yield /price/ human health improved

Functional Genomics

- Positive reaction to preventing ill health risk
- Fatalist views
- Concerns: misleading test results, need support, life assurance

References


Conclusion

- Consumers interested in:
  - benefits of functional genomics in personalised nutrition
  - balanced, informed debate on GM foods and consumer concerns

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