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Studying Uruguayan consumers' perception of vegetable oils using word association

GÁMBARO, A. et al.

■ Summary

The proliferation of extra virgin olive oil produced in Uruguay makes necessary the study of Uruguayan consumers' needs and expectations for olive oils. In this context, the aims of the present work were to gather information about consumers' perception of olive oil and to compare those perceptions with those of common vegetable oils commonly found in Uruguayan market. A total of 168 consumers completed a word association task about five types of vegetable oil: olive oil, corn oil, sunflower oil, soybean oil and rice bran oil. Consumers were asked to write down the first four images, associations, thoughts or feelings that came to their minds when thinking of each of the oils. The different associations were grouped into eighteen categories and the frequency of mention of each of them was determined for each of the evaluated oils. The evaluated vegetable oils raised clearly different associations in consumers' mind, suggesting that the personal constructs behind their consumption might differ. Olive oil was perceived as clearly different from the other oils and was described using categories such as *Dressing*, *Good quality*, *Positive effect on health*, and *Positive feelings*. On the other hand, soybean oil showed the opposite profile, being associated with the categories *Bad quality*, *Price*, *Negative feelings*. The other three oils were perceived as multipurpose common oils and were associated with categories such as *Frying*, *Ingredient in food products*, *Nutritional content*, *Consumption occasions*, *Packaging material*, *Raw material*, *Appearance* and *Texture*. Consumption frequency of olive oil strongly affected consumers' associations of this product, suggesting the importance of familiarity and previous experiences with the product in determining consumers' perception. The findings of this qualitative study provide a valuable insight for developing marketing strategies for promoting the consumption of olive oil among Uruguayan consumers.

Referência bibliográfica

Bibliographic reference

GÁMBARO, A. et al. Studying Uruguayan consumers' perception of vegetable oils using word association. **Braz. J. Food. Technol.** Preprint Series, n. 16, 2011.

Biblioteca Nacional | National Library

Brazilian Journal of Food Technology – Preprint Series, n. 16, 2011.

Separata: Brazilian Journal of Food Technology, 6º SENSIBER, 19-21 de agosto, p. 131-139, 2010.

ISSN 1517-7645

1. Tecnologia de Alimentos - Periódico.

I. Instituto de Tecnologia de Alimentos, ed.

Envio de manuscritos | Manuscript submission

Brazilian Journal of Food Technology

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