

## **United States Consumers Interest and Use of Functional Foods and Supplements**

**Edgar Chambers IV\* and Bruce McGuire**

Sensory Analysis Center, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66502, USA

E-mail: eciv@humecc.ksu.edu

Considerable research in functional foods or nutraceuticals is being conducted around the world. In many countries traditional medicines and foods have been used for centuries. However, in many countries, such as the United States, use of foods as medicine or foods to supplement medicines is just now becoming more common. In those countries, consumers' perceptions and use of vitamin/mineral supplements (VMS), non-vitamin, non-mineral supplements (NVNMS), functional foods, and use of functional foods in place of medicine is not known. This research, in the United States, was conducted to determine attitudes toward and potential use of functional foods in place of or as adjuncts to medicine.

Nine focus groups in four geographically dispersed states and a nationwide mail survey of consumers in the U.S. gathered information on consumers' perceptions and attitudes, behavior, and demographics related to functional food and supplement use. Sixty-four men and women (aged 21~85) participated in focus groups. One thousand thirteen (1013) respondents aged 18~80 completed the survey. Cross-tab tables were used with focus groups to find common themes. For the survey, frequencies, chi-square statistics, analysis of variance, and correlation determined differences in use of and attitudes toward supplements and medicinal foods.

From focus groups, most participants were unaware of the term functional foods and described products as "artificial" foods designed for specific health concerns. Respondents over age 40 indicated they were unfamiliar with the functional foods shown and usually were not interested in eating them. From the survey, 54.6% of respondents regularly took a VMS; 24.4% regularly took a NVNMS. VMS increased as education and income increased. For NVNMS those younger than 50 had higher use as did individuals with some college education. Only about 7% of individuals reported using a food primarily as a replacement for a medicine, but about half of consumers indicated they might consider such use.

This research is important because consumers appear unaware of the term functional foods, but taking VMS and NVNMS and considering eating a "medicinal" food were common. This research may assist companies and health care professionals in more effective product development and discussions about functional foods.