

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD CONSUMPTION AND AGING

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AGING AND FOOD CONSUMPTION



POPULATION AGING

- Population aging is the process by which older individuals become a proportionally larger share of the total population.



OVER 65 SHARE

- In the EU(-27), the share of people over 65, presently around 19%, of the total population, is expected to reach 29% by 2070.
- But the phenomenon affects the whole world.



SUCCESSFUL AGING

- Successful aging has been defined as “life satisfaction and well-being, maintenance of physical and cognitive function and good physical and mental health” (Milte and McNaughton, 2015).



THE ROLE OF DIETS

- Adequate dietary intake is one of the key factors in maintaining good health and in increasing the quality of life of the elderly.



OLDER CONSUMERS

- Older consumers are currently the fastest growing consumer segment worldwide (Goldman, McKay, Mojet, & Kremer, 2014).

FACTORS INFLUENCING FOOD CONSUMPTION BY ELDERLY

Physical

- Reduction of appetite (25% from 40 to 70 yrs)
- Reduction of smell and taste acuity
- Reduction of chewing efficiency
- Difficulty of movement
- Sight loss

- Preference for sweets

- Avoidance of heavy foods

- Reduced meat consumption

- Growing preference for fish

- Simpler packaging/simpler meals/smaller portions

- Food services (cooking, delivering, etc.)

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- **Growing preference for convenience food**

- **Demand for social eating (e.g. lunch clubs)**

Socio-Economical

- Increase in the number of older adults (64-75) living alone
- Income constraints

- Keeping on a diet

- Less fruit juice/nectars, soft drinks and spirits

- Attention to food origin and ingredients

Cultural

- Attention to health

NEW EVIDENCES FROM MEDICAL RESEARCH

Sarcopenia, the age-related loss of skeletal muscle mass, is considered the most important threat to the quality of life and the independence of the elderly.

In order to contrast age-related changes in protein metabolism and declined anabolic response to ingested proteins, medicine recommends an increase in proteins intake by individuals suffering from acute or chronic morbidities (Bauer et al., 2013).

Elderly with limited appetite often do not meet dietary requirements (particularly with regards to protein intake) and thus have problems in maintaining their muscular body weight.

EMERGING TRENDS: THE AGELESS CONSUMERS

The aging society is undergoing a radical change. A new segment of the third age is gaining momentum: the growing % of individuals aged 65-75 years.

This segment is the most dynamic within the “grey market”. It is the epitome of the «ageless society» and of the “Renaissance of the consumer identity” (Guido, 2014), characterized by the re-discovery of intellectual and artistic activities, the undertaking of new life projects and the affiliation to new groups.

The «new-age» oldies look for excitement, involvement, pleasure, health and aesthetic. Within this group the difference between cognitive age (subjective age) and chronological age is estimated in 8-13 years (feel-age depends on many factors: from health conditions and cultural level to social environment).

Just freed from the duty of work (retired), the «new teen agers» like to experiment, engage in cultural activities and travel. They are future oriented and ready to take risks. In terms of food preference they look for low fat/sugar/salt/cholesterol and novelty foods. According to American classifications, they fall now in the category of Baby Boomers (born during 1946-1964 and in the 56-74 age range).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD SMES

At present, many needs of the elderly remain unsatisfied. In the next future, food processors and services will face risks and opportunities.

In the developed countries, competition will increase as a consequence of the diminishing size of the market in terms of volume/calories (constant number of consumers but a growing % of older individuals). Product and process innovation will be one of the most important discriminants.

Opportunities will certainly arise for the food producers and distributors which will be able to deliver more digestible and natural products (less additives, preservatives, fertilizers, pesticides and antibiotics). Another challenge will be to preserve and enhance "taste".

Packaging will go through a revolution: more colorful, easy to use and sustainable. ICT will reshape food distribution.

New niche markets will open for companies delivering cooked meals at home and food services for lunch clubs.

Food conceived for special elderly needs (rich in proteins and vitamins or designed to contrast particular diseases) will be highly demanded and priced.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

What you have seen up to know is the result of a systematic Literature Review (LR) of 5 years (2014-2019) multidisciplinary research on the subject of elderly and food consumption.

Though simple, LR is an important technique for the scouting of emerging trends.

Experts are developing new analytical tools for Long-term Strategic Thinking: Megatrend Analysis, Focus Groups, Future Seminars and Delphi Surveys, to mention a few.

They provide insights over the future which can be usefully integrated with economic forecasting, while giving strategic planning a longer-term perspective (beyond SWOT and PESTLE)

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