HBW INSIGHT
CITELINE COMMERCIAL

16 Nov 2022 | **Analysis**

Consumers Want Functional Ingredients But Don’t Always Know How To Use Them

by David Ridley

Speaking at Vitafoods Insights Virtual Expo Europe, FMCG Gurus points to the key role that consumer health and food supplement marketers can play in educating consumers about functional nutrition ingredients, especially in trending categories like cognitive health.

Foods that offer health benefits beyond their nutritional value, including functional foods and and dietary supplements containing functional ingredients like vitamins, minerals and probiotics, have become increasingly popular in recent years.

Offering ways for consumers to prevent health conditions from arising and keep healthy for longer, global markets for such products have boomed during the pandemic.

However, consumers don’t necessarily understand what functional ingredients are, how they work or how they should be used, explained trends expert Mike Hughes at Vitafoods Insights Virtual Expo Europe.

To capitalize on this growing interest, consumer health and food supplement companies should seek to educate consumers in using these ingredients properly, especially with regards to new ingredients like lutein and ashwagandha in trending new categories like cognitive health, he argued.

Key Takeaway

Consumers are taking a greater interest in functional ingredients, and they are looking to incorporate them into their lifestyles and diets.

But at the same time, there's still a long way to go until consumers utilize these ingredients properly.

Industry can play a key role in educating

© Citeline 2024. All rights reserved.

Omega-3

“Consumers have definitely taken a greater interest in functional ingredients in the last couple of years,” commented Hughes, who is head of research & insight for market researchers FMCG Gurus.

consumers about these ingredients, especially in new categories like cognitive health.

“But it's important not to overestimate how educated they are about these ingredients,” he warned.

Hughes pointed to omega-3 as an example. “Consumers recognize that it's important to have fatty acids like omega-3 in their diet, but they can't actually say why.”

Many consumers supplement their diets with fish oils that contain eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) without realizing that omega-3 is also present at high levels in walnuts and increasingly popular products like chia seeds.

Assessing tolerable upper intake levels in 2012, the European Food Safety Authority’s Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies concluded that supplemental intakes of EPA and DHA combined at doses up to 5g/day, and supplemental intakes of EPA alone up to 1.8g/day, do not raise safety concerns for the adult population.

However, considering that a single mackerel can contain around 4g of omega-3, and a standard 28g (one ounce) serving of chia seeds and walnuts contain 5g and 2.5g respectively, this limit can be reached quite quickly without realizing, especially if consumers also take an Omega-3 supplements every day.

Vitamin A

More importantly, some omega-3 supplements like cod liver oil also contain vitamin A, which at high doses over many years may affect bone density, making them more likely to fracture as the body gets older.

According to the UK National Health Service, the amount of vitamin A adults aged 19 to 64 years old need is 700mcg a day for men and 600mcg a day for women.

The NHS advises consumers that they should be able to get all the vitamin A needed from their diet. It also notes that any vitamin A not immediately needed by the body is stored for future use. “This means you do not need it every day,” the NHS points out.

With the vitamin A content of high-street cod-liver oil supplements anywhere between 500-1,500mcg per serving and many consumers also taking a daily multivitamin with on average

© Citeline 2024. All rights reserved.

800mcg per dose, this limit is also easily and regularly exceeded.

“Consumers don't know how much they’ve consumed in the last 24 hours,” Hughes said. “And they don't understand what the recommended guideline is.”

“So, consumers may feel that they're improving their health,” he continued. “But actually, they tend to under-consume ingredients that are vital and over-consume in ingredients that they don't need.”

Ashwagandha, Lutein

All of this points to a role for industry, Hughes argued, especially with regards to newer ingredients that consumers are less familiar with, like ashwagandha and lutein in trending consumer health categories such as cognitive health.

“There are certain demographic groups, such as gamers, for example, who tend to be aware of the link cognitive health benefits of lutein, as well as the protection it offers from things like blue light,” Hughes explained.

While most consumers are probably not all that familiar with these ingredients, "this is actually a real positive,” he suggested, because it reveals an opportunity to educate consumers about these specific, sometimes exotic ingredients.

Consumers are willing to try new ingredients, Hughes said, based on FMCG Gurus research, if companies can show that they offer maximum efficacy, and provide specific benefits.

“The one thing that's really important when it comes to these new ingredients that consumers may not be that familiar with, is providing the science behind the ingredient in a simple and transparent manner,” he continued. “So there’s no risk of consumers thinking that they have been positioned as magic bullet designed to capitalize on desperation for instant health solutions.”

© Citeline 2024. All rights reserved.