

POULTRY PACKAGING

Focus groups reveal poultry labeling needs

Bored with at-home poultry fare, consumers are looking to on-package recipes, photos and cooking instructions for new meal ideas and variety. BY GARY THORNTON

What do consumers want to see on their poultry and meat packages? Focus groups conducted by the National Pork Board, National Cattlemen's Association and Yerecic Label indicate that consumers are eating more at home but are bored with eating the same poultry and meat dishes and look to package labeling for new recipe ideas and cooking instructions.

With more post-recession dollars being spent in the retail store for meat and poultry to be prepared in the home, poultry packaging and labeling can be crucial in generating additional sales.

Key trends

Research presented at the National Chicken Marketing Seminar showed the following key trends:

- ✓ Regardless of generation, consumers desire new meal ideas.
- ✓ Consumers need help with meat and poultry decisions and preparation information.
- ✓ Cooking directions, recipes and photos are a must for cooking-challenged and moderately-skilled cooks.
- ✓ Cross-merchandising offers are well received when properly conceived.
- ✓ New technologies, like mobile marketing and traceability, may be ahead of their time.

These insights come from nine mini focus groups held in Bethesda, Md.; Chicago and Los Angeles. Breakouts were maintained for consumers with moderate cooking skills, consumers who described themselves as cooking challenged and by generational group, including Millennials.

Bored with the familiar meals

"Consumers are bored and stuck in a meal-preparation rut," said Rich Thoma, vice president of sales and marketing, Yerecic Label. "In the past, consumers might have gone to a restaurant for added meal variety, but in today's economy they are eating at home more. This means they are looking for more ideas from processors and retailers for meat and poultry meal solutions."

Tapping chicken's versatility

Chicken's meal preparation versatility is an opportunity for increasing sales, but marketers need to help consumers tap into that versatility with new recipe ideas and cooking instructions.

A cooking-challenged consumer in a Bethesda focus group said, "I'm so tired of buying chicken and making just chicken.

Sometimes I like to maybe do something else but it's hard to come up with a different idea, changing it – like taking the same thing and making it different."

Ways of exploiting chicken's



Consumers prefer to find recipes on the package label. It helps them make meal decisions while shopping and provides a shopping list while in store.

versatility include providing multiple recipes on each package and ideas for use of leftovers.

Catering to family preferences

Different tastes and preferences within the family unit also represent an opportunity to increase sales.

"A lot of meal-preparers are not cooking just one meal. They are catering to the tastes of the different family members. Any help that allows them to prepare meals in multiple ways to appeal to individual tastes is helpful to them," Thoma said.

Consumers in the focus groups, in fact, said having more in-store meal-preparation ideas could lead them to purchase more than one package of poultry on a given shopping occasion.

Thighs mystery

Chicken thighs represent another opportunity, according to results from the focus groups.

More about packaging trends is online in "Poultry packaging grows green, convenient" at www.WATTAgNet.com/16888.html

“Chicken dark meat is kind of a mystery to a lot of consumers. They don’t recognize what to do with it,” Thoma said.

A cooking-challenged consumer in a Bethesda focus group said, “I always see chicken thighs, and I have no idea what to do with them. I have never, ever, ever bought them because I have not one clue what to do with chicken thighs.”

Simple instructions on the label are helpful – like “great for grilling” or “roast in the oven” – even if more detailed cooking directions aren’t supplied.

How consumers use technology

Digital technologies involved with meal planning and shopping continue to gain acceptance, but mobile marketing and traceability may be ahead of their time.

While the Internet is the most popular way for consumers to access recipes at home, there’s disconnect when they arrive at the meat case. Motivated shoppers often don’t know what ingredients are needed. On-package labeling can provide this information.

Mobile marketing and traceability

Technology is being used in Europe that allows shoppers to capture product source codes on packages in the store with their cell phones. The U.S. focus groups showed, however, that while some consumers had interest in traceability the majority assumed that what they buy is safe and good for them.

Mobile marketing, which allows shoppers to access promotional and other information in the store, similarly is ahead of its time. A significant number of consumers do not have smart phones and acquiring a cellular signal can be a problem.

As one focus group participant said, “First of all, I want to get in and out of the store as quickly as possible, and secondly cell phone reception in the store is an issue.”

These responses about the use of technology were typical of even the Millennial consumers, which surprised the researchers.

Cashing in on versatility

Chicken is versatile, Thoma concluded, but marketers need to help consumers understand all the things that can be done with chicken.

“Consumers are eating more at home. They are bored with eating the same thing. They don’t really have the time to solve this problem, but if you hand the solution to them while they are shopping they love it,” he said. ■