
Spotlight on Minnesota: Highlighting Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Medicine

Session 1 Developments In Safe And Healthy Foods

Q&A

MODERATED BY

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Charles Muscoplat: Susan, you mentioned General Mills' health messages. What is happening nationally and internationally in terms of delivery of such messages by retail or wholesale companies? What's the magnitude of that effort?

Susan Crockett: Obviously, we are delivering lots of messages to consumers. The challenge is to have them hear it and hear it often enough so that they actually can apply it. For instance, on the calcium issue, interestingly we found that gatekeepers understood their own needs for calcium, particularly women, but they just assumed that their children were getting sufficient amounts and they didn't understand the importance of building bone mass. We were then able to craft messages that helped fill in those blanks.

Muscoplat: Kati, are you thinking about irradiating any other products, and what consumer issues will be raised?

Kati Fritz-Jung: We continue to survey emerging technologies as they pertain both to food safety and to nutritional benefits. Quite possibly we will find opportunities to apply radiation to more products.

Muscoplat: Let's take some questions from the audience.

Audience member: You all talked about listening to consumers and also creating messages. With about 80% of the soybeans genetically engineered, what are you hearing from consumers about this and what messages are General Mills and Cargill creating in response?

Steve Snyder: I'm not sure I can comment for Cargill as a whole, but inside Health and Food Technologies we do hear comments about that and they are quite varied. They vary by region around the world and they vary by customer. Clearly, this is an evolving area where listening to the consumer is going to be absolutely critical. We have seen what can happen when consumers aren't considered and aren't well informed.

Crockett: I help to manage many issues for General Mills, but biotechnology isn't one of them. I am not an expert, but I can tell you that we don't get as much negative input from consumers as you would anticipate.

Muscoplat: Hershel, who should use pasteurized eggs and why?

Hershell Ball: Our consumer information, although limited, indicates that our customers buy them for the reasons you would expect. They want to do some special cooking, whether it be under-cooked eggs or making cookie dough for their kids. Also, the population is increasing in age and is potentially more at risk for salmonellosis. The pasteurized shell eggs would be appropriate for nursing homes and other healthcare institutions serving so-called at-risk populations.

Chris Kwong (University of Minnesota Clinical Research Center, Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN): I'm a registered dietician. Kati, please briefly summarize the education process that you use with your sales people. Your truck drivers provide a different point of sales contact—how are they trained to bring messages back?

Fritz-Jung: I have a two-fold answer to this question, as our school-food services are very different from our home-delivery business. We have 4,000 route drivers who are trained in our products, both when they come into the company and on a continuing basis. It is very unusual for a company to have direct contact with every single one of their consumers on a regular basis. Consequently, it's relatively easy for us to respond to their needs, both from a product standpoint as well as a nutritional standpoint. Many of our products aren't necessarily marketed or sold for their health benefits, but were designed because of feedback and requests from our consumers. There are ice cream

products, for example, that are not labeled for diabetics but have all of the attributes for diabetic people who want to consume ice cream. We have a line of breakfast products that are fortified and enriched, pancakes for example: many women who consume our pancakes asked that they be enhanced in calcium. So we have a unique means of targeting people, filling their needs, without a heck of a lot of education, quite frankly and quite fortunately for us. In terms of educating the sales force for our school-food service, that entire group is in Marshall, so it is relatively easy to disseminate that information to our sales force. We use all the normal venues: press releases, brochures, fliers, and packets of information that describe what we do and why, and we target those directly at the people who make purchasing decisions at the schools.

Audience member: In reference to utilization of pasteurized eggs: in Maryland, my home state, it is illegal in long-term care facilities to serve shell eggs that have not been pasteurized. With respect to industry application and Dr. Crockett's discussion of partnerships with public-health organizations and development of messages—I'm a registered dietician and, generally speaking, I am reluctant to use industry-produced materials unless there is some evidence that they have been developed in partnership with a public-health organization, for example the American Dietetic Association or the Cardiac Rehab Nurse Association. Is there any industry organization promoting that approach with respect to materials that are distributed to consumers, for those of us who are reluctant to use industry-logoeed teaching materials?

Crockett: At General Mills, we believe very strongly that partnerships are powerful, and we partner with health professionals to produce educational materials that suit their needs. This kit, for teaching American National Cholesterol Education Program (ANCEP) and American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines, for instance, is better precisely because we developed it after listening to health professionals who use it. I mention only these two nursing groups, but we make this kit available through our Web site to dieticians and 8,000 other health professionals. General Mills has also partnered with the American Dietetic Association and the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports: we are awarding fifty grants of up to \$10,000 each to grassroots nonprofit organizations that develop innovative programs to improve nutrition and fitness for youth. We are working together on an issue of common interest.