

Design of new foods should focus particularly on healthy gastro-intestinal tract

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New foods should be designed – more than has been the case up to now – with human health in mind, and especially the health of the gastro-intestinal tract. There is a need for a new generation of products known as functional foods, which are beneficial to bowel health and which are also regarded as such by consumers. This is what Professor Vincenzo Fogliano said on accepting the post of Professor of Food Quality and

Design at Wageningen University. He believes his own scientific discipline should help to reduce the high percentage of failures involved in introducing new products.

About ten years ago, thinking up and designing functional foods was regarded as the promised land for the [food industry](#). However, that resulted far more often in frustration than in success, explained Professor Fogliano in his inaugural address entitled 'Food Design: Quality Matters!'. Consumers were obviously not willing to pay more for products that appeared to them to have few advantages. Furthermore, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) turned out to be very restrictive in permitting health claims for those products. The outcome was that around 90% of newly introduced healthy products were taken off the market within several weeks. That meant enormous losses for the food companies and a decreased motivation to follow this particular route any further.

Allergy

Nevertheless, Vincenzo Fogliano thinks there are good reasons for continuing to develop healthy products. He has noticed a growing demand for such foods among consumers. Besides, there have in fact been successful introductions of certain products over the last few years; products for people with an allergy, for example. Recent scientific discoveries involving the functioning of the gastro-intestinal tract indicate many possibilities for designing products with a particular biochemical and physiological function, he said.

By way of illustration he mentioned foods focusing on weight loss, which are geared towards creating a well-fed feeling, and foods that are able to release a particular concentration whenever and wherever necessary, which have been designed to help prevent cancer. For Fogliano, the most interesting food products are those that have a

beneficial impact on the intestinal flora and that could result in a [new generation](#) of [functional foods](#).

Insects as sustainable source of food and feed

Prof. Fogliano mentions in his address two areas in which the 'food chain approach' developed by his group could contribute new knowledge and innovations. He sees considerable potential, for example, in employing insects as a sustainable source of food and feed: "Despite the cultural obstacles to consuming insects, scientists and policymakers are all agreed that using insects as a food source offers the best chances of feeding mankind in the future."

He also sees considerable potential in thinking up and designing specific [products](#) that are suitable for feeding the populations of rapidly expanding cities. "Would it be possible to overcome problems that occur in metropolitan areas – undernourishment and the disappearance of traditional eating customs, for example – and at the same time maintain the local economy and community?," he wonders. Fogliano, whose group does a great deal of research in Africa with the aim of linking local production to modern distribution chains, thinks it is possible.

Amsterdam Metropolitan Solutions

With reference to this, he mentioned the AMS (Amsterdam Metropolitan Solutions), the new Amsterdam-based applied technology institute that will soon be starting up in Amsterdam, with Wageningen University as one of the most important partners. Fogliano would like the expertise his group has developed over the last few years to play a part in this initiative. At the same time he would learn more about [food](#) supplies in the metropolitan areas, knowledge that could be useful for his group.

Provided by Wageningen University

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