

Mapping the Danes' kitchen skills

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Over 92 per cent of Danes know how to boil an egg, while less than one in ten have tried their hands at making homemade sushi or fish soup from scratch.
Credit: Colourbox

Last year, researchers from Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University developed a so-called quality index, a tool applied when mapping the factors that matter in Danish people's perception of food quality. This year, the tool has been adjusted and extended. The "Quality Index 2015" was ordered and financed by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark (now: the Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark) as part of an agreement with Aarhus University on research-based public sector consultancy.

The quality index has been developed in collaboration with "Food Culture" (Madkulturen), which is a self-governing institution under the Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark.

The reason for developing the index and measuring the levels of consumer satisfaction is that extant knowledge of the consumers' perception of [food](#) quality is both fragmented and dated. Last year, researchers also studied how satisfied we were with the food we are able to buy, and on a general level, we are quite satisfied - even slightly more satisfied than the year before. "This is most likely due to an overall increase in consumer optimism," says George Tsalis, research assistant at the MAPP Centre and one of the authors of the 2015 Quality Index, and emphasises:

"You need to look at a longer period of time to spot an overall tendency. What we have here is a snapshot of how things are."

Soft-boiled eggs or homemade sushi

This year, the section of the tool which concerns Danish people's kitchen skills has been significantly extended compared with last year. Here, questions include everything from the level of difficulty in the dishes we make to our knowledge of storage, health and taste. While more than 92 per cent of Danes know how to boil an egg, less than one in 10 have tried their hands at making homemade sushi or cooking a fish soup from scratch.

Our kitchen skills and our knowledge of how to store and prepare food is perhaps not surprisingly closely linked to our level of education and income. The more educated we are and the more money we earn, the more advanced we are in the kitchen, and the more we care about quality when we go shopping.

But why is it even necessary to explore whether Danes know how to make mayonnaise or fillet a fish?

"Skills are a manifestation of something else found on a higher level. Our skills say something about our entire lifestyle, our approach to food, meals and consumption, so skills are an integrated part of the tool," George Tsalis explains.

What type?

In the study, researchers have divided consumers into five segments according to their [eating habits](#) and purchasing patterns: The quality-aware are people who shop in delis, care about natural and [organic food](#) and experiment in the kitchen. 26 per cent of Danes belong to this group.

The next group comprises the organic-efficient, who, like the quality-aware, care about organic food, but who are less concerned with cooking and preparing the food compared with the quality-aware. The organic-efficient make up 25 per cent of the participants in the study. Then there are the unconcerned consumers, who make up 24 per cent of the participants. They care less about whether or not food is organic, natural or contains additives. They do, however, care more about cooking than the organic-effective, and they willingly try out new recipes. 17 per cent of us are conservative consumers, who buy more ready-made dishes than others and steer clear of great culinary adventures.

Finally, we have the disengaged, who make up 9 per cent of the population. As the name suggests, they care little about the quality of their food or their meals. The group of disengaged is, however, almost half the size of what it was in last year's study. Here 16 per cent of us did not think much about cooking skills or shopping for food.

For more information on the different types, please see last year's Quality Index.

Did our grandmothers have better kitchen skills?

The study shows that people under 30 generally know less about cooking, taste, storage and health than older people. However, this does not mean that the younger generations have lost certain skills, George Tsalis points out:

"It is a natural process. These people will also get to be 40, 50 and 60 years old, and as we do get smarter with age, this group will not remain at the same level of knowledge and competences throughout their lives."

Willingness to pay

The participants in the study were also asked about their willingness to pay more for certified food products with specific quality stamps such as products that are animal friendly, locally produced or organic, etc. Here, the study showed that, just as in the 2014 study, many Danes (75 per cent) are willing to pay slightly more for animal-friendly products. The quality stamp certifying that the products are animal friendly is also the stamp which would persuade most people—even the disengaged—to pay more.

"Personally, I find it positive that the 2014 results regarding animal welfare were not just coincidental. This year's study confirmed that people are not just concerned with their own welfare, but also with the welfare of the animals that end up on their plates. This shows that the consumers are engaged and involved. We are not just unconscious consumers," says George Tsalis.

The contribution of the index?

George Tsalis is careful not to draw any overall conclusions about Danish people's food habits on account of two years' of studies. But the quality index is an important tool for monitoring our habits, consumption and approach to [food quality](#) over time.

"The small changes that happen from year to year are to be expected, and they say nothing about an underlying or permanent change in the state of affairs. But if you measure the same factors again in 10 years, I think that we will see other patterns in our consumption, level of satisfaction and the general approach to food and meals."

By measuring Danish people's overall satisfaction with food and the other parameters over time, you can monitor significant changes in the population's attitudes, purchasing and eating habits. This allows you to take action at an early stage via specific initiatives or campaigns if politicians wish to push people in a certain direction e.g. to persuade them to eat more healthily or to cook more from scratch.

More information: The results have been published in a report from the DCA - Danish Centre for Food and Agriculture - at Aarhus University.

Download the [report](#) "Kvalitetsindeks 2015 – et instrument til kortlægning af fødevare-forbrugernes kvalitetsopfattelser", DCA report number 069, December 2015.

Provided by Aarhus University

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