

Consumer study explores future diet of plant-based fermented foods

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Researchers at Umeå University have conducted the first consumer study focusing on plant-based fermentation and its role in the necessary dietary transition to achieve European health and sustainability goals.

The goal is to create plant-based fermented foods that offer health benefits to the population in general.

[The study](#)

[is based on a](#)

[survey](#) of 7,800 EU consumers in over nine European countries, where they surveyed their preferences and attitudes towards plant-based fermented foods. The research is part of the HealthFerm project, which aims to create plant-based fermented foods that offer health benefits to the population in general.

"This consumer study has shed light on the development towards a societal tipping point. With about 27% of omnivores eating as flexitarians, without identifying as flexitarians, this is a step forward, as it suggests that reducing [meat consumption](#) is becoming the new normal," says Professor Armando Perez-Cueto, leader of HealthFerm's Consumer Studies.

"The majority of respondents consider fermented plant-based foods as contributing to -and facilitating- the dietary shift."

The role of plant-based fermented foods

The majority of respondents believe that fermented plant-based foods contribute to and facilitate the dietary transition. The survey also delved into sensory preferences and identified important characteristics of different fermented plant-based foods by looking at what consumers dislike and like about these foods.

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looking at what consumers dislike and like about these foods. For fermented plant-based yogurt and drinkable yogurt, consumers want products that are white, creamy, sweet and uniform, without flavorings.

When it comes to fermented plant-based chicken alternatives, smooth color, natural shape, chicken-like smell, and a tender texture are important. In protein-enriched breads, small air bubbles, cohesion, toasted and nutty aromas and a crispy yet soft texture are preferred. In addition, the report demonstrates the significant market potential of fermented plant-based foods.

"This groundbreaking study provides valuable guidance for developing innovative plant-based fermentations that are in line with sensory expectations," says Professor Christophe Courtin, Project Coordinator of HealthFerm.

Taste preferences are the main driver of dietary choices, followed by health and animal welfare. However, when consumers decide to reduce or eliminate meat from their diet, it is usually for personal health reasons. When it comes to choosing plant-based and fermented plant-based foods, the main obstacles are perceived discomfort, satiety and taste problems, as well as a lack of familiarity with such products.

Market potential and future prospects

The study also shows significant market potential for fermented plant-based foods. The researchers have investigated market opportunities and consumer expectations when it comes to plant-based fermented foods.

Responses from different countries showed a strong preference for fermented plant-based meat and [dairy products](#) that are priced on par with animal alternatives rather than at lower prices.

In addition, the willingness to try foods prepared via different fermentation processes was high, with traditional methods being the most accepted, followed by precision and biomass fermentation. Younger, educated and financially secure respondents showed a greater willingness to try products produced using different fermentation techniques.

"Our research provides insights on how to better communicate these innovations to different segments of consumers in the surveyed countries, hence it is useful for companies, [policy makers](#) and practitioners," concludes Armando Perez-Cueto.

More information: Federico J.A. Perez-Cueto et al, Plant-Based Fermented Foods. European Consumer Attitudes and Preferences. *HealthFerm Project* (2024). [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12542743](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12542743)

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