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Popularity of healthy oils, clean labels heats up

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Consumers are reaching for healthy oils in the grocery store aisles, and they're looking for food products with "clean labels," according to market researcher David Sprinkle at a July 17 symposium at IFT16: Where Science Feeds Innovation, hosted by the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT).

"Market analysts were so attuned to tracking consumer avoidance of fats, especially trans fats and saturated fats, that we have been slow to recognize the high degree to which consumers are seeking out healthy oils and fats," says Sprinkle, research director of Packaged Facts, which publishes data on consumer behavior and products. In fact, shopping for healthy oils ranks as a consumer priority along with seeking out high-protein or low-sugar food products, he says.

Packaged Facts surveys of consumers show:

- 47 percent consider healthy fats and oils important to them when choosing the foods they eat. Of these, 52 percent look for olive oil; 26 percent for canola oil.
- 65 percent say the foods they buy at the grocery store have changed significantly compared with 10 years ago.
- 72 percent say that naturally occurring nutrients are better for you than nutrients added in processed foods.
- 65 percent believe that when it comes to food and beverage products, the fewer ingredients the better.
- 52 percent say the ingredient list is very important to them when

> choosing which packaged food or beverage product to buy; 50 percent say the Nutrition Facts Panel; 45 percent, flavor or variety; 35 percent, ingredient-free statements; 32 percent, ingredient benefit statements; 32 percent, brand.

The government's dietary guidelines advise consuming less than 10 percent of calories a day from saturated fat (butter, cheese, fatty meat) and recommend replacing solid fats with polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, such as olive, canola, corn, peanut, safflower, soybean and sunflower oils.

Substituting foods that are high in saturated fat with healthier fats and oils can lower blood cholesterol levels and possibly lower your risk of heart disease and stroke, says Penny Kris-Etherton, a nutrition professor at Pennsylvania State University, who also spoke at the symposium.

Scientists say the new generation of monounsaturated oils can replace trans fats in products by providing stability to packaged foods, such as popcorn and chips, without sacrificing shelf life.

The positive attitude toward healthy fats is showing up in products with labels such as "organic popcorn with olive oil" and "California olive oil," Sprinkle says.

Food marketers are emphasizing "clean labels," a term that describes how companies have reduced the number of ingredients, including problematic ones, in products and are restricting themselves to more traditional and familiar kitchen ingredients, he says.

"Clean label" is a product formulation goal and also a product packaging look – a less-is-more look often with minimalist natural imagery and see-thru windows to the actual package contents, Sprinkle says. Consumers are looking for a balance of positive and free-from attributes—such as

organic, local, artisan, healthy oils, or a good source of protein, on the one hand, and vegan, gluten-free, low-sugar, reduced-sodium, trans fat free and no artificial ingredients on the other, he says.

Provided by Institute of Food Technologists

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