

A CACOPHONY ABOUT PULSES!

In the search for a more sustainable diet, pulses like chickpeas, lentils or beans have a right to their say! They are actually of great nutritional, environmental and economic value and yet their consumption is still declining in France - from 7.2 kg per year and per inhabitant in 1920 to 1.7 kg in 2016. How can this paradox be explained?

To answer this question, a CSGA team studied social representations associated with pulses such as beliefs, knowledge and attitudes held by non-vegetarian consumers and professionals in the pulses industry. The researchers had a dual aim: i) highlight any dissonance between the representations and expectations of these two groups; (ii) identify levers which might promote better communication about the benefits of consuming pulses. To achieve this, the researchers asked participants to give the first 5 words that came to mind when they heard the term "pulses" (an evocation task). The participants then graded these words from the least to the most important and assessed their hedonic valency (positive/negative).

The study results revealed radically different representations. The core of consumer representation remains relatively vague yet positive. When thinking of "pulses", consumers came up with "lentils", "starches" (in former French Food pyramids, pulses were in the same category as starches) and "nuts" (in French language, "pulses" is translated in "légumes secs" close to "fruits secs"). Conversely, the professional respondents' representation is consensual, precise and mainly focuses on pulses' nutritional values and culinary qualities (they mentioned the words "protéines", "fibres", "recipes") but displayed a less positive valency.

To sum up, there is a strong discrepancy between consumer respondents who value the taste of this food category while still having an unclear representation of such foods, and professionals who focus on pulses' functional and nutritional values. These data underline the importance of rethinking communication strategies regarding pulses by adapting messages to the eaters' expectations and representations to ultimately boost their consumption.

Contact

Sandrine Monnery-Patris : sandrine.monnery-patris@inrae.fr
Stephanie Chambaron : stephanie.chambaron-ginhac@inrae.fr
Gaëlle Arvisenet: gaelle.arvisenet@agrosupdijon.fr

To know more

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