Consumer Acceptance Surveys
samples of experimental food products submitted to public
taste-testing in attempt to estimate consumer acceptance

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Unless the public accepts the taste of a food product—regardless of how carefully prepared, nutritious, packaged, priced and available—the food is a complete failure.

The flavor—and consequent public acceptance of a food—can not be defined or measured except in terms of human reactions, because flavors are what people perceive them to be.

Experimental samples of canned cling peaches—packed at various sweetness and acidity levels in the pilot canning plant at Davis—have been submitted to consumers visiting the California State Fair at Sacramento, each year since 1954.

The opinions of approximately 13,000 people—expressed over the three-year period—revealed that consumer acceptance of the peaches was based primarily upon the sweetness-acid flavor relationship.

In 1956, more than 7,000 additional consumers evaluated vanilla ice cream made at Davis—from five sweetness formulas—by stating a choice between paired samples.

Each taste survey participant completes a questionnaire concerning age group, sex, height, weight, and frequency of use of the product. The information obtained is later correlated with sweetness preference and degree of acceptability of the product. Children between six and 12 years are admitted if accompanied by an adult. After the participant completes the questionnaire he is given a colored score card which he takes to one of the six sampling windows where he is served peaches or ice cream, in a specific combination determined by the color of his score card. He records the degree of his like or dislike on the card or—in some instances—simply a preference between two samples.

In addition to obtaining information on sweetness preferences and frequency of use, the surveys provide a medium for basic studies on the most efficient and accurate methods of collecting consumer opinions.

California food processors have submitted from 20 to 30 foods and beverages each year to the Consumer Reaction Council—operated by the State Fair Administration—for an unbiased estimate of the acceptability of their products that have ranged from salami and chocolate to beer and cottage cheese. The processor pays an entry fee and attests that the food entered is a standard product and samples submitted are of regular quality.

An average of 1,200 evaluations have been made on each processed food during the consumer acceptance surveys. At the end of each test period, the score cards are correlated and gold medals awarded to products receiving above 93% approval and blue ribbons to products placing between 75% and 93%.

The program of public taste-testing at the California State Fair has provided an economical and satisfactory method for pre-testing a food product and seemingly conclusive results have been obtained from consumers on food preference. The prediction of consumer behavior remains a problem because liking may change on repeated tasting.

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