

DOI: 10.2478/arl5-2019-0001

EDITORIAL

Sensory Evaluation of Food – A New Trend for Assessing Food Quality

State-of-the-art sensory methodologies (e.g. free-choice profiling, flash profile, napping, focus group, omission testing, etc.) are the new trends in sensory evaluation of food; however, the role of this highly-growing science is still the same as in the last decades, ensuring consumer acceptability and market success for new products or concepts. The final goal of all food companies is selling their products, first introducing them into new markets and, then, keeping the consumers' trust and buying fidelity. Nowadays food companies integrate sensory science and methodology in both their "Research and Development" and "Marketing" departments because innovation is regarded as a major source of competitive advantage. Innovation in most cases is not only related to the quality (nutritional, organoleptic, and/or functional) of the product but mainly on knowing consumers' needs and demands at a target market. Thus, affective tests using consumers oriented for marketing and product development play a major role in food industry. Today consumers care very much for their health and the sustainability of the environment. Thus, food companies are

developing strategies to move into a more sustainable food chain. This change into sustainability is certainly attracting many consumers. In fact, a recent on-line study conducted in different countries, including USA and Spain, showed a clear interest of US and European consumers on sustainable products. However, in many cases the consumer's motivation to behave sustainably is quite frequent, but is not directly translated into sustainable food choices. Thus, it is our responsibility and goal to understand how consumers think, and making that their concern on sustainability is converted into consumption and food habits. Is it possible to reduce food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers? The lecture will try to answer that question through the example of water sustainability. There is no doubt that current food habits and farming practices are degrading terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, depleting water resources; thus, there is an unquestionable need to save water and use it in a more sustainable way. Our research team has developed a brand "hydroSOSustainable products", and has used the branding as a tool to differentiate fruits and vegetable grown using sustainable irrigation strategies. Sensory evaluation can be used as well in establishing a certification label, using as example the role of a trained sensory panel in the quality control, certification, and

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development of attractive marketing promotions of a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO); in our case, we are cooperating directly with the PDO Alicante wine. Regarding animal production, our team is also working on assessing the effects of animal feed, especially those using farming wastes (e.g. broccoli) and wastes from agro-food industries in the Eastern part of Spain (e.g. production of citrus juices) on the quality of sheep and goat milk. Besides, we are also studying the effect of animal welfare and the size of the litter on the quality of rabbit meat. Thus, we have no doubt that sensory evaluation of food is a tool that any researcher worldwide must learn and apply in their experiments. But, this science involves multidisciplinary knowledge [e.g. (i) psychology to know the instrument used in research the human body and mainly its

senses and brain, (ii) statistics because a huge number of data is produced in consumers studies involving 100 consumers in five different locations, meaning a total of 500 consumers, etc.) and we need to be very carefully when using it because otherwise our data will have no value at all. Thus, my conclusion will be that researchers should approach teams specialized on sensory evaluation and learn from the inside how to use and how to process the data produced. Wish you the best luck on this adventure.

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