



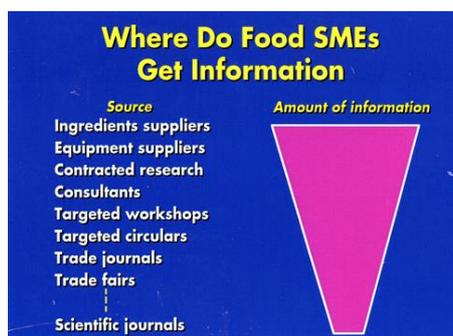
Issue 17: July, 2023: This e-bulletin is aimed at health professionals, consumers, growers, farmers, packers, processors, distributors, retailers, and others in the plant foods area.

Food Reformulation:-a shared responsibility of processors, caterers & consumers

Food reformulation is an issue/requirement in most developed countries, including Ireland, as these have an abundant fresh and processed food supply. Food reformulation has many aspects but salt, sugar and fat are the 'big' three. There is ample scientific and practical evidence showing that excess intake of these is responsible for a plethora of modern diseases and conditions. However salt, sugar and fat are important nutrients in their own right but too little is as bad as too much. The type of sugar and fat consumed is very important. Some nutritionists also argue that sea salt is better than other forms. Too much salt may increase blood pressure while too much sugar and fat give rise to obesity and its many related health issues. A review of the scientific evidence and recommendations for public policy in relation to salt consumption and health in Ireland (Revision 1) has been published by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI, 2023a) while a roadmap for food product reformulation in relation to obesity policy implementation has been published by the Irish Department of Health (IDH, 2019). The FSAI has also published three recent reports from the Food Reformulation Task Force: (i) priority food categories for reformulation in Ireland; (ii) nutritional characteristics of priority food categories for reformulation in Ireland; (iii) technical report on the methodology for setting nutrient baseline values and evaluating progress (FSAI, 2023b). All three reviews/reports are essential reads in relation to this 2-page e-bulletin.

Food processors

Much of the responsibility for food reformulation lies with processors but caterers and consumers are also key players (see below). The Food Reformulation Task Force Progress Report (FSAI, 2023c) lists a plethora of goals for food reformulation but lacks simple quantification i.e. how many Irish food companies have actually achieved food reformulation to date in products that are on sale in retailers. Food company personnel are well aware of the 'big three' (salt, fat, sugar) and it is largely a marketing decision whether or not to proceed with reformulation. When a decision is made to reformulate then there is ample



technical assistance available in *existing institutions* and especially in *food ingredient companies and equipment suppliers* to help overcome technological, physicochemical and safety aspects associated with product modification. Funding is also available from state agencies for food companies who decide to reformulate. Food companies get most of their technical information from food ingredient and equipment suppliers and virtually none from scientific journals as indicated in a survey of 809 European food SMEs (see image) (Gormley, 1995). A recent study has indicated the truthful yet

misleading situation for consumers of food labels indicating fat reduction in food products while sugar contents remain high i.e. consumers expect/assume 'low fat' to be accompanied by 'low sugar' (John *et al.*, 2023).

Caterers

Operators of hotels, restaurants, canteens and fast food outlets can play a major role in food reformulation. Firstly, the use of salt should be *optional* and left to diners themselves whether to use salt or not. For example, soup, mashed potato, French fries, stews, stir fries, pasta dishes, meat/fish dinners and a wide range of other in-house cooked items are frequently served loaded with salt leaving diners no choice/options. Sauces with salt should be served on the side and vegetables should not be 'oiled' to make them shiny and attractive. Chunky French fries have a smaller surface area than thinner versions and, therefore, retain less cooking oil. Using the correct frying temperature (175-190°C) is also key in minimising oil uptake in fries. This has been highlighted by Morley-John *et al.*, (2002) who concluded that deep frying practices could be improved through operator training and certification options and that even a small decrease in the mean fat content of chips would reduce the obesogenic impact of this popular food. For example, excess oil should be removed from fries before serving: (i) drain properly in the draining basket (20sec); (ii) toss fries (10sec) in absorbent paper; (iii) use a centrifugal de-oiling machine (large operations). Chefs and especially colleges of catering need to awaken to the importance of reformulation and change cooking cultures accordingly. Caterers should adopt a food reformulation policy and publicise to customers.

Consumers

Much of the above advice for caterers also applies to cooking in the home. Some households adopt a zero salt policy where no salt is added to dishes cooked in the home. Bread is one of the highest salt carriers and home bakers should minimise salt addition. Making fruit preserves at home should focus on conserve-type reduced sugar versions. These may have a shorter shelf than conventional preserves and will require refrigeration once the jar is opened.

Conclusions

Food reformulation is highly important for the health of the nation going forward. However, let's keep it simple with a small team approach and focusing on implementation and quantification of outcomes by food processing companies, catering outlets and consumers.

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