

Consumers seek 'trust marks' as sign of quality, says firm

5/15/2006- Consumers are increasingly looking for quality seals and trust marks on food products, which provide a fast and easy indication of the item's benefits, according to research conducted by ConAgra Foods.

These include claims such as 'heart-healthy', 'organic & kosher' and '0g trans fats', said the firm.

According to ConAgra, which presented a number of its new products at the FMI show in Chicago last week, the three primary consumer demands continue to be taste, convenience and nutrition, but within these categories people want help in identifying what is good for them.

"Consumers are looking for seals of standards that they recognize and that they trust as a mark of quality food," said the company's communications director Garth Neuffer.

Other trust marks identified by the firm include 'whole grains', 'heart-healthy', 'low sodium', 'natural' and 'dietary guidelines'.

The survey, conducted at the end of April and involving around 1,000 consumers, revealed that 95 percent of shoppers would consider quality marks. That is four times as many as last year, said ConAgra.

Other factors that influenced shoppers' decisions included being able to prepare healthier meals (66 percent), finding meals that taste better (64 percent), and spending more time eating together as a family (50 percent).

"What a lot of people are looking for now is an ingredient you can't put on a package: more time," Neuffer told FoodNavigator-USA.

"Things are moving so fast and people are having a hard time finding time. That's why we're trying to find ways to provide people with more time," he added.

And the company's efforts appear to have paid off. Two years ago ConAgra introduced its Marie Callender Crock-Pot meals, a 'home-cooked' meal that cooks itself all day and is ready by the evening. Sales for the product reached \$100mn in the first year, and the company is due to introduce a new beef version to the range next month.

Other products that ConAgra had on show at the FMI and due to be launched soon included its Healthy Choice whole grain flour, made with the company's Ultragrain blend, and designed to allow consumers to make their own whole grain products.

Neuffer said this is the next step in promoting the consumption of whole grains, traditionally associated with 'less-tasty' products.

"We think we've finally made a breakthrough in getting people to eat more whole grains. These have been out there for a long time, but most Americans prefer white flour products. If you want people to eat whole grains, you need to get them into goods that are like white flour products," he said.

Other factors the survey revealed as influencing consumers' shopping choices included reducing the stress around meal preparation and convenient gourmet foods.

"People are looking for slow food fast," said Neuffer.