

Title Horticultural products as functional foods: a consumer's perspective
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Abstract

Market research of consumer attitudes to functional foods has been undertaken in Australia and New Zealand. The research is part of a larger programme, called Vital Vegetables, which aims to develop and deliver to consumers, novel vegetable products that impart a known health benefit. The market research utilized 12 focus groups (comprising 108 people) and 600 telephone interviews across Australia and New Zealand. Both of these quantitative and qualitative methods showed that consumers have a high propensity to purchase functional foods based on the proposition that scientific R & D would enhance levels of naturally occurring substances. Once the Vital Vegetables project objectives and the concept of 'functional foods' is explained to consumers, 63% claim they would probably or definitely buy new horticultural products if they had proven functional benefits. The consumer drivers are founded on the growing awareness of the link between diet and disease and a strong motivation to focus on diseaseprevention, wellness and quality of life. The preference for 84% of respondents is to consume functional foods as fresh fruit and vegetables rather than in a processed form. However, a key finding is that consumers will not readily forgo other product attributes like freshness and flavour. Instead a health benefit should be an additional trait. If the product package is right, consumers would be willing to pay a small but significant premium of up to 30% above the price of traditional products.