Sustainable diets: What are consumers already doing and what will they do?

David Pearson, Pia Rowe, Michelle Minehan
Email: david.pearson@canberra.edu.au
Phone: +61 (2) 6201 5720
Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra, Australia

2nd World Non-Profit & Social Marketing Conference,
Dublin 11-13 April, 2011

Overview

- Food system
- Food policy challenge
- Sustainable diets
- Empirical results
- Behavioural changes
- Opportunities for industry
Food system value chain

- Producing food
- Processing and packaging food
- Distribution and retailing food
- Consuming food

Food system outcomes

- Food availability
- Food utilisation
- Food access

Social welfare

Environmental welfare

(GECAFS 2011)
Food policy challenge

- vital work is needed to establish more precisely what 'sustainable food' represents (GOS 2011)

- developing ‘demand-led change towards low impact diets’ (Defra 2010:4)

- paucity of knowledge about ‘what information is most useful to consumers wishing to make informed decisions about the environmental and social impacts of their food choices’ (Pretty & etal. 2010:233)

Consumer views...

- Put plants on your plate
  - (ie reduce meat consumption)
- Reach for real food
  - (ie minimal processing).
- Send packaging packing & Finish your peas
  - (ie reduce food waste )
- DIY food
  - (ie grow your own, reclaim kitchen)
- Lean towards local
- Don't panic, go organic
Behavioural changes for more sustainable diets

High priority areas:
• ↓ consumption of meat products
• ↓ consumption of dairy products
• ↓ consumption of food of low nutritional value
• ↓ food waste

Lower priority areas:
• ↓ out of season fruits and vegetables
• ↓ consumption of non-sustainable fish
• ↓ consumption of non-organic foods
• ↓ energy input from purchasing and preparation
• ↓ consumption of bottled water

Research context: Australia

• Food system
  – 20% of carbon footprint
  – Agriculture 60% landscape and 70% available fresh water

• Population 22 million
• Food produced feeds ≈60 mill.
Research methodology

• Focus group discussions
  – 30 students (Pearson et al. 2010)

• Online questionnaire
  – 160 household food buyers, 75% women
  – City (Canberra) with above average income and education
  – Range of ages
  – (32% overweight or obese)

Summary of key research findings

The environment is important to food buyers:
  – most (96%) would like to lead a more **environmentally friendly lifestyle**
  – many (53%) think about the environment when making **choices about food**
  – a few (3-17%) are already engaged in **environmentally friendly behaviour**
I would like to lead a more environmentally friendly lifestyle

I think about the environment when buying food
High priority environmentally friendly behaviours

- ↓ junk food
- ↓ meat
- ↓ food waste
- ↓ dairy

Low priority environmentally friendly behaviours

- ↓ bottled water
- ↓ non-sustainable fish
- ↓ non-seasonal produce
- ↓ energy use
- ↓ non-organic food
Will consumers change their behaviour???
Implications for food policy

Highest consumer take-up
• Reduce food waste
• Reduce consumption of food of low nutritional value

• Minimise purchases of bottled water
• Increase purchases of seasonal fruits & vegetables
Conclusions – target areas

Reduce food waste:
- Purchase appropriate amount
- Use before spoilage occurs
- Re-use cooked food
- Avoid overeating
- Recycling of food waste (feeding animals, composting)

Government program in Australia, based on WRAP (UK) (http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au/)

An example of advertising – information for public education

Conclusions (continued)

Reduce consumption of low nutritional value foods
- Does not add to health, but may add to ‘happiness’

‘Australia needs a tax on junk food’
(Bond et al Medical Journal of Australia Oct 2010)

An example of differential pricing

‘NSW Greens out to ban junk food in schools’

An example of choice editing
Conclusions (continued)

Purchases of bottled water

• University of Canberra becomes Australia’s first bottled water free campus (10 Feb 2011)
  An example of choice editing – and provision of alternative

Increase purchases of seasonal fruit and vegetables:

• Complementary retail outlets such as farmers markets, food co-operatives, (and home grown) as well as conventional markets?

Conclusions (continued)

Meat consumption:

• In Australia, consider switch from ruminant meat (high carbon footprint) to animals such as kangaroo
  An example of cultural change
Opportunities for the food industry

Develop new products for a ‘climate friendly diet’
  • Premium branded products, similar to health driven ‘lite’ dairy products & ‘lean’ meat
  • Substitutes for products with reducing demand
  • (and corporate social responsibility benefits??)

Lifelong habits rather than short term fads

the behavioural approach involves making many small, sustainable adjustments in habits that are prompted and encouraged by the people and the rest of the physical environment around the decision maker

(adapted from Freedman 2011)
Acknowledgements:
This research has received support from:
- University of Canberra through the Global Studies and Sustainable Food Research Cluster

References:
GECAFS, 2011. Components of the food system, Global Environmental Change and Food Systems http://www.gecafs.org/research/food_system.html