

Dairy Products Among Foods Consumers Look To Most To Help Improve Or Maintain Their Health

Washington—Some 90 percent of US consumers can name at least one food and its associated benefit and 76 percent say that functional foods can have a meaningful impact on their health when they consume them, new research from the International Food Information Council (IFIC) concludes.

The foods and food components consumers look to the most to help improve or maintain their health are, in order: fruits and vegetables; fish/fish oil; dairy; whole grains; and herbs and spices, according to the “2011 IFIC Functional Foods/Foods for Health Survey.”

“Functional foods” can be defined as foods and food components that may provide benefits beyond basic nutrition. Functional foods include a wide variety of foods and food components believed to improve overall health and well-being, reduce the risk of specific diseases, or minimize the effects of other health concerns.

These foods include, for example, the naturally healthful components in fruits and vegetables, whole grains and fiber in certain breads and cereals, calcium in milk, and fortified foods and beverages such as vitamin D fortified milk.

The top components with benefits mentioned in the survey include calcium (92 percent) and vitamin D (90 percent) for bone health, protein (87 percent) and B vitamins (86 percent) for overall well-being, omega-3 fatty acids (85 percent) for heart health, and probiotics (81 percent) and fiber (79 percent) for digestive health.

Cardiovascular disease (including heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and stroke) remains the top overall concern of consumers (46 percent), followed by weight (32 percent) and cancer (22 percent). Further, cancer (22 percent), physical activity and exercise (21 percent), sleep and rest (20 percent), diet and nutrition (19 percent), and healthy aging (19 percent) are vying for the third top health concern.

Consumers are most likely to agree that functional foods can make a meaningful impact on health when they consume them, and that the added benefits of these foods provide a compelling reason to consume them more often.

However, only slightly more than half feel they have enough information to understand which foods provide an added benefit, and that they would consume more of these foods if a health professional told them they would benefit.

A majority of consumers are interested in learning more about foods with benefits. 