CHINA: FUTURE PROTEIN

The science of premium™
The global diet is changing, with an increased focus on plant-based protein sources.

Much of the current understanding around the growing adoption of plant-based sources of protein is based on Western markets. Plant & Food Research, the Ministry for Primary Industries Economic Intelligence Unit and Mintel Consulting have partnered to conduct exploratory research in China to understand whether this trend is likely to gain momentum in this key market for New Zealand’s exports.

An online survey was carried out in Tier 1 and 2 cities across China, in August 2017. Responses were collected from 2000 people, broadly representing the demographic strata of the country.

Key findings from the survey include:

- Increasing affluence means Chinese consumers are trading up to healthier, higher integrity options.
- The main reasons for reducing meat intake is weight management and better health.
- More than 60% of Chinese consumers intend to eat more fruit and vegetables.
- Pork consumption is in decline; dairy, fish & seafood and beef are on the rise.
- A sudden shift towards solely plant-based diets is not expected owing to an entrenched eating culture of balance (huncai and sucai).
- 15% of consumers in China intend to follow a vegan or vegetarian diet.
- 42% of respondents seek foods that are better for the environment – meat production is viewed as worse for the environment than dairy production.
- Fear of fraudulent products is very high – credentials and assurances that signal authenticity and food safety are strong purchase motivators.
THE CHANGING ATTITUDES TO PROTEIN ON CHINA’S PLATE

1. Chinese consumers are changing the sources of protein in their diet

Chinese consumers have become a driving source of change in proteins’ place in their diet – more inclined to energy, growth and weight control. However, it all ties to what is available, and 36% of consumers ranked seafood as their top protein source (though the biggest selection is in pork).

For consumption, the top 3% of all protein sources have increased their usage the most, with fish, vegetables, and legumes. 26% are eating more meat but fish, reft, and in a lesser manner, seem to have increased their intake 14% of respondents use plant-based products.

% of consumers associating each product type as a protein source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant-based</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seafood</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef, Lamb</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice &amp; noodles</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts &amp; seeds</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Not all protein sources are created equal

Proteins are part of the basic elements of every meal they do not substitute for each other or each other’s negative perception. Consumers view all food types as having a unique profile of protein-rich foods.

Fish and dairy are seen as the highest sources of protein followed closely by bean curd, mock meats and legumes,

3. Less animal, no animal protein

In 2018, the Chinese government revised dietary guidelines to encourage people to include more plant-based protein to promote health and avoid disease. But a much smaller consumer segment indicated a desire to reduce their meat consumption overall, 15% avoid meat completely. In the Chinese survey, people indicated that they are eating more fish and meat.

4. Chinese consumers are open to experimentation however insects may be a step too far

When presented a wide range of novel food concepts which included insect-based products, the Chinese consumers showed high acceptance to try some. Of course, the image would struggle to break past the perceived barrier of insects as food. However, less than 21% of consumers were interested in trying each of the other insects. In the Chinese survey, acceptability of insects as a source of nutrition was slightly above 50%, generated a comparatively low level of interest.

5. Priorities are shifting and consumers are trading up

The most common reason given for switching protein consumption was weight management and health. Health details are key in this market and increasing influence in a business consumers to choose products that are healthier, more plant-based, and less processed for a longer period of their life rather than following a fad diet. The consumer is interested in new products, with healthier options, such as: raw, dairy, and vegan. Environmental concern influences purchase decisions for many half of Chinese consumers. These animal-based products are seen higher in Chinese, brands and fresh market signals of products authority are among purchase influencers.
This brochure is a snapshot of our work examining Chinese perceptions of, and attitude towards, the sources of protein in their diet. We’re adding to our knowledge on the Chinese consumer all the time, with an ongoing research effort by the Plant & Food Research Consumer & Product Insights Group and the best partners in market and consumer research.

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Also in this Insight Edition series:
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