

Consumer not ready for tailor-made nutrition

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In the near future it will be possible to customise the food we eat to individual needs, based on the genetic profile of the individual. Dutch researcher Amber Ronteltap suggests that the consumer market is not yet ready for this so-called nutrigenomics. Ronteltap concludes that many obstacles must be overcome before products based on nutrigenomics become a reality.

Nutrigenomics is a discipline that investigates the correlation between nutrients and the human genome. This area of science can contribute to public health and disease prevention by providing individuals with advice on specific adaptations in their nutrient regime. This form of personalised nutrition joins the bandwagon of broader marketing trends to develop products more tailored to the individual.

For her doctoral research, Amber Ronteltap interviewed 29 experts from trade and industry, civil organisations, government, media and science. These interviews reveal that there is poor consensus on important questions such as: What exactly is nutrigenomics, within what time frame will it be usable in practice, and how is acceptance by consumers determined?

Based on these interviews with experts and an extensive literature study, Ronteltap developed different future scenarios to put to the general public. A representative random sample generated a number of conditions that consumers would require before accepting nutrigenomics. The most important is freedom of choice: the guarantee

that it would not be compulsory to register a genetic profile. The consumer also believes that the products being developed should provide proven (health) benefits and that their use should not disrupt the routine of daily life. The general public also wants to see clear scientific agreement about the usefulness of the possibilities provided by nutrigenomics.

As well as assessing the opinions of experts and consumers, Ronteltap made an analysis of conclusions from other scientific work in this area. She concludes that much needs to be done before people are able to and want to start using products that match their genetic profile. Besides limitations in the marketing of personalised products, she also sees a clear gulf between the wishes of the consumer and the expectations of experts with respect to the feasibility of consumers' wishes.

Source: Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research

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