

Survey reveals consumers' pecan preferences

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Popular pecans were the focus of a study that yielded important information for US tree nut growers and marketers. Credit: Photo courtesy of New Mexico State University

High-profile marketing campaigns for nuts such as pistachios and almonds have become familiar to consumers throughout the United

States. Shining a spotlight on these products has increased public awareness and boosted sales. For example, domestic per-capita almond consumption has increased five-fold since 1976, thanks in part to savvy marketing efforts. In contrast, the pecan industry been successful in focusing their efforts on expanding pecan export markets, but pecan consumption in the U.S. has remained relatively flat over the past 35 years. A new survey of consumers sheds some light on specific preferences and can help guide expanding domestic marketing strategies for the pecan growing industry.

Jay Lillywhite, Jennifer Simonsen, and Richard Heerema from New Mexico State University published the report of their [survey](#) in *HortTechnology*. The researchers designed the survey in order to get a better picture of the "demand" side of the U.S. [pecan](#) market. The survey explored consumer demographics, nutrition knowledge, and purchasing preferences.

According to the authors, almost three-quarters of the survey respondents reported they consumed pecans on a regular basis. Results also showed that pecans were more widely consumed in the southern U.S. than in other regions of the country. "This is logical given the regional eating patterns and the prevalence of pecan production in southern states," the researchers noted. "Respondents from this region could be more familiar with the uses for and taste of pecans, as well as have increased access to pecans."

An overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) said that taste is an "important" or "very important" reason for eating tree nuts. Nutritional and health aspects of eating pecans were also determined to be important to the consumers. "Additional education about the antioxidant properties of tree nuts, including pecans, relative to other 'healthy' food choices may be needed to successfully market tree nuts using an antioxidant-based health claim," the authors noted.

Interestingly, more than one-fifth of the survey respondents indicated that they did not make a conscious effort to consume or purchase [tree nuts](#). The authors said this group could be part of a potential new domestic market segment for the pecan industry. They also cautioned that pecan [marketing strategies](#) could have limited success at times when pecan prices are high because consumers may choose to substitute lower-priced nuts.

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS *HortTechnology* electronic journal web site: [horttech.ashspublications.org/ ... nt/24/2/222.abstract](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/24/2/222.abstract)

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