

How well do consumers understand their dairy purchases?

July 13 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Consumers may have less trust in food processes that they don't understand, and animal-based foods may be subject to more uninformed scrutiny than other foods due to consumers' perception of higher risk. Dairy producers can benefit from understanding how consumers interpret unfamiliar terms and claims on dairy product labels. In a new

study appearing in the *Journal of Dairy Science*, scientists from North Carolina State University conducted interviews and surveyed more than 1,200 consumers regarding their knowledge of and attitudes toward dairy processing terms that may appear on product labels.

Only about a third of respondents reported that they always or often read labels before purchasing [dairy products](#); however, product labels are the primary source of information about food purchases used by consumers. This is reflected by the fact that only 24 percent of respondents were familiar with microfiltered milk, and no respondents could recall seeing the term on dairy product labels. Despite this, 20 percent expressed a negative opinion of it.

"Our [survey data](#) align with previous work that suggests the majority of dairy product consumers find both milk and cheese healthy and natural," said corresponding author MaryAnne Drake, Ph.D., North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA. "However, adding processing-related terms to 'milk' lowered average agreement that the resulting product was natural or healthy." Overall, agreement responses suggest that although overall [dairy](#) product consumers have a positive view of milk, processing terms introduce uncertainty that may lead to questioning this evaluation.

Providing education about processing terms improves consumer understanding and perception of those terms on labels. Before reading a definition of ultrafiltration and microfiltration, 83 percent of respondents were unfamiliar with the terms. After reading the definition, 97 percent of participants indicated that their understanding had changed. The majority of participants viewed ultrafiltered and microfiltered milk more positively and were more likely to purchase these products.

"Processing-related descriptors in ingredient statements are likely to be overlooked, especially on the labels of products with which consumers

already feel familiar. However, consumers may express caution when they are made aware of unfamiliar processing terms," added Drake.

The study suggests that explaining processing-related terms using simple terms may increase positive perception among [consumers](#). On-package education and other marketing messaging should be investigated further.

More information: A.N. Schiano et al, Consumer understanding of fluid milk and cheese processing and composition, *Journal of Dairy Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.3168/jds.2020-20057](https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2020-20057)

Provided by Elsevier

Citation: How well do consumers understand their dairy purchases? (2021, July 13) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-07-consumers-dairy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.