

**EC-DG Research Workshop
Consumer Science for Today and Tomorrow
- Challenges for Research in the Area
"Food, Health and Well-Being" -**

Date: 11 November 2010

**Venue: European Commission, DG Research
Room SDR1, Champs de Mars 21, B-1049 Brussels**

The workshop is organized for internal staff only.

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The rationale

There is a growing interest in the analysis of food choice and eating habits to better understand the effects of different factors on consumer behaviour and how this is linked to consumer health and well-being. Further research is also needed to explore more precisely the interactions among the actual and latent consumer needs, market conduct and performance (e.g. technology choice, production decisions, innovation, information), and design of policy instruments (e.g. tax and fiscal food policies, prevention mechanisms).

Recent work in behavioural and health economics show that several factors such as prices and public policies, food availability and accessibility, income disparities, consumer education, and nutrition labelling but also cultural factors, life style, genetic predisposition and emotions can influence food choice. At the same time uninformed food choice and/or unbalanced diet may negatively influence human health (obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, allergies, etc.), which can lead to high public health and social costs. Thus, reducing risks resulting from unhealthy diets or unsafe food and better management of these risks is still on the top of the research and the political agenda.

At the same time more collaborative research and science-based innovation is needed to tackle the long term challenges (societal, economic, environmental and technological). We should address in a more systemic way the problem of food availability and affordability for all groups of households. For example the growing importance of demographic aging in Europe is calling for innovative research and tools to meet the specific needs of the elderly population. This includes not only identification of taste preferences but also development of novel dietary strategies and adoption of novel technologies to provide convenient products. The financial crisis and increasing income disparities will require additional support to low income households to maintain an adequate diet and avoid or reduce malnutrition.

In addition, communication to the consumer has become more important than ever. Consumers show a growing awareness of food quality issues and there is an increasing demand for nutrition information. However, still many questions remain open, e.g. on the interactions between product health claims and consumer choice. On the one hand the increased complexity of production technologies and retail

markets make it more and more difficult for consumers to make an informed choice when purchasing goods and services. On the other hand too much or too complicated information can again limit the optimal consumer's choice. The current debate around health claims show that a sound scientific basis remains a valuable tool for decision making processes.

Workshop Objectives

- Give an overview on what has been achieved so far regarding consumer research in the area of food, health and well-being
- Highlight the latest innovative developments in various consumer research sub-disciplines linked to food
- Assess the major challenges and identify research gaps and future research needs in this area
- Identify tools to better advice policy makers so that they can effectively tackle food related, health and well-being concerns

Workshop Organisation

The workshop will be held on the 11 November 2010 in Brussels, and will include invited speakers, selected participants representing DG Research, and other Commission policy services with expertise in the topic considered. It will be organized in two general sessions.

The morning session will include three presentations elaborating on selected EU-funded projects. These presentations will address the main findings and future research needs/gaps in their respective research fields.

The afternoon session will focus on new fields in the consumer research area. The speakers will present the state of the art in their field and propose ideas for further consumer research actions in the area of food, health and well-being. The contributions are the starting point for an open discussion among all participants.

The workshop will be held in English. The submitted papers and presentations will be available after the workshop upon request at <mailto:Ariane.Stalpaert@ec.europa.eu>.