



Dietary Fiber: Consumer Attitudes and Preferences

P. D. BLACK AND D. LEWIS

Tate & Lyle—Americas
Decatur, IL, U.S.A.

Research confirms it. Fiber is becoming a leading nutrient that's actively sought out by consumers in the United States, Brazil, and Mexico. Dietary fiber isn't a new nutrient. Its application in food, however, is relatively new. With roots primarily in the dairy industry, dietary fiber is now making regular appearances in foods such as breads, muffins, and cereals, as well as savory treats, such as cakes and pies. Although fiber once had the reputation of promoting a bland, cardboard-like taste, current dietary fiber formulations may help to change that perception, as they have been shown to provide many health benefits, such as promoting gut health in the foods that people desire.

An Emerging Trend: Healthy Living

The abundance of reality slim-down shows, diet supplements, weight loss programs, fitness centers, and health and wellness magazines all point to one key fact: consumers are increasingly interested in

healthy living. And, retailers are taking notice. Last year, the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) (2) reported that nearly 50% of all food retailers in the United States provide consumers with health seminars, disease management programs, health-focused shelf tags, and store tours of healthily positioned products.

Eating healthier fare may become an ongoing action. Tate & Lyle, a manufacturer of renewable food and industrial ingredients, found that over the past two years, 65% of Americans, 67% of Brazilians, and 69% of Mexicans report having a greater interest in healthy eating. Healthy living doesn't plateau at interest, though. Fifty-seven percent of Americans are looking for ways to eat healthier while 52% of Brazilians and 67% of Mexicans are taking similar action.

For many consumers, the inclusion of fiber serves as an indication of a product that's healthy. The *Nutrition Business Journal* (NBJ) (6) reported in 2008 that nearly 52% of consumers found that products containing fiber attribute to their purchasing decision. This is more than products touting reduced sugar, added vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, and reduced calories. Further, Tate & Lyle's (8) research shows that consumers are looking to fiber as a value-added ingredient for benefits, such as weight management, immunity defense, and healthy digestion, and

- Research shows that consumers are looking to fiber as a value-added ingredient for benefits, such as weight management, immunity defense, and healthy digestion, and are willing to pay extra for foods offering these benefits.
- Eighty-two percent of parents agree that dietary fiber is an important component of their children's diets; 74% agree that they read labels more often if the product is for their children.
- With marketers and scientists tasked with creating products that ensure bottom lines stay in the green, opportunities to establish brand-loyal, health-conscious consumers exist, especially in the grains and savory sweets categories that include fiber as a key ingredient.

are willing to pay extra for foods offering these benefits.

The NBJ (6) also found that more than 25% of consumers spend between 50 and 74% of their grocery budgets on healthy foods. This confirms that food manufacturers have profitable opportunities to convert traditionally energy-dense foods, such as cookies, into more healthful fare.

Tipping the Scales

Several research reports have arrived at the same conclusion: obesity is an epidemic and fiber is an important nutrient to help combat it. The prevalence of obesity in the United States has "doubled" in the past 20 years, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (1). The CDC asserts that weight gain can be attributed to the increased availability of energy-dense foods. To reverse this trend, the CDC recommends that consumers avoid energy-dense foods and increase their intake of high-water, high-fiber foods.

The USDA (9) reports that only 1 in 5 Americans is getting the recommended daily serving of fiber in their diet (25 g of fiber for women; 38 g of fiber for men). In a 2008 survey, the International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC) (5) found that 77% of people are proactively trying to consume additional fiber.

Last year, the Associated Press (3)

reported that nearly half of Mexico's 110 million citizens are overweight, and obesity among children climbed 8% a year over the past decade. Two years ago, Mexico's government launched "*Vamos Por un Million de Kilos*" (Let's Lose a Million Kilos) (11), a national campaign encouraging Mexicans to collectively lose about 2 million pounds. In late 2008, the country expanded the program to include adolescents in order to help the country double its original weight loss goal.

Brazil, a country revered for its beaches and known for a historical aversion to obesity, revealed that the country's population of overweight adults topped 40% four years ago (7).

Tate & Lyle's market research (8) found that 69% of U.S. consumers catapulted weight management to number one on their health concern list. In Brazil, 76% believe weight is an important issue, while 79% of Mexicans also agree.

The various reports are telltale signs that obesity is a key concern of U.S. and Latin American health and government organizations, as well as consumers. With marketers and scientists tasked with creating products that ensure bottom lines stay in the green, opportunities to establish brand-loyal, health-conscious consumers exist, especially in the grains and savory sweets categories that include fiber as a key ingredient.

Immunity Defense & Digestive Health

While weight management is a major concern in the United States and Latin America, digestive health and immunity defense prove to be important to consumers as well. In the United States, Tate & Lyle's (8) research found that 66% of consumers believe supporting a healthy immune system is an important health issue, while 61% of people say maintaining healthy digestion is of great importance.

Similar statistics for immunity defense were detected in Latin America (8). Brazilians say helping intestinal flora (78%) and supporting a healthy immune system (77%) are important health issues. Mexicans think the most important reason for consuming fiber is for good digestion; 76% say they perceive maintaining healthy digestion as a key positioning opportunity for food manufacturers.

Healthy Eating—One Label at a Time

When it comes to getting clues to support healthy eating in the United States, consumers have become label sleuths. In its 2008 "Food & Health Survey" (5), the IFIC found that 51% of consumers look at

ingredients when deciding what to purchase or eat.

IFIC's survey (5) also found that 52% of Americans look for fiber on the FDA's nutrition facts panel. While the FDA's nutrition facts panel is integral to the decision-making process, Tate & Lyle's research (8) confirmed that 50% of U.S. consumers also trust information about fiber content listed on the package. This is more than they trust friends, in-store information, the Internet, word of mouth, the media, and manufacturers' ads. The company's research also found that more than 60% of consumers rely on labels for clues to determine whether a product is healthy and 50% of consumers agree that they read labels when they are looking to add a particular nutrient to their diet.

When considering content on packages, U.S. consumers find these label statements appealing (8):

- Bagels, rolls, and English muffins: 62% as an "excellent source of fiber" and 62% for "promoting healthy digestion"
- Bakery mixes: 60% as an "excellent source of fiber" and 65% "for good digestive health"
- Bread: 67% as an "excellent source of fiber" and 57% for "supporting a healthy immune system"
- Cookies: 53% as an "excellent source of fiber" and 58% "for good digestive health"
- Pies, cakes, and snack cakes: 51% as a "good source of fiber" and 57% "for good digestive health"

In Mexico, food ingredients impact purchase decisions most of the time (8). The top three reasons Mexicans use food labels are to add nutrients, such as dietary fiber, to their diets; determine the "healthfulness" of products; and limit the perceived, potentially "negative" ingredients. Seventy-three percent of consumers agree that they are familiar with fiber when it is on a label.

Mexicans find label statements about fiber content and digestion appealing on products (8):

- Baked goods: 71% find "excellent source of fiber" and 81% find "for healthy digestion" appealing
- Cereals and grains: 78% equally find "high in fiber" and "excellent source of fiber" and 82% find "for healthy digestion" appealing

Food ingredients are also a matter of great importance in Brazil. Tate & Lyle found that Brazilian consumers are concerned about products containing ingredients that are unfamiliar. In fact, 48% attest to reading nutritional facts and ingredients labels on the products they purchase; 71% seek caloric information; 61% look at the

ingredients list; and 49% look for fiber (8). More than 60% look for ingredients, such as fiber, that they recognize on the label (8).

In terms of label statements, Brazilians find the following appealing (9):

- Baked goods: 62% believe "now healthier, with fiber," while 75% find "helps your intestinal flora" appealing
- Snacks and meal replacements: 67% find "rich in fiber," while 70% find "helps your intestinal flora" appealing

Fiber Content Impacts Parental Purchase Decisions

Kids need fiber, too. In the United States, the daily recommended intakes of fiber are 19 g for 1- to 3-year-old kids and 25 g for 4- to 8-year-old kids (10). However, very few kids would probably eagerly dive into foods with a "healthy halo," such as fiber-rich foods.

Despite geographic location, Tate & Lyle's research uncovered that parents in the United States, Brazil, and Mexico believe dietary fiber is a key nutrient and parents have adopted label reading for foods eaten by their kids as a healthy habit (8).

In the United States (8):

- Nearly 70% of parents believe fiber is an important component of a child's diet.
- Six out of 10 parents say fiber is useful to help maintain or control children's health.
- Thirty-five percent of parents believe that consuming food/drink products with fiber help their children's digestion.

In 2002, Mexico's National Institute of Public Health (3) reported that 30% of elementary school-aged children and 45% of adolescents were overweight or obese. Tate & Lyle's research (8) found that dietary fiber is a key nutrient for parents to keep in mind when considering products for their children and reading labels is a healthy habit they have adopted when purchasing food for their children. Furthermore, Tate & Lyle (8) also found that:

- Forty-three percent of parents report actively thinking of including dietary fiber in their children's diet.
- Eighty-two percent of parents agree that dietary fiber is an important component of their children's diets; 74% agree that they read labels more often if the product is for their children.

In addition, Brazilian parents also prefer healthier options for their children. Tate & Lyle's research (8) found that more than 80% of parents read food and beverage labels more closely when shopping for their

kids. When considering what nutrients to feed their kids, 84% of parents believe fiber is an important component of their child's diet.

Boost Profits with Fiber

Boosting the fiber content in food can attract and maintain consumers, which can help positively drive the bottom line for manufacturers. Despite long-standing beliefs about fiber's bland taste, Tate and Lyle's consumer market research (8) shows that 64% of consumers believe fiber can taste good. The research also found that consumers rated the following foods with added fiber appealing:

- United States: 76% consider cereals and grains a source of dietary fiber
- United States: 80% believe cereals and grains that help to manage weight are appealing
- United States: 46% consider baked goods a source of dietary fiber
- United States: 71% believe baked goods with an "excellent source of fiber" are appealing
- Mexico: 46% consider baked goods and 76% consider cereals and grains sources of fiber
- Brazil: 18% consider snacks and grains and 43% consider baked goods as sources of fiber

Several opportunities exist for manufacturers to reach consumers in the United States and Latin America who seek healthier options on grocer shelves. Food products sold in the United States that consumers believe are strong conduits for fiber-enhancement include (8):

- Breads: 57% of regular consumers consider them a source of fiber
- Cookies: 19% of regular consumers consider them a source of fiber
- Pies, cakes, and snack cakes: 13% of regular consumers consider them a source of fiber
- Baked mixes: 35% of regular consumers consider them a source of fiber
- Bagels, rolls, and English muffins: 48% of regular consumers consider them a source of fiber

Tate & Lyle Research Methodology

Tate & Lyle's proprietary research was conducted in the United States, Brazil, and Mexico during the first half of 2008 by Illuminas, an internationally recognized consumer research agency. The research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative

studies, an online survey in the United States, and a combination of qualitative and quantitative studies in Brazil and Mexico. The studies used samples of 4,421 adults in the United States, 1,399 adults in Mexico, and 1,399 adults in Brazil.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control. U.S. obesity trends 1985–2007. Published online at www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html.
2. Food Marketing Institute Research. Supermarket pharmacy trends 2008. Published online at www.fmi.org/forms/store/Product-FormPublic/search?action=1&Product_productNumber=2268.
3. Harrington, Patrick. Mexico may overtake the U.S. as the fattest nation amid junk food binge. Published online at www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000103&sid=aIx_c4LACK_Q.
4. Information Resources Inc. (IRI). Consumer Trend Watch 2008. Published online at <http://us.infores.com/Insights/ArticleDetail/ta/bid/117/ItemID/216/View/Details/Default.aspx>.
5. International Food Information Council Foundation. 2008 Food & Health Survey: Consumer attitudes toward food, nutrition, & health. Published online at www.ific.org/research/2008foodandhealthsurvey.cfm.
6. Nutrition Business Journal. New opportunities & insights into the U.S. healthy foods market powerpoint presentation: Part III—
7. Rohter, Larry. Brazilians grow bigger on a diet of sweets, soda. Published online at www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/01/16/MNG6TAPRVQ1.DTL. Originally published on January 16, 2005, in the *New York Times*.
8. Tate & Lyle. Consumer preferences and attitudes toward fiber in the U.S., Mexico, and Brazil. Tate & Lyle, Decatur, IL, U.S.A., 2008.
9. United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition and Policy Promotion. Dietary guidelines for Americans. Published online at www.cnpp.usda.gov/DietaryGuidelines.htm.
10. United States Department of Agriculture Food & Nutrition Board. Dietary guidance: Dietary reference intakes (DRI) report—Energy, carbohydrate, fiber, fat, fatty acids, cholesterol, protein, and amino acids (macronutrients). Published online at http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=4&tax_level=4&tax_subject=256&topic_id=1342&level3_id=5141&level4_id=10588.
11. Zea, Jamie. Campaign calls for Mexicans to lose 2 million pounds. Published online at www.usatoday.com/news/health/weightloss/2008-09-28-mexico-fat_N.htm?csp=34. *USA Today*, September 28, 2008.



Pashen D. Black is the marketing communication manager for Tate & Lyle—Americas. Black develops and executes media relations strategies in the United States and Latin America to help position the company as a health and wellness leader. She is experienced in developing and executing marketing strategies, web management, sales communication, and social media strategies and outreach. She holds an M.A. degree in communication and a B.A. degree in advertising/public relations from the University of Central Florida, Orlando. Tate & Lyle is a world-leading manufacturer of renewable food and industrial ingredients. The company has an extensive portfolio of ingredients and ingredient solution systems; customer-focused product applications experts; dedicated technical services team for hands-on collaboration; and a focus on the consumer through its proprietary custom research program. Black can be reached at Pashen.Black@tateandlyle.com.



David Lewis is the business development manager for Tate & Lyle. Lewis has spent nearly 25 years in the food ingredient industry in a variety of sales and marketing roles promoting omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, and protein. Lewis oversees the development of new products and ventures into new markets for PROMITOR dietary fiber. He holds M.B.A. and M.A. degrees from Western Illinois University. Lewis can be reached at David.Lewis@tateandlyle.com.