

**By Carol T. Culhane, P.H.Ec., MBA**

**☀ Functional Foods – Present & Future**

Food and beverages have emerged over the past decade that offer a new dimension to the improvement of wellbeing through dietary choices. Commonly referred to as ‘functional foods’ the category was recognized by the British organization, IGD, as an integral part of any future nutrition and health strategies. Hence, the term ‘Future Foods for Wellbeing’ (FFWB).

In late 2002/early 2003, IGD conducted research to identify the impact that FFWB will have on health enhancement and maintenance over the next 25 years. They recruited an International Expert Panel who subsequently identified six areas of activity where FFWB will have a significant impact: Economic, Disease Prevention, Science & Technology, New Product Development, Legislation & Regulation, Education & Communication.

**☀ The Current & Anticipated Situation**

The FFWB report attempts to improve our understanding of how foods will impact on human health over the next 25 years. To do so requires an understanding of the current situation and the pace of changes that are taking place. An excerpt:

“At this time of rapid change in the field [...], with the uncertainties surrounding claims, substantiation and legislation, it is easy to only see the immediate problems and to miss the issues that will arise in the future and our opportunities to influence them.”

**☀ Where Science Meets Reality**

Several questions emerged. ...Even if the link between consumption of functional foods and disease reduction can be scientifically substantiated, will it be possible to impart the required level of awareness and knowledge [...] so that consumers can make informed and appropriate choices?

**☀ Top Ten Driving Forces**

The panel agreed on 36 factors that would affect FFWB development, then ranked them in order of relative strength, from 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest). The top ten, in descending order are:

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>S.D.*</u>
Obesity and associated diabetes	4.24	1.03
Food technology advancement	3.83	1.04
Regulation of communication	3.83	0.99
Development of nutrition science	3.75	0.94
Positive attitude of mass media	3.72	0.89
Use of new, beneficial ingredients	3.67	1.14
‘Convenience’ factor of food	3.61	1.29
Treatment replaced by prevention	3.61	1.24
Regulation of food composition	3.56	1.34
Nutrition education of the public	3.56	0.98

\*Standard Deviation in which a lower S.D. denotes general agreement; a higher S.D. reflects difference in opinion, among the expert panelists.

**☀ Some observations on the findings**

Technological and scientific advances in food and nutrition (#’s 2 and 4), reflecting huge investments in education, skills and expertise, will be less of a driving force than obesity (#1). Regulation of communicating the benefits of FFWB (#3) will be a stronger influence than the regulation of food composition (#9). Consumers will not likely go out of their way for FFWB – the convenience factor rated #7 of the 36 driving forces. **FF**

**☀ Read the Full Report**

<http://www.igd.com/FutureFoodsForWellbeing.asp>