

Organic Monitor

PRESS RELEASE

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Consumer Behaviour Key to Sustainable Proteins Success

London – Major changes in consumer lifestyles are necessary if the food industry is to avoid a proteins crisis. Protein alternatives to meats and seafood will be featured in the upcoming European edition (June 5-6, Amsterdam) of the Sustainable Foods Summit (www.sustainablefoodssummit.com).

According to the FAO United Nations, demand for animal proteins is expected to rise by over 30% by 2050. The expanding population and changing dietary habits in the developing world are putting pressure on existing protein sources. Rising demand is likely to hike meat and grain prices, and further strain seafood supply. Increasing meat production is also casting a long environmental shadow; livestock occupies 70% of agricultural land, takes over 8% of human water usage, and generates a high level of greenhouse gases.

As will be shown at the Sustainable Foods Summit, significant changes in dietary habits are essential to avoid protein shortages. According to Professor Aiking of VU University, consumers should reduce their reliance on meats and consider a variety of proteins. His research recommends re-thinking traditional meal structures and having meat-free days.

Many are advocating plant-based proteins, such as soya, peas and wheat. Vegetarian foods are already using tofu, seitan and mycoproteins as meat substitutes. Plant-based proteins have a lower environmental impact as they require less land area, water and energy than livestock products. However, with growing competition for agricultural land area and rising commodity prices, these plants may only provide a partial solution to the proteins conundrum.

The need for sustainable proteins is casting the spotlight on entomology. Unlike meats and plants, insects do not require agricultural land. Their relatively short breeding cycle makes them potentially the most sustainable source of proteins. Professor Van Huis, an entomologist from Wageningen University, states they are also a rich source of minerals like calcium, niacin and iron. Although accepted in parts of Asia and Africa, there are questions about their take-up rates in Europe and North America. Some food experts recommend the use of insects as food powders, paste or protein isolates, with potential applications in burgers and sausages.

Synthetic meat – produced in laboratory conditions - is mooted as another solution. Prepared from 20,000 muscle fibers by stem cell technology, the concept of the synthetic burger was introduced last year. Synthetic meat is also hailed for its sustainability

benefits as it does not require agricultural land. However, high production costs are the major barrier to commercialisation of synthetic meat proteins.

According to Organic Monitor, the way forward involves diversification of proteins. Plant-based proteins, insects, and new technologies are part of the solution. However, consumer behaviour is the biggest obstacle to averting a proteins crisis. Meat consumption levels have stagnated in Western Europe as meat reduction and vegetarianism have become socially acceptable. Further lifestyle changes are required if sustainable proteins are to take root.

Rising prices of meat and seafood products, as well as food scandals, are likely to influence consumer behaviour. The horsemeat scandal caused a 7% drop in frozen beef sales in the UK in 2013. Such food scandals make consumers question the origins and provenance of meat products. The need for traceability could lead to the de-commoditisation of meat and seafood supply chains.

Seafood is already quite advanced in this area. Organic Monitor research finds that over 10% of wild fish sold in Europe is now from a sustainable source. Some brands are going further by providing complete traceability. In the Netherlands, Fish Tales gives the names of the fishermen who caught the fish on product packs. By doing so, the Dutch company gives a personal connection to each of its products. Another brand FollowFish enables consumers to scan a barcode on its products to trace the fish products to where caught and how transported. Followfish products are certified organic and MSC.

Such transparency is lacking in the meat industry, although organic and ethical labels have become popular. Food scandals are expected to make consumers question product origins and consider meat alternatives; however, rising product prices are predicted to have most impact. Only when consumers pay more for animal proteins are they likely to consume less.

About the Sustainable Foods Summit

Organised by Organic Monitor, the aim of the Sustainable Foods Summit is to explore new horizons for eco-labels and sustainability in the food industry by discussing key industry issues in a high level forum. The 6th European edition will be hosted at the Mövenpick hotel in Amsterdam on 5-6th June 2014. More information is available from www.sustainablefoodssummit.com

About Organic Monitor

Organic Monitor is a specialist research, consulting & training company that focuses on the global organic & related product industries. Since 2001, we have been providing a range of business services to operators in high-growth ethical & sustainable industries. Our services include market research publications, business & technical consulting, seminars & workshops, and sustainability summits. Visit us at www.organicmonitor.com

Further Information

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