

SECOND CONSENSUS WORKSHOP ON NOVEL FOOD

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM 5-7 FEBRUARY 2003

Abstract

Consumer responses to new technologies

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The presentation will give some principal considerations about consumers' responses to novel processes. The overall impression is rather paradoxical with, on the one hand, increasing demand for processed food and also for "simple" solutions to a healthy diet. On the other hand, novel processes typically represent increased complexity in terms of technology as well as the actors and decision-making processes involved. The understanding of and insight into risk and safety assessments is challenged. There is a knowledge bias that is related not only to the lack of competence among lay people, but also to the need of simple routines in our daily shopping for food. Trust constitutes a central condition for this routinisation; we cannot know everything, we have to believe that other actors will not harm or cheat us. With the introduction of new, complex processes, consumers may be uncertain as to whether their own good has been sufficiently considered. Some consumers become more anxious in their perception of food, making their food choices more cautious. Others may refrain from thinking about it. An increasingly important way is to react collectively by making public and political claims directed towards both the information bias (transparency, labelling, etc.) and measures of consumer protection that can relieve the responsibility of the individual consumer.