



Policy Brief #6

CONSUMER CHOICE FOR HEALTHIER FOOD DIETS

How to meet the demand for high-quality fruit and vegetable (F&V) products

WHY HIGH-QUALITY FRUIT AND VEGETABLE (F&V) PRODUCTS?

Fruit and Vegetables (F&V) are key elements of a healthy and balanced diet providing humans with essential nutrients and bioactive compounds, including vitamins, organic acid, carotenoids, minerals, fibre, and polyphenols. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), eat plenty of F&V is one of the 5-kyes to a healthy diet. People whose diets are rich in F&V have a significantly lower risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and certain types of cancer. Despite the health benefits of eating F&V, EU citizens consumed on average 192 grams of fruit and 161 grams of vegetables per day in 2014, increasing slightly (1.6%) compared to 2013. Although the consumption was below the minimum recommendation of 400 grams by the WHO, the trend towards natural, sustainable and locally produced F&V is positive. The increased consumers' attention to "healthy" food attributes (such as "freshness", "naturalness" and "nutritional value") and overall sustainability of production and processing methods has contributed to a growing demand for regional and locally produced/supplied and less processed food. A wide variety of minimally processed F&V products has been offered on the market, resulting in an increased consumption and consequently intake of fresh F&V, benefitting the agri-food economy and human well-being. Although minimal processing (MP) methods, such as washing, cutting and modified atmosphere packaging (MAP), have been demonstrated to preserve the freshness of the products, the shelf life of F&V is still limited. However, regional and local products are still characterized by a very short shelf life due to the intrinsic natural properties of the F&V. Moreover, current available chemical sanitisers, besides being perceived negatively by consumers, are not considered as a solution since they are not efficient for microbial reduction and are harmful to human health and the environment.



[SHEALTHY](#) is a H2020 project (2019-2023) which aims to assess and develop an optimal combination of non-thermal sanitization, preservation and stabilization methods to improve the safety, while preserving the nutritional quality and prolonging the shelf-life of minimally F&V products. This project also focuses on the business conditions enabling Small and Medium Enterprises to successfully adopt and exploit new technologies.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**WHAT
TO DO?**

 EXTENDING SHELF-LIFE, BEING HEALTHIER AND MORE NUTRITIOUS
ENSURING BETTER HYGIENE AND SAFETY



BUT HOW?

In SHEALTHY, a wide variety of non-thermal processing technologies are optimised and up scaled to meet consumers' demand. During the processing of F&V, non-thermal processing technologies use mild temperatures and minimal amounts of physical and chemical processing aids. Compared to conventional thermal technologies which use invasive temperature or treatments (e.g., thermal pasteurization), non-thermal processing technologies are expected to better preserve the original quality of food products and by-products, such as maintain the nutritional value, freshness and some other sensory attributes of F&V products for a longer time, and reduce the use of added preservatives. Moreover, the extension of shelf-life could potentially help with reducing food waste for both households and producers. Although R&D is happy about the progress of food technologies, consumers are known to have more conservative attitudes towards food processing. Consumer choices are influenced not only by the intrinsic features of the product, but also by the production characteristics, including the way the products have been processed. .



The following recommendations emerged from SHEALTHY's work. They should not be considered a comprehensive guide on integrated governance, but provide indications of what can be done.

POSITIVELY IMPACTING ON CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEW FOOD TECHNOLOGIES

Consumers paid special attention to the effects of processing on food quality, safety, price, and naturalness. SHEALTHY will underline the key heuristics (such as the affect heuristic, natural-is-better heuristic, and trust heuristic).

LABELS AND HEALTH CLAIMS

Results from the analysis on consumers need and expectation, optimized levels and price points will be used to design F&V products including labels, health claims, price and packaging to test with consumers.

LEVERAGING ON HIGH-PERFORMANCE COMMUNICATION TOOL(S)

Consumers prefer infographic, always with an attitude of utmost certainty and determination; the poster is perceived as too generic, a persuasion tool aimed at sales, whereas the info graphic is perfect as a dissemination tool. Other suggestions are: Stand and info point in local markets; Short cartoon/ info graphic TV spots; Videos by experts.

TAILORED COMMUNICATION TO CONSUMERS

Consumer-oriented communication is important to enhance social awareness and trust in products processed with novel technologies. Targeted communication that could explicitly and efficiently reveal benefits and risks is highly recommended to enhance consumer awareness and trust.

