

Millennials

point the **way** to the **eating** and **buying** habits of **tomorrow**



Vegetables have earned a permanent and well-deserved place on the daily menu all over the world. Internationally, consumption behaviour is undergoing a sea change, with ever more attention being focused on the origin of products. Producers that respond effectively to this change with the right products, partners and marketing mix do good business. But this also calls for good communication with the end customer via modern channels. This applies to every link in the chain. What does the near future have in store for us?

There will always be regional and local differences in eating and buying habits, but it makes sense to focus on megatrends that influence that behaviour. Millennials are an interesting focus group in this regard. Millennials are consumers born roughly between 1981 and 2000, who now form the biggest and most influential group of young adults. What is striking is the relatively large number of single-person households among this group. They are also referred to as 'Generation Y', as the successors to Generation X (born in 1961-1980). "Thanks to the internet, this Y cohort is the first generation in world history to have many values in common measured over many different countries and to have similar buying and eating patterns. Convenience, and a quick and on-the-go availability are key elements of this. But there is also social involvement," market researcher Hans Verwegen explains.

Internet and social media

Millennials have grown up with the internet, mobile phones and social media. Their world view and buying behaviour are influenced by blogs and apps to a far greater extent than by traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television and radio. Authenticity, integrity and opportunities for interaction are important criteria against which millennials judge not only media but also companies and products. Social media, especially blogs, play just as crucial a role in mutual communication and group formation. Social networks form around specific topics or themes; within them, people communicate on these subjects unhindered by distance or national borders. Verwegen: "As a provider you can capitalise on this development, but you must do so in a language that resonates with the target audience and with a real passion for your product."

Loyal and committed

Once a product or brand has earned their trust, millennials are often very loyal and committed customers. They want to influence and join in the conversation and like companies to be open to that. "This means that companies not only need to advertise on social media and in social networks, but they must also participate actively in them. This takes time, money and a clear vision for interactive communication, of course, but you really do get something in return." Millennials are active co-creators and their questions, ideas, suggestions and tips often make a very valuable contribution to product development within companies.

Socially involved

Millennials have sincere concerns about climate change, pollution and social abuses. They detest greed: companies can make a good profit, but they should also give something back to society. Companies that can prove that their production methods are

sustainable and that they also support the community in other ways have a clear advantage over competitors who don't. We are not talking 'certified organic' per se. Local products with a traceable origin and transparent information about the circumstances under which they were produced are also greatly appreciated. Demand for local products is so strong that 'local' is now being referred to as the new 'organic' in Germany.

Authenticity

Verwegen: "Because the young consumer spends a large part of their life in a virtual world, they have a strong need for 'the real thing', or in other words tangible products. For example: contact with the earth in a literal sense, as evidenced by the popularity of small-scale urban farming and growing vegetables at home – preferably experimental, with new taste sensations. The young producer shares the end-product proudly with their friends. As a result, appreciation of the skills of the professional grower is definitely on the rise, but this manifests itself most of all when people feel that they know this person – in real life or virtually."



Asia vs Europe

Supermarkets in Japan and Korea have been displaying producers' names on the sales shelves, often along with a photograph, for the past 25 years. And as long as 15 years ago, the arrival of the mobile phone made it possible for customers to go straight to the manufacturer's website while in the store. This was particularly successful, given the number of active users on the Japanese shop floor. This method of promotion has been less successful in Europe. Major players often place QR codes on packaging, but their use has not lived up to expectations.

Changing consumer behaviour

The desire for authenticity among millennials is translating into changing consumer behaviour. It is a given that supermarkets, whose largely standardised offerings are relatively anonymous in terms of origin, are still by far the most important sales channel for food. But more and more alternatives are coming on stream which appeal to younger generations in big cities in particular. A new golden age has begun for small-scale, artisan shops, preferably grouped together under the roof of a wide-ranging fresh food market. They offer a selection of sustainably produced food, usually of local origin. These local markets are not the place to do the entire daily shop; instead, people visit them to top up – and not

only for the products but also for the social aspect. Verwegen: “These are the first sales outlets where new trends become visible, like the rapid rise of peppery rocket, for example. Taking part in one of these markets or a food festival or taste-testing with a food truck can provide producers with valuable feedback prior to launching new vegetable varieties.”

Convenience services

At home in the kitchen, more and more consumers are keen to take the time to cook with care, especially at weekends. Slow food as a time to relax and spend with family or friends is in. But convenience and time-saving are called for in this area too. Online

Transparent information provision

In France initiatives have been launched in which local sales of various vegetables, meat and dairy products are combined into modern, internet-driven concepts. Take O'TERA for example. It may look like a cooperative, but it is actually a trade-driven initiative. In fact, it is a local platform with a physical sales outlet located close to the local traditional street market. The name of the grower of every product is shown, along with a photograph and address and details of how long they have been with O'TERA. A special feature is the transparent pricing information provided, which includes the growers price and the mark-up.

O'TERA: <http://www.lafermedusart.com/>



convenience services in the form of delivery or click-and-collect subscriptions are already available in many countries. This way consumers get all the fresh ingredients they need to make hot meals and salads delivered to their homes at prearranged times and in precisely the right quantities, along with a recipe and a brief or detailed description of the origin of the products. The emphasis is often on regional and seasonal organic products, which gives the service extra authentic, sustainable credentials. "Interestingly, these delivery services are introducing a new dynamism into product development. Items that do not make it onto the supermarket shelves immediately are getting real opportunities through direct contact with the target audience," Verwegen explains.

Multichannel approach

A multichannel approach for supermarkets and other links in the production chain is a must if they are to survive in the future – at least in terms of communication with end consumers. They are interested in the source and the producer's expertise. Verwegen: "The internet has made it much easier for producers to communicate directly with the end consumer and has even enabled them to sell directly. But make no mistake, the potential client will still demand a lot of attention." ■



US kale day

The multichannel approach takes up a great deal of time and effort. It can therefore sometimes be more cost-effective not to do everything yourself. With a trendy product, for example – one that people will actively seek out online – it can be a good idea to seek collaboration with other growers and possibly trading partners. A good example of this is the US site of the national kale day. This is not only a website where producers can actively promote

kale, but they have even declared 1 October "US kale day". Within a cooperative, individual producers can also be given scope to profile themselves on the internet in an efficient way. The website Verse Oogst, powered by The Greenery (the Netherlands) is a good example of this.

National kale day:
<http://www.nationalkaleday.org/>

Verse Oogst:
<http://www.verseoogst.nl/>

