

Food Safety Facts and Myths: Condensed Natural Smoke™ – A Healthy Alternative

Even as globalization transforms the tastes of American consumers, chemical additives, biotechnology and food recalls have heightened consumers' concerns over food safety. In 2007, just 15 percent of people said they were "very confident" in the safety of the United States food supply, a significant drop from the 21 percent who gave the same response in 2006.

Public concern falls into one of two categories: the fear of known dangers from food borne diseases and anxiety about potential dangers from additives, genetically modified ingredients and the technological process.

Concerns about food borne diseases are relatively easy to address. Although there are an estimated 76 million incidents of food borne disease in the United States every year, virtually all of them are mild cases that last just a day or two. In fact, incidence of one of the most severe food borne diseases – E. coli O157 – decreased 42 percent between 1996 and 2004.

Addressing consumer anxiety about food additives, preservatives and advanced technological processes is much more difficult. The growing demand for "organic" and "natural" products is a testament to consumer concerns that human intervention in the food chain can be bad, even though evidence points to the contrary.

Condensed Natural Smoke™ is a good example of a manmade process that is actually better than traditional smoking. Condensed Natural Smoke™ is natural smoke, generated from real wood chips, that is condensed in purified water through a strictly controlled process to maximize the smoke's flavoring, coloring and preservative qualities. The Condensed Natural Smoke™ is then aged for several days in stainless steel tanks to filter out the resins, tars and undesirable smoke compounds that are known health risks and found in the traditional methods of smoking. The Condensed Natural Smoke™ process maintains the preservative qualities of the traditional smoking process. Studies have demonstrated that Condensed Natural Smoke™ is effective at reducing or suppressing *Listeria* and other food-related bacteria associated with ready-to-eat foods.

At the same time, Condensed Natural Smoke™ provides additional environmental and health benefits. The process used to create Condensed Natural Smoke™ generates significantly less undesirable compounds than is produced by traditional smokehouse generators, which has made liquid smoke extremely popular in Scandinavia and other areas of Europe with strict air-quality regulations.

At the same time, the process all but eliminates the hydrocarbon fraction of smoke thought to cause cancer. According to the European Commission, “Because smoke flavorings are produced from smoke which is subject to fractionalization and purification processes, the use of smoke flavorings is generally considered to be of less health concern than the traditional smoking process.”

This finding by the European Commission is significant. While the United States government has traditionally given food processors significant liberties with the ingredients they use – provided they are properly labeled on the package – Europe regulates “novel foods,” which are defined as any food ingredient not used for human consumption prior to 1997. Europeans are also very wary of genetically modified ingredients, which include corn, wheat and other grains engineered to resist pests and disease. This makes the European Commission endorsement of liquid smoke noteworthy.

Today’s chef cannot ignore consumer concerns about food safety. These concerns should be turned into marketing opportunities that demonstrate how new processes and food ingredients can bring new tastes and safer foods to the table. Condensed Natural Smoke™ are a prime example.

Sources

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