



INSIGHT  
EDITION

#2

**CHINA:**

**FRESH FOOD**

**HABITS**



The science of **premium™**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



**GLOBAL FOOD COMPANIES ARE  
INCREASINGLY LOOKING TO ASIA  
AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING  
NEW MARKET OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR THEIR PRODUCTS.**

**To assist New Zealand companies, Plant & Food Research has undertaken exploratory research to better understand Chinese consumers. This research is the first step in building a platform of understanding with which to grow from — identifying the multiple factors that add to meal enjoyment, as well as understanding the key health and well-being beliefs and values of Asian consumers.**

Insights were gained through in-home visits, face-to-face focus groups and market research online communities (MROC) involving women 25 to 55 years old who live with and without children across a broad geographic area of China.

**The consumer insight themes explored in the study included:**

- The importance and interaction of flavour, freshness, naturalness, healthiness and food safety on Chinese consumers' choices of food
- Meal occasions and the types of foods and beverages consumed
- Food-related habits and behaviours, and the beliefs and attitudes that inform them
- Key influences on shopping habits



1

**INSIGHT**  
**Consumers see 'fresh and natural' as the key to health and food safety**

Consumers identified health as one of the most important factors when choosing food. Traditional wisdom is very influential when deciding what's healthy and what's not, and say the most important rule is "a mix of vegetable dishes and meat dishes for any main meal". Consumers identified a strong belief in balance and moderation – that you need a little bit of everything to ensure rich nutrition and promote health. Family also influenced perceptions on health, as consumers felt strongly that kids or grandparents needed to eat healthily. Consumers said that they read the ingredients listed on packaging, but that they were more influenced by the latest news, TV shows and information from friends on what's healthy or not.



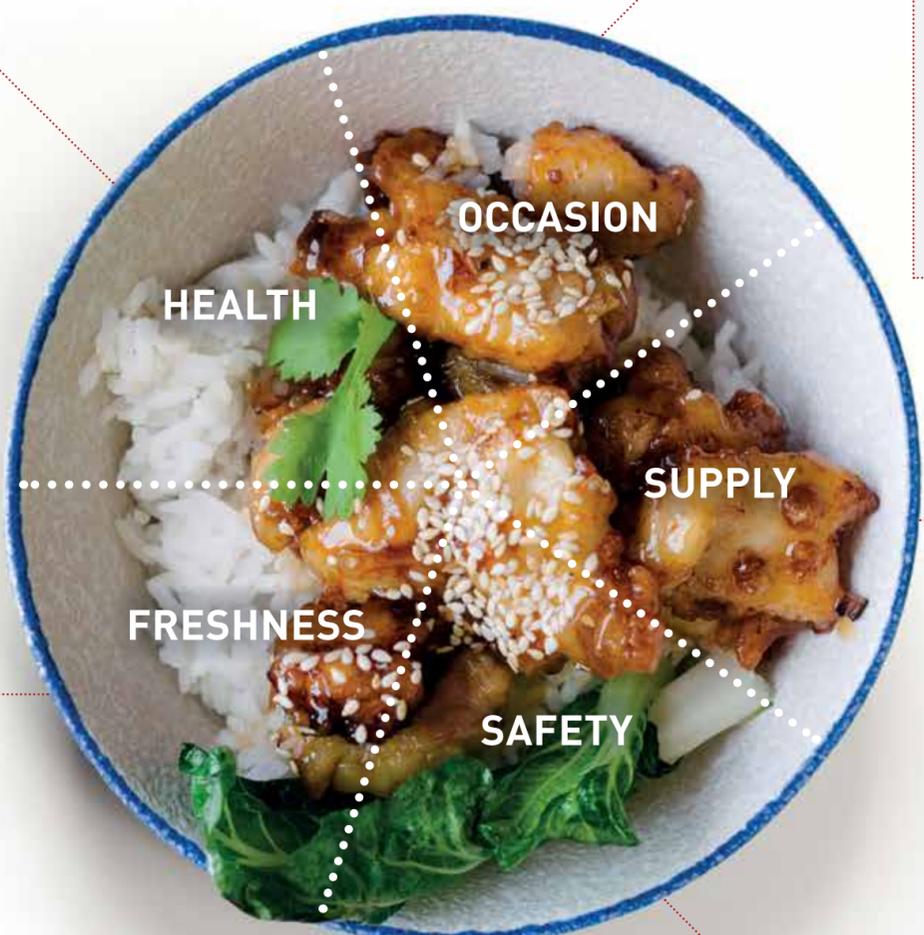
For me healthy means **fresh food ingredients, safe food and a balanced diet**

**5 FACTORS INFLUENCING FRESH FOOD CHOICES IN CHINA**

“ When people eat, the **most important thing is definitely health**. If you are not healthy, how do you work and study?



I usually go to the wet market in the morning because the **food is fresh and therefore nutritious**



3

**INSIGHT**  
**Modern lifestyles are changing when and how meals are prepared and consumed**

Consumers try to eat a nutritious breakfast, and satiety (feeling full) is seen as important as people go off to work or school, but breakfast was hardly anyone's favourite meal, as people feel in a hurry. Most consumers suggested breakfast needed to be a quick and easy meal to prepare and eat, such as heating frozen dumplings or reheating leftovers. Traditionally lunch is viewed as the main meal with dinner secondary; however, urban lifestyles are changing this. The main meal involves more energy, and time is put into preparation and family members get together for a sit-down meal. The traditional full meal at noon is only possible if the meal preparer has a traditional profession and a long break at noon (2-3 hours) with a short commute, usually within smaller cities. In larger cities where the lifestyle is faster, commuting times are often long and lunchtime breaks are shorter, dinner serves as the main meal.



The whole family gets together to have dinner, very lively environment. Besides, there is longer time in the evening so **I can cook a few more dishes to share**



I buy shrimp from a special wet market. **I think the seafood there is fresh**



4

**INSIGHT**  
**Consumers have preferred ways of shopping for specific products**

Pork and chicken are the two most popular types of meat. Consumers prefer these fresh – recently killed in the wet markets – but will purchase refrigerated meat from supermarkets if they can't find the cut they want or quality is poor. Consumers generally avoid frozen/processed meats. Leafy vegetables have to be purchased fresh on the day (either in the morning or before they cook the main meal), usually from a wet market as consumers believe it has a stable supply and is freshly picked. Seafood is most often purchased alive (considered fresh) from specialist markets. However, dried or salted seafood is also acceptable.



Food in the supermarket is more quality-guaranteed because there are safety checks, but the **wet market is fresher**



5

**INSIGHT**  
**Food safety is top-of-mind**

In recent years, many incidents regarding food safety have been exposed, usually involving manufacturers using low quality, even fake and toxic ingredients in products. These incidents have led to a heightened attention to food safety issues and concerns that unsafe food will harm health. Two fundamental reasons consumers have difficulty selecting safe products are the lack of knowledge and information and the lack of trust in the food system including the manufacturer. Consumers do not know what ingredients are put into the foods, what manufacturing process is used, how the product is distributed and whether what is communicated is true. Consumers prefer products that are:  
→ 100% fully imported and comply with foreign evaluation standards  
→ From big and well-known brands that have a long and untarnished history  
→ Endorsed by the trustworthy third parties.



2

**INSIGHT**  
**Consumers will go the extra mile for freshness**

Freshness is the most important criterion for consumers when buying ingredients for their main meal, especially for vegetables. They believe fresher products are tastier and more nutritious. Many consumers will take extra time to purchase products from a specialty market to ensure freshness. Consumers evaluate freshness by looking at the colour, smell and feel the product, defining freshness as vegetables freshly picked in the morning, pork freshly killed on the day, and poultry or seafood alive when purchased. Consumers have a very strong preference toward products grown naturally (without any chemicals). Consumers also have a strong aversion towards products that are not seasonal as they believe non-seasonal products use unnatural planting/farming methods.

This brochure is a snapshot of our work examining Chinese fresh food habits, attitudes, behaviour and beliefs. We're adding to our knowledge on the Chinese consumer all the time, with an ongoing research effort by our own Consumer & Product Insights Group and the best partners in market and consumer research. If you'd like more detail and to access this or other Plant & Food Research-led studies on Asian consumers, please get in touch.

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