

MARKETING SUNFLOWER NUTMEATS

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How many of you have ever eaten sunflower nutmeats? In the shell for snacks? In a salad, cereal, muffins or other foods?

Now, take a guess at how many people in your area have eaten them. The results might surprise you. They show us the necessity for a marketing program such as we have undertaken in a small scale at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

I'm very honored to discuss the marketing phase of sunflower meat production because I've seen how it plays a part in promoting our state's top nut.

Up until a few years ago seemingly no-one had played up the idea of selling sunflower nutmeats to eat. We just sat quietly by while the birds had all the fun.

Suddenly we realized the potential market of our Red River Valley crop and went full swing into one of the Department of Agriculture's prime functions -- to assist our state's farmers in the market development of their crops.

Why did we think marketing sunflower nutmeats has such a good future?

In the first place, they have a natural advantage - they're a unique product. People's interest is easily aroused about them because they're different. It doesn't take much to create a curiosity about them or to get people to actually taste them.

They have such a likable flavor that they're actually fun to eat. You don't get so tired of eating them as other nuts, and I've actually known people who crave them.

Their size is another advantage. They are "just right" for adding to salads, casseroles or desserts without first being chopped up. Their "bite size" makes them the ideal thing for the nut bowl.

Price-wise they're ideal. I went to my own supermarket and priced several kinds of nuts. For the same quantity you can see they compare favorably with other nuts.

Another reason we viewed them with a future is their versatility. I personally feel this is the most important selling factor.

The home economist for our Department reviewed a new cookbook by the American Dairy Association. At my suggestion, she was asked to tell how

many of the 500 recipes ranging from appetizers to desserts would be better when sunflower nutmeats were added.

Her suggestions were amazing. She found them versatile enough to be used in every recipe in the book except those in the beverage section.

Did you ever think of using crushed nutmeats as a replacement for bread crumbs as coating for chicken or fish? Perhaps they could replace croutons in salad or be used as a surprise texture inside meatballs.

She found it could be used in any casserole and with many vegetables, salads, dressings, cheese, cakes, cookies and candies, pies and pastry, breads, sandwiches and desserts. Perhaps even "sunbutter" cookies might replace peanutbutter cookies if given a proper chance to be tried.

Of importance to all of us is their nutritive value. They are about one-third complete protein and contain all 10 essential amino acids. They are about one-half polyunsaturated fat, important to many who support the theory of diet related to heart disease.

For the weight watcher, they're low in calories, only 154 for little over a quarter of a cup. Their intensive flavor limits you from eating too much.

All these advantages led us to question how people react to them.

We gave sunflower meats to a young home economist in the test kitchen of one of Minnesota's largest milling companies. She let her co-workers try them and questioned how they felt the nuts could be used in recipes where other nuts were called for. The specialists felt the product was very versatile and tried some work on their own and are planning to do still more.

An institutional foods director of another milling company found the same results - they had many possibilities for the mass feeding field. People like them. This home economist has presented television shows and promoted their use in pancake batter and many other products.

A free-lance home economist suggested the best way to put the product across was to put it in a recipe. This gets the ball rolling and lets the homemaker know what she is supposed to do with the nutmeats and why she should buy them.

Advertising and promotion is a must pointed out to us by still another home economist. She felt most women haven't become used to the idea of sunflowers as the nut to buy. They need to know that shelled nutmeats are available and will fill many needs well at reasonable cost. Their use in special seasons such as Christmas, could be promoted as well.

To see how our own co-workers felt, we surveyed 56 men and women in our own Department of Agriculture.

Only 4 had never eaten sunflower meats before and most said they bought

them only for snacks.

About half have "never really looked" for the ones without shells at the store because they didn't realize they came that way or what they would use them for if they did purchase them.

Eye appeal seemed to be no problem. Several asked if they were fattening.

Only two persons didn't like the meats. One said she didn't like nuts anyway and the other didn't give a reason.

Many felt more people would try them if given a "proper introduction". All but two said they would try the shelled nutmeats if given a recipe booklet. This strongly supports our idea of the necessity for creating a product demand.

Our home economist also surveyed 13 suburban housewives. All were eager to know more about sunflower nutmeats and how to use them.

All 13 heartily approved of the taste. Only one had never eaten sunflower nutmeats before.

A friend of ours in the school lunch program tried some in salads and as topping for cakes and brownies. She said the school children didn't even notice any different nuts had been used. This worker found the nutmeats easy to work with and easily stored. She plans to use them in nutcups this fall.

Quality is a constant problem - especially for producers and manufacturers. They must be responsible for making sure the nutmeats retain flavor and won't get rancid too rapidly. Packaging is an important part of quality.

Another important factor in developing a program for the promotion of a product is to have a good supply. One example of the good supply is that sunflower nutmeats are a crop that can be established in one year, as compared to apples or other fruits.

What about the markets? What are some of the areas where expanded markets may be obtained?

Nut racks in grocery stores. Snacks for the bar trade. Institutional foods. Candy manufacturing. The baking industry. School lunch programs. Ice cream stores. I'm sure you can think of many more.

Perhaps you're wondering how our Minnesota Department of Agriculture promotes sunflower nutmeats?

Whenever our Department promotes a dinner of all Minnesota foods, or can influence the design of a menu, we suggest using sunflower nutmeats.

For example, next week at the Minnesota State Fair we'll be entertaining many radio, television and newspaper personnel in the state plus all our

legislators. We'll be serving them.

We also use them in all our Minnesota food dinners.

We have served thousands of samples of Minnesota sundaes - a special treat of ice cream, honey topping and crushed sunflower nutmeats.

We've promoted their use in pancakes by putting them in the ones we serve at conventions and meetings.

We've served them to food buyers and merchandisers at out-of-state all Minnesota food dinners. In short, we've tried to use them as much as we can.

In closing, I'd like to point out two important things to remember.

You've got a natural seller on your hands. First you must create a genuine desire for it and then continue to promote its use with all the know-how you have.

Thank you.

DISCUSSION

Tretsven: About the only area where you cannot use sunflowers would be in the beverage trade.

Kinman: They can be used as beverage.

Tretsven: Well, this is good, I'd like to know about this, how do you use them?

Kinman: Milkshakes or just milk; put them in a blender and grind them up. They are delicious.

Tretsven: Real good, this makes the story 100%.

Sackston: The Russians make alcohol out of the hulls.

Tretsven: Is that right? I'm glad to find that out, it makes us 300% ahead.

Heiser: When you were referring to sunflower meats in the grocery stores, bars and so on, these were already hulled?

Tretsven: Yes.

Heiser: Because one of the known problems in the past was that people have not known whether to use their fingernails or teeth and so on.

Tretsven: Everything I have mentioned was strictly out of shell.

Heiser: As the unofficial historian of sunflowers maybe someone here

can answer a question that I have. The sunflower was first introduced into Europe around 1550. Then the first mention of its use for food was by someone, one of the herbalists mentioned it I think, around 1600. They tried to eat the whole head cooked like an artichoke but as he said it, "the flavor of turpentine so did overwhelm all" that they soon gave it up. I have not yet found when they first realized it was the seed that should be eaten. Although the American Indian, of course, had long practiced eating the seeds it went to Europe without this knowledge, apparently, and it is not until it gets into the Mennonite area of Germany fairly late before its entry into Russian that we find it actually being used for the meats. There is a big, blank record - a couple of hundred years I think on the sunflower in Europe.

Editor: No-one answered this.

Martin: Have you tried to induce the chocolate bar industry to use sunflower nuts instead of, say peanuts?

Tretsvan: Some of the candy people have tried them. Yes.

Martin: In what form do you market the meats for the use of the housewife? The packages I have seen in the stores here are the 10¢ ones that you eat out of hand. Do they sell in pound packages or something like that?

Tretsvan: The most common-size package is $4\frac{1}{2}$ oz. I am glad you brought this up. We still think in the term of $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 oz. packages. My question is the same that you have here. Is this the adequate size, consumer-type package?

Martin: Would the housewife like to buy a little bigger quantity? Is it worthwhile and is it always sold as roasted or are they raw and the hulls taken off?

Tretsvan: This is a roasted product almost exclusively.

Bondshu: You can buy this product raw, just hulled in one pound or probably in bulk up to 25 or 50 lbs. in health stores in California.

Tretsvan: How about the grocery store itself?

Bondshu: You can buy it in one pound packages in grocery stores but it is not too widely distributed.

Baldwin: In this day and age we talk so much about high protein foods and the need for high protein foods, what recently has been done on using sunflower as a source of protein?

Kinman: I can possibly answer this question. In Texas at least in the health food stores you can buy defatted sunflower meal.

Interjection: Where is it made?

Kinman: I do not know where it is made.

Kinman: You mention shelf life. Have there been critical tests during the summer in the warm areas, especially this country, in the middle west, the south or even California, as to actual shelf life in cellophane bags of toasted sunflower meats.

Tretsven: Somebody in the industry possibly could provide the answer to that.

Bondshu: There is a problem with shelf life. I guess it is a merchandising problem again. To keep this material moving they try to have a complete turnover within two weeks to a month. If you buy the bulk material that I was talking about, perhaps in 25 to 50-pound bags, you can get in trouble with it. This is a small part of our business. The greatest part of sunflowers sold in California is in the shell. We take precautions of our own with shelled seed. We hold all of ours in cool storage because you can get in trouble in warm weather in California if this stuff sits around for 3 or 4 months.

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