

Consumer Preferences Concerning Food from Carob: A Survey in Crete, Greece

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Abstract : Research: The nutritional benefits of eating carob are many and important for the human organism, as it is a food rich in carbohydrates and low in fat and contains multiple nutrients, making it a "superfood". Within the framework of the project "Actions for the optimal utilization of the potential of carob in the Region of Crete" which is financed-supervised by the Region of Crete, a second-grade local self-government authority, with the collaboration of the University of Crete and of the Hellenic Mediterranean University, an online survey was carried out with the aim of evaluating dietary habits and views related to the consumption of carob and its products in a sample of local residents. Results and Conclusions: Of the 351 participants, 259 (73.8%) stated that they consume carob products, and 26.2% stated that they do not. Difficult access and limited availability of carob-food products (33.7%), high price (20.7%), and difficulties of use and preparation (15.2%) were cited as the main reasons for non-consumption. Other reasons, to a lesser extent, concern the taste, especially the sweet aftertaste of some products. Concerning the behavior and eating habits related to the consumption of carob products (n=259), 57.9% of the sample report that they buy carob products "sometimes"; 21.2% report "often"; 19.7% report "rarely", and a very small percentage of 1.2% report "constantly". With reference to the reasons for choosing carob products, the participants mention the main reason for their high nutritional value (51.7%), followed by 32.4% of nutritional claims and health claims, and the organoleptic characteristics (10.8%). Other positive factors are the final price of the product, the ease of use, and the respect for the local environment and producers. Some bakery products show the highest percentage of consumption among carob-food consumers, mainly in the form of rusks (86.1%) and breadsticks (70.3%). They are followed, in descending order, by bread (63.3%), toast (52.1%), and flour (50.6%). More specifically: 40.5% consume carob rusks less than once a month; 22% consume less than once a week; up to twice a week 12.4%; 6.6%, consume rusks 3 to 4 times a week, and daily 3.9%. It is worth mentioning that a high percentage of consumers of carob products recommend the consumption to their family and friends. Only a small percentage, in the range of 5%, does not recommend the consumption of carob products in their close family/social circle. The main motivating factors for the consumption of carob products are the expected effects they may have on health (74.1%) and the organoleptic characteristics with a percentage of 21.6%.

Keywords : food, consumer, preferences, carob, Crete, Greece

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