

Consumer demand for chocolate stays sweet

LONDON, UK: As the UK's National Chocolate Week commences (11 - 17 October), latest research from Mintel reveals that despite cutbacks in other areas, chocolate sales are staying sweet - with UK sales of chocolate confectionery increasing by 9.2% between 2007 and 2009 to reach an estimated £3.6 billion (about R39 billion) and sales projected to grow even further to £4.1 billion (about R44 billion) by 2015.



And its good news for innovation too as global new chocolate product launches increased by a strong 34% over the past six months and are up 16% year-on-year. Indeed, despite a difficult economic climate, it seems chocolate is one thing consumers would not give up and today, some 90% of consumers say that they 'regularly' eat chocolate. In addition, a 'treating' culture has emerged - with the number of consumers saying that they use chocolate to do this increasing from 46% in 2008 to 49% in 2009.

Vivianne Ihekweazu, senior food and drink analyst at Mintel, said: "Chocolate rode out the recession, with consumers turning to it as a low cost comfort food. And the good news for National Chocolate Week is that the chocolate confectionery market is continuing to see growth, as UK consumers remain a nation of chocolate lovers. But challenges for the market are on the horizon. Issues such as rising commodity prices and the VAT price rise in 2011 will increase cost across all confectionery products and inevitably pass these onto the consumer. However, our over-riding desire for indulgence will keep the chocolate category going, helped by continued new product development."

When it comes to chocs, men are catching up

While the link between women and chocolate remains a popular perception, it seems men are catching up. Indeed, today 87% % of men say they eat it, compared to 91% of women. Furthermore, while the milk versus dark chocolate divide remains, Mintel finds that dark chocolate is reclaiming its place in the heart of the nation. While over half of consumers claimed they preferred milk chocolate in 2008 - this dropped to just 35% in 2009. In addition, consumers claiming that dark chocolate is healthier has increased from 23% in 2008 to 35% in 2010.

While chocolate has fared well in recession, so it seems have ethical concerns. Indeed, the amount of consumers who say they look for fair trade chocolate has remained steady, from 35% in 2008 to 36% in 2009 - a year when many consumers traded down on key products. In addition, ethical is now the third most popular claim for new chocolate products and 25% of new chocolate products launched in the UK in 2009 carried this claim.

' Ethical issues remain high on the consumer agenda'

"Ethical issues remain high on the consumer agenda and in spite of the recession, an increasing number of retailers and manufacturers have been moving towards fair trade sourcing as a marker of quality and way to show of their corporate social responsibility for chocolate confectionery. It seems only a matter of time before the seasonal and boxed chocolates market shifts this way too to meet consumer demand." Ihekweazu continues.

And it seems consumer demand for chocolate has also encouraged supermarkets to increase their interest. Indeed, while the brand / supermarket own label divide for UK chocolate products in 2008 stood at 84% / 16%, supermarket own label has now increased its market share to 77% / 16% in 2009. Claims for each sector remain different however, with top claims for supermarket own label new product development in chocolate standing at No additives / preservatives (30%), Premium (20%) and Ethical (18%). However, with branded chocolate NPD it is Premium claims which are most popular at (22%), followed by Organic (21%) and Vegetarian (17%).

"With parents split between wanting 'no added sugar/sugar free' or 'no preservatives, additives and artificial flavouring', innovation has focussed on these issues and brought a wealth of new chocolate choices to the market." Ihekweazu concludes.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>