



CONSUMER COLOR PREFERENCE:  
**FOOD & DRINKS**

— A CASE STUDY —

# THE FIRST MOMENT OF TRUTH

Coined by Procter & Gamble, the “First Moment of Truth” is the first 3-7 seconds after a shopper encounters a product on a store shelf. These first seconds are precious to marketers and their best chance of converting a browser into a buyer by appealing to their senses, values and emotions. In the food industry, if a product’s look doesn’t resonate with its positioned attributes like flavor or wellness, consumers will most often ignore it.

Color is an incredibly important part of a consumer’s first moment of truth in food and drink products, as it not only delights viewers with an immediate visual experience but also induces flavor perception. Color actually helps bring many products to life.



—VS—



# LOOKING AT FOOD SELECTION WITH A SCIENTIFIC LENS



It turns out science has a very good explanation for why consumers depend on colors. SCIENTIFIC REPORTS recently released the study “The Role of Human Trichromatic Vision in Food Evaluation,” which focuses on the visual function of trichromacy. An advanced trait in primates and humans to help them adapt to and survive in changing landscapes, trichromacy refers to our three independent photoreceptors within the retina capable of responding to multiple wavelengths in the visible spectrum of light at once. In simpler terms, the human eye is capable of seeing a color range of violet to red.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- 1** The trichromatic function enabled early humans to differentiate nutrient-rich foods like the purples and reds of berries or meat vs. empty calorie and low-energy foods such as leafy greens.
- 2** With the development of the trichromatic function, the human species immediately defaults to sight versus smell, unlike non-trichromatic primates or mammals that rely on olfaction.
- 3** Instinctively, humans show a preference for food with bright reddish nuances because of our ancestral craving for nutrients.

Interestingly enough, there has actually been a “first moment of truth” for humans from our species’ beginnings.

# A TASTE FOR COLORFULLY NATURAL PRODUCTS

Our attraction to color in natural environments has continued today. Most frequently elicited in produce sections of retailers, our innate excitement about colors of fruits and vegetables energizes our shopping experience and affects our food selection in other aisles.

Our enjoyment of colorful produce sections is probably a blend of our human condition and our more rational, modern desire for less processed foods. The food industry's current push to "naturalness" shouldn't come as a surprise with united demands for the removal of artificial ingredients around the world.

Food color is at the forefront of this global "natural" phenomenon. According to Mintel, natural food colors have taken the lead in all regions and continue to be favored in global food and drink products. In addition, as many as two-thirds of global consumers (68%) said they were willing to pay more for foods without undesirable ingredients (Nielsen). Today's consumers want to see color from fruit and vegetable juices on product labels.

Given this information, we were curious about today's preferred and expected colors from nature in food and drink products. Do we still gravitate towards shades of reds? Does color preference change across categories? Etc.



Produce is the expression of the dish. It's the easiest way to liven up a dish, to add color and vibrance.

Anytime I get fresh produce it makes me happy, bright eyed and bushy tailed.

Bringing home colorful, fresh things is like celebrating your family being together.

The color says fresh, juicy, healthy, decadent, easy.

# CONSUMER COLOR PREFERENCE STUDY

To satisfy our curiosity, Sensient conducted national research to identify retail offerings believed to be the best representation of consumers' expectations in our "age of naturalness." It is important to note our study was completed by North American consumers, but the data applies to global food manufacturers as colors are a universal expression of the human condition. The following question was posed for each survey.

**If a new food or beverage product was being introduced into the market that was only made from all-natural ingredients and offered a superior nutritional profile, which of the following visuals best represents your expectations of the product's look?**



**Our research reveals some interesting truths about human nature and color:**

- 1** Consumers prefer bold and vivid colors, because they authentically illustrate nature's brilliance
- 2** Products should mimic and replicate the bright colors offered by nature
- 3** Consumers favored Purple, Orange, and Red shades

Nature not only provides us with boundless color opportunity but also a bounty of natural color sources. Luckily today, expertise in extraction and standardization provides food manufacturers with application-ready color solutions from fruit and vegetable juices to cater to these consumer expectations.

# DON'T LET NATURE LOSE ITS LUSTER

Advanced technologies in today's market enable color suppliers to provide application-ready solutions to brands reflective of nature's brilliance. With the abundance of natural color sources, we are able to achieve more shades today than ever before.

Global natural color innovation allows color application specialists to achieve shades that have never been possible from FD&C colors. The number of shade offerings from natural color sources compared to artificial sources is immensely different.

However, in the spirit of naturalness and simplicity, some brands choose to dull products that are making flavor or wellness claims associated with bright fruits, vegetables, florals, etc.

Why are brands letting nature lose its luster in this age of "naturalness?" It's unclear why brands fear color for natural products when color capabilities from natural sources are better than ever. While color from botanical and fruit sources are inherently more complex, vivid and bright shades are certainly possible. Compromise on shade and flavor is unnecessary.

One thing is clear though — consumers prefer naturally colored products in vibrant shades.

Entice the conscious consumers of today with nature's brilliance in your application-specific color solutions from Sensient.

