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FOODSERVICE OPERATORS DISH ON COOKING OIL PREFERENCES IN SURVEY:

"Flavor" and "performance" outrank "price" as key attributes considered when making cooking oil purchasing decisions; still, a majority indicate "confusion" when comparing and contrasting options

CORDOVA, Tenn. – October 16, 2009 – On the heels of *trans* free reformulations and an economic downturn, the National Cottonseed Products Association (NCPA) recently completed a foodservice survey to better understand foodservice operators' current cooking oil needs and concerns. Commercial and noncommercial operators nationwide identified oil flavor and performance as top priorities, while also indicating difficulty or confusion in understanding their options.

"While cottonseed oil is a lesser known oil in today's wide range of options, we've long suspected that foodservice operators were seeking exactly the attributes offered by this premium oil, namely flavor neutrality and performance," says Ben Morgan, executive vice president, National Cottonseed Products Association, Cordova, Tenn. "Interestingly, the research shows that operators rank flavor and performance even ahead of cost, a point that is very significant given the current economy. It also suggests that we need to do more to communicate the key attributes of cottonseed oil to quality-driven foodservice operators, particularly those in the commercial sector."

NCPA's operator survey consisted of online interviews with more than 600 purchase decision-makers in both commercial and noncommercial market segments, including fine dining, casual dining, quickservice, family dining, cafeteria/buffet, and hotel/lodging, healthcare, and college/university. Key findings:

- An overwhelming 81% of operators indicate that oil performance is more important than price when choosing an oil
- A majority of operators – 60% – are not considering changing the type of oil they use to reduce food costs, despite the current economy
- Across both commercial and noncommercial segments, "functionality/performance" and "flavor/flavor neutrality" are key attributes when deciding on a type of oil to use
 - Both attributes ranked as "extremely important"
 - Other key factors include "no *trans* fats," "long fry life" and "cost"
- Commercial operators' top priorities when choosing an oil are "functionality" and "flavor," while "no *trans* fat" and "healthiness" rank slightly higher for noncommercial operations, immediately followed by "functionality"
 - 23% of commercial operators ranked "flavor/flavor neutrality" as their top priority, followed by 19% for "functionality/performance" and 14% for "no *trans* fat," while 25% of noncommercial operators ranked "no *trans* fat" as their top priority

- Price and length of fry life are important secondary considerations for commercial operators when choosing a type of oil
- When commercial operators move to a cheaper oil, they are most concerned with flavor and fry life; noncommercial operators first consider the health impact, but take fry life into consideration
- About half (49%) of operators indicate having “difficulty or confusion” in understanding the oil options available and in comparing/contrasting traits and function

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A Survey on Cooking Oils in Commercial and Noncommercial Kitchens, Cont.

“The research seems to indicate a shift away from ‘*trans* free’ and ‘price’ as top purchasing factors,” Morgan says. “It is likely that operators discovered their oil replacements were lacking the flavor and performance they desired. With flavor and performance once again ranking as top priorities, and given the confusion that exists among many decision-makers about oil choices, we see a unique opportunity to educate commercial operators about the merits of cooking with cottonseed oil.”

Flavor and Performance Attributes are Inseparable

The foodservice industry’s focus on oil flavor and performance bodes well for cottonseed oil, a *trans* free vegetable oil that is prized for its neutral flavor and performance characteristics.

Under extended frying circumstances, many oils will break down, negatively impacting the food’s finished flavor. Cottonseed oil’s inherent stability makes it one of the few oils that can promise nearly zero flavor reversion. These factors translate to longer fry life and less oil turnover, making cottonseed oil quite cost-effective, as well.

Fishing for the Perfect Oil

San Diego-based seafood chain Anthony’s Fish Grotto is a classic example of a restaurant that relies on the high performance and neutral flavor of cottonseed oil for its catch of the day. The successful restaurant group has fried its fare only in 100 percent cottonseed oil for more than 62 years, and despite changes in food trends and oil price fluctuations, has always found it to be the best choice.

“We ask a lot of our cooking oil,” says co-owner Craig Ghio. “It can be a challenge to find an oil that suits all of a restaurant’s needs – including flavor, functionality, fry life, healthfulness, affordability, and so on. We take our seafood seriously and have experimented with various highly engineered oils over the years. We always come back to pure cottonseed oil; its stability and performance never falter. Since cottonseed oil does not impart its own flavor, we are able to extend fry life and maximize oil usage, while preparing a catch-of-the-day that’s fresh and flavorful.”

About the National Cottonseed Products Association

NCPA is the national trade association for the cottonseed processing industry. In addition to the U.S. cottonseed crushing industry, association membership includes refiners, who process cottonseed oil into semi-finished and finished products, dealers and brokers who market cottonseed products, and other firms that provide goods and services to the industry. For more information, visit www.cottonseedoil.com.

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