

INDUSTRIAL UPGRADING OF TRADITIONAL TOMATO PRODUCTS: A CONSUMER SCIENCE APPROACH

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Abstract:

During the last few years the tomato products market, a driving sector of Italian economy, is going through a significant market crisis due to a lack of a coherent correspondence of products to the new updated consumer's needs.

The sector needs a product upgrading as already seen in other commercial segments such as, for example, fruit juices or dairy products industries with the development of new foods more coherent with the new market requests (new lifestyles, more service content and environmentally friendly).

The current market standardization of traditional tomato products (peeled tomatoes, tomato pulp and cherry tomatoes) since their birth packed in metal cans or glass jars doesn't allow their discrimination and competition with International Companies more interested in new concepts, such as wellness, convenience and new lifestyles much more "on the go".

A great interest is run towards products which remind consumers concepts like health and naturalness. Among these, traditional tomato products represent a trendy product in their several industrial forms (natural, peeled, puree, sun dried, etc.).

An upgrading should be necessary as a consequence to restore the tomato products leadership position conforming their aspect to International competitors much more careful to the consumer's needs.

In addition, it will be necessary to solve the timeless problem represented by industrial wastes (peels and seeds) try to transform them in by-products with added value (tomato wastes are approximately 3% of the whole material processed, that is in the 2009 5 millions nationwide). Nowadays wastes are mostly used as cattle feed after ensilation and mixing with other vegetables (typically corn). The paper reports the results of a project in progress aim to valorise the industrial tomato wastes by seeds oil and peels functional substances extraction (carotenoids and phytosterols). This oil will be used as covering media for many tomato "integral" products, for fuel production and for possible uses in cosmetic industry application, due to composition particularly rich in functional and aromatic molecules. The "made in Italy" perception, definitely the real key of success for these products has been interpreted by a consumer test carried out in USA to better understand the real and updated needs of market.