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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the views and expectations related to the quality of potatoes served in institutional catering kitchens from the viewpoint of consumers and catering professionals. The data for this qualitative study were collected by means of consumers' group discussions and theme interviews of catering professionals. There were four groups of consumers with altogether 23 participants, a half of whom were school children aged 13-15 years and the other half adult employees who used staff canteen services regularly. Altogether 18 catering professionals were interviewed, half of them representing school kitchens and the other half staff canteens.

The potato has an established position in mass catering, although consumers would prefer potatoes to be served more often in some other tastier form, e.g., as mashed potatoes, instead of boiled. Consumers and professionals both appreciate the potato as such because it is healthful, versatile, economical and domestic. Boiled potatoes were regarded important by adult consumers particularly because of their lightness. The weaknesses of potatoes served in institutional kitchens were mainly related to boiled potatoes, especially when served peeled. School children mostly associated the weaknesses of boiled potatoes with a rubbery quality, and also complained that they did not stay hot on the serving line. In the view of adult consumers, the problem with boiled potatoes was that they became dry and formed a "skin" while on the serving line and also were watery and bad-tasting. They felt that potato quality could be improved by more careful procurement of potatoes and appropriate boiling and serving. Serving the boiled potatoes unpeeled was seen as another solution toward better quality. Catering professionals recognised the same problems as consumers, but felt that they were doing the best they could for good potato quality. They also evaluated the quality of the potatoes served as sufficiently good.

According to the interviewed professionals, the quality of boiled potatoes, particularly their freshness, was influenced by the place of procurement and amount of additives used to prevent fresh peeled potatoes from enzymatic discoloration. Direct procurement from potato farmers were commended for better potato quality, flexible and reliable deliveries, and expertise in the choice of potato. The currently strengthening efforts towards concentration of deliveries in the institutional catering sector were seen by the professionals as somewhat inconsistent with efforts to improve potato quality. They considered it important to be able to choose the most suitable potato supplier themselves. Another important aspect for better potato quality is open and flexible co-operation between institutional kitchens and their purchase organisations, on one hand, and institutional kitchens and potato suppliers, on the other, thus creating a functional channel for utilising the available knowledge and expertise related to the potato. Smooth co-operation and appropriate boiling and especially serving of potatoes could further improve the present quality of the boiled potato.

Keywords

Consumers, institutional kitchens, consumption, potato, foods, quality

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