Seaweed as snack food - What target consumers ? IDEALG project

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Seaweed as snack food

What target consumers?

Idealg project

Context

In Asia, seaweed is historically a traditional source of food whereas in France, seaweed consumption is relatively limited and only started to gain momentum in the 2000s. French seaweed producers and processors have developed a **wide range of products suited to French-style cuisine and containing seaweed in all its various forms.**

In France, food intake is traditionally divided in **three daily meals**. Some consumers, however, choose to **move away from this eating pattern**, with repercussions on breakfast, which they may skip, or on lunch, which will merely consist of a bite to eat. Thus about one third of French consumers eat between traditional main meals, afternoon snack and aperitif excluded.

Snack food is food that can be eaten with the fingers at any time and/or anywhere.

Methodology and work focus

The surveys conducted by AGROCAMPUS OUEST as part of the Idealg project identified consumers interested in seaweed as **snack food**, work that resulted in the authors asking the following question: “Are **seaweed food products suited to French eating habits?**”.

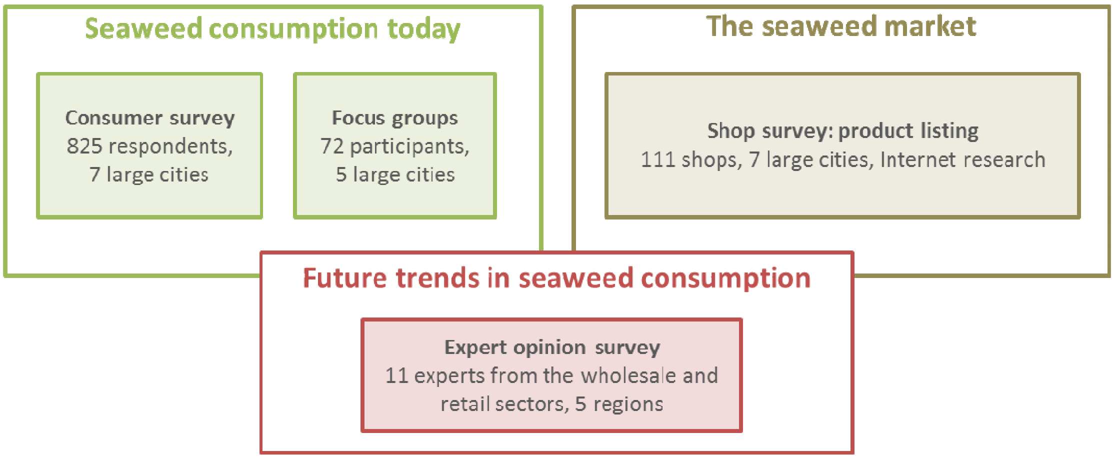

Diagram summing up the methods used

Seaweed snacks account for a fairly small part of the range of non-Asian style seaweed food products available although they potentially meet the eating requirements of many consumers who have made a habit **of eating between meals,** outside their homes but who also want to eat **healthy**, **natural and local food**. Who are these potential consumers of seaweed snacks and what products are currently available? What measures could be taken to encourage consumers to eat seaweed?

What consumers?

The results of the surveys show that seaweed snacks appeal to two consumer profiles: **consumers of "takeaway" food** and **consumers of "ready-to-eat" food** .

	Consumers of "takeaway" food	Consumers of "ready-to-eat" food
Target profiles	• **Age**: 25 to 54 • **Gender**: female • **Income**: medium to high • **Socio-professional group**: executives, self-employed, technicians and associate professionals, students	• **Age**: varied • **Gender**: female / male • **Income**: medium to high • **Socio-professional group**: none in particular

Target consumers of snack foods have quite a wide range of profiles, although **seaweed "takeaway" food** targets a relatively small group of the French population, namely **women in active employment and female students**. For these people, seaweed snacks mean they can eat healthy food quickly and easily, at home or the office.

Concerning **"ready-to-eat" seaweed products**, the field of target consumers is **much wider** and includes children, working and older people. This profile covers a large part of currently non-seaweed consumers.

Seaweed snack target consumers are therefore people who tend to eat between meals and like the simplicity of using these products.

What seaweed-based products?

Seaweed-based snacks currently present in the French-style product range are processed products with **low seaweed content**, a plus point when it comes to first-time tasting. Most of them are **line extensions** of western-style products or meals commonly eaten in France to which seaweed has been added.

These products **cover the various eating occasions** in France. They therefore provide further opportunities to eat seaweed. Their main advantage is that they require very little preparation and can therefore be eaten anywhere.

	Consumers of "takeaway" food	Consumers of "ready-to-eat" food
Seaweed products matching the profile	**Processed food**: canned fish and fish rillettes, mixed salads, soups and dehydrated soup mixes, teas and herbal teas	**Processed food**: savoury and sweet biscuits, rice or cereal cakes, energy bars
Eating occasions and places	• All (aperitif and afternoon snack included) • Office and home	• All (aperitif and afternoon snack included) • **Everywhere**

The on-the-go aspect of these products needs to be qualified depending on their conditioning and how much preparation is needed before eating them. **Ready-to-eat** food can be eaten directly after purchase with no preparation required.

Takeaway food has to undergo some kind of preparation: rehydration, cooking, dressing and/or cannot be eaten without a fork/knife/spoon or container.

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What product innovations?

	Expanding the intrinsic product range	Improving and developing the extrinsic product range
Product innovations	• **Aperitif snacks**: develop seaweed crisps (dehydrated, fried or salted seaweed or flakes incorporated into potato crisps) • **Co-branding**: possibility for two brands to develop, market and/or communicate about a new product	• **Packaging aesthetics**: environmentally-friendly, attractive packaging • **Informative content on the back of the packaging**: product composition, origin and name of the species used, place of manufacture, possibly the name of the producer, as well as tips on how to use the product and recipes • **"finger-food-style" packaging**: containers adapted to immediate consumption, complete • **Microwaveable snacks**: containers (boxes or cups) can be placed in a micro-wave, com-
Plus points	⇒ Offering that meets target consumers' demand ⇒ Makes it possible for two brands to share expertise and reputation	⇒ Attracts and informs consumers about the product and its origin ⇒ Provides further opportunities to eat seaweed ⇒ Facilitates purchase decisions ⇒ Helps consumers adopt and cook the product alone at home
Minus points	⇒ Investment in new materials and R&D ⇒ Co-branding: of little benefit to the seaweed processor's partner	⇒ Marketing investment ⇒ No transparent packaging (processed food sometimes does not look attractive)

What distribution and marketing?

In addition to **organic food shops** and **delicatessens**, processors and manufacturers interested in marketing seaweed snacks should also consider two other distribution channels where consumers expect to find seaweed snacks: **hyper- and supermarkets** and **traditional fishmongers**. In-store **marketing** would then be **situational**, meaning seaweed snacks would be marketed in one of the following four universes based on need units: sea delicatessens, chilled snacks, aperitif and nibbles.

Universe	Sea delicatessens	Chilled snacks	Aperitif	Nibbles
Type of products	Chilled or ambient products	Chilled delicatessens	Chilled and ambient "ready-to-eat" products	Ambient products to nibble
Place on the shelves	• Grouped per eating occasions • Chilled aisle • Cabinet with canned and aperitif products, alcoholic beverages	• Chilled shelving units • At store entrance or near check-outs	• With other aperitif products • Chilled cabinet	• With other products marketed as nibbles
Promotional tools	• Spotters • Totems at start of a shelving unit • Display unit	• Spotters • Chilled cabinet at shelving end	• Spotters	• Spotters

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What communication?

To help retailers make an informed choice when purchasing seaweed snack products and better prepare them to sell seaweed to consumers, there are a number of incentives open to processors, if possible **collectively**, given the financial costs involved.

Processors and distributors of seaweed snack products could also develop consumer communication campaigns to boost sales, either in-store or in the media (including social media) in order to widen the edible seaweed consumer base.

Target audience	**Retailers**	**Consumers**
Objectives	• Train retailers	• Get people to try seaweed • Attract consumers
Possible measures	• **Technical datasheets** 1. On edible seaweed and production methods 2. Specific to each processor (production and offer) with tips on how to use seaweed products • **Cooking workshops**: how to cook seaweed sessions for salespeople, small retailers , section managers and shop assistants	• **Handing-out of samples in stores**: associated with immediate discount coupons, especially for ambient "aperitif" products and "nibbles" • **Promotions and tasting events:** around aperitif products and including price promotions. May be accompanied by the handing out of goodies (pens or magnets with the seaweed product brand on them) • **Media and social media**: adverts, include collaborative R&D

For further information

COMPARINI Charline, LESUEUR Marie, LE BRAS Quentin, LUCAS Sterenn, GOUIN Stéphane. 2016. *Quelles pistes d'actions pour impulser la consommation des algues en France*. Programme IDEALG Phase 3. Les publications du Pôle halieutique AGROCAMPUS OUEST n°40 à 43, 136 p.

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