**CHALLENGES AND TRENDS IN THE HEALTH FOOD INDUSTRY**

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*Aim:* The aim of the study was to evaluate the challenges and trends in the health food industry focusing on consumer choice of diet based on healthcare challenges.

*Material & Methods:* This included a random survey of 50 people. They were asked the types of foods they preferred under the following categories: Organic Foods, Whole/Natural Foods and alternative sweeteners (foods) based on their diets as a result of their healthcare challenges.

*Background Information:* Whole natural foods refer to any food that's as close to its natural state as possible for consumption. This means that the food is not processed and unrefined. Whole foods are free of chemicals, preservatives and additives. Fruits and vegetables are examples of whole foods. Other types of whole foods include nuts,

milk, eggs, beans, seeds, and certain types of meat, fish and poultry. However, a food is no longer considered a whole food, if any additives has been added or undergone any processing. Organic Foods according to the United States Department of Agriculture, refers to meat, poultry, dairy and eggs that come from animals that were never exposed to growth hormones and antibiotics. Organic fruits and vegetables that have never been treated with bioengineering, pesticides or ionizing radiation are considered to be organic foods. Furthermore, certain organic foods have shown to have great volumes of vitamin C and protein than their non-organic counterparts. Alternative sweeteners (foods) are simply substitutes to sucrose and other mono-and disaccharides that produce sweetness. Many substitutes have been produced and developed to hand zero calorie or provide low calorie for foods and drinks. Due to the fact that most of these offer little to no calories, these sweeteners are also called non-nutritive sweeteners. Examples include Stevia, xylitol etc.

*Results:* 50 % of the people (25) indicated that they will go for Organic foods due to their higher mineral and nutrient substance and really better taste. Another reason they gave is their longer lifespan/durability especially the fresh produce and the extraordinary biodiversity seen in indigenous vegetables and organic products. They also indicated that the high price and cost of these products as one of the major disadvantages of these foods. 40 % of those surveyed (20 people) indicated that they prefer Whole/Natural Foods because these foods are free of synthetic or artificial ingredients or additives. They also indicated that these foods did not have artificial coloring, preservatives and flavorings which negatively affect people’s health. They also mentioned that whole foods do not have any unnecessary added sugars and salt and as such is healthy choice for them. The most difficult challenge that they faced was the very high price of the whole/natural foods. Their prices are very high compared to those of organic foods and most times these consumers end up going for organic foods. The remaining 10 % (5 people) indicated they preferred alternative sweeteners due to their affordability despite knowing that alternative sweetener based foods, can lead to health problems, such as tooth decay, weight gain, poor nutrition and increased triglycerides. Their strong point was their affordability compared to the other types of foods.

*Conclusion:* From this little survey we see that the relationship between the desired foods of choice and their actual selection is highly determined by price irrespective of the consumers’ needs. As indicated by some of the consumers we see that they tend to go for what is affordable compared to what they really need for their health and in some cases they start with their prescribed diets and foods and switch to more affordable options over time despite them being less healthy options.