

by Marianne Gillette

## Countering Information Overload

Today, information on a range of food issues is available at the click of a mouse or remote. Thanks to new Internet marketing strategies, consumers are bombarded with information on food from every direction. Futurist Alvin Toffler predicted this media dynamic when he coined the phrase “information overload.” He defined the concept as “an excess amount of information being provided, making processing and absorbing tasks very difficult for the

messages that resonate best are those that are the simplest. However, those messages are not necessarily rooted in science or accurately depict the true application of science.

This new movement signals a rapidly growing wave of consumer interest in wellness and sustainable food supplies. As the world’s food scientists, we have an enormous responsibility. With this responsibility comes an opportunity to leverage our knowledge and our scientific expertise

FTC actions, and journalists will continue to write about healthier and simpler food choices.

Throughout the next year, it will be important that we ask ourselves the right questions about how we can best address consumers’ changing demands and lend clarity when it comes to information overload on food issues. How can we balance all of the healthful scientific knowledge we have at our fingertips with the bottom-line realities of managing food

and sustainability. I urge members, particularly those in industry, to resolve to be an active part of the future of food science and technology.

As the demand for foods that are both nutritious and functional increases, our profession is positioned to take the lead on the type, variety, and quality of available food products. I’d like to continue this dialogue by asking you, our IFT members, to identify how you believe the science of food will help consumers

*With this responsibility comes an opportunity to leverage our knowledge and our scientific expertise to do what is best for our food supply and for consumers.*

individual because sometimes we cannot see the validity behind the information.”

More recently, the public is heading to theaters, reading books and articles, referencing blogs, and conducting online research about food and the companies that produce it. Whether we agree or not with the information that is penetrating the mainstream through recent film and book marketing campaigns, it is evident that people are taking a serious interest in food.

While consumers readily absorb information from all mediums, they still may not make educated choices. It is simply not possible to synthesize all of the available information on food from the science, medical, and culinary communities... and beyond. As a result, the

to do what is best for our food supply and for consumers.

I believe that all of this public attention provides a breakthrough opportunity for food science and technology professionals to be catalysts in addressing food safety, health, and wellness of the planet. Let’s get passionate about our role as educators on these issues.

We understand that food will reside at the forefront of consumers’ consciousness. However, there are clearly obstacles when it comes to sustainable development of the food supply. We face the twin challenges of protecting the environment, while still making plenty of food available for millions of hungry people. At the same time, the media will continue to saturate us with news about product recalls, FDA and

costs effectively? How can we better maintain record productivity while ensuring that the generations to come can live and thrive on a healthy planet? I believe that the answers to these questions will help us to reinvent the food science community and lay the groundwork for future young scientists.

Through IFT’s Current and Emerging Science Issues Expert Advisory Panel, we have identified four pillars that represent avenues for advancement and growth. The pillars—food security and sufficiency, sustainability, food quality, and health and wellness—serve as a guide for our scientific strategies and priorities.

United together, we can address the challenges of our profession with the best of science, technology, safety,

to eat well. As a scientist, educate yourself and stay on top of the consumer’s emerging perspectives. Read the popular books on food by Kessler, Pollan, and others. Familiarize yourselves with their issues, their passion, along with the quality of information in the popular media.

We must remember that first and foremost, we are members of the world’s leading society of food technologists. Our collective dedication to the highest standards in food science and technology enables us to listen, act, and respond by addressing issues with the best science our organization can offer. **FT**



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