



HOT DOGS



Contract Testing Inc.



INTRODUCTION

Few foods are more synonymous with the glory days of summer than hot dogs. Whether at the ballgame or the backyard barbeque, hot dogs are an easy, affordable, tasty treat. And frankly, 'franks' are one of the longest-standing traditions in North American food culture. With a taste, texture, and appearance which is much the same today as it was 50 years ago – hot dogs have truly stood the test of time.

So at the depth of our long cold winter, what better way to remind ourselves of the dog days of summer than a hot dog taste test. We wondered, in the seemingly simple, unchanging world of wieners, is there a top dog among them?

This research aims to explore whether there are perceivable differences between brands of All Beef Wieners, and if so, what attributes help them stand apart.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

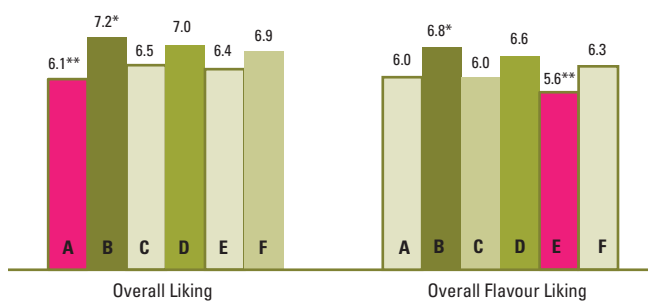
This research sampled 50 females in the Greater Toronto Area who are regular consumers of hot dogs. The test included six brands of all beef wieners, including three national brands and three private label brands, each sourced from local grocery stores. The wieners were tested in hot dog buns on a plastic plate labelled with a 3-digit code.

The samples were evaluated blind with a fully rotated trial order, utilizing a combination of 9-point hedonic scales and 5-point Just About Right scales. Once tasted and evaluated, the declared sodium and fat values were revealed and the respondent was asked how this would impact their interest to purchase the brand.

RESULTS

Among our six contenders, one dog stood apart as the 'best in show' with top scores on Overall Liking and Flavour (Fig. 1), and a top two box purchase intent of 64% - heads and tails above our second place finisher which yielded only 48% (Fig. 2).

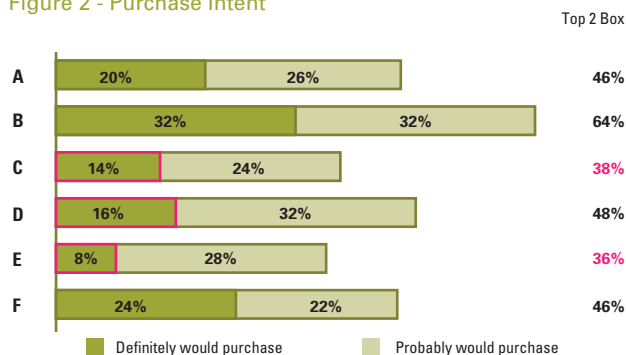
Figure 1 - Overall Liking and Overall Flavour Liking – Mean scores



* Product B significantly higher than products A, C, & E at 95% confidence
 ** Product A significantly lower than products B, D, & F at 95% confidence

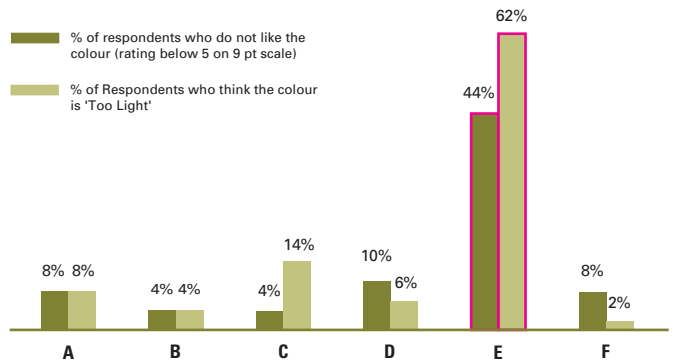
* Product B significantly higher than products A, C, & E at 95% confidence
 ** Product E significantly lower than products B & D at 95% confidence

Figure 2 - Purchase Intent



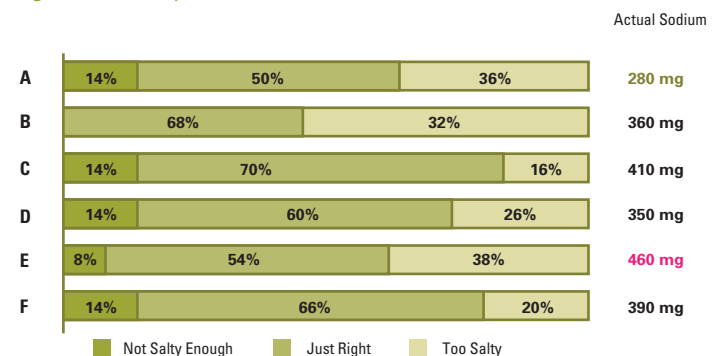
Three of our six contenders failed to achieve most of our key measures hurdles. Product E had a very unappetizing appearance, with a very pale colour that stood apart from the pack. All three of the weaker performing brands also had issues with the seasoning flavour and were perceived as too salty.

Figure 3 - Colour Liking



Interestingly, perceptions of saltiness did not always align with actual declared sodium levels. The wiener with the highest sodium (460 mg) was in fact perceived as the saltiest with 38% of respondents reporting it as too salty. However, the dog with the lowest sodium (280 mg) was also perceived as too salty with just a slightly lower 36% calling it too salty. The wiener with the best Just Right score of 70% - wiener C, did in fact have one of the highest declared salt values.

Figure 4 – Perceptions of Saltiness



Following their tasting and evaluation, participants were shown the declared sodium and fat content for each product. Once revealed, close to half of our tasters were more likely to purchase the lowest sodium product, and less likely to purchase the highest sodium products (Fig 5). Interestingly, the product with the highest fat content, which was the top performing dog 'B', did not suffer a net loss in purchase interest when the numbers were revealed. Sodium it seems had a stronger negative influence on purchase interest than Fat.

Figure 5 - Impact of Sodium/Fat Content

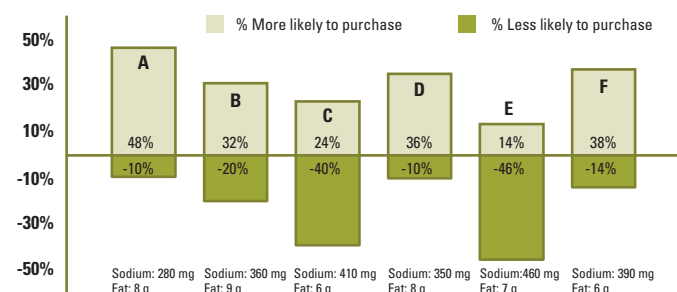
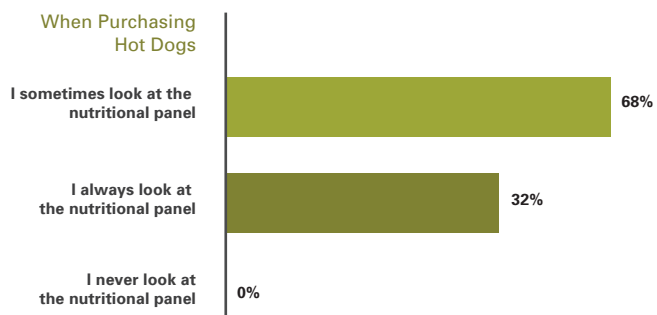


Figure 6 - Interest in Nutritional Panel



Prior to tasting, when we asked our testers about their interest in the nutritional panel when purchasing hot dogs - 38% said they always look at the nutritional panel, 62% sometimes (Fig. 6). And when asked to choose the nutritional fact that is most important to them, sodium was number one (Table 1).

Table 1 - Important Nutritional facts

When looking at the nutritional panel on the hot dog package, which of the following is most important to you?	
Sodium	38%
Calorie	34%
Protein	14%
Fat	12%



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this research was to investigate the sensory performance of six all beef wiener brands. We included both national brands and private label brands, and recruited female consumers residing in one geographical area – Greater Toronto. Further research might also explore whether similar differences and preferences are revealed in other geographic markets, or among males or children.

In the sensory research world, some food categories are considered ‘hard to impress’ and hot dogs are certainly one of them. That is, it’s difficult to attain the ‘wow’ factor with a processed meat product, brownish in colour, and shaped like a tube. On the other hand, it is also a food icon that runs deep in our psyche – many of us have been eating them since we were young so our expectations are ingrained in us and maybe even impervious to change.

So although it may be hard to impress, it’s also very easy to disappoint, and that means that getting it right with the basics (colour, texture, and flavour) is critical. But as consumers are increasingly more conscious of nutritional content, product objectives should also aim to improve numbers such as sodium. If you want to be the top dog in this category, aim for nutritional improvements without compromising the taste and textural profile we are all accustomed to and maybe you’ll just get lucky... a lucky dog that is.

For questions about this research, or how you can leverage consumer taste buds in your business, contact Andrew Scholes at andrew.scholes@contracttesting.com.

Contract Testing Inc. is an industry leader in sensory evaluation and consumer product testing. We are the only sensory evaluation and consumer product research company with corporately managed test sites in both Canada and the United States. With nearly 30 years of experience, we are innovators in testing with consumers across all major food, beverage and household and personal care categories.



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