

SAY CHEESE



Contract Testing Inc.



INTRODUCTION

While no one really knows the exact origins of the first cheese, the making of cheese is said to date back more than 4,000 years. Cheese in all its glory is now woven into the fabric of North American food culture. It's hard to imagine life without cheese these days – whether eaten on its own, as a topper on salad or nachos, in a sandwich, stirred in a sauce, shredded on pizza or sprinkled on pasta – cheese is as versatile as it is delicious.

And at the top of the glorious cheesy mountain, lies the undeniable classic favorite (at least in our part of the world), cheddar. While on some occasions we might opt for more premium artisanal or imported cheeses, most families have a supply of the more affordable everyday grocery store cheddar at the ready.

So we recently took a closer look at the mainstream cheese category to find out whether all brands of cheddar are worth heading for.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We asked 50 female cheese lovers from the Greater Toronto Area to taste six brands of regular medium cheddar, all sold in the grocery store dairy section in 450g-460g block formats. The brands were procured at a similar price point between \$5.47 and \$5.97 and included samples of both National and Private Label brands. The cheese samples were tasted blind, in varied order with a 3 digit code, and were rated on a combination of 9-point hedonic scales and 9-point intensity scales.



THE BIG CHEESE

One of our six brands, Product A, emerged as a clear leader within our test array. This brand achieved exceptional scores for overall liking (Fig. 1) and future purchase intent (Fig. 2), clearly surpassing the other five brands – it was truly the better cheddar.

Figure 1 - Overall Liking

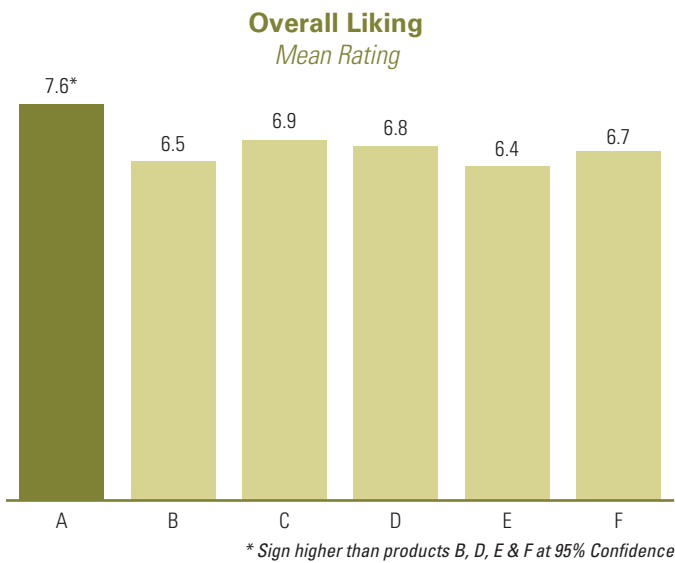
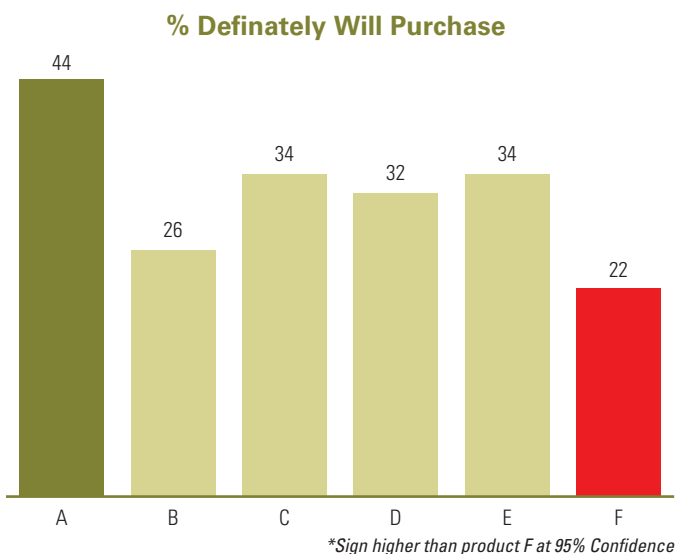
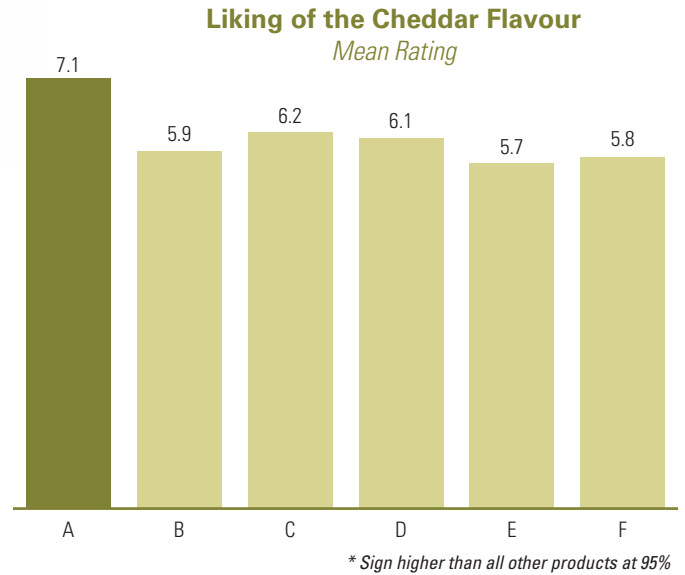


Figure 2 – Percent Top Box Purchase Intent



And while it heralded the top scores on many product attributes, where it really stood apart and gained its edge was in the cheddar flavour (Fig 3).

Figure 3 - Liking of the Cheddar Flavour



In fact, 54% of our testers gave this brand top scores (8 or 9) for liking of the cheddar flavour, compared to 32% for the second runner-up brand. It also performed well for naturalness of the flavour and had a particularly pleasant aftertaste. Diagnostically, this brand had the best balance of both tangy and salty taste notes (Table 1), and just the right amount of lingering aftertaste. There really wasn't much wrong with this cheese – although for some, it was slightly too dry and not creamy enough.

Table 1 - Percent Just Right for Tanginess and Saltiness

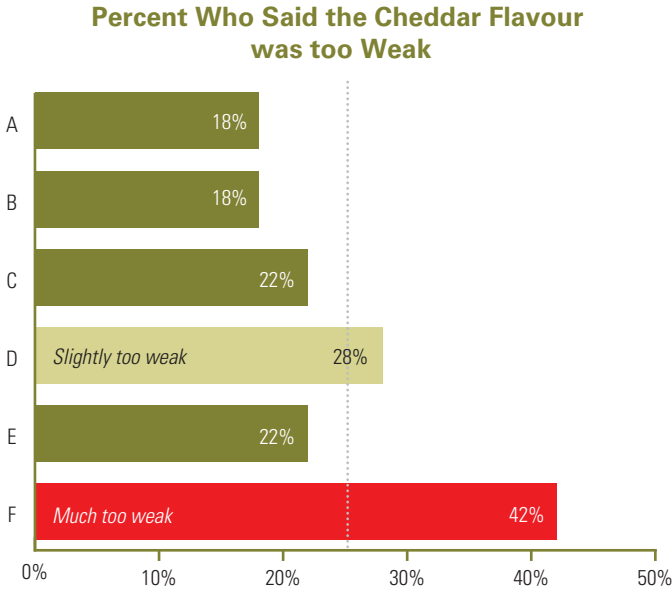
	Percent who said the Tanginess was 'Just Right'	Percent who said the Saltiness was 'Just Right'
A	72%	72%
B	58%	56%
C	58%	58%
D	66%	70%
E	56%	68%
F	42%	56%



CHEESED OFF

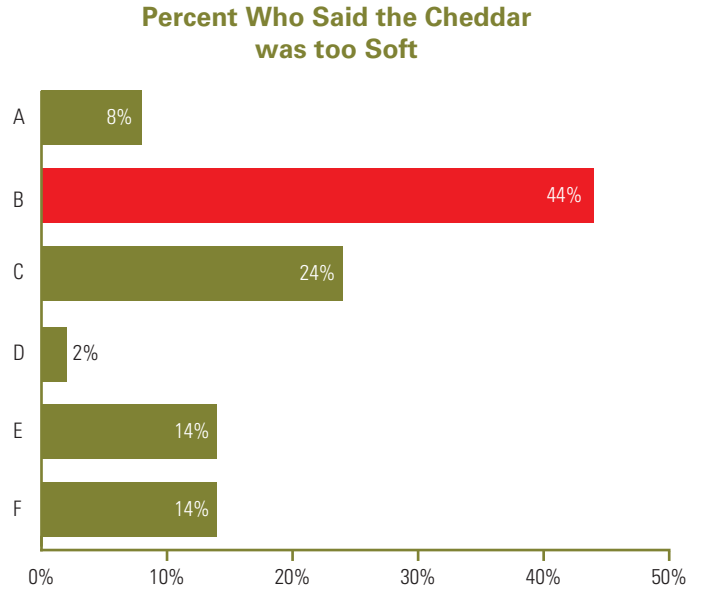
At the other end of our cheddar assortment was a far less impressive candidate, Product F. Very few respondents described this underdog as delicious and most did not intend to ever buy it. And while this cheese definitely had the right look and feel of cheddar, it failed dismally on the palate. In fact 42% of respondents felt that it did not provide enough cheddar flavour - it was far weaker in flavour than any others (Fig. 4).

Figure 4 - Percent Cheddar Flavour Too Weak



And while flavour was the top driver of liking, the textural profile of the cheese was also an important factor. Most of our cheddars seemed to achieve the right degree of firmness, but one stood apart as being far too soft (Product B), translating into a serious liability for this brand of cheddar (Fig 5).

Figure 5 - Percent Cheese Too Soft



BETTER CHEDDAR

Nowadays, non-premium cheddar cheese brands are not highly differentiable in mainstream grocery. These big blocks of cheesy goodness come in similar packages, are sold at similar price points, and are essentially competing in the same space for the same consumer. In fact, among our cheese lovers, close to 70% claim that they buy many different brands of cheddar – foregoing any sense of brand loyalty for the more



compelling motivation to choose a brand that's on sale.

Retail pricing strategies are certainly effective levers for generating short term share gains in this category and others like it. But in some

cases, there may be other unique selling propositions that are being overlooked. Our taste test revealed significant differences in product quality among these cheddars, yet we found no evidence of any marketing claims regarding taste or other product credentials – in fact, the only thing really differentiating these products was their brand names. Like all mainstream grocery categories, product quality is not the only motivating factor of purchase interest, but it is certainly a marketable benefit.

If you have a product that stands above the rest, would you know it? If your product is the top cheese, are you marketing those credentials? Competitive product assessments can provide a window into your product advantages (or your competitor's disadvantages) which may translate into compelling selling propositions and share growth... otherwise you may just be leaving the cheddar on the table.



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