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Driving growth for Australian onions

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Introduction

A project seeking to gain a deeper understanding of onion consumers, including their consumption habits, attitudes and needs has been completed, providing key information that will help industry increase demand for Australian onions.

Commencing early in 2019, the project (VN18001) delivered by independent research company fiftyfive5, had the overall aim of creating a framework which could then be further utilised by the Hort Innovation onion fund to explore opportunities for the Australian onion industry to grow consumption.

Methodology

The project used a number of research methods to determine consumer sentiment and develop a plan for growth, including store visits to various retailers, an online survey of recent purchasers, and a workshop to review customer segments. The research undertaken also looked at identifying and prioritising growth drivers.

More than 1000 purchasers of onions in the last three months were interviewed to understand who is buying, why they are buying, how much, and when purchases are being made.





Results

There were a number of key findings from the research, including that onions are performing well, with high market penetration (on par with carrots and tomatoes), and there are positive perceptions and strong volumes per shop. There are also very few 'issues to address', meaning that there is limited scope for category growth.

The research also revealed that some of the key barriers to consumption were saliency as well as a lack of usage in everyday meals.

This information correlates with the finding that category momentum is flat, with the same quantity of onions being purchased as two years ago. The results also showed that 65% of purchasers buy every two weeks or less, so they are not a frequently purchased item.

Drivers to increase consumption

Onions are widely loved, and the research showed that purchasers do know how to cook with them and enjoy the taste and flavour they add. Specifically, the research discovered that onions are used mostly in meals at dinnertime, in pasta sauces, casseroles, curries and stir-fry.

There is an opportunity to get consumers purchasing more frequently, and one of those drivers is the development of new meals and methods of cooking with onions.

The majority of onion purchases are planned and regular (58% purchased because their stocks were low) and one way to increase consumption is to help consumers get through their stock so they buy more, and that is to expand the number of meals containing onions.

While taste, flavour and versatility are the key drivers for consumption- health benefits are not a big driver at the moment and there is real potential to dial this up.

Educating consumers more about specific onion varieties and how they can be utilised, for example, as the hero in a dish (raw for red onions, brown for being more versatile) is also a driver for increasing consumption.

A snapshot – onion buying segmentation and attitude

The data to the right helps target opportunities for increasing consumption.

% of buyers	Description and attitude
31%	Cooking simple meals with few ingredients, generally eat the same things
35%	Cooking family favourite meals, they have kids and family in mind, and are looking for value for money
10%	Those just looking after themselves or a partner, health is important, they are cooking meals from scratch and also looking for value for money
24%	These are the creative and confident foodies, have family and kids in mind, interested in food origins, have a large repertoire of meals and health is important

Conclusion

Research undertaken by marketing project (VN18001) has determined that the focus should be on moderate and occasional users to help grow onion consumption, but there is a need to inspire and educate those occasional users.

The project has identified five potential positioning territories that could be leveraged according to different opportunities. Two relate to existing territories that onion marketing campaigns have already begun addressing, including 'keeping it fresh' and 'food ninja' (talk about the specific health benefits, and onions are a secret weapon). Another three territories, 'everyone's favourite', 'effortless flavour' and 'level up' are all designed to help bring onions to the fore, use the right onion for the right meal, and use onions in everyday meals for ease and impact.

The project reveals that the overarching position of any future campaign aimed at increasing onion consumption should be to bring onions to the fore, connect with everyone and excite and inspire consumers to use onions in new ways.

