“Edgy Veggies” Workshop

Using taste-focused labeling to encourage healthier eating

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Background

- Strategies are needed to **increase consumption of plant-based foods**, like vegetables, as part of a **plant-forward diet** to improve the health of people and our planet.

- Food labels are a powerful way to **influence how people expect a food to taste** and whether they choose it.

- Healthy foods are typically marketed and labeled with an emphasis on nutrition, yet research suggests **that tastiness is a stronger motivator**.

- What if we flipped the script? Can emphasizing the **flavorful and enjoyable attributes of healthy foods** (instead of health attributes) lead more people to choose them?
Will people be more likely to choose vegetables with taste-focused, health-focused, or basic labels?
Twisted Citrus-Splashed Carrots

Vitamin-Packed Carrots

41%

Research Model

Pilot Study
2017

1
Institutions

46
Days

+27,000
Diner decisions

17
Vegetable dishes
The MCURC is pioneering a new research model to scale innovative research projects from one university across the MCURC network.

**Pilot Study** 2017

- 1 Institute
- 46 Days
- +27,000 Diner decisions
- 17 Vegetable dishes

**MCURC DISH study** 2019

- 5 Institutes
- 185 Days
- +137,000 Diner decisions
- 71 Vegetable dishes
The Delicious Impressions Support Healthy eating (DISH) Study

Do taste-focused labels increase vegetable choice across multiple campus dining halls?

Research Model
Taste-Focused Labels Increase Vegetable Selection

Key Insights

Taste-focused Labels

Healthy Labels: 29% MORE

Basic Labels: 14% MORE

Key Insights

Taste-Focused Labels Increase Vegetable Consumption

Key Insights - Why does this work?

Taste-Focused Labels Increase Expectations of a Positive Flavor Experience

Key Insights - Would any old label work just as well?

Taste-Focused Labels Outperform Fancy Words, Vague Positives, and Listing Ingredients

In other words, “Twisted Citrus Splashed Carrots” works because it highlights the flavor and the positive experience, while “Absolutely Awesome Zucchini” and “Roasted Broccoli” are too vague.
Key Insights - When does this work best?

Taste-Focused Labels Work Better when **Dishes are Tastier**

The *more delicious* a school's vegetable recipes were rated overall, *the more effective* the taste-focused labels were in promoting selection of vegetables.

Taste-focused labels don’t work with vegetable dishes that are basic or bland, because the dish will not live up to the flavorful expectations set by the label.

The DISH study supports the following Menus of Change Principles:
Putting the Findings into Practice

Opportunities for Impact
The Edgy Veggies Toolkit was developed to help foodservice operators implement taste-focused labeling in their operations. This resource is available online at http://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies

Putting the Findings into Practice

If all 57 member institutions of the MCURC implemented taste-focused labeling across the 750,000 meals they serve each day, this would translate to **38,000 more vegetable servings per day**
Edgy Veggies Toolkit, Step by Step

The online version of the Edgy Veggies Toolkit walks you through a simple 4-step process to translate your healthy dishes into deliciously enticing ones, without changing a line in the recipe!

http://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies
Edgy Veggies Toolkit, Step by Step - # 1: Select a Healthy Dish to Promote

http://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies
Edgy Veggies Toolkit, Step by Step - # 2: Make Sure the Dish Tastes Good

http://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies
Taste-focused labels **elevate diners’ expectations** of a positive taste experience by using words that elicit expectations of **specific flavors** and **positive experiences**.

### Taste-Focused Labels

- **Indulgent**: If a sauce is used or the dish is particularly satisfying
- **Exciting**: If a unique ingredient or prep method is used
- **Traditional**: If the dish is hearty, comforting, nostalgic, or rooted in tradition
- **Location-Based**: If the dish draws from a particular culture, location or setting
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### Recipes for Brainstorming Edgy Dish Names

1. **Don’t Say “Hot”**: Avoid food descriptors that suggest deprecation, such as “healthy,” “light,” “lean,” and “reduced.” Also, think twice about using health-positive words like “high fiber” and “vitamin-packed.”

   Many people already know that vegetables are healthy but don’t expect them to be flavorful, so your job is to eliminate flavor.

2. **Survey All Five Senses**: How would you describe this dish to someone who has never tried it?
   - **What Does It Taste Like?**
     - Examples: Sweet and Spicy Squash, Ginger Citrus Carrots.
     - Look for examples: Rainbow Chard, Sunny Yellow Corly.
     - Feel that Examples: Silky Smooth Yogurt, Crispy Kale Chips.
     - Sound like Examples: Cornmeal-flavored Fritter, Fragrant Lemon and Herb Bread.
     - Savor it! Example: Sticks! Oriental Green Beans.

3. **Provide Context**: What location, culture, or time period does this dish come from? Examples: Tuscan Salad, Moroccan Tagine, Fajita-Jenney’s Wild Pecan Pie, Guayabera’s Quinoa, Ancient Grain Bread, Thanksgiving Apples.

4. **Nomenclature (Hitch)**: How is this dish prepared? Examples: Slow-cooked Spanish Carrots, Pan-fried Eggplant with Soy ginger Sauce, Butter green Asparagus.

5. **Need to be Naughty?** Can this dish make diners feel released, caused, and maybe even a little wicked? Examples: Dirty Hugger for Way, Sleepy Jones, Indulgent Delight, Luscious Lewis, Edgy Veggie, Naughty Nuts.

6. **Tell a Story**: Does the dish follow a food story? Example: Street style Tacos, Farm to table Salad, Hope’s donut.

If you’re stuck, use the cheat sheets below that provide labels grouped by vegetation (edible/dirty/delicious/delirious) and edgy words grouped by theme (colorful/food version).
Evaluate the impact of this program by taking:
- The pre-toolkit survey **before**
- The post-toolkit survey **after**
- The menu developer **evaluation**

And Share your Story on the Edgy Veggies website!

http://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies
Spread the Word!

#deliciousimpressions

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https://bit.ly/2mWw0dQ

http://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies/
Thank You to the Research Project Funders
Questions?

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Edgy Veggies Toolkit available at: https://sparqtools.org/edgyveggies/