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Pearl Millet an Indigenous Grain Less Known and Understood: Exploring Consumer Truths

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Abstract

South Africa is challenged by food insecurity and underutilized indigenous nutritious grains such as pearl millet that could provide dietary deficiency. As a dearth of pearl millet consumer research exists, this study aimed to explore consumers' perception and knowledge (subjective and objective) of pearl millet and the influence on the intention to purchase pearl millet as indigenous grain. The Theory of Planned Behaviour formed the theoretical framework through which behavioural, normative and control beliefs that influence the intention to purchase pearl millet, could be identified.

A qualitative exploratory study, using purposeful, convenient and snowball sampling methods was designed to recruit 36 participants, from Mbombela, who had heard of pearl millet. Data was gathered through 12 recorded focus group interviews. Data was transcribed and thematic analysis was performed identifying codes and categories that best represented emerging ideas. Principles of trustworthiness was applied to the study design and data analysis. Ethics clearance was obtained.

Findings suggest participants subjective knowledge (self-assessed) certainty of pearl millet, associated with health-related features of high fibre foods. Objective knowledge was directed at either human or animal consumption. Purchasing criteria (price, nutritional health benefits, quality etc.) would influence the decision to purchase, although hampered by the need for information. Behavioural beliefs were articulated in the actions of producers, marketers and suppliers directed at brand awareness, product samples, differentiation between pearl millet and other products, competitive pricing, and consumer information campaigns. Normative beliefs addressed nutritional and health benefits, value for money and price of the grain, quality and functionality of the product, consumer product information, availability, and product appeal. Control beliefs negatively influencing consumer purchase were price competitiveness of the grain, lack of consumer knowledge and a nutritionally poor product. This study highlights the purchasing barriers that may negatively influence the intention to purchase and consumption of pearl millet, identifying the aspects that would attract consumers to pearl millet and the important aspects that need to be addressed when marketing pearl millet. Should manufacturers and marketers not address consumers' needs pearl millet will remain an unfamiliar grain, under purchased and not consumed for its nutritional benefits.

Biography: Prof. Elizabeth Kempen

Prof Elizabeth Louise Kempen is a full professor in the Department of Life and Consumer Sciences at the University of South Africa with a PhD in philosophy from The University of Liverpool. She started her

academic career at the University of North West. Her research interest is in Consumer Decision making and purchasing intention related to food and clothing products, specifically focusing on sustainability and consumer education. She supervises masters and doctoral students, has published in national and international journals, and presented at national and international conferences. Prof Kempen is the editor of the Journal of Consumer Sciences published in South Africa and reviews for several national and international journals. She is the President of the South African Association for Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences. She received the SARIMA award for a Distinguished Contribution in Research Management in 2020.