

MEDIA RELEASE

Article in LT sheds light on future challenges in the nano food and packaging sector

St.Gallen, 25th July 2008: The packaging sector offers the potential for a variety of nanotechnology applications. Among others, the ethically and economically wasteful use of food could be reduced by increasing its self life. The use of the corresponding technologies, however, must be accompanied with an open communication toward the consumers to prevent a boycott as experienced with genetic engineering. A new article in the journal LT discusses this area of tension and shows possible approaches to a solution.

Nanotechnology in Packaging

Companies in the food and packaging sector have long recognized the potential of nanoparticles for the extension of the shelf life of perishable products. The antimicrobial properties displayed e.g. by nano silver can be integrated in a variety of packaging devices. If these substances are contained within the matrix of the packaging and therefore immobilised, they do not represent a health risk to consumers.

Nano-Inside vs. Nano-Outside

However, packages that have been modified in such a way are in direct contact with food and are therefore an especially delicate topic for consumers. From a consumer's point of view it is of central relevance to differentiate between "nano inside" and "nano outside". Especially the nano inside category is being regarded as critical by consumers, because it means that the nanotechnology itself is ingested via food products. "Nano outside" – including most packaging devices – is perceived to be less problematic, because the nanoparticles are not internalised in this case.

In order to gain the trust of consumers in the use of nanoparticles in packaging it must be proved that those substances cannot migrate from the packaging into the product. Critical cases might be the so called "active packages", where an interaction between the two components is actually intended.

Open Communication

Although – especially in the food sector – testing procedures are very strict and basically no harm for consumers need to be assumed, many producers and retailers still take a very critical stance on the topic of declaration, and it is not clear yet what a declaration should look like in details, also considering the limited space available on product packaging. However, it is this lack of transparency paired with uncertainties about the need for specific legal regulations that is fuelling scepticism about nanotechnological packaging solutions among consumers.

The LT article highlights first attempts of the Swiss Retailer's Association (IG-DHS) with the aim of increasing transparency for consumers by means of a Code of Conduct. The author also proposes a concept for a dialogue platform for the food and packaging industry in order to openly discuss the topic and develop broadly accepted measures.

LT Lebensmittel-Technologie (6/2008): "Ohne Kommunikation droht ein Boykott", pp. 24-26.

Translated version available at:

http://www.innovationsgesellschaft.ch/media/archive2/tv_radio_und_printartikel/Interview_Lebensmittel-Technologie_Eng_June_2008.pdf

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