

Development of New Supermarket Initiatives and Strategies to Encourage Healthy Food Choices for the Consumer Retail Sector in Sri Lanka

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Awareness about healthy food choices is important to improve the health status of our population. Modern food retail services such as supermarkets have been identified as a contributor towards consumers' choice of unhealthy food in Sri Lanka leading to an alarming increase in non-communicable diseases. The foods available in the supermarkets may be classified as healthy to moderately healthy and unhealthy depending on the food's composition and the consumer's health status. With people switching to modern trade for their shopping, it becomes important that supermarkets step up to ensure that people are aware of healthy ways to eat. This research aimed to develop new supermarket initiatives by compiling a guidebook that includes retail foods identified as "healthy" and "unhealthy" food choices based on food composition and our population's health status, for a supermarket chain in Sri Lanka. The research resulted in a guidebook (ISBN 978-624-97482-1-7) comprising healthy food choices concerning specific health conditions, age, and nutrient requirements for specific population groups. Information in the guidebook has been compiled based on the most recent literature reviews on food and the prevention of diseases, and food-based dietary guidelines, confirmed by the review of nutrition experts. An online survey was conducted to explore the consumer perspective on implementing supermarket interventions in Sri Lanka and was completed by a sample of 1067 subjects, which claimed that 98.4% of the consumers buy food from supermarkets. Among them, 67.8% buy both natural and processed food while 19% buy only processed foods. A majority of 30.3% of the consumers were usually (9 on a scale of 1 to 10) health conscious about the food they buy from the supermarket. The guidebook will be used as a manual by the supermarket management to encourage healthy food choices by making store environment changes and initiating economic and educational interventions in the supermarket.

Keywords: Food-Based Dietary Guidelines, Food Retail Environment, Healthy Food Choices, Supermarket Interventions