

# Consumer Food Trends

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Defining Opportunities  
for Alberta's Agri-food Industry

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## The Aging Consumer Population

### Economics & Competitiveness



# **THE AGING CONSUMER POPULATION**

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## The Aging Consumer Population

### Background

2001 Census data shows that the median population was 37.6 years as of May 15, 2001, an all-time high and an increase of 2.3 years since 1996, which StatsCan reports is the biggest census-to-census increase in a century. One-quarter of the Canadian population was aged 45 to 64 in 2001. By 2011 this group should make up one-third of the population. The charts below shows the changes in the age make up of the population from 2000 to 2011. The greatest growth segments will be in the older segments of the population as the wave of baby boomers move through.

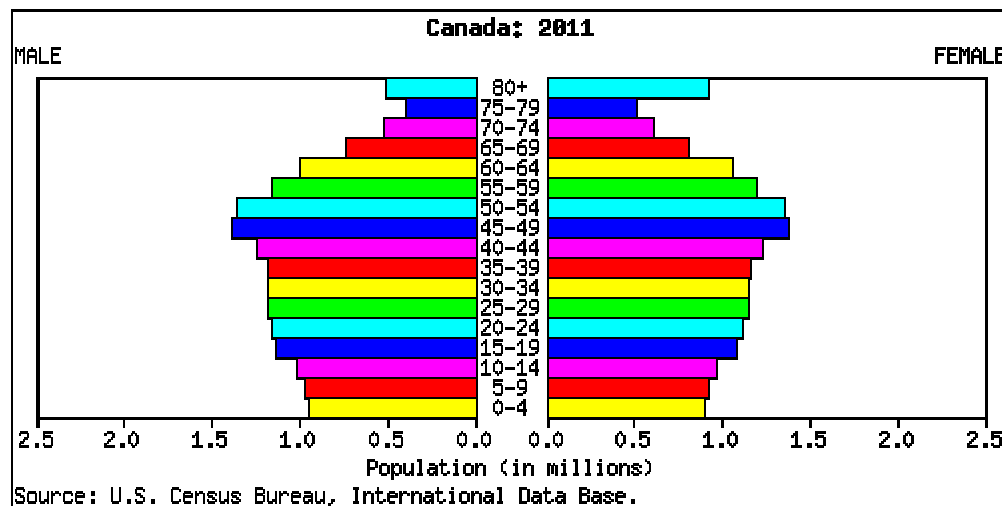
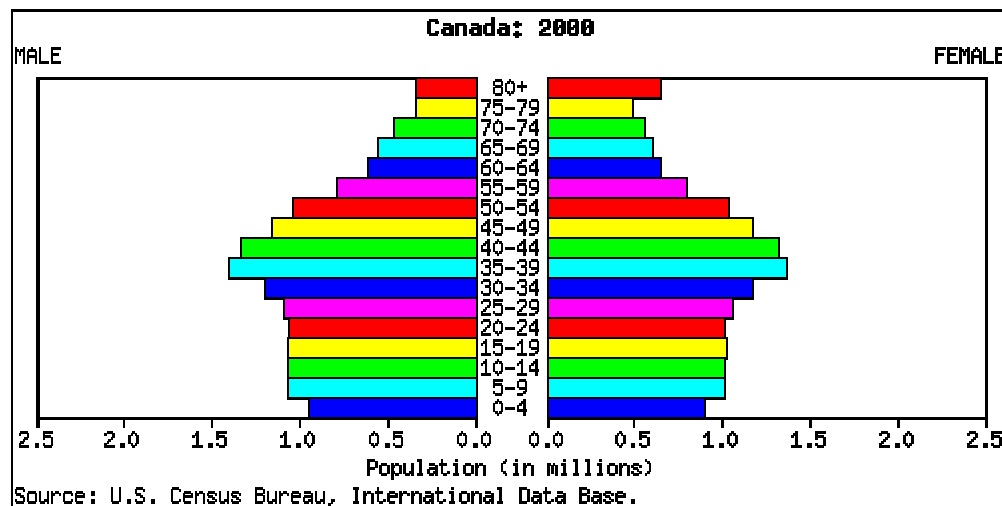


Figure 1. Population Growth by Age Segment, 2001-2011

As people are living longer, the older population is growing exponentially throughout the world. However, longevity is a double-edged sword. With lengthened years comes increased threat of chronic diseases and impairments, imposing limitations on what older people can do for

themselves, especially if they live alone. And most do.<sup>i</sup> As illustrated below in Table 1 you will see a growth in single person families or in married couples with no children at home.

**Table 1 - Number of Males and Females Either Living Alone or with Spouse but no Children (Canadian)**

Year 2006			Year 2011		
Males	Living Alone	Living with Spouse No Children	Males	Living Alone	Living with Spouse No Children
<b>Total 65+</b>	29,516	113,271	<b>Total 65+</b>	33,686	129,272
<b>65-74</b>	14,952	68,779	<b>65-74</b>	17,354	79,830
<b>75-84</b>	11,244	37,294	<b>75-84</b>	12,116	40,189
<b>85+</b>	3,686	6,415	<b>85+</b>	4,624	8,046
<b>Females</b>			<b>Females</b>		
<b>Total 65+</b>	85,514	86,988	<b>Total 65+</b>	95,373	97,017
<b>65-74</b>	33,414	56,994	<b>65-74</b>	38,603	65,844
<b>75-84</b>	33,564	24,149	<b>75-84</b>	37,831	24,484
<b>85+</b>	15,423	2,884	<b>85+</b>	18,780	3,512

## Changes in Consumer Demand

As the consumer population ages in North America, there will be more focus on health -- stirring manufacturers to pare down fat and sodium levels even more. Smaller package sizes (or portion sizes within larger packages) will also be in more demand, as appetites get smaller and there are fewer mouths to feed in the house. Finally, individual, single-serve meals (with their accompanying more reasonable portion size) that are convenient and appear healthful will be more in demand among older consumers.<sup>ii</sup> Remember also that with smaller appetites the aging consumer will need to pack the same amount of nutrients into a small portion size so the need for nutrient dense food will play a role in product choice.

Another thing to note about an aging population is a decrease in taste buds. At age thirty you have 245 taste buds and by age eighty you have only 64 taste buds. Foods that will appeal to this age group will need to be flavor enhanced. The use of more exotic spices or the addition of herbs may enhance flavor without adding high fat or sodium levels.

Even with healthy eating habits, physical activity and other healthy ways of living there are some things that are just factors that come with an aging population. Increases in the incidences of arthritis, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and other medical conditions rise as you age. Since there is a movement towards being more responsible personally for health there will be increased interest in functional foods or herbal remedies that will address these problems.

Another factor to take into consideration is the increasing attention given to the number of the population that is considered obese. This may lead to further requirements by Health Canada or the Food and Drug Administration for nutritional information such as the need to label trans fatty acids in food that will be coming into effect in the United States.

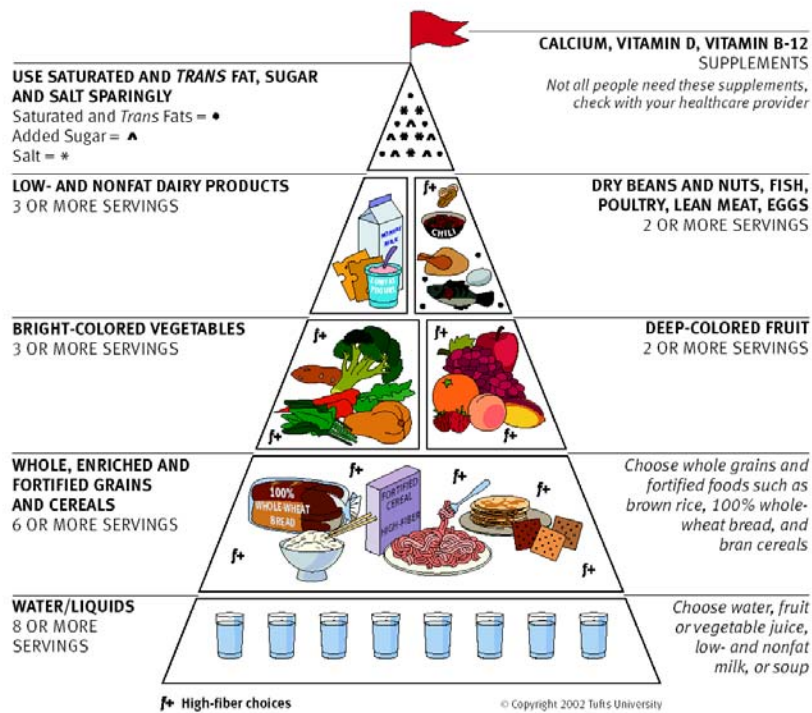
## Senior Food Pyramid

Below is a food guide pyramid aimed at the older consumer. You will notice that one thing that is different from the usual food pyramid is the increasing importance of liquids to the older

consumer and the possibility of needing calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B-12 supplementation. This could be an area where functional drinks in individual serving sizes could show promise.

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## Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults



## Packaging

One last area that should be addressed is the packaging. There are several things to look at here. Vision is not as good as it was when they were twenty. Make the print as large as possible. As you age appetite decreases so there is no need to super size everything. Make appropriate size servings. Make the package easier to open. When you have arthritis you do not always have the strength or dexterity to open pull-tabs or pull open plastic bags or even to use the can opener to open a can. Think of these things when contemplating packaging. When making a product think of the final weight. Seniors enjoy shopping but are not able to carry heavy bags. Frozen products usually weigh less than canned product. Smaller packaging units mean less weight. Less weight means being able to carry more products.

## **Recommendations**

When looking at this market remember these things:

- Smaller portions
- Lightweight packaging
- Easy to open packaging
- Healthy ingredients with more intense flavours (herbs or spices instead of sugar and salt)
- Nutrient dense foods
- Foods that will assist in control of diseases affecting this age group (higher fiber, lower sodium etc.)
- Consider looking at possible health claims you may be able to associate with your product
- Consider working with a nutritionist in order to obtain a healthy final product

i i <http://ift.confex.com> - Retrieved from the World Wide Web on August 1, 2003

ii <http://www.morningcup.net/081903ca42.htm> - Retrieved from the World Wide Web on August 19, 2003