

Consumers and Fermented Foods

Barriers and Enablers to Fermented Food Adoption

Key takeaways

Consumers are increasingly expected to **adopt healthier** and **more sustainable diets**. Fermented foods can contribute to this transition, but **misconceptions** and **limited understanding of fermentation** may reduce confidence and may lead to slow adoption. Our work aimed to address the following knowledge gaps:

- **European consumers show positive attitudes towards fermented foods**, but are favorable attitudes sufficient to guarantee product adoption?
- **Consumers are uncertain**: Which foods are fermented? Do all fermented foods confer probiotic benefits?
- **Knowing is growing**: Can fermentation literacy drive fermented food adoption, including of unfamiliar products?



Consumers associate fermented foods with...

- ✓ health benefits
- ✓ sustainability
- ✓ naturalness
- ✓ improved shelf life
- ✓ digestibility



Consumers are often unsure about...

- ? which foods are fermented
- ? whether all fermented foods contain live microorganisms
- ? the role of microorganisms
- ? spoilage and consumption safety

Figure 1: Consumers recognize benefits, but knowledge gaps remain



What do Europeans know about fermented food?

A survey of **4,946** consumers across **seven European countries** (*France, Germany, Austria, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Estonia*) showed that consumers generally perceive fermented foods **positively** and associate them with **health benefits, naturalness** and **sustainability**. Consumers also demonstrated a reasonable understanding of fermentation, including of its benefits regarding **improved shelf life** and **digestibility**.

However, **substantial knowledge gaps remain** regarding the underlying **microbial processes** and the **identification of fermented products**. The most common misconception was the belief that all fermented foods contain live microorganisms, which consumers often associate with probiotic benefits. Consumers were also **less familiar with the role of molds** in fermentation and often failed to recognize foods such as vinegar and table olives as typical fermented products.

These findings suggest that **consumers generally understand what fermentation does** but are **less certain about how it works** and **which foods result from the process**. **Improving fermentation literacy** could help **strengthen confidence in fermented foods** and **support informed food choices**.



Figure 2: Knowledge of fermentation and sensory appeal drive consumption

What drives people to eat fermented foods?

Our survey revealed that **knowledge of fermentation** and **sensory appeal of fermented foods** were the **strongest drivers of fermented food consumption**.

But other factors matter, too: **Income** and **education**. Higher-earning and more highly educated consumers tend to eat fermented foods more often.

Lessons learned

Fermentation knowledge strongly supports acceptance and engagement. Consumers with a better understanding of fermentation perceive fermented foods more positively and are more likely to recognize their health and sustainability benefits. They also consume fermented foods more frequently. **Improving fermentation literacy** could therefore build **interest and trust**, and encourage **wider adoption**.

Taste remains a decisive factor. Consumers are more likely to choose fermented foods when they taste good, look appealing and fit easily into daily routines. For both traditional and novel products, **sensory appeal paired with convenience were among the strongest drivers of consumption.** Product developers should therefore combine excellent sensory quality and everyday usability with **clear, credible communication of health and sustainability benefits.**

Recommendations for producers

In summary, consumer insights from DOMINO show that **fermented foods align with consumers' aspirations for healthier, more sustainable food options.** However, **positive attitudes alone are not sufficient to drive adoption.** To convert interest into regular consumption, stakeholders should work together towards the following consumer-oriented goals:

- Address common **misconceptions** and improve **fermentation literacy**
- Communicate clearly about **health and sustainability benefits**, such as food waste reduction, resource efficiency, and nutritional advantages
- Create consumer-centered products that are **appealing** and **convenient**
- Support transparent product labeling and **responsible marketing practices**



Figure 3: Common fermented foods (left to right: kimchi, tempeh, sourdough bread, yogurt)