



**Getting Ahead of the Curve:
Phytosterols**

By Dr. A. Elizabeth Sloan

Cholesterol-lowering remains one of the most sought after nutraceutical solutions. Ninety-Eight million (44%) of U.S. adults over age 20 have total cholesterol levels higher than 200 mg/dL; more than 33 million with levels higher than 240 mg/dL (AHA, 2011).

According to SymphonyIRI's "2010 OTC Medications Report," 50.5 million U.S. households have a member with high cholesterol—projecting an annual market potential for cholesterol-lowering OTCs and dietary supplements of more than \$8 billion.

Moreover, with two-thirds (69%) of adults having had their cholesterol levels checked in the last year, LDL (bad) cholesterol levels are also getting much needed attention. In this vein, 73 million (33%) of adults have LDL levels higher than 130 mg/dL—this includes 8% of male and 7% of female teens. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of adults are now aware of LDL cholesterol, creating high market potential for LDL-lowering ingredients, e.g. plant sterols/phytosterols (AHA, 2011).

Sales of low/"lowers" cholesterol foods reached more than \$10 billion in 2009 per the Nielsen Co. One-third (33%) of shoppers look for a low/lowers cholesterol

claim; the 10th most sought after food/drink health claim (FMI, "Shopping for Health, 2010"). Among shoppers who have, or perceive they're at risk of high cholesterol, 76% have changed their food buying habits.

Perhaps, most important the heart market is shifting from one of prevention to risk factor reduction. Interest in cholesterol-lowering has increased significantly among young Gen Yers: 40% are concerned about their cholesterol level vs. 54% Gen X and 65% of Boomers (Hartman Group, 2010).

Market Potential

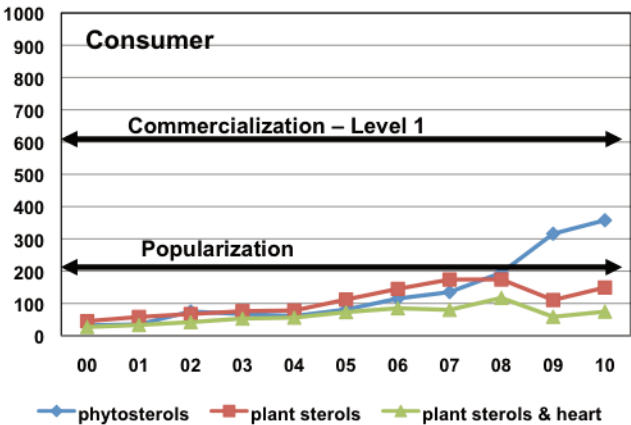
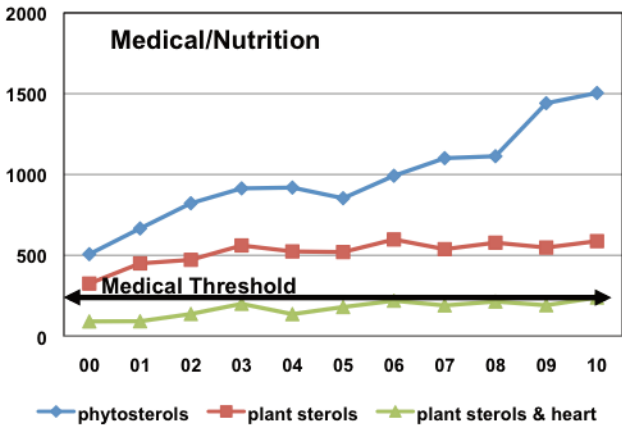
According to Sloan Trends' TrendSense model, phytosterols, which crossed into the Popularization Phase in 2008-09, are currently a highly marketable opportunity only among very health conscious, condition-specific and specialty/channel shoppers. Phytosterols crossed over the Medical Threshold nearly a decade ago, signaling the beginning of a long-term sustainable trend.

While Medical Counts have tripled during the past 10 years, they're still at a relatively low level, and although fast-accelerating, they are not of a magnitude to drive growth in Consumer Counts quickly toward the mass market (Commercialization). If research activity continues at the present rate, phytosterols will likely cross into Commercialization in about one to one-and-a-half years. A wait-and-watch posture is best for mainstream marketers.

While plant sterols have been flirting with crossing the Medical Threshold for most of the last decade, they are not a viable marketing option at this time; although they'll likely get a beneficial boost if phytosterols continue to move mainstream.

Lastly, with very low awareness surrounding both plant and phytosterols—and recognition of their link to

TrendSense™ Predictive Model: Phytosterols, Plant Sterols, and Plant Sterols & Heart



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* Although there are many factors that go into determining consumer trends, measuring how medical/nutrition activity levels have risen over the past decade, as well as some of the key milestones that have occurred and how these issues have been understood and embraced by the public are essential in predicting the sustainability of the Consumer trend line.

heart health and LDL-cholesterol lowering even smaller—they should be supported in formulations with other familiar cholesterol-lowering ingredients.

Growth Opportunities/Barriers

- 89% of Gen Yers, 82% of Gen Xers and 81% of Boomers are either unaware of the term phytosterol, think it is bad, or don't know if it is good or bad (The Hartman Group, 2010).
- Only 8% of consumers look for phytosterols/plant sterols in a functional food; 7% in a functional beverage (Mintel, 2010).
- Cholesterol is the 4th fastest growing consumer health concern after eye health, arthritis and Alzheimer's (HealthFocus, 2009).
- 69% of those who have high cholesterol levels are aware of their condition; only 59% of them are under treatment; 80% of those being treated have their levels under control (AHA, 2011).
- 64% want more functional foods that help lower cholesterol (Mintel, 2011).
- 43% look at the cholesterol information on the nutrition panel; 44% say it is very important to them (IFIC, 2010).
- 51% of those with household incomes less than \$35K are trying to lower their cholesterol levels through food (Packaged Facts, 2009).
- Among kids ages four to 11, the mean total blood cholesterol level is 165—170 is considered "unacceptable." The prevalence of abnormal lipid levels in those 12-19 is 20%, or 1 in 5; 14% of normal weight, 22% overweight and 43% of obese kids (AHA, 2011).
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends conducting lipid profiles in those kids between the ages of two and eight, especially if there is a family history. AAP and AHA support the use of statins in children as early as age 8-10.
- Among racial groups, Mexican Americans are at the highest risk from high cholesterol—50% of Mexican American men and 47% of women have high cholesterol levels vs. 37% of Black men and 41% of Black women; and 41% of White men and 47% of women (AHA, 2011).
- The number of persons with high blood cholesterol/triglycerides globally will reach nearly a third of a billion by 2015—a clearly underestimated opportunity.
- Cholesterol-lowering foods/beverages are best known in Europe. Spain, Italy, Iceland, the Scandinavian countries and Canada are also key target markets, although EU regulations loom overhead.

Functional Foods

Phytosterol-containing foods and beverages are currently limited in the U.S. Juice/juice drinks are the leading category with 9 new products introduced in 2010, followed by bars with 4 (Innova Market Insights, 2011).

European markets and bars/beverages directed at the specialty market however are other viable options.

Mass market food companies would be best served by using whole grains, ancient grains, soy protein, beta glucan/oat bran and/or a unique dietary fiber to achieve a cholesterol-lowering claim at this time. With such a low level of awareness and understanding, adding phytosterols to a major brand already making cholesterol claims might actually be perceived as adding an "artificial" ingredient.

Dietary Supplements

Phytosterol-containing supplements make good sense for dietary supplement marketers, as one-third of consumers plan on self-treating more and going to the doctor less in 2011. With limited awareness, they are perhaps best packaged with other known heart healthy/cholesterol-reducing ingredients.

References furnished upon request.

About the author: Dr. A. Elizabeth Sloan is president of Sloan Trends, Inc., Escondido, CA, which is a consulting firm that offers trend-tracking and predictions, strategic counsel and business-building ideas for food, supplement and pharmaceutical marketers. Each month she will provide analysis and discuss opportunities of a particular market being covered in a given issue.

SLOAN TRENDS' TRENDSENSE is a 15-year-old trend tracking system, which identifies and quantifies trends as well as predicts the optimal timing, sustainability and life-cycle stage of ingredients, terms, product opportunities and related market issues.

The model displays medical and consumer "activity levels" based on a comprehensive analysis of five critical sources of information—consumer, trade and competitive, legal and regulatory and media coverage. The resulting charts give insight into the market's changing health issues and concerns, the ingredients that are up-and-coming and those that have just about run their course, as well as what health claims, marketing messages and products will bring your company the most success.

- **Emerging Phase** = Trends begin to appear on the radar screen. Companies should begin to collect literature and market details for those that exhibit continual growth and that might be of interest.

- **Popularization Phase** = Medical/Nutrition crossover to consumer media and marketplace; opportunity for niche or specialty markets. Marketers/manufacturers should begin a detailed evaluation of the supporting marketing and scientific data and determine if this term/trend offers a good strategic fit and is appropriate to pursue. Appropriate product development procedures should be undertaken.

- **Commercialization Phase** = Mass-market ready. Mainstream consumers have a significant degree of familiarity with the term/trend and there is opportunity for competitive advantage by getting out ahead of the competition or by providing a unique and highly innovative product positioning for success.