



## Getting Ahead of the Curve: Omega 3,6,9 & DHA

By Dr. A. Elizabeth Sloan

Fish oil/omega 3s are among the most sought after nutritional ingredients. In 2010, omega 3s became America's third most popular dietary supplement, behind multi-vitamins and calcium, according to Packaged Facts report, "Nutritional Supplements in the U.S." Meanwhile, *Nutrition Business Journal* reports that omega 3 supplement sales surpassed \$1.2 billion in 2009.

High-omega 3/DHA-enhanced food/beverage sales hit \$4 billion in 2010 and are projected to reach \$6.7 billion by 2015. Moreover, the U.S. omega 3 ingredient market is expected to grow 40% during the next 5 years, according to Packaged Facts' June 2011 report, "Omega-3 Foods and Beverages in the U.S."

But despite the enthusiasm for the category, the question is: Is controversial omega 6 and lesser known omega 9 poised to contribute to sales? While the recent U.S. Dietary Guidelines and the American Heart Association support omega 6 to replace undesirable fats in the diet, more traditional nutrition experts point to the importance of an omega 3/6 ratio, which when out of proportion as it currently is in the U.S. diet, can actually promote other serious conditions.

And, we'd better get it right. A *Supermarket News* survey found that only 27% of retailers believe that added omega 3 is a trend; 56% a fad.

## Market Potential

According to Sloan Trends' TrendSense model, market interest in omega 3s shows no sign of slowing down. In 2009, omega 3s moved solidly into the larger Level 2 mass market phase. In 2010, there were nearly 10,000 new medical/research studies conducted on omega 3s.

According to TrendSense, in descending order, heart health/cardiovascular support, cholesterol-lowering, mental/brain and arthritis/inflammation are the most marketable linkages for omega 3s. DHA remains a Level 1 mass market.

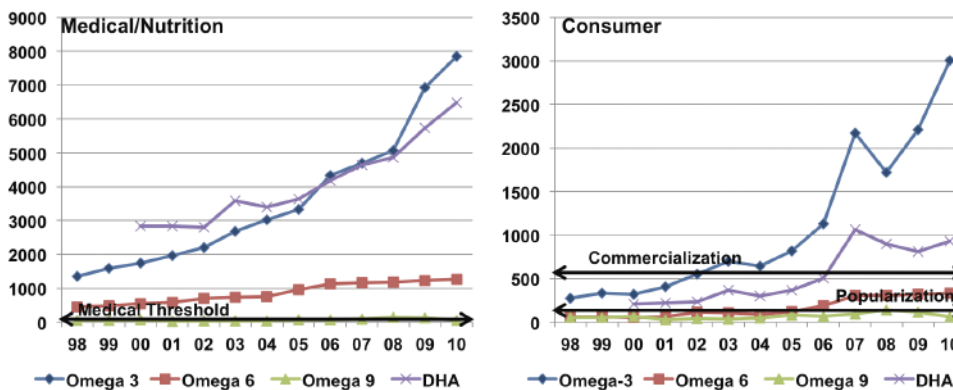
Despite the current scientific controversy, omega 6s are currently perfectly timed for launch into the specialty/health food channel and for targeting very health conscious shoppers and condition-specific consumers. During the past decade, omega 6s have quietly crossed over the Medical Threshold, signaling the beginning of a long-term sustainable trend. However, with medical counts at such a low level, there is little chance omega 6 will become a mass-market opportunity in the foreseeable future.

According to the Hartman Group's "Reimagining Health and Nutrition" and "Healthy Eating Trends Reports," 74% of Millennials are unfamiliar with omega 6, think it is bad or don't know if it is good or bad, 59% of Gen Xers and 58% of Boomers; 74%, 62% and 63%, respectively, for omega 9s.

Even among those who say they consistently try to eat healthy, Hartman reports there is some confusion about whether to seek or avoid omega 6 and 9. Most believe they are good fats, available in fish, nuts, seeds and supplements. Only a small group, however, of the most knowledgeable consumers is alert to the differences between omega 3, 6 and 9 and tend specifically to seek omega 3s

Omega 9s remain in the "Emerging Phase" and have not yet crossed the Medical Threshold. No action is recommended on omega 9 at this time.

**TrendSense™ Predictive Model: Omega 3, 6, 9 and DHA**



\* 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.

### Growth Opportunities

- Marketers should stay focused on the basics: omega 3, fish oil or DHA.
- 52% of consumers are trying to increase omega 3s in their diet, which is on par with antioxidants; 45% fish oil (Hartman, "Reimagining Health and Nutrition," 2010).
- Awareness is high for fish oil—81% of consumers; and 67% for omega 3s; 40% are aware of omega 6, 18% DHA and 9% EPA. In 2010, 32% made a strong effort to get more omega 3s, 21% fish oil, 4% DHA and 2% EPA (Gallup "2010 Study of Nutrient Knowledge and Composition").
- 79% of food shoppers believe omega 3 is a good fat (FMI, "Shopping for Health, 2011").
- 44% of consumers look for omega 3 in a functional beverage; 38% in a functional food (Mintel, "Functional Beverages U.S.," 2010).
- 64% of consumers are interested in functional foods that help lower cholesterol; 54% lower blood pressure; 41% improve mental focus (Mintel, "Functional Food Report," 2009).
- 657 new foods/beverages were launched in N. America with an omega family claim in 2010 (Innova Market Insights, 2011).
- 61% of consumers are extremely/very concerned about heart disease; 53% retaining mental sharpness as they age; and 51% joint health (HealthFocus, 2010).

### Functional Foods

FMI reports that one-quarter of food shoppers say that an omega 3 claim on the label is of interest to them; Pack-

aged Facts found that 9% of grocery shoppers purchased omega 3 labeled foods in the first half of 2011. The leading food categories among new products introduced over the past five years were cereal bars, breakfast cereals and functional drinks, followed by baby snacks, savory snacks, bread/rolls and milk/cream products (Packaged Facts). Clearly, marketers need to broaden the list of products available, including salad dressings, oils and dairy products.

### Dietary Supplements

More than 20 million or 18% U.S. adults took a fish oil supplement in 2010 (Packaged Facts). Further, 51 million U.S. households have a member afflicted with high cholesterol; 50 million high blood pressure; 27 million heart problems/stroke; 39 million arthritis/osteoporosis; 31 million asthma; and 23 million diabetes. Taking this into consideration, the projected annual market potential for supplements and OTCs include \$8 billion for cholesterol, \$7.8 billion high blood pressure, \$4.2 billion for heart problems/stroke, \$6.6 billion for arthritis/osteoarthritis, \$4.5 billion for asthma and \$3.4 billion for diabetes. So pursuing a more condition and risk factor directed approach is best (SymphonyIRI, "OTC Medication," 2010).

Moreover, with the pathway that converts ALA to EPA and DHA in the body requiring nutrients such as vitamin B6, C, zinc and magnesium, products that help ensure optimal efficient conversion should be a welcome twist.

*References furnished upon request.*

**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.