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A portrait of Randy Huffman, a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue zip-up jacket over a blue and white checkered shirt. He is sitting on a green couch with his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a blurred office setting with wood paneling and a red wall.

Maple Leaf Foods executive **Randy Huffman** leads with a purpose-driven approach to food safety, sustainability and industry change

On **PURPOSE**

Let us give thanks

Are tasters feeling thankful for a seasonal offering from Perdue?



PRODUCT:

Perdue ThanksNuggets
Turkey Breast Nuggets

PRICE:

\$9.99 per 22-ounce bag

PLUS:

Fun shapes; a fresh take on nuggets

PROBLEM:

Lacking in flavor; hit-or-miss textures

Although we do not usually highlight a limited edition product, we were intrigued with Perdue's ThanksNuggets Turkey Breast Nuggets, which we spotted in our grocers' freezer prior to the holidays. The colorful, eye-catching bag claims "It's all the flavors of Thanksgiving packed into one perfect bite." So even though it was just past 'traditional turkey season,' we thought it worthwhile to sample these fun-shaped turkey nuggets due to their uniqueness, and because it made us think, "Why did it take this long to get a different poultry nugget?"

DEMOGRAPHICS

Our tasters included kids aged 2 and up, along with a variety of adults who enjoy chicken nuggets.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND APPEARANCE

A number of tasters were immediately taken with

the product's concept. One taster stated their family was "excited to try these as we all love turkey and Thanksgiving," while another taster asked, "Why didn't they come up with this idea (a turkey nugget) sooner?!" A third taster was pleased that the package contained directions for air frying.

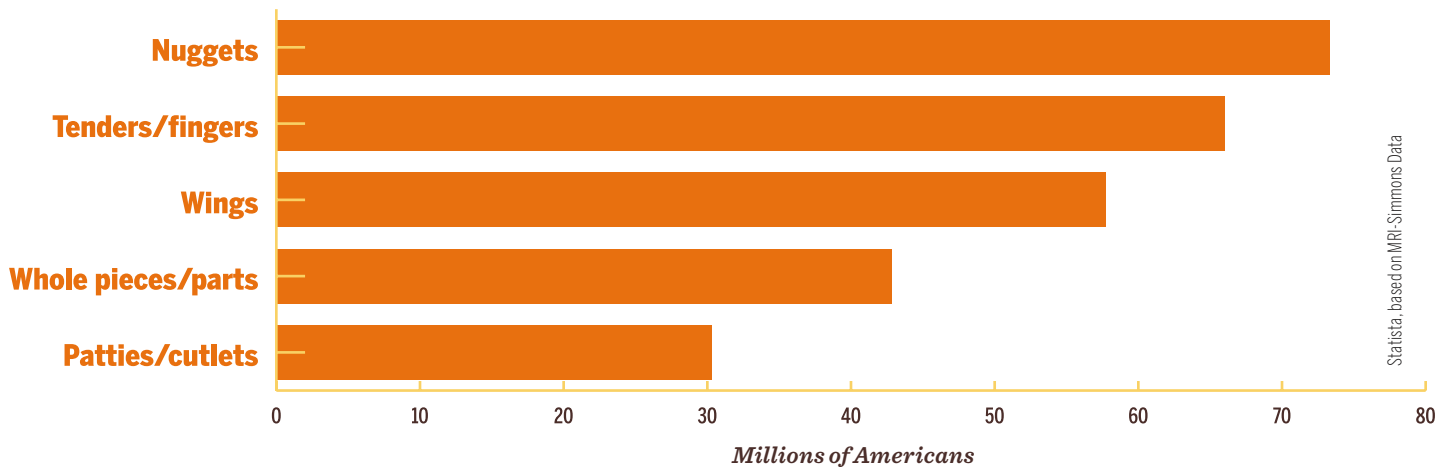
Among other tasters, there was some uncertainty about the product's packaging and intent. While one taster found the "bright and colorful" bag a clear nod "towards Thanksgiving," others were not sure how to reconcile those qualities with the food itself.

"Since the nuggets are turkey shapes, is this meant to be for kids?" a taster asked. "If so, I wouldn't say that's clear. Having themed-shaped nuggets for adults seems odd, and I would never buy just for me and my husband, just for my son."

A second taster said, "I initially thought the marketing was for adults by the flavor profile —

TURKEY TRANSLATION

A number of tasters remarked on the lack of variety among nugget products. The following chart shows that among fried chicken products, nuggets are far and away the most popular with consumers.



turkey and sweet potatoes — but the shapes were fun and meant for kids.”

TASTE, TEXTURE AND MORE

Some tasters struggled with the nuggets’ flavor, particularly in how Perdue tried to incorporate typical Thanksgiving tastes.

A few tasters singled out the nuggets’ coating, which incorporated sweet potatoes. The first taster found the coating “overly sweet,” while the second taster thought the sweetness “overwhelmed the taste of the turkey.” The third taster stated, “If the [sweet potato] flavor wouldn’t be so strong, this would have been a very good, innovative product.”

For a couple other tasters, the product’s references to Thanksgiving did not match the resulting taste. “It claims it has the ‘best flavors of Thanksgiving packed in one bite,’ but it’s missing spices [and a] turkey taste,” one taster stated, with another adding, “I want the taste of stuffing

and gravy. Just turkey (and they didn’t even get that) and sweet potatoes does not make Thanksgiving, especially when the back is promising even more about Thanksgiving flavors.”

And although one taster thought the nuggets did not have a ground-meat flavor, a number of other tasters were less than enthused with the meat’s texture. As one taster described it, “They are not very crispy, even in the air fryer ... It doesn’t taste like turkey, or even chicken, and the meat has a weird metallic taste and is spongy. I want a whole muscle piece of meat because I’m thinking about Thanksgiving based on the package.” Other terms that tasters used to describe the meat included “rubbery,” “turn-off” and “tough.”

UPSHOT

Despite some of the tasters’ harsh assessments of Perdue’s ThanksNuggets, many were positive in their overall reviews. One remarked, “They’re fun for the holidays and a change from regular



Why did it take you this long to get a different poultry nugget?



chicken nuggets,” and another shared, “I would eat these on a special occasion like Thanksgiving, just because of the novelty of it.”

Many tasters, in fact, were so taken with the product’s concept that they wished it were a year-round offering.

“I would eat a turkey nugget any time of year, so they may be limiting themselves by branding them as Thanksgiving themed,” one taster said. Other tasters declared, “Why did it take you this long to get a different poultry nugget?” and “The ‘limited edition’ comment is not a good one — I could see turkey nuggets all year.”

Two tasters did target the product’s packaging as a problem for any year-round sales. “I would never buy these (because of the packaging and shapes) past Thanksgiving,” the first taster said. The second added, “Putting a stylized turkey like that says ‘Thanksgiving,’ and it’s not. If I saw this in June or July, I would think it’s been sitting in the freezer since last year and nobody bought it.”

And finally, a couple tasters were still deliberating on the flavors. “Are they trying to make it taste like Thanksgiving?” the first taster asked. “If it did, it would be all right, but it doesn’t. It needs a roasted turkey flavor to be Thanksgiving.” The second taster added, “I would buy these once to try them, since they are limited edition,

but probably would not buy again. The ‘sweet’ nugget I would need to be in the mood for.”

CONCLUSION

Perdue created a fun, limited edition offering that didn’t quite hit the mark for delivering flavors reminiscent of Thanksgiving. However, people were very receptive to turkey nuggets as a change-of-pace from chicken nuggets, making it obvious that Perdue is clearly limiting themselves by calling this ThanksNuggets and focusing on Thanksgiving.

Almost all tasters, including us, narrowed our usage to Thanksgiving because of the name. But there is such an opportunity for alternate poultry products, i.e. turkey nuggets, year round! Changing the sweet potato coating (which overwhelmed the flavor of the turkey) to something complementary would give people an alternative to traditional chicken nuggets. And, what about other chicken nugget options? Perhaps, featuring chicken thighs (or even back meat) could create even more flavorful, juicy, tender alternates to chicken nuggets.

Turkey bacon and turkey sausage are available throughout the year. Why not make turkey nuggets a year-round product offering in a non-seasonal package?

by **Jacqueline Beckley,**
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Food product development and consumer research veterans, Jacqueline Beckley, Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, join Meatingplace Magazine as regular contributors to MeatingTaste, a consumer sampling of new products featured in our monthly Taste Test column. Here’s how the program works: The meat item is distributed to consumers, including the core demographic, for preparation in their own houses. No instructions are provided to the consumer, other than to write their overall impressions of the product, as well as to evaluate the flavor, texture, packaging and ease of use. Beckley, Cesario and Vahalik look for common threads by using Getting It!®, a system developed to listen to consumers about products. The sample of people is not intended to be a ‘taste test’ in a controlled setting, nor is it intended to simulate a focus group. Others are doing both. Rather, the intent is to interpret the response of the people who might purchase a product like this and use it, simply based on their encounters with the product in their individual, unique home environment. That is how U&I has been developing cutting-edge product and people understanding since 1999.