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Good doggie

With The Do Good Dog, Applegate Naturals attempts new ethical standards for the beef hot dog

Photo by Getty



PRODUCT:

Applegate Naturals
The Do Good Dog

PRICE:

\$7.99 per 10-ounce
package (6 hot dogs)

PLUS:

A healthier,
eco-friendly take on
the hot dog

PROBLEM:

Bland flavor and high
price point

Given the timing of this feature and knowing hot dogs are eaten most often between Memorial Day and Labor Day, we purposely wanted to see what was new in this popular category. We found the recently introduced Applegate Naturals' The Do Good Dog, which it touts as "Made with regeneratively sourced beef. Intended to taste positively delicious, while demonstrating

the positive impact animals can have on the land." That is unique copy for a summertime fun hot dog, which is why The Do Good Dog piqued our interest. Available online (where we purchased) or in many natural food stores, The Do Good Dog is made with beef raised on regenerative U.S. grasslands. Let's see what our hot dog aficionados had to say about this "Do Good" product.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Our tasters included hot dog lovers of all ages, especially those who enjoy a summer cookout featuring these must-haves.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Applegate's promotion of the Do Good Dog's regenerative nature produced some confusion among tasters.

"The package says 'Beef raised with practices that

regenerate the land,' but nowhere does it say what that means," one taster observed. "And they don't explain other symbols on the front of the package either."

"What does regenerate the land mean?" another taster asked on multiple occasions while trying the product. "Does it make the land better than it was?"

And a third taster remarked that "because the package

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TASTE *test*

“What does regenerate the land mean?”

bottom is green and there are leafy symbols, at first I thought it was a non-meat product.”

Some tasters were also surprised at the Do Good Dog's relatively short shelf life. One taster, after pointing out the three-week shelf life of their dogs, remarked, “If the shelf life is so short, the Best by Date should be prominently displayed on the front of the package.” Another taster added, “Is something missing to keep it fresh? I don't even know what uncured means. I guess regular hot dogs must be cured, but do they say cured?”

Lastly, there was some disagreement among tasters about the product's price. One taster remarked, “\$7.99 is really expensive for a package of hot dogs, especially since most go on sale during the season. And, there are only six in this package!” However, another taster stated, “For hot dogs, I don't worry about the price. If anything, it's the opposite! If they are very cheap, I worry about what's in them!”

TASTE, TEXTURE AND MORE

There was a stark divide

among tasters when it came to the taste of the Do Good Dog.

One taster grilled, boiled and seared the hot dogs, but “None of the methods resulted in a hot dog with any flavor.” Instead, the taster found the dogs “bland,” without the “fatty notes usually found in hot dogs.” Furthermore, the dogs did not have the “snap” you get when biting into a hot dog.”

Another taster, who grilled the Do Good Dog along with a favorite brand, also reported “little snap” to the texture, along with “barely any flavor.” The taster added, “The taste did not come through at all on a potato bun with spicy brown mustard!”

A third taster was succinct in stating, “It tastes ‘clean,’ but maybe I don't want that in a hot dog since we eat it so rarely. I want to taste it!”

Other tasters, however, had a very different reaction to the Do Good Dog. One taster, for instance, reported a “snap” when eating it, and without any mushiness in the meat.

Another taster also compared the Do Good Dog to a favorite brand, albeit with



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TASTE *test*

“Who is Applegate appealing to with this product?”

dramatically different results. “They tasted very similar!” the taster said. “The taste was very good, and it was nice knowing they were made in a healthier fashion. They crisped up nice, and had a very good texture and bite to them. Not too mushy and not too crispy.”

And finally, a different taster and family reported they “loved them,” and that the meat was “really juicy ... My son thought they had a grilled taste, even though I boiled them.”

UPSHOT

A couple of tasters were, ultimately, very positive about the Do Good Dog. One shared, “I grilled these with friends and they all agreed these were very good hot dogs. I will definitely buy them again!” Another stated, “I’m a big fan of other products by Applegate and love that these are all-natural, made without nitrates/nitrites and preservatives. I’d spend a little more for these since they are all-natural.”

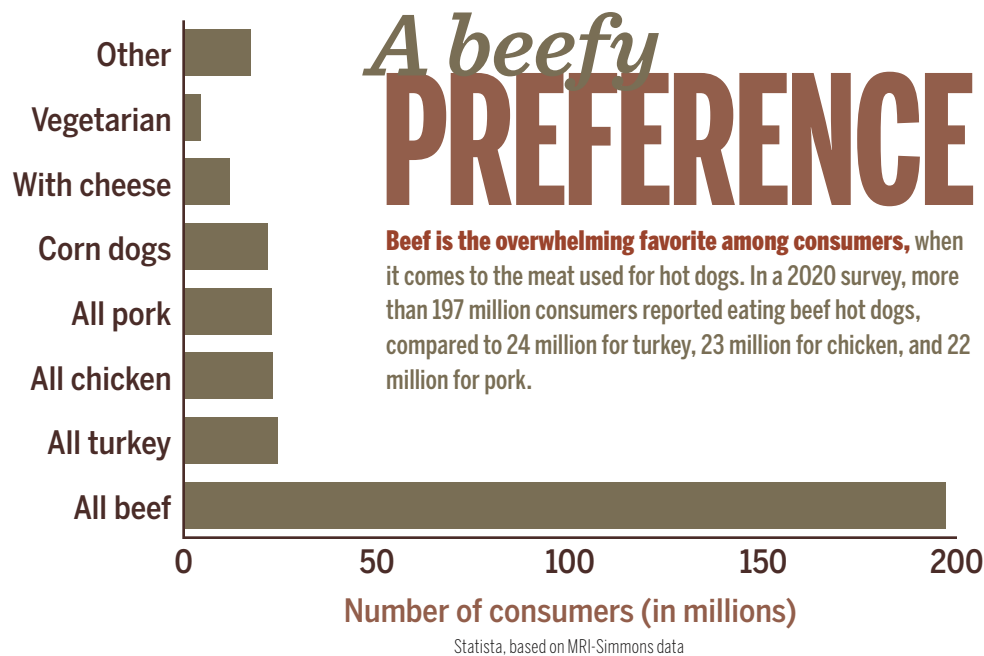
However, the majority of tasters were critical of the product, and asked a number

of pointed questions of both Applegate and product.

“Who is Applegate appealing to with this product?” one taster asked. “They use fancy terms which they don’t explain, and don’t give a reason to buy. This product would not win in a blind tasting with hot dog consumers and the pricing is out of proportion in the hot dog market and in today’s economy. We definitely would not buy.”

A second taster explained that in a backyard cook-out, guests will not see the product’s packaging (and therefore, Applegate’s regenerative mission). “They’re not going to see ... what this company stands for, so does it matter? Will they know I spent the extra money for this versus buying my favorite, more-flavorful brand? Buying this isn’t going to make me feel ‘good.’”

Even among tasters who were less critical, they still concluded they would not buy again. “I want both flavor and texture to bother with a hot dog,” one said, while another stated, “For me to spend extra money on these, they would have to ‘wow’



me, and they didn't. I'll just wait for my regular brand to go on sale and buy them."

CONCLUSION

Applegate Naturals is selling their new product in an already crowded field, but is messaging to environmentally conscious consumers. If you read the comments above, there were differences of opinion — large differences!

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As noted by a few of our tasters, perhaps the Applegate brand alone can provide the motivation needed to consider the purchase. But for most others, the price point will deter them from even put-

ting this product in their consideration set. Some purchase products because of what a manufacturer stands for, but in this case, even though the product name and packaging copy is intended to provide

that “feel good” feeling, Applegate does a poor job of explaining The Do Good Dog and its regenerative mission. Applegate is focused on marketing their environmental consciousness, but they need

to connect the dots for us. They should consider using some of their explanatory website content on their package to accomplish this. And, it would be great if they could adjust their price for today’s eco-

nomically concerned consumers.

In the end, given the competition and the product category, we believe price point and taste have to be considered along with a social/environmental message.

by **Jacqueline Beckley, The Understanding & Insight Group, and Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, U&I Collaboration LLC.**

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.

