



## Message in a Bottle - Increasing Market Demand for Soybean Oil

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MSLGROUP and United Soybean Board, Jan 1,2013

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Marketing Business-To-Business — Products

The United Soybean Board charged MSL Seattle to drive awareness, acceptance and demand of commodity and new soybean oils. Our plan met or exceeded all objectives. We promoted “vegetable oil is soybean oil” and its benefits to consumers and influencers. As a result, **soybean oil product sales increased 62 percent**. Opposition to food biotechnology (GMOs) – a primary soybean growing method – was met with influencer education about the safety and advantages. We marketed new soybean oils to the food industry. Among **foodservice operators, high volume oil users, 80% are now aware of and nearly one-third are testing new soybean oils**. Marketing business to business includes programs designed to introduce new products, or promote existing products or services to a business audience.

### Full Text: **SITUATION**

From home cooks to major food manufacturers, soybean oil varieties offer significant health and recipe benefits. However, awareness is very low for commodity soybean oil – sold at supermarkets as “vegetable oil.” While new, enhanced soybean oils for commercial use face stiff competition from other oils.

Each bottle of **commodity soybean oil** offers heart-health benefits, zero grams of trans fat per serving, vitamin E and omega-3s. Health is a driving factor in cooking oil purchases and health professionals (HPs) are a trusted source. This presented an opportunity to take soybean oil nutrition messages to consumers and HPs. **New, enhanced soybean oils** are coming to market with superior health properties and functionality. These oils will be sold to the food industry and consumers under the soybean oil umbrella. Competing oils are threatening the success of enhanced soybean oil, though, compounding the challenge of low awareness.

At the same time, there is growing public opposition to foods produced through **biotechnology (GMOs)**, posing a threat to the soybean industry that uses biotech growing methods. For example, California Proposition 37 sought to add GMO food labels, based in part on the perception that such foods are unsafe to eat. The fact is biotech crops/food pass stringent safety assessments, have been commercially grown for 15 years and not a single documented case exists of a person made ill.

On behalf of the United Soybean Board (USB), MSL Seattle released positive messages about soybean oils, driving awareness, acceptance and demand of commodity and enhanced varieties.

### **RESEARCH**

We conducted primary and secondary research, using results to confirm the situation and guide planning.

*Soybean Oil vs. Vegetable Oil (nationwide online consumer survey commissioned by USB)*

- Just 10% of consumers are aware that soybean oil is vegetable oil, although 71% actually use it
- When respondents heard the health benefits of soybean oil, 75% stated vegetable oil should be changed to say 100% soybean oil, which they would be as/more likely to purchase
- Health (especially heart health) is the top motivator when choosing cooking oils

*Health Professionals & Biotechnology (nationwide online HP survey commissioned by USB)*

- Only 11% realize vegetable oil is 100% soybean oil
- 61% view biotech positively (down 7% from 2009)
- 33% are aware of health/nutrition benefits from biotechnology (down 12% from 2009)

*Vegetable Oil Market Share (U.S. Department of Agriculture data)*

- Vegetable oil market share is declining for a number of reasons, resulting in competing oil gains. Market share of vegetable oil declined from 65% to 61% between 2010 and 2011. Historically, it was about 80 percent.

## PLANNING

**Target Audience:** We targeted oil users along the path to purchase: from the food industry (food manufacturers, foodservice) to retailers to consumers and those who exert purchase influence (health professionals, media). Research helped us determine which tactics would best reach targets.

- 56% of consumers choose HPs as a trusted source for information (International Food Information Council, IFIC)
- HPs find industry shows, publications and online to be the most valuable resources (USB)
- 73% of consumers believe retailers (supermarkets) are good/excellent at ensuring food safety (IFIC)
- 42% of foodservice professionals learn about oils at industry tradeshow/conferences (USB)
- 87% of foodservice professionals use websites when researching new ingredients/menu applications (USB)

**Key Measurable Objectives:**

- Secure (1) supermarket chain partnership and promote its store brand of vegetable oil; track sales volume for effectiveness
- Measure an increase in knowledge and positive perceptions about soybean oil among target audiences
- Promote soybean oils through 40-60 trade media hits, 200M consumer media impressions, 750 new food industry contacts, 1,500 new HP contacts, and one-on-one food company meetings
- Increase food industry awareness and impressions of USB marketing activities
- Show deeper interest of [SoyConnection.com](http://SoyConnection.com), a website we manage, via increased visits and Page #1 search rankings

**Budget:** \$1.54M covers hard costs and fees specific to soybean oil, a portion of the full USB marketing program

## EXECUTION

**Key Tactics:** We employed a mix of traditional and non-traditional PR tactics:

*Soybean Oil Consumer Promotion:* Secured partnerships with 226 Bashas'/Food City and Spartan grocery stores; store brand vegetable oil was promoted as soybean oil via in-store signage, demos, radio commercials, brochures, flyers and recipes; English & Spanish

materials; Twitter & Facebook posts by Bashas' dietitian

*HP Outreach:* Promoted soybean oil/biotech safety at (7) events (tradeshows, meetings, webinar) targeting dietitians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants; webinar offered Continuing Professional Education credit; new Facebook page included soybean oil posts; Facebook ads designed and placed online

*Food Industry Outreach:* Promoted enhanced soybean oil at (8) foodservice/food manufacturing shows targeting corporate chefs, restaurant chefs, food technologists, oil chemists, marketing staff; trade ad designed and (18) placements; foodservice direct mailer and e-kit; (10) Food Industry E-Newsletter stories mentioned soybean oil

*Media Relations:* Shared soybean oil messages with consumer media via a press kit (print/online) and (2) press releases

*Online Resources:* Expanded [SoyConnection.com](http://SoyConnection.com) (foodservice microsite, podcasts, uploaded brochures); Pay-Per-Click campaign focused on oil searches

**Difficulties**

- There is growing public opposition to biotechnology (GMOs). In response, we developed events and distributed brochures with compelling pro-biotech messaging, utilizing soy farmers to humanize the story.
- Many retailers were reluctant to promote soybean oil since vegetable oil is the industry standard. Therefore, we conducted/provided consumer research showing demand, targeted dietitians with MSLGROUP relationships and offered in-house design services.

**EVALUATION**

Goals/ Measures of Success	Evaluation/Outcomes
Increase soybean oil sales through (1) supermarket chain partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secured (2) supermarket chain partners representing 226 stores</li> <li>• Sales rose 62% in Bashas'/Food City during promotional period, reached 2M shoppers</li> <li>• Spartan sales rose 22% on product sampling days</li> </ul>
Increase knowledge and positive perceptions of soybean oil (commodity & enhanced)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80% of foodservice operators are aware of enhanced soybean oils</li> <li>• 29% of foodservice operators are currently testing enhanced soybean oil</li> <li>• 75% of consumers believe vegetable oil should be labeled 100% soybean oil</li> <li>• 100% of vegetable oil bottlers would consider relabeling vegetable oil as soybean oil due to our research showing positive consumer perceptions</li> <li>• 67% of HPs believe soybean oil to be healthy</li> </ul>
Promote soybean oil awareness through media impressions and increased USB target audience contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieved 460 million consumer media impressions (double the goal)</li> <li>• Achieved 54 trade media hits, representing 3.5 million impressions</li> <li>• Added 3,607 HP contacts (double the goal)</li> <li>• Added 1,500 food industry contacts</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gained 3,131 Facebook “Likes”</li> <li>• 352,428 Facebook ad views increased follows by 5,000% that day</li> </ul>
Increase food industry awareness and impressions of USB marketing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 88% of food industry professionals attended shows with USB presence</li> <li>• 52% attended USB panels (double the past year)</li> <li>• 61% recall seeing trade ad (above avg.); described it as “informative,” “eye-catching”</li> <li>• 42% of foodservice learned of enhanced soybean oil primarily through USB events</li> </ul>
Show deeper interest of SoyConnection.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic increased 16%, 87% newcomer rate; 192,102 unique visitors</li> <li>• Highest awareness among (8) soy industry websites</li> <li>• Page #1 Google ranking for “soybean oil” searches</li> <li>• 80% of food industry visiting website</li> <li>• Pay-Per-Click campaign: 28,909 impressions among highly qualified targets</li> <li>• Food Industry E-Newsletters: 20% click-through rate (above goal and avg. rate)</li> </ul>

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