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**BAKE-OFF OVENS COMBI STEAMERS TRAINING SERVICE**

WIESHEU GmbH · Daimlerstraße 10 · 71563 Affalterbach · Germany

Phone +49 7144 303-0 · Fax +49 7144 303-111 · [www.wiesheu.de](http://www.wiesheu.de) · [info@wiesheu.de](mailto:info@wiesheu.de)



# Open field: consumer protection

Recently, news buzzed around German newspapers that cakes made with poppy seeds should be consumed with caution as the poppy seed contains morphine and therefore eating the cake might make you high. Even officials were calling for a limiting value. This is a great example on how consumer protection has become an open playing field for people vying for attention and for gaining more importance for themselves or for an institution and the respective support that comes in terms of morals and finance. However, it is a poor example on how to protect the consumer.

It is true that poppy seeds do contain morphine and therefore to eat too many is not good for you. However, the morphine content is depending on provenance and the processing of the raw materials. The application of professional washing, steaming, grinding, and cooking will help to reduce the morphine content in poppy seeds to almost nothing. Poppy seeds processed less professionally may still contain traces of morphine. If such products come from countries in which the raw materials naturally have a higher morphine content we will get outrageous headlines like the one about the motorist picked up by the police because his blood level had too high a level of morphine.

However, if food authorities and scientists ignore the difference between poppy seeds and professionally processed poppy seeds as raw materials in food processing and call for limiting values, then this is foul play and can do real harm. Consumers have become quite sensitive and will react to even minor uncertainties with reticence.

Equally, everybody concerned with consumer protection is first of all considered to be of a higher moral standard and regarded with a higher reputability than the producer who has the sole aim to sell his products. This is unfair but fact in today's world. After all there are scientists who are trying to claim more funds for their institutes and there are organizations which hope to increase their proportion of official funds this way. The problem is that the content of the news is confused driven by the obsession to distribute newspapers. The quality of consumer protection is measured by press coverage.

There is only one cure for this, a constant professional information policy. Bakery associations as well as supplier associations must in future get used to being more candid and informing the public on products and analysis results with the help of professional public relation agencies. This is the only way to prevent them becoming pawns in the hands of those whose sole interest is in external power and influence.

Sincerely yours,




++ Hildegard Keil, editor-in-chief  
Your comments or suggestions  
are always appreciated:

fax: +49 40 39 90 12 29  
email: keil@foodmultimedia.de