

How to Talk About Sugar: Messaging Strategy

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Research Objectives + Timeline

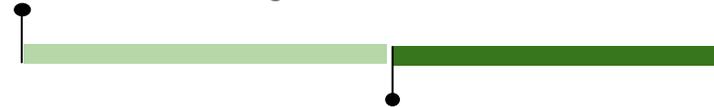
Objectives

- Understand how consumers think about sugar and sweeteners
- Determine where consumers learn about sugar
- Gauge if their perceptions have changed over time
- Identify terms and messages that resonate, and increase their confidence in eating sugar

Timeline

Phase I: Qualitative Focus Groups

6 focus groups with Anti-Sugar, Balancers, and Strugglers in Atlanta, St. Louis, and Los Angeles.



Phase II: Quantitative Poll

Online quantitative poll among 1500 General Consumers in the US.

The Big Picture

In a world with seemingly ever-changing diet advice, **consumers are skeptical and admittedly confused** when it comes to food and nutrition.

Instead of thinking they can enjoy sugar in moderation, **consumers fixate on limiting their sugar consumption as much as possible.**

For consumers, “sugar” stands for all sweet foods– like ice cream, cake, and candy– foods that they have negative health associations with.

In order to build a perception of sugar that is less reactionary and more grounded will require:

1. Resetting the understanding of what real sugar actually is.
2. Reframing the discussion around moderation.

There are three core messages to keep in mind when communicating about sugar:

1

**Focus on
simplicity**

2

**Talk about
balance**

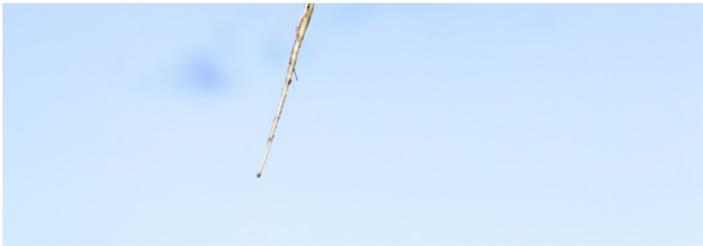
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**Communicate
sugar's utility**

Simplicity



Focus on simplicity



For consumers, less is more.

Their main principle: simple and natural is healthy.

“My goal is to eat less processed. So, as close as I can get to the actual ingredient and knowing what I’m [eating].”

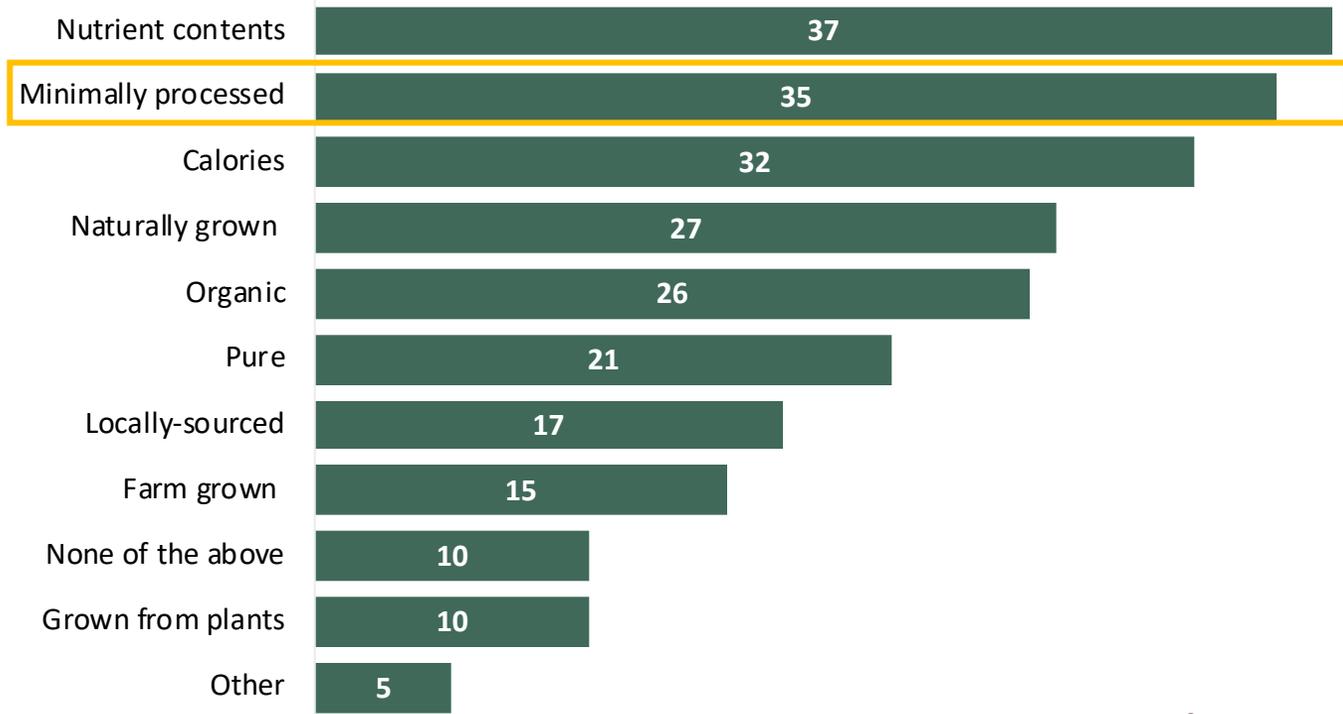
- Struggler, St Louis

“I see if I can pronounce [the ingredients]. If I can’t pronounce them, I don’t want to eat it.”

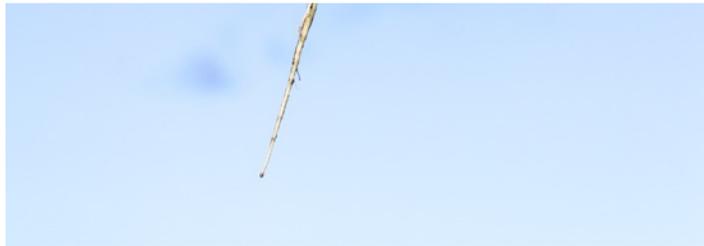
- Struggler, Los Angeles

Consumers prioritize food being minimally processed– the simpler the better.

Which of the following qualities do you prioritize when it comes to buying food products? Showing % Total



**Focus on
simplicity**



When sugar is tied to its origin, it's in the same category as honey and agave.



**Focus on
simplicity**



<i>How healthy/natural do you feel each of the following products is? Showing % Total</i>	HEALTHY % "Very Healthy" + "Somewhat Healthy"	NATURAL % "Very Natural" + "Somewhat Natural"
Honey	87	94
Beet sugar	63	75
Maple syrup	60	80
Agave	57	66
Raw sugar	57	84
Cane sugar	57	84
Real sugar	52	78
Pure sugar	54	79
Stevia	44	41
Sugar	44	67
Sucralose	21	20
Erythritol	19	20
Aspartame	19	18
High Fructose Corn Syrup	18	26



Focus on simplicity



Key message: Sugar comes from a plant – like sugar beets or sugar cane. It's grown on a farm, and it's minimally processed.

Does this statement make you more or less confident including sugar in your diet?

Showing % Much more confident, for two of our best-testing messages

Real sugar comes from plants and is grown and harvested on a farm.

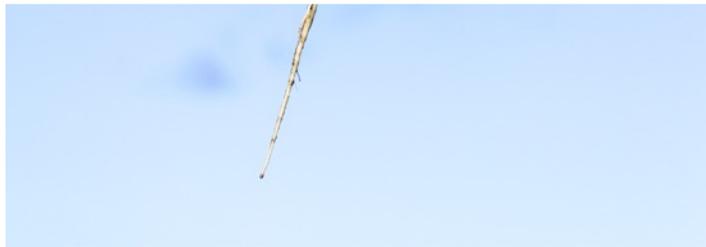
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Like honey, sugar is a naturally occurring sweetener, and they have around the same calories - honey has 5 more calories per teaspoon than sugar.

27



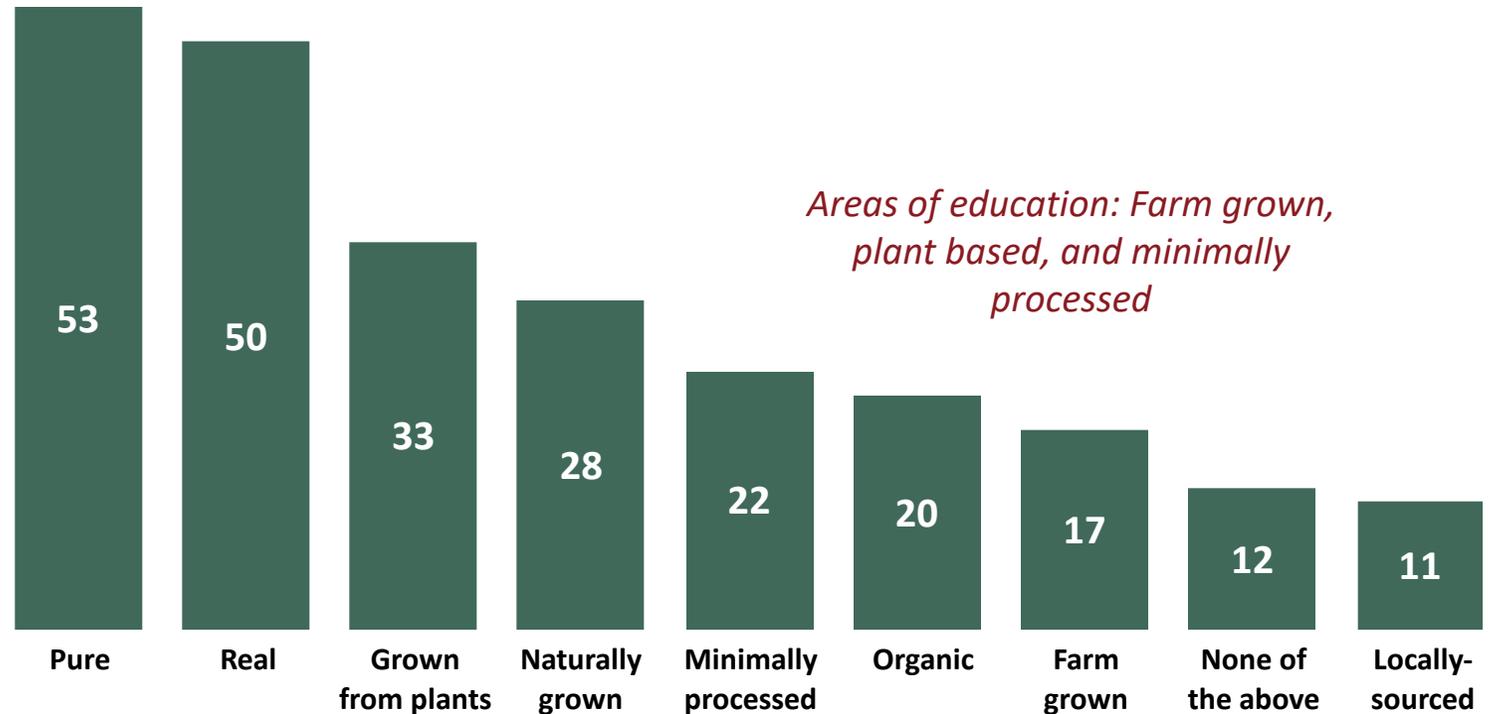
**Focus on
simplicity**



Real and Pure are both viable names.

It's important to pick one and stick with it to build a brand.

Which of the following terms apply to sugar/honey/High Fructose Corn Syrup?
Showing % Total



Balance



Talk about balance



Moderation feels vague and negative.

It reinforces the sense of harm without providing confidence.

"I don't like to hear [moderation]... Moderation feels like, 'oh, I know you can eat a little bit more but no--don't eat too much.' It feels like limitation."

- Anti-Sugar, Atlanta

"Balance doesn't sound like you're ripping yourself off. It just sounds like if you have pizza...maybe have some salad with it and it's healthier overall."

- Anti-Sugar, Los Angeles



Talk about balance



Key Message: *Living healthy is about balance - enjoying sugar while getting all the nutrients you need from a variety of food groups.*

Which of the following makes you the most confident including sugar in your diet?

Showing % by audience, for our Top 2 messages

Living healthy is about balance - getting all of the nutrients you need and occasionally including some sugar along with them.

30

When you take a balanced approach to eating, you can enjoy sugar along with a variety of food groups.

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Utility



Communicate sugar's utility



Consumers are pleasantly surprised to learn sugar has a purpose.

Otherwise, they assume it's just empty calories.

"It stuck out to me that 'oh, you're consuming sugar because it has a purpose in your body, and fake sugar can't do that.' [If you use sweetener], you're just consuming fake sweets."

- Struggler, St Louis

"I like that sugar is going to help your bodily functions...the fact that you need it for your brain, I didn't know that, so it was a fun fact."

- Struggler, Los Angeles



Communicate sugar's utility



Key message: Sugar is a source of glucose, which your brain and muscles need.

Which of these statements makes you most confident including sugar in your diet?

Showing % Total

Sugar is a source of glucose, which your brain and muscles need to function.

30

Sugar is a carbohydrate and carbohydrates are essential to your body's functioning.

23

Sugar is a simple carbohydrate that provides quick energy.

20

Sugar has a moderate glycemic index, much lower than potatoes or carrots.

13

Sugar makes nutrient-rich foods like vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products easier to eat.

13

Guardrails



What to avoid in messaging



Leading with defensive messaging on public health issues.

Which of the following statements makes you most confident including sugar in your diet?

Showing our Top and Bottom messages

A balanced diet means you consume a diet that meets your nutrient and calorie needs, are physically active, make room for indulgences, and avoid anything in excess.

41

While added sugars consumption hit an all-time peak in the late 1990s, consumption has been on a steep decline for the past 20 years. In fact, today's sugar consumption is only 11 calories greater than what we consumed in the 1970s.

13



What to avoid in messaging



Relying on government guidelines and data.

Use disease-oriented advocacy groups instead.

“A lot of things like the USDA are too money-driven-- they’re profit driven at the end of the day. You see even on the websites for diabetes and all those other things, they say ‘Eat these foods, it’s better for diabetes or heart disease’...then you go further down and it says it’s sponsored by all these companies...So, a lot of it is based off of money, in my opinion.”

- Balancer, St Louis

Messaging Architecture

*Sugar is a naturally-grown, minimally-processed source of glucose.
Living healthy includes enjoying sugar in balance with a variety of foods and nutrients.*

High Priority: Simplicity	Medium Priority: Balance	Lower Priority Utility
<p><i>Sugar comes from a plant – like sugar cane or sugar beets. It's grown on a farm, and it's minimally processed.</i></p>	<p><i>Living healthy is about balance - enjoying sugar while getting all the nutrients you need from a variety of food groups.</i></p>	<p><i>Sugar is a source of glucose, which your brain and muscles need.</i></p>

Appendix

Audience Definitions

Quantitative Research

1575 General Consumers in the US – mapped to census demographic data.

- **86 Anti-Sugar**
Consumers who identify as anti sugar
- **729 Balancers**
Consumers who feel like they're able to balance the good and bad in their diet.
- **53 Strugglers**
Consumers who feel like they struggle deciphering fact from fiction in nutrition headlines.
- **707 Other**
Consumers who did not fall in the aforementioned categories.