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Book review

C.C. Akoh (Ed.), Handbook of Functional Lipids, CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, ISBN 0-8493-2162X, 525pp.

Functional lipids are broadly defined, according to this book, as "lipids that provide specific health benefits when consumed and/or that impact a specific functionality of a food product". There is no doubt that the food industry is interested in such products, but the scientific evidence for their functionality and perceived health benefits is often less than clear. This book is aimed at those working in the food industry, nutritionists, product development scientists and researchers interested in foods with health-related properties.

The book is divided into four main sections: Part I deals with the Isolation, Production and Concentration of Functional Lipids, Part II with Lipids for Food Functionality, Part III with Lipids with Health and Nutritional Functionality and Part IV covers the Role of Biotechnology and Market Potential for Functional Lipids. These divisions are in fact ambiguous and the structure of the book overall is a little confusing. For example, in Part I, which is mainly about the isolation, production and concentration of functional lipids, there is a chapter on γ-linolenic acid, which devotes a substantial amount of space to the role of this fatty acid in disease prevention, which would seem to be much more appropriate to Part III. Chapter 15 in Part III, on the other hand, is a very basic description of the digestion and absorption of fat, which one would expect much earlier in the book. There are also several areas of overlap. For example, there are three chapters on structured lipids, each in a different section, but with some degree of overlap. It is not clear why a chapter on the clinical benefits of structured lipid in infant formula should belong in Part II, while a chapter on clinical studies with structured triglycerides should belong in Part III and the chapter on the production of structured lipids, rather illogically, is at the very end of the book rather than the beginning.

The issues of structure aside, the majority of chapters are well written and informative. The opening chapter is a concise and easy to follow summary of the market, consumer trends and regulatory issues concerning functional lipids. As a nutritionist, I found the chapters on phytosterols and conjugated linoleic acid interesting, although in a rapidly moving area, the latter is in danger of already being slightly out of date.

I would recommend this as a reference text for those wishing to dip into specific areas of functional lipids for some background information on issues which are clearly of importance to the food industry.

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