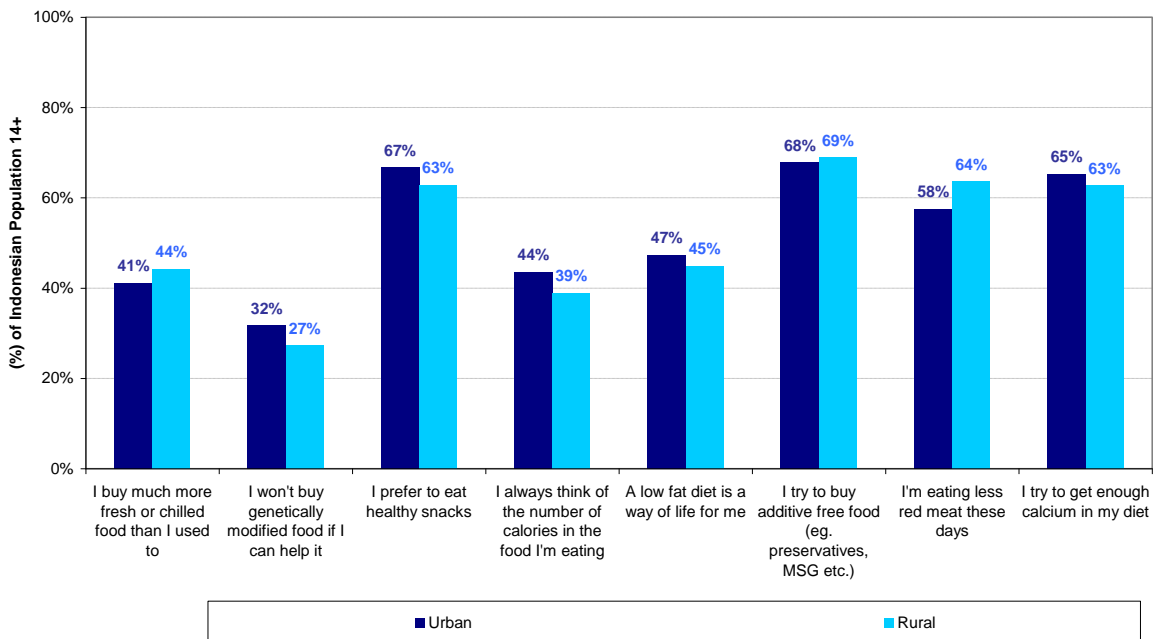


A More Mature Indonesia Is Also Eating Better.

With one of the best BMI scores in the world traditionally, Indonesia is continuing to make even bigger strides in the right direction each quarter. Today, 78 per cent of the population is in the “acceptable weight range”, up 6 points in three years. That’s a remarkable achievement collectively, reflecting a healthy ratio of height to weight, or Body Mass Index. The men are in slightly better shape than women. Go on Indonesia, take a bow. Equally heartening is the news that both the overweight and the underweight percentages of population are also declining, each now at about 10 per cent of all Indonesians. When you compare that with the fact that approximately 2 out of 3 Americans and Australians are overweight, the local picture becomes a lot clearer. Or leaner, whichever way you to choose to look at it.

A more modern, more conscious Indonesia is coming of age with its food habits as well. Like the wiser choices the country is making with its beverage habits, as illustrated in this column last week, more people are also eating better now. Across the country, in the cities and towns as well as the villages, the people of Indonesia are gradually but visibly shifting for better food. Almost without exception, attitudes to food are moving to wiser choices by a growing number of people. “I buy much more fresh and chilled food nowadays”, say four out of ten people today. This is similar to the shift away from syrups and fruit drinks to fruit juices, the edging way from powders to fresh milk. Three out of ten Indonesians are conscious enough, knowledgeable enough, to conclude that they “wont buy genetically modified food if I can help it”. Snacking as a habit is never going to go away, nor can any real declines be expected. But out two of three Indonesians now say they “prefer to eat healthy snacks”. No surprise that four out of ten believe “I always think of the number of calories in the food I’m eating”. Nor is it worrying that this particular trend is slipping a little, considering the fact that all the other concious choices being made are healthy.

ATTITUDES TO FOOD & HEALTH



In particular, almost half the population now think “a low fat diet is a way of life for me”. As could be expected, women are more conscious than men, but not by a big margin. Both genders, around 70 per cent of each, are now “try to buy additive free food” in a country where MSG was a part of the daily diet not so long ago. 60 per cent of the population is also “eating less red meat these days”. The only places where beef sales are up are in the growing number of trendy restaurants and chic supermarkets offering choice cuts of imported beef. To round up the steadily improving scores, over 60 per cent of the population “try to get enough calcium in my diet”. Noteworthy is the fact that country cousins are not far behind the city slickers on this particular concern.

Zooming in from attitudes to real action, the scores are equally reassuring. While the purchase patterns of sauces and seasonings remain steady, there are visible downward trends among many of the less nutritious foods consumed across Indonesian society. MSG is down, and heading south. Remarkably, the percentage of population buying instant noodles is also sliding, slowly but noticeably. This is true across the country: urban and rural, male and female, older and younger. In sharp contrast, fresh fruits and vegetables are gaining in popularity. Eight of ten Indonesians continue to relish their *tofu*, yet another good ingredient in the daily diet.

In the world of snacks, the news isn't good for candy. Both hard and soft varieties are taking a beating. Biscuits are steadily gaining popularity, the plain variety not the salted savouries. It's a small but important distinction, reflecting the growing sophistication in eating habits. Chocolates are relatively steady with about 30 per cent of the population buying at least one bar a month, but ice-cream has yet to gain equal favour. Only 1 in 10 Indonesians are regular buyers, with popularity concentrated in the big cities where it has a penetration level of 13 per cent. For every one man licking an ice-cream, there are two women.

As in the world of beverages, Indonesia's processed foods market is also dominated by brands locally born and bred. That's true in category after category, good, bad and in between. They include giants like Mie Sedaap and Indomie, ABC and Cap Bango, Masako and Silver Queen. The evidence shows that the marketing wizards at multinationals like Nestle and Unilever have taken note. If McDonald's had looked at the inner workings of Sederhana years ago, they may well have come up with their healthier options a whole lot faster than they actually did. That would have given a whole new meaning to the phrase “transfer of technology”.

These opinions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the country's largest syndicated consumer survey with over 25,000 respondents annually. Interviews are conducted face-to-face each week, continuously, with results released every quarter. The findings are projected to reflect over 85% of the population, 14 years of age and older.

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