

## **“Claims about Natural” Focus Group Study Appendix II. Moderator’s Guide**

### **WELCOME**

Thank you for taking the time to join us today. I am \_\_\_\_\_ from [name of contractor], a marketing research organization. The purpose of this group is to get your thoughts related to your food choices. Your feedback is very important to us and may ultimately be used to [insert goal]. Our discussion will last about 90 minutes.

I am an independent consultant hired to moderate these discussions. As such, I do not have a vested interest in receiving any particular point of view. I simply want to have an active and lively discussion with all of you.

Have you all had the opportunity to read and sign the informed consent notice?

### **Ground Rules**

- A. You have been asked here to offer your views and opinions; everyone’s participation is important
- B. Audio/observers
- C. Speak one at a time
- D. No side conversations
- E. No right or wrong answers
- F. It is OK to be critical. If you dislike something or disagree with something that is said, I want to hear about it.
- G. All answers will be kept private to the extent provided by law, so feel free to speak your mind
- H. Please respect one another’s confidentiality.

### **Participant Introductions**

To begin, I would like to have you go around the table and introduce yourselves. Please give me:

- I. Your first name only
- J. Tell me how many people are in your household or at which stores you typically do your grocery shopping.

## I. Warm-up Discussion about Food Selection in Grocery Store

Today, we will be talking about foods in the grocery store that are packaged and come with a label, for example, packaged crackers, canned soup, frozen products, etc. We will not talk about products sold in bulk, such as, produce or fresh meat.

[Moderator: Please keep this section short, ideally no longer than 10 minutes.]

1. Let's start by talking about how you select packaged foods when you shop at the grocery store. What helps you decide which food items to choose? [Probe if needed: price, convenience, taste, nutrition].
2. Let's think about two different yogurts that are sold at the same price, how you would choose which one you will buy.
3. Do you typically pay attention to food labels? [Probe for: before purchasing food for the first time, every time when I buy food, before cooking at home, etc]
4. What part of the label do you pay the most attention to when you choose food items at the grocery store? [Probe if needed: brand name, the nutrition facts label, front of package information such as claims like low fat, organic, low sodium, others?] [Once someone mentions health or nutrition]: How do you know which product is healthier? What do you look for?
5. If you did not have to pay attention to the price would you choose any different foods than you do now? How would your choices be different? What on the label indicates that these are such foods? [Moderator: they may say that they would choose organic or a more expensive brand of the food they typically buy. Probe for what would be the difference between these products and the ones that are cheaper.]

## II. "Natural" Claim on Food Labels

6. Have you ever **seen** any packaged foods that claim they are "natural"? What foods were they? [Probe if needed: yogurt, drinks, others?]
7. Have you ever **bought** any packaged foods that have a claim "natural" on it? What foods were they? How often do you buy them? What do you think about the term "natural" on these food products?
8. Please think about foods of the same category, for example frozen entrée. What differences do you expect between a product that claims "natural" and a product that does not claim "natural"?
9. What ingredients would you expect to be included in a food product that is called "natural"? [Probe for: vitamins, calcium, etc.]

10. What ingredients would you expect to be not included in a food product that is called “natural”? [Probe for” added vitamins, added calcium, etc.]
11. Please provide examples of packaged foods that you consider natural? Why do you consider these foods natural? Have you seen products that you would consider “natural” without the word “natural” on the package? What are some examples?
12. And now, please provide examples of packaged foods that you would NOT consider natural. Why do you not consider these foods natural?

### ***Sorting Exercise***

Now, I will pass to each of you a package with label images for some ice-cream. These labels are the backs of the packages with the information on Nutrition Facts and ingredient list. Please look at each label carefully and group them into three categories: (1) foods that you would consider “natural”, (2) foods that you would not consider “natural” and (3) foods that you have a hard time deciding whether they are “natural” or not.

[Moderator: once participants are done, go around the table and ask each person how they classified the labels. Write down the scores on a sheet of paper and tally them. Then ask the group for their reason to classify labels as they did.]

13. Why did you place these products in the “natural” group? And why did you place those products in the not “natural” group? Why did you decide that some labels are in the hard to decide group?

[Moderator: give participants the matching front labels.]

Now, please look at these matching front labels, do you want to change your mind in how you classified any of the labels. Which ones you re-grouped? What are the reasons?

### **III. Perception of “Natural” Vs. Synthetic Ingredients, Artificial Flavors and Added Colors**

14. Now, I would like to ask you what does “synthetic ingredients” mean to you in relation to food products?
15. What about “chemical preservatives”?
16. What do you think about products that contain synthetic ingredients or chemical preservatives? For example [insert the name of synthetic ingredient] and [point to

- examples shown in the sorting exercise.] Would you consider products that contain these ingredients “natural”?
17. What do “artificial flavors” mean to you? What do you think about products that contain artificial flavors? Would you consider products that contain these ingredients be labeled “natural”? What does artificial mean to you? [Probe for: made chemically, not inherent in the product?] [Again, point to examples used in the sorting exercise.]
  18. What do “added colors” mean to you? What do you think about products that contain added colors? For example [insert the name of added color]. Would you consider products that contain these ingredients as “natural”?
  19. Focus on color additives that come from both plant and synthetic sources. [We will show examples such as Sweet Potato Fries with paprika and turmeric for color plus Tortilla Chips with synthetic colors]. Would you consider these color additives natural? [if not mentioned, probe] What difference, if any, does it make whether the color comes from a synthetic color or a spice like paprika? Does the source of the color make a difference? If the product is called natural, does it matter if the ingredients used for color are from natural sources, or would you not consider it natural because a color was added?
  20. Are “natural” food processed? Why? What does “processed food” mean to you?
  21. Does the word “natural” mean different things when it is used on a meat or poultry product than when it is used on a yogurt or a fruit juice?
  22. What do you think about prices of products that claim to be “natural” compared to the prices of similar products which do not have that claim?
  23. What do you think about the safety of foods labeled “natural” compared to safety of similar products which do not have that claim?
  24. What do you think about the healthiness of foods labeled “natural” compared to healthiness of similar products which do not have that claim?
  25. Do you think that foods labeled “natural” are healthier than foods without such claim? In what way?
  26. Are there any other characteristics of foods labeled “natural” that we have not mentioned yet in our discussion? [Do not probe for anything specific. Participants may talk about organic, ecological, sustainable, environmentally conscious, genetically modified, etc. but let’s not ask specifically about these things unless they come up during the discussion.]

#### **IV. Expectations about the Claim “Natural”**

27. What do you expect when you see a claim “natural” on a label of a food product?  
[Moderator: Ask the same question about “all natural” and “100% natural”, “made with natural ingredients” and “made with all natural ingredients”? Pass around the sheet with different claims including the word “natural and ask what differences they see between the terms?]
28. What are the characteristics of packaged food that may be called “natural”?
29. Is the term “natural” standard across different brands and food types?
30. Do you think that the term “natural” on food packages is standardized? If so, by whom and what are the requirements?
31. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?