Snack food testers sought by club

By Page Albright
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College students who are big snack food eaters are getting a chance to participate in a taste test for an Ohio snack food company.

The Wyandot Popcorn Co. of Marion has hired the Ohio State Food Technology Club to conduct student taste panels to test the company's corn-based snacks against those of their competitors.

"We have the facilities and people to test their product and can do it cheaper than other firms," said Jim Calhoun, president of the club.

Wyandot originally used its own employees to taste test its popcorn, caramel corn, and tortilla and corn chip snacks. The company found employees could easily pick out the company products and were not objective.

Don Mount, an employee in quality control and research and development for Wyandot Popcorn, came to the club with the project for a possible club fundraiser.

Mount graduated from the OSU food technology program in 1977 and knew the club had access to the needed facilities.

The testing facility in Howlett Hall consists of an adjoining kitchen and panelist room. Students sit in the panelist room separated by isolation walls which prevent panelists from influencing each other's opinions by talking or facial expressions. The room also has special lighting for correct color evaluation of the tested product.

Samples of products being evaluated are slid through small doors from the kitchen to each panelist booth to protect the test's objectivity.

"It takes about 15 minutes of a person's time to just taste," Calhoun said.

The panelist then gives the product a number rating and has an opportunity to comment on any improvements or criticisms of the snack.

"This test is to improve the quality of our product and to use as a sales and marketing tool," Mount said.

The college audience is a good place to do the testing since many college students are typical snack lovers, Mount said.

The club holds the tests every Monday, Wednesday and Friday through the end of the quarter and is still looking for testers.