Titel: Valorising seaweed – Novel food valuation in everyday encounters
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Popular science summary

Food production and consumption generate substantial greenhouse gas emissions, and many agree that we need more sustainable diets and food systems. One way forward is to explore new kinds of foods, for example ingredients that have not been widely used before, and finding ways to make them part of everyday eating. This requires cultural change: people need to recognize a new resource as "food", which raises questions about how norms and values evolve over time.

Researchers, companies, and the media increasingly promote large seaweeds that grow in the ocean as promising new food for Western countries. These seaweeds are seen as environmentally friendly because they require no freshwater, fertilizers, or farmland. This thesis looks at seaweed as an example of an emerging food source in Sweden. It examines what helps a new type of food to become part of an already established food culture.

The work explores this question in two main areas: consumption settings and scientific settings. First, examining consumption settings, this thesis gives a snapshot of people's past experiences with seaweeds and shows how new foods are categorised in grocery stores. A qualitative survey captures what people think about seaweeds, where they have come into contact with them, if they use them for anything, and what they know about seaweed as a food in their everyday shopping environment. These insights are complemented with additional data sources, such as online reviews. Second, turning to scientific settings offers a way to investigate how the qualities and values of new food sources are evaluated before they reach consumers. This part of the thesis draws on a review of academic literature, a hands-on interdisciplinary experiment, and observations and interviews with panel members working in a sensory science laboratory.

The thesis consists of four academic papers and one book chapter, each focusing on a different setting and ways people in Sweden encounter seaweed. These context-specific reactions matter because they can either support or slow down cultural change, such as the shift towards recognizing seaweed as a common food. The studies add to broader research on more environmentally friendly eating by showing in what ways novel food sources are part of different situations and thereby gradually merging into existing contexts. Understanding these dynamics clarifies seaweed's potential role in Sweden's sustainable food transition and offers wider insights into how societies adapt to new foods during environmental change.

The results may also be useful for groups working to introduce new foods into everyday eating habits. This includes product developers, grocery retailers, and food intermediaries who help consumers learn about unfamiliar ingredients and how to use them in daily cooking.