

CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR SEVERAL LAMB CUTS

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SUMMARY: Consumer preference for four lamb cuts was determined by a survey. The cuts were forequarter, chump and loin valentine chops, and leg schnitzels.

Sixty-two (41%) of those interviewed produced and killed their own meat and the remaining 89 (59%) did not.

Overall 41% preferred the schnitzel, 31% the chump chops, 17% the forequarter chops and 11% the valentine chops. The implication of the findings for the retail and production sectors is discussed.

INTRODUCTION: In recent years annual consumption of lamb within Australia has stabilised at around 15 kg per head after showing a significant drop from the 1970's. Further drops have been predicted (Geldard and Jackson 1988). Although real prices are forecast to remain stable costs are continually increasing.

It is this situation that has prompted closer studies of consumer preferences with regard to lamb and the development of a new range of boneless cuts (Thatcher 1988).

The general acceptance of these cuts has received some attention (Currie and Thatcher 1988) showing a variation in appeal dependent on the specific cut and perceived value for money.

To further clarify consumer preference towards some of these cuts a survey was conducted to compare two traditional and two alternative cuts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: From a carcass with a cold weight of 19.8 kilograms and with a "GR" measurement (total tissue thickness at the 12th rib 110 mm from the midline of the carcass) of 13.0 mm the following were obtained; five square cut forequarter chops, five chump chops, four loin valentine chops and four leg schnitzels. The two latter cuts are boneless and prepared as follows:

Loin valentine chops - The loin is boned out and then sliced into sections twice the thickness of the desired chops. Working from the external surface these are then cut not quite all the way through, then turned out to form the heart shaped chops. The tail can be trimmed if necessary.

Leg Schnitzels - These come from the topside of the leg. The topside is removed and then sliced at an angle to give thin sections of maximum size.

The four cuts were displayed side by side on a meat tray in an enclosed refrigerated cabinet. Each cut was identified by a letter on meat markers.

Each person interviewed was asked three questions:

1. Who buys the meat in their household?
2. Do they kill and produce their own meat?
3. To state their order of preference for the four cuts.

Surveying was conducted over two days with several different interviewers. A total of 164 people were interviewed from which 151 responses were used for analysis. Cross tabulation was applied to analyse the data using STATGRAPHICS 3.01.

RESULTS: Sixty-two (41%) of those interviewed produced and killed their own meat and the remaining 89 (59%) did not. Meat for the household was purchased by 68 females, 35 males and 23 by both sexes. Twenty-six respondents did not answer the question.

A frequency distribution is shown in Table 1 which shows the first preference of respondents to the four cuts.

Table 1. Preference of each respondent (number and %) according to the sex class of the purchaser.

| | Female | Male | Both | Overall |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| Schnitzel | 27 (39.7) | 16 (45.7) | 9 (39.2) | 62 (41) |
| Chump chops | 21 (30.9) | 13 (37.1) | 7 (30.4) | 47 (31) |
| Forequarter chops | 13 (19.1) | 5 (14.3) | 5 (21.7) | 26 (17) |
| Valentine chops | 7 (10.3) | 1 (2.9) | 2 (8.7) | 16 (11) |

There is a clear trend that emerges irrespective of the sex of the person responsible for purchasing the household meat. This same trend is seen when consideration is given to whether or not the respondents family produced and killed their own meat as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Preference of each respondent (number and %) according to whether the respondent killed and produced their own meat.

| | Kill own | Don't kill own |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Schnitzel | 26 (42.0) | 36 (40.5) |
| Chump chops | 20 (32.2) | 27 (30.3) |
| Forequarter chops | 9 (14.5) | 17 (19.1) |
| Valentine chops | 7 (11.3) | 9 (10.1) |

DISCUSSION: Currie and Thatcher (1988) found that consumers irrespective of whether they were classed as meat lovers, money aware or health conscious all anticipated they would buy leg schnitzels more regularly than any of the six cuts they studied.

The data presented here reinforced the significant appeal that a boneless low fat cut like a schnitzel has to consumers. Cuts such as the schnitzel not only overcome the perception of lamb as being too fat (Hopkins and Congram; Hopkins 1988) but offer versatility in preparation, lack of which is another factor known to restrict the sale of lamb (Ashton-Jones 1986).

Although the schnitzel was strongly preferred the boneless valentine chops were least preferred. This finding was in contrast to that found by Currie and Thatcher (1988) who reported that these cuts were preferred on average above forequarter cuts. Subcutaneous fat levels on the valentine chops used in this survey when related to carcass weight were probably marginal and this was reflected in the results found. A carcass weighing between 22-25 kg with a GR measurement of 8-14 mm is the desirable type for preparing boneless/alternative cuts.

Chump chops were not included in their study. They did find however that of the cuts examined the preference of consumers varied more for the forequarter than any other cut. People classed as meat lovers and experimenters said they would almost never purchase forequarter chops whereas money aware and meat lovers indicated they would purchase them at least monthly.

The strong preference for chump chops is not surprising because these present the consumer with a low fat, potentially boneless cut of a reasonable size. Indeed the appeal of this cut is not as dependent on the weight and fatness of the carcass that it comes from. In this sense it offers significant potential to the retail butcher.

It is apparent that adoption by the retail sector of a range of these alternative cuts would assist in halting the demise of lamb meat.

Probably the most salient point needing verification is the influence of price on preference and the actual preparedness to pay more per kilogram for a boneless low fat cut as this has not been closely studied.

CONCLUSION: These cuts offer significant scope for a niche market to be developed based on systems of production which provide the base commodity, a large lean carcass. Establishment of such a niche could only benefit producer, retailer and consumer.

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