

CONSUMPTION PREFERENCES FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF MEAT: LAMB'S PLACE
Mc Cormick, Mercedes; Moré María Rosa; Gambetta Ramón; Lynch, Gloria; Lacaze, María Laura
 C.E. Agro - Facultad de Ciencias Agrarias - Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora
 Ruta 4, Km.2, Llavallol. C.P. (1836). Buenos Aires

1. - Introduction:

The production of meat in the world has been increasing progressively in recent years, poultry has increased much more rapidly, outstanding from the rest. Consumption behaviour has followed the same tendency (Wellbrok, G., 1997). Analysing world consumption for lamb meat we can observe that it decreased, though in developed countries the tendency is just the opposite (USDA, 1999). Some of the reasons for this decrease, according to Oberts, H. D. (1992) are: the price (much more expensive than other meat); the sort of fat; high proportion of bones in lambs and changes in alimentary habits (families are smaller, there's less time for cooking, etc.). Sheep meat in Argentina has been traditionally considered as a by-product of wool enterprise. Now, as wool prices have fallen notoriously in recent years, sheep meat is being analysed as an interesting enterprise to improve farm profitability. In order to face this alternative, market studies are essential, particularly those referring to consumers. It's not possible to draw up economic policies without knowing consumers habits and demands as they are the ones who play a decisive role in the agroalimentary chain (Alfredo Cunhal Sendim y José Albiac Murillo, 1992).

2. - Objective:

Taking into account what has been described before, the objective of this work was to study consumer's behaviour in relation to sheep meat consumption, analysing its attributes and the place it occupies in consumers mind, compared with other meat. Looking forward to a) describing and categorizing nowadays meat consumption through consumer's habits and attitudes; b) circumscribe the place sheep meat occupies in relation to other meat, finding out the ways and the moments in which it is preferred to be eaten; c) try to categorize consumers through their ways of using meat. And, last but not least, finding out the best ways to stimulate the consumption.

3. - Materials and Methods:

In order to meet the mentioned aims, qualitative methods have been employed: focus groups (Kent, R. 1993) as they allow meeting people's speech about their attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values, etc. The sample was as follows: 6 focus groups with 10 people each: 4 groups of women, 2 groups between 25 and 35 years old, and the other 2 between 40 and 50 years old, they had to be responsible of the shopping and the ones who elaborate food at home. The last 2 groups were made up of men (interested in culinary aspects) between 25 and 35 years old and the other group 40 to 50 years old. These chosen ages allowed us to include families with small children and others with older children. The socio-economic level chosen was "C1" (middle high socio-economic level) (A.A. de M., 1998). A specialist co-ordinated the groups.

4. - Results and Discussion:

4.1. - General significance context: meat consumption.

We were able to typify, through certain characteristics in consumption, different groups that are described as follows: the "traditional type" characterised by predominance in consumption of red meat: beef, pork and lamb. The "equilibrated type" the ones who consume different kinds of meat (with variety). The "fast food type" they eat red meat and chicken and include in their meals preelaborated meat, they use freezer and microwave. Another way of classifying people was through their connection or disconnection to farm life. We called them as it follows: "urban type" those who live in the city and have no connections with farm, their knowledge about meat is connected with what they see at selling stores such as supermarkets, butchers, fishmongers, and in restaurants or T.V. culinary programs. The "urban / farm type", they have some kind of connection with farms, they've got a varied paradigm of meat, they know different kind of cuts, etc. not only what they see at the selling points.

4.2. - The place meat occupies in diets.

In Argentina, meat occupies an important place in diets. It is thought as "the base" of our alimentation. It's only accompanied with vegetables; only "pasta" can compete with it. Some people believe that a plate of food has to have meat in it, if not it can't be considered as food. The consumption of meat - specially beef - is associated with a "national identification" and masculinity, as well as a ritual: the "asado" -special preparation of meat in Argentine- is a synonymous of a social event, a celebration.

4.2.1. - "Beef" or Cattle meat".

This is the one which is much more eaten, people say that: it satisfies, it is considered handy, useful, it's cheap. It's rarely questioned. If it is not eaten, it's because of health problems. It's always accessible, easy to find at selling points, easy to prepare, to pay. The "traditional group" loves it. They say this meat is always present at their dishes. This kind of group is integrated by older people (40 to 50 years old), specially men. "Fast food group" also eats red meat with predominance of beef. They prefer to buy cuts that allow easy preparations. They usually choose good cuts (such as loin). Sometimes, these cuts are cooked at home and introduced in freezer for storage, then heated up with microwave when used.

4.2.2. - "Chicken".

Chicken has nowadays been incorporated firmly in our diets although it's questioned because of different reasons or beliefs; these are for its taste, fat, health wearing, etc. People built a myth around it, "they say that in other times chicken was expensive and luxurious. Nowadays its supply increased, consumption became more common, meanwhile its quality decreased, its colour changed, it lost taste and it's supposed to be obtained by feeding chicks with food which has dangerous hormones". They usually compare it with "farm brought up chicken" which is natural, it's yellow, it tastes good and is healthy. They also say that there are now more options at markets; different cuts, some without bones, prepared forms, ready to eat preparations, shapes for children.

4.2.3. - "Fish".

Eating this kind of meat is seen as a "duty" people say as it follows "I try to eat it once a week". It's considered as healthy and light - it has calcium, phosphorus, etc. less cholesterol than other meat-. At home people try to oblige their children to eat it, but not everyone

likes it, and sometimes they say that it doesn't satisfy. People also object some aspects for this meat, they say that there's a limited offer at supermarkets, there are few fishmongers. It is eaten once a week or once in 15 days.

4.2.4. - "Pork".

It is less eaten than beef or chicken. This is because it is said to be heavy. Some people consider it dangerous because they say pigs are sometimes ill or because they are fed with strange things. It is also considered expensive and they say it doesn't satisfy.

4.2.5. - "Other meat"

In this group the following are included: rabbit, hare, viscacha and goat. Here, in this group, lamb is mentioned too. Rabbit and goat are said to be present in city consumptions.

4.3. - Specific problems: sheep meat's image and an evaluation of the actual supply.

4.3.1. - Evaluation of its characteristics.

The image people have about this meat depends on their link to it, that is to say, those who buy it more frequently, consider it as delicious, tasty, refined; it is tender and its not fatty if it comes from a small animal or from Patagonia. Others say that it can be sometimes greasy but it can be cleaned. They also mention that it's taste is sweet, and that it needs some seasoning. The group named as "urban" that are the ones who don't know this meat very well, think its very greasy and it smells a lot.

4.3.2. - "Cuts and preparations".

The knowledge of this matter depends on the knowledge people have of this meat. The "Urban / Rural group" can distinguish between lamb, mutton, ewe and its cuts and preparations. The "urban group" can't recognize or distinguish different categories - they just know lambs- or cuts and preparations. And their occasional consumption has been on the farm with just one kind of preparation "made outside with fire; asado".

4.3.3. - Description of the supply of this meat (mentioned by the interviewee).

They say local offer is deficient, they can't find it, it is not easily seen, it appears rarely in supermarkets when different celebrations take place, the sellers who offer it more frequently don't place it where it can be easily seen. This is why people who love eating this kind of meat has to remind their butchers to bring it, or they have to look for it in special stores. Other complaints are that the cuts that can be found at shops are generally too big: a whole lamb, half a lamb, a big leg, and big ribs, all with bones. These presentations are not considered handy, its size difficult its storage. Other important obstacles are, for everyone, its price: an average of 5 u\$s per kg., this is much more expensive than beef and near pork's price. People also mention that there are no preelaborated products offered.

4.3.4. - Suggestions offered by people to optimise consumption.

People suggest that lamb has to have more presence and continuity at selling points, cuts and different sizes should offered, with or without bones, useful cuts and preparations. They also suggest prices to be lower than the actual. They ask for recipes, easy explanations for its cooking, information about its origin, properties, promotions that include tasting, etc. They believe this kind of meat won't reach beef's level of consumption but they think it could compete with pork, chicken or fish. Analysing the different groups of people mentioned above, we can say that the "traditional group"- the ones who eat red meat very often- are the "target" for lamb meat. On the other hand, the "fast food group" could incorporate this meat through the appearance of several cuts or ready to eat preparations. Showing good chances of competing with chicken. The "equilibrated group" probably won't be the ones who will incorporate easily this meat as long as they consider it as "heavy" or "fatty".

5.- Conclusions.

Sheep meat is considered as occasional. Its consumption is associated to special moments, celebrations, parties, social events and trips. We were able to identify 2 groups of people taking into account their habits and their differences in meat consumption, 1) Connected with farms: "Urban / Rural type" and the other group which had no contact with farm named as "Rural type". Some of the "Urban" have never tried sheep meat before and some have eaten it but just occasionally. They don't recognise categories of animals, or cuts or preparations. They just know one way of preparing this meat, lamb, "asado". They believe it's heavy, fatty, that is difficult to prepare. The "Urban/Rural" group know different cuts and preparations, they believe that sheep meat is as handy as beef and they consider it as a pleasure, it tastes good and its tender.

Everybody agreed that the local supply of this meat is limited: that it's difficult to obtain, cuts are too big and there are few cuts. And the prices are too high.

People suggest more presence and continuity at selling points. The appearance of: cuts with and without bones, different preparations, small sizes for children, lower prices. They 'd like nutritional and institutional information in the package, as well as knowing the origin of the animals. They would like brands and ready to eat preparations.

As a conclusion we suggest that the "target" for this meat could be the "traditional group", competing with that of pork.

The second target group would be the "fast- food group" if cuts and ready to eat, or easy to cook presentations are offered.

Those who won't easily incorporate this meat are the "equilibrated group" as they like a reduction of red meat in their diets.

6.- Bibliography

- A.A.M. (Asociación Argentina de Marketing). 1998. Índice de Nivel Socio Económico Argentino. Principales localidades. 174 pp.
- Cunhal Sendim, A.; Y Albiac Murillo, J.1994. Estrategias Comerciales de las Cooperativas Ovinas y Perspectivas de la Denominación Específica del Ternasco de Aragón. Unidad de economía y Soc. Agraria, Servicio de investigación Agraria, Zaragoza.
- Kent, R. 1995. Marketing Research in Action. Routledge, London.
- Oberst, H.D. 1992. "Marketing de carne ovina, desde el punto de vista del consumidor". Congreso Mundial de Ovinos y Lanas, Bs As.
- Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Agricultura y Alimentación. 1997. Examen de la Situación Mundial de la Carne. En 1997 y perspectivas para 1998, Roma.
- United States Departament Of Agriculture. 1999. Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and trade. Circular Series FL&P 1-99.
- Wellbrock, G. 1997. "Cuestiones acerca del consumidor del Siglo 21". La industria cárnica latinoamericana N° 109, 1997. 11° Congreso Mundial de Carnes. Pekin.