CONSUMER CRITERIA OF QUALITY OF MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS

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Background
         Quality is a special importance factor affecting consumer behaviour in the market. Elimination of contradictions between criteria of the manufacturer and those of the consumer applied by him/her when assessing product quality is of highest significance. Learning consumer quality criteria is the basis for the creation and changing in the level of quality features and their interrelationships (Wajdner 1998). The consumer, buying a specific product, has some expectations on its quality. The degree to which these expectations are met determines the satisfaction level related to the purchased goods. Manufacturers who want to increase production and obtain higher profits must first adjust quality of their products to the actual consumer requirements. This is related to the continued identification of quality features which are most important for consumers in order to secure and develop them in the production process, as well as to properly exhibit and use them in marketing activities.

Objective
         This work was aimed at determining consumer preferences as regards meat and meat products quality features.

Methods
         The research was conducted in 1999 with the questionnaire method in the southeastern macro-region of Poland with the sample of 948 consumers differentiated for sex, age, education, number of members in their family, residential location and income. Results of the questionnaire research were statistically processed with the multidimensional scaling method (Mirek 1998, Mynarski 1998).

Results and discussion
         Calculation results are given in the tables 1-3 and are graphically presented in the form of perception maps (Fig. 1-3). Location of particular meat organoleptic features, their importance for the opinion of consumers in the space of two major factors indicates that the first of them accumulates features of palatability, meat (taste and smell, tenderness, presence of visible fat), and the second groups visual parameters (general appearance, colour). Co-ordinates of this space, which define location of respondents, justify a statement that in their choice and purchase of meat, they first take into account organoleptic features, especially general appearance.

Table 1
Configuration of meat features importance: value of factor loads

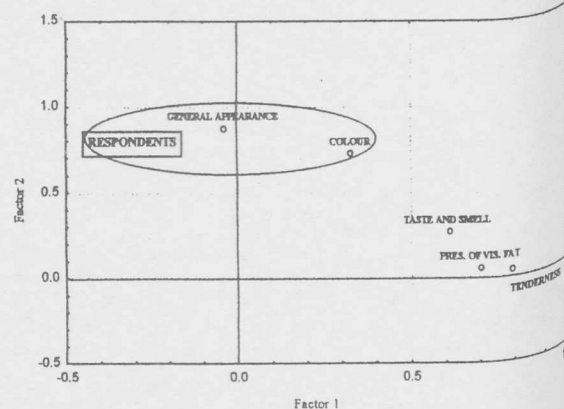| Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
General appearance	-0.04	**0.88**
Colour	0.33	**0.73**
Presence of visible fat	**0.70**	0.06
Taste and smell	**0.62**	0.27
Tenderness	**0.79**	0.03
Respondents	-0.29	**0.81**

Fig.1 Configuration of meat features importance

Location of importance of the proposed quality features for meat products in the opinion of consumers in the space of the three major factors (Table 2, Fig. 2) indicates that the first of them accumulates health features (content of fat and albumin, caloric value, presence of additives, lack of foreign matter), the second: parameters of availability (easy preparation, small processing degree), and the third one: organoleptic features (general appearance, taste and smell, freshness and life).
Location co-ordinates in this space of respondents justify a statement that when choosing and buying meat products, they mostly follow organoleptic features of the products. The other quality items are of secondary importance.
The relationships observed correspond with the results of consumer preferences research run by Kowrygo et al. (1997) on food in general and in the four basic product groups (fats, meat and meat products, milk and diary products and fruit and fruit products). Similar conclusions were formulated in the paper by Świda on diary products (1998) and in papers by Urban (1995) and Sikora (1995) on meat and meat products.
Location according to the importance factor, in the opinion of consumers, of the features describing quality in the questionnaire (descriptive features) in the space of the two major factors indicates that the first of them accumulates availability (cooking availability, easy preparation, presence of information on the package), and the second one accumulates quality features related to the

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basic product functions: general attractiveness and ingredients, which determine preferences on meat and meat products (Table 3, Fig. 3).

Table 2. Configuration of meat products features importance: value of factor loads

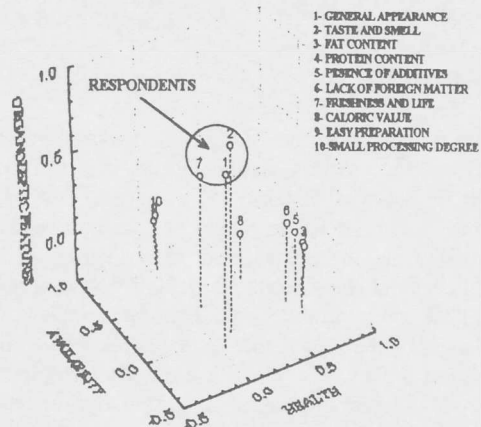| Item	Factor 1	Factor 1	Factor 1
General appearance	0,04	-0,12	**0,74**
Taste and smell	0,15	0,00	**0,82**
Fat content	**0,68**	-0,08	0,13
Protein content	**0,80**	0,08	0,00
Presence of additives	**0,76**	0,14	0,08
Lack of foreign matter	**0,65**	0,08	0,19
Freshness and life	0,11	0,32	**0,50**
Caloric value	**0,50**	0,44	-0,01
Easy preparation	0,07	**0,89**	-0,03
Small processing degree	0,05	**0,83**	0,05
Respondents	-0,26	-0,13	**0,76**

Fig. 2. Configuration of meat products features importance

Conclusions

1. The most important quality features in meat and meat products are sensory features according to consumers.
2. The choice and purchase of meat is determined mostly by its general appearance, while in the features determining quality of meat products (including meat) consumers preferred, apart from general appearance, first of all taste and smell and freshness and life.
3. Also, parameters describing quality of meat products, which result from ingredients and affect their general attractiveness are significant for consumers.

Table 3. Configuration of importance of descriptive features: load factor values

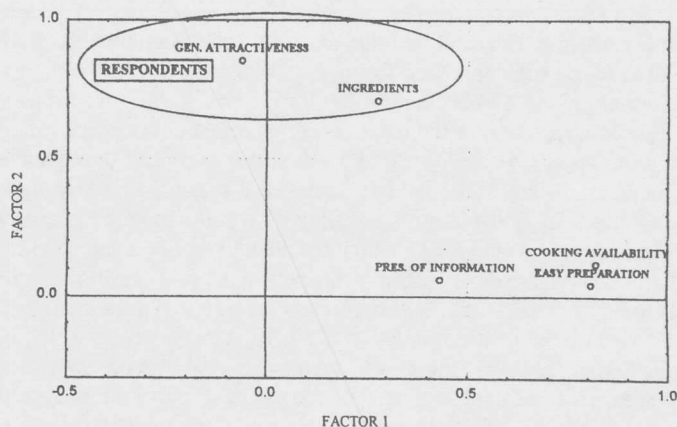| Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
General attractiveness	-0,06	**0,85**
Ingredients	0,28	**0,71**
Cooking availability	0,82	0,12
Easy preparation	0,81	0,04
Presence of information on the package	0,43	0,06
Respondents	-0,29	**0,81**

Fig. 3. Configuration of importance of descriptive features

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