

CHARACTERISTICS OF BEEF AND PORK CONSUMPTION IN MEXICO: A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

Meat consumption in Mexico is very sensitive to the economic environment. In 2005 the average consumption was a total of 48.8 kg of meat, of which 11.8 kg was beef, and 9.6% pork. These estimates are the result of the efforts of the Mexican government and national producers to stimulate meat consumption. The amount of meat consumed per capita and the accessibility of this product to the less economically favoured has been a reason for the government's favouring the importation of meat, despite strong controversy. Regardless of the reasons that have caused its growth, consumption is presently 43% above that in the nineties. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that it is lower than in the eighties when 20kg of pork alone was consumed per capita yearly. It is a fact that the Mexican consumer eats more meat everyday and is more critical with regards to its characteristics. People are more concerned with the quality of their lifestyle and take better care of their health as a result of this attitude. This new lifestyle imposes new demands on the market. It no longer suffices to produce healthy animals which in turn yield healthy products. The industry is under pressure to evolve and development better production techniques, processing, distribution, packing and presentation of meat products.

The state of Guanajuato is an important pork producer in Mexico, though its beef production is not notable, to the point of being deficient. The state also has an important hog slaughtering industry. The pork industry in Guanajuato is third in importance, generating 9% of the national production; on the other hand, it only generates 2% of the national beef production (Sagarnaga, 2005).

The producers and state government are presently undertaking a project to modernise the state meat industry, principally those segments that include the raising of calves up to their slaughtering, wholesale distribution, and primary cuts. A lack of information oriented towards the decision making process is one of the main limitations that need to be overcome.

Materials and Methods

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the consumption characteristics and habits, and preferences of meat consumers. The analysis is based on the information collected through a questionnaire applied to 154 consumers in the state of Guanajuato. The results are considered to be exploratory.

Results and Discussion

The people who buy meat are middle aged (40-49 years of age), females (92%), with small families (3-5 members), and a monthly income of under 6,000 Mexican pesos (less than 400 euros). The consumers interviewed consumed an average of 40.2kg yearly, of which 23.3 is beef, and 16.9kg pork. This is above the national average. The size of the family determines the amount of meat consumed. In families with fewer than 2 members, the per capita beef consumption is 880g weekly, and of pork, 420g. This amount decreases to 140 grams of beef and only 60 grams of pork weekly in families with more than 10 members.

The amount of meat consumed is also affected by family income. The demand for beef increases according to the income level. The weekly consumption of low income families is 1.6kg, while the meat consumption of high income families is 2.30kg weekly. On the other hand, pork consumption decreases as the income level increases. Low income families acquire 1.2kg of this type of meat, while high income families only buy 0.7kg of pork weekly.

The majority of the consumers interviewed (54%), eat meat from 3 to 4 days a week; an important part (31%), eat meat only once or twice a week. Beef is bought 8 times a month, which implies that consumers customarily buy meat twice a week. Pork is bought 5 times a month, on an average of about once a week. Meat products are mainly bought at butcher shops found in public markets; given that 55% and 57% of the beef and pork products, respectively, are bought in this type of establishments. The second most important place of purchase is neighbourhood meat markets, 39% and 40% of those interviewed buy beef and pork products in this type of establishment, respectively.

The main reason for customarily buying meat products in the aforementioned places For 34% of the consumers interviewed is the freshness of the products offered; an equal number of those interviewed mentioned hygiene as another of the main reasons; 33% mention their closeness; and 31% the quality of the service. Other reasons of lesser influence in the selection of where to buy meat products are: convenience, price, variety, and the sale of other products. The type of meat most sought by the retail consumers is hot meat (51.3%), that is, meat from animals that have been

recently slaughtered. Consumers in Guanajuato prefer regionally produced meat. Those interviewed said that they preferred meat that had been produced locally (51%); for an important percentage of those interviewed, (37%), the source of origin was not a determining factor when buying meat. Of those interviewed, 81% preferred, (37%), the not been previously packaged or cut, that is, they preferred meat in whole sections so that they might select the part they wanted when they were served. The cuts preferred were 86% beefsteak, while pork cuts had a greater variety. Those preferences were: ribs (35%), loin (32%), and jams (31%). The majority of those interviewed (62%), indicated their conformity to paying a higher price for meat if hygiene and quality were guaranteed. The average surcharge that consumers are willing to pay is 9%. The price is flexible depending on the income level. The demand for beef in the case of high and medium income consumers is less flexible with regards to price; a large number of consumers (80% and 49%, respectively), maintain their consumption level independent of the changes in price. Low income consumers are more sensitive to price changes; a larger number of them (41%), significantly reduce their consumption when there are price changes. Something similar occurs with regards to pork; high and low income consumers maintain their consumption despite price increases. In the case of low income consumers (68%) reduce their pork consumption as the price increases.

Conclusions

It can be generally stated that the consumer in Guanajuato retains traditional buying and consumption habits which should be considered when modernizing the state meat industry. Such behavior is different from the average Mexican consumers. Along the same line, this population consumes more meat than the average Mexican, which is an opportunity to this market.

References

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