

# Consumer attitudes and expectations of meat, meat products and meat packaging in Ireland

Paula M. Conroy<sup>1</sup>, Ruth M. Hamill<sup>2</sup>, Joseph. P. Kerry<sup>2</sup> and Maurice G. O'Sullivan<sup>2</sup> \*

<sup>a</sup>School of Food and Nutritional Sciences, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland.

<sup>b</sup>Teagasc Food Research Centre, Ashtown, Castleknock, Dublin 15, Ireland.

\*Corresponding author. Tel.: +353 490 3544; fax: +353214270001.

## Abstract

**Meat and meat products are the main source of protein in the diets of Irish consumers. However, the meat sector has deteriorated as a result of economic instability and negative consumer attitudes towards meat products. This paper examined the underlying issues Irish consumers have with meat and meat products in Ireland. The packaging of meat and meat products was also examined. The health effects of processed meat was of great concern among most respondents (68%). The salt levels were thought to be the leading factor (79%). However, when asked if they knew their RDA for salt per day 59% of the respondents replied 'no'. Of the respondents that stated that processed meats are bad for our health; 45% indicated that they still consume them regularly. The majority (62%) of participants indicated the way in which meat is packaged is important. The majority of the respondents (96.85%) reported using a sharp object to open a meat package with 13.78% reporting an injury from this opening technique. Consumer awareness of the health effects on processed meats varied. Willingness to consume the products was not effected by their knowledge of the health effects. Clearly, there is a lot of confusion among Irish consumers and the effect processed meats have on their health. Consumers should be more educated on product labelling and calculating their RDAs for nutrients. The packaging of meat should also be explored further taking into account the difficulties consumers have opening meat packaging.**

**Key Words – Consumer Survey, Procesed Meat, Meat Packaging.**

## INTRODUCTION

Processed meat is often perceived by consumers as being unhealthy due to perceived levels of sodium, fat and harmful additives Tobin et al. [2]. Currently in Ireland there is a huge focus on processed meats and their health effects. According to the FSAI 19% of consumers stopped eating meat in the last few years due to concerns regarding food safety and 53% of consumers expressed concern regarding adverse long term health effects of food consumed nowadays Caulfield [1]. The package's overall features can underline the uniqueness and originality of the product. Quality judgments are largely influenced by product characteristics reflected by packaging, and these play a role in the formation of brand preferences. If the package communicates high quality, consumers frequently assume that the product is of high quality. If the package symbolizes low quality, consumers transfer this "low quality" perception to the product itself. The package becomes the symbol that communicates favourable or unfavourable implied meaning about the product. It is therefore imperative to gauge consumer acceptance and decipher what are the specific concerns of the consumer and derive a solution to alleviate these concerns. The survey conducted set out to explore consumer (n=657) knowledge and attitudes pertaining to meat, meat products and meat packaging in Ireland.

## I. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was generated using Survey Monkey software and emailed to a wide cohort of subjects (n=1000). Data was collected and was statistically analysed. The respondents represented the meat consuming population of Ireland. The ages ranged from 18-70 years old. Both males and females took part. Data was summarised as frequencies for each question and statistical differences were analysed using the Chi-square statistical test. A significance level of 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) was set for analysis.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The health effects of processed meat was of great concern among most respondents (68%). The salt levels were thought to be the leading factor (79%) of health concern. However, when asked if they knew their RDA for salt per day 59% of the respondents replied 'no'. Of the respondents that stated that processed meats are bad for our health; 45% indicated that they still consume them regularly.

Participants voted nutrition the main reason (71.29%) for favoring fresh meat over processed meat. Protein was viewed as the main (90%) nutrient responsible for nutrition benefits of fresh meat.

The shape of the meat package was deemed the most important quality of meat packaging by consumers (54%), this was followed by convenience features such as opening reliability (25%). The majority of the respondents (96.85%) reported using a sharp object to open a meat package with 13.78% reporting an injury from this opening technique.

## III. CONCLUSION

Consumer awareness of the health effects on processed meats varied. Willingness to consume the products was not effected by their knowledge of the health effects. Clearly, there is a lot of confusion among Irish consumers and the effect processed meats have on their health. Consumers should be more educated on product labelling and calculating their RDAs for nutrients. Consumers were well informed on the benefits of consuming fresh meat.

The majority of participants indicated the way in which meat is packaged is important. Attention should be focused on ensuring easy to open meat packaging to eliminate the use of sharp objects as opening tools, thus decreasing the risk of injury. The packaging of meat should also be explored further taking into account the difficulties consumers have opening meat packaging.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by The Food Institutional Research Measure (FIRM) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The project is titled Meat4Vitality-Enhancement of texture, flavour and nutritional value of meat products for older people (Project Ref: 11/F/045). It is funded by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan 2007-2013.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Tobin, B. D., O'Sullivan, M. G., Hamill, R., & Kerry, J. P. (2014). European consumer attitudes on the associated health benefits of neutraceutical-containing processed meats using Co-enzyme Q10 as a sample functional ingredient. *Meat Science*, 97(2), 207–213.
- [2] Caulfield, P. (2003). *Consumer Attitudes to Food Safety in Ireland*.