# MEAT CONSUMPTION—WHAT DO FRENCH CONSUMERS FEEL ABOUT THE QUALITY OF BEEF?

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## I.    OBJECTIVES

The French beef sector developed a new trading system for beef in self-service aisles published in 2014 in a ministerial decree. It is based on labels indicating a simplified name of cut, the potential quality of each cut expressed in a number of stars, and the preferred cooking method. After a few years of implementation, the aim of the current survey was to study beef consumption habits and to get feedback from consumers about this new meat labelling system.

## II.    MATERIALS AND METHODS

To investigate consumers' purchasing behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge about the new labelling system, an *ad hoc* questionnaire was designed. A total of 625 individuals participated in a survey with questions related to sociodemographic characteristics, focused on meat purchasing behaviors and consumption, or related to consumer perceptions of the new beef labelling system.

## III.    RESULTS

Respondents say they eat beef because they like its taste (87%) but also because meat is a source of various important nutrients such as protein and iron (50%). Over the last few years, the respondents' consumption has remained stable or has diminished. The reasons for the decline in meat consumption are numerous: too-high price, the possible health risks, the lack of sensory consistency, animal welfare concerns, and the impact of health scandals. While the respondents indicated that they paid close attention to the labels (81%), a large proportion of them (72%) had not noticed the presence of stars on labels of beef in supermarket self-service aisles. About 75% of the respondents, who do use this potential quality ranking, consider that eating quality should be reflected by the number of stars indicated on the label. When both old and new labels were shown to the respondents, 57% said they prefer the new labelling system, 75% of them found the new system clearer due to the presence of stars, and 10% like the cooking method tips. The respondents who prefer the old labelling system (13%) do not like not knowing the name of the cut (55%) and criticize the "marketing" aspect, which does not "educate" consumers (22%). A proposal would be to place the name of the cut in italics under the generic name in order to satisfy both educated consumers and those who do not know the names of cuts. Of the respondents, 88% would be interested in a system that would ensure a guaranteed level of meat tenderness/taste at the time of purchase. Consumers that often eat meat appear to be more interested in such a system. This type of system could encourage consumers to purchase and eat more beef undoubtedly or probably for all consumers or for the restricted population who had decreased their meat consumption.

## IV.    CONCLUSION

The beef industry should, in addition to maximize meat yields and profit, guarantee good sensory and nutritional quality in order to better meet consumers' expectations (2). Consumers

generally highlight the importance of the cut at the time of purchase, which is highly relevant since cuts have different tenderness potential. This explains why some quality prediction systems (e.g., the Meat Standards Australia [MSA] grading scheme) are based on the cut and not the carcass as in Europe (3). In this respect, the star system is a real step forward in satisfying consumer expectations. However, it is still incomplete as, unlike MSA, it does not take into account other factors that contribute to the variability of beef eating quality. Further developing the star system to something comparable to MSA would be judicious, as it will be appreciated by European consumers (4).