

CONSUMER'S PREFERENCES FOR BEEF PURCHASED ON FARM

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I. INTRODUCTION

Beef consumption has been slightly but constantly decreasing during the last decade in Italy [1]. The main purchase channel for home consumption is supermarkets' network, although, specialised butchery shops remain an important supply alternative especially dedicated to high quality cuts and meat preparations. In addition, an increasing number of small beef producers, have developed a short supply chain, for selling meat directly to consumers on farm (the most common is a beef box containing about 10 kg, with 4-6 different meat cuts and preparations). In Veneto region (North East of Italy) farms implementing short retail chain are small-medium size, mainly located in less productive areas, adopting organic or mix farming systems with a combination of vegetables (horticulture, cereals, pasturage) and small animal (beef, pigs, poultry, etc.) production. For beef production, local sucker cows or double purpose breeds are normally used, often crossed with meaty type breed; slaughtering live weight of young bulls and heifers is variable, as well as the fattening period and carcass composition [2]. Direct selling of beef meat box requires a specific organisation (live animal transport to abattoir, carcass aging and deboning plants availability within the production area) as well as dedicated farm facilities; all these activities increase cost production. Price of beef meat box is normally higher (+ 30-50%) compared with those of common retail chains. This study focuses on attitude and motivation of consumers to directly purchase beef on farm.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in two steps (June and September-October 2022); three focus groups (semi structured group discussion) took place with the participation of respectively 8-10 and 11 consumers, followed by a survey [3] [4]. In the focus groups the consumers shared their opinions about agriculture systems in general, food supply chains with particular focus on beef meat. Main topics and themes from the focus groups were included in a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, in order to investigate consumer socio-demographic and financial details, the knowledge about food production systems, consumption patterns with a particular focus on meats. Questions about beef buying habits, in relation to frequency of consumption and main intrinsic and extrinsic attributes were asked. For this purpose, a simple scale ranging from "Not important", "Neither important nor unimportant" and "Important" was used. Survey was conducted with face-to-face interview, on 347 consumers, during purchasing in seven farms.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The four main beef attributes, considered "important" for large number of consumers (50-60%), were "farm origin", "medicament/antibiotic", "overall palatability" and "grazing". Unsurprisingly, palatability of meat (tenderness, juiciness, etc.) remains an 'important intrinsic attribute of beef, and probably one of the most important reasons to buy it directly on farm. Other three attributes confirm the great attention of these consumers to avoid the risk of drugs residues in meat, about the beef production system (preferably extensive as animal grazing) and the knowledge of the farm. Informing consumers about beef production system, accompanying them on the field during on farm open days or ad hoc visits, seems one of most successful way to make a strong and trusty linkage. In this survey organic certification and animal welfare, linked in some way with the farms production system, remain important factors for consumers. Sampled consumers would consider less important intrinsic beef attributes such as fat or nutrient content. Although the price of beef from short chain retail box is more

expensive, for the large part of sampled consumers (60 %) it seems not representing a barrier on purchase decision.

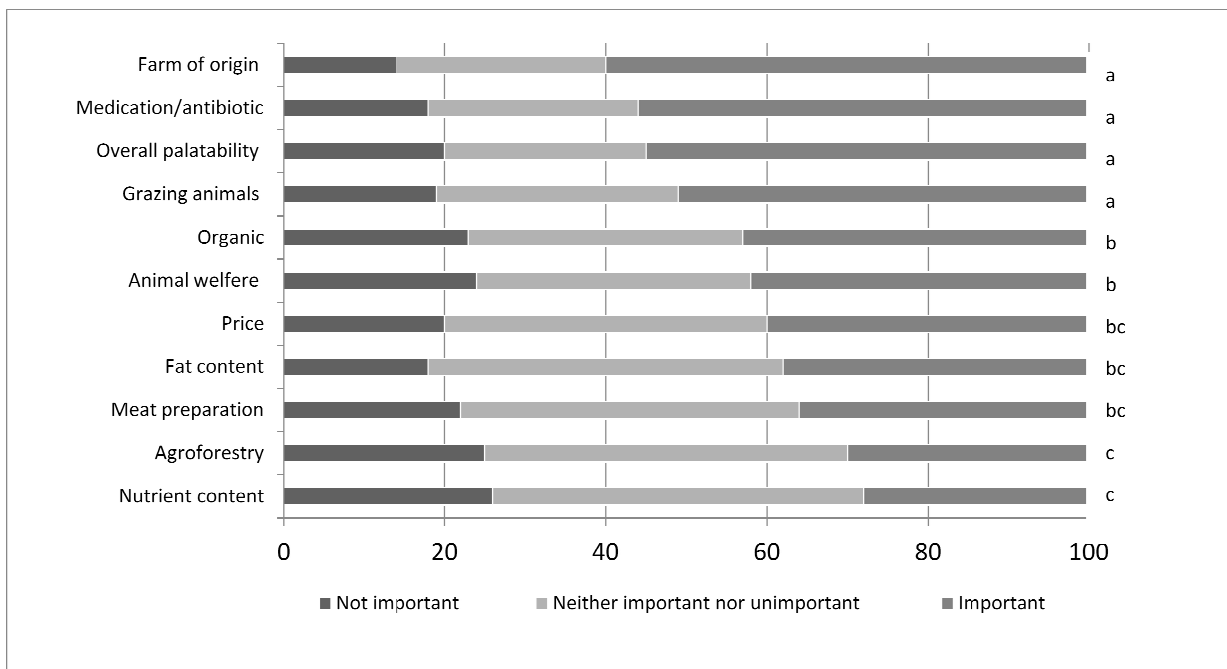


Figure 1. Importance of various beef attributes for consumers at the moment of purchasing on farm. Different letters indicate significant differences (in a post-hoc Fisher's test).

IV. CONCLUSION

The beef short retail chain on farm (using meat box), still remains a niche market, but it sounds a very promising way to reach a stable ally between different sustainable farming systems such as mixed and agroforestry, and consumers. Nevertheless, some weaknesses of chain (abattoirs availability, farm facilities, hygienic standards, etc.) could represent serious threats to its develop.

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