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# MINNESOTA LAMB CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Despite promotional efforts by lamb producers and the meat industry, per capita lamb and mutton consumption in the United States decreased from 4.3 pounds in 1950-55 to 3.7 pounds in 1965. This decline was contrary to a 12-percent increase in per capita red meat consumption during the same period.[1]

The decline probably resulted in part from a low consumer preference for lamb. In addition, lamb may not have been sufficiently available to consumers at retail outlets.

To learn about consumer preference for lamb in Minnesota and its availability at retail, the Departments of Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Economics surveyed people at the 1963 Minnesota State Fair. Nearly 4,300 people filled out usable questionnaires.

By answering one set of questions, respondents classified themselves by age level, sex, marital status, residence, education, and family income level. They also answered six questions concerning lamb consumption and purchasing practices.

Because of the survey method used, respondents did not make up a representative sample of all Minnesota consumers. The respondents were older, consisted of proportionately more females and married people, were more highly educated, and had higher family incomes than did Minnesotans generally. However, respondents' places of residence by size were approximately the same as 1960 Minnesota residency proportions.

These consumers were asked: (1) if they had ever tasted eight different lamb cuts, (2) how they ranked three of these cuts relative to comparable cuts of beef and pork, (3) whether seven of the eight cuts were available where they purchased meat, (4) what type of meat market they used most often, (5) how frequently they purchased lamb, and (6) why they did not purchase lamb more often.

## Lamb Cuts Tasted And Rankings

Nearly 60 percent of the respondents had tasted leg of lamb; over 50 percent had tasted shoulder chops. The least tasted of all cuts was lamburger; less than 14 percent of the respondents had eaten it (see table 1).

[1] A detailed study of these trends is presented in Agricultural Economics Fact Sheet 5, U. S. Lamb Consumption Patterns.

Table 1. Lamb cuts tasted and taste rankings

| Lamb cuts | Tasted | Preferred over beef and pork* |
|---|---|---|
| | ..percent of respondents.. | |
| Chops: | | 27.2 |
| Shoulder | 50.8 | |
| Loin | 39.8 | |
| Rib | 28.9 | |
| Roasts: | | 20.2 |
| Leg | 59.6 | |
| Loin | 21.1 | |
| Shoulder | 26.1 | |
| Other | | 11.3 |
| Burgers | 13.7 | |
| Stew | 37.0 | |

*The comparable cuts identified on the questionnaire were: pork chops and beef steak, pork and beef roasts, and sausage and hamburgers.

Over one-fourth of the respondents preferred (ranked in first place) the taste of lamb chops to pork chops or beef steak. About one-fifth of the group preferred the taste of lamb roasts to pork or beef roasts. But only slightly more than 1 in 10 preferred chopped lamb meat to sausage or hamburger.

Taste experiences and rankings also were compared with the personal characteristics of respondents. A definite relationship existed between a person's age and: (1) the number of lamb cuts tasted and (2) how lamb taste ranked with beef or pork. The older the respondents the greater was the number of lamb cuts they had tasted. Older age groups also preferred lamb more than did the younger set. For example, of those people over age 65, 58 percent preferred lamb chops to pork chops or beef steak.

Proportionately more male than female respondents had tasted the several lamb cuts listed. But females preferred lamb more than did males. A similar relationship held for married and single respondents; although married people had tasted more lamb cuts, single people preferred lamb more than did married respondents.

Proportionately more people in the higher education categories or in the higher income groups had tasted the lamb cuts listed than did respondents with lesser levels of education or income. But a greater proportion of persons with lower educational levels or income preferred lamb than did those in higher education or income categories.

No clear relationship existed between taste experience and ranking and residence by city size. Nor was there a relationship by place of meat purchase. Obviously, people who had tasted lamb and preferred it also purchased it more frequently.

## LAMB CUT AVAILABILITY

Over 40 percent of the respondents felt that seven of the eight lamb cuts listed were "always" available where they purchased meat. Only 9 percent said that lamb was "never" available (see table 2). The most "available" lamb cuts were loin chops, shoulder chops, and leg of lamb. The "least available" was chopped lamb.

Table 2. Lamb cut availability

| Lamb cuts | Availability: Always | Sometimes | Never | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .....percent of | respondents..... | | |
| Leg of lamb | 43.7 | 40.1 | 5.7 | 10.4 |
| Shoulder roasts | 38.5 | 37.9 | 7.8 | 15.9 |
| Shoulder chops | 43.7 | 34.8 | 6.9 | 14.6 |
| Loin chops | 48.7 | 32.7 | 5.9 | 12.7 |
| Rib chops | 41.9 | 31.9 | 8.3 | 18.0 |
| Chopped lamb | 24.4 | 27.7 | 18.8 | 29.2 |
| Stew meat | 37.8 | 32.0 | 9.9 | 20.4 |
| All cuts | 40.2 | 34.2 | 8.8 | 16.9 |

Proportionately more of the older than the younger respondents indicated that lamb cuts were "always" available. Of course, older respondents had tasted more cuts and indicated a higher preference for lamb as well.

Relationships between lamb cut availability and the respondent's sex or marital status were not clear. Greater proportions of the lowest income and education groups (where preference was high) said that lamb was more available than did respondents in high income and education categories.

An important difference in availability was noted for people living in towns of less than 10,000 in size. For example, one-fourth of the people living in towns of less than 2,500 population claimed that lamb was "never" available to them.

People who preferred lamb to pork or beef also claimed it was more available to them. More respondents who purchased their meat in butcher service stores found lamb available than did those trading in self-service markets.

## REASONS FOR NONPURCHASE

For all respondents, the most important reason why lamb was not purchased was that they never thought of it. Other reasons were that they objected to its taste or felt that it was too high in price relative to other meats (see table 3).

Table 3. Why lamb was not purchased more often

| Reasons | Percent of all responses* |
|---|---|
| Never thought of it | 24.4 |
| Objected to its taste | 23.3 |
| Felt lamb was too high in price relative to other meats | 19.3 |
| Usually did not find lamb available | 14.2 |
| Needed variety in diet | 13.9 |
| Couldn't prepare lamb easily | 2.5 |
| Usually ate at restaurant | 2.4 |

*Multiple answers were given by most respondents. The percent is of all answers.

The importance of these reasons differed when respondents were classified by their personal characteristics. Older people didn't buy more lamb because it was either too high priced or not available to them. People under age 40 claimed they never thought of it. Respondents with lower levels of education failed to buy more lamb because of its taste or lack of availability. But respondents with higher education listed the high price as the greatest deterrent. People living in small towns felt that unavailability was the prime reason for nonpurchase. People from large cities said they never thought of lamb.

Respondents who had tasted the various cuts didn't buy lamb more frequently because it was too high in price or because they wanted variety. People preferring lamb cuts to comparable beef or pork cuts listed unavailability as the most important reason for nonpurchase. On the other hand, respondents ranking lamb availability quite high didn't purchase lamb because they needed variety in their diets, usually ate in restaurants, or couldn't prepare lamb easily.

CONCLUSIONS: These findings suggest that additional or newly directed effort is needed by the lamb industry to acquaint consumers with lamb and to promote lamb as a meat alternative. Promotion campaigns to introduce lamb to people who believe they object to its taste or who have never tasted it may be effective. In-store taste programs could attract potential customers. However, largescale promotions should be geared with ample supplies so that people who seldom think of lamb can select from a wide variety of cuts.

Apparently the urban community does not have a major problem in lamb availability. Distribution of lamb in small towns should be encouraged.

Decreased lamb prices are not likely unless highly coordinated production and processing programs make them possible. Shifts of processing units to production areas and emphasis on processing lamb into retail frozen cuts may help production and marketing efficiency. Lamb must be competitive in price, broadly available, and introduced to consumers if the lamb industry is to share in an expanding red meat market.



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