

A Pilot Study of Halal Goat-Meat Consumption in Atlanta, Georgia

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Atlanta is a relatively large market for goat meat. As in most metropolitan areas around the U.S., goat-meat consumption has grown steadily in Atlanta over the past decade (Northwest Cooperative Development Center 2005; Nettles and Bukenya 2004). This growth is attributed to the influx of immigrants from goat-meat-eating countries into the U.S. over the same period (Gipson 1999). The increase in demand for goat meat has made the U.S. a net importer of competitively priced goat meat from Australia and New Zealand into major U.S. cities such as Atlanta (USDA-FAS 2006). The fact that goat-meat imports from Australia have steadily increased over the years makes markets such as Atlanta of particular interest to both Georgia goat-meat suppliers and meat-goat producers. The goat-meat market, however, is highly segmented (Nelson et al. 2004; Mclean-Meyinsse 2003). Recognition of the diversity among Atlanta goat-meat consumers raises interest in identifying preferences of particular segments. One such segment is the Muslim consumer. However, very limited information is available to help assess the preferences of Muslim consumers in the Atlanta goat-meat market.

This study focuses on the Muslim segment of actual goat-meat consumers in the metro Atlanta area. Contrary to earlier assertions, we hypothesize that Muslims eat goat-meat for cultural reasons and not for religious reasons. Furthermore, we assert that Muslims are not a single homogenous niche group and should not be treated as such in marketing. Thus this study examines goat-meat consumption patterns among Muslims in metropolitan Atlanta. Insights gained in this study benefit meat-goat producers and consumers in Georgia.

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Muslim Consumers

The halal niche market for goat meat is patronized mostly by Muslims. Halal means “permissible,” and it is a preferred method of slaughter among Muslims. Muslims are mandated by their religion to consume meat products that are “halal.” This market is one of the major goat niche markets in the metro Atlanta area. With a relatively large Muslim community, it is believed the demand for halal goat meat among goat-meat-eating Muslims may be profitable for goat producers. Although there are no exact figures for the Muslim population in Atlanta, estimates range between 45,000 and 75,000 (al-Farooq Masjid n.d.; Prothero 2002). In this study, the upper bound of 75,000 is assumed in recognition and consideration of the existence of an illegal-immigrant Muslim population in Atlanta.

Data

The data used in this report were collected using a survey instrument. Respondents were randomly solicited after Friday prayers at different locations (mosques) for their voluntary participation in the survey. Initially, the mosque intercept method was chosen because of its relatively low cost and flexibility. After encountering problems because most people were relatively unwilling to participate in the survey, we conducted the rest of the survey online. Emails were sent to mosques (with web pages) in Atlanta requesting that imams direct their congregations to the website via a link. The sole qualifier for the survey subjects was that they should be Muslims and eat goat meat. The total number of returned questionnaires was 95 from both the on-site survey and the online survey. The survey was conducted in 2006 over a three-month period in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

Results and Discussion

We used SAS software to conduct preliminary analysis of the data gathered. The results derived from data set reveal some interesting findings.

Strong Concern about Halal

Figure 1 provides responses to the question, “How important is it to you that the meat you eat is processed following the halal/zabihah processing methods?” Most respondents indicated that halal meat is important or very important to them. Over 80 percent of respondents said halal was very important to them. Only five percent responded that halal was not important; the rest said they did not know.

Preference for Smaller Goats

A majority of respondents prefer goats that weigh 50 pounds or less. About 46 percent of respondents indicated they preferred goats weighing less than 30 pounds and about 27 percent preferred goats between 30 and 50 pounds. Only five percent of the respondents preferred larger goats and 29 percent

said the size of the goat did not matter (Figure 2).

Figure 2 also presents the responses to the question, “What’s your preference in goat meat? Would it be skinned, singed or neutral?” Nearly half (44.57 percent) of the respondents said they preferred skinless goat meat and about 26 percent indicated they preferred singed goat meat. The rest of the respondents said they were indifferent.

Willingness to Pay More for Halal Goat Meat

Most respondents indicated a willingness to pay a premium price for halal goat meat. More than 60 percent were willing to pay a premium above the regular price of goat meat (see Figure 3). Over 38 percent of the respondents said they were willing to pay one dollar or more extra for halal goat meat. This is consistent with the notion that people will pay a premium to consume whatever they desire (Loureiro and Hine 2002). Only six percent of the people surveyed said they would not pay a premium for halal goat meat. Nearly one-quarter of the respondents, however, were undecided as to whether they were willing to pay a premium.

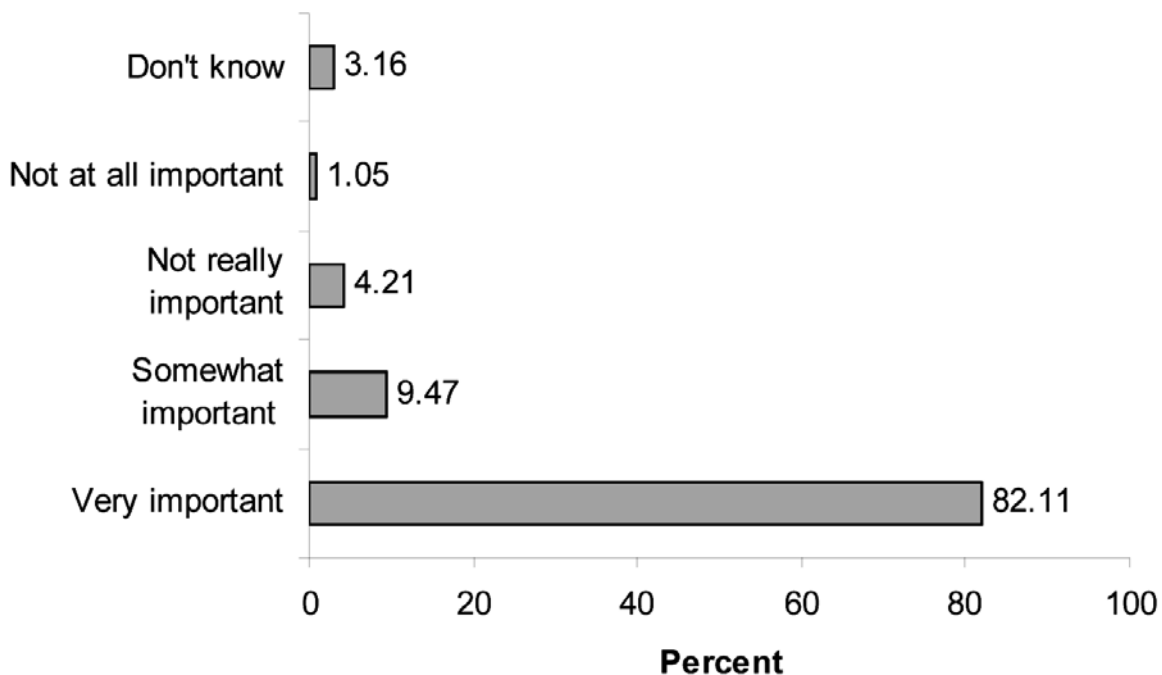


Figure 1. Importance of Halal Meat.

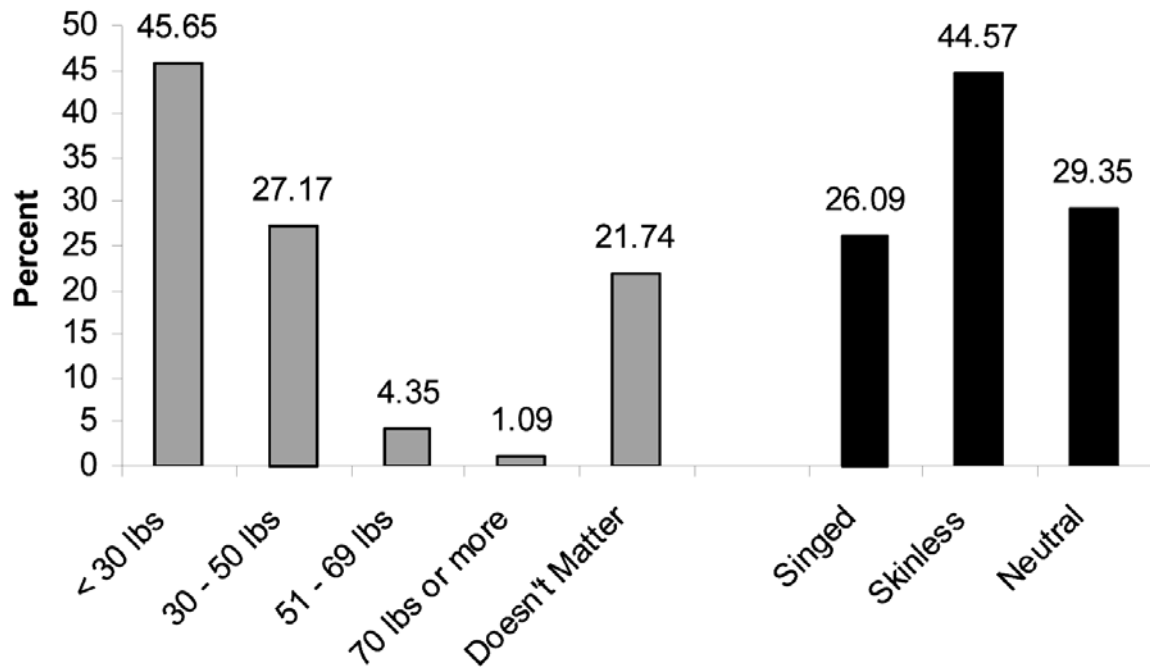


Figure 2. Consumer Preference for Goat Size and Processing.

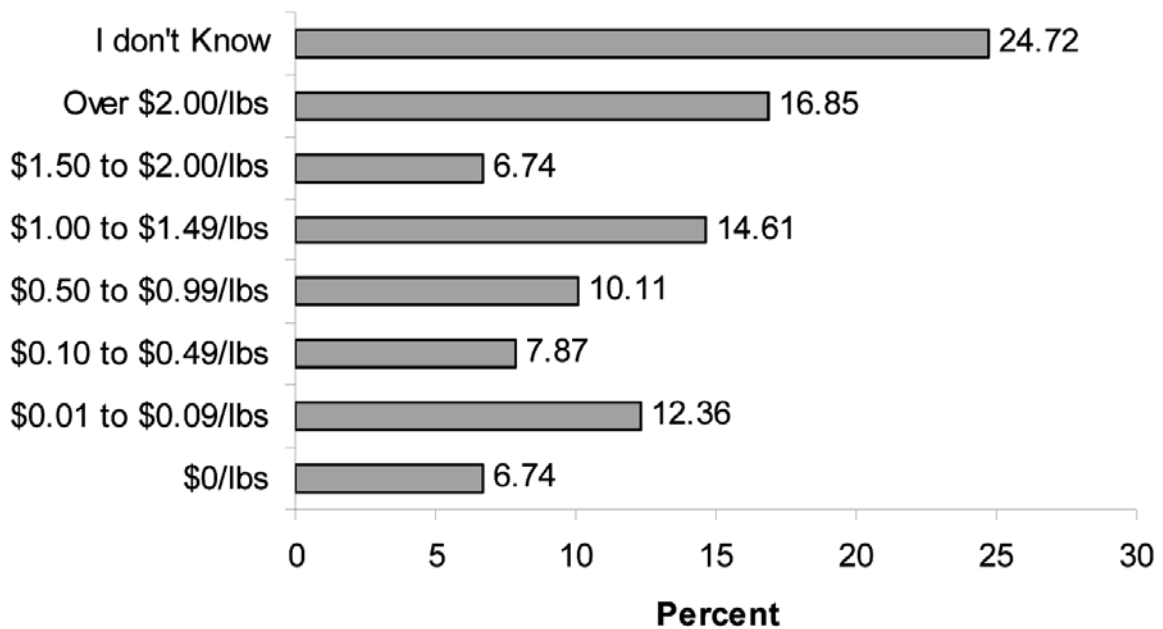


Figure 3. Willingness to Pay a Premium Price for Halal Goat Meat.

Respondents Eat More Goat Meat During the Eids

Results show respondents ate more goat meat during the two Eids (Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr). Eid al-Adha is the Muslim festival of sacrifice. The festival is a commemoration of Prophet Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael (or Isaac in Christianity). Muslims commemorate this occasion by slaughtering an animal that fits some specific characteristics. The meat is distributed among family, friends, and the needy. Eid al-Fitr is celebrated after a month of fasting during daylight hours. The respondents also indicated that they ate more goat meat during marriage ceremonies and Ramadan (fasting month). Ramadan is the ninth month of the lunar calendar. Throughout Ramadan, Muslims all over the world fast from dawn to dusk. Special foods are prepared for both the dawn meal and the evening meal.

Preference for Fresh Goat Meat

Fresh goat meat comes from domestically produced meat goats. Our results show that consumers prefer fresh goat meat more than frozen goat meat. The

fact that the U.S. imports millions of pounds of frozen goat meat from Australia and New Zealand illustrates the shortage of fresh domestically produced meat. Figure 4 shows responses to the question, “How important are the following attributes in your decision to purchase goat meat products. Would you say fresh, never frozen product is very important, important, not very important or not at all important?” More than 80 percent of respondents indicated that freshness of goat meat was either very important or important to them. About 12 percent said they were indifferent, and only six percent of respondents said fresh goat meat was not important.

Monthly Goat Meat Purchases

About 41 percent of respondents said they spend less than \$50 a month on goat meat (see Figure 5), but nearly half of respondents indicated they spend over \$50 a month on goat meat purchases. Note, however, that about 12 percent of the survey respondents said they do not buy goat meat. One possible reason that comes to mind is that these respondents may still live with their parents and may be considered future buyers of goat meat.

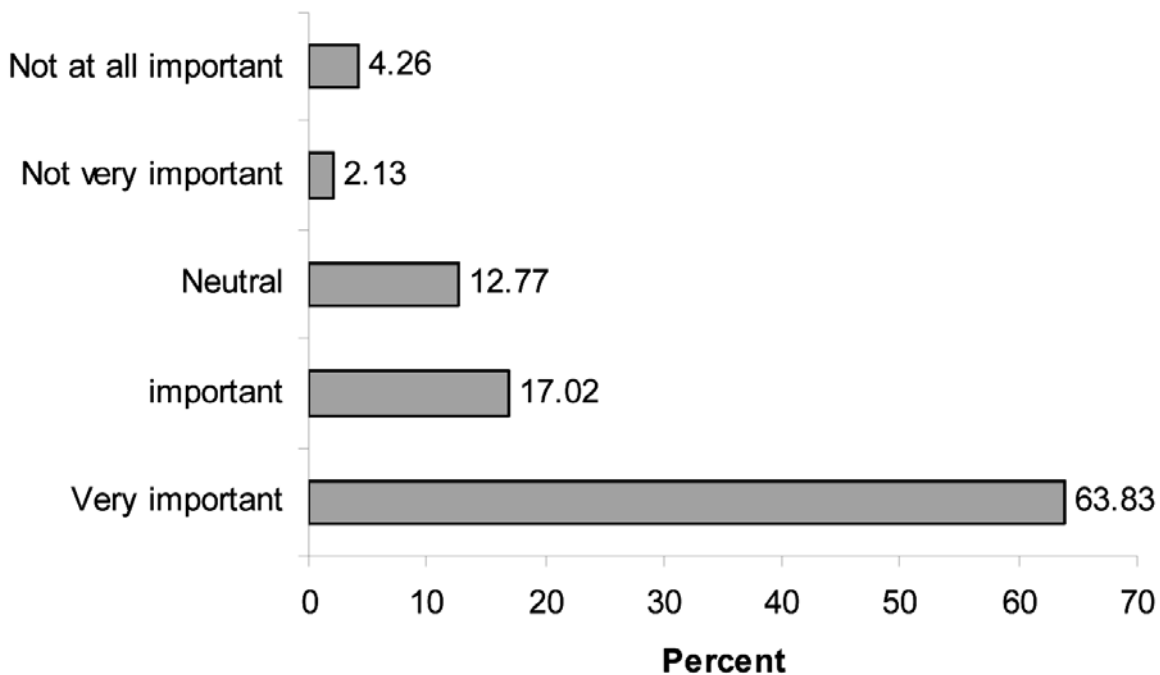


Figure 4. Consumer Preference for Fresh Goat Meat.

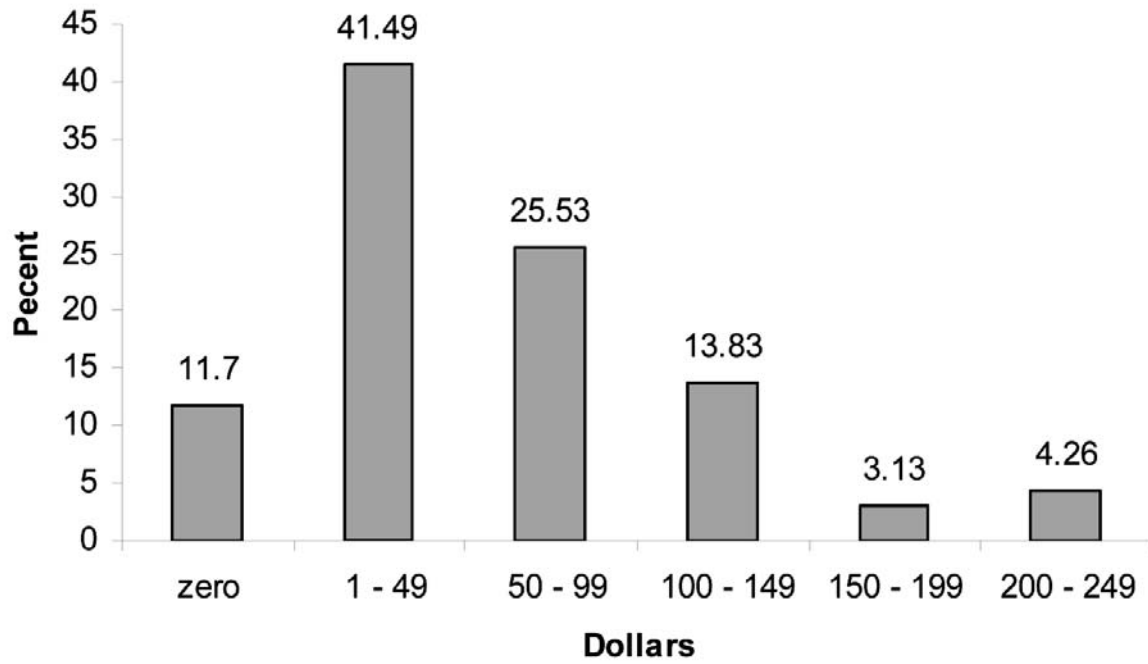


Figure 5. Monthly Purchases of Goat Meat.

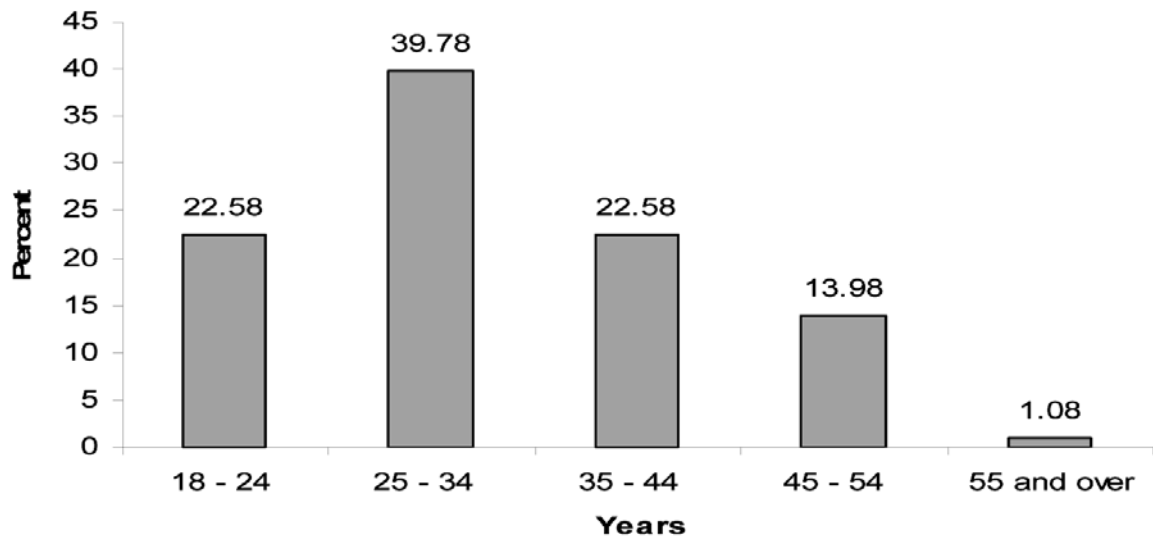


Figure 6. Age Structure.

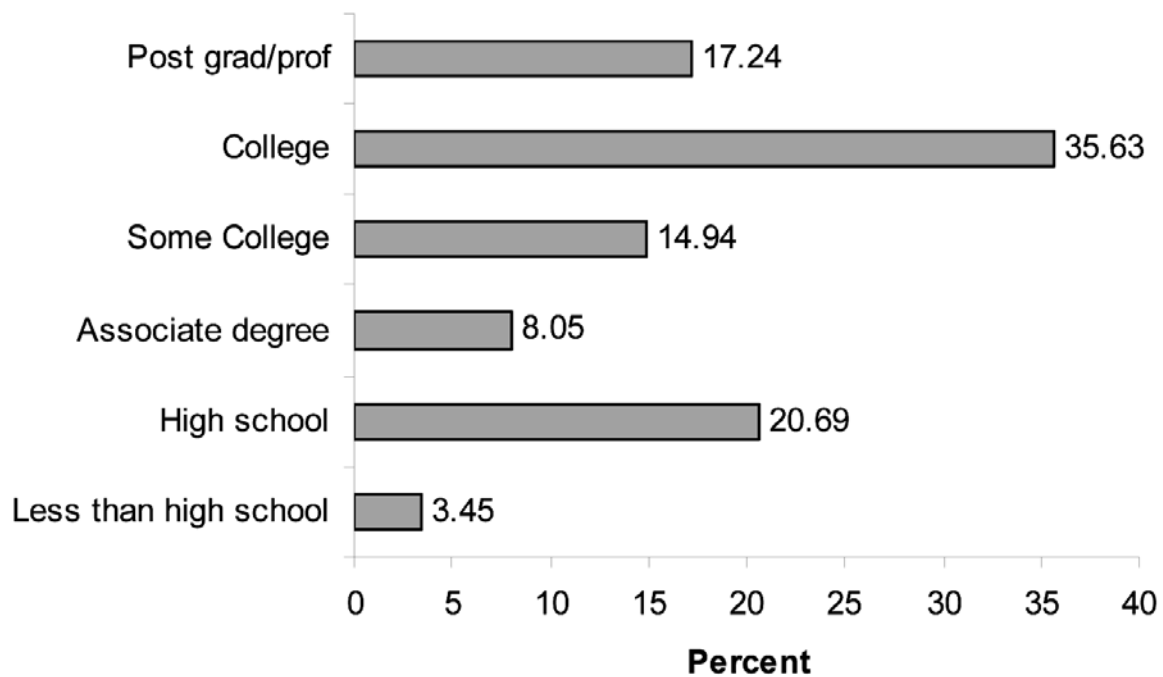


Figure 7. Educational Background.

Young and Educated with Medium to High Income

Figure 6 shows the responses to the question, “Which of the following age groups do you belong to?” More than half of the respondents are less than 35 years old. About 36 percent are between 35 and 55 years of age. This is consistent with the immigrant population. Figure 7 provides responses to the question, “Which of the following represents the highest level of education you have completed?” A majority of respondents said they had at least some college (about 69 percent). Only three percent of respondents had less than high school diploma. This finding is contrary to the assertion that immigrants are less educated. Figure 8 presents the data for responses to the question, “Which of the following categories best describes your total household income before taxes?” Sixty-eight percent of households had income of at least \$25,000. Less than 10 percent of respondents said their income was less than \$10,000. This group may be students who do not have full-time jobs.

Halal Consideration Ranked Highest

When asked to rank their criteria for purchasing goat meat, most respondents ranked halal as the most important attribute. Quality was ranked second and price third. This finding is contrary to earlier studies which claimed that immigrants do not care about quality, and may be a strong indication that immigrant preferences are not homogenous. To our surprise, buying from a Muslim processor ranked at the bottom.

Region of Origin and Number of Years in the U.S.

Most respondents indicated they are from the sub-Saharan African Region (51.32 percent) followed by Asia (23.68 percent). About 16 percent of the respondents said they were from either the Middle East or North Africa. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents indicated they had been in the country ten years or less—a period marked by an influx of immigrants into the U.S. For example, studies have shown that the immigrant population

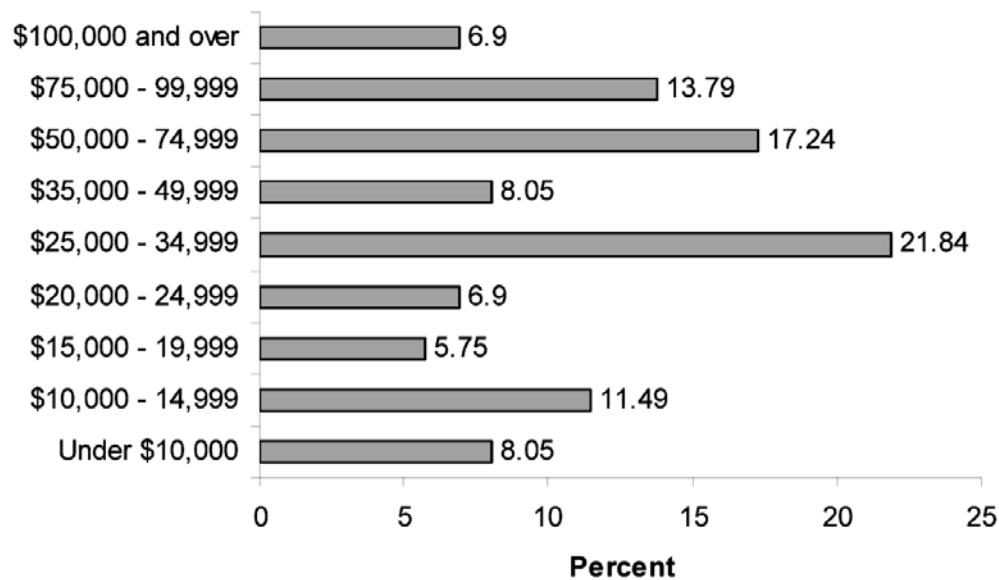


Figure 8. Household Income.

in metropolitan Atlanta more than doubled in size during the 1990s (The Brookings Institute n.d.; Martin 2003).

Implications

This study examines the consumption patterns of goat meat among Muslims in metropolitan Atlanta. To achieve this objective, a survey was conducted using a mosque intercept method and an online method. The findings of this study provide insights into the consumption patterns of goat-meat-eating Muslims in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Muslims in Atlanta consider halal meat to be very important. They eat more goat meat during special occasions such as Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and marriage ceremonies. The study also shows the willingness of respondents to pay a premium for halal goat meat. This means that targeting the halal niche market can be profitable to Georgia meat-goat producers if they can sell directly to Muslim consumers. Thus halal goat meat can be considered a value-added product. The findings also suggest that the halal goat-meat market has a promising future, given that most of the consumers are relatively young, educated, and have relatively high income.

The study has some limitations, however. For example, only Muslims who attended Friday prayers

or had access to computers had the opportunity to be surveyed, which may lead to selection bias. This may limit the application of the findings to the general population. Limitations of the study notwithstanding, the findings still gives us insights into the state of Muslim preference for goat meat in the Atlanta areas.

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