Urban animal agriculture: consumer perspective of rabbit meat in Ibadan metropolis.

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Abstract

Traditionally, agricultural research has focused on production issues even though demand issues should usefully complement production research. Focusing on demand issues will help to improve decision-making in production and marketing activities. With all the merits of rabbit meat, the study revealed that a large proportion of the population in Ibadan metropolis who desire to regularly eat this meat do not have access to it. About 36.00% of those who eat this meat purchase directly from rabbit keepers at prices considered to be high. About 20.00% of all the respondents indicated preference for processed (smoked) rabbit meat, thus creating an opportunity for urban animal farmers to produce this meat for a ready market. This is an avenue to increase producer income by adding value to the meat through processing.

Keywords : Rabbit meat, Protein. Consumer perspective.

Introduction

Urban Animal Agriculture (Definition)

Urban agriculture is said to be practised by an estimated 800 million people who raise crops and livestock, and net fish in towns and cities (Jonas and Schmetzer, 1997). This form of agriculture has been defined by Baumgartner and Belvi (2001) as comprising the production, processing and distribution of a diversity of foods, including vegetables and animal products within or at the fringe of an urban area. Urban animal agriculture can therefore be referred to as the production, processing and distribution of animals and their products within or at the fringe of an urban area.

Meat as a source of proteins

Animals are important source of food of high quality protein that are generally lacking in food of plant origin. Proteins are very important because they are the only dietary source of amino acids. In meat, all the essential amino

acids are well balanced in the ratio that the body needs and that is why according to Schlolaut (1992), meat is considered a source of high quality proteins. Norma (1997) has also observed that meat is so intrinsically important that it is consumed all over the world. In Nigeria, meat is generally eaten as part of daily meals, especially traditional starch based staples such as cassava, yam and maize based meals. Meat, regardless of the size, is consumed as food supplement. Meat can also be considered as an enjoyable nutritious item of both normal and special meals.

Rabbit Meat

Rabbit meat is high in protein (20-22%) and has a lower cholesterol content than most other meats. Its fat content is also low (10-12%) and mainly of the unsaturated type. It also has a low sodium content. A meat type which is a delicacy in a region or to a group of people, may be abominable to another. However, there is no widely known religious or cultural obstacles to

the consumption of rabbit meat and its moderate carcass renders it easily storable. Meat is bought and eaten to be enjoyed even though there are diversities of consumer tastes and expectations.

Urbanization and Animal Protein Consumption

With the current Nigerian population growth rate of about 2.8% and increased urbanization, Brook and Davila (2000) have noted that the projected number of urban dwellers will almost double by the year 2025. Per capita consumption of meat, milk and eggs in Western Africa in 1995 was only 8.2, 16.9, and 2.3 kilograms respectively, which were about 23%, 22% and 31% of the world average per capita consumption of meat, milk and eggs respectively (FAO, 2001). It is expected however that the demand for animal products in Sub-Saharan Africa will more than double by the year 2020 as a result of increased population growth, rapid urbanization and higher income (ILRI, 2000). In order to develop better strategies and technologies for increased production and supply of animal protein, it is imperative to find out the expectations of the end users (consumers) as surveys of consumer needs and expectations help to guide both production and marketing. However, the supply of any product should be a response to the decision of consumers to buy or not to buy such product. Hence, this study was aimed at finding out consumer expectations for rabbit meat and whether these expectations were being met. Specifically, the study was to find out;

*whether or not consumers had easy access to rabbit meat;

*the price at which consumers obtain rabbit meat and the actual price they are willing to pay;

*the features consumers desire in rabbit meat for optimum satisfaction;

*suggestions from consumers on ways to improve and increase the consumption rabbit meat.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in Ibadan metropolis (7° 26'N ; 3° 54'E) which is the capital city of Oyo state and geographically located in the forest zone of south west Nigeria. Ibadan metropolis is administratively made up of five local government areas which in turn comprise of several wards each.

For each of the five local government areas, the list of wards was obtained and five wards were randomly selected from each. Ten households were then selected randomly from each ward. This procedure gave a sample of 250 households. A survey of these 250 households was then carried out with the aid of structured questionnaires and personal interviews with household adult representatives.

Data obtained were analysed using tables and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 250 households covered in this study, 110 had eaten rabbit meat one time or the other while the remaining 140 had never eaten the meat. 16.37% of the rabbit meat eaters consumed the meat without any awareness of the intrinsic benefits of the meat. This group of people consume rabbit meat for satiation while the remaining 83.63% consumed the meat with the awareness of its intrinsic benefits mainly as a good source of protein.

It is assumed and expected that the knowledge of the benefits of a product would stimulate consumers to utilise such product on a regular basis in order to fully exploit the benefits. Seventy-five percent of the non eaters of rabbit meat had not had any opportunity to eat this meat while the remaining 25.00% had several reasons for not eating the meat (Table 1). Nevertheless, 85.71% of these non eaters indicated willingness to eat rabbit meat when the opportunity arises.

Consumer perspective of rabbit meat in Ibadan

Table 1 *Position of Non-consumer Respondents on Rabbit Meat Consumption.*

Characteristics	Frequency	Distribution (%)
Reasons For Not Eating Rabbit Meat		
No opportunity yet	105	75.00
Allergy	2	1.43
Religious/cultural restriction	8	5.72
Personal bias	25	17.83
Awareness of Any Benefit in Consuming Rabbit Meat		
Positive	90	64.30
Negative	50	35.70
Willingness to Eat Rabbit Meat		
Positive	120	85.71
Negative	20	14.29

n = 140

Source : Field Survey, 2001.

Consumption frequency of rabbit meat / Accessibility

It is interesting to note that 16.37% of the rabbit meat eaters consume this meat at least once a week while 13.64% consume it only once a year and 18.18% had not eaten this meat after their first time. The main reason attributed to this trend is the non availability of rabbit meat when

desired. In other words, consumers do not have ready access to the meat (Table 2). It can be seen from Table 2 that the actual consumption rate of rabbit meat is much lower than the desired rate. Slightly over 80.00% of the rabbit consuming respondents desire to consume this meat at least once a week while only 16.37% had access to consume the meat at this rate.

Table 2 : *Frequency of rabbit meat consumption by respondents*

Features	Frequency	Distribution (%)
Frequency of Consumption		
Never after the first time	20	18.18
At least once a week	18	16.37
Once a month	17	15.45
2-3 times a month	14	12.73
Once in 3 months	6	5.45
Once a year	15	13.64
2-3 times a year	20	18.18
Desired Frequency for Rabbit Meat Consumption		
Once a week	24	21.82
At least once a week	65	59.09
Once a month	10	9.09
Twice a month	11	10.91

n = 110

Source : Field Survey, 2001.

Price of Rabbit Meat

With the great importance of animal protein in human diet, it is expected that animal protein sources would be readily available at affordable prices. For an average sized rabbit (1.7kg-2.3kg live weight or 0.8kg-1.2kg dressed weight), 17.28% of buyers paid between N310.00 and N400.00 while 5.45% paid between N410.00 and N500.00. These prices were considered to be on the high side as the meat lasted their households for only an average of two days. Although the intrinsic values of rabbit meat were appreciated, prices will have to be lower for these households to be able to consume the meat more often. About eighty per cent (80.91%) of the respondents indicated willingness to pay not more than N300.00 for an average sized rabbit.

Quality / Features of Rabbit Meat

Quality can be said to be the extent to which a product meets/satisfies the expectation of the buyer/user. Of all the rabbit meat qualities, fat content and meat texture (toughness/tenderness) ranked the most important to the consumers even though the meat texture is not actually confirmed until the meat is eaten while the fat content is usually apparent. The quality of rabbit meat eaten so far has been described as satisfactory by 81.82% of the consumers (Table 3) while 18.18 % expressed dissatisfaction about the meat quality. Quality and meat form preferences as indicated by respondents are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 *Quality of meat as expressed by rabbit meat-consuming-respondents.*

Features	Frequency	Distribution (%)
Quality of Rabbit Meat Eaten so far		
Too fatty	10	9.09
Too tender	8	7.27
Too tough	2	1.82
Just okay (Satisfactory)	90	81.82
Preferred Quality of Rabbit Meat		
Low fat	34	30.91
High fat	10	9.09
Tough texture	33	30.00
Tender texture	27	24.55
Tender texture and low fat	6	5.45

n = 110

Source :Field Survey, 2001.

Table 4 : *Most preferred form of rabbit meat as indicated by all respondents.*

Features	Frequency	Distribution (%)
Most Preferred Form of Rabbit		
Live	79	31.60
Smoked	93	37.20
Dressed (skinned)	47	18.80
Dressed (unskinned)	31	12.40

N = 250

Source : Field Survey, 2001.

Conclusions and Recommendation

For the successful sale of any product, it must be attractive enough to appeal to the potential buyers. Product presentation is thus an important aspect of marketing which should be given necessary attention in the Nigerian livestock industry. It is only by understanding consumers' feelings and expectations and responding in appropriate manner to satisfy them that development can readily take place in the livestock sector. It is evident from this study that quite a large number of people in the study area are aware of the benefits of rabbit meat and are willing to consume this meat on a regular basis even though at present, the supply is far short of meeting the demand. With the desired frequency for the consumption of rabbit meat as expressed by the respondents, there is a ready market to explore in the livestock industry. This is a challenge for livestock farmers to enter the ready market for rabbit meat and direct their production activities to meet consumer specifications. Smallholder farmers and interested individuals can also improve/increase their incomes by adding value to rabbit meat through processing to meet consumer specifications so that the per caput consumption of this meat can increase and so improve the overall protein intake of the populace. In addition, research should be directed towards the development of extension packages for city rabbit keepers to promote and ensure sustainable production of rabbit meat.

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