

# Chapter 3: Consumer Perceptions of Goat Meat

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Market research in the late 1980s, indicated that ethnic consumers were the "backbone" of the goat meat market in Florida. As goat production grew, producers feared that larger supplies of goat meat in the absence of increased consumer demand would result in drastically lower farm-level prices for goats. Ways of reaching new customers had to be found.

The first step in formulating a viable, long-term market development program was to ascertain consumers' existing perceptions of goat meat, both "real" and "imagined." "Real" perceptions, based upon objective product evaluations, allow the industry to actively pursue ways to improve product quality through grades and standards or alternative cooking recommendations if negative product attributes are identified. Similarly, knowledge "imagined" perceptions or consumer attitudes allow the industry to exploit positive images and counteract negative images through various educational and promotional programs.

A review of literature revealed little about consumers' attitudes toward goat meat. The literature search found several palatability studies which compared goat with beef, pork, lamb and even horse. However, the palatability studies had used standardized laboratory cooking methods that appeared to put goat meat at a disadvantage.

Because of the limited information available on goat meat, several studies were conducted by the Florida Agricultural Market Research Center. One study explored consumer attitudes towards goat meat while the other obtained more appropriate product evaluations by having consumers evaluate goat meat barbecued, a cooking method commonly used by consumers and many foodservice establishments.

## CONSUMER ATTITUDES

Consumer attitudes toward goat meat were explored in focus group interviews conducted in Tampa and Jacksonville, and also during a survey of 600 consumers. Several negative factors were identified that could impair market development efforts for the product, but there were some positive findings as well.

There is a pervasive perception among consumers that red meat is "bad" for health; this perception has manifested itself in dramatically reduced beef consumption in recent years. This continuing downward trend could negatively affect goat as well, unless there is documentation that the nutritional composition of goat meat is superior to other red meats such as beef and pork. Another commonplace perception is that goats are cute little animals that belong on idyllic farms, in nursery rhymes or in petting zoos, rather than on the dinner table. Some focus group participants expressed their disgust with the idea of eating goat, saying "It's like eating a pet...like a dog or cat." Another relatively common negative perception is that goats will eat anything from tin cans to tires, and trash consumption results in inedible or poor quality meat. Still another negative image of goat meat persists among older men that served in World War II. These ex-servicemen say they were fed strong-smelling, foul-tasting "goat" (probably mutton) during the war when shortages of beef, pork and poultry were common.

Fortunately, there are many positive images of goat meat as well. Many consumers have a perception that goat's milk is especially nutritious and, therefore, goat meat should be healthful as well. Another positive finding was that, when asked to describe possible outlets, they indicated that "trendy," "upscale" restaurants would likely serve goat. Of the 600 taste panel consumers, the majority described restaurants selling goat meat in positive terms, such as "clean," "well maintained," "moderately priced," "tastefully decorated," and "in a nice part of town." Negative restaurant associations were expressed by a minority of respondents.

Names commonly used in the industry for goat meat were also examined. Using a psychological word association technique, the 600 consumers in Tampa and Jacksonville were asked for first impressions of "chevon," "cabrito" and "goat." Additionally, each respondent was asked to indicate the social class of people that would consume each of the items. In general, "chevon" and "cabrito" received more favorable association than did "goat." Additionally, "chevon" and "cabrito" were usually associated with higher social classes than "goat". The implications of these associations are clear for the goat industry: "chevon" and "cabrito" project a better image than