

# Consumers' Preference for Goat Meat in the United States

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## Introduction

The numbers of meat goats in the U.S. have slightly declined in recent years while the tonnages of imported frozen goat meat from Australian and New Zealand have increased (Pinkerton and McMillin, 2012a, b). Previous survey research of Muslim goat meat consumers (Fisher et al., 2009; Ibrahim et al., 2008; and Worley et al., 2004) indicated preference for Halal meat, particularly during religious holidays, with some consumers preferring fresh goat meat and to slaughter goats themselves. Males older than 41 years of age, non-Caucasian, and non-Catholic individuals were found more likely to consume goat meat in studies of consumers in Southern areas of the U.S. (Knight et al., 2006; Nelson et al, 2004; McLean-Meyinsse, 2003). Increased numbers of immigrants, more emphasis on local production, and consumer awareness of natural and organic food choices have increased opportunities for small-scale farmers. There is a lack of knowledge about goat meat consumers, which limits strategic planning by individual goat producers and collectively, the meat goat industry. This survey was designed to sample national representative populations of goat meat eaters and the general U.S. to determine goat meat preferences and opinions for at-home consumption.

## Materials and Methods

A survey questionnaire was developed to ask questions about the frequency, occasions, and form of goat meat consumption; query preferences and attitudes about goat meat and live goats; provide choices between characteristics of type of cut, color, source, and price of goat meat and age, sex, slaughter method, and price of live goats to determine relative differences in through conjoint analysis; and give socioeconomic and demographic data on respondents. An internet company obtained data from 2000 general respondents and 2000 goat meat eaters from their representative national sample populations. Goat meat eaters were designated as individuals 18 years of age and older who had eaten goat meat in the past year,

## Results and Discussion

The demographics of the general population respondents were average of 48.4 years of age, 58.8% female, 85% white, 7% black, 4% Asian, 7.1% Hispanic, 4.4% Asian descent, 5.2% African descent, 31.4% from South region, 24.3% West region, 19.7% Northeast region, and 24.7% Midwest region. Of the general population respondents, 12.8% had eaten goat meat in the past year, with the majority (86.7%) purchasing goat meat cuts, 3.9% purchasing live goats, and 9.4% purchasing both. Most of the general population respondents (87.2%) had not eaten goat meat in the past year and 76% of those had never eaten goat meat. Responses to the question of

“Why have you never eaten goat meat?” indicated that 43.2% had never heard of eating goat meat, 41.7% did not have goat meat available in their grocery or meat shop, 10.2% consider goats as pets not intended for consumption, 3.6% had been told by others that it is not tasty, 3.6% considered goat meat too expensive compared with other meats, and 1.2% thought that only low class people eat goat meat. Of the general population, 0.2% considered themselves vegan and 0.1% as vegetarian.

A follow-up question gave choices as to occasions when individuals who had never eaten goat meat were likely to try goat meat. 34.8% indicated that they might try goat meat at a grocery store providing samples of cooked goat meat, 34.7% as part of a meal served at a friend’s home, 31.4% as an appealing menu item served in an ethnic restaurant, and 29% at a social gathering which included goat meat as part of the meal. Only 2.9% indicated that they would never try goat meat under any circumstance. The reasons for not eating goat meat regularly if goat meat had been tried were not available in my grocery or meat shop 51.7%, just not part of my culture 33%, don’t know how to cook goat meat 25.7%, didn’t like the taste 18.5% and too expensive compared with other meats 11.4%. 63.1% would be willing to eat goat meat more often as an appealing item at an ethnic restaurant and 61.9% at a social gathering with goat meat as part of the meal, 29.6% as part of a recipe in a food magazine and 22.6% as part of a recipe seen on a cooking show, but 7.7% would never eat goat meat again under any circumstance.

The demographics of the respondents indicating that they had eaten goat meat 1 to 2 times in the past year were average of 41.5 years of age, 59% male, 65.4% white, 12.9% black, 12% Asian, 15.6% Hispanic, 12.1% Asian descent, 8% African descent, 33.9% from South region. 26.3% West region, 20.4% Northeast region, and 19.5% Midwest region. The goat meat eating respondents purchased goat meat cuts (85.8%) while 5% purchased live goats and 9.2% purchased both. The demographics, except for male:female ratios and slight ethnic differences, of the goat meat eating population matched those of the respondents in the general population.

Of goat meat eaters, 59.4% consume goat meat on no specific occasion, with consumption on special occasions or other holidays 30.7%, Easter 15.1%, Ramadan 5.6%, and Christmas 14.1%. Goat meat consumption by goat eaters in a restaurant were stratified with 39.5% responding 0 to 26% of the time and 38% responding 76 of 100% of the time. Conjoint analysis allows comparison of different levels of variables that represent realistic combinations of choices that consumers might make. The levels for meat choices were whole carcass, half carcass, chops, and cubes for cuts; light pink, medium red, and dark red for meat color; fresh domestic, frozen domestic, and frozen import for meat source; and \$3.89, \$5.39, and \$6.89 per pound for price of goat meat. Relative importance of the attributes were cut 68%, source 15%, price 14%, and color 3%. The levels for purchase of live goats were intact male, castrated male, and female for gender; less than one year, one year, and two years for age; slaughtered by buyer, farmer, or commercial for slaughter choice; and \$75, \$130, and \$195 per head for live goat price. Slaughter type (33%) and goat age (32%) were more important than goat sex (18%) and price (17%) to goat eaters who purchased live goats.

Goat eating consumers who purchased meat preferred chops and cubes over whole and half carcasses. The attribute color was found not to be very important to consumers' choices. Consumers valued fresh domestic over frozen domestic or frozen imported goat meat. Non-white goat consumers preferred half carcasses, imported meat, and darker color of goat meat. Consumers of goat meat once per month or more frequently preferred purchasing whole or half carcasses, as did Hispanic respondents. Goat eaters who purchased live goats preferred purchasing goats of less than one year of age with slaughter by the farmer rather than by themselves or in a commercial plant. Hispanics preferred one or two year old goats.

## Conclusions

The demographics of goat eaters and general population of the respondents surveyed were similar, with about the same proportions of goat eaters purchasing meat and live goats from each survey group. Only 2.9% of respondents who had never eaten goat meat would never try it under any circumstances, 18.5% did not like the taste of goat meat, and 7.7% who had eaten goat meat would never eat goat meat under any circumstances. Goat meat color was less important to consumer consuming goat meat than cut, source, and price of goat meat. Slaughter method and goat age were more important to goat meat eaters purchasing live goats than price and goat sex. The results of the survey indicate that many marketing niches exist for goat meat and live goat sales for meat goat producers to exploit.

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