

## A NOTE ON THE MEAT-CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF A GROUP OF BLACK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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As meat consumption predictions are essentially related to meat-eating habits and patterns, a relatively accurate idea of the latter characteristics becomes imperative. However, consumer resistance to the high-price trend, particularly in regard to the red meats, can modify such short or long-term predictions, but not to the extent of nullifying their usefulness in terms of advance planning in agriculture. In any case, the rapid escalation in human population numbers, with concomitant wage rises, must tend to stimulate rather than decrease the overall demand for meat.

This report is the result of an initial probe into the meat preferences of Fort Hare students, predominantly undergraduates, and was carried out by means of questionnaires which were completed under the direction and control of four agricultural students appointed to collect the necessary information. A total of 392 students, representing approximately 64% of the total number, were approached for their opinions in 1970 and the results are indicated below.

Table 1

*Meat preference list*

Meat type	1st %	2nd %	3rd %	4th %	5th %	Won't eat or not liked %
Beef	7,4	15,6	43,5	17,4	15,3	0,8
Goat	0,3	3,0	5,4	21,0	54,0	16,4
Mutton	51,9	34,0	7,7	2,1	3,8	0,5
Pork	6,0	11,1	15,7	23,8	26,7	16,8
Poultry	31,7	30,6	17,5	12,0	7,1	1,0 -K-

-K- figure applies to fowls only - some students indicated that they would not eat turkey (9,7%), duck (13,4%) and geese (16,5%).

The preferences of the student sample are summarized in Table 1. The results tend to bear out the traditional thinking and conservatism of the group and relates to that commonly found in the rural areas. Cattle are still regarded highly in the tribal structure and the fact that their reproductive cycle is such that it takes many years under existing conditions of nutrition and management to replace such animals, causes the build-up of a great reluctance on the part of the owners to slaughter them, unless motivated by a special occasion.

Beef, as in the case of mutton and poultry, was eaten by all but a few Blacks in the group. The goat has long been associated with the folklore of the African and is more generally considered from a ritualistic viewpoint than one of straight meat provision. A high percentage (16,4%) declined to eat goats, or did not

like this item as an article of their diet. Sheep, which were introduced into the Nguni culture apparently after the 1800's, play no part in tribal affairs. However, they are important economically in many areas and mutton tends to be high on the preference list. The more rapid turn-over too would tend to be a valid point in its favour.

There is little clarity as to when the pig came into the hands of African tribesman but it is generally assumed that this resulted from various shipwrecks on the south-east coast of Africa. The pig is beginning to play a more prominent part in meat provision than hitherto. Pork, however, has a low popularity rating, although bacon and ham are well liked by the average student (refer Table 2). Reasons for not eating pork were given as "religion", "tribal beliefs" and one student mentioned that "it smells bad". In the rural areas there are several taboos associated with pork and the above "reasons" are not unexpected. Considering that there is a high incidence of cysticercosis in Black-owned pigs (Brown, 1970), particularly in the Hut-pig, a scavenger type, the reluctance to eat pork was less than anticipated. Poultry, which refers predominantly to fowls, contributes more to the diet of the average Black than is commonly appreciated and it is not surprising to find this article of diet high on the choice list. Both the pig and the fowl belong to the womenfolk in the tribal structure, unlike the other farm animals which are usually under the ownership of the men.

During the course of the survey, information concerning other categories of meat was collected and this is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

*Acceptability of processed and other meats*

Item	Acceptable %	Not acceptable %	No answer or preference %
Bacon	60,1	10,2	29,7
Equines	8,4	89,4	2,2
Meat with high fat content	55,0	42,3	2,6
Fish	96,4	1,3	2,3
Ham	58,4	10,9	30,6
Hare (wild)	71,4	28,6	-
Kid (goat)	17,4	56,1	26,5
Lamb	30,3	43,9	25,8
Rabbit (domestic)	38,3	61,1	0,5
Veal	45,0	28,9	26,1
Venison	74,3	25,1	0,5

On the whole, the outcome of the survey, as reflected by the figures in Table 2, is in line with prevailing tendencies in the rural and urban areas. Bacon and ham, once tasted, appear to be relished and the high number of students not stating a preference one way or another, have most likely not come in contact with these meats in the past. In preceding years, the African has always had a preference, as far as can be ascertained, for meat with a great deal of fat attached, and the group majority still favour such fatty meat. Few of the group interviewed considered the flesh of equines as being acceptable, although of those who eat horse meat, the majority are Sotho with a few Zulu and Xhosa included.

Fish is readily eaten by the majority of Blacks, and the students are no exception. It would appear that the mines, with their migrant labour system, have contributed greatly to the ready acceptance of fish in the diet of the average Black. This is a considerable achievement when it is considered that fish were tagged with the label of 'nyoka' or snake not so many years ago. It is of interest to note that the hare is eaten by a high percentage but that the domestic rabbit would appear to be thought of as being less desirable from a food point of view. This is most probably due to lack of exposure to this type of meat.

The eating of meat derived from young animals is not popular and it is certainly foreign for a rural

Black to slaughter his young animals as they are regarded as his future "bank balance" and hence security. It is realism of a high degree that is responsible for this state of affairs, particularly when additional reasons are sought. The reproductive rate is generally low (calving percentage under 40; lambing percentage 50-80) and with high preweaning mortality (calves 15-30%; lambs 10-40%) (Brown, 1969), the lack of support for the meat of young animals becomes more apparent. Venison is popular, and several students volunteered that they enjoyed biltong, although this aspect was not included on the questionnaire.

The number of students replying to certain categories would suggest that some are not acquainted with these types of meat, although the majority appear to have had exposure to nearly all categories at some time or another. This is best illustrated by indicating that 391 students gave a positive opinion in regard to beef and mutton, but only 370 volunteered such an opinion in the case of pork. While it is assumed that all had been exposed to the meat of the hare, in which category 392 students gave forceful answers, this was not the case with the meat from young animals where a lesser number replied and decisiveness declined accordingly.

In conclusion, two students indicated that they were vegetarians, and two ate only poultry meat and fish but no other meat.

#### References

- BROWN, D.L., 1969. *A study of the animal and crop production systems and potential of the Bantu Ciskeian territories*. D.Sc. (Agric.) thesis, University of O.F.S.
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