

# CONSUMERS' OPINION ABOUT RABBIT MEAT CONSUMPTION IN HUNGARY

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to get information about the rabbit meat consumption habits of Hungarian consumers. Data were collected by questionnaires (n=1274). The official rabbit meat consumption data (0,1 kg/person/year) is calculated by the difference of the carcass weight of the purchased and slaughtered rabbits and the weight of the exported rabbit meat. However, most of the decreasing number of small and medium scale rabbit farmers, rabbit breeders has a regular self-consumption, and they sell living animals and carcasses to friends, neighbours and also to local markets. Differences were found between the answers of the asked sample population by living in Budapest (n=543) or in the countryside (n=731). In this study countryside means all regions of Hungary except Budapest. A lot of people can not make difference between rabbit and hare, so our first task was to make clear the difference between the two species. 75% of the asked population in Budapest has already tasted rabbit meat, but 70% of them eat it only one or twice a year. Those people who have a negative attitude towards rabbit meat are vegetarian or refuse consumption due to emotional reasons. One third of the people buys living animals or the whole carcasses (8% and 26%) and 46% is looking for different parts of the rabbit. 66% of the consumers (almost all from the centre of the city) would like to buy semi-finished or ready-made products. The culture of rabbit meat cooking is very poor, only 14% of the people could list more than 2 rabbit recipes. The housewives of the suburban area prefer the rabbit carcass from the farmer or from small butcher shops instead of the supermarkets. Most of them do not trust in the quality and the freshness of the meat in the supermarkets, and they wouldn't like to pay much more for the carcass than the price of the poultry meat. More people have a negative attitude towards rabbit meat in the countryside than in Budapest. Most of them have never tasted it. However the most frequent problem is the lack of rabbit meat and rabbit products in the supermarkets in the country, so the urban citizens who like rabbit meat can not buy it in their preferred shops. The culture of processing and cooking domestic rabbit meat is very poor in the Hungarian cuisine. Only 7% of the people could list more than 2 rabbit recipes.

Several possibilities were found to improve the rabbit meat consumption. The marketing can be ineffective only in the vegetarian group.

**Key words:** Rabbit, Meat consumption, Meat processing, Hungarian cuisine, Marketing.

## INTRODUCTION

Meat rabbit is a nourishing alternative for people, the rabbit meat has well known nutritious characteristics (low cholesterol, high protein) (Bleyer, 2002/a). After a decline lasting for several years in the last few years there is a more and less stabil situation in the quantity of live rabbits sold (11,000-13,000 tons) and in the volume of export of slaughtered rabbits (5,000-6,000 tons) in Hungary (Kling, 2005). The changes of the European (or maybe the world) rabbit meat market have great influence on the Hungarian rabbit production (Virág, 1996), because the Hungarian rabbit meat production strongly export oriented (about 95% of the production sold abroad). In Hungary approx. 270,000 does took part in the production (Colin and Lebas, 2000) and the number of farms with more than 200 does increased. The number of rabbits were over 21,000 at registered rabbit producers, when the organised rabbit purchase by the slaughterhouses was finished.

Domestic consumption of rabbit meat continues to be negligible (Szendrő, 2005): although total self-consumption rose, only about 3-5% of the processed rabbits were sold on the domestic market. The domestic consumption was calculated as the difference between the weight of processed rabbit and the weight of the exported meat. The official rabbit meat consumption is not more than 0,1 kg/person/year (Bleyer, 2002/b). The rabbit meat sold only in few supermarkets and the price is two or three times higher than the poultry meat (Colin *et al.*, 1996). Additionally, rabbit production systems in Hungary have a potential for higher domestic consumption and being sustainable.

One of the most notorious gaps of information is how the consumption of rabbit meat is carried out in Hungary. The main objective of this paper was to study the consumers' opinion about the rabbit meat, and the pattern of domestic consumption (Budapest and the country).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to obtain the information a survey of questionnaire was designed and carried out. The questionnaire with 19 questions was aimed at knowing the traits of the involved population, and the rabbit meat consumption patterns in Hungary.

The questions focused on the following areas:

- personal information about sample (sex, age, living place)
- connection with rabbit production)
- opinion about rabbit meat consumption (causes of rejection)
- opinion about rabbit meat
- frequency of consumption
- places of purchasing rabbit
- form of purchasing rabbit
- opinion about prices
- information about cooking recipes
- effects which can increase consumption frequency.

The survey was applied in Budapest and all over in Hungary (except Budapest) as study areas. The selection of the interviewees was random. Sample size was established in 1274 surveys (Budapest n=543, countryside n=731).

Data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistic (central tendency and dispersion measures). Results were expressed as proportions and percentages of the analyzed sample with SPSS (Martin and Acuna, 2002).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results in Budapest

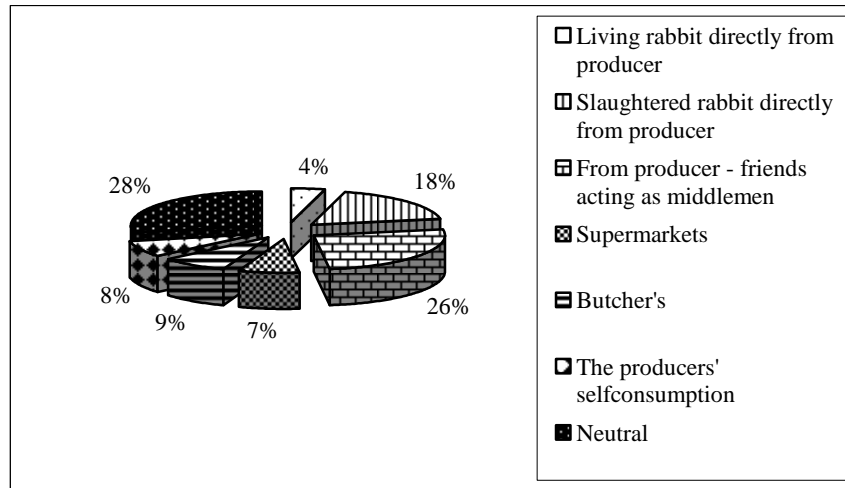
We noticed that the interviewees often can not make difference between rabbit and hare, so our first task was to make clear the difference, because the meat quality alter between the two species.

The sex rate of the sample was 64% female and 36% male. 67% of the ladies belonged to the young (18-35 years) category. The motivation for try out new products is easy in this group.

Those who themselves are rabbit breeders or have a direct and close connection with producers are living in the peripheral suburban areas of the capital. The rabbit breeders have a regular self-consumption, and they sell living animals and carcasses to friends, neighbours and also for local markets (3% eat rabbit meat every week). 75% of the asked population has already tasted rabbit meat,

in the opinion 76% of them it is healthy and it has the same character as the poultry meat has, but 70% of them eat it only one or two times a year.

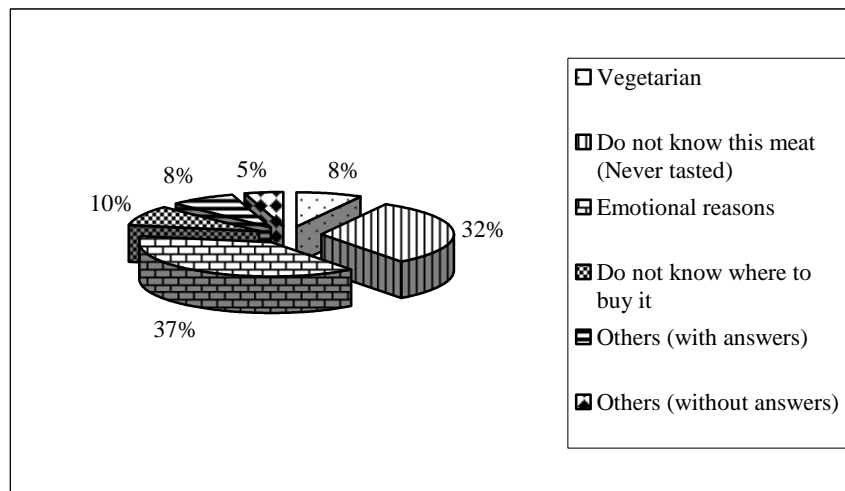
One third part of the people buy living animals or the whole carcasses (8% and 26%) and 46% is looking for different parts of the rabbit. 66% of the consumers would like to buy semi-finished or ready-made products. The sample population does not trust in the supermarkets, only 7% of them buy rabbit there (Figure 1), less than the rate of producers' selfconsumption (8%). Most of the consumers buy rabbit from producers (48%).



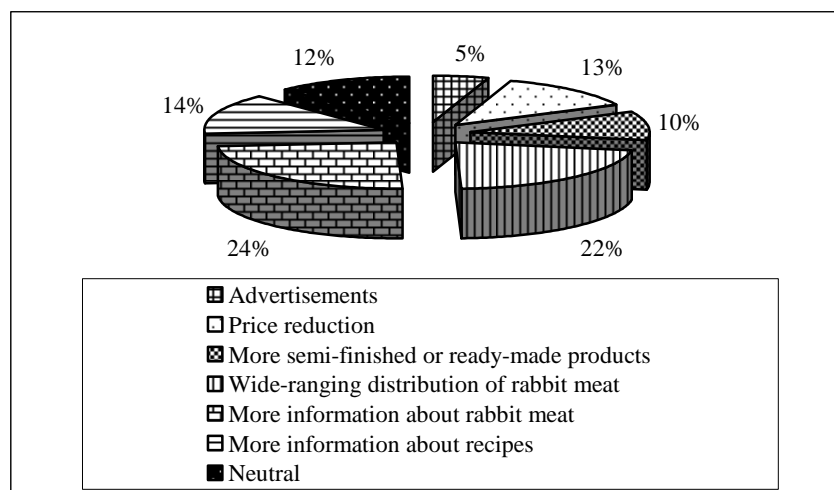
**Figure 1:** The preference of sources where the consumers buy rabbit/rabbit meat

The culture of rabbit meat cooking is very poor in Hungary, only 14% of the people could list more than 2 rabbit recipes.

Discussing with the people about the causes of rejection (Figure 2) of rabbit meat consumption, we found that from those people who have a negative attitude to rabbit meat only the vegetarians and/or who refuse consumption due to emotional reasons reject so strongly that there is no way to convince them. It seems that better distribution (Figure 3) and more information about rabbit meat, and all this combined with introductory price reduction can be effective in the changing of peoples attitude.



**Figure 2:** The main causes of rejection of rabbit meat consumption



**Figure 3:** The proportions of positive effects for motivation of rabbit meat consumption

### Results in countryside

The results are very similar to the results of the sample from Budapest. In most questions there is no difference in the opinion of people living in the capital or in the countryside. Outstanding the difference in the preference of buying living rabbit (Country: 42% vs. Budapest: 11%). Most of the consumers buy rabbit directly from farmer (70%), and unsatisfied with the distribution of rabbit meat in supermarkets. 46% of the interviewees found the rabbit meat too expensive in the shops, and buy it only one or two times a year. The fact that farmers selfconsumption is high suggests that the frequent rabbit meat consumption among them a social necessity too.

## CONCLUSIONS

More than 1/3 part of the sample population eat rabbit meat, but most of them buy it only 1-2 times a year directly from the producer (the meat is always fresh, and the price is cheaper than in the supermarkets). Peoples need better information about rabbit meat and about the ways of processing (recipes) and the increasing of domestic production seems to be accessible. The marketing work can be ineffective only among the vegetarians and those who reject consumption due to emotional reasons.

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