

FOCUS GROUP EXAMINATION OF THE HABITS OF TRADITIONAL HUNGARIAN MEAT PRODUCT CONSUMERS

Erika BAKONYI, Nikoletta BÖRÖNDI-FÜLÖP

Kaposvár University, Faculty of Economic Science, Hungary
bakonyi.erika@ke.hu

ABSTRACT

Traditional food products present a great opportunity in the competition between imported and domestic food products, because most customers acknowledge the value of their authenticity (Szakály et al., 2004). They are well-known in Hungary and abroad. Traditional meat products are especially well-known, and the Hungarian meat industry has a great past and great traditions. In this survey our aim was to get to know consumers' attitudes and consumption and purchase habits related to meat, especially traditional meat products. We made 3 focus group interviews in 3 towns in South-Transdanubia with 8 participants in each group. As a summary of the focus group discussions' results, it can be said that the participants have good opinions about the Hungarian meat industry. They trust its products, especially the traditional ones, because these are considered to be more natural and thus healthier. The results confirmed that meat is a product of which customers especially want to know the origin. The largest disadvantage of traditional products is perceived to be their price; this seems to be an increasing problem nowadays. However, if they can be sure that they are really buying a good Hungarian product, customers are willing to pay the higher prices. There is need for a reliable quality and authenticity trademark system to this, because consumers currently face too many nominations. The participants consider the traditions-flavours-regions collection to be a good start, but no one had heard about it prior to the meeting of the focus group, so there is a need for its further popularization.

Keywords: tradition, meat industry, meat consumption, focus group

INTRODUCTION

Although the inland market has strategic significance for the food companies, the proportion of Hungarian food products in the retail has been decreasing for years. However, there are some positive tendencies lately, more surveys justified that consumers prefer the Hungarian products if they cost as much as the import, and they are considered to be high-quality (Szakály et al., 2009). Traditional food products mean a great opportunity in the competition, because most of the customers acknowledge their added value and are willing to pay higher price for them, and they are well-known in Hungary as well as in abroad.

Traditional meat products are especially well-known, and Hungarian meat industry has great past and traditions. For the sake of that we could take advantage of these facts and protect the traditional Hungarian meat products from the foreign competitors, there is a need for a community marketing strategy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To shape this strategy we have to collect information first, therefore in this survey our aim was getting to know the consumers' attitudes and consumption and purchase habits of meat and especially traditional meat products.

In order to get to know the consumers' opinion about the topic in details we chose a qualitative research method, the focus group discussion. We made 3 interviews in 3 towns in South-Transdanubia with 8 participants in each group. The towns were Kaposvár, Szekszárd and Pécs, the participants were 2 women and 2 men under 40 and 2 women and 2 men above 40, all of them meat consumers. We did not choose more women than men as usual, because we thought that men consume more meat so they know more about the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Association play

We played an association play with the participations first. It turned out that they feel a tight connection between tradition and food, they listed several kinds of food in each group hearing the word „tradition”.

The word „meat” reminded the members of group in Kaposvár and Pécs mostly chicken, while in Szekszárd the participants consume presumably more diverse types of meat because they listed even turkey, pork, fish, salami, game, mutton, sausage and gammon besides chicken.

There was an interesting difference among the groups reacting to the expression „Hungarian product”, too: consumers in Pécs listed Hungarian products, like onion, sausage, paprika, tomato, unikum, while in Szekszárd they thought of them as a „quality category”, answers were here „let's consume them”, „it would be the best”. Some members in Kaposvár worded their disadvantage, too: they are expensive, although trendy.

From the word „quality” the brand name Pick came to several participants' mind, in Szekszárd more traditional Hungarian meat products were listed, they think that it is important that we check the origin of products and „if it is Hungarian, then has good quality, too”. The other groups were more sceptic, some members said that quality is expensive and doubtful.

To the word „trademark” they connect mostly positive words like trust, quality, reliability, even so they do not really trust them, because in their opinion there are too many trademarks and these also can be faked, so the consumers can not make it out.

Meat purchasing habits

In the next part of the discussion we talked about the participants' meat consumption and purchase habits. As for the meat purchasing habits it can be said that the consumers' opinion corresponded that meat is a confidential product and they never buy it in hypermarkets. Instead, they prefer local butcher's, most of the consumers has their favourite place and purchase there every time. However, they purchase directly from farmers only if they know them. Several participants make

sausage at home, because so „at least they know what it contains”. Pig-killing at home was mentioned several times in connection with traditional meat products, some of the participants think that traditional products cannot be purchased in stores, only home-made is traditional, it would be the best if raw materials could be grown at home, too, though it is almost impossible nowadays.

Most of the consumers plan their purchasing, but sales or seeing an appetising product can influence them. It is important that the meat product appeals to the consumers, almost everyone decide to buy or not the product after watching it. The choice is influenced by price, too, but the participants try to lay stress on the quality.

According to the results of these focus group discussions, there is a tendency that more and more men take part in purchasing, the person who cooks or has more free time do the shopping.

Important viewpoints in meat-purchasing

In the next task the participants had to select cards. There were viewpoints on the cards which can be important when buying meat and they had to select first, which are those that influence them and which are irrelevant for them, then they had to put the important ones in order.

The viewpoints listed were: routine, salubrity, speciality, the whole family likes it, it is available everywhere, price, quality, price/value rate, brand, trademark, acquaintances' recommendation, advertising, Hungarian origin, short-order, traditional production process, wrapping, security, environmental viewpoints.

The order of the viewpoints was similar in the three groups: in Kaposvár salubrity was thought to be the most important, followed by security, quality, Hungarian origin and price, in Pécs the top three were the same in the order quality, salubrity and security, followed by price, while in Szekszárd after the most important security and salubrity comes the Hungarian origin.

They noticed in each group that although the shortlisted things are or at least should be more important than price, nowadays more and more consumers can not afford buying better products so it is still a significant viewpoint. As one of the participants said: “price would not be important if we had money”.

Traditional Hungarian products

As a next step participants were asked about traditional foods. They thought the process to be the most important criteria of traditional foods, traditional is “what our ancestors made the same way”, the process “remained through generations”, and is of old standing.

They highlighted the importance of curing in case of meat products. They trust the traditional products that these are smoked, while every common product is thought to be quick-cured. The components are connected to this tightly: in the participants' opinion if the process is traditional, the product contains genuine components, for example garlic instead of garlic powder and flavour degrees which are often used in common food products.

Because of these, almost every participants rely on the traditional products better than mass-products, and trust is more and more important since the food scandals in the recent past.

Some of the participants think that tradition is more important in case of meat products than other food products.

In the next question we examined what is accepted as Hungarian product, what the criteria are in the participants' opinion. They agreed that the most important are the components; the raw materials have to be Hungarian, "to be grown in Hungarian soil". Raw materials are followed by processing.

Opinions about the question whether it is important that we buy Hungarian products or not were very different. Some participants think that quality, taste and price are much more important than origin, "if it is good and cheap, I buy it". Some of them, however, consider the Hungarian origin to be primary, because they trust the Hungarian products.

Participants agreed that we can support the Hungarian economy by purchasing Hungarian products, but they do not consider this in the course of shopping. Even those who try to buy only Hungarian products said that he or she does that, especially in case of meat products, because of their taste and quality.

This difference caused disagreement in the next question, too, while in this we were curious about the extra price the consumers are willing to pay for traditional meat products. Eventually they agreed on 10-15%, because the traditional methods are more labour-intensive than mass-production, and maybe even 15-20% is acceptable in case of curled products.

However, they only pay this additional charge if they can be sure about the product's origin and its traditional process. There is a need for a trustable and transparent trademark system to this.

Most of the participants think that environment protection is important and try to take it into consideration in the course of shopping. They prefer for example the returnable stripping and products with less wrapper. However, none of them prefer the local products because of environment protection viewpoints, it does not occur to them that their environment may be defended with the reduction of the transportation distance.

CONCLUSION

The participants are with good opinion about the Hungarian meat industry, they trust its products, especially the traditional ones, because these are considered to be more naturally and that is why more healthy also. It is important for the customers that they know the meat products' origin.

In the participants' opinion the largest advantage of the traditional meat products is their taste, most of them think that if someone taste these products, he will buy them.

In contrast with this the largest disadvantage of them is thought to be their price. However, if the consumers can be sure that they really buy a good and Hungarian product, the taller price is often willing to be paid. There is a need for a trustable trademark system to this, because the consumers face too many nominations currently and they do not believe them.

REFERENCES

- Szakály, Z., Pallóné Kisérdi, I., Nábrádi, A. (eds.) (2009): Marketing a hagyományos és tájjellegű élelmiszerek piacán. Kaposvár : Kaposvári Egyetem 1-264. p.
- Szakály, Z., Szigeti, O., Sente, V. (2004): Hagyományos magyar termékek marketing-lehetőségeinek elemzése a vidékfejlesztés szempontjainak figyelembevételével. In Varga Gy. (eds.): EU-tanulmányok V., Budapest : TAS-11 Kft., 465-496. p.