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Retailing Turkey Parts

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SUMMARY

Retailing of turkey parts is gradually increasing in Texas food stores. At least one regional food chain has found a ready market for the product. Inadequate supplies rather than lack of consumer demand have been the main problem.

Most purchasers interviewed at one super-market handling the parts year-round are steady users of the product.

More than half the shoppers interviewed served turkey parts three to five times a month.

The meatiest turkey parts are sold to higher income families as parts or as deboned turkey steaks. The bonier parts are purchased by low-income shoppers.

Size, freshness, cleanliness and plumpness of the turkey parts are considered most by shoppers.

Those buying turkey parts rated them very favorably as to family acceptance compared with other meats such as beef, pork, fish and chicken.

A wide variety of dishes is being prepared with turkey parts. Baking is the most prevalent method of preparation. Other methods include smothered, steamed, stewed, creamed, soup and salads.

Turkey is appearing more and more frequently during the year on the dinner table of American families. In many parts of the country, it has been introduced in new forms such as turkey parts, turkey steaks, cut-up turkey and turkey patties.

Retail food stores and processors are increasing their interest in year-round merchandising of turkey in these several forms. The merchandising methods discussed here should be of interest to those food dealers desiring to maximize their share of the expanding market for this product.

Research was conducted in a retail food store located in a large Central Texas city. The store is unique in that it handles a large volume of fresh turkey parts, cut-up turkey, turkey steaks

and turkey patties. It is a self-service store located in a wholesale merchandising section of the city and is operated by a poultry processor who began merchandising turkey parts as an experimental sideline in 1948.

About two-thirds of the turkey shoppers patronizing the store are Negro since it is located adjacent to a Negro residential area. About one-third are white, including a few Latin-Americans. About two-thirds of the shoppers interviewed were in the low-income bracket (under \$3,000 per year).

Although this research is in the nature of a case study, because of the uniqueness of the store and the characteristics of the shoppers, the findings are considered of value to all retail food outlets wishing to expand their sale of turkey parts or other forms of turkey.

A more complete description of the characteristics of the shoppers interviewed is available in the appendix of this report.

FREQUENCY OF CONSUMER PURCHASES

Almost a fourth of the buyers of turkey parts purchased them six or more times per month. About half of the shoppers purchased three or four times a month. Only a fourth of the buyers made less frequent purchases.

Approximately the same purchasing pattern exists for chicken among shoppers patronizing food chain stores in large cities.

As the family size increased so did the frequency of purchasing. This held true whether the increased number was adults or children.

PIECES AND PARTS PURCHASED MOST FREQUENTLY

Nearly 40 percent of the shoppers reported buying wings more frequently than any other turkey part. The large number of the shoppers at the store that are in the low-income bracket probably accounts for this. About 20 percent usually purchased drumsticks and another 20 percent favored backs.

Thighs are the popular choice of 12 percent of the shoppers. Fewer than one in fifty usually selected breasts, necks or giblets most frequently.

Racial differences in purchasing habits were noted. Race classifications used in this publication are Latin-American, other white and Negro.

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5.00
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Nearly one in four other white shoppers favored drumsticks, whereas among the Negro shoppers only one in five bought this piece.

A fifth of the other white shoppers purchased thighs most often compared with only 7 percent of the Negro customers.

Only 6 percent of the other white shoppers mentioned selecting breasts, and none of the Negro shoppers reported buying this part. However, the store operator wholesales most of the turkey breasts to large food chains in the form of turkey steaks.

The Negro shoppers bought wings and backs very frequently. Income obviously is a factor in these buying habits.

Family income and composition also were observed to have additional effects upon purchasing habits for turkey parts. Medium or high-income families were more likely to buy drumsticks. Also, families with children purchased drumsticks twice as often as others. Only one high-income family in five purchased wings, whereas nearly half of the low-income shoppers did.

NUMBER OF PIECES PURCHASED

One in six of the shoppers for turkey parts reported buying only one piece at a time. A little more than half of them buys two or three pieces, and one in four buys four pieces or more. This suggests that packages of one, two and three pieces would meet popular demand. Shoppers desiring a larger number of pieces would have the opportunity of buying multiple packages.

Since the number of children in the family appeared to have little effect on the number of pieces purchased, it seemed likely that the amount probably is related to the type of dish to be prepared. Likewise income had little relationship to the number of pieces bought. Income affects the type of part bought rather than the number of pieces purchased.

POUNDS PER PURCHASE

Shoppers apparently purchase turkey parts more on the basis of the number of pieces than the number of pounds. Consequently, only one-third of those interviewed felt capable of answering a question as to the average number of pounds bought at each purchase. Those who said they favored purchasing by weight usually bought 2 or 3 pounds at a time. Very few bought more than 4 or 5 pounds.

WHAT CONSUMERS LOOK FOR FIRST IN PURCHASING

Size appeared to be the first criterion used in the selection of turkey parts. It was most important to nearly one-third of all the shoppers interviewed. Preferences were about equally divided among large, medium and small-sized parts. Of those interviewed nearly one-half of the Latin-American shoppers, one-third of the other white shoppers and about one in four of

the Negro shoppers looked first at the size of the parts.

Freshness and cleanliness were the second most important factors to consumers. About one in four looked for these first in making buying decisions. This factor was mentioned first by 36 percent of the Latin-Americans. One-fourth of both the other white and Negro shoppers mentioned freshness and cleanliness as a first consideration.

Plumpness, with an emphasis on a medium amount of fat, was the third most popular criterion. One Negro shopper in five interviewed considered plumpness first in making a selection. Only about half as many Latin-American and other white buyers gave plumpness primary concern.

Skin color of the bird is much less important to shoppers in selecting turkey parts than it is in selecting chickens.¹ Only 15 percent of those interviewed mentioned skin color as of first importance, whereas when choosing chicken, color was the most important characteristic.

Other miscellaneous items mentioned in purchase decisions of shoppers included texture, quality, leanness and freedom from bruises or torn skin.

Hardly any of the shoppers contacted in the store survey mentioned dark or light meat as of first importance in selecting turkey parts.

Reports from the West Coast concerning merchandising of turkey roasts indicate that consumers there emphasize dark or light meat as an important selection factor. These roasts are either dark meat or white meat and are made from a full quarter of a turkey. The front quarters comprise the breast and wing section and the hindquarters the leg and thigh section.

It is not known which of the two—turkey roasts or the parts—will prove the most popular among Texas consumers.

RATINGS OF MEATS SERVED

Using a rating scale of one to ten, shoppers were asked to indicate the ranking their family would give to various meats served the way they usually liked them. One indicated a high preference and ten completely unacceptable. Most of the respondents kept their ratings among the top levels—one, two, three or four—rather than use the full range of the scale. This resulted in average ratings that are relatively high. It also indicates the ranking of these consumers' preferences for various turkey parts as compared with other meats, Table 1.

Only chicken was ranked higher than turkey parts by the shoppers interviewed. Most preferred the popular turkey parts as well as or better than other meats. This is consistent with the answers by these respondents mentioned later in the report regarding their family's reactions to the serving of turkey parts.

¹Mountney, G. J., R. E. Branson and H. V. Courtenay, "Preferences of Chain Food Store Shoppers in Buying Chicken," Texas Agricultural Experiment Station MP-348. April 1959.

TABLE 1. RATINGS OF TURKEY PARTS AND OTHER MEATS BY USERS OF TURKEY PARTS

Meat	Average rating	Method of preparation			
		First preference	Percent of housewives	Second preference	Percent of housewives
Turkey parts					
Breasts	1.2	Baked	76	—	—
Wings	1.5	Baked	52	Boiled	24
Thighs	1.7	Baked	60	Boiled	16
Drumstick	1.8	Baked	61	Boiled	17
Giblets	2.0	Boiled	52	Gravy	30
Frozen patties					
Meat	4.2	Fried	80	Broiled	16
Chicken	1.4	Fried	80	Baked	11
Beef steak	1.7	Fried	61	Broiled	30
Ham	2.1	Baked	72	Fried or broiled	24
Beef roasts	2.2	Baked	61	Roasted	22
Fish	2.5	Fried	82	Broiled	9
Pork chops	2.7	Fried	90	Broiled	6
Lamb	3.4	Baked	40	Broiled	20

FROZEN TURKEY PATTIES

The frozen turkey pattie is a relatively new form of turkey which was introduced in Texas by the retail store where this survey was made.

Only 20 percent of the shoppers purchased frozen patties. More might have purchased except that a constant supply of fresh patties and fresh ground turkey meat was always available at the store.

Turkey patties were rated excellent or good by six out of ten shoppers buying them. Two out of ten said they were acceptable. Only one in five was not satisfied with them.

Medium and high-income shoppers were slightly more prone to rate frozen patties excellent, good or acceptable than were the low-income people. Families with higher incomes are more accustomed to frozen foods.

Most of the shoppers using frozen turkey patties fry or broil them. A few mentioned baking.

CONSUMER ATTITUDES REGARDING PRICES OF TURKEY PARTS

Most of the shoppers interviewed considered turkey parts less expensive than the popular beef, pork and lamb cuts. Most of them also considered chicken and fish as more expensive than turkey parts.

Turkey parts were considered to be priced higher than fish by 10 percent of the shoppers. However, only 1 in 20 thought that turkey parts were priced higher than beef steaks, beef roasts, pork chops, pork roasts, ham, chicken and lamb.

Most of the few shoppers who thought turkey parts were priced higher than other meats were Negroes. This opinion also was held by more of the low-income families than medium or high-income families.

As family income increases, the opinion that turkey parts are cheaper than other meats also increases. This is to be expected since high-in-

come families buy the more expensive beef or pork cuts.

PREPARATION TIME AND EFFORT REQUIRED

A majority of the shoppers felt that turkey parts required about the same or less time to prepare than other meats such as whole or cut-up chicken, beef steaks, roasts and fresh fish. The only exception was frozen fish. Opinions about frozen fish vary considerably, according to the kind of frozen fish used.

PREPARATION OF TURKEY DISHES

Nearly two out of three of the housewives baked turkey and served it with dressing. This preparation was used more by Negro than by other housewives. Many other turkey dishes were mentioned by the respondents. Those mentioned most were smothered, steamed, stewed with dumplings, soup, salad, prepared with noodles or spaghetti, boiled with dressing and creamed.

Only four of the housewives interviewed said they used turkey parts sliced for sandwiches. Since chicken is sliced for sandwiches, it appears that some promotion may be needed to encourage this use of turkey parts.

The variety of turkey dishes prepared by housewives increases as income and education increase.

USE OF TURKEY PARTS

Breasts. Only 17 percent of the shoppers interviewed had ever used turkey breasts. Most housewives said they baked them. The next largest group used them with dressing, in salad or main dishes. Less than 1 percent of these respondents used turkey breasts for sandwiches or frying. Three-fourths of these housewives said they usually bought and cooked one piece of breast at a time.

Wings. The largest group of housewives buying wings baked them. The next largest group baked them with dressing. Other common uses for wings were smothered, soup, salad and other main dishes. Eighteen other ways of using wings were mentioned. Most housewives generally used two to four pieces at one time, although two were the most common.

Drumsticks. Most of the housewives buying drumsticks baked them. Most of the others used them for salads or together with dressing. Twenty other uses for drumsticks were mentioned. Eight out of ten of the housewives preparing drumsticks used one or two pieces at a time. About one in five used three or four pieces.

Thighs. The most common use of thighs was for baking. The next most popular was for salads or with dressing. Seventeen other uses for thighs were mentioned by the housewives contacted. About 80 percent of those preparing dishes from thighs used one or two pieces at a time. Very few used more than three pieces.

Turkey backs. Turkey backs generally were baked separately or with dressing. Most housewives prepared one back at a time. Surprisingly few used backs for soup.

Giblets. Those who purchased giblets usually used them for gravy or dressing. Most housewives used only one or two pieces of giblets at a time.

MEALS SERVED WITH TURKEY PARTS

Turkey parts were served three to five times per month by more than half the shoppers interviewed. A further 25 percent served them once or twice a month. Only one shopper in five served turkey six or more times per month.

The groups serving turkey parts most frequently were Negro and Latin-American housewives. Almost half of these consumers served turkey six times or more per month. Of the other white shoppers only one in three served turkey this frequently.

Income did not appear to affect the number of times turkey parts were served. In contrast, the findings in a recent survey of consumer preferences for chicken show that the higher income people did not serve chicken as frequently as did people in the other income groups.

All of the shoppers interviewed cooked their turkey parts with the bone left in. Three-fourths of them served it with the bone in.

The most popular seasonings used in cooking turkey parts were salt, celery, poultry seasoning, garlic, sage and onion.

FAMILY REACTION TO TURKEY DISHES

Most of the shoppers interviewed said they liked turkey parts at least as well as and in some cases better than beef steaks, beef roasts, pork chops and pork roasts, ham and chicken.

One shopper in three said that the family liked turkey parts better than beef steaks or beef roasts and a further 25 percent said the family liked turkey parts as much as beef steaks and beef roasts.

Pork chops and pork roasts received a similar rating.

Ham fared better than the above meats. Only one consumer in five said he liked turkey parts better than ham. Forty percent said they liked turkey parts as much as they liked ham. Turkey parts generally compared favorably with other meats.

Chicken was the greatest competitor of turkey parts as a preference meat. One consumer in three said he liked chicken better than turkey parts. Only 13 percent of the shoppers said they liked turkey parts better than chicken. This is believed to be partly because a large percentage of the shoppers were Negroes and previous research has indicated that chicken is the preferred meat of Negro families.

OCCASIONS FOR SERVING TURKEY PARTS

The question was asked, "Are there any special occasions where you would especially recommend that housewives use turkey parts as their

main dish?" Responses were special company, church socials, parties, picnics and other large gatherings, in that order. High-income shoppers at the surveyed store frequently came there especially to get turkey parts. They found them excellent for preparing turkey salad (like chicken salad) for social occasions.

MARKETING TURKEY PARTS ON A YEAR-ROUND BASIS

The consumer interviews summarized in this report were obtained during the summer of 1956. Since that time merchandising of turkey parts has been under continued research observation at the same retail food store. About 1 year ago the store was remodeled and expanded into a medium-sized modern supermarket, and marketing of turkey parts has continued to be successful.

Fresh ground turkey meat is a recently added turkey product at the store. This utilizes the meat from any portions of the turkey that otherwise might not sell at a sufficiently rapid rate. Ground turkey can be favorably priced in relation to ground beef and does not shrink in cooking as does beef.

Merchandising of ground turkey for turkey-burgers has possibilities which should be explored by alert meat departments of food stores and hamburger vendors. Further research on this and other forms of turkey marketing is being planned by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

The turkey parts bought by consumers interviewed in this survey were in the fresh form. During the last 2 years, there has been an increase in retailing of frozen turkey parts in Texas food chain stores. Thus far, the development of an adequate supply of turkeys for processing has been the limiting factor rather than the sale of the frozen parts.

These research findings indicate that more attention should be given to developing a year-round production and retail market for turkey parts and ground turkey.

APPENDIX

The consumer survey was made among 220 families purchasing turkey parts contacted at a selected store which has a large volume of business in turkey parts. The store is a medium-sized supermarket, self-service except for a service meat counter and situated in a commercial area in a large Central Texas city. It is owned by a poultry processor. This store was chosen for the project because it was the first and, as far as we know, the only retail store in Texas specializing in a large volume of turkey parts and cut-up turkey.

The shoppers for turkey parts were contacted in the store and later interviewed in their homes.

The racial distribution of the housewives interviewed was as follows: 31 percent, other whites; 63 percent, Negro; and 6 percent, Latin-American.

The income distribution was: Less than \$2,000—30 percent; \$2,000 to \$3,000—35 percent; \$3,000 to \$4,000—11 percent; \$4,000 to \$5,000—9 percent; \$5,000 to \$6,000—5 percent; \$6,000 to \$7,000—3 percent; and \$7,000 and over—6 percent.

The prices of turkey parts in the store were competitive and, in many instances, lower than in other food stores.