

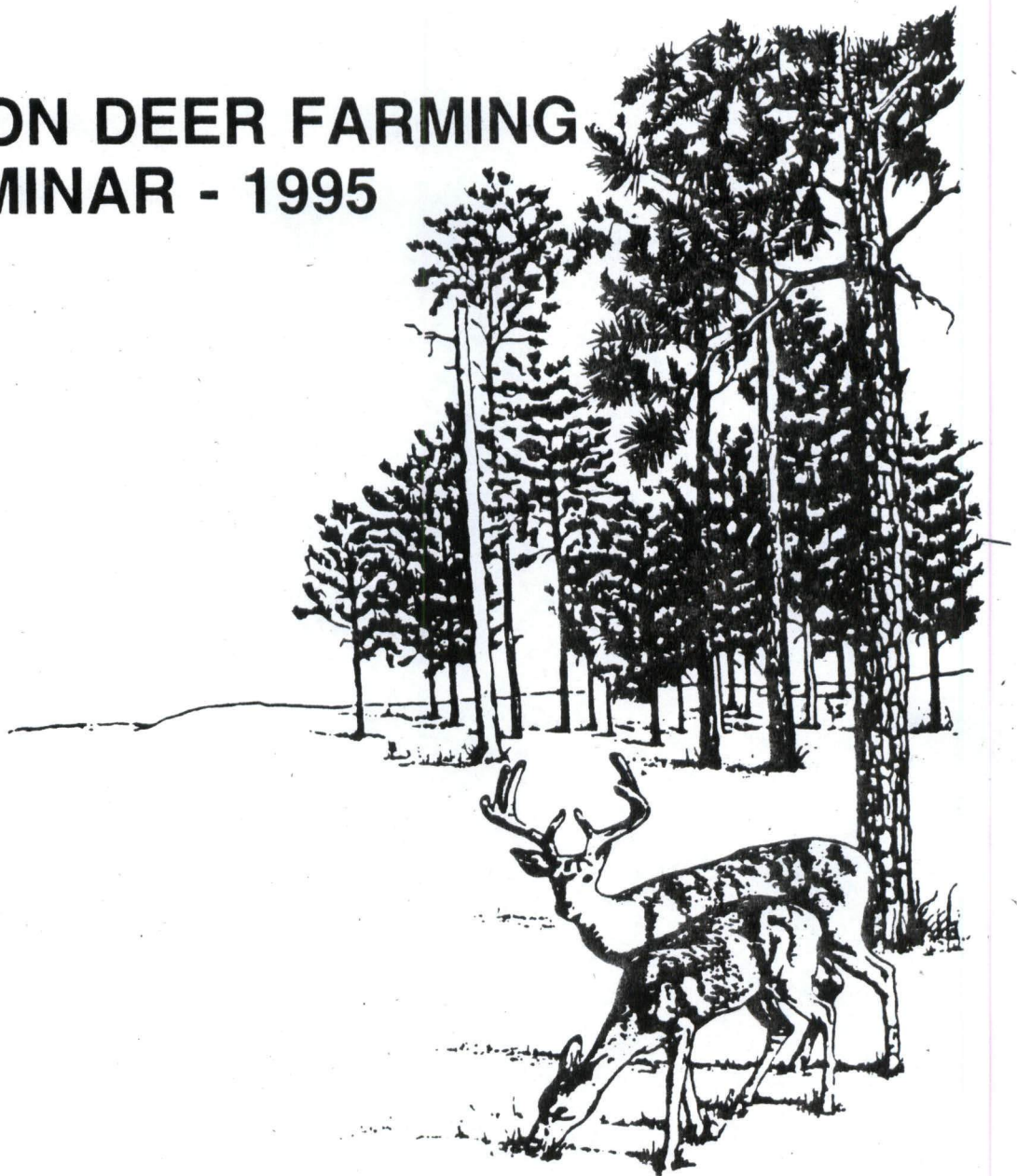
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## MARKETING EXOTIC GAME MEAT PRODUCTS TO RESTAURANTS

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**Background.** Wild deer, antelope and other exotic hoofstock have been hunted and their meat consumed for centuries. However, it has only been within the past decade that viable commercial markets for domestically raised exotic game have emerged in the U.S. During this time, production of many different species has been the center of attention and has grown dramatically. Few marketing problems were encountered as breeders found readily available buyers eager to enter new and exciting industries. Many producers have begun to recognize the need for marketing information about meat and other products as prices of breeding stock have declined with increased availability of live animals.

Producers and marketers of exotic game meat products (EGMP) can look to other major meat industries to see the importance of market information. Recognition that these are consumer driven industries is an important first step. The need to thoroughly understand how to match products with consumer demand is critical to industry long-term success, as those involved in beef, pork, poultry and fish industries have learned.

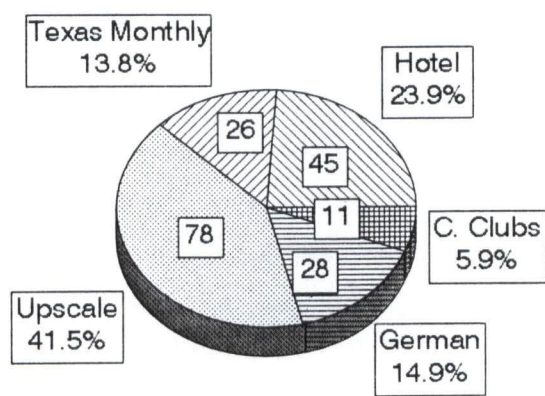
Gathering information about important characteristics of markets and about efficient marketing systems for EGMP is an expensive and time consuming process. However, it is vitally important that decision makers have the proper information as they develop operational strategies. Considerably more documentation is needed about EGMP regarding such things as why consumers buy or do not buy certain products, what products do they want and in what form, how can products be packaged and transported while maintaining product integrity, what are consumers willing to pay for products and how can consumer preferences be influenced. Most marketing information also has critical implications for production decisions dealing with feeding, genetics, health, handling and processing.

It is important that potential markets for EGMP be segmented for conducting market research and for development of targeted marketing strategies. Markets for food products often are segmented into at-home and away-from-home consumption. Away-from-home generally includes the hotel, restaurant and institutional (HRI) trade. Characterizing restaurants as a market segment offers an introductory look at one important potential market for EGMP.

**Research Findings.** Six categories of restaurants initially were identified as possibly offering EGMP on their menus, figure 1. These included upscale, hotel, German theme, country club, bar and grill and Texas Monthly (TM) establishments. All restaurants were selected

randomly from Texas Restaurant Association (TRA) membership except those described in Texas Monthly magazine. Bars and grills were eliminated early as they handled limited food and very little, if any, EGMP. Restaurants listed in Texas Monthly seldom mentioned serving EGMP. However, they were considered or chefs depending upon who made decisions about items to be placed on menus. a potential market segment since most were usually upscale, innovative and "trendy" by design. Actual survey respondents were either owners, managers or chefs depending upon who made decisions about items to be placed on menus.

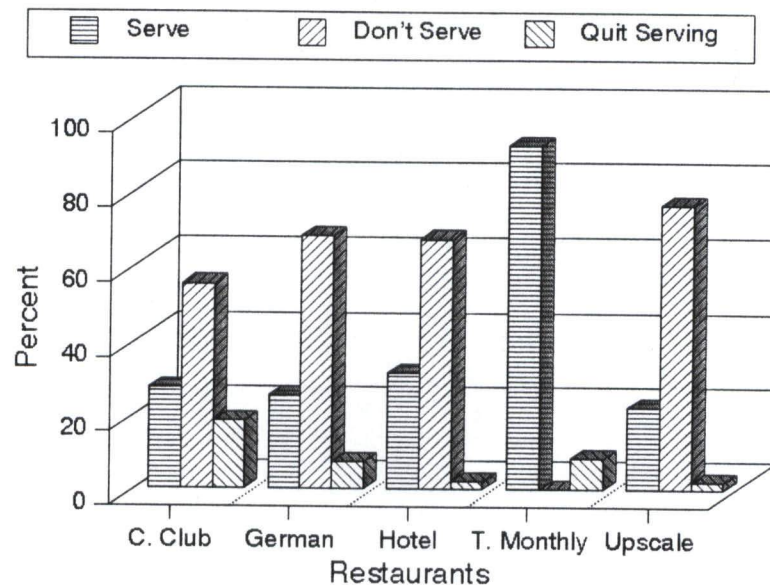
Figure 1. Types of restaurants responding to the Exotic Game Meat (EGMP) marketing survey.





As much as 30% of most restaurants in the selected categories offered EGMP to their customers, while over 92% of TM restaurants served EGMP, figure 2. This wide disparity for TM establishments was due mainly to the targeted sampling procedure. However, it did illustrate that there are ways of identifying and narrowing down potential markets for EGMP. Marketing

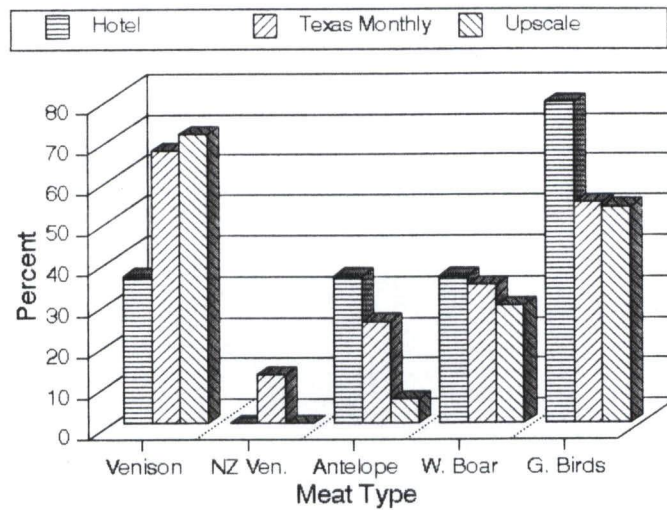
Figure 2. Proportion of survey respondents that serve, don't serve and quit serving EGMP, by restaurant type.



efforts aimed at restaurants listed in TM would be much more cost effective than efforts aimed at larger more heterogeneous groups. Magazines similar to TM from other states, trade publications and other media can provide detailed profiles of their subscribers to aid in targeted marketing efforts.

Venison was the primary type EGMP served by restaurants currently offering exotic meat entrees on their menus, figure 3. Respondents were allowed to list all meat products they considered to be exotic, even though ungulates were of greatest concern. Sixty percent of all restaurants serving EGMP offered venison while 18% served antelope. No restaurants offered EGMP exclusively as they viewed it as a way of diversifying their menus. Respondents also listed game birds, wild boar, lamb, emu, ostrich, alligator, and several other meats as examples of meat entrees on menus other than the traditional beef, pork, poultry and fish items.

Figure 3. Types of EGMP served by restaurants serving EGMP.



Loins, saddles and legs were the primary cuts preferred by restaurants offering EGMP, figure 4. These represent the higher valued and more consumer acceptable portions of carcasses. Wholesalers and retailers face considerable challenges in marketing lower valued cuts or developing products from them with greater consumer acceptance.

The main reason that restaurants served EGMP was clearly because they had recognized customer demand for it, figure 5. Managers also believed these meat items offered traditional fares to customers in many regions, while adding variety to menus. A few restaurants, having discontinued serving EGMP, mentioned that they also had included it on menus because of tradition and because of the variety it offered. However, they eliminated it from their menus after sufficient sales did not materialize. Some restaurants may need outside assistance in more accurately determining the true level of demand and which EGMP would make profitable additions to their menus.

Figure 4. Proportion of restaurants serving various cuts, by meat type for restaurants serving EGMP.

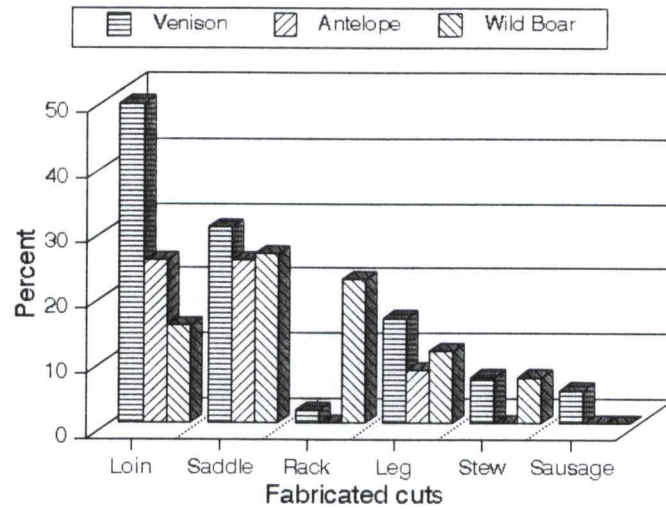
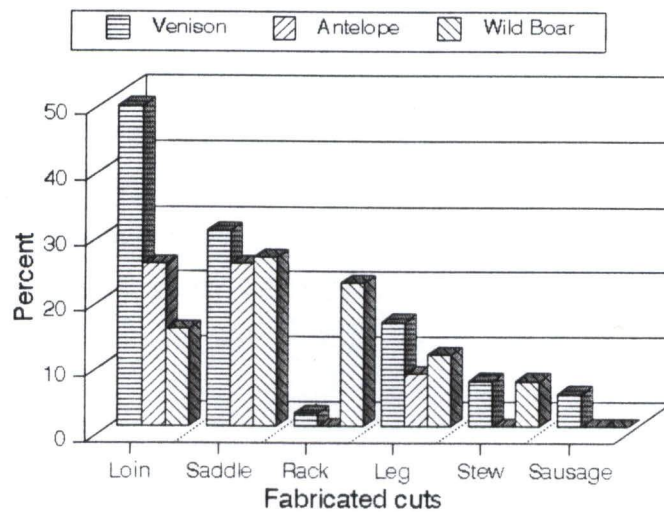


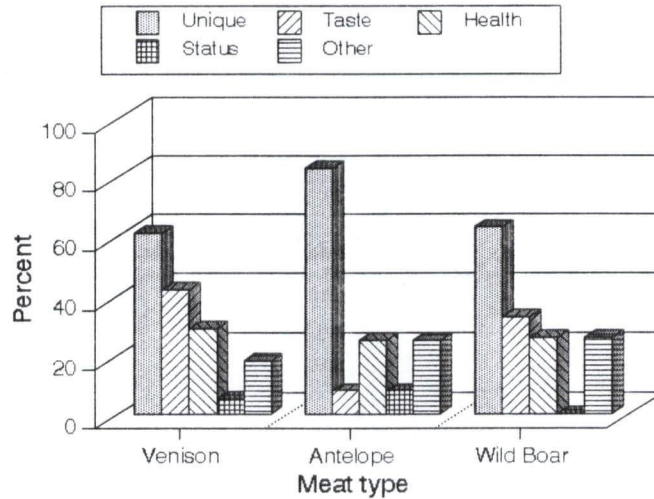
Figure 5. Proportion of restaurants stating selected factors influencing the serving of EGMP for restaurants serving EGMP.



Respondents provided several reasons why customers order or do not order EGMP, figure 6. Respondents thought customers order EGMP because it offers a more unique dining experience than other more traditional products, because customers like its taste and because of its health attributes. EGMP has been shown to be low in fat, low in cholesterol and high in protein.

characteristics that health conscious consumers should find appealing. These responses suggest key selling points that marketers might use in promoting EGMP. However, this type of information should be validated with further research to include direct questioning of consumers.

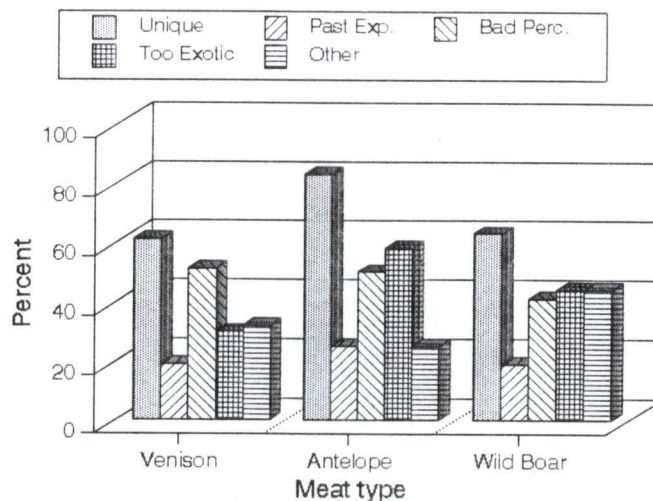
Figure 6. Reasons why customers order EGMP as stated by restaurant managers serving EGMP, by meat type.



Restaurant customers shied away from ordering EGMP largely because they had bad experiences eating exotic meats in the past, because they had a bad perception of what wild game tastes like and because they considered EGMP as too exotic for their tastes, figure 7. These and other reasons offer considerable opportunities for restaurateurs and EGMP industry representatives to inform potential consumers about desirable product qualities. In addition, those involved in producing and marketing EGMP must create innovative ways to entice consumers to try samples of various products that might lead them to become customers.



Figure 7. Reasons restaurant managers serving EGMP give as to why customers do not order EGMP, by meat type.



Prices were mentioned infrequently as objections to restaurants serving EGMP as well as customers ordering EGMP. Many respondents serving EGMP were attracted to profit margins at prices they thought were acceptable with customers. Average EGMP entree prices were similar to higher priced beef and seafood entrees at just over \$20, tables 1 and 2. Portion costs for an EGMP entree generally were about one-third of the entree price, a ratio restaurant managers thought offered acceptable profitability.

Table 1. Average EGMP entree prices, by meat type for all restaurants serving EGMP.

EGMP	Average Entree Price
Venison	\$22
Antelope	\$22
Wild Boar	\$20

Table 2. Average maximum entree prices for all restaurants, by meat type and whether restaurants serve or do not serve EGMP.

Entree Meat	Serve	Do Not Serve
Beef	\$21	\$13
Chicken	\$13	\$9
Pork	\$15	\$15
Seafood	\$19	\$13

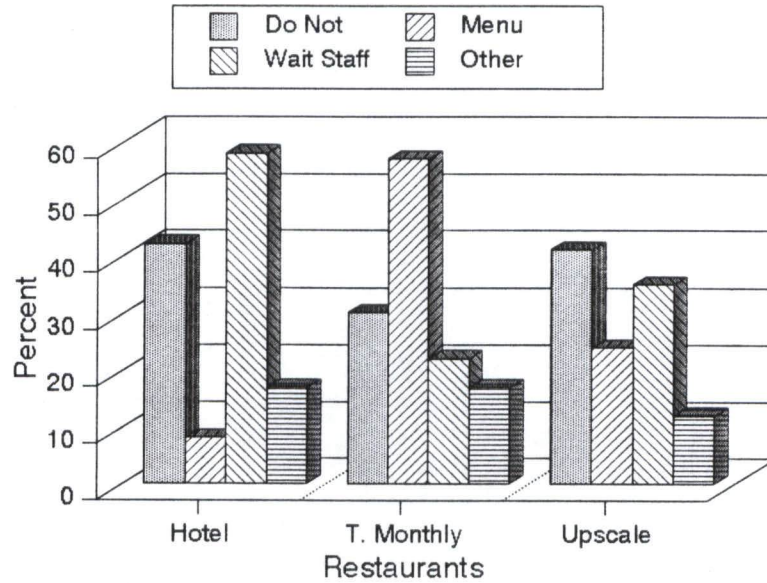
Restaurants with established customers expecting to pay upwards of \$20 or more for entrees were more likely to consider serving EGMP, table 2. Chain operations, family dining establishments, cafeterias, and restaurants with a majority of their business in morning and noon meals were not a segment of the away-from-home industry with which EGMP marketers should be concerned.

Educational programs and product information will not only be critical elements of future marketing efforts to consumers, but will be essential within marketing channels for EGMP as well. Over 70% of EGMP entrees placed on menus were creations of chefs in their respective restaurants. Many of the ideas they had about products and entrees came from trade publications and services of salespeople. Evidently, some excellent information is being made available. However, considerable evidence suggested substantial payoffs to providing more.

However, additional sources and increased frequency of dissemination for information about EGMP may be necessary as indicated by responses from establishments that have never served EGMP. Approximately 90% of the upscale restaurants in this group were aware that EGMP was being served in restaurants throughout the U.S. Nearly 40% of this group expressed an interest and considered serving EGMP in the near future. Respondents stated that they needed more information about consumer acceptance, prices and profit margins, preparation, product quality and other important items prior to introducing EGMP on their menus.

Many restaurants serving EGMP did not even promote that fact to customers, figure 8. Others that engaged in promotion activities utilized menus and wait staff almost exclusively. Outside promotions were only noted by a few establishments. These promotions generally focused on restaurant characteristics rather than specific menu items offered.

Figure 8. Promotion methods by restaurants serving EGMP.



Restaurant managers currently serving EGMP have a moderately optimistic outlook that EGMP will have a prominent place on their menus, figure 9. Upscale restaurateurs foresee sales levels increasing and are making plans to expand EGMP offerings. Respondents generally plan to continue promoting EGMP as they have in the past and would welcome additional information to use in these efforts.

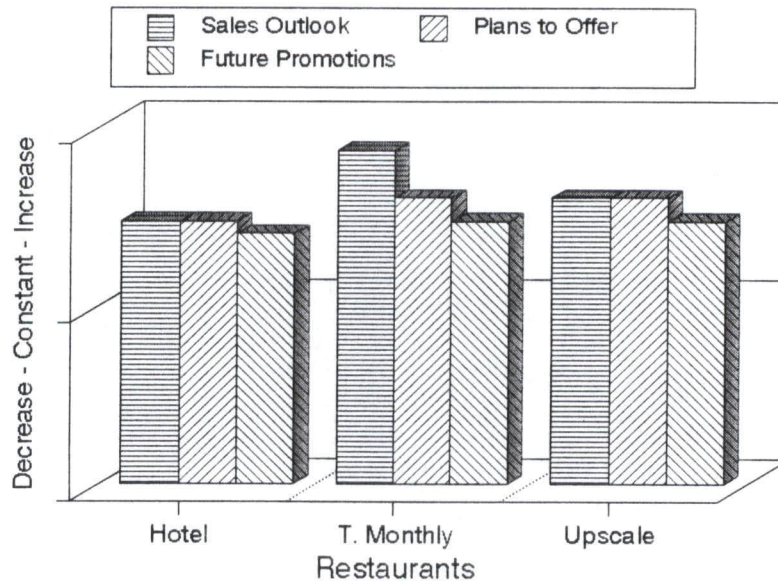
This study is one of the first market research efforts involving the collection of data from participants in EGMP marketing. Respondents provided significant information that will benefit producers, processors and other marketing firms as they work towards improving production practices, expanding existing markets, creating new products, and identifying new markets. Several other potential marketing channels besides restaurants currently are being used and warrant study as well.

It is now clear that hotels and upscale restaurants with customers willing to pay \$20 or more for entrees are viable target markets for higher valued EGMP cuts. Lack of comments about how



lower valued cuts are utilized implies that there are many challenges facing meat scientists and others to develop products which will insure sale of entire carcasses. Some of this is being done by industry participants who have developed niche markets. Restaurants should continue to express an interest in including EGMP on their menus as long as sales remain at respectable levels

Figure 9. Restaurant managers' outlook regarding future sales trends, plans to offer EGMP and promotions, by restaurant type for those serving EGMP (average responses where decrease, constant and increase were assigned values of 1, 2 and 3, respectively).



and products are profitable. Customers should continue to express their demand for EGMP because of its product uniqueness, taste, and healthiness. Quantity demanded by these customers likely will not be significantly affected by prices as long as EGMP is priced similar to other traditional meats.

**Applications.** One of the key activities that will enhance industry growth in the future will be the providing of factual objective market and product information through a variety of educational programs to a number of key audiences. Restaurants need information about preparation, about product information for promotion, about pricing and about how wait staff can better inform customers about EGMP. Consumer education should provide information on product availability and attributes which might dispell some of the misperceptions or traditional biases people might have about EGMP. Producers need information about carcass traits identified as having value in selected markets so they can tailor genetic selection and production practices to



provide products with those characteristics.

Future challenges for industry participants include promotion of EGMP to appropriate audiences informing them that EGMP are available; they are nutritious and safe products; they are profitable products; they are demanded by consumers; and they are a growth industry for interested new participants. More extensive information distribution, increased educational programs and more market research ultimately will result in expansion of markets for existing and new products, in more innovation and new product development and in more profits for participants.