

Proceeding Paper

# Food Habits and Knowledge Related with Meat on a Sample of Portuguese Consumers <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** This research was based on a questionnaire applied to a sample of Portuguese consumers. Most participants agreed that the influence of meat consumption on human health depends on the amount consumed, while practically none believed that meat is bad for health. Regarding knowledge, it was observed that 33% did not believe that cattle production is harmful to the environment; 51% believed that red meat contributes to increase the blood cholesterol; 31% thought that red meat is richer in protein than white meat; 30% did not believe that pork meat is harmful to health. As for the preferences for meat in Portugal, chicken was the most preferred, followed by turkey, and then pork. The least preferred meats are horse, goat and sheep. We concluded that white meat is preferred by the participants who tend to reduce the consumption of red meats.

**Keywords:** questionnaire survey; environmental impact; food habits; health

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## 1. Introduction

Meat is mostly made up of proteins, lipids and water and contains vitamins and minerals. However, meat composition varies according to the type of animal and production conditions, such as feed [1]. Meat contains proteins of high biological value, having a large amount of essential amino acids, supplying about 50% of the human being's daily protein needs. White meat has a lower fat content as compared to red meat. The main lipids present in chicken are unsaturated fatty acids, around 67.3%, while in sheep meat the saturated lipids are around 57.7% [2]. Meat is rich in minerals, phosphorus and potassium being quantitatively the most important, while at the level of trace elements, iron and zinc are the most available in meat. It is important to notice that the iron in meat is more bioavailable than that in vegetables, due to the composition of amino acids and antinutritional factors [2]. Meat has vitamins of B complex, and pork is one of the most important in terms of vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, while vitamins A and D are found in higher amounts in the liver [2,3].

Meat is one of the most consumed food products by the Portuguese population, according to the Portuguese Institute of Statistics [4], meat consumption in 2019 was 119.1 kg/inhabitant, with poultry meat being the most consumed, followed by pork. A smaller amount relates to consumption of beef, then sheep and goat.

The Portuguese Health Board [5] recommends a weekly ingestion of red meat up to 500 g (about 70 g per day), because when in excess it can increase the risk of colon cancer [6]. Some meat is high in fat, such as pork, which, when eaten in large quantities, can increase blood cholesterol levels, thus increasing the risk of heart disease [7,8]. The fat can be reduced, depending on the cooking method used. For example, fried meat will increase its fat absorbed from the oil while grilling will reduce its fat through dripping.

Excessive consumption of red meat is directly related to the environment, and there is an increasing concern to reduce these impacts. In a study carried out by researchers

from the ICS (Institute of Social Sciences) of the University of Lisbon, meat continues to be a staple of food in the Portuguese population, but respondents said they were willing to change their eating habits due to the impact on health, namely to reduce the consumption of red meat, as it is seen as the most harmful and also due to the impact it has on the environment [9].

The consumption of meat has been increasing over the years worldwide, with greater consumption in richer countries, such as the United States of America, Australia and Argentina, where consumption exceeds 100 kg per year per person. On the other hand stand the poorest countries like Ethiopia and Nigeria where consumption is between 7 to 9 kg of meat per year [10]. Studies have shown that people are trying to reduce their consumption, due to the impact that meat production has on the environment and also because there is an increasing concern for the welfare of animals. Still it appears that the consumption of meat remains high, with the United States of America reaching in 2018 its peak in decades [10]. Other factors that can contribute to a decrease in meat consumption are related with the health implications. Over the years there has been a concern to reduce the consumption of red meat due to the health problems it can bring to human beings, although its moderate consumption also brings nutritional benefits, especially in countries where incomes are lower, because their diets are not so varied, and the consumption of meat provides a high amount of protein [10]. The attempt to reduce meat consumption is mainly for the case of red meat, as this has an environmental impact three to ten times higher on the environment than white meat [10].

This study aimed at investigating the meat consumption habits and knowledge about some facts related with meat consumption and production, namely the effects for human health and for the environment.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Study

This study was based on a questionnaire survey, made through on-line platforms, with data collection between March and May 2020. Only adult Portuguese participants were included and all ethical issues were considered in collecting and treating the data. The questionnaire included parts referring to consumption habits related to different types of meat and others related with knowledge about meat and its effects on health and on the environment. For data treatment Excel 2016 was used.

### 2.2. Sample Characterization

The sample comprised of 100 participants, mostly female (66%), single (52%) and with a university degree (82%). The average age was  $38 \pm 17$  years, with younger women in relation to men ( $38 \pm 17$  y and  $42 \pm 16$  y, respectively). Almost half of participants have an income below 750 € (46%), while only 11% have a net monthly income from 2000 € to 3000 €. Regarding the dietary regime, the majority of respondents, 91% did not follow any specific diet, 4% followed a vegetarian diet, 1% followed a vegan diet, and 4% followed other types of diet.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Shopping Practices

More than 50% of participants buy their own food, while only in 6% of the cases is the husband or wife who purchases food. Regarding the frequency of food purchase, we found that 63% buy once a week, 25% buy 2–3 times a week, 10% buy every two weeks and 3% buy monthly. Most people usually buy meat at the butcher's, 49%, then the supermarket with 50% and small shops only 1%.

When buying meat, the Portuguese consumers value more the aspect (most important for 71% of participants), the colour (38%), amount of fat (32%), price (31%) and texture (10%).

### 3.2. Preferences and Consumption

Table 1 presents the participants’ preferences regarding the type of meat, with chicken being the most preferred (33%), followed by turkey (27%) and pork (18%). The least liked meats are horse (2%), followed by goat (4%) and sheep (6%).

**Table 1.** Preferences for different types of meat.

	<b>Totally Dislike</b>	<b>Like Very Little</b>	<b>Like Little</b>	<b>Like Much</b>	<b>Like Very Much</b>	<b>Never Tasted</b>
<b>Beef</b>	7%	7%	19%	51%	16%	0
<b>Pork</b>	9%	6%	15%	52%	18%	0
<b>Chicken</b>	0	1%	7%	59%	33%	0
<b>Turkey</b>	5%	5%	12%	49%	27%	1%
<b>Sheep</b>	35%	9%	17%	31%	6%	2%
<b>Goat</b>	37%	7%	16%	33%	4%	3%
<b>Rabbit</b>	33%	9%	22%	25%	9%	1%
<b>Horse</b>	41%	3%	5%	5%	2%	43%
<b>Boar</b>	31%	3%	11%	28%	8%	19%

Table 2 shows how many times per week the participants usually consume the different types of meat, the most consumed, being consumed five or more times per week being chicken (3%), pork (2%) and turkey (2%). The meats that are rarely consumed are rabbit (44%), goat (43%) and sheep (43%). Horse and wild boar types of meat are not consumed by a great majority of respondents.

**Table 2.** Weekly meat consumption.

	<b>Five or More Times</b>	<b>Four Times</b>	<b>Three Times</b>	<b>Twice</b>	<b>Once</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Beef</b>	0%	3%	9%	23%	28%	27%	8%
<b>Pork</b>	2%	6%	8%	32%	31%	17%	4%
<b>Chicken</b>	3%	11%	31%	38%	15%	3%	0%
<b>Turkey</b>	2%	3%	8%	26%	21%	34%	5%
<b>Sheep</b>	1%	0	3%	6%	8%	43%	38%
<b>Goat</b>	0%	0	2%	3%	5%	43%	46%
<b>Rabbit</b>	0%	0	2%	4%	15%	44%	35%
<b>Horse</b>	0%	0	2%	3%	0%	19%	76%
<b>Boar</b>	0%	0	2%	3%	1%	41%	53%

Presented in Table 3 are frequently used meat cooking methods by the participants. The results show that the most consumed are grilled pork (selected by 42 participants) followed by stewed beef (selected by 30 participants), roasted chicken and turkey (29 and 28, respectively) and grilled chicken (27).

**Table 3.** Cooking methods used for meat.

	<b>Stewed</b>	<b>Roasted</b>	<b>Fried</b>	<b>Boiled</b>	<b>Grilled</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Beef</b>	30	17	6	4	24	81
<b>Pork</b>	17	11	5	12	42	87
<b>Chicken</b>	25	29	3	8	27	92
<b>Turkey</b>	10	28	8	4	31	81
<b>Sheep</b>	14	19	2	6	11	52
<b>Goat</b>	11	18	0	3	12	44
<b>Rabbit</b>	25	15	1	6	2	49

<b>Horse</b>	9	1	2	1	14	27
<b>Boar</b>	17	7	2	1	12	39

### 3.3. Knowledge

When questioned about the influence of meat on health, 80% agree that it depends on the amount consumed, 12% believe that it is beneficial and 1% think that meat is harmful, 7% did not manifest opinion.

Figure 1 presents the respondents' opinions about some statements aimed at measuring the knowledge about meat. Regarding the statement about cattle production being harmful to the environment, people believe it is not (57% were against it). People are generally informed that chicken skin has more fat content (58%), although the possibility of pork meat being bad for health is not consensual (39% voted for it and 33% against). A high percentage believe that red meat is bad for cholesterol (71%) and that white meat has less fat (73%). Again there is no consensus about red meat being richer in protein than white meat (44% believe this is true and 33% do not). 84% know that cooking affects the meat composition and 81% agree that white meat is healthier.

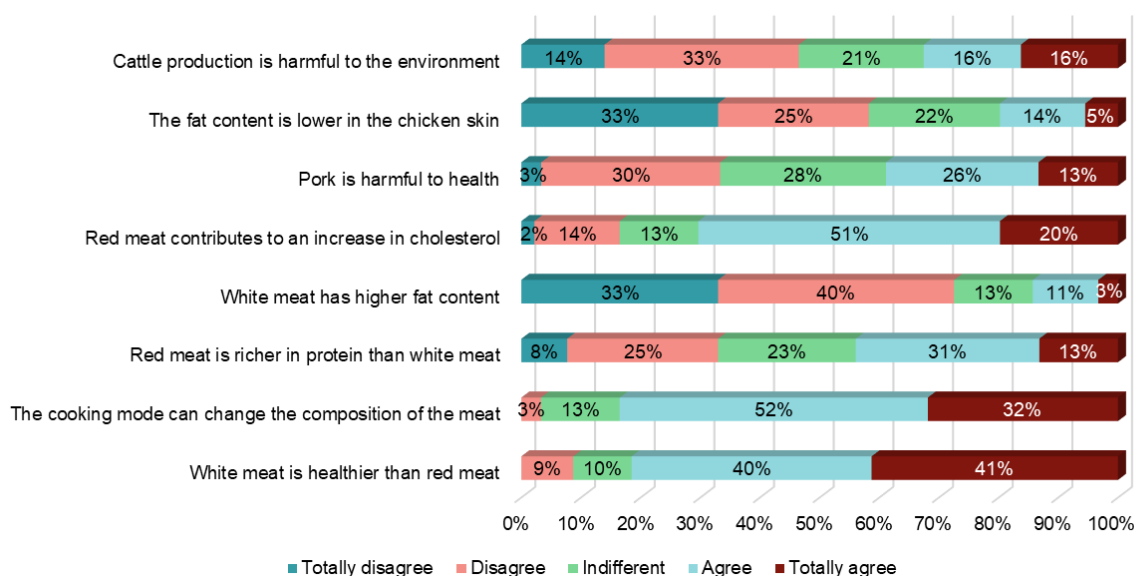


Figure 1. Level of agreement of the participants with different statements related to meat.

## 4. Discussion

Most Portuguese consumers purchase meat usually on a weekly basis rather than monthly. This might be related with the preference to consume fresh meat products rather than frozen ones that the buyers would have to freeze if they shopped with a high time interval (over one week). The purchase of meat is mostly made in supermarkets and butchers. Although the monthly net income is low for most participants (under 750 €), the main reason considered when purchasing meat is its appearance, showing that quality is more important than price. Regarding the factors that influence the decision, colour and the amount of fat are also essential when purchasing meat. These results are in line with those from a study carried out by Oliveira [11] on meat Mirandesa PDO (Protected Designation of Origin)t, according to which most people consider the colour and appearance the most important characteristics.

Most people follow a regular diet with all kinds of food, without restrictions, but adherence to vegetarianism and veganism has increased over the years. These trends impact and will influence greatly the consumption of meat in the near future [12,13].

People's knowledge about meat is good, as most of them answered the questions correctly. When questioned whether pork is harmful, most people disagree, but if it is in excess it can impact health, such as accumulation of fat in the arteries and liver, as well as an increase in cholesterol. Participants also knew that chicken skin has a higher amount of fat. As for the question of whether cattle production is harmful to the environment, the majority disagreed (33%). However, scientists have been discussing the effect of beef production on the environment, arguing that it is much more harmful than other meats, particularly due to the generation of higher amounts of GHG (green House gases) that cause climate change. Also the use of resources is much higher for beef production than for other meats [14].

We found that the meat preferred by the Portuguese is white meat (chicken and turkey), which is in line with the Portuguese statistics data from 2019, in which the most consumed meat was white meat, followed by pork [4]. The meats with less preferences are horse, goat, sheep and rabbit. Horse meat may be less consumed due to the population's view of the horse as a domestic animal [15]. Also rabbit is considered a domestic animal and for many people it is difficult to consume its meat. In what concerns goat and sheep meats, they are associated with Easter and Christmas celebrations because their price is higher [16].

The characteristics and nutritional value of meat vary according to the type of animal and production factors, as well as with the way it is cooked. Most people cook white meat by stewing, grilling or roasting, which will make the meat retain its flavour, as the cooking mode is slow and progressive, until it reaches the central point of the meat portion. On the other hand, for red meat (beef) and rabbit meat the most used cooking method is more stew, in which the cooking is done with fat and water, over a slow fire, thus resulting in a mixture of flavours [17].

## 5. Conclusions

This study allowed a better understanding about the consumption of meat by the Portuguese, showing that white meat is more consumed than pork, and there is also a trend to reduce the consumption of red meat.

The price is not the main factor to take into account when purchasing meat, but the appearance and colour are the main quality attributes valued by consumers. This confirms that people care more about the appearance than the price itself, being willing to pay more for a meat that looks better. Regarding the cooking methods, people prefer methods that preserve the flavour and eventually contribute to reduce the amount of fat.

Finally, it was concluded that people are informed about meat and are concerned about the type of meat they buy and the effects they might have on human health as well as on the environment.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, with reference 12SUB2020.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:**

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