

STUDY ON THE CONSUMER PREFERENCES REGARDING THE PURCHASE OF PRODUCTS OF ANIMAL ORIGIN IN THE PRE-PANDEMIC AND DURING THE PANDEMIC COVID 19 PERIOD

Ana URSU

*PhD, Scientific Researcher, degree II,
ursu.ana@iceadr.ro*

Eduard DUMITRU

*PhD, Scientific Researcher,
dumitru.eduard@iceadr.ro*

*Research Institute for Agriculture Economy and Rural Development,
Bucharest, Romania*

Abstract. *The study aims to identify changes in consumer preferences, in terms of purchasing products of animal origin, in the period before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was used as a research tool to conduct the study. The paper covers a representative and balanced set of defining elements of quantitative research, in order to represent as accurately as possible the behavior of consumers towards products of animal origin in two different periods of consumption.*

Keywords: *consumers, animal products, COVID-19 pandemic.*

JEL Classification: *O12, Q12, R10*

Introduction

Lifestyle changes and measures aimed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have significantly changed economic activity, employment, food consumption and working conditions [1,4]. The pandemic has a serious impact on economies, suggesting a change in market dynamics Abe (2020), in his report on “Market Trends and Opportunities in COVID-19” noted, as a trend during the pandemic, that people spend less of their income on items perceived as pleasant or non-essential (such as clothing, footwear, makeup, jewelry, games and electronics, etc.) [3,5]. However, the efficient supply of agri-food products is the foundation of a stable and functional economy and protects people's livelihoods. In this context, maintaining the functioning of agricultural enterprises is an indispensable economic component in the ongoing battle against the epidemic [2].

The present study aims to identify changes in consumers regarding the purchase of food of animal origin and is conducted through a quantitative research, research that includes research methodology, research coordinates, main objectives, delimitation of research variables, results obtained and their interpretation according to the choices of the respondents.

Material and method

The quantitative research carried out in this study involves conducting an opinion poll on consumer behavior towards the purchase of food of animal origin.

The survey questionnaire includes 15 questions, classified by content (questions about behavior - reveals the respondent's actions; questions about the respondent's personality - shows the characteristics of his personality - sex, age, income, level of education, etc.) and by form: closed questions, questions with answers from which the respondent chooses his own option); direct questions, etc.

The objectives of the defined quantitative research refer to the determination of the consumption behavior of the respondents towards the products of animal origin (frequency of consumption before the pandemic, frequency of consumption during the pandemic, reasons for consumption, form in which it is consumed, price at which they are willing to pay it); determining factors underlying the purchase decision (type of meat (fresh, frozen), canned food, price, origin, etc.).

Results and discussions

We will present the results of the quantitative research carried out to analyze consumer behavior, in terms of consumption of animal products, in the period before the pandemic and during the COVID

19 pandemic, analyzing each question in the questionnaire applied.

For this research, the sample was represented by 168 respondents. Regarding the sample structure, the random sampling method was used. Thus, the respondents were divided according to age and sex as follows:

- Sex criterion: 80 men, 88 women;
- Age criterion: 18 - 39 years: 36.31%; 40 - 65 years: 44.66%; over 65 years: 19.05%;

Regarding the education of the respondents, following the interpretation of the data obtained with the help of the questionnaire, we state that a percentage of 54.76% of the respondents finished high school, followed by those who graduated a form of higher education (38.10%). Only 7.14% of the respondents participating in the survey graduated from general school and gymnasium.

Table 1

Frequency of consumption of animal product types (%)

No. crt	Specification	Questions no. 8 and 9: How often did you buy animal products?							
		Prior to the COVID pandemic 19				During the COVID pandemic 19			
		N	R	F	V. o.	N	R	F	V. o.
1	Fresh pork meat	1.2	22.6	34.5	41.7	1.8	23.2	56.6	18.5
2	Fresh poultry meat	1.2	13.7	41.7	43.5	2.4	21.4	58.3	17.9
3	Fresh beef meat	18.5	42.9	26.8	11.9	42.9	34.5	19.1	3.6
4	Fresh sheep meat	43.5	36.3	16.7	3.6	64.3	27.4	5.4	3.0
5	Frozen meat	54.2	35.1	7.1	3.6	20.8	15.5	35.7	28.0
6	Fish	54.2	35.1	7.1	3.6	20.8	15.5	35.7	28.0

Source: ICEADR online opinion poll.

During the pandemic, fresh poultry meat was frequently among consumers' preferences compared to the period before the pandemic (58.3% compared to 41.7%), Table no. 1 rd. 2 col 5 and col 8, followed by fresh pork meat (56.6% versus 41.7%), eggs (54.8% versus 43.5%), canned fish (39.3% versus 46.4% rarely consumed), processed meat (47.6% compared to 54.8% rarely consumed), sheep meat (35.7%), frozen meat (35.7), etc. (Table 1.).

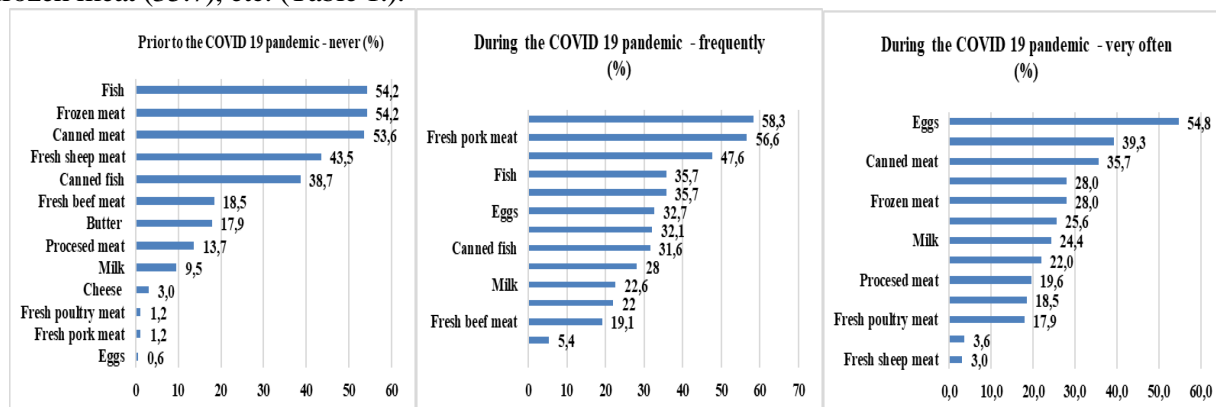


Figure 1. Frequency of consumption of animal products

Source: ICEADR online opinion poll.

Comparing the two reference periods, it is observed that the preferences of the responding consumers have changed with regard to the consumption of animal products. In the run-up to the pandemic, more than 50% of respondents said they had never bought frozen fish and meat (54.2%), canned meat (53.6%), fresh sheep meat (43.5%) and canned fish (38.7%).

The economy of exchange and health care

During the analyzed period, the consumers participating in the production and consumption chain decided to make their purchases from traders who applied visible safety measures, such as cleanliness and physical barriers.

Frequency of purchase of products of animal origin on the market

No. crt	Specification	Question no. 10 and 11: What are your favorite places to buy animal products?							
		Prior to the COVID pandemic 19				During the COVID pandemic 19			
		N	R	F	V. o.	N	R	F	V. o.
1	Supermarket	3.6	6.0	29.2	61.3	1.2	17.3	57.7	23.8
2	Permanent market	7.7	20.2	36.3	35.7	7.7	61.3	26.2	4.8
3	Greengrocer	28.6	36.3	26.2	8.9	45.2	31.0	8.9	14.9
4	Flying market	36.3	35.7	23.8	4.2	51.2	29.2	13.1	6.6
5	Neighborhood store	21.4	50.0	20.8	7.7	8.9	11.9	38.1	41.1
6	Manufacturer's shop	34.5	39.9	19.6	6.0	13.7	16.1	36.3	33.9

Source: ICEADR online opinion poll.

The first major wave of food and agriculture disruptions at COVID-19 resulted from restrictions imposed during the pandemic, resulting in an unexpected demand for agri-food purchases from other traders compared to the pre-pandemic period. If in the pre-pandemic period more than 50% of the respondents never bought animal products directly from the producer or from online stores and only rarely from neighborhood stores and butchers, during the pandemic the options changed (Table 2.).

Conclusions

Following the processing of data obtained using the questionnaire, it was observed that men, even if they do not have a predominant share among respondents (48%) participate in the activity of purchasing products of animal origin, thus influencing the choice of product types in both periods analyzed. Naturally, the age of the respondents influences the extent to which they, having habits and traditions in the way of consumption of animal products, determine the decision to purchase the products according to their preferences. Considering the analyzed periods (the one before the pandemic and the period during the pandemic), we can say that once the respondents get older, the desire to buy products of animal origin in the presented forms (type of meat (fresh, frozen), canned, sausages, milk, cheese, etc.) increases or decreases. In this context, the age of the respondents influences their opinion about the consumption of animal products.

The level of education of the respondents also influences their desire to purchase the types of animal products, so that the level of education influences their perception of the products on the market of animal products for which they are willing to pay a certain price. Also, the level of education influences the perception on the taxability of animal products, the degree of availability to try other products, as well as the method of payment for purchased products.

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