

Pork Industry Picks Up Speed

CHICAGO, Ill. — By continually improving their product, pork producers will be well on the road to increasing pork consumption, according to the experts — a panel of consumers.

The consumer group was part of a seminar during the National Live Stock and Meat Board's Demand Strategies '94 conference in Chicago. The session, "On the Road to Pork Quality: What Mile Marker Are We At?," featured a live consumer focus group and a look at measures the industry must take to improve quality and increase demand for pork.

The focus group gave the audience of pork industry leaders an opportunity to see consumers as they looked at and reacted to pork products. Ten Chicago-area women of diverse ages, ethnicity and lifestyles talked frankly about their food-purchasing habits in general and specifically about pork. The consumers did not learn that their audience was the pork industry until the end of the focus group.

Some of the women purchase pork from supermarkets, and others buy meat from butcher shops. Their pork consumption frequency ranged from four times a week to two times a month.

All but one woman consider nutritional aspects when purchasing food. Most are aware of the new nutrition labels, although not everyone reads them.

What qualities do the consumers look for when purchasing pork? More meat than bone, less fat, fat they can easily trim off, pink color, and freshness. They also are concerned about the fat and cholesterol levels in pork.

A twist to the focus group session was showing the group typical pork products purchased at a Chicago supermarket and then unveiling top-grade, case-ready cuts from a Midwest packer.

The consumers rated the products purchased at the grocery

store from very poor to excellent. Problems noted were inconsistencies in products in the same package, too much fat and poor color. Some of the women were surprised at the number of cuts and various cutting styles available.

The case-ready -- customer ready, as the packer calls it -- received rave reviews. The gist was the consumers would purchase pork more frequently, and possibly pay more, if consistent, high-quality products were available and they had more information about how to prepare pork.

"We have many opportunities to better serve the consumer if we have consistent, high-quality pork products," said Bill Kuecker, Meat Board director of pork scientific affairs. "But to achieve this, everyone along the pork chain -- including geneticists, producers, packers and distributors -- must work together."

Avenues to increase the demand for pork are being explored by the Pork Chain Quality Audit. The objective is to obtain World Class Pork by the year 2000. The audit was initiated in 1992 and is a project of the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) in cooperation with the National Pork Board.

"World Class Pork will meet or exceed quality and safety standards and will be continuously improved," said David Meeker, NPPC vice president of research and education.

He noted that improvements under producer control include fat content, PSE, inconsistency of color and carcass defects. "Advances in these areas will lead to pork that is tops in taste, value, leanness, color, packaging, freshness, safety, shelf-life, reputation, versatility and convenience," Meeker said.

These are the qualities consumers are looking for in pork, as revealed by the Chicago focus group and confirmed by consumer

studies conducted as part of the quality audit.

"Results of the studies showed that consumers crave variety, but they need education about the safety and menu possibilities of pork," said Barry Pfouts, NPPC vice president of consumer product marketing. "Pork is uniquely positioned for the future and can be the meat of choice by the year 2000."

But to reach this goal, the industry must overcome barriers to pork consumption. One group being targeted is healthcare professionals, who traditionally have advised patients not to eat pork. Sharlet Brown, Meat Board director of research/meat science information and pork information, said several efforts are under way to change dietitian and physician

attitudes toward pork and get them to recommend the product to patients.

"This group can be a powerful sales force for the pork industry," Brown said. "By improving quality, we'll be able to send more positive messages to healthcare professionals about the benefits of pork and thereby give consumers permission to eat pork."

make it Milk

Somerset Holds Lamb Banquet

GAY BROWNLEE
Somerset Co. Correspondent
NEW CENTERVILLE (Somerset Co.) — "Eat lamb and wear wool" is a dictum held by the Somerset County Lamb Jackpot and Carcass committee.

They didn't mind eating those words as well as the lamb entree served recently by the ladies auxiliary of the New Centerville Volunteer Fire Department at the carcass class banquet.

Lauded were the 4-H'ers whose animals were found best at the "on the rail" evaluation held at LaRue Meat Market, Somerset, by judge Bill Kelly, Westmoreland County extension agent. Gifts and cash premiums were awarded to five.

Luke Svonavec, 12, Rockwood, got the award for having the overall grand champion. The High Ridge 4-H'er received, besides a nice trophy, a unique stained glass window crafted by a 4-H leader.

Svonavec said it will be hung in the sheep barn during the Somerset

County Fair. Later, he plans to display it in a prominent place at the family home, he said.

His parents are David and Betty Lou Svonavec.

Jake Vough, 11, was soaring when his was a double honor, having first the overall reserve grand champion and also the Somerset County born champion. "I was overjoyed," he said. "My lamb last year didn't place at all."

Vough, also a High Ridge 4-H Club member, received a sheepskin and coverlet.

Larry and Melissa Vough, Markleton, are his parents.

Corey Sechler of the Valley 4-H Club had the third place finisher, which was also county born, and received a coverlet. Parents of the 17-year old are Rick and Audrey Sechler, Meyersdale.

Fourth place went to Steven King, along with a sheep clock. He's aged 16, a High Ridge 4-H Club member and the son of Theona King, Rockwood.

Brian Smith, 13, the son of Charlie and Betsy Smith, Rockwood, had the fifth place winner and got a decorative ceramic lamb. Smith, too, is in the High Ridge Club.

Carcass evaluation, according to a spokesperson, "is an evaluation of the quality of the meat as opposed to on the hoof at the fair." Most critical are the measures of loin and fat, she said.

Twenty-five kids participated, weighing in their animals on Monday, Aug. 8, and listening to Scott Baer's educational presentation about "condition" or "finish" on a lamb.

Seniors giving essays at the banquet were Teggan Hayes, Jenna Svonavec, Charlie Smith and Heidi Svonavec. Junior essayists were Brian Smith, Luke Svonavec and Gabriel Svonavec.

Baer showed a video and enlightened the group of guests with a carcass explanation.



Winners at the Somerset County Market Lamb Carcass Class banquet, held in New Centerville are from left, Luke Svonavec, grand champion owner; Jake Vough, reserve grand champion and Somerset County born champion; Corey Sechler, third; Brian Smith, fifth. Steven King had the fourth place winner but was absent from photo. All but Svonavec's were county born winners.

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