

Beef consumers get information from websites, social media

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Kuo-Liang "Matt" Chang

In an era when consumers have a wealth of information at their fingertips, where do South Dakotans turn for recommendations on meat-purchasing?

That's the question assistant professor Kuo-Liang "Matt" Chang and a team of South Dakota State University researchers sought to answer when trying to determine the best way to use social media to encourage beef consumption. The study was funded through a \$9,100 grant from the South Dakota Beef Industry Council.

In addition to Chang, the research team included assistant professor of economics Lisa Elliott, assistant professor of journalism and mass communications Rocky Dailey and SDSU Extension field specialist Shannon Sand in Rapid City.

Social media platforms provide a wealth of quantitative analytics, including the number of people who visited the site, what they viewed and their demographics, according to Briana Burgers, nutrition assistant and director of online communications for the South Dakota Beef Industry Council.

"We want to know what information our consumers want to see from us," said Burgers. "This study gives us that qualitative data we need."

The data collected will help the South Dakota [beef industry](#) leadership better understand beef demand and tailor their marketing efforts to fit consumer needs.

Recipes, nutritional information

Based on an online survey filled out by 126 South Dakotans, websites are their No. 1 source of nutrition information and recipes, followed by family and friends, according to Chang. Most [respondents](#) were in the 24 to 45 age range.

The third-most popular place the respondents find recipes is magazines, followed by social media, the consumer economist explained. However,

for nutrition information, social media takes a back seat to health professionals, magazines and television—in that order.

In looking at consumers' nutritional knowledge, Chang found that more than half the respondents identified beef as containing more iron than other meats, but only 25 percent knew that a chicken thigh has more fat than a steak.

Shopping decisions

Nearly 45 percent of respondents had shopped groceries based on information posted on social media, according to Chang. Though only 27 percent of the respondents had done meat shopping on-line, about 77 percent said they are willing to try new products based on their friends' suggestions on social media.

More than 80 percent of the respondents used Facebook, while just over 50 percent visited Pinterest, with Twitter coming in third, Chang explained, noting that the beef council maintains a presence on all three. "This suggests that the beef council can take increasing advantage of the great marketing opportunities on these platforms."

In addition, Burgers said she also writes a blog on which she tries to connect with millennials and provide easy, convenient and nutritious recipes with how-to photos.

Consumers viewed nutrition and health as top priorities when purchasing both beef and poultry, but when considering price, 55 percent felt it was important when purchasing beef and 58 percent when buying chicken. This difference, though, is not statistically significant, Chang pointed out.

Eating habits, choices

Approximately 37 percent of the respondents buy their beef at a chain store, such as Hy-Vee or Walmart, while 33 percent purchase a half or quarter of beef from a friend or family member, according to Chang.

When faced with higher beef prices, South Dakota consumers purchase less meat in general, rather than selecting less expensive alternatives, such as chicken, explained Chang. However, Midwesterners consume 10 percent more beef than the rest of nation.

"One type of meat does not necessarily compete with the other," said Chang. Consumers purchase a variety of meats which complement, rather than substitute for one another.

To complete the study, Chang will interview 25 respondents to find out how the [beef](#) council can draw visitors to its website and adapt its [social media](#) messages to their needs.

Provided by South Dakota State University

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