

Socio-Economic Characteristics Associated with Rural Households Perception about Grasscutter Meat Cost in the Niger Delta Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract: The study examines the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and rural households perception about cost of grass cutter meat in Ogba, district of Niger Delta zone of Nigeria. Two hundred respondents in the area were randomly selected and used in the study. Data were collected by the use of structured questionnaire. From the findings of the study majority of the respondents are middle aged, had formal education and earned ₦10, 000 and ₦ 30, 000. It was found that most respondents like grass cutter meat for its moderate taste and see it as first among other meats. Hunters are the major source of grass cutter meat. Though the meat is expensive, respondents still buy and cherish it for its good quality. No significant relationships were found between selected socioeconomic characteristics of respondents and their perception about cost of grass cutter meat.

Key words: Socio-economic characteristics, grasscutter meat, rural households, perception

INTRODUCTION

It has been noted that grass cutter meat is a good alternative for protein intake in Nigeria (Adesope, 1996) but the fact still remains that the live animals stay in the wild and a problem of getting them easily and readily will arise. However, there is need for variety in meat consumption by the populace. A research in Benue State (Ogebe *et al.*, 1996) showed that grass cutter meat is known by the respondents and available for sale in their locality regularly throughout the season from hunting activities. It was reported that grass cutter exists in a high social hierarchy and seldom migrate. In the same vein, Eniang *et al.* (1996) are of the opinion that city dwellers cherish bush meat as it is popularly called. They also reported that one of the prominent wildlife that people have taste for and feature relatively regularly in their meals is grass cutter. Grass cutter is a major wildlife animal that Nigerians cherish a lot. Olayide (1981) observed that the most important biological value of wildlife is its use as a source of meat supply for human consumption. The continual increase in demand for wildlife which is also known as *bush meat* was noted. Adeyoju (1981) also noted that Nigeria is at least 10-15% dependent on wild animal protein from our forests.

Grass cutter occurs throughout West Africa and is well known as it is very good to eat. The body is thickset

and covered with hair interspersed with flattish spines, which gives it a rough, bristly appearance. The face is square and blunt, the feet are strong and clawed and there is a short tail. It feeds on thick grass stems and can cause a lot of damage to sugarcane plantations (Webb, 1957). Grass cutter meat is relatively more expensive than other meat types, that notwithstanding it is highly demanded by individuals both in homes and restaurants in Nigeria. This is however, more important in the rain forest belt where the Niger Delta is. The rainforest vegetation belt is conducive for the survival of the animal, therefore, making it more available all year round. It is because of this that the meat is common to the people of the area, though studies on the preference levels are limited. Also there have not been studies available to researchers on the relationship between socioeconomic features of consumer and their perception about the cost of the animal. This study therefore, determines the likeness for grass cutter meat and its preference to other meats. It also examines the source of the meat (procurement) by consumers as well as the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and perception of grass cutter meat cost.

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between socioeconomic characteristics (income, age, education, occupation) of respondents and their perception about cost of grass cutter meat.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population for this study comprises Ogba people who eat grass cutter meat. Ogba is a major district in the upland area of Rivers State in the Niger Delta zone of Nigeria. One major activity apart from farming in the area is hunting. This activity makes the availability of bush meat possible. Two hundred respondents were randomly selected from three delineated clusters which include Egi, Igburu and Usomini communities in Ogba district of Niger Delta zone. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire containing structured items developed from literature review. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered and information obtained and used in data analysis. Data analysis was by the use of both descriptive (percentages, frequencies) and inferential (chi-square) statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents fall between 30 and 40 years old, majority had formal education and were farmers/businessmen. Findings also show that most respondents earned between ₦ 10, 000 and ₦ 30, 000, revealing a low income level of the respondents.

It was found most respondents eat/like grass cutter meat 85% for its taste, while few 5% like it for its commonness as shown in Table 2. This therefore, suggests that majority of the respondents like grass cutter meat because of the taste.

About 48% of the respondents indicated that grass cutter meat is in the first position compared to other meats, 5% of the respondents indicated that it is second position, 19% indicated that it is third position, 19% indicated that it is fourth position, while 10% indicated that it is seventh or eight position as shown in Table 3. It can be inferred that Ogba people perceive grass cutter meat as very important hence is first among others. This implies that grass cutter meat is referred to other meats. The other meats available for consumption in the study area include snake, turkey, duck, crocodile, beef, hedgehog, pork, goat, chicken, donkey, rabbit, snail.

It was found that most respondents 52% are of the opinion that grass cutter meat has moderate taste, 40% of the respondents however indicated that the taste of grass cutter meat is high while 8% indicated that the taste is low (Table 4). The implication is that grass cutter meat is good enough, taste and quality-wise. This is in accordance with Eniang *et al.* (1996) assertion that people cherish bush meat.

Table 1: Personal data

Variables	Frequency	(%)
Age		
< 30	34	17.0
30-40	111	55.5
>40	55	27.5
Education		
None	30	15.0
Formal	109	54.5
Non formal	61	30.5
Occupation		
Civil servants	58	29.0
Business/farming	123	61.5
Oil company	19	9.5
Income		
<₦10,000 -₦ 30,000	120	60.0
₦31,000 -₦ 50,000	46	23.0
₦ 51,000 ->₦ 70,000	34	17.0

Table 2: Reasons for liking/eating grasscutter meat

Reasons	Frequency	(%)
For its taste/quality	170	85
For its commonness availability	10	5
No comment	20	10

Table 3: Position of grass cutter meat among other meats

Position	Frequency	(%)
1st	96	48
2nd	10	5
3rd	36	18
4th	38	19
7/8th	20	10

Table 4: Taste/quality of grasscutter meat

Taste	Frequency	(%)
High	80	40
Moderate	104	52
Low	16	8

Table 5: Sources of grass cutter meat

Source	Frequency	(%)
Buy from hunter	126	63
Buy from hawkers	16	8
Hunt for it	28	14
Buy from market	30	15

The major source of grass cutter meat is from hunters (63%), 8% of the respondents buy from hawkers who carry the meat from the market to the house, 14% hunt for the animals, 15% buy from the market (Table 5). The implication here is that the meat is mainly got or bought directly from hunters. Since the animal lives in the wild it is not easy to come by except through hunters.

It can be seen that 70% of the respondents indicated that grass cutter meat is moderately available all seasons while 30% of the respondents indicated that the meat is not available (Table 6). In essence, majority of the respondents get grass cutter meat even though the live animal is not easy to come by Ogebe *et al.* (1996) has noted that grass cutter meat is generally available for sale in their locality.

From Table 7, 65% of the respondents indicated that grass cutter meat is very expensive, 31% indicated that it

Table 6: Availability of grass cutter meat

Availability	Frequency	(%)
Moderately available	140	70
Not available	60	30

Table 7: Relationship between income level and cost of grass cutter

Income level	Cost of grasscutter			Total (%)
	Very expensive	Moderate	Not expensive	
< N10, 000- N30, 000	82(41)*	38(19)	0	120(60)
N31, 000 – N50, 000	32 (16)	14 (7)	0	46 (23)
N51, 000 – >N70, 000	16 (8)	10 (5)	8 (4)	34 (17)
Total	130 (65)	62 (31)	8 (4)	200 (100)

*Percentage in parenthesis

Table 8: Chi square analysis showing relationship between income level of respondents and perception towards grass cutter meat consumption

Variables	X ²	df	P	Decision
Income	6.00	4	>0.05	Not significant
Age	3.55	9	>0.05	Not significant
Education	4.63	3	>0.05	Not significant
Occupation	2.74	5	>0.0	5 Not significant

is moderately expensive, while 4% indicated that it is not expensive. Wekhe (undated) posited that people accord importance to grass cutter meat because it costs more dearly than the domestic animals. Even though it is expensive, people still see it as the best meat among other meats (Table 3).

Findings of the study also show that most respondents (60%) earn between ₦10, 000-₦30, 000. On the other fewer respondents earn moderate level of income (5% + 12%) = 17%. To these group of persons the meat (grass cutter) may not be too expensive for them to buy when they want to.

The chi-square table shows relationship testing the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between socioeconomic characteristics of respondents (income, education, age, occupation) and their perception about cost of grass cutter meat. The Table 8 shows that there is no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics and perception about cost of grass cutter meat, implying that the null hypothesis is accepted. The findings suggest that grass cutter meat preference and consumption cut across all categories of persons in the Niger Delta zone. This is obviously due to the fact that the meat is highly nutritious and common to the region therefore, cherished by all. Respondents perceive that grass cutter meat is moderately expensive though affordable this is not minding their low income level. This is an evidence that respondents greatly cherish the meat even though it is quite expensive compared to other conventional meat types.

CONCLUSION

Grass cutter meat is highly cherished by the respondents in the study area for its moderate taste. Hunter are the main sources of the animals. Even though the animal is expensive consumption level is moderately high. The income level of respondents though low has no significant relationship with their perception of cost of grass cutter meat thereby implying that respondents cherish the meat not minding their low income and the high cost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is the need for enlightenment campaign on the domestication of grass cutter among the Niger Delta people. This will help in sustaining continuity of the animal's life. If hunting is to be continued at the present rate the rodent may soon be extinct.
- Agricultural agencies, governmental and non-governmental organizations should encourage domestication of grass cutter to enhance its production and longevity in life. This can be done by organizing an awareness programme for identified hunters.
- A multidisciplinary approach to the management/ breeding of grass cutter should be intensified where experts in forestry, wildlife, livestock production and agricultural extension will come together to discuss advances in breeding and management of grasscutter.

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