

# Patterns of meat consumption in Ireland

TEAGASC researchers are looking at meat consumption patterns to see what they tell us about Irish consumers.



## Food choice

An understanding of drivers of food consumption and behaviour patterns can enhance marketplace effectiveness for many food companies. A thorough understanding of the factors underpinning current meat consumption patterns can provide valuable information to the meat industry for effective targeting of consumers with new product offerings.

## Meat segments

The aim of this research, which was completed in conjunction with University College Cork, was to determine if distinct meat consumption patterns are evident among Irish consumers. These segments were profiled based on demographic characteristics and food choice attitudes. Segmentation is commonly used in market research to identify distinct consumer groups or segments based on similar characteristics. In addition to traditional segmentation variables, such as age, gender and geographic location, segments can also be derived based on attitudes, behaviours or preferences. Using National Adult Nutrition Survey (NANS) data, reported meat consumption for beef, pork, poultry and lamb was subjected to cluster analysis to identify meat consumer segments displaying similar behavioural patterns. Six distinct segments of meat consumers were identified (Table 1) and named based on the consumption patterns that best differentiated between the segments. These segments were then profiled based on socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes and dietary behaviours.

'Processed pork indulgers' comprised 13% of respondents, and derived the highest proportion of their energy intake (28%) from meat in their diet. They had fat intakes above what is recommended for a healthy diet. The meat products most consumed were pork

based, with this segment consuming five times more sausages/bacon/pudding than the other segments. This segment was characterised by a high proportion of men from a lower socioeconomic background, who had little motivation to eat healthily. 'All things meat', the smallest segment at 4%, consumed all meat types but had the highest lamb consumption of all segments. Energy from meat was 26% and fat intakes were slightly above what is recommended for a healthy diet. Membership of this gender-balanced segment was associated with being older and rural dwelling. 'Chicken eaters' comprised 20% of respondents, had the highest chicken meat consumption of all segments, and derived 22% of their energy intake from meat. They were more likely to be younger, physically active and urban dwellers. They displayed lower motivation to eat healthily than many other segments but were motivated by weight control and taste.

Representing 21% of the population each, 'fish eaters' and 'beef focused' both derived 19% of their energy intake from meat. The fish eaters segment consumed nearly twice as much fish as beef, chicken and pork. Fish eaters were associated with being older, female, and strongly motivated to eat healthily. The beef-focused cluster consumed the most beef and had a relatively low consumption of other meats. The gender-balanced beef-focused segment had total fat intakes in line with healthy guidelines. Meat provided 14% of energy intake for 'diverse moderates', who also accounted for 21% of the population. Their consumption of all meats was at a moderate to low level.

## Opportunities

The fish eaters segment was the most motivated to eat healthily. They have heard the message about the health benefits of fish

**Table 1: Meat consumption and dietary characteristics of Irish meat consumers.**

|                      | Processed pork indulgers | All things meat | Chicken eaters | Fish eaters | Beef focused | Diverse moderates |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Cluster size (%)     | 13                       | 4               | 20             | 21          | 21           | 21                |
| Age (years)          | 45                       | 56              | 38             | 50          | 43           | 45                |
| Body mass index      | 28                       | 28              | 27             | 27          | 27           | 26                |
| Energy from meat (%) | 28                       | 26              | 22             | 19          | 19           | 14                |
| Energy from fat (%)  | 37                       | 36              | 34             | 35          | 34           | 34                |
| Fat from meat (%)    | 37                       | 38              | 28             | 26          | 25           | 19                |
| Beef (g/day)         | 88                       | 41              | 43             | 33          | 124          | 30                |
| Chicken (g/day)      | 49                       | 38              | 138            | 35          | 39           | 46                |
| Fish (g/day)         | 8                        | 36              | 15             | 79          | 20           | 11                |
| Pork (g/day)         | 108                      | 24              | 28             | 37          | 30           | 39                |
| Lamb (g/day)         | 6                        | 66              | 2              | 4           | 1            | 17                |
| Turkey (g/day)       | 3                        | 9               | 1              | 2           | 1            | 4                 |
| Game, offal (g/day)  | 1                        | 22              | 0              | 1           | 0            | 2                 |

consumption, but this does not include meat consumption for them. Promotion of the benefits of lean meat may appeal to this group. The young chicken-consuming urbanites ranked taste and eating enjoyment as more important to them than health and nutrition. To this cluster with a lower body mass index, weight control when selecting foods was of greater importance than it was to others. They have heard the message that chicken can be incorporated into a lean diet, but that has not limited their selection of chicken type, with consumption of processed and food service chicken high. This contributed to the high proportion of their energy gained from meat compared to the beef-focused segment. A more rounded awareness of the nutritional profile of all meats would benefit these young consumers of chicken. Other meat product offerings that are low calorie and convenient may appeal to this group.

Price-sensitive male indulgers ate the most sausages/pudding/rashers. Convenience was no more or less important to them than to other segments and health was of low relevance. These mostly-overweight males appear relatively unconcerned about the health consequences of their food choices.

From a public health perspective, there is a need to decrease this segment's fat intake levels but this is not going to present as an attractive market opportunity. To attract this segment's attention away from high fat, alternative leaner meats should be presented as offering strong enjoyment and taste benefits, thus taking a somewhat stealth approach to health.

This research has shown how meat plays a diverse role in the diets of Irish adults and is influenced by a range of food choice motivations. These motivations can be used for effectively targeting new meat products to the intended consumer segment.

### Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine through the FIRM programme (ReVisData (13/F/527)). The authors thank Janette Walton and the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (IUNA) for access to the National Adult Nutritional survey data used in this research. For more information, see [www.iuna.net](http://www.iuna.net).

### Authors

#### Sinead McCarthy

Research Officer, Department of Agrifood Business and Spatial Analysis, Teagasc Food Research Centre, Dublin 15  
Correspondence: [sinead.mccarthy@teagasc.ie](mailto:sinead.mccarthy@teagasc.ie)

#### Mary McCarthy

Professor of Marketing, Cork University Business School, University College Cork

#### Saibh McGrath

Research Assistant, Management and Marketing, Cork University Business School, University College Cork

