FOCUS : JSMTV

What does traceability mean for beef meat consumer?

G. Giraud¹, C. Amblard

1 – INTRODUCTION

Post BSE crisis in France was managed with meat traceability as standard. All the beef meat supply chain quickly faced to problems of clear application and economical absorption of traceability. The valorisation with distributors and consumers of this peculiar effort is still unresolved (LATOUCHE et al., 1998). According to the incorporation principle (FISCHLER, 1990) it seems that consumers are likely reluctant to accept technological argument with respect to food. Consumers expectations for high quality beef meat become more oriented towards labelled meat despite a strict trade-off that does not accept high price premium (DRANSFIELD, 1997, VERBERKE & VIÆNE, 1999). Nowadays there is a very high probability of discrepancy between consumer reinsurance needs and the technical way used by the beef meat chain to satisfy such expectations by means of traceability (GRUNERT, 1999).

Who wants to identify the perception of traceability by beef meat consumer needs to answer to some questions: Which kind of guarantee is perceived by means of traceability? Origin? Breed? Hygiene? Brand? Which kind of convenient key-words can be directed towards consumers about meat traceability? What perceives the beef meat consumer: traceability or breed? A measurement of the consumer knowledge about beef meat traceability has been done during a research program about consumers’ perception of Massif Central beef meat in France (GIRAUD & AMBLARD, 2002).

¹ ENITA of Clermont-Ferrand, UR Food Products Typicality, Marmilhat, F-63370 Lempdes, France
Correspondence: giraud@enitac.fr
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2 – MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data were gathered by way of two focus groups (11 + 12 beef meat consumers) and one consumer survey with 383 respondents led during May and June 2001 in the region of Clermont-Ferrand in France. Only method and results focusing on traceability perception are presented and discussed below.

Two consumer focus groups were used to prepare the quantitative survey questionnaire. Two of ten questions used by the moderator were dedicated to traceability:

"What is the usefulness of traceability?" for a measurement of unprompted perception, and

"More precisely, what is the usefulness of traceability, (you can choose one item among the following):

- It allows to quickly find an infected set of food products
- It allows a better transparency on animal breeding and slaughtering
- It allows to restore consumer trust with some information on label
- I don't know" for a measurement of prompted perception.

These definitions were used to distinguish three stages of traceability perception. The first proposed definition is techno-oriented, it is close the professional and technical meaning of traceability. The second definition is animal-oriented, it is close the high sensitivity towards animal welfare. The third definition is more consumer-oriented.

3 – RESULTS

3.1 Traceability according to consumer focus groups discussion

During focus groups, consumers evoke the traceability as a fuzzy term. The word is variously understood. Some consumers, few ones, can define it while the majority is not able to do so. Consumer associates the traceability with animal origin. There is still certain mistrust against meat traceability, but the respondents said they now pay more attention to read labels.

Traceability is spontaneously associated with labelling. The label should contain "the origin, the packing date, the breed mention and the price per kilo". Sometimes others elements are elicited: "the kind of production (intensive vs sustainable, animal feeding…), the farmer’s name, a consumer claim phone number". At the same time consumers seem to wish for a lighter labelling.
3.2 Beef meat traceability perception according to consumer quantitative survey

3.2.1 Unprompted perception of traceability

The unprompted vocabulary used by respondents to explain traceability is very general and often poor, although various. None, among all the respondents, was able to precisely define the traceability during the whole survey. Traceability gives "need of information, to know what we buy" for 45.7% of respondents. For 11.2%, traceability "is well, is important, is useful". For 10.7%, "it is healthy, it is a guarantee of taste", it is an element of trust "my butcher". 10.2% of respondents declare "to pay more attention to read the label when purchasing food products". On the other hand, 28.7% declare spontaneously that they don’t know what is traceability used for. The term traceability is not a daily word, even if it seems widely used. The word is "fuzzy, doubtful, it needs more rigour" for 15.1% of respondents. Sometimes it is associated with "fraud" by 7.8% of respondents. 9.9% declare that traceability is "useless". Only 4.2% of respondents declare spontaneously that traceability allows to "clearly identify the origin of problem" or to "locate infected sets", 2.9% tell that it gives information about "breed". Only 4 respondents (1%) associate traceability with an "higher price".

3.2.2 Prompted perception of traceability

The main answer of the 383 respondents (48.6%) was: "traceability allows a better transparence on animal breeding and slaughtering". For a quarter of consumers (24.6%), traceability allows "to find an infected set of food products". For 19.1% of consumers, traceability allows "to restore consumer trust without precise information on label". 1.5% of respondents don’t know, even in a prompted mode, "what traceability is used for".

4 – DISCUSSION

Consumers who define traceability as an information source on animal breeding and slaughtering or as a way to find an infected set of food products are those who are seeking information about what they buy. Those who define traceability as a way to restore consumer trust with some information on label spontaneously declare not to seek information. Answers as "I don’t know" about the definition of traceability in unprompted replies seem more frequent among consumers who, in prompted mode, choose the most fuzzy definition of traceability or don’t choose any definition (Figure 1).
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Figure 1
Traceability definition (prompted) x information seeking on traceability (unprompted)

Female respondents seem to be more interested than male by animal feeding (Table 1). Is it a singular anxiety about meat or a gender effect linked to woman feeding orientation? Maybe both.

Table 1
Gender x Traceability gives information on animal feeding (unprompted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Animal feeding</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Khi² = 7.881, 1 ddl, p = 0.01

Traceability perception as an information way on what we buy varies according to the kind of store where respondents were interviewed. Consumers who buy beef meat in convenience stores specialised in meat products seem to pay
more attention to information seeking about beef meat. Whereas those who buy beef meat in supermarkets seem less information seekers and consumers who buy beef meat in traditional butcheries seem more oriented by confidence towards the butcher.

The kind of store seems to be a discriminating criterion with regard to traceability perception. Shoppers in supermarkets (65.4% of respondents) seem to pay little attention to traceability. On the other hand, shoppers in convenience stores specialised in meat products (32.1%), seem more involved in meat purchase (Figure 2). They are looking for traceability and are the most capable to define it. Consumers in traditional butcheries (2.5%) seem to use trust towards butcher as a substitute of traceability.

![Figure 2](image_url)

**Figure 2**
Kind of store x I pay attention to traceability (unprompted)

The acceptability of questionnaire in convenience stores is high (50.1%) while it is lower in supermarkets (30.4%). Consumers of traditional butchers or convenience specialised stores are more attentive to traceability than buyers in supermarkets: 21.7% answered that traceability is an important element of choice during purchase, against only 4.3% in supermarkets. Meat concerns seem stronger for consumers of traditional butcheries or convenience specialised stores.
5 – CONCLUSION

Traceability of meat is a hard notion for consumers, they are not able to define or to describe it. The unprompted responses use very general words. It is interesting to observe that the elicitation of terms linked to traceability move from technical to general (and also to no-answer) when skills and household income of respondents decrease. Higher is monthly household income, higher is the level of consumer seeking on breeding conditions and meat origin (Figure 3).

The most interesting result is the relationship between the perception of traceability and the kind of store used to buy beef meat. Three behaviours appear: shopper of supermarket is the less attentive to traceability, consumer of convenience specialised store is involved in meat purchase and pays great attention to traceability and customer of traditional butchery is more confident towards “his/her” butcher than towards an abstract and disembodied traceability.

Finaly the survey gives new elements on traceability perception because it didn’t seem to be studied before. This notion is nowadays mandatory for all actors along the beef meat sector but still remains unknown and unintelligible for consumers.
6 – REFERENCES


