

SUMMARY OF INDIVIDUAL
SEMI-DEPTH INTERVIEWS
REGARDING
FROZEN CHICKEN PARTS
FORT WORTH, TEXAS

FOR
THE PILLSBURY COMPANY
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
JUNE, 1969

Texas Agricultural Market
Research and Development Center
in
Department of Agricultural Economics and Sociology
Texas A&M University

OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES OF HOUSEWIVES CONCERNING CHICKEN

A Summary Report to The Pillsbury Co. of Semi-Depth
Interviews in Ft. Worth, Texas

Robert E. Branson and John P. Nichols
Texas Agricultural Market Research and
Development Center

Texas A&M University

The Research Objective

The technology has been available for several years to successfully market high-quality frozen chicken through retail food stores. Furthermore, marketing of chicken in the frozen form has both economic and food technological advantages to broiler producers as well as to processors, marketing firms and consumers. Nonetheless market resistance has been present. That resistance is primarily at the consumer level in the form of uninformed prejudices and mental biases against the product.

Obviously, the success of frozen chicken marketing pivots in large measure upon eliminating this consumer market mental resistance. Therefore, one of the objectives of the depth interviews of Fort Worth consumers was to search for those biases. More important, the objective was to explore for motivational "triggers" that would bridge the resistance gap to frozen chicken purchases.

A third objective was to obtain information that would guide the development of a consumer interview questionnaire. The latter would be employed in a consumer survey to seek quantification of attitudes and opinions that emerged from the semi-depth interviews.

The Methodology

Two approaches were selected to obtain shoppers' attitudes concerning chicken. First four group interviews, of eight to ten housewives each, were conducted in Forth Worth. Two groups were to have been at least "sometime" buyers of frozen chicken. The other two groups were non-buyers of frozen chicken. These group interviews were conducted by Roger Harned of The Pillsbury Company staff. Fred Nordeen of The Pillsbury Co. observed the group interviews as did Robert Branson and John Nichols of the Texas Agricultural Market Research and Development Center. Results of those group interviews have already been summarized by Roger Harned.

Following the group interviews, approximately 20 to 25 individual semi-depth interviews were conducted by Branson and Nichols among randomly selected Fort Worth residents. The sample was drawn among different sections of the city in order to obtain responses of housewives representing different income levels and ages. About half of the individual interviews were conducted by face to face questioning and the other half by telephone interviews in Fort Worth. The individual interviews were recorded on tapes and a master copy has been forwarded to The Pillsbury Company.

Formats for the semi-depth individual interviews followed some variation in sequence pattern. Included were explorations into the following subject areas.

1. Food stores shopped.
2. Where meats were purchased.
3. Type of meats generally used.
4. Kind of chicken purchased (whole, cut-up, or parts)
5. Behavior in storing chickens at home; Freezer versus refrigerator section.
6. Purchase or non-purchases of frozen chicken and why.
7. Attitudes toward frozen chicken versus non-frozen chicken.
8. Uses of and experience with other frozen meats.

9. Methods of thawing normally used.
10. Experience, if any, with quick thawing of frozen meats.
11. Experience, if any, with cooking frozen meats direct from frozen state.
12. Things looked for in selecting chicken at the food store.
13. Objections, if any, to the present way chickens are processed with respect to a) appearance of the product, b) how it is cut up, and c) the way it is packaged.
14. Chicken dishes usually prepared in the home.
15. Is there left-over chicken from original meals and, if so, what is done with leftovers?
16. What chicken parts are favorites of the household members?
17. Have chicken parts been purchased and if so which ones?
18. Interest in skinless chicken parts.
19. Would the purchase of individually frozen chicken parts be a help or convenience in home use?
20. Are frozen vegetables, fruits and/or fruit juices purchased and if so, why?
21. Size and type of package preferred for frozen vegetables.
22. What type of package would be preferred for frozen chicken parts?
23. Knowledge of how and where chickens bought at local food store are processed.
24. Opinions as to how old non-frozen (fresh) chickens are that are purchased at the local food store.
25. Opinion as to which is better--a quick frozen chicken bought in store 2 days later or a non-frozen (fresh) chicken purchased in the store 2 days later?
26. Attitudes and opinions concerning national branded foods as compared to local or store brands.
27. Opinion as to whether national brand of non-frozen chicken would be of any value.
28. Opinion as to value, if any, of a national brand of frozen chicken, cut-up or parts.
29. Price differential, if any, that would be paid for a national brand of frozen chicken.

General Description of Interviewees

Of the individual interviews, at least a third were young housewives (under 25 years of age) and the balance ranged from about age 30 to 60. All interviews, except one were with Anglo-Saxon persons. One Negro household was interviewed. Incomes of the households represented were divided approximately one-fourth low income, one-half middle income and one-fourth high income. Two interviews were made with both the husband and wife present.

Summary of Interview Findings

Answers to the key questions in the semi-depth interviews are presented below in general summary form. With such a small number of interviews, no attempt at tabulation was made. This was particularly appropriate since the primary objective was to search for ideas opinions and marketing concepts rather than a quantification of replies. For convenience, the summary of replies is numbered in relation to the number assigned in the subject area list in the preceding section of this report.

4. Whole chicken appeared to be purchased by those buying primarily because of the price advantage, which is about 4 to 5 cents per pound in the Fort Worth market. Another reason was because there was objection to the way chickens were cut up by the processor or store. Cutting at the natural bone joints was preferred and separate pieces were preferred instead of two or more left together. For example, one housewife said that the leg and thigh are left together even in the cut-up chicken.

Those housewives buying parts were about evenly divided between exclusive use of parts and occasional use of parts.

5. Three-fourths, or more, of those interviewed put unfrozen chickens in the freezer at home where they became frozen before use.
6. Less than one-fourth of those interviewed had bought frozen chicken. Of those, about one-third were consistent users of frozen chicken and these generally bought parts.

Objection to dark bones in frozen chicken was expressed by by infrequent frozen product users.

7. General attitudes concerning frozen chicken were somewhat negative in that no advantage was perceived. Users of frozen chicken felt

that it saved their having to freeze it themselves. Thawing from store to home was a problem in some instances but not a usual one.

8. About a third to a half of those interviewed had experience with frozen beef, or other meats, on a fairly frequent basis.
9. & 10. Thawing at room temperature was by far the preferred and most common method used. Quick thawing was employed only in emergencies and housewives were rather uncomfortable with the process.

Thawing of chicken in water to shorten the time requirement had been tried by several persons. However, there was resistance to the procedure because of a belief that it somehow impaired product flavor or quality. The difficulty is believed, as a matter of interpretation, to be tied to the psychological "hang-up" that water dilutes flavor or strength in any food.

11. Cooking meats direct from a frozen state was experienced mostly with beef roasts or steaks. Circumstances of little available time for meal preparation instigated the behavior. The practice of this method of cooking was considered by most everyone as abnormal. Lack of personal confidence and cooking instructions for this method of meat preparation appeared to be an underlying handicap.
12. Appearance of chicken is important when selecting a purchase. Skin color, pin feathers, bruises and weepage were mentioned. Also it was desired that the bird be plump in appearance as an indication of its being well fed and healthy.
13. The packaging should be safe for transporting the product home. Visibility of the product is important. Some objected to the sawing of the chicken carcass that did not separate pieces at the natural joints or connecting edges.

Pin feathers on wings were objected to. There was interest by some in skinless chicken parts.

Some noted the chickens bought were partly frozen but assumed it was from the ice or refrigeration in the display case.

14. A surprising proportion of those interviewed were using chicken in casserole dishes or baking or stewing chicken. Reflected was the fact that a number of those interviewed had come to Ft. Worth from other parts of the United States. Therefore, frying and barbecuing of chicken did not represent a primary method of preparation.

Interest was expressed in recipes that would call for the use of a specified number of chicken thighs or breasts. It was felt that such a dish, perhaps a casserole, would be useful for serving dinner guests.

15. Left-over chicken was not considered to be a problem by most. Leftovers were eaten as is or were put into chicken salad.

Nonetheless, about a fifth of those interviewed felt that the ability to cook just what was wanted from packages of frozen parts would be an advantage.

16. Breasts and thighs were the most popular pieces of chicken. There was a positive response by at least a third of the persons to the pulley bone, and especially for children. However, most families have learned to eat all of the chicken and, therefore, the boney parts are considered just a part of the package, so to speak.

17. Chicken parts had been purchased by about a fourth of those interviewed. Housewives with children at the age levels of about

5 to 10, it seemed, were likely to have children who wanted only one or two kinds of pieces of chicken. This motivated the purchase of parts.

One large family bought 5 pound boxes of frozen parts and ate the entire box at one meal.

Favoritism for light or dark meat also seemed to prompt the buying of chicken parts.

18. Skinless chicken was mentioned by at least three housewives. Whether this represents a potential product differentiation market would require further investigation.
19. "Yes" answers to convenience and desirability of individually frozen chicken parts were expressed by a small portion of those interviewed. About a fourth said they would try the product. No more than a sixth seemed to display any enthusiasm for the product concept.
20. Frozen vegetables, fruits or juices were primarily bought because of "better flavor" considerations. However, some had definite preferences for canned versions of some foods.
21. Most bought the small opaque packages of frozen vegetables. None-the less, about a fourth used the plastic bags and used product out of the bag as needed. The bag was re-closed and returned to the freezer.
22. Packaging of frozen chicken parts definitely should be a plastic bag, or at least a package giving high visibility to the product. It should also be re-closable.
23. Consumers had no disposition to discuss processing of chickens. They preferred not to even think about it.

Consensus was that chickens were processed locally so that they would be fresh.

24. It was assumed, or hoped, by housewives interviewed that chickens (non-frozen) bought in the store were processed only a few hours earlier, or certainly no more than the previous afternoon or day.
25. Opinions were practically unanimous that a quick-frozen chicken (one or two hours after processing) was superior to a non-frozen chicken that was two days old at the store.
26. National brands are held in general esteem. In the case of chicken and other meats, however, there is a tendency to place great reliance upon the store in providing quality products for sale.
27. & 28. There was considerable division of opinion as to the advantage of a national brand for chicken. For fresh (non-frozen) chicken, an advantage was perceived by less than a fourth of those interviewed. Most, however, would try it and see if there were any quality difference that warranted continued purchase.

Frozen chicken had somewhat more appeal on a national brand basis. Confidence in the quality of the product and its age appeared to be more a factor when considering frozen foods.

29. A price difference of no more than 2 to 5 cents a pound would be paid for a national brand chicken. This assumes quality advantages of some perceived nature.

Conclusions

In our judgment the most significant conclusions from the individual depth interviews are these:

1. The most significant factor upon which to bridge the resistance gap to frozen chicken is that of inherent freshness of the product.

The positive response to a quick-frozen chicken as compared to a fresh (non-frozen) chicken two days old was very significant in our judgment.

Nonetheless, the housewife does not know the facts about the matter and is inclined to "fall back" to buying unfrozen chicken if this product differentiation is not fully believed and "sold" to her.

2. The convenience of individually frozen chicken parts will have to be adequately demonstrated via educational advertising if a market share of over 10 to 15 percent is to be secured. This is apart from considerations in item one above.
3. Packaging should have good product visibility, carry a positive message about product freshness and also provide
 - a) interesting recipes
 - b) kitchen tested instructions for quick thawing
 - c) kitchen tested recipes for cooking direct from the frozen state.

It is recommended that a market test be made using these above marketing concepts.