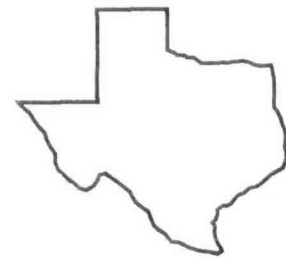
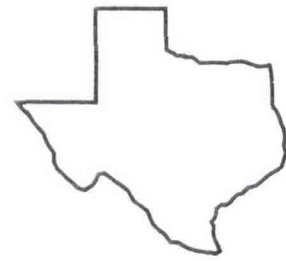
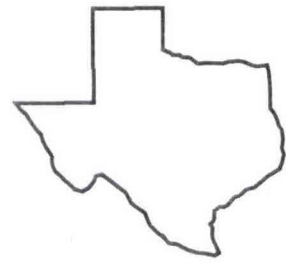
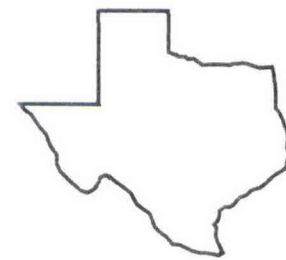




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CHARACTERIZING THE DEMAND BY RESTAURANTS FOR EXOTIC GAME MEAT PRODUCTS

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Background. Marketing of exotic game meat products (EGMP) by relatively few producers and even fewer processors in the U.S. offers many unique challenges. Limited production and processing results in restricted supplies of selected species.

Little is known about public awareness, perception and receptiveness to EGMP. Likewise, little information is available about why customers chose to buy EGMP and why members of the hotel, restaurant and institutional (HRI) trade chose to serve it.

Research Findings. Results of this study begin to identify the extent to which EGMP is served, why and how decisions are made to offer EGMP on menus, why patrons order EGMP, and general characteristics of restaurants serving or not serving EGMP. A sample of restaurants was selected from members of the Texas Restaurant Association (TRA) and from advertisers in Texas Monthly Magazine (TMM). Just over half the respondents were upscale restaurants with the remainder classified as hotels, country clubs and german-style.

Over 90% of the upscale restaurants identified through TMM offered EGMP entrees on their menus. However, less than one-third of restaurants in other categories from the TRA list served EGMP. A small percentage of restaurants had served EGMP in the past and had taken it off their menus. Most of these establishments were country clubs.

Restaurants most commonly served venison, wild boar, antelope, and wild game birds. A few TMM restaurants noted that they served New Zealand venison. However, most respondents stated they served U.S. venison, while some did not know the country of origin. Loins, saddles, racks and legs were the most common cuts of venison, antelope and wild boar served by restaurants. These cuts contain the higher valued muscle groups in the carcass. This offers challenges for EGMP processors to find outlets for the less valued parts of carcasses. Some chefs were utilizing lower valued meat items in stews, soups and sausages.

The average entree price for venison, antelope and wild boar was \$21.55, \$21.64 and \$19.67, respectively. This compared closely with average maximum beef and seafood meal prices of \$20.54 and \$19.31, respectively, for restaurants also serving EGMP.

Similarity of meal prices implied there was little price competition between EGMP and other meats. Restaurants were not offering EGMP as a lower priced alternative to other menu items, as EGMP was priced similarly to other premium priced entree items.

Responses from restaurant chefs and managers clearly indicated that the primary reason for their serving EGMP was that customers asked for it. They also added that EGMP was on their menus because it has been traditional to offer it and because they want to offer a variety of meat entrees to their customers.

Restauranteurs believed that customers primarily ordered EGMP entrees because of its uniqueness and taste. Low-fat healthy characteristics of EGMP were not mentioned often as a major consideration in customers decision to order EGMP.

Respondents serving EGMP believed customers were hesitant to order these entrees because of bad past experiences, because of poor product perceptions or because EGMP was too exotic. Examples of other reasons given for customers not ordering EGMP included because they were unaware of it, because of health reasons and because it was too expensive.

Only about 40% of hotels and upscale restaurants promoted EGMP in any way. Hotel restaurants relied almost exclusively on their wait staff, while upscale restaurants relied on both wait staff and menus to let customers know EGMP entrees were available.

Future sales and promotions of EGMP will likely increase, especially among upscale restaurants, according to respondents. Upscale and hotel restaurants expressed plans to offer more EGMP entrees and to engage in additional future promotions involving EGMP.

Application. Knowing more about the market characteristics for particular product lines, like EGMP, helps marketers target their efforts to appropriate audiences. Purveyors of EGMP should target their marketing efforts to upscale restaurants and hotels with upscale restaurants, at least initially until supplies increase substantially.. These establishments should already have an established clientele accustomed to paying \$20 or more for entrees.

Restaurants will continue to serve EGMP entrees as long as customers demand it and serving it is profitable. Customers will continue ordering EGMP for its uniqueness and taste.

EGMP processors must continue to add value to less desirable cuts from carcasses. Consumers likely will be receptive to new menu offerings as they continue to look for variety and as long as price appears to play only a minor role in selecting dining experiences.

Results in this study imply that education will play a major role in industry growth. The public, especially those who eat in upscale restaurants or in hotel restaurants with upscale-type menus, need to be informed about the availability, uniqueness and desirability of EGMP. Managers and chefs should receive and would welcome assistance on methods of preparation, pricing and promotion. Industry participants should report to the restaurant industry that EGMP are available, nutritious, safe, profitable to serve, desired by customers, and high quality.