



# PROTEIN Labeling Study

Yerecic Label, the National Pork Board and America's Beef Producers through the Beef Checkoff Program conducted focus groups in three geographically dispersed markets in April 2004. The purpose of the study was to gain further understanding of the value of on-pack labels for consumers and to evaluate various labeling concepts for beef, chicken and pork.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Consumers Tend to Purchase the Same Familiar Cuts

The same cuts of meat are regularly purchased because they are easy to prepare. Since the preparer is comfortable with them, the end result is likely to be good. Consumers typically buy certain types of meat because they and their family like the taste of that meat and because it is quick and easy to prepare.

- Comfort level and familiarity with preparing particular cuts of meat play a major role in purchasing decisions. Consumers keep standard recipes for their favorite meats in their minds. Lack of familiarity with different cuts of meat relates to not always knowing what ingredients are needed in cooking the meat or what side dishes complement it.
- Purchasing unfamiliar cuts such as beef roast, beef chuck and round steaks, pork roasts, ground pork and chicken thighs and drumsticks requires more planning and effort. Consumers are hesitant to purchase different cuts of meat because they are uncertain how to prepare them to guarantee good results.
- Larger cuts of meat, such as beef roasts, whole chickens or whole pork loins, are purchased less frequently because the purchase price and the

### Consumer Quotes:

*"I know what to expect from something in particular, where I may not know what to expect from a different type of meat. Like when I grill a different kind of roast, it may turn out differently than I'm used to. And I get unhappy about that."*

*"We're so used to knowing that certain meats go with certain recipes, and don't necessarily try something new."*

time invested in preparation is higher in total than for smaller, individual cuts. Thus, there is greater risk involved if the meal is not successful.

- Many consumers complain that they and their families are bored with eating the same meals over and over. They want to learn to prepare familiar cuts in new ways.



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## On-Pack Labels Help Consumers With New Meal Options

Consumers respond well to having on-pack labels for fresh meat. They believe the labels motivate them to try new cuts of meat and/or prepare the cuts they traditionally buy in new and varied ways. They see on-pack labels as a helpful source of information for preparing meals.

### Consumer Quotes:

*For people who haven't tried that particular [type] of meat, you can learn how to prepare it. You have the information on the pack to prepare it. You're more willing to try new things and it may help the meat industry when people are going to buy different cuts of meat that they didn't buy before."*

*"I'm always looking for different ideas. When you're cooking every night, you want to try different things. You don't want to be cooking a chicken breast and just throwing it in the oven. You want to try different ways to cook it. So I like to have ideas given to me instead of me trying to think of things."*

## Key Label Attributes Important for Success

**Cooking instructions:** Preparation instructions should be presented in an easy to read format such as a chart. At a minimum, meats should have basic preparation information (time and temperature) on the package. Ideally, cooking information should be customized for a particular cut and portion size.



### Consumer Quotes:

*"Don't you think that perhaps people would be more willing to buy pork if they knew better how to cook it? Because, I think, in the past most of us have been afraid of pork and we overcook it until it's dry."*

**Nutrition information:** Consumers appreciate nutrition information because they desire to cook healthy meals for their families. They prefer labels that have nutrition information over those that do not.



**Recipes:** Recipes should be quick and easy to prepare, requiring a limited number of ingredients (e.g., about five ingredients). A list of all the ingredients is helpful and serves as a shopping list.

### Consumer Quotes:

*"I don't know if I'm unique, but I'm always running in the store trying to get everything done in five minutes. And I don't always look up recipes. I love to cook, but it would be helpful [to have the complete recipe] so that when I get home, I don't think, 'Now I don't have x, y, z. I can't make it.' So I just grill the chicken again like I usually do."*

*"...When I'm going to prepare a meal, I go out and do the shopping for that week. And I want to know, am I picking up the right ingredients so that I'm not making 600 trips to the store? So it would be helpful to list the ingredients or know what else you're going to need in order to make this dish."*

**Appetite appeal:** A label that is colorful is likely to capture the consumer's attention. Vibrant colors such as blue, purple or even black are preferred as long as accent colors such as red and yellow are also used. This is further enhanced if visuals

or photographs depicting the cooked meat along with side dishes are used. The visuals on the label should be as large or dominant as possible.

**Consumer Quotes:**  
*"I think a picture makes it look more appetizing. Some people are looking for ideas. To see a finished picture helps them a lot. It also makes you hungry."*

**Text:** Wording must be easy to read in order to capture the consumer's attention. Dark lettering on a light background rather than reverse type (i.e., white lettering on a dark background) is preferred because it is considered much easier to read. Consumers also insist that the font size must be legible.

**Consumer Quotes:**  
*"If the text is too small, I really wouldn't care what that said because it's so small"*

**Label shape/location:** A triangular-shaped label is preferred, assuming it contains all the necessary information, since it is less likely to obscure the meat if it is placed in the corner of the package. Regardless of the shape of the label (i.e., triangular or rectangular) or whether or not the labels are peel-back or booklet type, the labels should be designed and placed so they do not conceal the meat in the package and so they contain all the desired information.



**Construction:** Consumer respondents had mixed opinions regarding label construction. Some prefer peel-back labels, while others prefer booklet labels. A major concern about peel-back labels is that the label can come completely off when peeled, leaving an incomplete label for other potential customers. It is important that the peel back edge be easily identified, and that once the label is peeled back, it doesn't come all the way off or can be reset. This will reduce consumer concerns that the label information will get lost, the meat cases will get messy and the meat packages will look previously handled.



Regardless of the construction style of the label, consumers want a clear indication of where to open the label.

**Material:** On-pack labels are clearly preferred over film printed labels or thermal weighscale labels. On-pack labels are seen as less messy and convenient to use and save.

**Consumer Quotes:**  
*"The first thing I thought of if it's printed on the film, when you undo that package, you might read it right then, but are you going to save that? It's on a little piece of film. But if it's stuck on top of the package, I'm going to take it off, put it to the side, and use it and use it and use it. I'm not going to mess with that film. I'm not going to clean it."*

## Other Promotions Can Add Further Value

**Discounts:** Labels that provide a significant discount (e.g., two dollars) off a meat purchase are especially motivating. Consumers indicate they would purchase meat or try different cuts of meat to take advantage of this type of savings. Cross-merchandising coupons are favorably received even for lower priced grocery items when with a recipe.

**Consumer Quotes:**  
*"[It] is really tantalizing because it offers free meat, which I would go for in a heartbeat. It says two dollars off the meat."*

**Day-of-purchase discounts:** Labels that offer day-of-purchase discounts on meat, additional discounts off complementary products appearing in the accompanying recipes, provide nutrition



information, and also offer a sweepstakes clearly differentiate themselves from other labels. If contingent offers (i.e., get \$2.00 off pork loin with purchase of...) are made, they should be for popular name brand products, "hot" new products from established manufacturers to induce trial or products regularly used in the household.

**Sweepstakes:** These offers appeal to some consumers but not to others. For security reasons some consumers prefer to enter a sweepstakes the "old fashioned" way (i.e., by completing a form and sending it in), rather than by having to go online.

**Themes:** Labels that promote food themes (e.g., ethnic cuisines, a variety of holiday or seasonal meal solutions) are extremely appealing. Having these labels focus on holidays, specific cuisines, seasonal foods or cooking methods encourages consumers to try different cuts of meat in new and varied ways.



## Summary

- Consumers are extremely receptive to on pack labels that communicate key consumer benefits such as taste satisfaction and variety, good nutrition and savings of time and money. Simple, appetizing recipes as well as photos that illustrate taste and versatility, nutrition facts, and coupons that translate into savings are all critical elements in communicating these key consumer benefits.
- On pack labels are an important retailer tool and should be considered as part of an overall consumer communication strategy for the meatcase. Not only do they entice consumers to try something new and/or different but they also enhance repeat fresh meat purchases.

### Consumer Quotes:

*"I never bought London broil – ever. I didn't know how to prepare it. It was a thick cut and I get nervous around thick cuts. It had a label on it that had a recipe for a marinade. I bought it and used the marinade and it was fantastic. It totally turned me on to the whole idea of [on pack] recipe labels giving us ideas and now I buy it all the time; it's a family favorite".*