

One year on- Beef is on the menu again

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A GfK survey of household consumption of meat and other foodstuffs following the emergence of BSE.

Nuremberg, 27 November 2001 – Beef is once again being eaten in Germany, one year after the first report of BSE on 24 November 2000. In the initial months following this and similar announcements, poultry, fish, vegetables and other side dishes became very popular. Now, however, German consumers have reverted to their normal eating habits.

In the past year, consumers have spent as much during the Christmas and New Year period as in previous years. Many of them however, did not eat any meat during the New Year period 2000/2001. Given the circumstances, this particularly affected the consumption of beef. It now seems, however, that consumers' purchasing behaviour is almost the same during the public holidays at the end of this year as before the emergence of BSE. Nearly everyone who ate meat previously is now eating meat again, although beef tends to be purchased less frequently.

Last winter, almost half of those who ate beef before no longer ate this product. It was not until after Easter that more consumers began to buy beef again and sales of beef improved. Findings from the GfK Fresh produce panel reflect the extent of this renewed interest: whereas households in December 2000 and January 2001 bought almost 70 per cent less beef than in the previous year, sales in June 2001 were only 20 per cent down on the previous year and sales in September 2001 only 14 per cent down.

However, consumers were far less restrained when it came to buying other types of meat. For example, pork continued to be eaten despite reports of foot and mouth disease. Consumers, in fact, bought even more pork than the year before.

Sales of types of sausage however, suffered as a result of the BSE debate, although consumers' reactions were far less extreme than with regard to meat. At the beginning of the year, liver sausage and salami often remained unsold, but this is a thing of the past. Consumers have now reverted to their original eating habits.

Fish, poultry, vegetables and organic products

In the first few months after 24 November 2000, consumers opted for poultry, fish, cheese and above all, vegetables as an alternative to meat. This is no longer the case. Meat has completely regained the popularity it had among consumers before 24 November 2000. After the run on fish triggered by BSE had subsided, the increase in consumption of fish only amounted to 7 per cent in 2001.

Organic products, on the other hand, are slowly becoming more popular. Almost five million households have bought organic meat or sausage at least once since Easter. However, the total market share of organic meat and sausage is still approximately 1 per cent.

Purchase sources

Consumers have nevertheless become more selective with regard to where they buy meat. Consumers continued to buy from the local butcher (who they know and trust) just as often as the year before, whereas they tended to avoid the delicatessen counters in supermarkets or large hypermarkets.

Increase in meat prices

However, meat consumption in the last few months has still been subject to a number of difficulties. This is however only indirectly connected with BSE. Other issues have long since dispelled fear of mad cow disease in the consumers' consciousness. Depending on the outlet, consumers had to pay, on average, between 8 and 20 per cent more for meat since the beginning of the year. In May 2001 prices reached their highest value this year. However, meat prices have since levelled out again significantly. Beef, for example, could be bought in September 2001 for exactly the same price as the year before.

These and other findings are taken from the GfK Fresh produce panel, in which a representative sample of 5,000 private German households regularly reported on their household purchases, including meat, sausage, poultry and fish. For further information, please contact: Ralf Mertes, Fax: ++ 49 911-395-4009, e-mail: ralf.mertes@gfk.com.

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