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# Meat Buying and Preparation Practices of Professionally Employed Women



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## SUMMARY

Employed women constitute a potent shopping force. And undoubtedly their numbers will continue to increase. Since meat processors and retailers can profit by meeting the specific food desires of this segment of the population, they need to understand needs of the group.

Results of a recent study by Auburn University Agricultural Experiment Station point up different shopping habits of professionally employed women.

Although these women are busy, they are discriminating in food purchasing and preparation practices. They are conscious of food costs, but place greater emphasis on non-cost considerations, such as quality, convenience, pre-planning, and advice of associates. It is likely that such women enjoy food shopping and preparation as a sort of avocation, since they are not full-time homemakers. As such, they are receptive to innovations and new ideas.

Beef was the leading meat in purchases by the professional women. Taste preference was the main motivating factor in meat purchasing, with ease of preparation, needs for special meals and lunches, and costs also important.

Shortage of time for meal preparation also affected meat purchase and preparation by the employed women. To overcome the time pressures, meals were prepared in advance, quick and easily prepared foods were used, and maids were hired if possible. About 60 per cent of meals were prepared in less than 30 minutes and 78 per cent took less than 1 hour. Frozen foods were used by about 60 per cent.

Most of the women interviewed enjoyed food shopping, despite time limitations. They shopped in a particular store mainly because of convenience or because the store stocked high quality meat. Time spent shopping for food averaged 25 minutes per trip on weekdays and 40 minutes on weekends. They averaged 2.7 food shopping trips per week.

Forty-five per cent of the women bought all their meat at one store and 98 per cent purchased all groceries in a single store. About 30 per cent bought half or more of their meat in a different store from where they bought groceries. Most of those interviewed did all the shopping for their households.

Meat was prepared differently by the professional women than by other homemakers. They usually broiled beef steaks and baked roasts, and ground beef was more often broiled than prepared in other ways.

# Meat Buying and Preparation Practices Of Professionally Employed Women\*

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AMONG THE MANY FACTORS that affect housewives' meat buying decisions are their activities outside the home. The most important of these is gainful employment.<sup>1</sup> Household surveys and census estimates reveal that about one-third of the women in Alabama are gainfully employed. In addition, many more participate in social and civic activities that limit their time at home. Increases in numbers of gainfully employed women will likely continue and women will continue to devote considerable time to outside activities. In any event, pressures with regard to time and convenience will exercise considerable influence on food buying and preparation practices.

Principal concern in the study reported here is with meats. Meat buying and preparation problems of this large group of women should be of great interest to producers, meat packers, and retailers who must adequately serve the needs and desires of all their customers. Increased sales could result from better serving the needs of the large group of professionally employed women.

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\*\* Resigned.

<sup>1</sup> HUDSON, A. C., AND DANNER, M. J. Decision Making in Meat Buying. Auburn Univ. Agr. Expt. Sta. Cir. 139. June 1961.

The specific purpose of the report is to provide knowledge about the attitudes and habits of gainfully employed women in professional type positions regarding meat purchases and preparation. The nature of the study sample precludes a wide application of results; however, the data should provide a good basis for understanding the actions and attitudes of a particular group of gainfully employed women.

### **SCOPE and METHOD**

Results of this study were based on interviews with a sample of 47 gainfully employed professional women in Mobile and Montgomery, Alabama, during May 1961. All were members of a professional woman's club. This organization was used as a source of respondents to avoid the costs and uncertainties of obtaining interviewees of the desired characteristics from a random sample. Members of the club agreed to provide the evening time necessary for the interview and to keep the required records. Moreover, it was believed that these women would be well aware of changes and innovations in meat products and meat preparation.

Three separate questionnaires were used. The first was relatively unstructured, dealing with meat selection and preparation. The second schedule consisted of a one-week diary type report on meats purchased and served and time spent in selection and preparation. The third questionnaire was a decision making scale that measured the homemakers' familiarity with various factors associated with meat purchase decisions.

### **DESCRIPTION of SAMPLE**

Households in the sample were distributed as follows:

<i>Type of household</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
Husband and wife	49
Woman and family	19
Woman alone	32

Almost two-thirds of the women interviewed were over 50 years of age. Less than a fifth were under 40 years of age. None were younger than 30.

Occupations of these women are shown below:

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
Office manager or equivalent	33
Other secretarial or clerical	31
Professional	16
Civil Service	11
Business	7
Self-employed	2

The proportion of total family income supplied by these gainfully employed women was as follows:

<i>Proportion of income</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
100 per cent	42
50 to 99 per cent	26
25 to 49 per cent	23
Under 25 per cent	9

Almost all the women were high school graduates and two-fifths had attended college. About a fifth had attended business school. Three-fourths of the women were reared in Alabama, and about two-thirds in urban areas.

### **FOOD SHOPPING PRACTICES**

Although these women were employed full time outside the home, they spent considerable time in food shopping. During a one-week period they averaged 2.7 trips to the store and spent 86 minutes per week shopping. Average time per shopping trip was about 25 minutes on weekdays and about 40 minutes on weekends. More than half of the women interviewed made only one shopping trip each week. About a third shopped more often than this and 9 per cent shopped less frequently.

These women did not shop around in various food stores to a great extent. Forty-five per cent bought all groceries and meats in one store and 92 per cent bought all their groceries in one store.

Seventy per cent bought half or more of their meats in the same store in which they bought their other groceries. About 30 per cent bought half or more of their meat in a different store. These women probably shopped more for meat because they had more money to spend and apparently wanted higher quality meats. Usually the women bought cured pork items, poultry, and processed meats in chain stores or supermarkets and went to smaller stores for beef cuts.

About half of the women interviewed shopped at particular stores because of convenience. Other reasons for selecting par-

ticular stores were related to quality and price considerations, as shown below:

<i>Reason for selection</i>	<i>Percentage reporting*</i>
Convenience	49
Quality of meats	38
Quality of other food items	15
Price	15
Other	21

\* Women were permitted to give more than one reason.

Most of these women said they enjoyed shopping for food. Only 15 per cent did not. Several mentioned that shopping would be more enjoyable if they were not forced to hurry because of time limitations. About a fourth added that they particularly enjoyed looking for displays of new items. Few reported dissatisfaction with the meat they purchased.

Only 15 per cent of these women made any effort to keep a budget for food purchases, probably because of minimum family responsibilities.

### **MEAL PREPARATION**

Most of the women interviewed reported severe time limitations in food preparation. To overcome these time pressures, various means were used. Meats were prepared in advance by 39 per cent, 15 per cent hired outside help, and 12 per cent chose items adapted to quick and easy preparation. The remaining respondents did not indicate specific means.

These women averaged 38 minutes per meal in meal preparation. There was little difference in weekday and weekend meals. Fifty-eight per cent of all meals were prepared in less than 30 minutes and 78 per cent in less than an hour. These data are in agreement with those of a Market Research Corporation of America study.<sup>2</sup> In that study, employed housewives prepared 57 per cent of weekday meals and 51 per cent of weekend meals in less than 30 minutes.

Frozen foods require little effort in meal preparation and make after meal cleaning much easier. Three-fifths of the respondents reported they used frozen foods. However, only 26 per cent regularly used frozen, prepared meat products.

Almost three-fourths of the women regularly ate the noon meal out during work days; the others carried lunches. Only a few al-

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<sup>2</sup> The Research Corner, Supermarket News. July 3, 1961.

ternated carrying lunches and eating out, but all sometimes ate meals out.

Only 15 per cent of the women interviewed said they did not enjoy cooking. All reported doing some cooking, and all stressed lack of time and the small size of family as factors that limited their cooking.

### MEAT BUYING PRACTICES

These gainfully employed women purchased more beef than any other kind of meat, Table 1. Of the total pounds of meat purchased, 57 per cent was beef, 17 per cent was poultry, and 14

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY OF MEAT PURCHASES AND POUNDS PURCHASED BY GAINFULLY EMPLOYED WOMEN, MOBILE AND MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, 1961

Meats	Number of pounds	Number of items purchased
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Beef cuts.....	55	33
Poultry.....	17	16
Pork cuts.....	8	13
Bacon and sausage.....	6	14
All canned and frozen meats.....	5	14
Seafood (fresh).....	5	5
Luncheon meat.....	2	3
Lamb.....	2	2
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

per cent pork. Canned and frozen foods and seafood items constituted only 5 per cent each of total pounds purchased.

These data were somewhat different from results of other studies. A 1957 Alabama study of gainfully employed women with lower incomes<sup>3</sup> and results from the Atlanta Consumer Panel,<sup>4</sup> representative of the general population, both indicated that more pounds of pork than beef were purchased. The use of poultry and other meats did not vary greatly among the three sample groups.

### Reasons for Purchasing Meats

Taste preference was the most frequently mentioned reason for purchasing meat items. This reason was given for 40 per cent of the items purchased by the women interviewed. Twenty-six per cent of the items bought by the study group were chosen with

<sup>3</sup> DANNER, M. J. Beef Preferences and Purchasing Practices. Auburn Univ. Agr. Expt. Sta. Cir. 131. June 1959.

<sup>4</sup> ELROD, J. C., PURCELL, J. D., FORD, K. E., AND PENNY, N. M. Food Purchases. Atlanta Consumer Panel, April-June 1960. Ga. Agr. Expt. Sta. September 1960.

ease and speed of preparation in mind.<sup>5</sup> Employment outside the home was apparently an influencing factor in this regard. A fourth of the items purchased were picked for special meals or lunches and a fifth were bought because of price considerations. Reasons given by the study group are listed below:

<i>Reason for purchasing</i>	<i>Percentage reporting*</i>
Taste preference	40
Ease and speed of preparation	26
Special meals and lunches	25
Price considerations	19
Nutrition or diet	5
Variety in menu	5
Provide for leftovers	4
Quality	4
Other	4

\* Women were permitted to give more than one reason.

### Methods of Preparation

Methods of meat preparation used by the women in the sample are reported in Table 2. Seventy-one per cent of the beef steaks were broiled and only a fourth fried. Most beef roasts were baked. Ground beef and other beef items were prepared in a variety of ways, but ground beef was usually broiled.<sup>6</sup> Forty-one per cent of the pork items were fried and about a fourth each broiled and baked. Frying and baking were the most popular methods of preparing poultry. Other meats were distributed

TABLE 2. METHOD OF PREPARING MEATS BY GAINFULLY EMPLOYED WOMEN, MOBILE AND MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, 1961

Method of preparation	Beef				Pork	Poultry
	Steak	Roast	Ground	Other		
	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>
Broil.....	71	0	30	20	28	16
Pan fry.....	24	0	21	14	41	31
Bake.....	0	84	24	25	24	29
Moist heat methods.....	5	11	23	34	3	21
Sandwich and salad.....	0	5	2	7	4	3
ALL MEAT.....	100	100	100	100	100	100

<sup>5</sup> In a previous study of representative households in six Alabama cities ranging between 25,000 and 100,000 population, 68 per cent of the women interviewed gave taste preference as the reason for buying a particular meat item. Only 2 per cent cited ease of preparation as the reason for purchasing particular items. Note Footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> A sample of gainfully employed women with lower incomes studied in 1957 revealed different meat preparation practices. In these households beef steak, as well as ground beef, was usually fried. Beef roasts were pressure cooked more frequently than they were oven roasted. Note Footnote 3.



about evenly by method of preparation and included 29 per cent in sandwiches and salads.

Differences in methods of meat preparation are important since this may determine degrees of satisfaction. These professionally employed women prepared meat differently from households previously studied. This could be influenced by incomes, employment, equipment, or these factors in combination.

### DECISION MAKING in FOOD BUYING

In an attempt to measure the factors that influenced homemakers' food buying decisions, each of the women completed a questionnaire designed for a Michigan State University Study.<sup>7</sup>

Housewives were asked to reply to each of 39 statements on a 5-point scale: (1) rarely or almost never true, (2) sometimes but infrequently true, (3) occasionally true, (4) very often true, or (5) true most of the time. These questions covered 10 major areas of decision making judged to be important. These major areas of influence are listed and explained below:

(1) **Friends:** One whose food purchase decisions, practices, and philosophies are influenced by neighbors, friends, or associates.

(2) **Quality:** One who bases food purchase decisions primarily on the appearance, flavor, healthfulness, or other qualities of the items considered regardless of cost or facility of preparation.

(3) **Preplanning:** One who, prior to reaching the site of purchase, knows what foods will be purchased and how and when each food will be used.

(4) **Convenience:** One who bases food purchase decisions primarily on the time and facility of preparation regardless of cost or quality of the item.

(5) **Wife dominance:** One who makes the decisions on where to shop, what to buy, and how much money to spend for food.

(6) **Calculation:** One who carefully weighs and measures all available information to aid in making a food purchase decision.

(7) **Mass media:** One who actively and purposefully seeks facts pertaining to prices, quality, or convenience of various food items.

(8) **Parents:** One whose food purchase decisions, practices, and philosophies are influenced by his or her parents.

<sup>7</sup> TRIER, H., SMITH, H. C., AND SHAFFER, J. Differences in Food Buying Attitudes of Housewives. *Jour. of Marketing.* 25:66. July 1960.

TABLE 3. ORIENTATION TOWARD AREAS OF INFLUENCE IN DECISION MAKING BY GAINFULLY EMPLOYED WOMEN, MOBILE AND MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, 1961

Areas of influence	Proportion oriented			
	Wife and husband	Woman and family	Woman alone	All women
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Friends.....	58	70	66	63
Quality.....	62	60	60	61
Preplanning.....	59	56	62	59
Convenience.....	57	49	56	56
Wife dominance.....	53	NA*	NA	53
Calculation.....	58	47	46	52
Mass media.....	54	48	40	48
Parents.....	47	NA	NA	47
Cost.....	55	41	34	45
Husband dominance.....	32	NA	NA	32

\* NA, not applicable.

(9) **Cost:** One who bases food purchase decisions primarily on cost of the item, irrespective of the time needed for preparation, taste of the item, or a pre-established habit of food eating.

(10) **Husband dominance:** (Same as 5.)

Percentage scores for the women interviewed are given in Table 3. The areas of influence are listed in order of how they were ranked by these Alabama professionally employed housewives.

Cost of food was placed low.<sup>8</sup> Influence of parents and husbands was also ranked low. Food quality and preparation time (preplanning and convenience) were of considerable importance.

<sup>8</sup> Cost of food and influence of parents and husbands rated high in the Michigan sample, which represented the general population. Preplanning and convenience were less importantly ranked in the Michigan sample than in the Alabama sample. Note Footnote 7.