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CHARACTERISTICS OF BEEF ASSOCIATED WITH CONSUMER PREFERENCES

by

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From 1976 to 1980, per capita beef consumption declined by more than 20 pounds or about 20 percent. Alleged reasons for this slippage have ranged from a more health conscious public to increased consumption of broilers.

Faced with regaining the losses, the industry must first gather factual information relative to consumer preferences in beef. Currently, one end of the spectrum is that consumers prefer tender, juicy, flavorful, and reasonably priced beef. Others indicate that consumers are demanding a less than Choice grade beef. Confirmation of any apparent change in demand characteristics is the subject of a carefully planned, national in scope, research project at Texas A&M. Using data from the study, the beef industry can better offer consumers a product in form and quality which is consistent with their dietary and nutritional preferences.

Other objectives are: 1) assist USDA in evaluating the need for present or future changes in federal grade

standards; 2) assist retailers in deciding the kind(s) of beef to be offered to satisfy consumer preferences; and 3) assist cattlemen in making marketing and production decisions which will be aligned with the consumer preferences.

The study will be made in two large metropolitan areas. The exact sites are yet to be determined. The methodology will parallel a study made in Houston which addressed similar issues. A household panel of about 180 households, for 10 weeks, sampled steaks which were cut from carcasses which had various grade standards and marbling scores. The order was randomized and the steaks were rated on a 9-point scale on overall desirability and a 4-point purchase intentions scale: would pay a premium; buy at present prices; buy at various discount levels; or not buy at any price.

The results of the ratings were then analyzed on various demographic sub-categories, along with correlation of desirability and purchase intentions versus grade standards.