



CLOCKWISE:
Dr. Getu Hailu,
Ken McEwan
and Yong Ma.

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What's behind the decline in domestic pork consumption?

With pork consumption down 24 per cent in recent decades, a Ridgetown team is examining the consumer attitudes and demographic patterns that may have led to the decline

The decline in Canadian pork consumption is no secret and researchers at Ridgetown Campus have been taking a hard look at its severity, its causes and how to stem it.

"We've witnessed a marked decrease in pork consumption at the same time that chicken consumption has increased," says Ken McEwan, production

BY
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and agribusiness researcher with the University of Guelph, Ridgetown Campus. In fact, pork has seen a decline in consumption of over 24 per cent per capita over the last 20 to 30 years, explains McEwan.

In 1981, each Canadian consumed an average 31.2 kilograms of pork. By 2008, that number had fallen to 23.5 kilograms. In contrast, Canadians con-

sumed 16.7 kilograms of chicken per capita in 1981, a number that had more than doubled to 31.7 kilograms per person by 2008.

McEwan says that, in the past, the pork industry did not have a good understanding of pork consumers. "Our mindset was that if we produce it, people will eat it," he says. While the industry focused on production, it did not understand the importance of consumer demographics, income levels, effective marketing and differentiated products.

McEwan's team, including grad student Yong Ma,

Dr. Getu Hailu and Dr. Richard Vyn, has been working on getting a better understanding of the effects of discounts and consumption patterns on the demand for differentiated pork products in Canada, using data collected by Ipsos Reid.

While still in its early stages, evaluation of the data from 6,117 households shows that, from fresh pork, loin cuts were purchased most often. In the processed pork category, ham was the meat most frequently purchased with luncheon meats coming in second.

Many factors, including ethnicity, age and region, influence pork consumption in North America. McEwan's group has found that income level also makes a big difference in Canadian consumption. Households with incomes over \$150,000 on average purchased the most pork and they paid the highest unit price. "Income does affect pork consumption," says McEwan.

Age also contributes, with almost half of Canadian pork consumed by people in the 40 to 59 age category. These households also tend to have a female doing most of the purchasing and contain four or five people.

"We're trying to peel back the onion a bit on this data. I think we need to understand better the role of the consumer and turn this horse around," adds McEwan. Considering that 53 per cent of food dollars in the United States are spent away from home and 10 per cent are spent in the car, the convenience factor is huge.

In Canada, 62.7 per cent of production is exported as pork or live pigs. "We can't lose commodity production focus, but it is also important not to forget the domestic market," says McEwan, as his team continues to look at the numbers and figure out how to stop the declining consumption. ■

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