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Consumer perception and buying behavior of dried fish: A case study in Kurunegala and Gampaha districts

P.S.S.L. Wickrama*, D.N. Koralagama and A.L. Sandika

Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

Dried fish acts as a rich source of animal proteins (<56.84%), minerals (<29.19%) and lipids (<18.45%), thus contributing towards the nutritional security of human beings. The consumption of dried fish has increased locally as well as globally. Food safety, convenience of buying, versatility, affordability, quality and quantity are other applicable attributes of the buyers. Despite plenty of research on fish and meat products, studies on the buying behaviour of dried fish are scarce. Thus, the objective of this work is to analyze consumers' perception and buying behavior of dried fish in Sri Lanka. Pre-tested structured questionnaires were distributed among 60 dried fish consumers by using Snowball sampling in Kurunegala (n=30) and Gampaha (n=30), which represent the highest dried fish consumption districts in Sri Lanka. Variables were selected on physical quality attributes of dried fish by using published research material. Data was analyzed using descriptive and non-parametric statistics including Chi-square and Friedman test. Buying from retailers are common in both locations; Kurunegala (73%) and Gampaha (56%). A significant relationship is noticeable between buying frequency and product sale promotion methods ($\chi^2=20.303$, $p=0.016$) from both districts. All perceived a quality deterioration along the supply chain where consumers in Gampaha believe hypermarkets as the source for higher quality dried fish products ($\chi=3.13$, $p=0.00$, $\chi^2=25.875$). Appearance is valued over texture, odor, breakage and shelf life by consumers in Kurunegala ($\chi=4.02$, $p=0.00$, $\chi^2=45.926$) and Gampaha ($\chi=3.79$, $p=0.025$, $\chi^2=12.859$) while breakage is indicated the least value in both Kurunegala ($\chi=1.97$) and Gampaha ($\chi=2.72$). A tendency towards locally produced dried fish consumption is significant in both districts rather than imported dried fish ($\chi_{\text{Kurunegala}}=1.79$, $\chi_{\text{Gampaha}}=1.67$, $p=0.00$). More than 86% consumers are willing to pay high prices depending on the quality of the product. Value additions and standardized handling practices need to be introduced and practiced throughout the value chain to ensure the quality of dried fish. Quality packing, free from mold and discoloration would be advantageous for better appearance of the product. Texture, odour and shelf life are the other important attributes that determines the buying behavior. This calls for careful attention on hygienic practices and quality consciousness in dried fish processing and handling along the supply chain to expand quality production on fair price.

Keywords: Consumer attitude, dried fish, quality measures, price, purchasing behavior

E-mail: shalikalaksan@gmail.com