



## Project Snapshot: Consumer Perceptions of Leanness



Date: March 17, 2010

### Background

A key industry priority for 2011 is to emphasize beef’s leanness and positively position it as a good protein source with significant body benefits. Nutrition concerns represent the biggest barrier to increased beef consumption and it is important to understand how the power of lean can help overcome the “eat less red meat” message that consumers hear with increasing frequency.

Seventy percent of consumers say they are concerned that beef has too much fat and cholesterol and that there are healthier choices for protein, vitamins and minerals. However, lean protein is beef’s catalyst for improving nutrition perceptions and overcoming the fat concern barrier to consumption.

### Objective

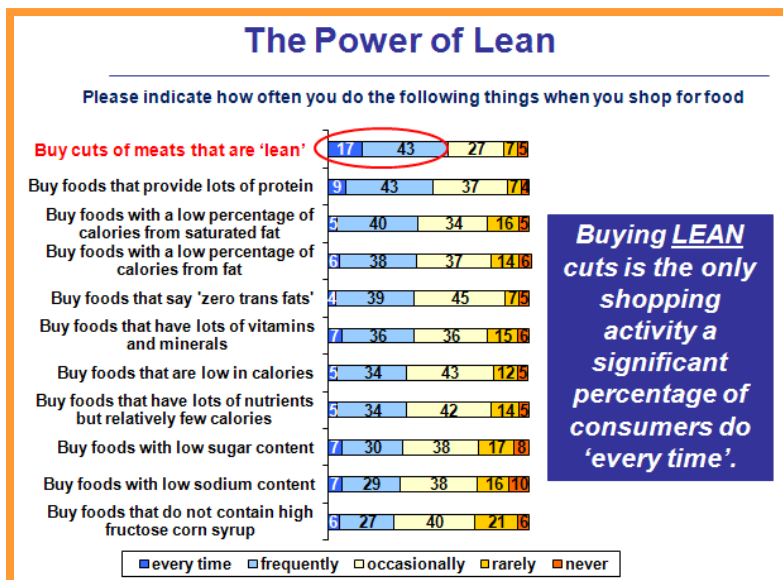
Previous research has shown that the word lean has significant power as a descriptor of beef. It helps overcome nutrition perception barriers and amplifies beef’s nutrient package. The objective of the current research was to provide a strategic platform for leveraging beef’s leanness by digging deeper into consumer perceptions of lean beef.

### Methodology

Two checkoff-funded studies were conducted as part of the perceptions of lean project. The first was an online survey of 981 adult beef eaters to determine perceptions of lean beef. The second was an online survey of 886 adult beef eaters who were primary shoppers or shared equally in food purchasing decisions to analyze the importance of quality when purchasing beef and to determine consumer definitions of quality.

### Findings

When asked how often they bought certain types of food, the highest percentage of consumers (60%) said they bought lean cuts of meat “every time” or “frequently.” In addition, consumers were asked how important it was to buy certain types of foods and, again, the highest percentage (69%) said buying lean cuts of meat was most important.



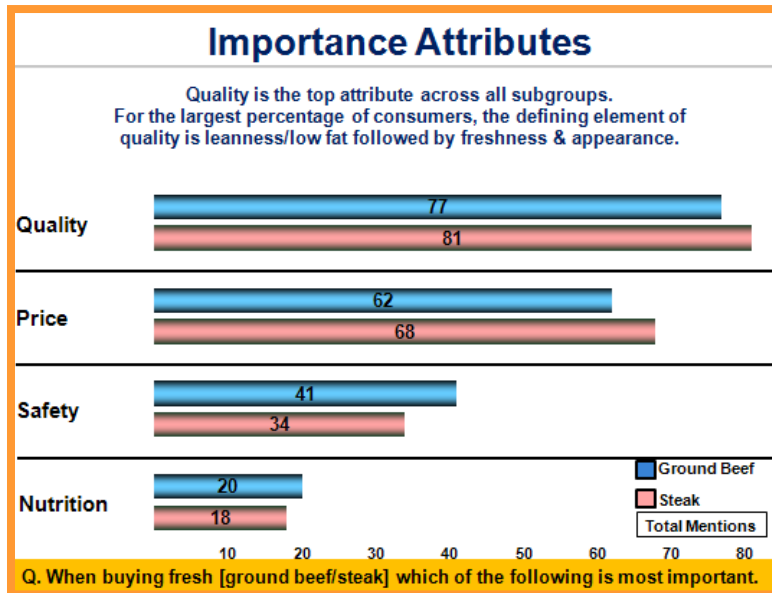
More than half of consumers also have favorable impressions of lean beef. A very strong majority (79%) said that lean beef is better for them than other kinds of beef. Consumers also believe lean beef is lower in saturated fat (66%), has fewer calories (56%) and is lower in cholesterol (55%) than other beef.



Funded by The Beef Checkoff

Consumers rely on the percent lean/percent fat designation on ground beef labels to identify lean ground beef. When buying steaks, more than half look for the degree of marbling, look for lean on the label and look at the amount of fat around the edge of the cut.

Consumers also were asked to rank the importance of safety, price, quality and nutrition when they were buying ground beef and when they were buying steak. Quality was identified as the most important attribute for ground beef by 77 percent of consumers and by 81 percent of consumers for steak. Price was ranked second in importance followed by safety and nutrition.



Consumers who ranked quality either first or second in importance then were asked, as an open end question, what distinguishes quality ground beef and steak from other ground beef and steak. The most often mentioned attributes of quality related to leanness and less fat, especially for ground beef where 62 percent of respondents mentioned leanness as an indicator of quality. Freshness (23% of mentions) and appearance (18%) were the second and third ranked quality indicators for ground beef.

For steak, more than a third (35%) of respondents mentioned leanness as an indicator of quality followed by freshness (20%) and appearance (20%).

Production methods (natural, hormone free, antibiotic free, organic, locally raised) were mentioned as a ground beef quality indicator by only 11 percent of respondents and by 10 percent of respondents as a steak quality attribute.

### Next Steps

The research shows that lean has power. It helps overcome nutrition perception barriers and amplifies beef’s nutrient package. The findings support strategies to amplify the proven benefits of beef’s nutrient package, including protein, giving thought leaders permission to recommend beef and consumers permission to act on their passion for beef. Next steps will include integrating research findings into nutrition influencer and consumer communications.

