ETHNIC MARKETS FOR SHEEP/GOATS

An ethnic market is a group of consumers who share a common cultural identity, such as race, color, national origin, religion, or language. Ethnic markets generally refer to cultures other than the majority culture in a marketing area. Researchers estimate that 58% of US lamb is consumed by "minority" populations. The two largest "ethnic" markets for sheep/goats are Hispanic and Muslim. Other important ethnic consumers include Orthodox Christian (e.g., Greek), Asians, Africans, and Caribbean Islanders.

Even within culturally-similar groups, there is no single ethnic market for sheep/goats. The ethnic market is composed of many different ethnic markets, with each segment having different preferences for the weight, age, and condition of the animal they want as well as when they want it. There may also be preferences for how the animals are harvested. For Muslims, the animal must be harvested according to HALAL dietary laws. For Jewish, KOSHER laws must be followed. Some goat consumers want the hair singed in lieu of skinning the goat.

Lamb (especially) has religious significance to many cultures around the world. Lamb consumption is traditional during celebrations on the Islamic, Christian, and Jewish religious calendars. Easter and the Muslim Festival of the Sacrifice (Eid al Adha) usually result in the biggest demand (thus highest prices) of the year for sheep/goats.

The dates on which many religious holidays occur vary each year, depending on the calendar they follow. "Western" Christian holidays follow the more popular Gregorian calendar. Orthodox Christians follow the Julian calendar, which is slightly different, usually resulting in DIFFERENT dates for Easter. Muslim holidays follow a lunar calendar, which is dictated by the moon. This calendar is about 11 days shorter; thus, holidays are 11 days EARLIER each year. Jewish holidays occur at the same time each year on a Jewish calendar.

Sheep and goats destined for ethnic markets can be sold at auctions or they can be sold directly to consumers. When selling to an auction, sheep/goats should be put in the market 3-10 days in advance of the holiday. For consumer sales, sheep/goats should be sold LIVE or processed in an inspected plant. Some ethnic consumers (especially older) may prefer to do their own ritual slaughter ("sacrifice").

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