

THE MARKETING PRACTICES IN THE RABBIT MEAT INDUSTRY: BASIS FOR A MARKETING PLAN

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Abstract. This study aimed to describe the marketing practices in the rabbit meat industry in Region III based on the 4Ps Model of Marketing Mix. The descriptive research design was used which involved 59 rabbit meat producers. Revealed in this study was a decline in the 2021 annual production because of the apparent lack of demand, unpopularity despite claims of its nutritive value and prohibitive price of ₱400 per kilo in the market today. There was an attempt to introduce the said meat either as raw meat or palatable food by some sellers. Findings further showed that rabbit farmers in the region preferred to raise the New Zealand White stock for its various benefits, including its high-quality meat for commercial uses. The Department of Agriculture endorsed rabbit meat as an alternative meat source for Filipinos because of the onset of the African Swine Flu. Thus, the researchers encourage to use this study as a basis for the development of a marketing plan for the rabbit meat industry.

Keywords: 4Ps Model of Marketing Mix; Marketing Plan Framework; Rabbit Meat Industry

1. Introduction

The Philippines is an agricultural country comprised of three major regions: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao (Go & Conag, 2019). Harris and Fuller (2014) defined agriculture as the most comprehensive term used to describe the various ways in which crop plants and domestic animals provide food and other products to the global population. In the same vein, as a country with vast agricultural lands, this sector enhances the Philippines' economic condition and improves the Filipinos' quality of life. Unfortunately, as reported by Rodriguez (2019), the Philippine agriculture workforce decreased from 35% to 26% between 2008 and 2018. Correspondingly, the country's growing population and a steady decline in agricultural productivity and food production have intensified the country's persistent hunger and food insecurity problems over the last few years. In fact, President Rodrigo Duterte declared a "State of Calamity" due to African Swine Fever (ASF). This affected 12 regions and across 46 provinces in the country since 2019 (The Pig Site, 2021).

To strengthen the Philippines' current situation by solving the food insecurity and providing livelihoods for the Filipinos, the Department of Agriculture (DA) together with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) constantly searches for alternative or possible solutions to these adversities. In this regard, this agency seeks to address Philippine food security challenges by suggesting rabbit meat as a possible source of food. Rivas (2021) reported that the DA had considered rabbit meat as a possible replacement for pork for some time and revisited the idea in 2020 after it became clear that the African Swine Flu (ASF) outbreak has not been contained. Furthermore, the rabbit industry has long-term potential since it is considered to be healthier meat, easy, and inexpensive to grow. Also, it does not require growth hormones or antibiotics commonly used in the poultry industry. Consequently, many restaurants in Manila have begun offering rabbits on their menus.

The emerging interest in the rabbit industry by private individuals as well as the Philippine government agencies like the DA and DOST necessitates this study. Upon reviewing the related literature and studies about rabbitry, the researchers found out that it only focused only on the production aspect. This unexplored area may be a basis to assess the marketability of the business idea to serve as a foundation to penetrate the industry fully. Moreover, Osei et al. (2012) mentioned that the marketing of rabbits was not organized, which was one of the significant challenges identified in facing the development of the rabbit industry.

True enough that research is an important activity that ultimately improves profitability for the business until a product can be considered for commercialization, hence, the researchers had decided to conduct a study on this. Generally, this study described the marketing practices of the rabbit meat producers in Region III through the 4Ps Model of Marketing Mix. Specifically, the objective of this study was to characterize the current strategies of rabbit meat producers in terms of product, price, place and promotion which will be a basis for the development of a marketing plan for the rabbit meat industry.

2. Methodology

This study employed the descriptive research design. According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), one of the research objectives of descriptive studies was the description of phenomena or characteristics associated with a subject population (the who, what, where, and how of a topic).

The primary instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire, followed by unstructured interviews. It was a checklist with question items that were patterned and modified from the works conducted by Dr. Richard Simangan entitled *The Marketing Mix Strategies of Manufacturing Micro-enterprise in Nueva Ecija* and was adapted from one of his questionnaires on the marketing mix strategies. To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments, these underwent the experts' review in the field of marketing and research, and the key informants from the rabbit farming industry for meat production.

2.1. Sampling Procedure

This study employed simple random sampling which was defined by West (2016) as the method where each member of a population had the same chance of being included in the sample and where all possible samples of a given size had the same chance of selection. The sample size was computed using an online sample calculator.

2.2. Respondents

The respondents of the study were the rabbit meat producers in Region III. They were registered with the Association of Rabbit Meat Producers (ARaMP), Inc. and the Rabbit Raisers and Meat Producers Cooperative (RRMPC). They operate in the region of Central Luzon.

Table 1 shows the list of the members of ARaMP, Inc, and RRMPC in the different provinces of Region III. It can be noted that there were no qualified rabbit meat producers in the provinces of Aurora and Zambales.

Table 1 Distribution of the Respondents – Rabbit Meat Producers

Registered Rabbit Meat Producers in Region III	N	n
Bataan	1	1
Bulacan	40	33
Nueva Ecija	8	7
Pampanga	17	14
Tarlac	7	4
Total	73	59

3. Results and Discussion

Discussed here are the rabbit meat producers' marketing practices based on the 4Ps model in terms of product, price, promotion, and place as follows:

3.1 Product

The product section describes the product, its attributes, packaging and labeling.

▪ **Attributes**

This segment details the information which enables the customers to search, compare, and choose products, including the breed and product classification.

Table 2 Breed

Breed	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
New Zealand White	56	95%
Californian White	36	61%
American Chinchilla	17	29%
Cinnamon	6	10%
Mixed breeds	16	27%

**Multiple responses; n = 59*

Table 2 manifests that 95% (56 out of 59) or almost all of the respondents have New Zealand White in their foundation stocks. The respondents described the New Zealand White as the most popular and widely used for meat production, considering it is the most suitable breed for commercial rabbit farming. A producer engaged in the food business asserted that New Zealand White is the best breed for their famous rabbit *lechón* for its taste, tenderness, texture, and color. New Zealand White is the ideal breed over the popular giant breeds since the latter may not be the ideal type for meat production because they eat more actively, and a large portion of what they eat goes to bone production instead of meat (Veneracion, 2017).

Table 3 Product Classification

Product Classification	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Live	57	97%
Raw - Dressed	42	71%
Raw - With Skin	21	36%
Processed	24	41%
Cooked	24	41%

**Multiple responses; n = 59*

It can be noted that 97% (57 out of 59) of the respondents sell rabbits at the live weight. Based on the interviews, it is determined that there are producers who only focus on offering the product "as is" rather than adding value to it once it is harvested. They disclosed that there were several reasons why it was still preferable to sell it in this manner. First and foremost, there are still many consumers who look for rabbits to breed. Secondly, they do not have the necessary resources to further process the rabbit meat. Lastly, they still await the approval of the rabbit production standard, or at the very least, the

construction of a slaughterhouse. But there are also several interviewees indicated that they underwent further activities like skinning, dressing, and cutting to make the product more attractive to buyers.

- **Packaging**

Table 4 Packaging

Packaging	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Meat is packaged	44	98%
Meat is not packaged	1	2%

As can be gleaned in Table 4, 98% (44 out of 45) of the respondents who offered raw, processed, and cooked meat packaged their products. According to the respondents who are selling raw and processed meat, they are selling in a vacuum-packed because it had numerous advantages, including the capacity to preserve and maintain food for a significantly longer amount of time. In fact, one of the respondents said that, based on his personal experience, rabbit meat may be frozen and kept for up to six months. This finding conformed with Culler et al. (2018), who analyzed that vacuum packaging was more effective than other packaging methods in preserving rabbit meat hygienic quality for the rabbit meat industry. Meanwhile, the respondents who offered cooked meat used microwaved able containers. This can be more appealing and acceptable to consumers. Finally, it should be noted that there is one reported case (1 out of 45) wherein the meat was not packaged. The respondent declared that there were no facilities and equipment available.

- **Labeling**

Table 5 Labeling

Labeling	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Package is labeled	18	40%
Package is not labeled	27	60%

Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents (27 out of 45) who offer raw, processed, and cooked meat do not place any label on their products. Although a label is key when it comes to product packaging, most of them indicated that they do not feel its immediate need. Some of the interviewees claimed that aside from the cost it entailed, it was deemed unnecessary because the market was limited, and most of their customers were relatives and friends.

In the case of the 40% of rabbit meat producers (18 out of 45) who recognized the crucial role of labels in marketing, they utilized water-proof stickers because of the nature of the product. The design was also developed

through self-initiatives by personalizing the design with a little help from a design consultant, family or friend.

3.2 Price

This component showcases the amount of money that the sellers typically set to sell the rabbit meat.

Table 6 Retail Price of Rabbit Meat

Retail Price (Per kilo)	Live Weight		Meat With Skin		Dressed Meat	
	*f	%	**f	%	***f	%
₱150.00 - ₱199.00	34	60%	0	0%	0	0%
₱200.0000 - ₱249.00	6	11%	0	0%	0	0%
₱250.0000 - ₱299.00	7	12%	0	0%	1	5%
₱300.0000 - ₱349.00	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
₱350.0000 - ₱399.00	3	5%	11	52%	16	38%
₱400.0000 - ₱449.00	4	7%	4	19%	13	31%
₱450.0000 - ₱499.00	0	0%	7	33%	11	26%
Others	4	7%	2	10%	2	5%

*Multiple responses; *n = 57; **n = 21; ***n = 42*

As indicated in Table 6, 60% (34 out of 57) or most of the respondents who sold rabbits at live weight indicated the retail price at ₱150.00 to ₱199.00 per kilogram. It expressed that the rabbit meat producers followed the standard price of live weight set by the organization. In an interview with one of the producers who focused on selling rabbits as breeders, he mentioned that the rabbit price varied based on the breed. A two-month-old local New Zealand White with a weight of three to four kilograms which can be used as a foundation stock intended solely for meat production can demand a price of ₱550.00. They typically sold rabbits at the live weight per kilo which allowed customers to quickly compare prices that were weighed during selling.

Also, Table 6 indicates that 52% (11 out of 21) of the respondents sold raw meat with skin and reported the retail price at ₱350.00 to ₱399.00. Meanwhile, the retail price of the dressed meat reported by the respondents is scattered: 38% (16 out of 42) priced at ₱350.0000 to ₱399.00; 31% (13 out of 42) priced at ₱400.0000 - ₱449.00; and 26% (11 out of 42) priced at ₱450.0000 - ₱499.00.

Rabbits are the most expensive meat among consumers compared to other meats sold on the market. However, based on the combined data, most rabbit meat producers offer their products below the ₱450-standard price. They claimed they were compelled to lower their price and even reduce their annual

production since 2021 because there was an oversupply of rabbit meat, and due to lack of demand.

In line with the pricing method used, nearly all of the respondents who sold processed and/or cooked meat used cost-based pricing. They indicated that they used this method because it was easy to understand and calculate. By charging a markup that covers all expenses, cost-based pricing ensures profits even when costs increase.

3.3 Place

The following discussion describes the channels that the rabbit meat producers used to deliver the rabbit meat to the customers.

- **Locations**

Table 7 Locations

Locations	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Within the area where the business is located	44	75%
Within the province	31	53%
Within the region	17	29%
National Capital Region	14	24%
Other Provinces in the Philippines	8	14%

**Multiple responses; n = 59*

As shown in the table, 75% (44 out of 59) of the rabbit meat producers who responded in this study commonly sold their products to individual customers situated within the area where the business was located. They preferred to sell within the municipality where the business was located because they believed that rabbit meat consumption should start within their community. But aside from the individual customers, some producers declared that they have institutional buyers which are consisted of cooperatives, government, hotels and restaurants, medical schools, and laboratories. The data also suggest that there are exchanges of the products across provinces. Many buyers from the different provinces in the Philippines look for a good line of foundation stock, and the influx of customers was through referrals or word-of-mouth.

- **Mode of Delivery**

Table 8 Mode of Delivery

Mode of Delivery	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Pick Up	57	97%
Meet Up	35	59%
Through Courier Services	25	42%

**Multiple responses; n = 59*

The data in Table 8 suggest that 97% (57 out of 59) of the respondents used pick-up as the primary delivery mode. Since their market outlet was in their house, it was more convenient for them to apply this manner of delivery to maximize advantages, save time, control working hours, and exercise flexibility. But aside from these, it can be revealed from the given data that the majority of the rabbit meat producers especially those who operated in Bulacan, and Pampanga combined pick-up, meet up and/or courier services. The respondents believed it was critical to focus their strategy on what was convenient and accessible to customers to increase sales, particularly during these times when people diverted to buying online due to the community quarantine in place to prevent the virus from spreading. Delivery arrangements and charges depended on the volume of transactions. It is either discount given; however, rabbit meat is most often to be picked up, or it can be the other way around. Negotiations are often upon the discretion of the seller.

3.4 Promotion

The description of the promotional activities used by rabbit meat producers to market the products is discussed in the promotion section.

- **Promotion Objectives**

Table 9 Promotion Objectives

Promotion Objectives	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Create product awareness among consumers	39	66%
Maximize profitability	26	44%
Penetrate the market	26	44%

**Multiple responses; n = 59*

The table above highlighted the top objective identified by rabbit meat producers. In connection with their affiliated organization's mission which is "To increase awareness on rabbit production as a viable source of income and to popularize rabbit meat as an alternative source of protein and good nutrition," 66% (39 out of 59) of the respondents aimed to create product awareness among consumers. They recognized that the industry is in its introductory stage. Focusing on creating product awareness is the key to eventually penetrating the market and maximize profitability.

▪ **Type of Promotion Used**

Table 10 Type of Promotion Used

Type of Promotion Used	*Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Personal selling	53	93%
Tri-media (television, radio, or print)	6	12%
Social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	48	81%
Through own website	4	8%
Trade fair	6	11%
Publicity and public relations	9	16%
Others (farm visits, sampling, word-of-mouth)	18	32%

Multiple responses; n = 59

The data in the table demonstrates that 93% of the rabbit meat producers used personal selling as their promotion strategy. The result was immediately followed by advertising through the internet, specifically social networking (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Multiply, etc.), with 81% (48 out of 59) of the total responses. In today's marketing, personal selling is still important and a key factor in success. But with the emergence of internet marketing, social media is a change agent and a source of opportunities for rabbit meat producers who learn how to work in a new business environment that puts customers back at the top of the list of business priorities.

It was also worth mentioning that sampling was one of the essential promotional strategies utilized by the small number of rabbit producer-respondents. Although only a minority of them currently practiced this approach, there was a positive impact as it promoted the real thing. Providing free tasting can acquaint potential customers with rabbit products (Fanatico & Green, 2012).

4. Conclusions

The rabbit meat producers follow the global practice by producing three-to-four-month-old medium-sized New Zealand White rabbits but most do not undergo value-addition. The price of rabbit meat is also prohibitive at ₱400 per kilo in the current market which is more expensive than other types of meat. They integrate technology to communicate with customers online and distribute products primarily via pick-up. Producers focus on personal selling and social media marketing.

To strengthen the rabbit meat industry, the researchers recommended that rabbit meat producers may optimize the potential of rabbit meat as a functional product at an affordable price as it may characterize an opportunity for this product to be a part of the customers' everyday food. In addition to that, the rabbit meat producers in collaboration with their affiliated organizations may intensify the promotional activities by initiating free food tasting using the surplus in all the provinces of Region III, particularly in Aurora, Bataan, and Zambales, where rabbit breeders are few. Therefore, they may attain their individual objective to increase customer knowledge of their product and penetrate the market. Lastly, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) and private universities may impart technological training skills including humane slaughter, basic food safety, meat processing, packaging and labeling, and product costing as part of its extension activities to maximize profit while safeguarding the consumer's interests, promoting their general welfare, and creating industry-wide standards of conduct. Developing the producers' marketing, technical, and management skills may secure continuous productivity, innovation, and success of the industry.

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