

..... AND WHAT ABOUT THE DOG?

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Summary

The dog (*Canis familiaris*) was the first domesticated animal. There is no doubt that the dog has today endeared itself to man. The fact remains that the dog's entrance to man's heart was through his stomach. The dog is endowed with tremendous potentialities. This is the reason; it has been where ever man was. There is abundant information on the very many uses of the dog, especially as man's companion. But the dog goes to the slaughter in many parts of the world with the least recognition, except for a vocal few that reject this idea on account of passion, and a few governments that made laws prohibiting trade of meat dogs that were never intended to be enforced, while many others remain indifferent to the plight of the dog. In the face of dwindling animal protein intake, particularly in the less developed countries, people are encouraged to take full advantage of all available food resources. Many unconventional meat sources have been recognized. Is the dog too close to count? More reason and less sentiment should ultimately define the status of the dog.

INTRODUCTION

The association between man and animals dates back to the primitive age. This association was at the outset unconscious. As time passed, a lot more consciousness was put into it, and the demand on the animal have had to vary in many respects, but have remained predominantly exploitative; man caring for animals because he cares for himself. The early man was at first a hunter, and later a herder. The progenitor of the dog; the wolf was his first herd (Davis, 1949). All the animals he hunted and herded were food. Animals for food have remained the anchor of man-animal relationship. Meat is food. The animals whose flesh is eaten by man are therefore known as food animals (Thornton and Gracey, 1974). Rege (2000) observed that over 80 animal types contribute directly and indirectly to human food. Majority of these are either undomesticated or semi domesticated.

Human appetite for meat is variable, and is in general controlled by several factors, among which is the availability of the animal species (FAO, 1995). The type of animal used for food was originally thought to be related to the level of development.

MAN AND THE DOG

The dog was the first domesticated animal. It has often been said that the domestication of the dog was man's greatest conquest. Wherever civilized man existed, he had the dog with him; domesticated, semi-domesticated and/or wild. The dog has served man as a hunter, herder (Drover), warrior, beast of burden, companion and food (Davis, 1949; Villa et al. 1997). Artificial breeding has created dogs with diverse abilities. The value of the dog for meat has for long been in doubt. Davis (1949) had observed that in isolated instances some types of dogs have been bred and raised to add to the food supply. Dogs contribute to human health physiologically and psychologically (Friedmann, 1995; Hart, 1995).

DOG MEAT CONSUMPTION: FACT OR FICTION

Hornby (1995) defines fact as a thing that is known or can be proved to have happened, to be true or to exist, and fiction as a type of literature describing imaginary events and people; a thing that is invented or imagined and is not true. Where therefore does the dog as a food animal belong; fact, fallacy or Fiction?

Food restrictions or prohibitions is known worldwide (Havekort, et al; 2002). Food habit is also known to change, though sluggishly. Some food animals are forbidden in some cultural areas (Ekanem et al; 2003). There is no known cultural or ancestral superstition over the dog meat except for a discriminatory food habit often learned early in life. The dog in modern time is not an item of worship, neither is the meat injurious (spiritually or physically) to the consumer. There is no known reason adduced for the avoidance of the meat except the "intimacy" between the dog and Man. Every dog owner/lover feels this intimacy. There is always a bond and a relationship between man and all his animals. This relationship is always exploitative. This idea was vividly captured by George (1984) in his satirical novel, *The Animal Farm*; Mr. Jones and his wife of the manor farm lived on the toils of the animals they were presumably tending. Every farmer loves and cares for his animals, but slaughters or offers them for sale for his own gains Emotional attachment may be necessity, the fact behind the iron cotton is more important.

OME PICTURES

Most African people consume far less than FAO/WHO recommended animal protein (Kinoti, 1998. Obasi et al; 2002). In the face of scarcity informed choices may be limited. The dog meat trade is quite developed in most Asian Countries. Dog farms exist side by side with other Livestock farms. Refrigerated trucks take dog meat to stores and restaurants (Kum, 2004). Dog meat has been augmenting the meat supply in many parts of Nigeria over the years

without being recognized and credited in literature. A 3 year retrospective study (1989-1991) revealed that a total of 49,209 dogs were cleared at the control posts in Akwa Ibom State (Okpuduedu, 1994). It was estimated that about 32,806 dogs (40%) either passed the posts unrecorded or completely evaded the posts. This represented 26.6% of all recorded food animals (cattle, goat, sheep and pig) transported into the state for slaughter within the period. Obasi et al; (2002) reported a total of 43,821 dogs slaughtered between January 1994 and December 1996. This represented 4.8% of the food animals studied (Table 1).

Table 1: FOOD ANIMAL SLAUGHTER RECORD IN AKWA IBOM STATE (JANUARY 1994 DECEMBER 1996)

PARAMETER	ANIMAL SPECIES					
	CATTLE	GOAT	SHEEP	PIG	DOG	TOTAL
1 NUMBER OF ANIMAL	3014	49319	5256	38453	43821	167463
2 TOTAL LIVE WEIGHT(KG)	5,510,520(180*kg)	986380(20*Kg)	157,690(30*kg)	3,460,770(90*kg)	438,210(10*kg)	10,553,56
3 QUANTITY OF MEAT (KG)	2,975,680.8(54**%)	547,440.9(55.5*%)	75,686.4(48**%)	24,225.39(70**%)	306,747(70*%)	6,328,094
4 MEAN QUANTITY (per annum) (kg)	991,893.6	182,480.3	25,228.8	807.513	102,249	2,109,364
5 MEAN QUANTITY PROTEIN (PER ANNUM) (ASSUME MEAT CONTAINS 16.5% PROTEIN)	163,662.4	30,109.2	4,162.8	133,239.6	16,871.1	348,045.1
6 % OF ANIMALS	47	9.2	1.5	37.5	4.8	100

Some parts of Western Nigeria and the middle belt where dog meat is a delicacy, and states with military installations (and mammy markets) may show similar picture. High acceptance of dog meat has been reported in Abia State (Ekumankama and Ekunmankama, 1998), and in Enugu State by Odo et al; (1998). A truck load of dogs, spotted at the 9th mile corner Enugu State was reported heading for Nkanu East Local Government Area for Christmas (Obasi, 2004, personal observation).

CONCLUSION

The dog has been silently and consistently contributing to animal protein supply, and is in this case a food animal in Nigeria. It has not though been formally so recognized. The attitude has been that of 'eat but don't talk about it'. This should not remain the case. The fact however remains that there are many people to whom the meat is repulsive. This is perfectly in line with human appetite for meat. We have kept mute long enough. The state should go on, to define the status of the dog. Those that eat the meat are satisfied. They believe everyone could.

Animal protein intake has remained in deficit in Nigeria. It is generally agreed that improvement in the level of intake is possible when the number and quantity of food animals is increased. This has justified the investment in microlivestock, and attempts to domesticate some wild life species; like the giant rat (*Cricetomys gambianus*) and porcupine (*Erethizontidae* Spp.). As efforts are geared towards increased production of these conventional animal species, it has become pertinent that the status of the dog be appropriately and adequately defined in general terms.

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