

Pre-Packaged, Bulk Tomatoes

survey of Berkeley housewives reveals practices in retail buying and opinions regarding quality and price

Jessie V. Coles

Housewives generally preferred buying fresh tomatoes in bulk rather than in consumer-packaged form in a survey conducted in nine grocery stores in Berkeley in the summer of 1952.

The survey was made in large independent stores located in widely separated areas of Berkeley and catering to customers of widely varying incomes and practices in buying.

Housewives Interviewed

About 90%—450 of the 501 housewives interviewed—bought fresh tomatoes once a month or oftener. Of those who bought fresh tomatoes this often 87% said they either bought bulk tomatoes exclusively—60%—or more frequently than packaged ones—27%.

Less than 9% of the buyers interviewed bought packaged tomatoes exclusively—1.8%—or bought them more often than they bought the bulk—6.9%.

Over 3% bought both bulk and packaged with about equal frequency and slightly over 1% bought both but did not know the relative proportions in which they bought them.

Forty-four per cent of the housewives interviewed said they would pay a premium for bulk tomatoes whereas only 2.4% said they would pay a premium for the packaged ones.

Reasons for Buying Bulk

The ability to choose quality and quantity desired influenced almost 53% of all the buyers to purchase bulk tomatoes exclusively.

The ability to choose the quality desired accounted for over half—56.8%—of the reasons given by the housewives for buying only bulk tomatoes.

The ability to get the quantity desired constituted 13.3% of the reasons given for buying bulk tomatoes alone.

The better quality of bulk tomatoes influenced about 30% of the buyers queried to buy bulk tomatoes. Their better quality accounted for 23% of the reasons for buying bulk tomatoes exclusively. In addition over half of the buyers who bought both bulk and packaged but who bought the bulk more frequently said they bought fresh tomatoes on the basis of quality.

The lower price of the bulk tomatoes accounted for about 5% of the reasons given by those who bought bulk tomatoes only, and about 13% of the reasons given by those who bought bulk more frequently than the packaged.

Almost 26% of the buyers who bought bulk tomatoes more frequently than the packaged preferred bulk ones and bought them if they were available, but if they were not available they bought the packaged.

Reasons for Buying Packaged

Since only 39 of the 450 housewives always purchased packaged tomatoes or purchased them more frequently than bulk it is difficult to determine reasons for their purchases.

It would seem that the better quality of the packaged products was most important. The fact that the buyers believed that the packaged tomatoes were superior in quality to those sold in bulk accounted for one half of the reasons for buying packaged tomatoes exclusively.

Over one-half—61%—of those who bought both kinds but bought the packaged more often said they bought on the basis of quality.

Almost 26% of these buyers said they bought on the basis of price. The fact that packaged tomatoes are more convenient to buy and refrigerate accounted for 42% of the reasons given by the few buyers who confined their purchases to packaged tomatoes.

Attitudes toward Quality

A large majority of the housewives who bought fresh tomatoes believed that bulk tomatoes were better in quality than the packaged ones.

Almost three fourths—71.4%—of the buyers said they believed that the bulk tomatoes were better in quality than the packaged. Only 9.3% thought that the packaged ones were the better. About 5.1% thought they were about the same in quality and 14.2% had no opinion as to their relative quality.

The reasons the buyers gave for buying either bulk or packaged tomatoes seemed to bear out the conclusion that they thought the bulk tomatoes the better.

Over 15% of all the housewives inter-

viewed—or 26% of those buying bulk only—did so because they thought the bulk tomatoes better than the packaged.

On the other hand only 1.3% of all the buyers bought packaged tomatoes exclusively because they believed that they were better than the bulk ones.

About 21% of all the buyers said they bought tomatoes on the basis of quality, buying either bulk or packaged, whichever kind was better.

Almost 15% bought bulk more frequently than the packaged, 4% bought packaged more frequently, and 2% bought bulk and packaged with about equal frequency.

Thus almost 70% of those buying on the basis of quality bought bulk tomatoes more frequently than they bought packaged ones.

About 20% of the buyers said they would pay a premium in price for the better quality tomatoes whether they were bulk or packaged.

Attitudes toward Price

Price was apparently not an important factor influencing the housewives queried to buy either bulk or packaged tomatoes. Only about 10% mentioned price as a reason for buying either kind.

Indifference to prices was further indicated by the fact that almost 39% had no opinion regarding the relative price of bulk and packaged tomatoes when they were queried directly regarding which they thought were cheaper. Moreover, 32% of the housewives said they would not pay a premium in price for either bulk or packaged tomatoes.

Of those who mentioned price as a reason for buying, almost 70% bought either bulk tomatoes exclusively or bought them more often than they bought the packaged ones.

Of those who expressed opinions regarding the relative prices of the packaged and bulk products when they were queried directly regarding their attitudes, almost two thirds—64%—said they thought that the bulk tomatoes were cheaper than the packaged. Only 26% thought the packaged were cheaper while 10% thought they were about equal in price.

Jessie V. Coles is Professor of Home Economics, University of California, Berkeley.