

The Ability to Identify the Imported Foods among Housewives in Cheongju Area

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to get some information about the educational program for consumers in the community. For this, the author investigated the ability to identify the imported foods and the educational contents to be taught. The subjects for this study were 183 housewives living in Cheongju city, and the research was conducted from March 1 to March 15, 2003. A survey questionnaire was distributed, asking general matters regarding the subject, attitude when purchasing foods, the ability to identify the imported foods, educational contents to be taught, and the identification ability between the domestic and the imported foods. The data was analyzed for percentage, mean, standard deviations using SAS program, and was also examined with Chi-square or ANOVA. 92.3% of housewives checked the label to distinguish between the domestic food and the imported one, among which 99.5% preferred to buy the domestic brand. For major reasons of this preference, 46.3% of them reported that the imported foods had many harmful substances. 66.1% of the subjects, however, replied that they did not have the ability to discern the differences between the two. The identification information was received from 'TV or radio program', which 61.7% of the subjects reported as such. 61.5% of the subjects were inclined to receive education about the imported foods. For the educational contents, 75.4% wanted to learn 'the method to identify the imported foods'. According to the identification test on the imported foods, they got 13.6 points on the average out of 40 points, which was quite low. The highest correct answer was for pteridium aquilinum (63.7%), sesame (49.2%), and yellow croaker (45.6%), while the highest incorrect answer was for red pepper powder (40.4%), chestnut (40.6%), and dried pepper (32.2%). The results suggested that most of the respondents had negative attitudes towards the imported agricultural products, but their identification ability was quite poor. Therefore, it is necessary to provide education and publicity work in relation to the identification methods for the imported foods so that consumers may have less risk from the imported agricultural products. (*J Community Nutrition* 7(2) : 85~92, 2005)

KEY WORDS : imported foods · domestic foods · identifying ability · housewives · Cheongju area.

Introduction

Our distribution system for the agricultural products has been through dramatic changes since the trade negotiation of Uruguay round in 1993, and conversion to the WTO system in 1995 (Kim, Kim 1997). From the consumers' points of view, there exist both positive and negative aspects in relation to the free import system. In other words, the imported agricultural products that were very expensive due to the protective tariff policy can be bought at a lower price, and the

price and quality of the competing domestic agricultural products may be improved. On the other hand, we are worried about such matters as rapid growth of the imported agricultural products, a breach of distribution order and the safety of such imported goods (Hyun, Kim 1997 ; Kim, Kim 1997 ; Kim, Son 2004).

The safety matters of a grave concern in the imported agricultural products include carcinogens, insecticides, lots of agricultural chemicals causing abnormality, irradiation, growth hormones, antibiotics and harmful metals (Choi 1994 ; Lee 1994 ; Park EH 2000). In reality, some carcinogen was detected in the imported fish (Oh et al. 2004), and more heavy metals were detected in the imported Kimchi than in the domestic ones (Choi et al. 2004). Also, some imported grains in circulation showed more pesticide residues than the domestic ones (Kim 2000 ; Rho et al. 2003 ; Son et al.

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1995).

Against this backdrop, a strict and timely quarantine should be performed and a labeling for the country of origin should be established as soon as possible (Korea Consumer Protection Board 1995a ; Kim, Kim 1997). In reality, the labeling for the country of origin is not strictly observed and is causing problems that the imported goods are disguised as domestic ones. The Korean government made an obligatory rule that the labeling for the country of origin should be followed including the imported agricultural products of July 1, 1993, for the domestic ones of January 1, 1995 and for the agricultural processed goods of January 1, 1996 (Song 1997 ; Kim, Kim 1997). A lack of strict surveillance and guidance however does not prevent incidents of disguising the labeling for the country of origin nor circulation without any labels (Cho 1993 ; Shin 1997).

At this point, consumers do not wait for protection of the administrative level, but should be more actively equipped with abilities to distinguish between the domestic and the imported foods. In addition, consumers awareness should be increased by gaining information and education regarding the imported foods. In case of the imported sesame with its high purchasing rate (Heo et al. 1995), the grains are bigger with narrow width, the germinal disk is dull, and the crease in the middle is clear. For imported *pteridium aquilinum*, the stalk is thicker and longer than the domestic one, and also has less scent with fewer leaves on the upper stalk. For imported rice, the grains are smaller than the domestic ones, and they have longer but thinner shapes without white spots on the embryo. Identification by appearance is not so difficult that consumers could easily detect the differences with just a little education.

Most of the prior researches have been conducted both in the safety of the imported foods (Choi et al. 2004 ; Hong 1992 ; Kim 2001 ; Kim 1999 ; Kim, Kim 1999 ; Kwon 1995 ; Lee 1994) and in its availability status (Cho et al. 1999 ; Heo et al. 1995 ; Hyun, Kim 1997 ; Kim, Kim 1997 ; Kim, Son 2004 ; Lee, Rhie 1995), but few researches have been reported regarding the ability to identify the imported foods, other than the one by Han, Kim (1999). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate housewives' abilities to discern the imported foods, to identify the kinds of imported foods which are difficult to distinguish, and to get some basic information to educate consumers in the community.

Subjects and Methods

1. Subjects

The subjects of the research were housewives living in Cheongju city. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed to women at grocery shops in Cheongju, among which 183 questionnaires were collected, and analyzed except the illegible ones. The survey was conducted from March 1 to March 15, 2003.

2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes general characteristics of subjects (age, educational background, occupation, monthly income, self-evaluated nutritional knowledge, and interests in health), ability to distinguish between the domestic and the imported foods, informants, educational contents that want to learn, and identification test to check the ability to discern the imported from the domestic foods. The questionnaire was developed based on the reference about the imported foods provided by the National Agricultural Products Inspection Center and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

3. Statistical analysis

The collected data was analyzed for frequency (percentage), mean and standard deviations for each item. General characteristics of the respondents and the differences by the identification test were examined by Chi-square or ANOVA. All data analysis was processed with SAS 6.2 program.

Results

1. Characteristics of the subjects (Table 1)

36.7% of them were in their thirties, who formed the highest percentage. For monthly income, 42.8% belonged to the group of 2 - 3 million won. 40.8% of them graduated from high school, and 40.8% graduated from college or above. For a question about the nutritional knowledge, 11.9% reported 'very lack', and 71.1% responded they were 'lack' of knowledge. Regarding the interests in health, more than 90% of them reported positively.

2. Attitude when purchasing foods

For the question whether or not to check the label, 92.3% of the respondents replied that they checked the label to find the country of origin. For the question of preference, 99.5%

Table 1. Characteristics of the subjects

	Category	N(%)	Total
Age (year)	20 – 29	24(13.3)	180(100.0)
	30 – 39	66(36.7)	
	40 – 49	59(32.8)	
	≥ 50	31(17.3)	
Education level	Elementary	9(5.0)	179(100.0)
	Middle school	24(13.4)	
	High school	73(40.8)	
	College	25(14.0)	
	≥ University	48(26.8)	
Occupation	Housewife	94(52.5)	179(100.0)
	Professional	27(15.1)	
	Public servant	23(12.9)	
	Sales	21(11.7)	
	Others	14(7.8)	
Income (10,000won/month)	≤ 100	21(11.7)	180(100.0)
	100 – 200	60(33.3)	
	200 – 300	77(42.8)	
	300 – 400	11(6.1)	
	400 – 500	7(3.9)	
	≥ 500	4(2.2)	
Nutritional knowledge	Very high	3(1.9)	159(100.0)
	High	24(15.1)	
	Low	113(71.1)	
	Very low	19(11.9)	
Interests in health	Very much	29(18.5)	157(100.0)
	Much	113(72.0)	
	A little	11(7.0)	
	Not at all	4(2.5)	

Table 2. Attitude when purchasing foods

Item	Answer	N(%)	Total
Whether or not check the label	Yes	169(92.3)	183(100.0)
	No	14(7.7)	
Preferred the domestic brands to the imported brands	Domestic brand	182(99.5)	183(100.0)
	Imported brand	1(0.5)	
Reason of preference domestics brand*	Imported brand has more harmful substance	85(46.3)	230(100.0)
	To save our agricultural regions	58(31.9)	
	Good quality	43(23.6)	
	Good taste	36(19.8)	
	Others	8(4.4)	

* : multiple answers

preferred the domestic brands to the imported brands. The statement, 'the imported products have harmful substances', was answered by 46.3%, 'to save our agricultural region' by 31.9%, and 'the domestic products have better quality' by

Table 3. Identification ability in the imported foods and information sources

Item	Answer	N(%)	Total
Ability to distinguish between the domestic and the imported foods	Can't distinguish at all	7(3.8)	183(100.0)
	Distinguish little	114(62.3)	
	Distinguish comparatively	58(31.7)	
	Distinguish very well	4(2.2)	
Information sources of imported foods*	TV or radio program	113(61.7)	207(100.0)
	Associates	34(18.6)	
	Newspaper	22(12.0)	
	Magazine	20(10.9)	
	Internet	4(2.2)	
	Cultural program	1(0.5)	
Others	13(7.1)		

* : multiple answers

Table 4. Request of education

Item	Answer	N(%)	Total
Request of education about the imported foods	Yes	112(61.5)	182(100.0)
	No	70(38.5)	
Most wanted program for education	Method to discern between the domestic foods and the imported ones	138(75.4)	202(100.0)
	Distributional process of the imported foods	33(18.0)	
	Superiority of the domestic foods	17(9.3)	
	Method to report a fraud labeling	12(6.6)	
	Others	2(1.1)	

23.6% (Table 2).

3. Identification ability in the imported foods (Table 3)

According to the test by self-evaluation to find the degree of identification ability, 3.8% replied 'they can't distinguish at all', and 62.3% answered 'they distinguish little', which showed that 66.1% of the housewives could not distinguish between the domestic and the imported foods. For the source of 'information about the imported foods', 61.7% chose 'TV or radio program', next was from 'the associates' by 18.6%, 'newspaper' by 12.0% and 'magazine' by 10.9%. The 'Internet' was only chosen by 2.2%, though it is convenient with its accessibility anytime, anywhere.

4. Educational contents to be taught (Table 4)

61.5% of the housewives reported that they were inclined

Table 5. Percentage of correct answers in identification test on the imported foods N(%)

Food	Questions	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Do not know	Total
1 Rice	Shape, color	67(36.8)	46(25.3)	69(37.9)	182(100.0)
2 Sesame	Shape	88(49.2)	26(14.5)	65(36.3)	179(100.0)
3 Beans	Shape, color	57(31.8)	34(19.0)	88(49.2)	179(100.0)
4 Potato	Shape	76(42.5)	26(14.5)	77(43.0)	179(100.0)
5 Pineagaric	Color	68(37.9)	33(18.4)	78(43.7)	179(100.0)
6 Onion	Color	61(34.3)	41(23.0)	76(42.7)	178(100.0)
7 Whole bulb of garlic	Color, fibrous root	73(41.0)	47(26.4)	58(32.6)	178(100.0)
8 Peeled garlic	Shape, color	62(34.6)	57(31.8)	60(33.6)	179(100.0)
9 Red pepper powder	Taste, flavor	55(30.9)	72(40.4)	51(28.7)	178(100.0)
10 Dried pepper	Shape, thickness of Sarcocarp	61(33.9)	58(32.2)	61(33.9)	180(100.0)
11 Walnut	Glossy of peel	73(40.8)	40(22.3)	66(36.9)	179(100.0)
12 Chestnut	Shape, size	36(20.0)	72(40.0)	72(40.0)	180(100.0)
13 Pteridium aquilinum	Flavor, number of leaves	114(63.7)	19(10.6)	46(25.7)	179(100.0)
14 Dried fragrant mushroom	Shape of top, length of trunk	39(22.0)	45(25.4)	93(52.6)	177(100.0)
15 Dried persimmon	Shape of top	56(31.5)	30(16.9)	92(51.6)	178(100.0)
16 Korean kiwi	Color, shape of fur	67(37.4)	24(13.4)	88(49.2)	179(100.0)
17 Sirloin	Color	80(44.4)	45(25.0)	55(30.6)	180(100.0)
18 Yellow croaker	Color	83(45.6)	23(12.6)	76(41.8)	182(100.0)
19 Mackerel	Color, wave pattern	48(26.7)	58(32.2)	74(41.1)	180(100.0)
20 Scabbard fish	Pupil of the eye, color of around eyes	46(25.8)	41(23.0)	91(51.2)	178(100.0)
21 Arkshell	Color	41(23.0)	32(18.0)	105(59.0)	178(100.0)
22 Red crab	Color	48(27.3)	35(19.9)	93(52.8)	176(100.0)
23 Shrimp	Color, pattern	42(23.6)	35(19.7)	101(56.7)	178(100.0)
24 Squid	Color, length and thickness of limb	63(35.4)	43(24.2)	72(40.4)	178(100.0)

to receive education about the imported foods. For the educational contents, 75.4% chose to learn 'the way to distinguish the imported foods', and the rest was 'the distribution process of the imported foods', 'superiority of the domestic foods' and 'the method to report the fraud labeling' by 18.0%, 9.3% and 6.6% respectively.

5. Identification test on the imported foods (Table 5)

According to the identification test on the 24 kinds of foods, the highest correct mark was in the order of pteridium aquilinum (63.7%), sesame (49.2%), yellow croaker (45.6%), sirloin (44.4%), and whole bulb of garlic (41.0%), while the highest incorrect answer was in the order of red pepper powder (40.4%), chestnut (40.0%), dried pepper (32.2%), mackerel (32.2%), and peeled garlic (31.8%). 13.6 points on the average out of 40 points were achieved in relation to 40 questions about 24 kinds of foods.

6. Difference of the identification ability in relation to the characteristics of the subjects (Table 6)

According to the research on the relationship between identification points and the characteristics of the subjects, there

was a significant difference in relation to their monthly income and the awareness of identification method. In other words, subjects with 2 to 5 million won of monthly income got the highest points, next was the group of less than 2 million won. The group with more than 5 million won of monthly income got the lowest points ($p < 0.05$). For the awareness about the identification method, subjects who answered 'I can discriminate between the domestic and the imported foods well' got higher points in their identification test. It suggested that there was a great significance between the ability and the points ($p < 0.001$). On the other hand, other variables such as age, educational background, occupation, the level of nutritional knowledge, and the interests in health did not have any difference.

Discussion

According to the research on whether or not to check the label of the products when purchasing foods, most of the respondents (92.3%) replied positively. This figure is much high-

Table 6. Difference of the identification abilities by the characteristics of the subjects

		N	Mean (SD)	F value
Income (10,000won/month)	≤ 100	21	10.50 (6.92) ^b	2.76*
	100 – 200	60	11.25 (7.30) ^b	
	200 – 300	77	14.71 (7.70) ^a	
	300 – 400	11	15.31 (6.82) ^a	
	400 – 500	7	14.57 (7.37) ^a	
	≥ 500	4	8.25 (4.35) ^c	
Age (year)	20 – 29	24	12.96 (9.04)	0.55
	30 – 39	66	13.33 (7.71)	
	40 – 49	59	13.59 (7.05)	
	≥ 50	31	15.19 (6.25)	
Education level	Elementary	9	14.67 (6.56)	0.63
	Middle school	24	12.42 (5.51)	
	High school	73	14.66 (7.37)	
	College	25	13.36 (6.42)	
	≥ University	48	13.00 (8.93)	
Occupation	Housewife	94	14.70 (6.72)	0.89
	Professional	27	13.56 (9.35)	
	Public servant	23	13.50 (7.40)	
	Sales	21	11.35 (9.02)	
	Others	14	13.14 (7.24)	
Awareness of the identification method	Never distinguish at all	7	10.57 (8.14) ^c	5.88***
	Do not distinguish	114	12.17 (7.21) ^b	
	Distinguish	58	16.69 (6.96) ^a	
	Distinguish very well	4	17.00 (4.97) ^a	
Nutritional knowledge	Very lack	19	11.05 (7.29)	2.53
	Lack	113	13.60 (7.42)	
	Rich	24	16.33 (6.53)	
	Very rich	3	19.67 (9.71)	
Interests in health	Never interest	4	14.25 (9.22)	0.36
	No interested	11	11.64 (6.77)	
	Interest	113	13.95 (7.74)	
	Very interest	29	14.24 (6.50)	

* : $p < 0.05$, *** : $p < 0.001$, abc : different letters within a column are significantly different by Duncan's test

her than 66.8% of the research by Hyun, Kim (1997). It suggests that persons interested in the domestic and imported foods have increased recently. In addition, the research on the preference, 99.5% of the respondents replied that they preferred the domestic foods to the imported ones. Regarding the reasons for such preference, the answer chosen the most was 'the imported agricultural products have many harmful substances', which was the second highest answer in the research by Hyun, Kim (1997). This suggests that housewives are more interested in food safety. Although most of the consumers preferred the domestic brand to the imported one, as mentioned earlier, in reality more people tended to buy the imported foods. For example, in 2004 the tendency increased to the extent that 92.3% of housewives bought imported foods (56.9% Lee, Rhie 1995 ; 78.4% Hyun, Kim 1997 ;

61.2% Han, Kim 1999). It is at this point in time that it is absolutely necessary for housewives to have the ability to distinguish between the domestic agricultural products and the imported ones. Subjects in this study, however, responded that 66.1% of them could not distinguish between the domestic products and the imported ones, and their identification points were merely 13.6 points on the average out of 40 points. This result is identified with that of the research by Kim, Son (2004). According to Kim, Son (2004), 76% of housewives replied that they confusedly bought the imported foods, among which 49.6% did so because they did not know how to distinguish between the two. For further reasons, 41% mentioned that there was not a label to distinguish between the imported and the domestic foods, while 8.6% replied that the salesperson cheated them. Against this backdrop, education-

nal programs regarding the method to distinguish the imported foods and the food safety regulations should be immediately promoted by the professionals. In addition, the government should put a strict enforcement of the imported food labeling standard and conduct a strict surveillance on the related industry in order to establish the distribution system of the agricultural products. Consumers should be more careful not to be damaged from these imported agricultural products by acquiring the ability to distinguish between the two.

According to the research on the most wanted program for education, 75.4% of them wanted to know 'the method to identify the imported foods', and 'the distributional process of the imported foods' was requested by 18.0%, 'the superiority of the domestic foods' and 'the method to report a fraud labeling' were followed by 9.3% and 6.6% respectively. Therefore, it is believed that this result may be useful when planning educational programs for consumers in the future.

For the source of information to identify the imported foods, 61.7% reported that 'TV or radio program' was their source, which was identified with the results of other researches (Heo 1995 ; Kim, Kim 1997 ; Kwon 1995). It is expected that more information on the identification methods should be provided through mass media such as TV or radio programs. Also, it is necessary to provide and expand education for housewives through the Internet, as the usage of the Internet has increased rapidly.

According to the identification test about the imported foods, the highest correct mark was in the order of pteridium aquilinum (63.7%), sesame (49.2%), yellow croaker (45.6%), sirloin (44.4%), and whole bulb of garlic (41.0%), while the highest incorrect answer was in the order of red pepper powder (40.4%), chestnut (40.0%), dried pepper (32.2%), mackerel (32.2%), and peeled garlic (31.8%). Those with higher correct answers such as pteridium aquilinum, sesame, yellow croaker etc. were frequently purchased by housewives and could be easily identified. For example, the stalk of the imported pteridium aquilinum is longer and thicker, and the upper part of the stalk has fewer leaves than the domestic one. In addition, its color is dark brown with more tough fibers and less scent. The color of the domestic yellow croaker is bright gold, its mouth is reddish, its eyes are yellow, and there is a diamond-shaped mastoid process, all of which makes it easy to distinguish between the domestic and the imported ones. On the other hand, for foods with higher incorrect answers, it is not easy to distinguish between the two, and es-

pecially those for powder types are even more difficult to discern. For red pepper powder, however, it is still possible to identify the imported ones because they are more reddish, have stronger scents and pungent tastes, and are more coarse. The imported dried pepper is more pungent, with thinner and coarser flesh, and is not as glossy as the domestic one. The imported chestnut is dull, and its shape is usually round with rough skin. It is not so difficult to detect the imported products with a closer look. In other words, consumers can exactly identify them if they are aware of the characteristics. For the educational programs, real objects, pictures, or images to promote the educational effects are suggested.

Summary and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to get some basic data for developing consumer programs by investigating the identification abilities in the imported foods. For data collection, a total of 183 housewives living in Cheongju city were surveyed.

The results are as follows :

1) In relation to the attitude when purchasing foods, 92.3% of the respondents checked the label for country of origin. 99.5% of them reported that they preferred the domestic brand to the imported ones. For the reason of such preference, 46.3% answered 'the imported brand has more harmful substances', next was 'to save the agricultural regions' by 31.9% and was followed by 'good quality' and 'good taste' with 23.6% and 19.8% respectively.

2) The result of the identification test showed that the majority (66.1%) of housewives replied 'they do not distinguish'. For a major source of information, 'TV or radio program' was chosen by 61.7% of the respondents, and was followed in the order of 'associates' (18.6%), 'newspapers' (12.0%) and 'magazines' (10.9%).

3) 61.5% of the housewives wanted to receive education about the imported foods, and for the educational contents, 75.4% of them selected 'the method to discern between the domestic foods and the imported ones'. Next was regarding 'the distribution process of the imported goods' by 18.0%, and was followed by 'superiority of the domestic foods' and 'the method to report the fraud labeling' by 9.3% and 6.6% respectively.

4) According to the identification test of 24 kinds of imported foods, 13.6 points on the average out of 40 points

were achieved, which was quite low. The highest correct mark was in the order of pteridium aquilinum (63.7%), sesame (49.2%), yellow croaker (45.6%), sirloin (44.4%), whole bulb of garlic (41.0%) and walnut (40.8%), while the highest incorrect answer was in the order of red pepper powder (40.4%), chestnut (40.0%), dried pepper (32.2%), mackerel (32.2%), and peeled garlic (31.8%).

5) According to the research on the identification ability depending on the characteristics of the subjects, there was a significant difference between monthly income ($p < 0.05$) and the awareness of the identification method ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, groups with monthly income of below 2 million and above 5 million won had low identification ability, while the group with monthly income of 2 – 5 million won had high identification ability. For the awareness of the identification method, those who said they could distinguish well had higher points in their tests. This means that there is a great significance between the identification ability and the points of the identification test ($p < 0.001$).

Based on the results of the present study, the author suggests the following :

1) As for the major source of information to distinguish between the domestic and the imported foods, 'TV and radio program' was chosen the most, and more than 60% of housewives reported that they were inclined to learn about the imported foods. Therefore, it is necessary to provide educational programs about the method to identify the imported foods through TV or radio. It is also necessary to develop a variety of educational methods and media such as the Internet or the actual objects as the medium for education

2) The identification scores about the imported agricultural products were generally low and some of the test items showed a high percentage of incorrect answers. For the food with the most incorrect answers, it is necessary to provide an immediate publicity work about the identification method. Furthermore, it is highly desired that consumers should be protected from the harmful, imported agricultural products by expanding the educational opportunities.

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