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Egg consumption patterns, preferences and consumer perceptions in Jorhat district, Assam

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ABSTRACT

Background: Assam produces fewer eggs than it consumes and depends on supplies from other states, yet little is known about the consumers that local layer farms must serve. This study examined egg consumption patterns, preferences and perceptions among consumers in Jorhat district of Assam.

Methods: A structured interview schedule was administered to 100 randomly selected consumers during January–April 2022. Response distributions were analysed using percentages with Wilson 95% confidence intervals, chi-square goodness-of-fit tests, brand preference shares and an estimate of consumption intensity.

Results: Of the respondents, 84% consumed eggs. Taste (50.0%) was the main reason for consumption, 63.1% of consumers ate eggs two to three times a week, and estimated consumption frequency was about 129 consumption occasions per person per year. Price was the leading purchase attribute (42.9%) and the main reason for brand choice (51.2%), while 77.4% of consumers rated egg prices as fair. Brand preference shares followed farm size (65.5%, 20.7% and 13.8% for the large, medium and small farm brands), and preference between local and commercial eggs did not differ significantly ($p = 0.46$). Most consumers bought eggs from grocery stores (89.3%) and obtained price information from neighbours (45.2%) or the market (39.3%). Competitive pricing, retail availability and origin-based branding are key to expanding the market for locally produced eggs.

Keywords: Brand preference, Consumer behaviour, Egg consumption, Layer farming, Price perception

Introduction

India is the third-largest egg producer in the world. Egg production in the country rose from 78.48 billion in 2014-15 to 122.11 billion in 2020-21, raising per capita availability to 91 eggs per annum (Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, 2021; Ministry of Finance, 2022) [1, 2]. Production is, however, concentrated in a few states. Andhra Pradesh alone accounts for 22.10% of the national poultry population, whereas Assam accounts for 3.73%. Assam therefore procures a large share of its eggs from other states, even though per capita consumption of 60–100 eggs per annum remains well below the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommendation of 180 eggs (The Sentinel, 2022) [3].

Jorhat district reflects this gap. It ranked fifth in Assam in poultry population in 2019 with 20.35 lakh birds and produced about 1.87 crore eggs in 2019-20, yet a large volume of eggs is still brought into the district from outside (Directorate of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Assam, 2019) [4]. Most of the population is non-vegetarian, and only two well-established commercial layer farms operate alongside a few smaller units. Expansion of local production can succeed only if producers understand who buys eggs, how often they buy, where they buy and on what basis they choose among eggs.

Studies on the Indian egg sector have focused largely on production, examining farm costs, returns and break-even output (Soumya, 2012; Palai, 2014; Borah *et al.*, 2014) [6, 7, 5]. Consumer studies are fewer and mostly descriptive (Memon *et al.*, 2009; Reddy, 2016) [8, 9]. At the national level, household data show that supply-side factors such as price and the geographic concentration of poultry production shape egg consumption across Indian states (Scudiero *et al.*, 2023) [10], which makes consumer evidence from production-deficit regions particularly relevant. District-level evidence from North-East India is, however, scarce.

The present study was undertaken to examine egg consumption patterns, preferences and perceptions among consumers in Jorhat district of Assam. The specific aims were to (i) document the participation, frequency and expenditure profile of egg consumers; (ii) estimate consumer preference for local versus commercial eggs and for the brands of the district's commercial layer farms; and (iii) identify the purchase attributes, outlets and information sources through which local producers must compete.

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Materials and Methods

Study area

The study was conducted in Jorhat district, located in the central Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (26°45' N, 94°13' E; average elevation 116 m). The district covers 2,859.35 sq km, equivalent to 3.63% of the state's area, and had an estimated population of about 1.2 million in 2022. The district was selected purposively because of its high demand for eggs and poultry products. Data refer to the year 2021–22 and were collected during January–April 2022.

Sampling and data collection

A total of 100 consumers were selected using simple random sampling to represent a wide consumer base. Data were collected through personal interviews using a pre-tested structured schedule with four parts: (i) general information (age, gender, occupation and monthly income); (ii) consumption pattern (whether eggs are consumed, reasons for consuming or not consuming, and weekly frequency); (iii) preferences and perceptions (preferred source, preferred brand and reason for the preference, and awareness of nutritive value); and (iv) buying behaviour (main attribute considered, place of purchase, monthly expenditure, opinion on price level and source of price information). Each item recorded a single response. The three brands named in the schedule, Bahubali, Aasomi and Uttarkhongia, are the brands of the three commercial layer farms in the district studied by Naiding (2022) [11], classified as large (above 20,000 birds), medium (5,001–20,000 birds) and small (below 5,000 birds), respectively. Of the 100 respondents, 84 consumed eggs; unless stated otherwise, results refer to these 84 consumers.

$$\text{Annual consumption occasions} = 52 \times \Sigma (f_i \times m_i) / n$$

where f_i is the number of consumers in frequency class i . As a cross-check, mean monthly expenditure on eggs was estimated from expenditure-class midpoints (below ₹50 = 25; ₹50–150 = 100; ₹150–300 = 225; above ₹300 = 350) and converted into number of eggs using the farm-gate prices of ₹8–10 per egg recorded in the district (Naiding, 2022) [11]. Because retail prices exceed farm-gate prices, this conversion gives an upper bound. Opinions on the price level were scored as low = 1, fair = 2 and high = 3, and the mean score was reported as a price perception index. All computations were performed in Python using SciPy (Virtanen *et al.*, 2020) [14].

Ethical statement

The study involved interviews with adult consumers (18 years and above) and did not involve any experimentation on animals. Participation was voluntary, the purpose of the study was explained to each respondent, and responses were kept confidential and analysed only in aggregate.

Statistical analysis

For each item, the proportion of respondents choosing each option was estimated with a 95% confidence interval computed by the Wilson score method, which performs well for small samples and for proportions close to 0 or 1 (Wilson, 1927; Agresti *et al.*, 1998) [13, 12]. To assess whether responses were distributed equally across the available categories, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was applied against equal expected frequencies:

$$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O_j - E_j)^2 / E_j, E_j = n / k, df = k - 1 \quad (1)$$

where O_j and E_j are the observed and expected frequencies of option j and n is the number of respondents. A significant result indicates that the observed distribution of responses differs from the hypothesised equal distribution.

Brand preference shares were computed among consumers who named one of the three study-area brands, excluding those with another or no preference:

$$S_b = n_b / \Sigma n_b, \Sigma S_b = 1 \quad (2)$$

where n_b is the number of consumers preferring brand b . Preference shares for local and commercial eggs were computed in the same way among consumers stating a source preference.

Consumption intensity was estimated from the weekly frequency classes using class midpoints (m_i : once = 1; 2–3 times = 2.5; 4–5 times = 4.5):

$$\text{Annual consumption occasions} = 52 \times \Sigma (f_i \times m_i) / n \quad (3)$$

Results

Profile of respondents

Eighty-four of the 100 respondents consumed eggs (95% CI 75.6–89.9%). The socio-economic profile of the egg consumers is presented in Table 1. The proportion of male (53.57%) and female (46.43%) consumers did not differ significantly from parity ($p = 0.513$). Students formed the largest occupational group (45.24%), followed by salaried persons (27.38%), and 47.62% of consumers reported a monthly income below ₹10,000; both distributions differed significantly from uniform ($p < 0.001$). The largest age group was 18–27 years (35.71%), followed by 28–37 years (27.38%), 38–50 years (22.62%) and above 50 years (14.29%), so that 63.10% of consumers were below 38 years of age; the age distribution also differed significantly from uniform ($\chi^2 = 8.10, p = 0.044$).

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of egg consumers in Jorhat district ($n = 84$ unless stated).

Item and category	n	Per cent (95% CI)	χ^2 (df), p
Consumes eggs ($n = 100$)			
Yes	84	84.00 (75.6–89.9)	46.24 (1), <0.001
No	16	16.00 (10.1–24.4)	
Gender			
Male	45	53.57 (43.0–63.8)	0.43 (1), 0.513
Female	39	46.43 (36.2–57.0)	
Age (years)			
18–27	30	35.71 (26.3–46.4)	8.10 (3), 0.044
28–37	23	27.38 (19.0–37.7)	
38–50	19	22.62 (15.0–32.6)	
Above 50	12	14.29 (8.4–23.3)	
Occupation			

(continued on next page)

Item and category	n	Per cent (95% CI)	χ^2 (df), p
Student	38	45.24 (35.0–55.9)	23.71 (3), <0.001
Salaried	23	27.38 (19.0–37.7)	
Business	15	17.86 (11.1–27.4)	
Agriculture	8	9.52 (4.9–17.7)	
Monthly income (₹)			
Below 10,000	40	47.62 (37.3–58.2)	30.57 (3), <0.001
10,000–30,000	10	11.90 (6.6–20.5)	
30,000–50,000	25	29.76 (21.0–40.2)	
Above 50,000	9	10.71 (5.7–19.1)	

CI = confidence interval (Wilson score method). χ^2 = chi-square goodness-of-fit test against equal shares.

Consumption pattern

Reasons, frequency and expenditure of egg consumption are presented in Table 2. Taste was the main reason for consuming eggs (50.00%), followed by health properties (21.43%) and habit (19.05%); budget and convenience were each cited by 4.76% of consumers. Most consumers (63.10%) ate eggs two to three times a week, 21.43% once a week and 15.48% four to five times a week, and none more than five times a week. Monthly expenditure on eggs was

₹50–150 for 64.29% of consumers. All three distributions differed significantly from uniform ($p < 0.001$).

Using class midpoints, the mean frequency of consumption was 2.49 occasions per week, or about 129 occasions per person per year. Mean monthly expenditure was about ₹118, which corresponds to at most 12–15 eggs per month, or 142–177 eggs per year, at farm-gate prices of ₹8–10 per egg. Among the 16 non-consumers, health reasons (7), dislike of taste (5) and vegetarianism (4) were cited, and these reasons did not differ significantly ($\chi^2 = 0.88$, $p = 0.646$).

Table 2. Reasons, frequency and expenditure of egg consumption in Jorhat district ($n = 84$ unless stated).

Item and category	n	Per cent (95% CI)	χ^2 (df), p
Main reason for consuming eggs			
Taste	42	50.00 (39.5–60.5)	57.43 (4), <0.001
Health properties	18	21.43 (14.0–31.3)	
Habit	16	19.05 (12.1–28.7)	
Budget friendly	4	4.76 (1.9–11.6)	
Convenience	4	4.76 (1.9–11.6)	
Frequency of consumption per week			
Once	18	21.43 (14.0–31.3)	33.93 (2), <0.001 ^a
2–3 times	53	63.10 (52.4–72.6)	
4–5 times	13	15.48 (9.3–24.7)	
More than 5 times	0	0.00	
Monthly expenditure on eggs (₹)			
Below 50	13	15.48 (9.3–24.7)	72.67 (3), <0.001
50–150	54	64.29 (53.6–73.7)	
150–300	14	16.67 (10.2–26.1)	
Above 300	3	3.57 (1.2–10.0)	
Reason for not consuming eggs (non-consumers, <i>n</i> = 16)			
Health reasons	7	43.75 (23.1–66.8)	0.88 (2), 0.646
Dislike of taste	5	31.25 (14.2–55.6)	
Vegetarian	4	25.00 (10.2–49.5)	

^aTest computed on the three non-empty categories. Other abbreviations as in Table 1.

Preferences for egg source, brand and attributes

Preferences for egg source and brand are presented in Table 3. Commercial eggs were preferred by 42.86% of consumers and local eggs by 35.71%, while 21.43% had no preference. Among consumers stating a source preference, the shares of commercial (54.5%) and local (45.5%) eggs did not differ significantly ($\chi^2 = 0.55$, $p = 0.460$).

Of all consumers, 69.0% named one of the three study-area brands. Brand preference was highly uneven ($p < 0.001$): among consumers naming a study-area brand, the preference share was 65.5% for Bahubali (large farm), 20.7% for Aasomi (medium farm) and 13.8% for Uttarkhongia (small farm). Price was the main reason for brand preference (51.19%), followed by quality (21.43%), popularity (11.90%) and availability (9.52%), while packaging was cited by 3.57%.

Table 3. Preferences for egg source and brand among egg consumers in Jorhat district ($n = 84$).

Item and category	n	Per cent (95% CI)	Preference share ^a (%)	χ^2 (df), p
Preferred egg source				
Commercial	36	42.86 (32.8–53.5)	54.5	6.00 (2), 0.050
Local	30	35.71 (26.3–46.4)	45.5	0.55 (1), 0.460 ^b
No preference	18	21.43 (14.0–31.3)	–	
Preferred brand				
Bahubali (large farm)	38	45.24 (35.0–55.9)	65.5	26.86 (3), <0.001
Aasomi (medium farm)	12	14.29 (8.4–23.3)	20.7	27.45 (2), <0.001 ^c
Uttarkhongia (small farm)	8	9.52 (4.9–17.7)	13.8	
Other brand / no preference	26	30.95 (22.1–41.5)	–	
Reason for brand preference				
Price	43	51.19 (40.7–61.6)	–	83.86 (5), <0.001
Quality	18	21.43 (14.0–31.3)	–	
Popularity	10	11.90 (6.6–20.5)	–	
Availability	8	9.52 (4.9–17.7)	–	
Packaging	3	3.57 (1.2–10.0)	–	
Other	2	2.38 (0.7–8.3)	–	

^aShare among consumers stating a preference within the item (66 for source; 58 for the three study-area brands). ^bLocal versus commercial only. ^cAmong the three study-area brands only. Other abbreviations as in Table 1.

The main attribute considered when buying eggs is shown in Fig 1. Price was cited by 42.86% of consumers, more than twice the 20%

expected under equal weighting, and its confidence interval (32.8–53.5%) did not overlap with that of any other attribute. Size (26.19%) was the only other attribute above equal weight, followed by brand (16.67%), colour (9.52%) and packaging (4.76%) ($\chi^2 = 38.38$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$).

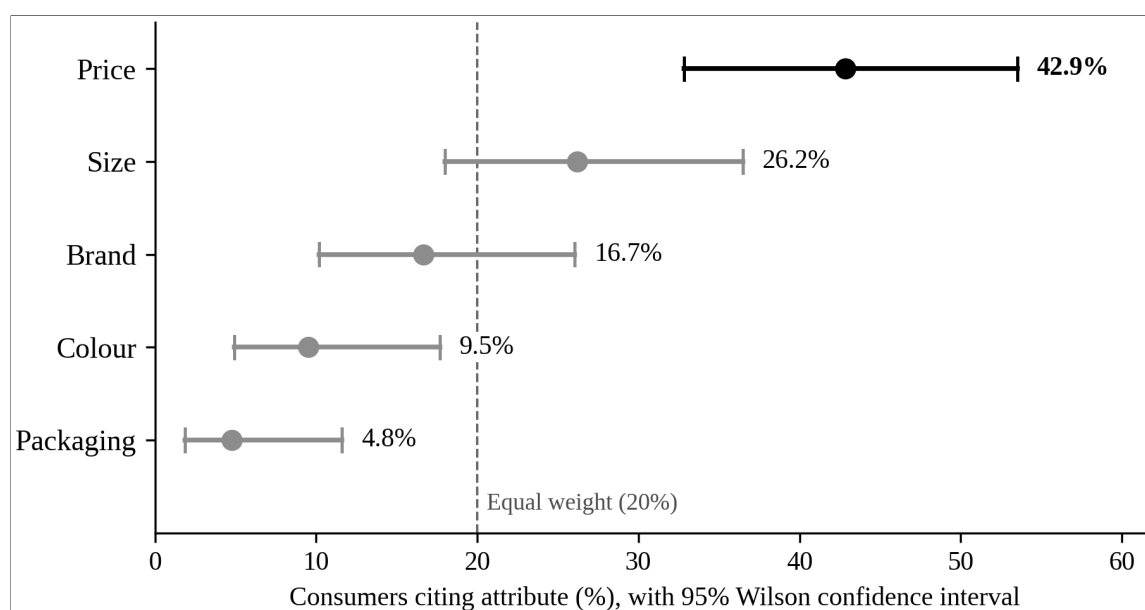


Figure 1. Main attribute considered by consumers when buying eggs in Jorhat district ($n = 84$). Dots show the percentage of consumers and bars the 95% Wilson confidence interval; the dashed line marks the 20% share expected if all five attributes were weighted equally.

Perceptions and market behaviour

Price perception, information sources, outlets and nutritional awareness are presented in Table 4. No consumer considered egg prices high; 77.38% considered them fair and 22.62% low, giving a price perception index of 1.77 on a scale of 1 to 3. Neighbours and relatives

(45.24%) and the market (39.29%) were the main sources of price information, while newspapers (13.10%) and e-media (2.38%) were minor sources. Grocery stores were the main place of purchase (89.29%), with wholesalers (5.95%) and farms (4.76%) used by few consumers. Most consumers (85.71%) reported awareness of the nutritive value of eggs.

Table 4. Price perception, information sources, place of purchase and nutritional awareness of egg consumers in Jorhat district ($n = 84$).

Item and category	n	Per cent (95% CI)	χ^2 (df), p
Opinion on egg price level			
Fair	65	77.38 (67.4–85.0)	25.19 (1), <0.001 ^a
Low	19	22.62 (15.0–32.6)	
High	0	0.00	
Source of price information			
Neighbours/relatives	38	45.24 (35.0–55.9)	42.57 (3), <0.001
Market	33	39.29 (29.5–50.0)	
Newspaper	11	13.10 (7.5–21.9)	
E-media	2	2.38 (0.7–8.3)	
Place of purchase			
Grocery store	75	89.29 (80.9–94.3)	118.36 (2), <0.001
Wholesaler	5	5.95 (2.6–13.2)	
Direct from farm	4	4.76 (1.9–11.6)	
Aware of nutritive value of eggs			
Yes	72	85.71 (76.7–91.6)	42.86 (1), <0.001
No	12	14.29 (8.4–23.3)	

^aTest computed on the two non-empty categories. Other abbreviations as in Table 1.

Discussion

Level and drivers of consumption

Egg consumption in Jorhat is widespread but moderate. The estimated 129 consumption occasions per person per year exceed the national per capita availability of 91 eggs but remain well below the ICMR recommendation of 180 eggs. A similar level has been reported for families in Tehran, where mean consumption was 2.58 eggs per person per week, or 134 per year, and was also judged to be well below recommended standards (Talakesh *et al.*, 2020) [15]. The finding that taste rather than health drives consumption, despite 85.71% of consumers reporting awareness of the nutritive value of eggs, suggests that awareness is not the binding constraint on demand. Nutrition messages that translate general awareness into a concrete norm, such as one egg a day for students and children, may raise frequency more than further generic campaigns.

Only a quarter of non-consumers cited vegetarianism, about 4% of all respondents. The remaining non-consumption reflected health concerns and taste, which are perceptions that information can address, although the small number of non-consumers (16) limits inference.

Price, brand and origin

Price dominated both the attribute considered at purchase and the choice of brand. This agrees with a review of 34 consumer studies, which concluded that price is very important in egg purchase decisions, especially in developing countries, and that sensory properties such as size and shell colour are also major determinants (Rondoni *et al.*, 2020) [16]. The ranking of size second and colour fourth in Jorhat is consistent with that pattern. It is also consistent with national evidence that price and the concentration of production shape egg consumption across India (Scudiero *et al.*, 2023) [10]: in a production-deficit state such as Assam, the availability and relative prices of eggs supplied from surplus-producing states may influence consumer choices.

Brand preference shares followed farm scale. The large and medium farms sold eggs at ₹8 per egg in 2021–22, whereas the small farm sold at ₹10 (Naiding, 2022) [11], and larger output allows wider retail presence. That the least preferred brand was also the highest priced fits the reasons consumers gave, since price, popularity and availability together accounted for 72.6% of brand choices. Local brands nevertheless have recognition, as 69.0% of consumers named one of them. Preference between local and commercial eggs was evenly divided. Origin is recognised as one of the extrinsic cues consumers use when

evaluating eggs (Rondoni *et al.*, 2020) [16], and a sizeable group of consumers in Jorhat values local eggs. However, origin alone did not give local eggs a significant advantage over commercial eggs. Origin is therefore likely to add value only when it is combined with the attributes consumers already rank highly, namely a competitive price, quality and size, under a recognisable brand.

Information and outlets

Price information travels mainly by word of mouth and through the market, and nearly nine in ten consumers buy from grocery stores. For local producers this means that the retail shelf is the main point of competition and that reputation spreads informally. Farm-gate sales and media advertising reach few consumers, whereas retailer partnerships, trial packs and community-level promotion fit the channels consumers actually use. The finding that no consumer considered prices high suggests some room on price, but because price drives brand choice, even a small premium is likely to shift buyers to cheaper brands.

Implications

For producers, the results point to four priorities: keeping prices competitive with eggs brought in from other states; securing regular supply to neighbourhood grocery stores; branding local origin together with consistent quality and size grading; and using word-of-mouth channels for promotion. Small units can narrow their price gap through shared input procurement or cooperative marketing. For policy, state programmes to expand layer farming, such as the Assam Poultry Development Project (Ningthoukhongjam *et al.*, 2022) [17], could judge success by the price at which local eggs reach the grocery shelf rather than by production volume alone. Support for local feed supply and capital investment could potentially contribute to reducing production costs and improving the price competitiveness of locally produced eggs.

Limitations

The study has four limitations. First, the sample is small (84 consumers) and drawn from one district in one year, so the results apply to Jorhat in 2021–22. Second, the analysis used aggregate single-choice tabulations; relationships between consumer characteristics and choices, such as income and frequency, could not be tested. Third, responses are stated rather than observed. Fourth, some schedule items, including time of consumption, size preference, consumption of eggs of other species, response to price increases and perceived availability, were not tabulated in the source data and are not analysed here.

Conclusion

Egg consumption in Jorhat district is widespread (84% of respondents), driven mainly by taste and moderate in intensity, at about 2.5 times a week or roughly 129 occasions per person per year against a recommended 180 eggs. Price is the dominant factor in both purchase and brand choice, consumers regard current prices as fair, and they buy almost entirely from grocery stores using informal price information. Brand preference follows farm scale, and preference between local and commercial eggs is evenly divided. For an egg-deficit district, these findings indicate that locally produced eggs will displace eggs brought in from other states only if they reach the retail shelf at a competitive price, after which local origin can add value for a substantial group of consumers.

Future research should collect respondent-level data across several districts of Assam, relate preferences to income, occupation and consumption frequency, and apply ranking methods such as Garrett ranking or best–worst scaling to purchase attributes. A choice experiment comparing local and commercial eggs at different price differences would estimate directly the premium that consumers are willing to pay for local origin.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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