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**iJOINED ETCOR**  
P - ISSN 2984-7567  
E - ISSN 2945-3577



**The Exigency**  
P - ISSN 2984-7842  
E - ISSN 1908-3181

## Evaluating Consumers' Perception Towards their Acceptability of Rabbit Meat Consumption in Tangub City

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**Received:** 10 July 2025

**Revised:** 14 September 2025

**Accepted:** 22 September 2025

**Available Online:** 25 September 2025

**Volume IV (2025), Issue 3, P-ISSN – 2984-7567; E-ISSN - 2945-3577**

<https://doi.org/10.63498/etcor460>

### Abstract

**Aim:** This study examined consumer perceptions and the acceptability of rabbit meat as an alternative protein source in Tangub City, amid income losses suffered by pig farmers due to a mysterious swine disease.

**Methodology:** A qualitative descriptive research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with 30 purposively selected residents near the city proper who regularly consume meat products.

**Findings:** Thematic analysis revealed that acceptance of rabbit meat was influenced by its similarity in taste to chicken and pork, its perceived cleanliness, and peer influence. Reluctance, however, was shaped by rabbits' appealing physical traits, feelings of compassion, unfamiliarity as a food source, health concerns, and their common perception as pets.

**Conclusion:** Findings suggest that cultural beliefs, emotional responses, and social norms strongly shape consumer attitudes toward rabbit meat. While initial hesitancy remains evident, targeted educational campaigns and awareness initiatives could gradually normalize its consumption, thereby supporting local farmers, enhancing food security, and strengthening economic resilience.

**Keywords:** *Acceptability, Consumer Perception, Personal Factors, Reluctance, Rabbit Meat Consumption*

### INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world, including Tangub City, the consumption of rabbit meat has been a relatively unexplored facet of the local diet. Tangub City, situated in the Philippines, is known for its vibrant culinary culture, with various meat options readily available to its residents. However, rabbit meat remains largely marginalized and underrepresented on the local menu. This underutilization raises questions about rabbit meat's acceptability among Tangub City consumers.

Consumer perception plays a pivotal role in shaping food choices and dietary habits. It influences the demand for certain food products and, consequently, has implications for the local food industry, animal farming practices, and environmental sustainability. Globally, rabbit meat has long been a part of traditional diets, especially in Mediterranean and rural regions, due to its high nutritional value—being rich in protein, low in fat, and containing unsaturated fatty acids (Petracci et al., 2018; Siddiqui et al., 2023). Despite these benefits, rabbit meat consumption remains controversial in many parts of the world. Cultural perceptions often frame rabbits primarily as pets, and this association significantly hinders their acceptance as a food source, particularly in countries like the Philippines (Canet, 2021; Wendt, 2022). Studies in education and consumer research highlight that perceptions and beliefs strongly shape acceptance or rejection of practices and products, reinforcing the need to address underlying attitudes.

According to Alama (2023), rabbits were introduced by the United States Peace Corps after World War II to combat food scarcity. However, they have remained largely viewed as pets rather than livestock. Although previous studies have explored rabbit meat consumption globally, few have examined Filipino consumers' perceptions, and none have specifically focused on Tangub City. The Department of Agriculture has started to support the rabbit meat industry by recognizing it as a pork alternative, especially in response to livestock challenges like the African Swine Fever outbreak. This outbreak devastated many backyard pig farms in Tangub City, causing financial losses and

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pushing farmers to consider alternative livestock options. Similar to challenges in other industries, local responses require adaptability, innovation, and collaboration to sustain livelihoods and future-proof practices.

Nonetheless, deep-rooted cultural norms and perceptions continue to obstruct the widespread acceptance of rabbit meat. Filipinos' perception of rabbits as adorable, domesticated animals contributes to a cultural hesitation to view them as edible. This cultural taboo is particularly evident among urban dwellers and those less exposed to international cuisines that feature rabbit meat (Astudillo, 2021; Ocampo, 2021; Tan, 2023). According to Sarmiento (2021), the controversial shift from "pet to plate" has made it difficult for Filipinos to embrace rabbit meat despite government efforts and its clear nutritional benefits. Furthermore, economic factors—such as the relatively high cost of rabbit meat, ranging from ₱400 to ₱500 per kilo—also serve as a deterrent for regular consumption among average-income families (Sagcal, 2022). This situation highlights the importance of reflective practices to better understand community attitudes and consumer readiness.

These challenges emphasize the complexity of introducing rabbit meat into the Filipino diet. Misconceptions, lack of information, emotional attachment to rabbits as pets, and the absence of market infrastructure all contribute to its underutilization. Despite these barriers, experts and local farmers continue to promote rabbit meat as a sustainable, nutritious, and economically viable alternative to traditional livestock. However, acceptance ultimately hinges on changing consumer perceptions and increasing awareness of its benefits.

This research aimed to bridge the gap in understanding by thoroughly assessing consumer perception and acceptability surrounding rabbit meat in Tangub City. By identifying the cultural, economic, and informational barriers that affect consumer choices, this study seeks to uncover opportunities for promoting rabbit meat as a viable component of the local diet. The findings can benefit the local food industry, guide farmers exploring alternative livestock, and contribute to broader dietary diversification and sustainable food practices in Tangub City.

### Statement of the Problem

The livestock industry in the Philippines, particularly pig farming, has faced significant economic challenges in recent years due to the outbreak of swine diseases. These outbreaks have resulted in considerable income losses for farmers and heightened the need to explore alternative and sustainable sources of protein for consumers. Rabbit meat, known for its high protein content, lean quality, and similarity in taste to chicken and pork, presents a potential solution to this pressing concern. However, despite its nutritional benefits and economic viability, rabbit meat remains an underutilized food source in many parts of the country.

In Tangub City, where residents are accustomed to consuming conventional meat products such as pork, chicken, and beef, the introduction of rabbit meat as a dietary option poses both opportunities and challenges. Consumer perceptions, shaped by cultural beliefs, emotional responses, and social norms, strongly influence the acceptability of unconventional meat sources. While some consumers may view rabbit meat as a healthy and clean alternative, others may be reluctant due to the animal's physical traits, its common role as a pet, or unfamiliarity as a food source.

Given these circumstances, it becomes necessary to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Tangub City residents toward rabbit meat consumption. Understanding these factors will not only provide insights into consumer behavior but also help local farmers and policymakers develop strategies to diversify protein sources, enhance food security, and support economic resilience in the face of agricultural challenges.

### Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to determine the acceptability of rabbit meat consumption among consumers in Tangub City based on their perceptions.

Specifically, this study aims:

1. To identify the factors influencing consumers' acceptance of rabbit meat as a food option.
2. To examine the factors contributing to consumers' reluctance to consume rabbit meat.
3. To assess the implications of consumer perceptions for food security and local economic resilience.

### Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the overall level of consumer acceptability of rabbit meat in Tangub City?
2. What factors influence consumers' acceptance of rabbit meat as a food option?
3. What factors contribute to consumers' reluctance to consume rabbit meat?



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4. How can consumer perceptions of rabbit meat consumption support local farmers and strengthen food security?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which is well-suited for exploring human perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors—particularly those surrounding culturally sensitive issues such as alternative meat consumption. This method utilizes non-numerical data and aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of a given phenomenon. According to Regionel (2023), descriptive qualitative research emphasizes detailed narrative accounts without delving into causal relationships, making it valuable for informing policy and guiding future research directions. Through this approach, the researchers aimed to capture in-depth insights into consumer perceptions and the acceptability of rabbit meat among residents of Tangub City.

Similarly, Abenojar et al. (2025) stressed that qualitative inquiry provides a deeper understanding of how individuals experience and interpret new practices, especially when cultural beliefs and attitudes strongly influence acceptance. This makes the approach particularly relevant to studies on food consumption behaviors.

### Population and Sampling

The study involved 30 urban-based participants from Barangays I, II, III, IV, and V of Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. These barangays were selected due to their proximity to the city proper and local markets, which positions residents as key stakeholders in meat consumption trends. The inclusion criteria targeted individuals who regularly consume meat, excluding those on plant-based diets or those restricted by religious, cultural, or traditional practices.

The researchers employed purposive sampling, a non-random technique wherein participants are selected based on specific characteristics aligned with the research objectives. As Nikolopoulou (2023) noted, purposive sampling allows researchers to deliberately choose individuals who are best positioned to provide relevant insights. A sample size of 30 was considered adequate to capture thematic saturation in qualitative data. This is consistent with Bontuyan (2025), who highlighted the importance of purposive participant selection to ensure rich, meaningful, and context-driven narratives in qualitative investigations.

### Instruments

Data were collected using a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide composed of four parts: (1) participant selection, (2) preliminary questions, (3) key questions on consumer perceptions and acceptability of rabbit meat, and (4) probing questions for deeper insights. The instrument was validated by three experts: two with academic expertise in qualitative research and one with a background in food science and consumer studies. Their feedback ensured the guide's clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives.

### Data Collection

Data collection was carried out over a one-month period (April 2024) in the selected barangays. Participants were approached in their communities, and interviews were conducted at convenient locations. Each interview was conducted face-to-face, lasted 20 to 40 minutes, and was audio-recorded with participant permission. Before starting, the researchers explained the study's purpose and interview procedures to participants in a clear and respectful manner.

As emphasized by Amihan et al. (2023), clear communication and alignment of procedures with participants' contexts are critical in ensuring both the validity of qualitative research and the trustworthiness of its findings. This guided the researchers' approach in conducting ethically sound and participant-centered interviews.

### Data Analysis

The researchers employed thematic analysis to interpret the interview data, following six systematic steps. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings. Next, the researchers engaged in familiarization by repeatedly reading the transcripts and noting initial impressions. Segments of text were then highlighted and assigned descriptive codes, which were subsequently grouped into broader categories during the theme generation stage to reflect emerging ideas. These categories were further reviewed and refined into coherent themes, ensuring consistency across transcripts. Finally, the themes were defined, named, and illustrated with





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representative participant quotations for reporting. Manual coding was used throughout the process, and any discrepancies between researchers were discussed to enhance reliability.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards. Ethical clearance was obtained from the adviser before data collection commenced. All participants were provided with clear information about the study and their rights, and written informed consent was obtained before each interview. Confidentiality was maintained by excluding personal identifiers from transcripts and reports. Anonymity was preserved throughout the research process, and the data was used exclusively for academic purposes.

### RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on consumer perceptions of rabbit meat as a food option in Tangub City. Thematic analysis revealed two main areas: (1) factors contributing to the acceptability of rabbit meat, and (2) factors contributing to its reluctance as a food option.

#### Factors Contributing to Acceptability of Rabbit Meat

There were three (3) themes that emerged from the responses of the participants on the question above. These is the consumers perception towards rabbit meat consumption in Tangub City.

##### Theme 1: Taste Equivalent to Conventional Meat

A recurring theme was the perception of rabbit meat as similar in taste to chicken or pork. Eight participants (P8, P11, P16, P17, P21, P22, P23, P30) highlighted this equivalence, suggesting that its resemblance to familiar meats enhances acceptability.

P8 observed: "Rabbit looks like pork, especially when roasted like lechon. It is delicious and there is no problem eating it."

P17 similarly explained: "I have eaten rabbit before, and its meat actually tastes like chicken—delicious to eat, not unpleasant."

P21 confirmed: "Rabbits taste just like chicken; I have tried it before."

Some participants relied on hearsay rather than direct experience. For example, P16 admitted: "I have not tried rabbit meat yet, but I always hear that it tastes like chicken."

These findings align with Staff (2020) and Sante (2023), who described rabbit meat as mild and comparable to chicken or pork in flavor and texture. Its versatility in preparation—whether roasted, grilled, or stewed—further contributes to its acceptability (Maddy, 2024).

##### Theme 2: Perceptions of Cleanliness

Participants also associated rabbit meat with cleanliness, largely due to its herbivorous diet. Three participants (P4, P15, P25) emphasized that rabbits eat grass and are raised in hygienic environments, making them suitable for consumption.

P4 stated: "It is fine to eat rabbit because they mainly eat grass, and they are clean since they're raised on farms."

P15 echoed: "It is probably okay to consume rabbit because it is clean, and what they eat is just grass."

This perspective reflects broader understandings of rabbits as obligatory herbivores dependent on plant-based diets (Frank, 2022; Jones, 2024). Such diets are perceived as "clean," enhancing consumer willingness to view rabbit meat as safe (Bradford & Harvey, 2022).



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### Theme 3: Influence of Social Peers

Eight participants (P8, P15, P16, P17, P21, P22, P25, P30) reported that their willingness to try rabbit meat was shaped by peers, neighbors, or colleagues. Social influence played a role in both introducing and normalizing rabbit consumption.

P8 shared: "My friends influenced me the most because they invited me to try it. At first, I felt sorry for rabbits, but over time that feeling faded as I got used to the taste."

P22 noted: "I have tried eating rabbit before. I was influenced by my colleagues at work, and it felt like a personal challenge."

Such accounts emphasized the role of peer influence in shaping food choices. Api (2023) emphasized that shared dining experiences validate individual preferences, while Thomas (2018) and McGowan (2024) noted that conformity to social norms increases the likelihood of trying new foods.

### Factors Contributing to Reluctance Toward Rabbit Meat

There were five (5) themes emerged from the responses of the participants on the questions above. These are the factors that influence the consumer perception regarding their reluctance of rabbit meat as a food option in Tangub City.

#### Theme 1: Positive Traits and Characteristics of Rabbits

The strongest deterrent to consumption was the perception of rabbits as cute, affectionate animals. Nine participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, P19, P20, P24, P26, P29) expressed reluctance rooted in rabbits' physical traits and pet-like qualities.

P1 explained: "I do not accept rabbit for consumption because I find them too cute and see them as pets rather than food."

P4 added: "Much like dogs, they hold a special place in our hearts and bring us happiness."

This reflects findings by Leroy and Petracci (2021) and Auffrey (2019), who noted that rabbits' charm evokes emotional resistance to eating them, a sentiment increasingly common in modern societies.

#### Theme 2: Compassion and Emotional Attachment

Seven participants (P7, P9, P12, P13, P14, P18, P28) reported that feelings of pity and empathy discouraged them from consuming rabbit meat.

P7 remarked: "Because of the docile and kind nature of rabbits, it is very heart-wrenching to think of them being slaughtered for meat."

P28 explained: "I cannot consider the rabbit as food because I have empathy towards it—to me, it seems like a person."

These insights align with Carter (2021) and Hawthorne (2020), who observed that rabbits' emotional responsiveness fosters human empathy, making them harder to view as food animals. Similarly, Flower (2023) emphasized that raising rabbits as companions deepens opposition to their consumption.

#### Theme 3: Unpopularity as a Food Option

Rabbit meat was also viewed as culturally uncommon. Six participants (P5, P10, P23, P27, P28) associated their reluctance with the rarity of rabbit meat compared to chicken, pork, and beef.

P10 explained: "I just cannot accept it because it is not the same as chicken, pork, or beef, which are well-known and introduced in our area."



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P27 added: "It is not suitable for consumption because it's not widely known as food."

This reflects broader consumption trends: while rabbit meat is widely produced in China and parts of Europe, it remains rare in the Philippines due to cultural perceptions and limited production (Neri, 2021; Ciuraru, 2022; Veneracion, 2020).

#### Theme 4: Health Concerns

Health-related worries also discourage consumption. Three participants (P2, P10, P11) raised concerns about allergies, disease transmission, or general uncertainty about safety.

P2 admitted: "There is uncertainty about whether rabbits may carry diseases."

P11 added: "I am cautious because rabbit meat might not be suitable for our bodies—it might cause allergy or high blood pressure."

These concerns echo findings by Knopp (2023) and Hays (2023), who warned of zoonotic risks such as tularemia or salmonella if rabbit meat is poorly handled. Although such risks can be mitigated by proper farming and cooking practices, consumer perceptions remain a barrier.

#### Theme 5: Rabbits as Pet Companions

Finally, the view of rabbits as pets rather than livestock emerged strongly. Sixteen participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P9, P12, P13, P14, P18, P19, P20, P24, P26, P27, P29) rejected rabbit meat based on its association with companionship.

P3 shared: "I see rabbits as pets, like cats, because they are friendly and domesticated. If you consider eating them, I cannot bear it."

P19 explained: "Rabbits are pitiful to look at because not everyone eats them since they are mostly kept as pets."

This aligns with McLeod (2021) and Good (2023), who described rabbits as affectionate companions that reduce stress, making them highly valued as pets. Pratt (2024) further emphasized that rabbits form strong bonds with humans, reinforcing their status as household companions rather than food animals.

#### Summary of Findings

The findings reveal a clear tension: while some participants accept rabbit meat due to its taste similarity, cleanliness, and peer influence, others reject it based on compassion, pet associations, health concerns, and cultural unfamiliarity.

This dual perception reflects broader global trends where rabbit meat is promoted for its nutritional benefits yet hindered by strong cultural and emotional barriers (Leroy & Petracci, 2021; Tuorila & Hartmann, 2020). Addressing these barriers in Tanguib City may require targeted awareness campaigns, improved market exposure, and culturally sensitive approaches that respect the symbolic role of rabbits in Filipino households.

#### Conclusions

This study revealed that consumer perceptions of rabbit meat in Tanguib City are influenced by cultural, emotional, and health-related factors. Hesitancy was largely rooted in the view of rabbits as pets, emotional attachment, and unfamiliarity, while acceptance was more evident among those who compared its taste to chicken, valued its clean diet, or were encouraged by peers who had tried it. These findings indicate that although rabbit meat holds promise as a sustainable food option, cultural and emotional barriers continue to constrain its wider acceptance.

#### Recommendations

In response, the Local Government Unit may prioritize short-term actions such as feasibility studies and pilot farming projects to introduce rabbit as a viable meat source, directly addressing economic and sustainability concerns. The City Health Office should lead evidence-based campaigns to counter health-related hesitancy and





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highlight the nutritional benefits of rabbit meat. Meanwhile, the City Agriculture Office can support long-term adoption by equipping farmers with training on rabbit production and its profitability. To build consumer awareness, food events and tasting initiatives are also recommended, aligning with the finding that peer influence encourages openness. Finally, future research should explore the deeper psychological and cultural dimensions of consumer reluctance and compare the health outcomes of rabbit meat with those of traditional meats.

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