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Consumer Knowledge of the Fat Content of Meat Products

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Statement of Problem

The World Health Organization recently released a study that links the consumption of processed meat to cancer in humans. The level of fat in meat has also been found to be harmful to human health. Knowledge of the fat content of various meat types is necessary for consumers to make healthier food choices. Imparting such knowledge to consumers will be more successful if baseline information on the existing stock of knowledge of the fat content of various meat types is available. This study assesses the subjective knowledge of the fat content of selected types of meat.

Description of Research Method

A survey instrument was used to obtain information, from a convenience sample of college students, on the level of fat that the respondents believe is contained in various types of meat including beef, pork, chicken and turkey. The responses were summarized and the means were compared to the actual fat content of those meat products to help identify knowledge gaps that could be addressed with nutrition education.

Results

- For beef products, respondents indicated that ground round is 23.8% fat which is over three times the actual fat content of 7.93% (Figure 1). Respondents also indicated that sirloin steak contains 21.7% fat which is almost twice that of the actual fat content of 12.72%. The respondents indicated that the fat contents of chuck roast and ground beef are 23.2% and 26.1%, respectively, which are higher than the actual values of 6.01% and 17.08%.
- For pork products, respondents indicated that low-fat ham contains 17.68% fat which is almost similar to the actual fat content of 18.52% (Figure 2). Respondents also indicated that center-cut chop contains 20.2% of fat which is almost twice that of the actual fat content of 11.07%. The respondents indicated that the fat contents of shoulder roast, ham and ribs are 20.7%, 25.1%, and 27.9%, respectively. The actual values of 18.01%, 18.94%, and 11.83%, are lower.
- For chicken products, the respondents indicated that white meat with skin contained 20.2% of fat which is almost twice that of the actual fat content of 11.08% (Figure 3).

Results Cont.

White meat without skin was thought to contain 14.4% of fat which is nine times higher than the 1.6% actual fat content of white meat without skin. The fat content of dark meat with skin, and dark meat without skin were reported to be 27.6%, and 21.3%, respectively, and are also higher than the actual values of 8.35%, and 4.31%.

- For turkey products, the respondents indicated that white meat with skin contains 20.8% fat which is almost three times that of the actual fat content of 7.4% (Figure 4). Respondents also indicated that white meat without skin contains 13.9% fat which is almost ten times that of the actual fat content of 1.4%. The respondents indicated that the fat contents of dark meat with skin, and dark meat without skin were 23.3%, and 21.8%, respectively, which are also higher than the actual values of 8.98%, and 2.5%.

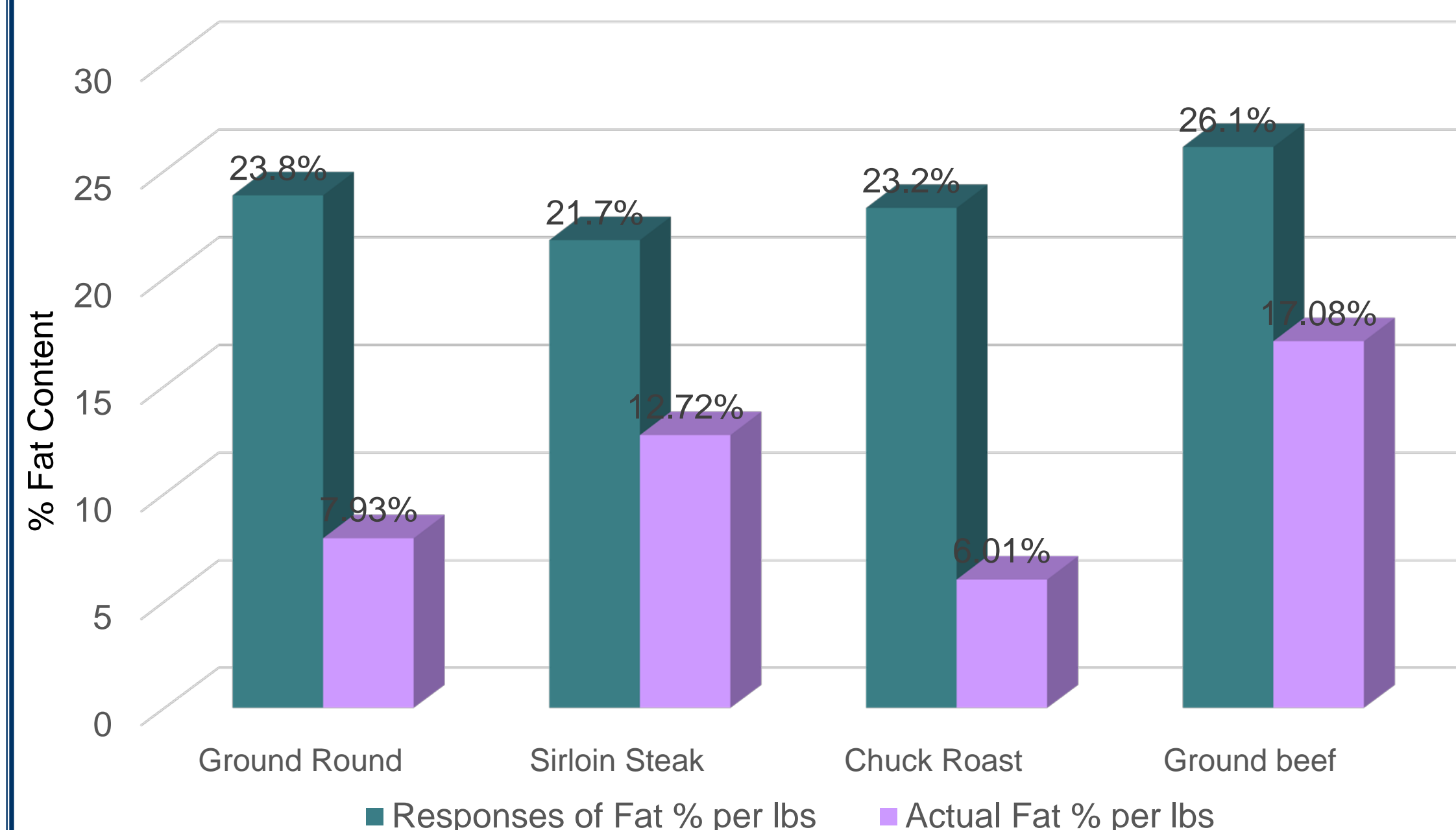


Figure 1: Responses Recorded vs. Actual Fat Content in Beef

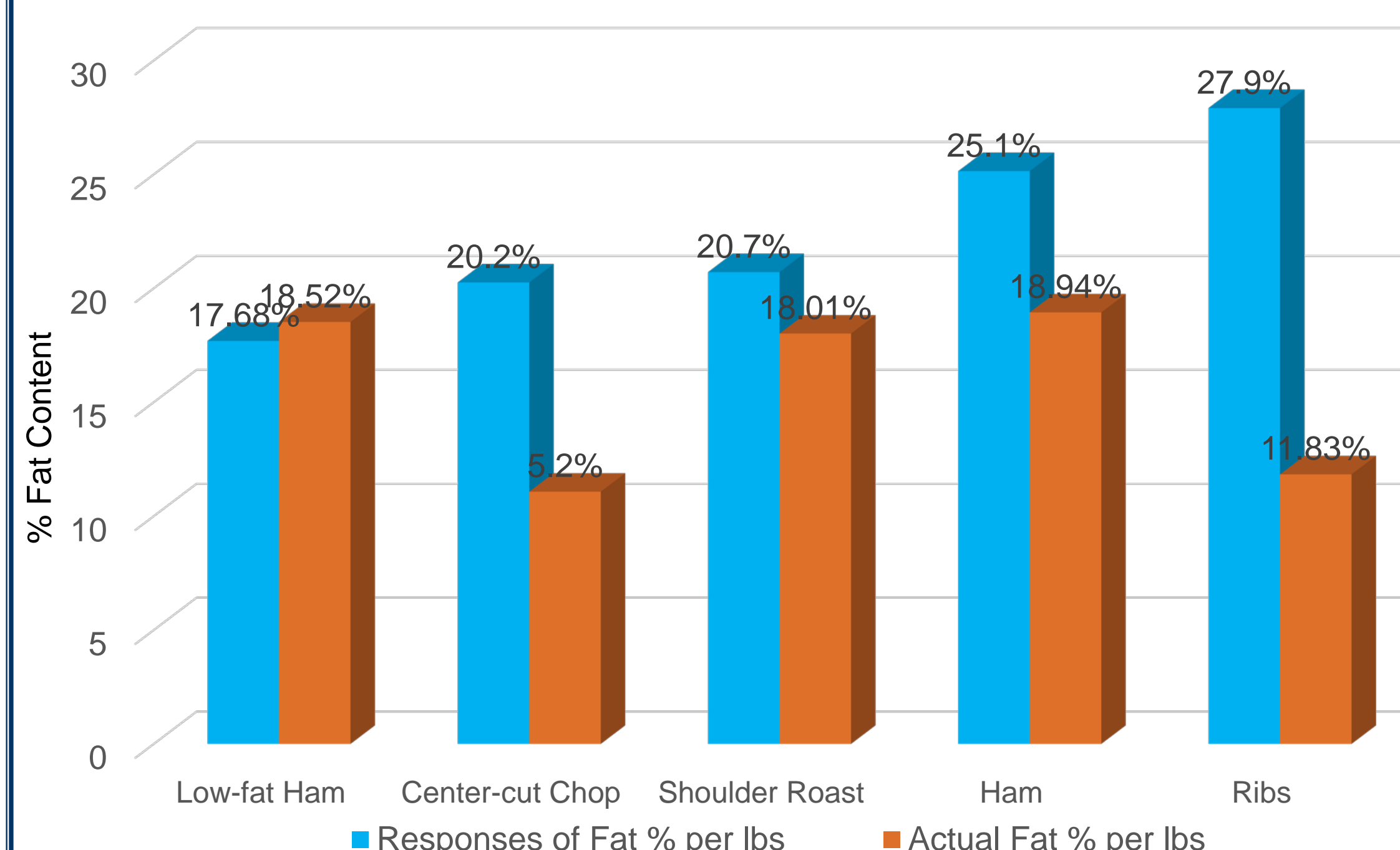


Figure 2: Responses Recorded vs. Actual Fat Content in Pork

Results Cont.

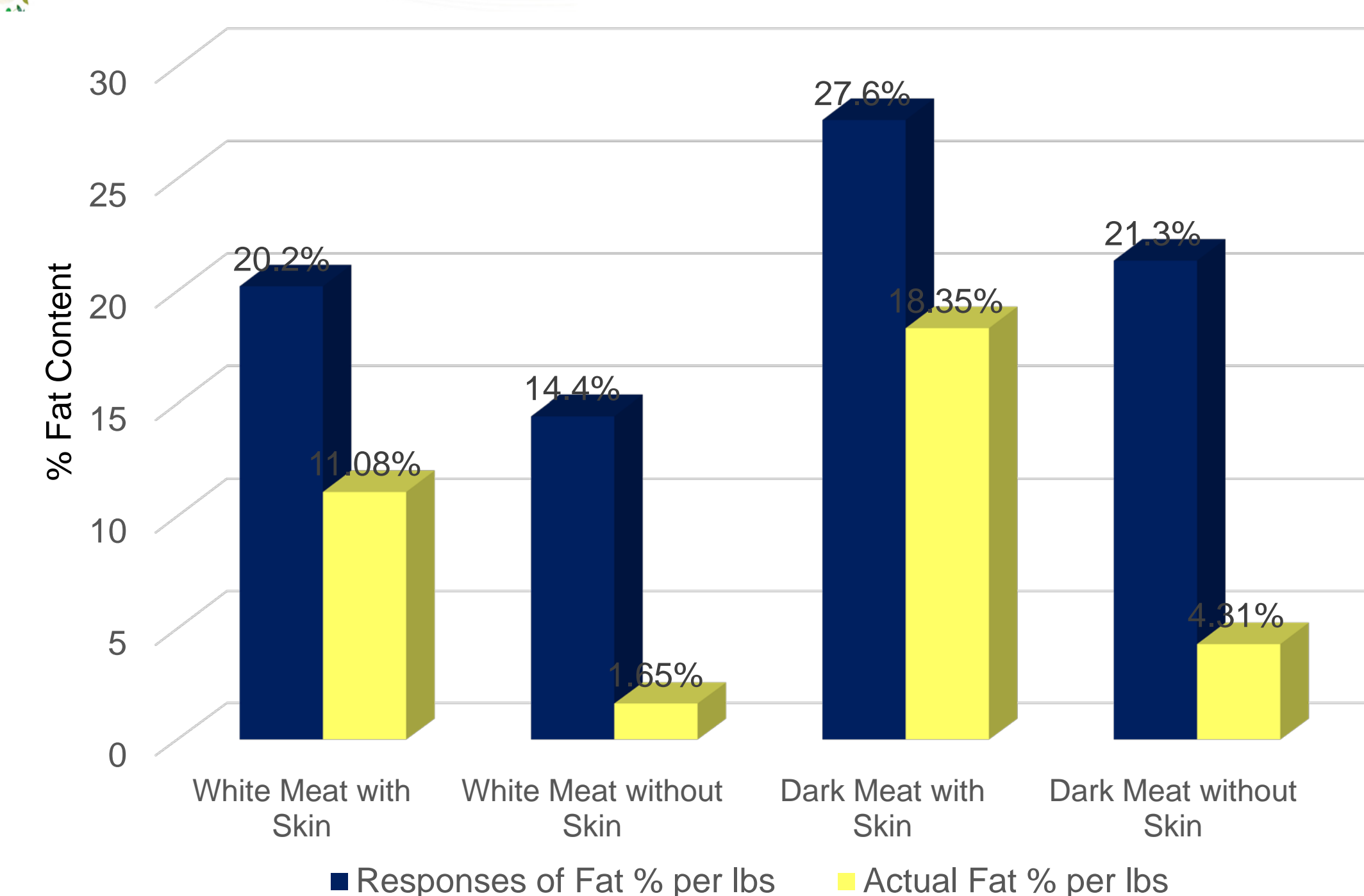


Figure 3: Responses Recorded vs. Actual Fat Content in Chicken

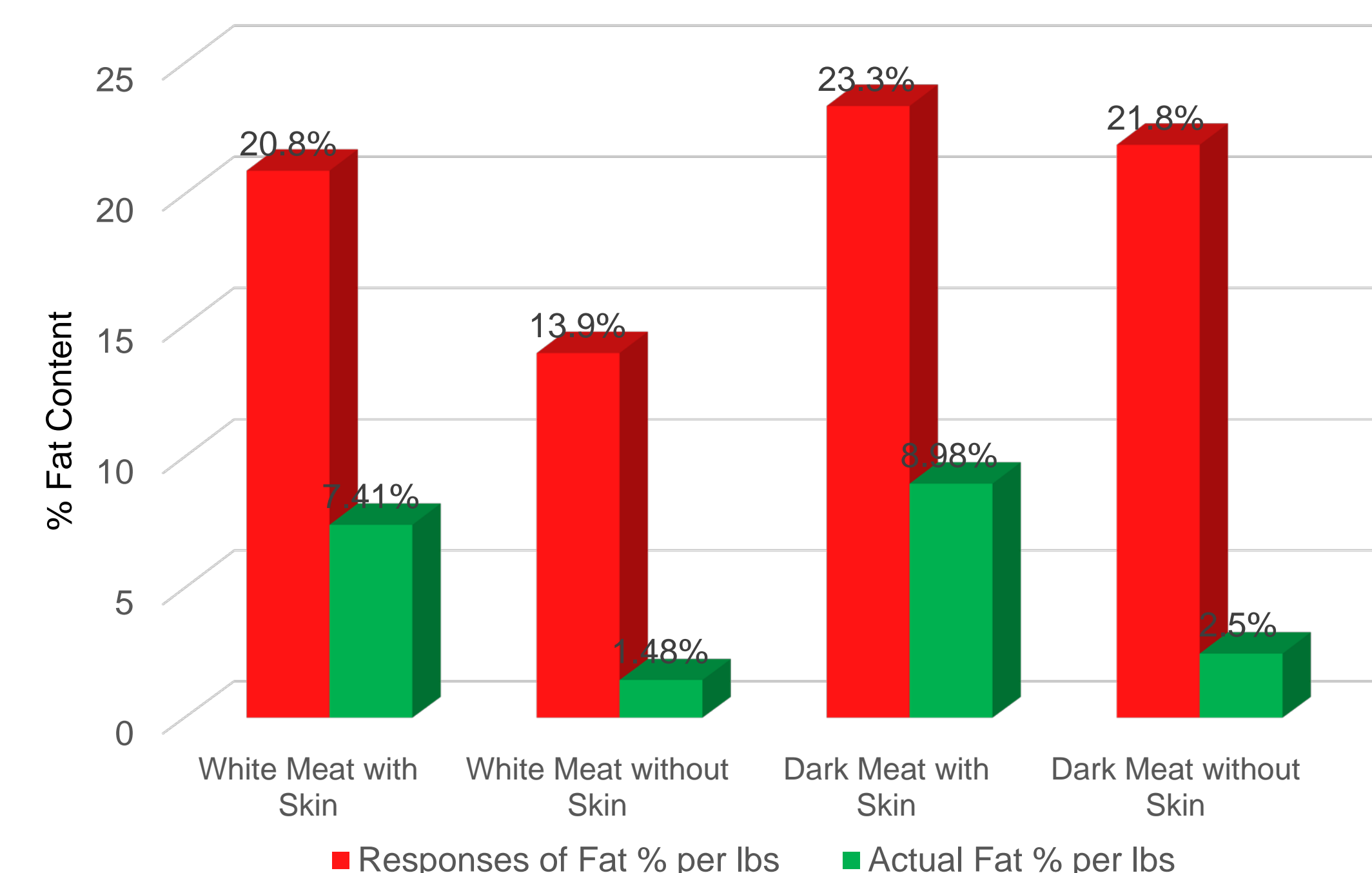


Figure 4: Responses Recorded vs. Actual Fat Content in Turkey

Summary and Conclusions

The results reveal that consumers' estimates of the fat content of most meat products are overwhelming higher than the actual levels of fat in such products. Increased efforts at nutritional education on meat products is necessary to help to bridge the gap between perceptions and reality. Improved knowledge from such education will enhance the performance of the meat market.

References

Peterson, E., Van Eenoo, E., McGuirk, A., Preckel, P. (2001). Perceptions of Fat Content in Meat Products. *Agribusiness*, 17(4), 437-453.