

**Appendix D: Manufacturer Cooking  
Instructions (MCI) Focus Groups  
Moderator Guide**

# **Food Safety Consumer Research Project Manufacturer Cooking Instructions Focus Groups Moderator Guide**

## **I. Introduction—Welcome Group (5 minutes)**

- Who we are and who we represent
  - o Introduce moderator.
  - o Study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture or USDA.
- Why you have been asked to participate
  - o You are consumers who prepare some of the products we want to talk about.
  - o Your experiences as consumers are important to USDA.
  - o You have opinions and ideas that we'd like to know about.
- How the discussion will work
  - o Session will last about 1.5 hours.
  - o So I can give you my full attention, tonight's session will be audio- and video-recorded. I will use the recordings to write a summary report, but I will not use names in any report.
  - o Staff members from USDA have come tonight to hear your opinions firsthand. They'll be listening via live streaming.
  - o We would like the discussion to be open and informal and encourage interaction.
  - o We would like to hear from everyone in the group.
  - o One person talks at a time.
  - o There are no right or wrong answers or ideas—we want YOUR opinions.
  - o Please silence or turn off cell phones and try to minimize any background distractions.
- Participant introductions
  - o State first name and favorite food to prepare at home.

## **II. Understanding of Preparation Instructions (30 minutes)**

1. For our first topic, consider both raw and processed meat and poultry products. How do you determine how to prepare these products?
  - a. Have you ever looked for instructions on the product packaging?
  - b. For what kind of products do you look for instructions?
    - i. What about items you have not cooked before?

- ii. What about for items you *have* cooked before?
  - c. If yes, what information are you looking for?
2. What is your experience with the instructions on meat and poultry products? (Probe if needed: confusing, clear, useful, not useful)
  - a. In your experience, is there information that is not provided that would be useful? What information?
3. Have you noticed that some product packages say “heating instructions” and others say “cooking instructions?”
  - a. If yes, why do you think that is? [Note to moderator: Do they think the terms mean different things? If so probe, can you explain in your own words the differences?]
4. For our discussion tonight, we will call them preparation instructions. Why do you think companies provide preparation instructions? (Probe: food safety, quality, mandatory)
5. Think about raw, single-ingredient refrigerated or frozen meat and poultry products that you buy from the meat department (e.g., raw ground beef or chicken breasts). Do you usually use the preparation instructions? [Moderator: only NRTE products]
  - a. If yes: How often do you use preparation instructions when preparing these types of meat and poultry products?
  - b. If participants do not use: What information do you rely on? (Probe: recipe or cookbook instructions, past experience, best guess or estimate)
6. Now think about processed, refrigerated or frozen meat and poultry products, like stuffed chicken breasts, chicken nuggets or tenders, prepared meatloaf, ham, or frozen burger patties. These products could be raw or already cooked. Do you usually use the preparation instructions? [Moderator: could be RTE or NRTE products]
  - a. If no, what information do you rely on to prepare the product? (Probe: instructions, past experience, best guess or estimate)

If yes:

  - b. How often do you use preparation instructions when preparing a specific brand of processed, frozen meat and poultry product for the first time?
  - c. Do you follow the preparation instructions exactly as written or sometimes make changes?

- i. If exactly as written, why do you follow the instructions exactly as written? What might happen if you didn't follow the instructions exactly as written?
  - ii. If changes, what changes do you make? Why do you make these changes?
- d. Have you ever noticed instructions to use a food thermometer?
  - i. If yes, do you ever use a food thermometer? Why or why not?
- e. Now think about your experiences when preparing the same product again.
  - i. Do you refer to the preparation instructions each time you prepare the product, or do you sometimes rely on previous experience with the product?
  - ii. Are there some types of processed products for which you always look for preparation instructions? If yes, which products?
  - iii. Are there some types of processed products for which you never look for preparation instructions? If yes, which products?
  - f. Now think about your experiences if you are preparing the same type of product, for example, chicken nuggets, but a different brand you haven't purchased and prepared before. What do you do? [Probe: do you read the instructions on the new product and follow as written or do you prepare like you would for other similar products]
- 7. Do you think the instructions for one type of product, like frozen breaded, stuffed chicken products, apply to all brands of frozen breaded, stuffed chicken products, or do you think they are brand specific? Why or why not?
  - a. What do you do if the preparation instructions differ from your previous experience with a particular type of product? For example, you usually cook a certain brand of stuffed chicken breasts for 35 minutes, but this brand requires only 20 minutes to cook.

### **III. Response to Manufacturer Cooking Instructions (MCIs) on Mock Packages (55 minutes; about 25 minutes per package)**

**Note:** Half of the groups will view the RTE product first, and half will view the NRTE product first.

Now, we are going to look at the labeling on two different brands of chicken tenders. (Moderator holds up product to camera and rotates for participants to see the front, back, and sides of the product. Notetaker disseminates link via chat so that participants can view a picture of the product on their screen. Moderator will share screen with link if needed.)

### **Questions for RTE product (Caldwells)**

8. Please take a few minutes to look at the product. Where is information on how to prepare the product?
9. Many of you mentioned the heating instructions on the side. Is there other information on the box that tells you how to prepare the product? If so, where? What does it say?
10. Now let's look at the side of the box that says heating instructions. What information would you use to prepare the product? Why?
11. Is there anything missing that you need to know to prepare the product? If yes, describe.
12. Is there anything you do not need to know that could be eliminated? If yes, describe.
13. Is anything confusing? If yes, how can it be clarified?

### **Questions for NRTE product (Cloverfield)**

Okay, now let's look at the box for the Cloverfield chicken breast tenders (Moderator instructs participant to close screen for Caldwell product. Moderator holds up product to camera and rotates for participants to see the front, back, and side of the product. Notetaker disseminates link via chat so that participants can view a picture of the product on their screen. Moderator will share screen with link if needed.)

14. Please take a few minutes to look at the product. Where is information on how to prepare the product? [Ask each participant; we want to know if they are looking at SHI (on back) or cooking instructions (on side).]
15. Many of you mentioned the cooking instructions/safe handling instructions. Is there other information on the box that tells you how to prepare the product? If so, where? What does it say?
16. What information would you use to prepare the product (clarify to see if the information is in the SHI or the cooking instructions)? Why?
17. Let's look at the side of the box where the suggested cooking instructions are provided. Is there anything missing that you need to know to prepare the product? If yes, describe.
  - a. Do you have any suggestions on how to revise the cooking instructions on this product to provide information on recommended food safety practices?
  - b. What about:
    - i. washing your hands before you cook or after touching raw product? Would it be useful or not to provide this information?
    - ii. practices to prevent the spread of germs or bacteria in the kitchen, for example, keeping raw product separate from foods

that won't be cooked, and cleaning/sanitizing? Would it be useful or not to provide this information?

- c. In your own words, can you please describe what this statement means: "For safety, this product must be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F." (Moderator: display PPT screen with this statement)
  - i. [Probes: What does internal temperature mean? If confusion on internal temperature of product vs. oven temperature, how can this be clarified?]
- b. How can you check to see that the product is cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F?
- c. Any suggestions on how to revise these instructions so that it is clear you are supposed to use a food thermometer to check that the product has reached an internal temperature of 165°F (e.g., add the phrase "as measured by use of a food thermometer")?
- d. Any other thoughts on how to revise these instructions to encourage you to use a food thermometer?

18. Is there anything you do not need to know that could be eliminated? If yes, describe.

19. Is anything confusing? If yes, how can it be clarified?

20. Why do you think microwaving is not recommended?

- a. Probe: Would you microwave a product that said microwaving is not recommended?

21. This box has cooking instructions on the side and safe handling instructions on the back [Display PPT with side and back of product]. Why do you think that is?

- a. What is the same about the two sets of instructions?
- b. What is different about the two sets of instructions?
- c. Which set of instructions is most useful to you? Why?
- d. Is it confusing or helpful to have two different sets of instructions? Why?
  - i. If confusing, any thoughts on how to make it less confusing?
  - ii. Probe if not mentioned: What are your thoughts on somehow combining the two sets of instructions? How would you do that?

22. Sometimes the cooking or heating instructions are on the back of the package and sometimes they are on the side. Any thoughts on the best location for these instructions? Why do you say that?

### **Questions for both products together**

23. Now let's consider both products. What are some differences between the two products? [Probe if no one mentions uncooked vs. fully cooked.] (Notetaker disseminates link via chat that has both products. Moderator will share screen with link if needed.)
24. Why do you think the Caldwell's product has heating instructions but the Cloverfield product has cooking instructions?
25. Why do you think the Cloverfield product has safe handling instructions but the Cloverfield product does not?
26. When buying these types of frozen products, do you check to see whether the product is fully cooked or not?
  - a. Does whether a product is fully cooked or not influence your purchase decision? If yes, why?

#### **IV. Wrap Up**

- Any other comments or questions before we wrap up?
- Thank you for participating.
- Your gift card and free gift will be sent to you within 14 business days.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0583-0184 and the expiration date is 03/31/2024. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 1.5 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.