



food and people

The changing American diet: How good for us are our present eating habits?

This is the third in a series of 15 articles exploring "Food and People." In this article, Robert L. Rizek of the Agriculture Department's Consumer Nutrition Center discusses the changes in the American diet, some of which might be damaging to our health. This series was written for *Courses by Newspaper*, a program of University Extension, University of California, San Diego, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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By Robert L. Rizek
special writer

At a time when fast-food establishments bombard us with rival claims for better burgers, chicken and filet of fish, it is easy to forget that these foods have not always enjoyed their current popularity. Yet scarcely more than a generation ago, Americans ate more pork than beef, and chicken hardly competed with red meat at all. The fact is that our food habits are changing. Although year-to-year changes are minor, there have been a number of major changes in the American diet since the beginning of the century. These changes reflect such varied factors as de-

clining birth rates, new methods of processing foods, concerns about health, and changing tastes and social patterns such as eating out frequently. Unfortunately, not all of these changes have been for the better.

As a nation, we are consuming substantially more meat, poultry and fish, and more dairy products than butter, then we did in 1900. Our consumption of sugar and other sweeteners, fats and oils, and processed fruits and vegetables also has increased.

On the other hand, we are eating fewer grain products and fewer potatoes, sweet potatoes and eggs.

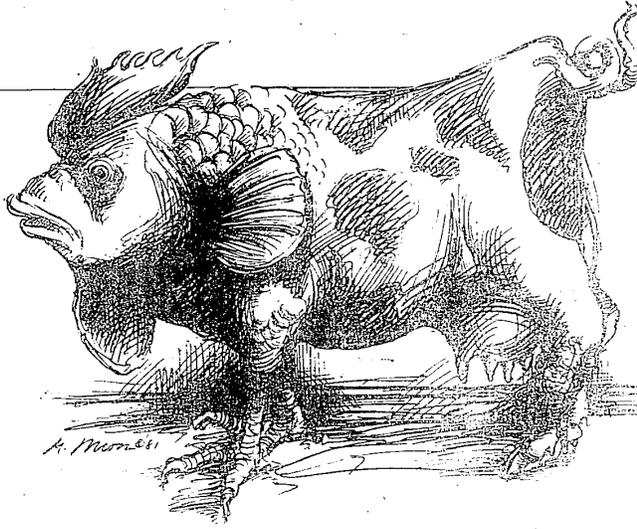
These conclusions are based on data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including national food supply estimates and Nationwide Food Consumption Surveys (NFCs), conducted periodically from 1935 to 1977-78.

A NATION OF MEAT-EATERS

The striking per-capita increase in meat, poultry and fish consumption is due mainly to our greater use of beef and poultry. From 1960 to 1980, beef consumption increased by three-fourths, reflecting our preference for new, more tender grain-fed beef as well as a greater demand for ground-beef products that are featured by fast-food outlets.

During this same period, poultry consumption increased more than 3½ times, with most of the increase in the past 30 years. Around 1950, poultry became competitive with meat, and more recently, the ever-expanding fast-food establishments have become large users of broilers.

In addition, new methods of raising chickens



have lowered production costs and made chicken an attractive buy in a period of inflation.

The 1977-78 NFCs showed the popularity of meat, poultry and fish. More than 90 percent of the respondents reported eating at least one food from this group on the day of the survey. The average daily intake of these foods, including mixtures containing them, was slightly more than seven ounces per person.

DAIRY PRODUCTS

Consumption of dairy products — other than butter — also has increased. Today, it is about one-fourth higher than at the beginning of the century, although almost 15 percent lower than at its peak in the mid-1940s.

There have, however, been dramatic changes in the mix of dairy products consumed. Currently, we eat more than four times as much cheese as we did in 1900 — a reflection of the growing popularity of pizza and cheese and crackers as snack foods.

In contrast, we have seen a continuing decline in the consumption of liquid whole milk in the past 25 years. This is probably a result of the declining proportion of children in our population.

Concerns about diet also may have played a part in this decline, as the use of liquid lowfat milks increased substantially during this period.

FATS AND OILS

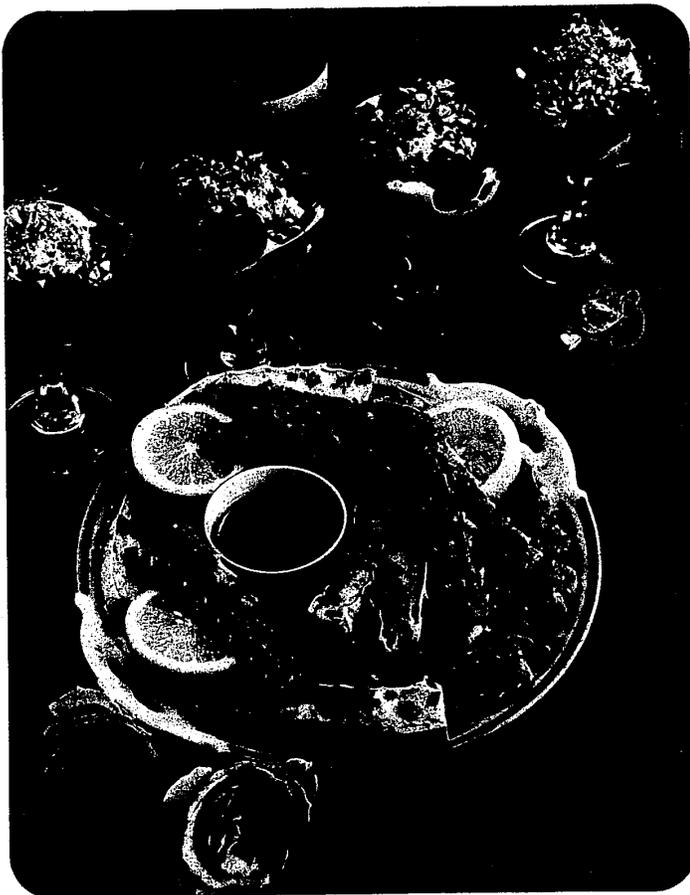
Fat and oil consumption in 1980 was about 1½ times as much as in the early 1900s, and there have been dramatic shifts in the types of fats consumed.

We eat three-fourths less butter, two-thirds less lard. In contrast, we are eating eight times more margarine — a reflection of the improved quality of the product and its price advantage over butter. The growing demand for liquid oil by food manufacturers, the fast-food industry and consumers alike also has led to a sharp increase in the use of cooking and salad oils in the past three decades.

Despite the urgings of generations of mothers to "eat your vegetables," our per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables has not changed much from the beginning of the century and is, in fact, down slightly from the peak levels of the mid-1940s.

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Lovely foods say 'Happy Valentine's Day'



HEART-Y SALMON PATTIES

- 1 can (7-3/4 oz.) salmon
- 1/2 cup fine dry bread crumbs
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, very finely chopped or forced through sieve
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1/4 cup minced onion
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Oil

Drain and flake salmon; reserve liquid. Combine salmon and reserved liquid with remaining ingredients except oil. Form into 4 heart-shaped patties about 3/4-inch thick; pan fry in hot oil until golden brown on both sides. Makes 4 servings.

Serving Tip: Patties are delicious served with chili sauce, seafood sauce or tartar sauce.

SWEETHEART PEAR CAKE

- 1 package (16 oz.) pound cake mix
- 1/4 cup broken nuts
- 1/2 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 1 can (29 oz.) Bartlett pear halves or slices
- 1 package (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup red currant jelly, melted and cooled

Prepare pound cake mix according to package directions; stir in nuts and orange peel. Pour half of batter into greased and floured 8 or 9-inch round or heart-shaped cake pan*. Bake at 350°F. 25 minutes or until wooden pick inserted near center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes; remove from pan and finish cooling on wire rack. Drain pears; reserve 2 tablespoons syrup. Slice pears if necessary; blot with paper towel. Beat cream cheese until light and fluffy; beat in reserved pear syrup until mixture can be easily spread. Spread half of cream cheese mixture over top of cooled cake. Just before serving, arrange pear slices over cream cheese. Spoon jelly over pears, coating evenly. Pipe remaining cream cheese mixture around cake, using a pastry bag and large star tip. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

*Remaining batter may be baked in one greased 8-1/2 x 4-1/2 x 2-1/2-inch loaf pan. Bake at 350°F. 35 to 40 minutes.



KING CRAB CASINO

- 1 to 1-1/2 pounds Alaska King crab legs, split
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 1/4 cup crumbled cooked bacon
- 2 tablespoons chopped green onion
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon tarragon

Thaw crab if necessary; place on broiler rack. Combine remaining ingredients; brush crab legs with sauce. Broil 5 inches from heat 3 to 4 minutes; brush once with sauce. Heat remaining sauce thoroughly; serve with crab. Makes 4 servings.

Note: Sauce may be doubled, if desired.

CHERRIES ALMONDINE

- 1 can (16 or 17 oz.) dark sweet cherries
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- Dash salt
- 1/4 cup almond liqueur
- 4 large scoops almond roca ice cream
- 2 to 4 tablespoons roasted, salted almonds, chopped
- Whipped cream or topping, if desired

Drain cherries; reserve syrup. Combine cornstarch and salt; gradually blend in reserved syrup. Cook and stir until thickened and clear; stir in liqueur. Let sauce cool slightly; spoon over ice cream. Garnish with chopped almonds and whipped cream or topping, if desired. Makes 4 servings.