

1956 Meat Output at New Records; New Year Indicates Some Cutbacks

All those hotdogs and ham burgers, steaks, ham and chops which Americans ate in 1956 topped a meat-eating record which stood for nearly half a century, the American Meat Institute reports.

It was back in 1908 that the approximately 89 million Americans ate 163.3 pounds of meat apiece. As the population grew,

the consumption per person fell. But since 1940 there has been a rising curve which finally overcame the old record with an estimated level for the current year of 163.5 pounds each.

"What is even more indicative of the prodigious output of our farms and ranches," said the Institute's chairman, J. Morrell Foster, "is that this per capita figure is for a population of around 169 million — almost a 90 per cent increase since 1908."

Foster is vice president and assistant to the president of John Morrell and Company, Ottumwa, Iowa, meat packers.

He added that prospects for 1957 are for another year of ample meat supplies at reasonable prices, although a reduction in hog numbers is likely to develop some decrease in the supply of pork.

Foster said in a year-end statement that both livestock and meat operations in 1956 held to a much smoother course all the way from the producer to the consumer than in the previous year. He cited a number of developments which contributed to the improved situation of the industry.

"Consumers were especially fortunate," Foster said, "since meat prices at retail were substantially lower than a year earlier throughout most of the year.

In some weeks they averaged as much as 16 per cent lower. Not until the last third of the year did prices drift higher than in the comparable weeks in 1955, and then only by three or four per cent."

Never before has the breadwinner of the family had to work so little to earn the family's food, Foster said. It takes the average industrial worker less than 19 minutes to earn a pound of meat, a new low. Pork is down to 15.7 minutes and beef stand at a new low mark of 21.6 minutes.

As recently as 1951 it took 25.9 minutes to earn a pound of meat, 19.9 minutes for a pound of pork, 33.5 minutes per pound of beef.

More meat was available in 1956 than ever before, it was pointed out. Total meat production moved to a record 27 1/2 billion pounds, a gain of more than 1/4 billion for the year and nearly double the output of 40 years ago. The 1956 total was nearly 25 per cent above the 1947-49 average.

On a per-person basis this amounted to about 83.5 pounds of beef, 66.3 of pork, 9.3 veal and 4.4 of lamb and mutton, or a total of 163.5 pounds.

"Several things account for this remarkable growth in the popularity of meat," Foster said. "Producers sent more livestock to market. Our meat industry turned out better products. Consumers had a six per cent higher spendable income this year than last. They're spending five per cent more of that income for food than in 1955. And there are millions more consumers at the nation's table."

"One thing," he said, "which

may be helpful in moving the pork into consumption channels is the increasing production by hog breeders of the meat-type hog; that is, one bred to carry a much higher proportion of lean meat. This production is now believed to be running about 20 per cent of the total.

"Another big help has been the widespread practice by the meat packing industry of close-trimming the exterior fat on pork cuts. This was advocated by the Institute in 1955 and gained great headway throughout this year. It is the industry's answer to the public's demand for lean pork until the meat-type hog can reach full production."

Two other farm-level developments which are helping the pork picture, Foster said, are the spacing of pig farrowings throughout the year and the marketing of hogs at properly finished weights. He noted that formerly there was a heavy concentration of hogs at winter markets, and scarcity of supplies in the summer because of the practice of having most pigs born in the spring.

"With improved equipment, farrowings can be spaced throughout the year and this helps to reduce the violent price fluctuations in the market," Foster emphasized.

He added that some hog breeds reach finished market weight at 190 pounds and others at 230, and that no rule of thumb could be applied to the best market weights for all breeds. An underfleshed or thin hog is as difficult for the market to handle satisfactorily for both the producer and the meat packer as an overfat hog, Foster pointed out.

For 1957, Foster indicated a likelihood of a strong market for all meat, beef, pork, veal, lamb or mutton. He pointed out farmers cut back eight per cent on the number of pigs

they will market in the spring, according to USDA calculations, which, if correct, will result in a reduction in pork supplies.

Foster said "this probably will mean a somewhat smaller total meat supply for the year — a change probably too small to be apparent to consumers — since there is likely to be little change in the supply of other meats. With our population increasing about 7,000 a day, the amount of meat to be eaten by each person may be fractionally lower."

The executive predicted per capita consumption of beef would drop to about 82 pounds in 1957 from the 83.5 pounds this year. Veal will decline but slightly to some 9 pounds per person. Lamb and mutton will be down to 4.2, and pork will fall from 66.3 to perhaps 61.5, for a total of less than 157 lbs of meat for each person during next year. This would make a 4 per cent decline for all meats but per capita consumption still will total 7 per cent above the 1947-49 average, he said.

"Along with the reduced supply of meat, there probably also will be an expanded demand for it," Foster said. "It places the livestock and meat industry in an enviable position indeed. Population is increasing rapidly. Spendable income continues to rise, and these mean greater purchasing power."

"On the other hand, the industry is producing an essential food product which is tasty, nutritious and economical and one which is needed two and three times a day for best health. The benefits derived by both the nation's people and its agriculture are greater in livestock and meat than anything else. This is one way of eating up farm surpluses which helps everybody."

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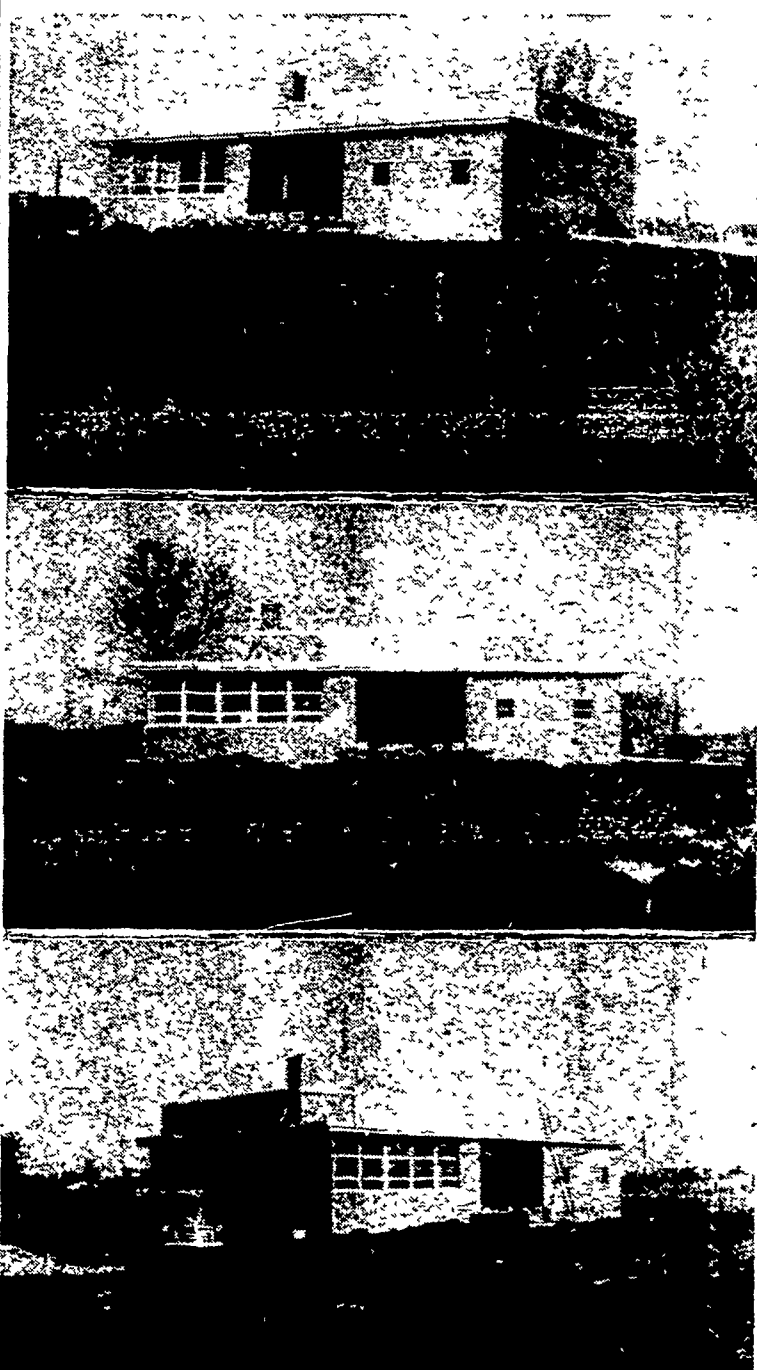
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New Poultry Center



THREE VIEWS of the new Lancaster Poultry Exchange — which will open for business early next year — are shown above, at the top looking northwest, in the center looking north from the highway, and at the bottom, looking northeast. (Lancaster Farming Staff Photos).