

Consumers

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will buy, and will like, and will come back for more.
His specifications are not arbitrary, because the competition of other stores won't let them be. In fact, the specifications are dictated by competition. They are designed solely to get successful products into his store so he can win against the competition.

Some processors and some farmers complain bitterly about having to deliver to the speci-

fications. But the retailer who writes them is the man who meets me every time I go shopping. He watches what I do. Then he writes specifications for what he thinks I will find most acceptable. And he had better be right — or I shall go to another store.

And farmers and processors had better give him what he needs or how is he going to sell me?

I am fickle. You who handle food—who grow it, process it, retail it—you can get my dollar,

but you can get it only by playing my game.

I am spoiled and demanding—but you have made me that way. You have done so by the competition of one food against other foods—of one processor against other processors—of one retailer against other retailers.

If any of you are tired of the rat race, why don't you just quit! There will be lots of you left, and lots of new faces for me to take up with.

You will agree with me that this is a fictitious homemaker and food shopper. But since of necessity, as agricultural bankers, you have to know a good bit about the food business, I think you might agree that this sounds all too much the way our food shopper behaves.

No group of consumers in this world ever before had it so good in terms of the abundance, the variety, the quality, and the build-in services in their food supply. And no other consumers ever obtained their food so inexpensively.

In terms of cheapness, I am not talking about the dollar-and-cents prices at the store, but rather in the only really meaningful measure of food costs—and that is the percentage of after-tax income that is required to buy the typical family's food. This figure is now less than 20 percent of typical family income.

What it means is that the typical family in this country obtains its food for a little less than one day of work from a five-day work week. This leaves the income from four days of work available for the other things—housing, schooling, medical care, vacations, and all the rest that make up our "American way of life."

I never truly grasped the significance of this figure until some

years ago when I had the privilege of working for a short time in a country where food cost the average family two-thirds of their total income. That meant four days of work out of a six-day work week—and they had only one-third of income left for everything else.

In a rather obscure way American families, I believe, understand and appreciate their blessing. But this does not mean they are any less demanding as food consumers.

Affluence & the Family Budget

We are said to be the most affluent population in the world. There is not much question that this is true. And yet, has affluence made the problem of family budgeting any less difficult? Aspirations have a way of out-running income at almost any level of affluence. There is the problem of college education for the kids; and Johnny needs glasses; and little Mary's teeth need straightening; and they really need a second car; and last year they had to skip a vacation! I suspect that greater affluence has made family budgeting problems only more difficult.

And then again about food. Almost everything else is bought on time or on monthly billings. But food is bought every day or at least every week, and for cash at the supermarket. One homemaker said to me that if she spent too much for food she had nothing left for getting her hair fixed! All these are the kinds of pressures that are on food budgets, regardless of affluence or the small percentage of income required in the typical family to buy food.

So homemakers keep pressure on the food industry. So the farmer who raises chickens, and the

processor who dresses and packs his birds, do everything in their power to make chicken an attractive buy compared to the alternatives. The cattle feeder, working with the meat packers, does the same. And so does the swine grower, and the pork packer who works with him.

If American agriculture ever was a unity, a single entity, a brotherhood with a single interest—it has ceased to be that any longer. It is instead an aggregate of hard-driving special-interest groups, each one working its head off to make its specialized product more popular with the spoiled and demanding consumer whom we discussed above.

USDA To Subsidize Poultry Exports

Sec'y Freeman has announced USDA will subsidize poultry exports to Switzerland as a first step in a new drive to regain world export markets lost in recent years to other countries (mostly European Common Market countries) that do. "This step is being taken with great reluctance," Freeman said, "and only after extensive efforts have been made to reach agreement among the exporting countries to discontinue their subsidization of poultry meat. We much prefer to compete in world markets on the basis of efficient production."

Mouth Cancer Test Easy

A simple cell smear test can help detect mouth cancer in its beginning stages when it is most curable. The American Dental Association is urging all dentists to make such tests anytime a questionable mouth sore is found.

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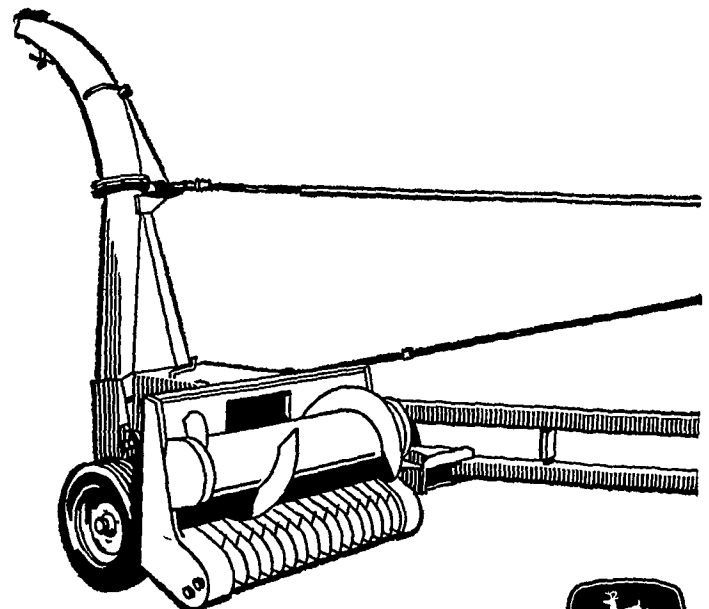
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