

\$130 Billion Food Assembly Line is Biggest Industry

Every year, about 1,500 pounds of food per person roll off the Nation's biggest assembly line—the one that spans from farmer to consumer. Its total goods and services are valued at \$130 billion.

The assembly line runs through processors, wholesalers, restaurants and supermarkets. Its outturn includes meat,

poultry, seafood, vegetables, fruit, cereals, and dairy products.

About 1.3 billion acres of land, and the 43 million people who work it, supply the raw materials.

In a single year, farmers and ranchers furnish the assembly line about 11 million sheep and lambs, 39 million beef cattle and calves, 94 million hogs, 120 million turkeys, 3 billion broilers, 72 billion eggs, and 115 billion pounds of milk.

In all, the Nation's farmers market over \$50 billion worth of agricultural goods annually. Some \$35 billion is food products for U.S. consumers. More than \$4 billion is shipped to consumers overseas.

Behind this outpouring of food products stand some 3.3 million farm people and 1 million hired workers. Add to this about 2 million other people who work in industries that supply goods and services to farmers.

Farmers invest more than \$40 billion annually in machines, fertilizers, chemicals, animal feeds, petroleum products, interest on loans, labor, and a host of other goods and services.

These goods and services, as well as better farming methods, new plant varieties, and improved livestock and poultry breeds, have accelerated farm production. Today, each farm worker produces enough for nearly 50 people, compared with about 28 just 10 years ago.

About 1 million firms that grade, store, process, manufacture, package, and distribute foods await the farmers' raw products. Services provided by this marketing system ultimately make up \$2 of every \$3 consumers spend for food.

First stop along the assembly line is often a country grain elevator, cold storage warehouse, or a stockyard. These businesses number about 10,000.

Most foods then travel through one or more of the 23,000 food processing plants located across the country. These firms employ around 1.5 million people. Food processors, like farmers, have become increasingly efficient.

Food brokers, wholesalers, food stores, and other buyers transfer food products on to the next point in the assembly line. A massive network of farm-to-market roads, highways, railroads, waterways, and air carriers link the various tops en route to consumers.

At the end of the \$130 billion food assembly line are approximately 300,000 retail food stores staffed by nearly 1.75 million employees. Large, modern supermarkets stock hundreds of new products every year, and discontinue others when consumer appeal wanes. Typical supermarkets offer consumers nearly 8,000 items.

The assembly line also ends at more than half a million restaurants and other away-from-home eating places. These are operated by some 3 million workers.

One in every seven workers—including farmers, waiters, processors, truckers, and grocery clerks—makes his living on the food assembly line. With 13 million employees, the food assembly line is the Nation's biggest business, accounting for more than one-tenth of the total value of goods and services produced in the United States.



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Butz Says Dairy Industry Just Swallow Away from Supply-Demand Balance

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz spoke at the 87th annual meeting of the Holstein-Friesian Association last week in Winston-Salem, N.C.

One of the most interesting statistics he presented to the group was one he gleaned from a personal research project. His methodology would no doubt earn him only faint applause at most junior high school science fairs. Butz did, however, get his point across to the assembled dairyment. Describing the experiment, he said:

"How close are we to a supply-consumption balance in the dairy industry? Just a swallow away. Here's what I mean. This year the government purchased well over six billion pounds of milk.

"Now, a pint's a pound the world around — so that makes over six billion pints of milk. And each pint pours two glasses, so that's 12 billion glasses.

"I decided to find out how many swallows of milk there are in a glass. One weekend when our two boys were home, Mrs. Butz and I performed a highly scientific experiment right next to the refrigerator.

"Mrs. Butz poured four glasses of cool, refreshing milk. Then we each counted the swallows as we drank it — and it averages out to a little more than six swallows per glass. Now when you multiply

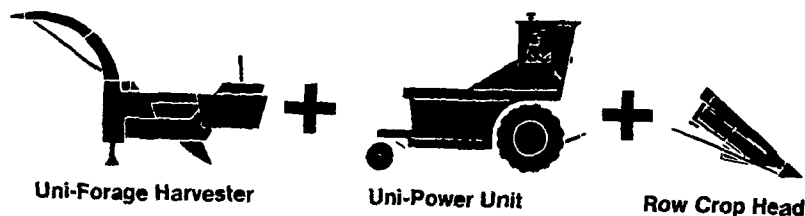
six swallows per glass by over 12 billion glasses of milk you get roughly 73 billion swallows of milk.

"Then, when you multiply 200 million people by 365 days, the product is 73 billion. So, if you folks can only convince every American to drink just one more swallow of milk everyday — we would completely eliminate the cushion in the milk supply."

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