

High Protein Diet - The Farmer's Gift to America

An efficient American agriculture has "kept pace with a changing society and moved America from bread and potatoes to a high protein diet in keeping with the times in which we now live," Under Secretary of Agriculture J. Phil Campbell told the National Newspaper Food Editors Conference meeting this week in Philadelphia.

The Under Secretary attributed this shift in America's diet to the higher productivity produced by research through the land-grant college system and more efficient agricultural output.

"We have actually moved from a bread and potatoes diet—which is what we needed when we were

plowing mules and digging ditches—to a high protein meat diet which is more consistent with the kind of energy demands placed on our bodies during a normal 35 or 40-hour week," he emphasized.

Mr. Campbell pointed to the dramatic changes in per capita consumption of beef, pork and broiler meat as demonstrating the changes in the American diet.

He said beef consumption has gone from 56 pounds per person to 115 pounds; pork consumption has stayed just under 70 pounds, and consumption of poultry meat has grown from 27 to 50 pounds per person in the last 20 years.

Farm mechanization has so reduced the manual labor needed for production of food that heavy

bread and potatoes diets are not necessary, Mr. Campbell said.

"Just a quarter of a century ago each person engaged in agriculture produced food and fiber for about 14 persons. Today, each person in agriculture produces food and fiber for about 50 persons."

At the same time, there has recently been a turn-around in milk consumption for the first time in many years, he added.

"The land-grant colleges and universities, county extension agents, home economists and others who have carried to the farmer the latest improvements resulting in higher and more efficient food production have contributed greatly to our ability to change our eating habits," the Under Secretary stated.

"In the past 10 years output per man-hour in agriculture increased about three-fourths—nearly two and a half times as fast as the increase of 30 percent registered by nonfarm workers," he explained.

The result of this, Mr. Campbell said, has been to release more people from farm-related occupations for the production of other consumer goods which are part of a more affluent American society, such as washers, dryers,

television sets, automobiles and boats.

"Without an efficient U.S. agriculture, utilizing the latest in labor-saving machinery, fertilizers and chemicals, thousands of Americans would still be tied to the land producing food for their fellow Americans as well as for the rest of the world," he suggested, "rather than being employed turning out other consumer goods needed by our society."

The Under Secretary said most Americans live in such a sanitized atmosphere, enjoying the safest food supply in the world, that they take for granted that what they eat and drink will not make them sick. He said they don't recognize the effort it took to make their food safe.

"This is why frequently our people get sick when they travel to a foreign country and eat their food. Their bodies just aren't adjusted to consuming the food and drink in those countries which the natives are used to. This is when Americans really begin to appreciate their sanitary food supply."

Milk, also an important part of today's high protein American diet, is another sanitary food which Americans are so ac-

customed to that they take its safety for granted, Mr. Campbell said. "We must remember that milk is a better culture for the growth of bacteria than perhaps any other food, thus it took a lot of effort to make it as safe for the consumer as it is today."

The Under Secretary added that the safety of milk is a good example of the fact that food safety "does not have to come out of Washington, D.C. We have obtained the safest milk supply in the world completely through enforcement of local city and county health ordinances and State sanitary regulations—not by any federal law."

And he said the effort to provide Americans with a clean milk supply has contributed to the elimination of some animal diseases affecting milk cows, such as tuberculosis and brucellosis.

Mr. Campbell told the food editors that farmers because of their high productivity "are not the cause of inflation but instead help to reduce it. This is why they are exempt from wage and price controls.

"Food prices to the farmer vary up and down according to supply and demand in a free and open market," he continued. "No other segment in the American economy functions in this way; the prices in those segments always seem to go up, never down. The farmer, meanwhile, takes his losses when prices are down and recoups them when the market is up. That's why it is so important that no price controls be placed on raw agricultural products—so our farmers can stay solvent by being able to make up their losses when prices are good."

Contrary to the beliefs of some people, Mr. Campbell pointed out, farmers are not wards of the Federal government. There are more individual producers in agriculture competing against each other than anywhere else in private industry, he said.

The large number of farm producers makes it difficult for each farmer to accurately produce for his segment of the market and thus agriculture has a tendency to constantly over-produce, the Under Secretary stressed. However, he said this excess production is sometimes necessary to assure an adequate food supply when losses from crop diseases and failures from adverse weather are taken into account.

"This is why we must continue to have workable farm programs—to guarantee consumers an adequate food supply, assure our farmers an adequate return from the market-place and balance out supply and demand," Mr. Campbell stated.

The Under Secretary stressed that "considering the hours farmers work; their marvelous record in increasing productivity per man hour; their high investments in land and equipment; higher taxes, and the risks farmers must take, farmers should be getting a higher return for their efforts.

"Yet the average disposable income of farm people is still only about 80 percent as much as the average income for nonfarm people. This is better than it used to be, but we are not content with that. We cannot be content until farmers are earning the same income as their nonfarm cousins in town," he declared, "so that farm families may be assured of a better standard of living."

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