

ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

Start Sampling Food Diversity

If you and your family are in a dietary rut, now's the time to climb out. Until now, the kinds of food we've all been eating have been largely predetermined by our culture, advertising and supermarket mass-marketing. But the rumblings of food shortages and far-off famine, combined with new evidence of the importance of eating a truly balanced diet, should make us question the wisdom of putting all our dietary "eggs" in one basket.

Food conformity isn't limited to America. "Our diet is too monotonous—potatoes, bread, pork and beef. The ingredients of our cuisine are always the same," laments Dr. Gunter Reinken, head of the "Ideas" department of West Germany's Agricultural Ministry. "Our farmers should give less attention to basic foodstuffs and concentrate of foodstuffs with a difference." Dr. Reinken is investigating things like quail, mushrooms and Chinese cabbage.

A major problem is our preoccupation with beef. Too many Americans erroneously regard fat-marbled steaks, roasts and hamburgers as the only first-rate protein sources, despite evidence that too much red meat is harmful. A possible link between heavy beef consumption and bowel cancer has been uncovered by National Cancer Institute researchers.

That other meat standby, chicken, is now being mass-produced by the millions in poultry "factories," where feed is laced with medicines and additives to help withstand the effects of severe overcrowding. Old-timers say the modern chicken can't compare with the old free-range bird when it comes to flavor.

Healthful meat alternatives are available, however. Rabbit, for example, compares very favorably with beef in protein and mineral content, yet contains less fat. Rabbit raising is catching on among homesteaders looking for a productive meat source and second income.

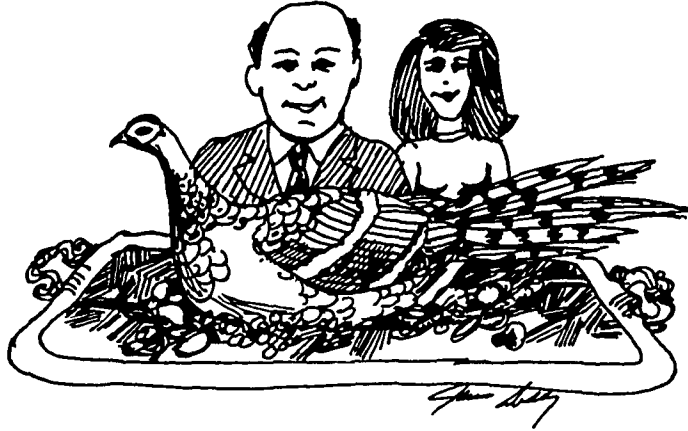
Quail, partridges and pheasants may soon be available at a reasonable price, too. "Small birds convert feed to meat well," says L. E. Dawson, nutrition specialist at Michigan State University. "Meat yield for partridge carcasses is high—80 to 85 percent—more than broilers and similar to that of quail. The boneless meat yield, too, is

very high—75 percent."

Compared with other poultry now on the market, partridge meat is high in protein (25 percent) and low in fat (5 percent), he adds.

Beef eaters looking for variety, economy and balanced nutrition should pass up steak and other muscle meats occasionally to try organ meats. Kidney, heart, liver, brains and sweetbreads are all good sources of vitamins, protein and minerals, the Department of Agriculture advises.

An excellent way to expand your dietary horizons is to eat more fish. Seafood, in particular, is a good source of iodine and other important minerals. All fish are high in protein and generally lower in fat than meat. But many Americans limit their fish menu to canned tuna and frozen



fish sticks.

Consider the case of squid, an abundant seafood that's high in food value but very low in price. Squid chowder, fried squid rings and squid cocktail score very favorably in taste tests, say researchers at MIT, but American consumers just won't try it. Squid may have to be exported to Europe, where it is appreciated.

Fresh-water fish, raised in aquaculture ponds, were another virtually untapped food resource. Now that's beginning to change. "Ten years ago there was no farm-raised catfish industry at all. Now it's a multimillion-dollar industry that's growing all the time," reports Don Carr, president of the Catfish Farmers of America. He says 50,000 acres of water in the U.S. are now being framed for catfish.

Because they are cold-blooded creatures, fish convert feed to food more efficiently than cattle, chickens or any other animal.

The passion for food conformity extends to grains, also, where wheat is king. Our breads, rolls, doughs and noodles are almost all fashioned from the same mold: bleached white flour, stripped of its natural fiber, vitamins and minerals. In most areas, bread and cakes

made of tasty, whole cornmeal are only a memory.

Millet, one of the most well-balanced and least allergenic of all grains, is ignored here in the West. But in China, millet is the chief carbohydrate food. Rich in protein, vitamins, minerals and lecithin, millet is quite tasty and extremely easy to digest. It's available in most natural food stores.

Buckwheat was a staple of our ancestors, but it lost out to wheat early in this century. Now it's making a comeback. Scientists report that buckwheat's protein is nutritionally superior to wheat and other cereals. It's particularly rich in lysine, an amino acid most grains lack.

Most of us eat more than just one or two vegetables (The USDA reports corn, white potatoes and tomatoes are our favorites), but there's still room for improvement. Greens, for example, could mean a lot more than just some iceberg lettuce in a salad. Other low-priced vegetables like collards, beet, dandelion, turnip and mustard greens actually have much more nutrient value than lettuce. They all score extremely high in vitamin A, C, iron and calcium.

One way to branch out is by sampling so-called "ethnic" vegetables. Some west coast supermarkets, for instance, are successfully marketing sugar peas, Chinese spinach, alfalfa root and other out-of-the-ordinary foods.

In the East, look for bok choy, shallots, Hungarian wax peppers and calabaza (a Latin American squash). "Specialty vegetables like these can be pretty hard to find here," says Dr. William O. Drinkwater, Rutgers University horticulturist. "But they're part of the familiar dishes of ethnic groups that are clustered in the metropolitan area, and there's a tremendous potential market for them."

"Lots of us have grown up in the meat-and-potatoes syndrome," he says. "We've been locked into that. We haven't been very fond of most vegetables, and we generally drag our heels at trying anything new."

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming staff.)

Corn Technology Conference Set

Equipment displays, a growers panel, and a free fried chicken lunch will be featured at the 1974 Delmarva Corn Technology Conference on December 12. The event will be held at the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center in Salisbury, Maryland.

Sponsored by the agri-business industry and the Cooperative Extension Services of Maryland and Delaware, the conference will focus on problems and solutions in corn technology. Specialists from the University of Delaware and the University of Maryland, as well as agri-businessmen interested in corn technology, will participate in the annual event. All interested persons are invited to attend. In Delaware, free lunch tickets are available from your county extension office in Newark, Georgetown or Dover, and from your local agri-businessmen.

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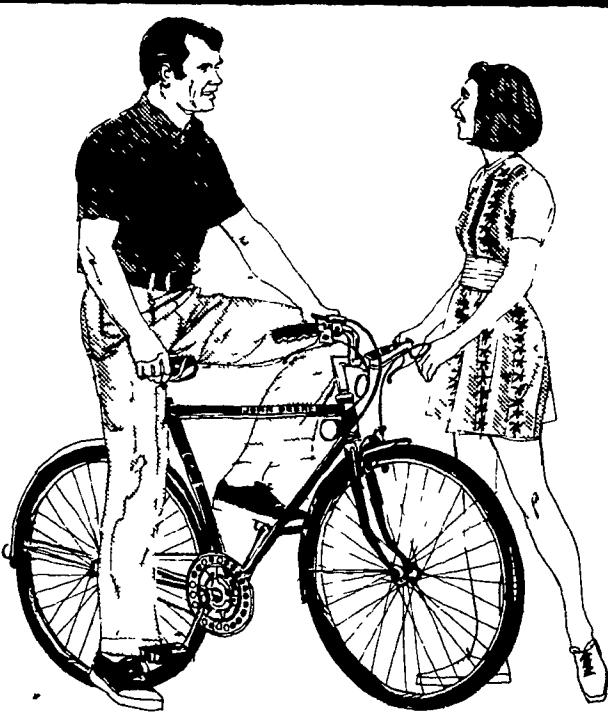
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