

Poland Reports Food Shortages Despite Good Overall Farm Year

DISPITE EARLIER reports of favorable farm results in 1974, Poland now faces a shortage of basic foods—vegetables, fruits, meat, dairy products, and sugar.

In a major speech on March 6, Polish Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz revealed that in 1974 the country's vegetable output was nearly 14 percent below last year's, while fruit output was down by 6 percent.

Because of lower sugar production, he continued, sugar exports were almost completely halted. A shortfall in potato output was compounded by larger-than-usual storage losses. The feed value of hay and silage was 30 percent less than that of last year.

The feed shortage has retarded livestock raising, Jaroszewicz warned, and consequently reduced Government purchases of meat and milk, and the market supply of these products. Although per capita meat consumption increased by 3.3 kilograms in the previous 12 months, he noted, demand was still not satisfied. (As of February 1975, the meat supply was above that of February 1974, but below the November-December 1974 level.) The shortages have caused prices to increase on free markets, but not in State stores.

The Prime Minister promised to try to remedy the shortcomings and asked milk producers to limit their own consumption and increase deliveries to the cities. He was apologetic that the fat content of marketed milk had to be lowered and cheese production reduced

in order to insure adequate butter supplies.

The Polish food shortages cropped up after a seemingly successful agricultural year. Gross agricultural production in 1974 rose 2 percent over that of 1973. Livestock numbers and production reached an alltime high, although growth rates slowed somewhat, compared with those of 1971-73. During the past 4 years, the cattle inventory has gained 25 percent and the hog inventory 57 percent. Beef production in 1974 increased by 18 percent and pork, 7 percent.

Results were less satisfactory in the crop sector. While grain output advanced by 1 million tons, oilseeds production remained at last year's low level. Outturns of potatoes, sugarbeets, forage, vegetables, and fruit all declined.

Consumer expectations were raised in recent months by the confident speeches of high authorities. In November, the Polish Prime Minister reported, "This year farm results are positive in every respect despite unfavorable weather."

Early in February, Party Secretary Edward Gierek said, "The efforts of the past 4 years evoke satisfaction and success in overcoming many difficulties. Incomes grew rapidly, price and market stability was maintained." He also noted that per capita meat consumption had increased by 29 pounds in the past 4 years and promised an additional gain of 4.4 pounds during 1975.

The following factors help to explain the difficulties in the Polish meat supply.

- A considerable increase in per capita disposable income has generated excessive demand for meat sold at controlled prices in State stores.

- In Poland, about two-thirds of the total feed supply consists of nonconcentrates. A decline in potato and forage output caused excessive slaughter at the end of 1974, and consequently, a reduction in marketable slaughter animals by February.

Farmers' decisions to slaughter heavily last fall were reinforced by the Government's warning to producers not to

carry more livestock than they could provide with feed from their own farms.

- In addition to the shortages of nonconcentrates, concentrated feed supplied by the Government to livestock producers declined from 3 million tons in July-December 1973 to 2.4 million tons during July-December 1974.

The excessive demand for meat will not be suppressed by price increases. Instead, the Government has stepped up feed imports and will reduce meat exports.

Onion Lovers Breathe In Pages of History

Whether or not you inherited their tastes, chances are you come from a long line of onion-lovers.

This vegetable offspring of the lily family dates back to prehistoric times, and its cultivated version is believed to have originated in parts of India and Afghanistan.

Now grown all over the world, the onion probably got its biggest consumption boost when the American hamburger was invented.

Actually it had a long and colorful history before the advent of the drive-in.

For instance, the 100,000 laborers who worked on the Great Pyramid of Cheops about 2,500 years before Christ were fed onions.

The idea wasn't to keep sidewalk superintendents at a distance (although it may well have), but to protect the workers from disease.

Ancient Egyptians also took oaths with their right hand on an onion. It was regarded as a symbol of eternity—not from its lasting taste—but because of its sphere within a sphere formation.

Egyptian priests, however, weren't allowed to eat onions but they could place them on the altar of the gods. That probably marked the first time in history that the phrase, "Please don't eat the merchandise," was used.

Legend also has it that the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness was punctuated with bitter complaints to Moses over the fact that they had no onions to eat.

The Spanish get credit for introducing onions to the New World. They are said to have brought the pungent bulbs to the West Indies shortly after their discovery. Onions soon spread to all parts of the Americas. Grown and enjoyed by the earliest colonists, they were later adopted by the American Indians.

The first mention of important onion varieties in U.S. seed catalogs was made in 1810. The variety offered was a white Portugal onion called "silver skin."

Some 50 years later, onions were exerting a powerful

force in the U.S.—even to moving armies.

General Ulysses S. Grant firmly believed that onions were an effective remedy for dysentery and other ills of hot climates.

During the summer campaign of 1864, he reportedly sent a terse wire to the War Department. It read: "I will not move my Army without onions."

Three trainloads of onions were started to the front the

very next day.

On the eve of its bicentennial celebration, the U.S. is still a big onion consumer.

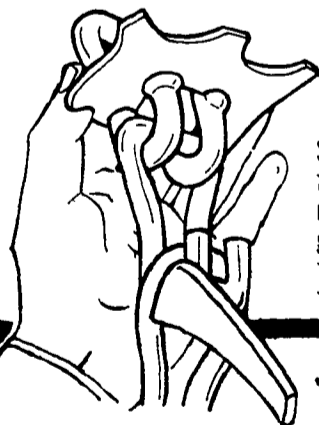
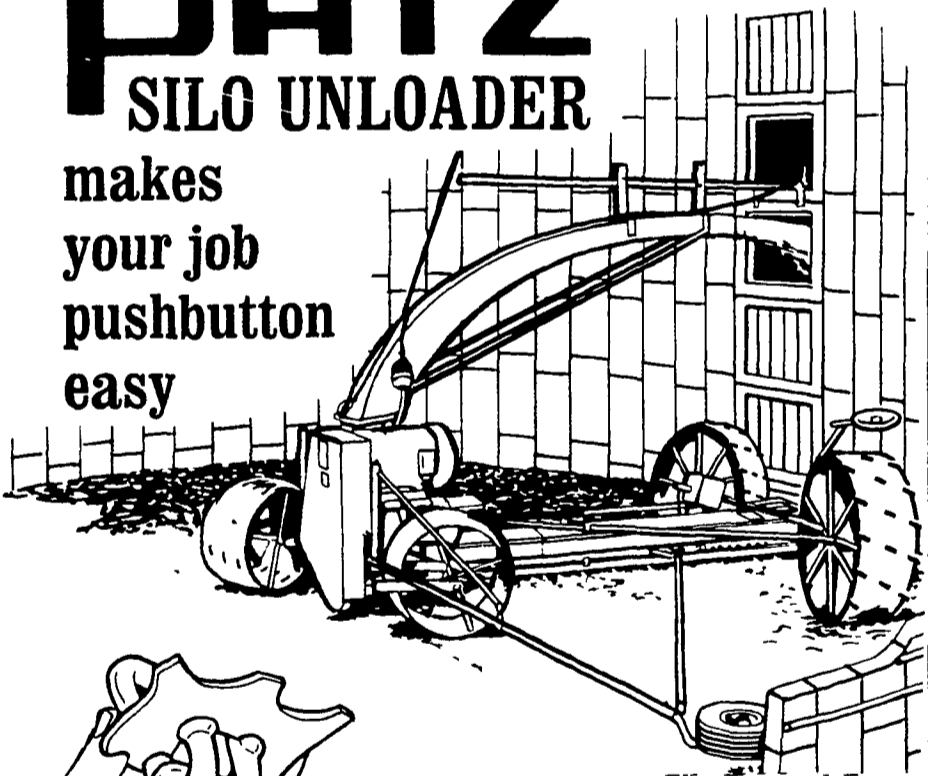
Tropical storms and unseasonable weather created an onion shortage in 1973.

But this year, the USDA reports the supply will be ample enough to meet demand. And if that demand stays about normal, it means each of us will probably eat about 13 pounds of onions this year.

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