

• 'Poultry - a scrambled industry'

Editor's Note: The following article is the printed version of an address by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz before the Pacific Egg and Poultry Association Annual Meeting. He presented his talk there a week ago.

ANAHEIM, Calif. — It's an irrefutable fact that when people start earning more money, they start consuming more livestock products. They switch from cereals to meat, from direct consumption of grains to eating meat, dairy products, poultry and eggs.

We have seen this pattern develop all over the world. Today's Japanese housewife now has enough household money to be able to sliver a few strips of chicken onto her husband's bowl of rice. The rural Latin American goes out to the chicken-coop to get a rooster when he wants to serve honored guests, whenever he wants to share his luxury with others.

We have seen this same emergence of livestock products in our own diets. Invite guests for Sunday dinner and chances are that you will grill a steak. Forty years ago you would have gone out to the chicken-coop for a rooster, just as many people in the developing world do today.

This is not to say that beef replaces poultry as people gain more affluence. No country in the world has developed more than the United States in the past 25 years — and in that time our annual consumption of chicken has leaped from 8.7 pounds per person to 37 pounds per person. We've also doubled the amount of turkey we eat, from just over four pounds per person in 1950 to about 8.5 pounds per person in 1975.

All of this hasn't just happened. The consumption of poultry has increased because the poultry industry has worked to improve their products and their marketing. Who, 20 years ago, would have ever envisioned a time when you could go to almost any major city in the world and rarely be more than a few minutes away from a quick-service, fried chicken outlet?

But those popular eating places would not be possible without all the research that has gone into vitalizing the broiler industry. The technological advances of your industry during the last 20 years is unsurpassed in all of agriculture. Genetic developments, technological advances in housing, and improved poultry rations all combined to bring about more efficient feed conversion and faster growth rates. These, in turn, have made the broiler industry competitive.

In 1950 it took around 3.3 pounds of feed to produce one pound liveweight broiler. By 1960 that amount of feed had dropped to 2.4 pounds. Today the feed conversion ratio for broilers has improved even further, to down around 2.1 pounds of feed for each pound of liveweight bird.

Right in step with this improvement, it used to take 10 to 12 weeks to grow a 4 pound broiler; now it only 7 to 9 weeks. This is another major gain in efficiency which has worked to improve the economics of raising broilers.

Together, these gains have been phenomenal. The broiler industry today takes the incomplete protein of grains and efficiently turns it into the sort of high quality meat protein that people need most. The only other industry I know of that can do it more efficiently is fish-farming — and as of yet people don't seem to want to eat that much fish.

The other part of the poultry industry that has shown real gains in the last two decades has been turkey production. Turkey has moved from being only a holiday feast, to one of our cheapest sources of animal protein. Today it is served year-around, and people recognize it for the excellent meat value that it is.

Turkey production, which had been at about 44 million birds in 1950, rose to a 1973 record of 132 million birds. Then, at least partially because of higher feed costs in the last two years, production dropped to 124 million birds in 1975. We will probably see moderate gains in turkey production in 1976, perhaps with the record being approached or surpassed.

So far I've been talking about your successes; now let's get down to the hard part — the weaknesses. Egg consumption per person in this country has declined steadily ever since 1945. In that year, the last of the War years, egg consumption in the U.S. hit 403 eggs per person. Since then; improving economic conditions, availability of substitute foods, and more recently the cholesterol scare, have worked to drastically cut egg consumption. From 1970 to 1975 alone, the number of eggs consumed per person in this country dropped from 311 to 278.

That's a significant shift in dietary habits. It's something to look into closely. Why has it happened, and will it continue? These are questions the egg industry must answer.

Probably the over-riding factor has been the change in lifestyle that is taking us from being a nation involved in physical labor to a nation of sedentary workers sitting behind desks most of the day. With less strenuous work, people have tended to spread out around the middle and bottom — and one of the first dietary changes many make to rectify this settling process is to skip breakfast. Or if they eat breakfast at all; they grab a doughnut, or stick a Pop-Tart in the toaster, slosh down a cup of coffee, then run through the door to catch the commuter train. Eggs and bacon have often been pushed to the back burner.

One ray of hope, however, would seem to be in awakening people to the fact that traditional breakfast meals are also pretty good when served at other times of the day. The working housewife who no longer takes the time to whip up an omelet for breakfast may now find, if she thinks about it, that that same omelet would now be a quick, easy, inexpensive main dish for dinner, one that her family would enjoy as an occasional change of pace.

I think this is a real opportunity for egg producers. But what about the health aspects of eating eggs, a real propaganda campaign based on half-facts and innuendos is being waged against them — often by people who should know better.

You can't fight that sort of thing with a fire hose, putting out hot spots whenever they develop. The only way to fight scare tactics is with the honest facts; disseminating the truth, throwing the valid questions open to research and objective consideration.

There is no question that egg yolks are relatively high in cholesterol. But there is also no question that eggs can also provide one of the most complete and perfect proteins humans can find.

To date the whole issue of eating foods high in fats and cholesterol has been much like the question of selling grain to the Russians — by that I mean the smoke from the fires of emotion has clouded the issue, distorting the facts and often leading people in wrong directions.

Cholesterol is a normal constituent of our blood and tissues. It is synthesized by the body whether we consume it in our foods or not. There is, however, a positive correlation for most people in the amount of cholesterol consumed and the amount of it in our blood. But the real question remains whether or not restriction of dietary cholesterol actually reduces the frequency of atherosclerosis and heart disease. The answer to this remains obscure.

In the more than 15 years since the controversy over the role of fats and cardiovascular disease began here's what we have learned:

- The utilization of fats in man is affected by:
 - the food we eat all our lives, and by our state of general nutrition;
 - The action and interaction of our endocrine system — the thyroid, adrenal, pituitary, ovarian, pancreatic, and other glands;
 - how active we are. Exercise increases the oxygen supply to the tissues, improves circulation, and relieves tension; all major considerations in heart and vascular diseases;
 - our emotional characteristics and mental well-being;
 - how each of us goes through the aging process: how our enzyme mechanisms keep up with our pattern of eating and exercise.

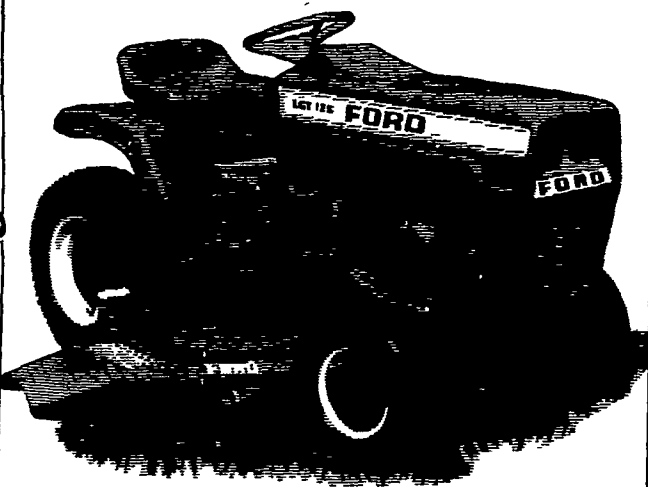
Every one of these things is a factor in our health and how our body uses dietary fats. Much more work and research

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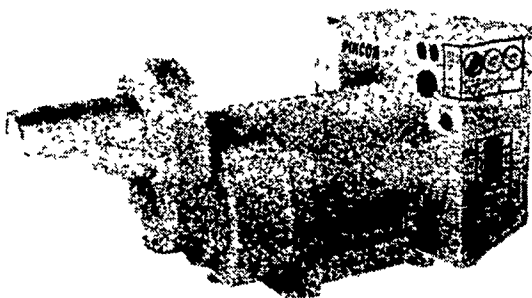
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