



Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

The pork industry has mounted a national effort to convince consumers of the economic and nutritional value of its products. That explains all the pork commercials accompanying the World Series radio and television coverage.

It also explains why this column is going to tell you more about hogs than you probably want to know. For instance:

Per capita pork consumption in the United States in 1979 was about 70 pounds, third highest on record;

Americans consumed 800,000 pounds of fresh pork sausage that year, a 12 percent increase over the previous year;

They ate two billion pounds of ham and that was a 15 percent increase over the year before;

In Iowa, the number one hog state, the average swine producer produces enough pork for 1000 people.

Traditionally, pork has had low status among consumers who seem always to prefer beef even if it costs more. But recently the price spread has been such that more and more consumers are using more pork products in their menu planning.

Meanwhile, the hog industry has done a lot to produce a better product. The lean, trim pork products that are displayed in supermarket meat cases these days are a far cry from the pre-World War II hog. There are good reasons for that.

Back in those days the typical farm family grew a few hogs and consumed some of them right on the farm. As the old saying goes,

they used everything but the squeal, and a large overly fat hog produced a variety of home use products including lard for cooking, fatback, cracklings, sow belly, ham, bacon, pickled pigs feet, and pork skin. But times changed and so did consumer preferences and the demand for lard and salt pork plummeted.

So farmers and researchers and others vitally involved in the swine industry literally re-designed the hog. They made it longer and taller and trimmer, and they eliminated almost all of the heavy backfat covering that used to be part of a pig.

Then they came up with new products and new recipes and new merchandising ideas, and now pork is right there in the forefront competing with beef and chicken for the consumer meat dollar and supplying some of the finest restaurant and home prepared meals.

One good example of that is ground pork - a product

that you may not have even heard of unless you tuned in on the World Series commercials.

Ground pork was launched a few years ago in Iowa and has been catching on nationwide. It can be used just about anywhere you would use ground beef, and home economists say it's a good source of high quality protein, plus iron, niacin and riboflavin.

The industry is producing ground pork that's about 75 to 80 percent lean meat and that makes it comparable to ground chuck. So it's ideal for a lot of home recipes.

National sales of ground pork are increasing as more and more homemakers are hearing about it and finding ways to use it. Most ground pork is produced right at the packing plant from trimmings from the shoulder, loin or belly, since they contain the reddest muscle and are mostly lean.

Ground pork is a bit more perishable than ground beef, according to the experts, and its flavor will deteriorate faster after storage in the refrigerator. So it should be stored in the coldest place in the refrigerator where the temperature is as low as possible without actually freezing.

Don't confuse ground pork with sausage. Those are two completely different products. Sausage has been around since before recorded history. It was born of necessity as a means of keeping meat from spoiling since there was no such thing as an icebox.

The word sausage actually

means salted or preserved meat.

One final historic note on pork. Sausage made from pork played an important part in early history. It seems that Julius Caesar, who died in 44 B.C., used it in his military campaigns.

The art of seasoning and preserving sausage has advanced to such a high level that he was able to gain advantages over barbarian armies by issuing pork sausage to his legions. His enemies meanwhile lost precious hours hunting game in the forests or feeding domestic animals.

In those days sausage accompanied manifestations of hilarity and joy. So much so that the early church came to associate sausage with heathen behavior. Reformers were actually able to get a prohibition law passed against sausage, so the Romans had to smuggle their treasured meat products past prohibition agents. Finally, the unpopular law was stricken from the books.

Pork is making some inroads into the fast food industry and when it finally

does gain a major share of that market, it will have an important impact on the pork industry.

Restaurants and other food-serving institutions have avoided pork mostly because of tradition and a problem of what to do with the leftovers. But the upsurge in the fast food business has changed that and the increase in specialty

restaurants is providing a new opportunity for pork producers.

So the next time you dine out, why not go whole hog? It's the nutritious, economical and tasty thing to do.

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