

Panel Urges New Emphasis On Development Of Leaner Meat And Dairy Products

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The federal government should revise current regulations that govern grading, labeling, and product standards to provide a greater incentive for production and marketing of leaner meat and dairy products, a National Research Council committee said last week.

Following the two-and-one-half-year review of national food supply statistics and dietary survey data, the committee concluded that recent trends show a move towards healthier dietary habits and a "remarkably responsive" record for industry in developing a new products to meet the demands of these more nutritionally aware consumers. Nevertheless, the committee said that most Americans consume more fat, cholesterol, and saturated fatty acids than recommended by national health organizations. Excessive levels of these nutrients in the diet have been linked to heart disease, stroke, and certain forms of cancer.

Current meat grading policies "encourage overfattening of beef and lamb," the committee found, while available labeling and nutrition information falls to inform consumers adequately about lower-fat animal products already available in the marketplace.

The "real solution" to excessive dietary fat, saturated fatty acids, and cholesterol "lies in the production of leaner animals," it said.

This could be accomplished by applying currently available technologies for the breeding, feeding, and management of farm animals, it added. Research in the use of growth hormones that promote production of muscle instead of fat tissue would also be useful, the committee concluded. In the meantime, fat should be removed from animal products "at the earliest stage in processing," the committee urged.

The 16-member committee recommended that additional information be provided to consumers at the point of sale and through improved labeling to help them identify cholesterol content and the sources and types of fat and fatty acids in the diet. In particular, it said, consumers need to know that some vegetable sources of fat and oil — such as coconut, palm,

and palm kernel oils — are also, important sources of saturated fatty acids in the diet.

Lowering Fat and Cholesterol Content

Many reduced-fat and -cholesterol products already exist in the marketplace and may help consumers reach targeted levels for these components in their diets, the committee observed. Using sample diets, it illustrated how low-fat milk, yogurt, or ice milk might be substituted for whole-milk products, or how leaner cuts of meat or a change in cooking method from frying to broiling or roasting could reduce the fat content of beef, pork, or chicken.

Changes in the current system for grading beef would provide an important method for encouraging the marketing of leaner products, it said. Currently, beef must be simultaneously graded for "yield" (the number of trimmed cuts per carcass) and "quality" (the relative flavor, juiciness, and tenderness). These evaluations can only be performed under current USDA regulations prior to removal of the outer layer of fat from a carcass.

By uncoupling the yield- and quality-grading processes and by allowing producers to remove this outer layer of fat immediately after slaughter (a technique called "hot fat trimming"), the committee maintained that USDA would encourage the food industry to produce leaner cattle. The yield for a trimmed carcass would be higher than for the same size carcass that had not been trimmed, "in effect penalizing the producer for additional fat."

Another committee recommendation, renaming of the leanest retail USDA beef grade from "Good" to "Select," has already been implemented by USDA. Some consumers had misinterpreted the "Good" grade as an inferior product, the committee explained; consequently, producers preferred to market it ungraded. Much of this leaner meat is now being marketed under supermarket brand names. The new "Select" designation established by USDA in November 1987 will allow consumers a greater range of low-fat beef options under a more appealing name, said the committee, while allowing producers to market lean beef more aggressively.

In support of efforts to improve acceptance of lean cuts of beef and other meat products, the committee advised that the maximum amount of truthful nutritional information be available to consumers at the point of sale. At the same time, however, it urged that use of labels such as "lite," "lean," "light," and "natural," be standardized to avoid misleading claims.

The Browns' Browncroft Farm Of Bradford County



Bill and Janet Brown of Browncroft Farm are keeping the fun in farming in Bradford County. In last week's Issue Rome was moved to another county in error.

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