

## Food Producers Profit By Watching Lifestyle Trends

BY LISA RISSER

LANCASTER — Consumer lifestyles and eating habits change continually. Food producers benefit by keeping a close eye on these changes and altering their products accordingly. This was the message Alletta Schadler gave to poultry producers at the Poultry Progress Day last week.

"It is important to realize that how consumers act will impact your business," added Schadler, interim regional extension director for Penn State and formerly a home economist for Lebanon County.

For instance, reports of salmonella in eggs has caused many consumers to reduce eggs in their diets, while the report of lowered cholesterol levels due to oat bran consumption has caused an increased demand in that product.

"To understand what is happening in the food industry, we need to look at eaters and cooks," said Schadler.

According to a recent study on chicken and egg consumption by "Consumer Report", one out of three people are eating more chicken than beef. There are many reasons for increased chicken consumption including its reputation as a good nutritional source, clever marketing, and its low cost.

The magazine reported finding no incidences of salmonella and that all chicken sampled was good, although some was better than others.

In addition, the staff sampled free-range chicken, which is raised in an environment where it can roam freely, a growing condition favored by animal rights activists. Staffers found that the flavor was good, but not necessarily good

enough to warrant paying its \$6.98 per pound price.

The trend of people eating away from home is increasing at a slower rate than before. "The trend toward buying out and eating at home is increasing, however," stated Schadler.

In 95 percent of households, at least one person has eaten away from home each week, according to Schadler. About 62 percent of households bought take out food during a week. Of that percentage, 48 percent purchased food at drive through windows, 42 percent purchased food at a deli take-out, and 20 percent received home delivery of food.

Consumers traditionally have been lumped into several groups based on age and marital status and stereotyped accordingly. This is changing as groups now are composed of people with a variety of lifestyles and needs. Consumers are still categorized by age but advertising and marketing companies are careful not to stereotype any longer. The main groups are the elderly or "grumpies" (grown-up mature people), boomers, and teens/young adults.

Grumpies are adults who are 55 years and older. "For the first time in history, this group outnumbered teenagers," Schadler reported. "And people in this group don't like to be categorized as old people thereby making marketing difficult. Their lifestyles are very different than the same age group used to be."

Consumers in this group spend more of their income on food and 62 percent of them eat for gratification as compared with 48 percent of the rest of the population. They are nutrition minded, brand

conscious, and price concerned. They want single portions and convenient-to-prepare foods. Taste is important to this group as their taste diminishes with age.

"Boomers is not one homogenized group," Schadler said. It is composed of married couples with children, singles, divorcees, single parents, and childless couples. This group also has different incomes levels, which brings different needs.

One boomer group that is growing is single person households established by men, according to Schadler. This group spends more money on convenience foods and includes many people who don't know how to cook.

Teens and young adults are quite different than they used to be in terms of food consumption and preparation. They are an important group for producers and marketers as they will be around for a long time.

"These consumers aren't receiving the same kind of training as they did a few years ago," commented Schadler. "They eat more fast food and convenience foods; they don't know how to cook." These consumers will need products with instructions and recipes.

On the other hand, there are many "latch key" kids who do the family shopping and cooking. These consumers aren't brand conscious and pick those that are deemed good buys.

### Diet Consciousness

Health and nutrition are very important to today's consumers. Approximately 78 million Americans are using diet foods, and 54 percent of those began using diet foods within the past five years.

Fitness is in and calorie-controlled and caffeine-free foods are popular.

Microwaves are increasing in popularity. About 50 to 70 percent of households have microwaves. Children are comfortable with this technology, often more so than adults. There is continuing research being done to develop foods that cook completely in the microwave.



Alletta Schadler recently addressed attendees at the Lancaster County Poultry Progress Day. Schadler, currently the interim regional director for Penn State Extension, has served Lebanon County as a home economist for many years. Here she is helping to judge cherry pies at the Schaefferstown Folk Festival.

People who have been using microwaves for some time now are becoming impatient even with waiting for frozen or refrigerated foods to cook in the microwave. This is producing a trend toward shelf-stable foods that can be heated more quickly. An example of this is pasta in jars.

Consumers continue to be interested in fresh produce. They're also interested in fresh, ready-to-cook foods such as stuffed chicken breast.

Ethnic foods are popular and have become an \$8 billion business. Chicken lends itself well to preparation in ethnic dishes.

Consumers seeking convenience continue to purchase prepared entrees. They want a variety of meals and look for those within 300 to 400 calories. There is a push for manufacturers to produce dinners with lower sodium levels.

"The things I think consumers want today are portion-size control, convenience, and new products," said Schadler. "They want health and nutritional information on the package, freshness, and recipes for the food."

By watching consumer lifestyle trends, food producers can change their products accordingly and always find an eager market.

## Ida's Notebook

Ida Risser



Often I feel that my life revolves around food. First I plant my garden in March, weed it all summer and I'm still harvesting in October. The vegetables are either canned or frozen and that occupies many of my days.

Then all year long, every single day, I'm planning meals for the men. Shall I bake a ham, fry hamburgers or grill a steak? Maybe we should have chicken, fish or hot dogs for a change. I always try to have variety in my meals. Potatoes are a constant though as I raised a lot of them last year. But, I'll admit that about now they are badly sprouted and wrinkled. So, we substitute rice, noodles or spaghetti.

I can't let 100 pints of pickles sit on the cellar shelf and so they appear regularly on the table. Another plentiful article is jelly and jam. They range from strawberry, peach and plum to blueberry, wineberry and raspberry.

And don't forget desserts. We usually have at least two each meal. Should we have pie and ice cream or would fruit and cookies go better with the meal? There is often a variety of puddings, cus-

tards and tapioca in the refrigerator. Fresh fruit salad is also a favorite. No wonder I must think about how much I am eating.

The other day I got an unusual seed catalog. It contains a description of old time garden seeds. The seeds originated from sources in southeastern Pennsylvania and were saved by families from one generation to another. These varieties had excellent taste rather than good keeping qualities that would allow them to be shipped.

One unusual seed is "Mostoller Wild Goose Bean." It supposedly was taken from the crew of a Canadian goose shot in Somerset County in 1864 by John Mostoller. It is thought the Complanter Indians grew this white, oval seed with reddish-speckled orange-brown spot over the eye along the upper Allegheny River. Some beans have names such as--Hutterite Soup Bean, Mull Kidney Bean and Sacrament Bean. There are even Risser Early Sugar Pea and Risser Sickle Pea seeds, which I gave the Landis Valley Museum's Heirloom Seed Project a few years ago.

## Boots 'N' Saddles

The first meeting of the Boots 'N' Saddles Horse & Pony 4-H Club was called to order at 7:30 p.m. at the Farm & Home Center late last month. The minutes were read followed by a report on the club's community service project.

Elected as officers for this year are Melissa Harris, president; Sharon Harnish, vice president; Missy

Overbaugh, secretary; Eileen Holm, assistant secretary; Becky Preiss, treasurer; and Kate Moxley and Eileen Holm, newspaper and scrapbook chairmen.

The Boots 'N' Saddles Club is a local club for those aged 8 to 18 that are interested in horses and

ponies. The organization hold regular monthly meetings and plans various activities such as trail rides, horse shows, and clinics for its members. Ownership of a horse is not required. For information on joining the club, call 717/569-3068.

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