

But I really needed to go to the supermarkets

My last visit had been two weeks earlier. And now the cardboard bottom was showing through the dwindling contents of the last box of The Farmer's favorite breakfast cereal. A basket I keep on the kitchen counter filled with assorted fresh fruit was down to one sad-looking banana, while the vegetable crisper was bare except for a small section of cabbage. Even my chalk supply for marking pens of baby calves until I get identification ear tags made had run out.

See, I really did need to go to the supermarket. Yet I dreaded going on a Friday, one of the busiest grocery shopping days of the week. And, the weather forecasters were warning of the impending First Big Snow of the season.

Awareness of all that still didn't totally prepare me for the worst supermarket crush of shop-

pers I've ever seen in my entire life. After gathering a supply of fresh produce, I rounded the far end, rolled partway down the aisle and nearly plowed into the end of the first checkout line, a dozen-plus-carts long and stretching down through snacks and soft drinks.

Halfway through shopping, I had to backtrack through cereals and greeting cards because the backup of carts completely blocked the other end and stretched a good third of the way back through that one, too. Plans to buy ice cream were halted by the line winding the whole way from the last checkout counter down into the dairy section—and it would have been soup 'til I got through anyway.

Several times I was tempted to do as a few others did: abandon the whole thing and leave. But most shoppers were in a smiling, if resigned, good humor about the whole thing. We became instant

sympathizers with one another, shaking our heads and comparing gripes about the insanity of it.

Fact is, most of us could have gone right home with nothing and still wouldn't have gone hungry. Only about half of the carts in line were filled with the usual week's worth of family supplies generally purchased by most Friday shoppers. It appeared to, at least in part, be a case of Supermarket Snow Scare. And nearly every cart contained milk, a fact I noted with glee. Not mine, though I did grab some bread.

Standing a full half-hour in the line to checkout gave me time to recall a couple of clippings cluttering my office desk. One railed on about milk prices and the "expensive" price of farm programs. Another one details the Census of Agriculture's figures which show a shrinking of farm numbers by an estimated 32,500 per year. And tacked to the bulletin board is yet another with the headline "Farmers Need Other Income To Survive." ("WHY?" I have scribbled across it.)

If farm programs were the get-rich-quick scheme detractors label them, why are so many farmers going out of business—or needing to rely on outside income to survive? In reality, farm programs contribute little to the overall income of the vast majority of American farm families, cost a fraction of one percent of the national budget and several times less than the food stamp portion of USDA spending. They are instead

a food insurance safety net, which continues to give us consumers the most abundant, safest and relatively cheapest food supply anywhere.

I pondered while waiting in line that half hour how many fellow shoppers considered that in many countries, people wait in line like that every day for a simple loaf of

bread, a cut of fatty meat, or maybe reconstituted, powdered milk for a hungry baby.

Just suppose some day we really needed to go to the supermarket—and it was empty.

Supermarket Snow Scares would be a picnic compared to what would happen then.

Sweet Potatoes' New Form

BY DORIS STANLEY
Everybody's Science

Sweet potatoes—even candied—have fewer calories than a spinach souffle and they're loaded with beta carotene and only a trace of fat. Now a new, high-value frozen food made from low-grade sweet potatoes rivals, can even exceed the quality of top-grade fresh sweet potatoes.

Developed by a U.S. Department of Agriculture chemist and North Carolina State University (NCSU) scientists, the new product takes only 15 minutes to prepare from freezer to plate.

Although an important food source since ancient times, sweet potatoes have declined in popularity because they've traditionally been considered a seasonal food. Also, most consumers prefer a baked sweet potato which takes an hour.

William M. Walter, a chemist with USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Raleigh, NC, hopes to revive interest in this nutritious vegetable. At the ARS Food Science Research Unit in

Raleigh, he and NCSU scientists ground up low-grade sweet potatoes, added two types of cellulose texturizing agents and a little sugar and froze the mixture in sausage casings. When baked in a conventional oven at 400°F for 15 minutes, the food was rated equal to baked fresh sweet potatoes in taste, texture, color and overall acceptability by a 30-member taste panel.

One of the additives used could increase the health value of the sweet potatoes, Walter said. Widely used in the food industry in texture modifiers, thickeners, binders, and stabilizers, MHPC (methylhydroxypropylcellulose) may lower blood cholesterol levels.

Walter and colleagues also increased by 100 percent the firmness of french fried sweet potatoes with an alkaline-neutralization treatment. This treatment and the frozen product work on all grades of sweet potatoes, which could open up new markets for growers. (Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture)



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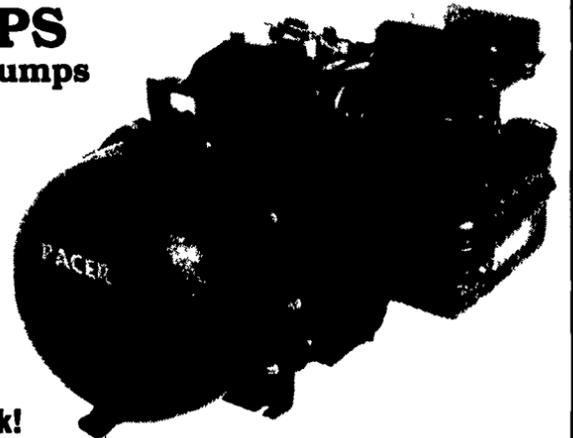
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