

Consuming Thoughts

by
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Sometime ago a co-worker teased me about eating a roast beef sandwich and jokingly said that I must have gotten a big increase to afford roast beef while his lunches usually consist of bologna sandwiches.

My roast beef sandwich was from leftover pot roast and was at least half the price of lunchmeat.

In many cases beef roast is cheaper than bologna and given the choice between homemade roast beef or hot dogs, what consumer wouldn't choose the roast? But some people think

that beef is more expensive and decide to buy cold cuts or prepared meats from a deli rather than treating themselves to roast beef. But remember that you are paying for convenience since cold cuts are ready to eat - and the beef needs to be roasted. If you carefully check prices and compare the cost per serving, you may find that the roast is actually less expensive.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture compared the cost per 20 grams of protein provided by several meats, and came up with some surprising results.

Some processed meat products, such as frankfurters and bologna, cost more as sources of protein than some beef roasts and steaks. And some cheap cuts of meat, after trimming off fat and bone, may cost more than the expensive cuts.

Shopping for specials can make protein choices even less expensive. "Buy when the price is right" is a cost-cutting principle for all consumers. Most stores offer specials on meat, poultry, and fish. Read the weekly newspaper ads and keep records of your purchases.

The cost per serving of protein isn't the only consideration for consumers. Food choices made at the supermarket affect health as well as budget.

In light of current dietary

guidelines, getting enough protein into most people's diets is not a problem. Eating a balanced diet that doesn't contribute to health problems such as excess fat and cholesterol is probably of greater concern to most consumers. Some prepared meat products, like luncheon meats and hot dogs, contain larger amounts of fat and sodium than are found in fresh, lean meats.

The desire to eat healthfully is reflected in new shopping trends. Shoppers now, on average, spend more time in front of chicken and turkey counters, and less time at the beef and pork counters, and fish is getting more attention.

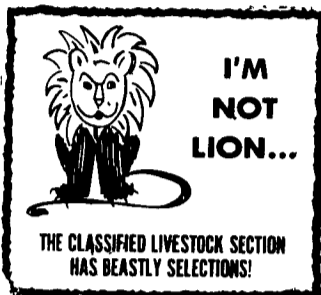
More good news: chicken breasts and other tasty poultry

dishes, while also being lower in fat and sodium, cost less per 20 grams of protein than some varieties of bologna and hot dogs.

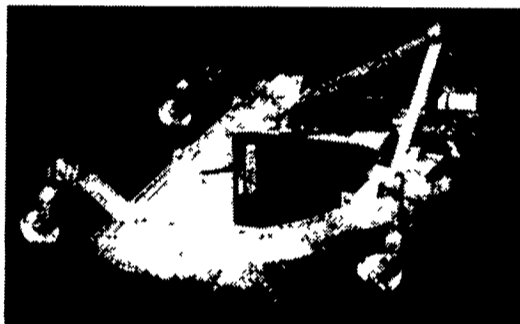
Over the last 20 years, beef prices have increased 257 percent; pork prices, 252 percent; and chicken prices, 220 percent. Hence, the price of chicken relative to beef dropped by 14 percent between 1970-74 and 1990-94.

The consumption of chicken has increased over beef. In the years from 1990-94 U.S. consumers per person ate 66 pounds of beef, 51 pounds of pork and 76 pounds of chicken.

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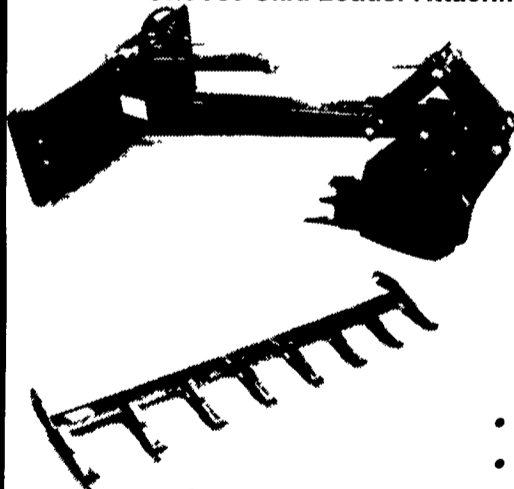
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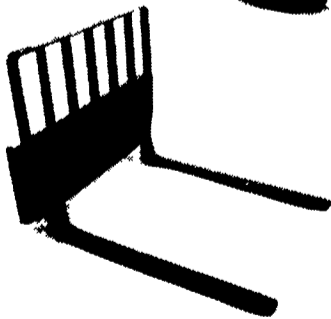


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