University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Extension

1934

EC947 Food Supplies and Consumers' Habits

Mrs. H. J. Gramlich

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist

Gramlich, Mrs. H. J., "EC947 Food Supplies and Consumers' Habits" (1934). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 2362.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/2362

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

AGRI
S
85
E7
#947
EC947

Not Available

Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
1934 U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating Extension Circular 947
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

FOOD SUPPLIES AND CONSUMERS' HABITS

By Mrs. H. J. Gramlich

Production and distribution of the food supply are becoming steadily more complex. Wastes that occur in the industrial world are enormous and many of them are avoidable. The repetition of service that takes place in the transfer of foods from the producer to the consumer is responsible for no small part of the consumer's living. Until about a century and a half ago the entire economic cycle was controlled by the individual. He produced and consumed practically all of the goods necessary to meet his wants. In 1786 a Massachusetts farmer wrote a pamphlet telling just how he supported his family.

File Copy

With wheat and corn and buckwheat that grew in the fields he furnished the family bread. The chickens, pigs, sheep, and an occasional beef that he slaughtered furnished the meat. His garden furnished all the vegetables and his orchard all the fruits, many of which, along with garden vegetables, were dried for winter use. Thus the farmer produced the family food. For clothing his wife spun the wool which he sheared from the sheep, and the flax that grew in the corner of a field was made into linen. The skin of the meat animals was tanned and made into the family shoes, and thus were they clothed. The trees from his wood lot furnished the boards to build his house, and the logs furnished fuel for his fire and the rails for such fences as were not of stone.

He himself, like most farmers of that time, was a fairly good worker in wood and had a little blacksmith shop so that he made practically all of his own tools on rainy days or in snowy winter weather. Only a few things he needed from the outside world, such as salt, pepper, a little lead and gunpowder and iron for his forge. These outside products cost him about $10 per year, permitting him to save $150 out of the $160 received for the wheat and cattle that he sold. Many clustered along the shores of the sea and rivers in that comparatively small part of the world where resources were reasonably complete. If crops were short, man went hungry. If crops failed, men starved as they did in England in Shakespeare's time.

Now America has one absolute assurance against famine - the American corn crop. In no other part of the world is such an enormous available supply of human food diverted to other uses. Our consumption of corn in all forms takes only a small percent of the annual production; exports take ten per cent; domestic animals and poultry eat the rest. The diversion of one-fifth of our average corn crop to human use would more than double the present per capita consumption of cereals. We still have an abundance of land outside the cornbelt to produce fruits, vegetables, and dairy products to balance an increased consumption of corn. However, time has wrought great changes and our meals today are quite different from those of the Massachusetts farmer of 1786.

Provisions from Many Ports

The man of today starts his breakfast with an orange from California or Florida; or a banana from Central America; or an apple from Oregon, Virginia, or New York. He takes a shredded wheat biscuit made at Niagara Falls from Dakota wheat.

He sugars it with the extract of Cuban cane. He puts Wisconsin butter on bread baked of Minneapolis wheat flour mixed with Illinois corn flour. He has a potato. In June it comes from Virginia; in July, from New Jersey; in November, from New York, Maine, or Michigan. If he indulges in meat it may be a lamb chop from a frisky little beast born on the high plains near the Rocky Mountains and fattened in an Illinois feed lot before going up to Chicago to be inspected, slaughtered, and refrigerated. He warms and wakens himself with a cup of coffee from Brazil or tea from Ceylon or Japan, or cocoa from Ecuador.

Advertising campaigns have been created largely to change and increase the family expenditure for food. Our citrus industry appears to have been rescued from disaster by the health appeal. How many of our mothers would have considered themselves little better than murderers if they had administered a tablespoon of orange juice to a child under six months of age? It used to be that oranges were eaten only at holiday time, and not long ago grapefruit had not even been heard of by many people, but due to advertising the orange and grapefruit business has increased very noticeably in recent years.

All of us are familiar with the slogan, "Have you had your iron today?" and many of us have been induced to buy the five-cent packages of raisins that are for sale on all candy and news stands because of this reminder that greets us everywhere. In spite of this advertisement, however, prunes, figs, or dates are a richer source of iron than are raisins. The only difference is that the prune, fig, and date people haven't told us about it as have the raisin people, so we go on buying raisins and increase their consumption while these lesser-talked-of fruits do not grow in favor. The orange, grapefruit, and raisin people went out to get the lion's share of public attention and they have it.

As an indication of the fact that substitution, or the winning of people to one kind of food and away from something else, is one of the major avenues to progress and profit today, we have only to look at the advertising in magazines and newspapers. We find that foods are advertised more heavily than any other class of merchandise. Food advertising in 1927 reached the staggering figure of more than twenty-three million dollars in magazines alone. No other commodity of any kind is advertised so heavily. In no other classification of industry are people trying so hard to change habits, customs, and preferences as through advertising and health appeal.

Transportation Changes

Health appeal has been chiefly responsible for the enormous increase in the use of spinach. The word has gone abroad that medical science regards spinach as the most desirable of all cooked greens. Ten years ago our railroads hauled an average of 2,500 carloads of spinach per year and now they are hauling an average of 10,000 carloads per year. In spite of all the protests of all the American children, many parents are now placing spinach with relentless regularity before their children and insisting that at least some of it be eaten.

How many of you noticed a few weeks ago an item in our morning Journal that a passenger train in Texas had been changed two hours from its regular schedule in order that the spinach special might have preference? A thing unheard of a few years back! Better shipping facilities, faster freight trains, and refrigeration are factors largely responsible for satisfying our tastes and appetites for a greater variety

of seasonable and non-seasonable foods. Two years ago last summer my husband was returning from the western coast on the Northern Coast Limited, which is the Northern Pacific's best train running between Minneapolis and Seattle. Crossing the plains of Montana this fast train was side-tracked and waited fifteen minutes in order that a raspberry special might be given preference at that time. This, too, was an incident which could come to our attention only during recent years, for only in very recent years have we had refrigerated cars that go to make up whole trains and permit the shipment of fruits and vegetables in such quantities as to warrant this special service.

To our Massachusetts farmer friend the possibility of fresh fruits in midwinter would have been just as unbelievable as the common use of the radio and many other modern inventions were to us only a few years ago. Even the enormity of the canning industry as it is today was quite unthought of in his time. The manufacture of cans in 1876 was a long and slow process, the most skilled workman being able to turn out only about sixty cans per day. About this time, however, the stamped can was invented and the canning industry grew by leaps and bounds. The canned vegetable industry yielded products of fifty-three million dollars valuation in 1909, 277 million in 1925; and the fruit and vegetable combined in 1925 yielded 616 million dollars. The entire canned food industry that year amounted to 750 million dollars.

Canning and Advertizing

We are informed that we now have everything from tripe to turkey, rye and pumpernickel bread and fish, eleven kinds of beans, and ready-cooked beef and onions canned and on the shelves for instant use. There are 62 kinds of vegetables, 44 fruits, 37 sea foods, 28 meats, 30 soups, and 12 entrees -- a total of about 250 varieties of food canned commercially. The tomato has proved the most popular of canned vegetables, corn and peas following closely, and then string beans.

One of the most outstanding examples of the results of canning and advertising together is evidenced by the increased consumption of Hawaiian pineapple. Canned pineapples first came on the American market from the Hawaiian Islands in 1902. The next year the consumption of pineapple in the United States was 1/360th can per family. In 1910 it had risen to 1/2 can per family, and in 1924 it rose to 7 cans per family. The Hawaiian Pineapple Canners decided that the people of the United States should eat more pineapple and they have been so persuasive in appealing to the public in behalf of their product that today Hawaiian pineapple represents 25 per cent of all of the commercial canned fruit eaten in the United States. One can out of every four is pineapple. Steadily, year after year, the American public has been changing its habits with regard to canned fruit until now every time your grocer pulls down four cans of fruit from his shelf, one of them is pineapple.

Another striking example of advertising propaganda is sauer kraut. Somebody discovered that sauer kraut had certain food values about which the public should know. So the kraut industry decided to tell the people of the United States what a good food kraut is and why it should be served more often on the American table. This propaganda in favor of kraut was begun in 1922 and since then 15 per cent more kraut has been eaten each year--an expansion which is way out of proportion to the expansion in the population of the United States during this same period of time.

You and I now keep our refrigerators permanently stocked with head lettuce. One does not have to look back many years to be reminded of the time when head lettuce was a choice delicacy, served only at holiday time or for some state occasion. Those of us who lived in small communities, if we wished head lettuce must put our

order in days ahead so that the grocer might write to some central shipping point and have our lettuce sent out special. Now head lettuce is available the year around in practically all towns of reasonable size. Lettuce shipments jumped from 13,000 carloads in 1920 to 56,000 carloads in 1930. Lettuce now ranks next to the potato in number of cars shipped annually in the United States.

Asparagus, too, is a food which until very recently has been classed more or less among the luxuries. Not long ago the California Canned Asparagus canners decided that they wanted Americans to eat more California canned asparagus. If they had been content to wait for the expansion in our population to take care of their desire for increased packs of asparagus, the volume of their packs would have followed the same course as the increase in population. Instead of being satisfied with this, however, they decided to persuade people to use more canned asparagus than they had been using in the past. How did they do it? They advertised! Consequently, canned asparagus jumped from 200,000 cases in 1912 to 2,200,000 cases in 1928.

With this increased consumption of so many foods, we are wondering if we are eating more than in years previous. The questions arise, How do we consume so many additional new foods? Is population increasing at the same rate that food consumption seems to be, or are dietary standards and food habits changing? A careful study has been made and we find that food habits do change and not man's capacity. Mr. Average Citizen eats his weight in food once a month, twelve times his weight each year, or approximately 1600 pounds of food year in and year out. This consists mainly of 529 pounds of dairy products, 280 pounds of fresh vegetables, 225 pounds of cereals, 190 pounds of meat, 140 pounds of fresh fruit, 100 pounds of sugar, 50 pounds of eggs, 25 pounds of canned foods, 15 pounds of dried fruits and vegetables, and 50 pounds of miscellaneous food items. When man has finished his meal, he is through. He cannot hold any more. Approximately 1600 pounds in twelve months is the limit - a limit set by nature which we have no power to change. The human stomach can take care of only so much food.

Health Urge Changes Food Habits of Nation

An interesting study regarding the changing food habits of the nation was made not long ago by Mr. J. O. Dahl, editor of Restaurant Management, a magazine devoted to the interests of the restaurant and hotel men.

Mr. Dahl kept an accurate record of the food consumed in over 600 hotels and over 700 restaurants. He analyzed carefully the accurate records of over 2,000 chefs, stewards, and managers.

Here is what he found: Since 1917 people's food habits, in public eating places, have changed in the following ways:

The demand for whole wheat bread has increased 35%.
The demand for white bread has decreased 29%.
The consumption of sandwiches has increased 215%.
Canned vegetables have increased 30%.
Fresh vegetables have increased 35%.
Meat has decreased 20%.
Coffee has decreased 12%.
Coffee substitutes have increased 15%.

This shows that people's food habits do change.

 R02138 86001

Most of our body-energy comes from cereals. Wheat is the most highly-prized of all cereals. It is more nutritious and wheat bread also tastes better than other breads to most people. History shows that as localities become richer they turn from less palatable breads to wheat bread. The negro in the South turns from his corn pone to wheat bread; the German and Russian peasants turn from their black rye to wheat bread; the West Indian leaves his yams for the product of the Minneapolis mills. Even the Chinese and Japanese have increased the use of wheat in place of the cheaper barley, rye, millet, and especially rice. In spite of this apparent fondness for wheat in our nation and other nations, there has been a decrease of twenty per cent in wheat consumption in the United States in recent years. The government explains this decline in part to the increased purchasing power of the dollar. This, along with education, health appeal, and advertising propaganda, has resulted in the utilization of more expensive foods such as fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

Our Massachusetts friend of years ago made up his diet largely of meat, wheat bread, cakes and cookies. There was little oatmeal or other breakfast foods that are in common use today. In this early day no mention was made of grapefruit, oranges, bananas, watermelons, dates, and prunes - all of which are taken as a matter of course today. Along with fruits is an unlimited supply of vegetables at all seasons of the year. Only recently my grocer pointed out to me tomatoes from Old Mexico, peas and beans from Texas, oranges from California, grapefruit from Florida, bananas from Central America, and hot-house cucumbers from eastern Iowa. The winter cucumber business, by the way, has increased 120 per cent in recent years.

We Buy Vegetables Attractive to the Eye

Our modern education concerning improved diets and our advertising would be of little avail if science had not kept pace with our newly-formed habits and increased demands. Modern refrigeration, quick freezing, and greatly improved transportation are prime factors in meeting the living standards of today. For these conveniences and to satisfy our whims we are, in many instances, paying dearly. How many of us when we shop for fresh vegetables buy bulk carrots or bulk beets? Our carrots come in bunches with the tops on and so also do the beets. "Will you have the tops removed?" smilingly asks the grocer. Whether you reply yes or no to his question, the consumer has added much to the transportation and refrigeration charges because of the tops which eventually find their way to the garbage can. These tops make up about 30 per cent of the bulk of our package and contribute 15 to 25 per cent of the weight, thus increasing greatly the freight charges, all of which is eventually paid by the consumer.

New Ideas in Frozen Foods

Quick freezing is just beginning to come into its own. Advocates of this method of food preservation feel that it will eventually be a deciding factor in the prevention of waste that is now taking place. With the quick freezing process only the edible food is frozen and shipped. Take spinach for instance, 33 1/3 per cent of which, as it now goes to market, represents inedible material. As now shipped it must be packed loosely and loaded loosely in the car. After it reaches the store another 17 per cent is lost through spoilage, according to retailers' figures. This modern freezing will prevent all waste. Only edible food would be packed and there would be no loss in the retailers' hands for it will keep indefinitely. One car would be equivalent to ten cars now needed for freshly-picked spinach. The same character of savings would be possible with many other foods. Those of us in the Middle West are only just beginning to know quick frozen foods. We have a few fruits --

cherries, strawberries, etc.-- a little frozen meat in packages, and frozen fish. Probably all of us have enjoyed the frozen fish that has appeared in our markets the last year or two. Last winter more fresh fish has come into the fishing ports of America than in any year in the memory of the fishing business. This has been due principally to the fine fishing weather. Sea bass was received in such quantities that the market could not absorb all the supply, and for the first time in history, the catch was frozen. People are buying and eating more fresh fish than ever before.

While frozen foods are not common in the Middle West, they are rapidly becoming so in the East. Wanamaker's store, New York, which in the seventy years of its existence has never sold food except in its cafeteria, now sells eighty varieties of frozen package goods--steaks, chops, soup meats, many varieties of fish, spinach, peas, and a variety of fruits. Already 100 stores, chiefly in New England, are selling frosted foods in considerable quantity.

No Ideal Ration Yet

Our food supply is highly complex with its involvement of factors and interests in agriculture, commerce, industry, and invention. We are just beginning to learn what real food values mean. There is yet no ideal ration. Some authorities have asserted that while a varied diet has many advantages it is not absolutely essential to good nutrition. In the simpler civilizations of the past and at present in many parts of the world where, for one reason and another, the food supply is limited, people have been and still are reaching a high degree of physical development and are maintained in great sturdiness on diets that consist of only a few foods.

A recent writer ventures to believe that American food habits have not been developed as a result of necessity but are matters of choice or fancy. Changes in the proportions of different foodstuffs grown or manufactured have been based largely on what people could be induced to buy rather than to supply a population ready to purchase whatever foodstuffs are available. The main inducements offered have been novelty, attractiveness, convenience, and most successful of all, health appeal.

Sugar was once consumed at the rate of 10 pounds per year per individual; the figure is now more than 100 pounds per person per year and it supplies one-seventh or more of the nation's calories.

Wisdom is by no means always a guide in setting dietary standards. Sherman of Columbia University points out that foods are almost universally selected by the eye.

We have heard much in recent years about the high cost of living and the chief present-day topic is the depression and how best to overcome it. Far be it from me to offer suggestions, but let me remind you that food habits, along with other living conditions have changed. Our wants of a few years ago now seem necessities and have them we must. At least we do have them. The fact that there is no per capita increase in the consumption of potatoes and cereals in the United States, but rather an apparent decrease, is one of the most convincing proofs of the general prosperity of the country. Our people buy what they like to eat. American food habits have not been developed as a result of necessity but are matters of choice and fancy.

13514m