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2-28-1992

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Murra, Gene, "Meat Consumption: A Few Comments" (1992). *Economics Commentator*. Paper 274.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/econ_comm/274

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ECONOMICS COMMENTATOR



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
No. 305 February 28, 1992



Meat Consumption -- A Few Comments

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The average consumer in the U.S. is expected to consume about 230 pounds of meat in 1992. That level of consumption is up almost 45 pounds since the mid-1970's and is 30 pounds greater than the amount consumed only 10 years ago. There are, however, many people who believe the increase in meat consumption cannot increase. If so, there could be even greater competition for the consumer dollar spent on meat.

The Past

One merely has to glance at the chart included in this newsletter to see that major changes have occurred in the consumption of the specific meats which make up the total meat picture. First, it should be noted that per capita beef consumption has decreased from about 95 pounds in 1976 to an estimated 65 pounds in 1992. Total beef production in the U.S. has remained fairly steady since 1975, so with more consumers and more exports, per capita consumption has decreased.

Second, chicken consumption has remained steady or increased almost every year since 1970. Consumption in 1970 was only about 35 pounds, and is estimated to be slightly over 75 pounds in 1992. Even if there are questions about how retail weight is computed, the gains total and per capita in chicken consumption are impressive.

Third, pork consumption has moved up and down as production has moved up and down. In general, however, consumption has remained between 60 and 65 pounds most of the time (about 60 pounds in 1970 and an estimated 65 pounds in 1992).

Finally, turkey consumption has increased dramatically. In 1970 consumption was well below 10 pounds per person. Now, it is close to 20 pounds per person.

The Future

What do the above trends mean for S.D. agriculture? First, since only a small amount of chicken and turkey is produced within the state, it means that some of "our" major competitors for the consumer meat dollar are out-of-state. We cannot control them and sometimes it isn't easy to figure out what they plan to do. Yet, what they do will affect us.

Second, "our" most important (in terms of dollars generated) meat industries (cattle and hogs) no longer are the national leaders in terms of per capita consumption. There is a strong message that says "we have competition and the competition is strong and likely will get stronger".

What can (or must) be done? There are several possibilities. Efforts must be continued to find out what the consumer wants and then to provide those products to the consumer. The lower fat, safe food, convenience, and positive diet aspects of beef and pork must be stressed. A positive image of those products is important today and likely will be even more important in the future.

Efforts to keep production costs down so "our" products can compete with other products must be continued and probably expanded. Research efforts at SDSU and other institutions are essential. Any progress which improves the image of the product and/or increases the competitiveness should be explored.

The poultry industry doesn't show signs of slowing down. More production and even a greater variety of products prepared many different ways seem to be in the picture. If the consumer has reached,

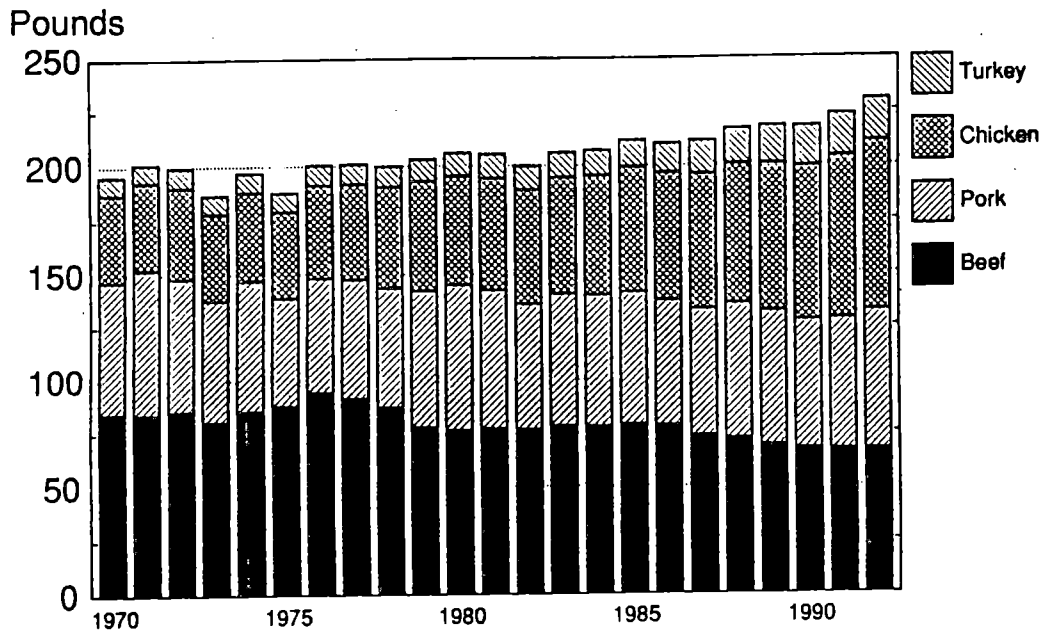


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MEAT CONSUMPTION PER CAPITA Retail Weight



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or is close to, a saturation point in meat consumption, something must give. The products which most closely fit consumer demand (willing and able) pictures will succeed. In general, it is better to recognize the competition and then address it rather than ignore it and hope it will go away. It won't!

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