

INFLUENCE OF CONSUMPTION UPON CHANGED FOOD HABITS

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Although consumption has been conceded an integral part of the whole economic structure, until recent years it has not been studied and analyzed. References to consumption in the text books of economics are still vague and lack the facts which are available (even though they are few) to make it convincing. The few cooperative ventures in buying have been a by-product of the producers' cooperatives and have made no such advances as have the mergers in production and distribution. The ultimate consumption, therefore, is scattered among the 20,000,000 or more families with little rhyme or reason other than traditional custom, personal tastes, and the influence the producers have been able to wield with high powered salesmanship and advertising campaigns.

VARIATIONS OF CONSUMERS' INCOMES

For the purposes of this discussion income is used in the sense of the value of money of the net receipts or gain accruing through a given period of time to an individual or family, which in turn is expressed in income as purchasing power consisting of net increase in power to obtain commodities which accrues to the individual consumer or family. This end is accomplished by dividing the money income by the index numbers of prices, thus giving the gain or loss in purchasing power experienced by the consumers' income.

King's 1915 study, in connection with the National Bureau of Economic Research, estimated the income of the people of the continental United States from 1850 to 1910. By 1910 the National income was fourteen times the 1850 value, the per capita share had trebled, and the average per capita purchasing power had more than quadrupled. The dollar's worth of purchasing power per capita in total increased about 30 per cent from 1909 to 1928. The 1930 study showed that there was a marked per capita increase from 1921 up to 1929. It indicated that the average American was better able by a third to buy consumption goods in 1927 than in 1921.

When the income of the family increases, the percentage spent for food becomes smaller, although the actual amount may grow larger. As a law of consumption this is now almost axiomatic, although the Chapin study in New York found the food expenditure remained about the same as the total expenditure increased. This was probably due to abnormal New York congested sections plus difference in sampling. Otherwise all American studies show a uniform tendency.

A number of quantity budgets of food that describe different standards of living show interesting trends when compared on the basis of percentage to various kinds of food consumed. A family cannot go on eating more food than it needs. It therefore turns to luxury types of foods or to a more generous and diversified diet. With an increase in money spent for food, the comparison of two standard quantity budgets at a lower and higher level shows a slightly reduced proportion going to meats, an appreciable increase in the milk and cheese, decreased amount spent on bread and

cereals, increased amounts of fruits and vegetables, and decreased amounts in fats and sugar. Although the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership report on substitute services in the home revealed no statistics available on the amount of home production of food, the increase in bakery foods and delicatessen products within the last ten or fifteen years shows a tendency to reduce home production of certain foods and an increased use of prepared products. Thus, though there is no mass of quantitative data to show diversification of dietaries as incomes increase, we know it is true and it is partly due to an increase in the consumer's available purchasing power making possible greater catering to human wants.

CHANGES IN THE MECHANISTIC AGE

Variations due to changes in the mechanistic age have influenced the mode of living and are reflected in food habits. With the definite hours, definite schedules, and more activity outside of the home there is less leisure for lingering over the meals. The influx of women into modern business and industry has undoubtedly had a marked effect upon food consumption both from point of view of the reduced time for food preparation in the home—and thus an increased purchase of ready prepared goods—and reduced help from family members. The introduction of labor saving devices in the tasks of the household has released the homemaker's time and energy for other things. Where in the past the display of cooking skill was a means of expressing "conspicuousness" of her family, the objects have changed to other forms of elaborateness in consumption, or in the case of food, to having meals out of the home.

INFLUENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL CHANGES

Occupational shift influences food utilization. As long as America was largely an agricultural country with pioneering hardships and much manual work there was a cause for greater per capita food consumption.

King has shown from his study of the period 1909 to 1927 that agriculture is the only industry in which fewer people were engaged in 1927 than in 1909. The "white collared" occupations increased at the expense of other fields.

What, then, is the relation of the occupational change to food consumption habits? With a shift to the "white collared" industries, the activities of the people are less strenuous, the lives more routinized, and the food needs of the body reduced. The first paper has shown the differences in nutritional needs due to occupational differences. This phenomenon occurring at the same time of increased incomes gives the consumer a greater opportunity to exercise choice in food selection and therefore tends to make him more discriminating.

The problems surrounding the differences in choices of food due to differences in race or nationality are not of as great importance in recent years as they were before the restriction of immigration by Federal legislation. In the main, dietary habits are remarkably fixed habits. Studies on the subject show that the immigrant's diet usually suffers when he comes to this country. He has come the cheapest way possible, has little available means, and is handicapped by a language deficiency, an ignorance of American foods, and higher cost of the foods that he has been in the habit of consuming. He usually settles in a neighborhood of his own country people which retards his learning of those American foods that are available or that are necessary for his new living conditions. By the second and later generations, the diet tends to become Americanized so that there is no appreciable influence of nationality upon the choices of foods. The

tendency to cling to characteristic national methods of preparing food is more pronounced than the tendency to cling to the native type of food.

Thus the national differences wield a less important influence upon changing food habits than might be supposed when viewed from the standpoint of differences between the fixed habits in the native country and the American customs.

INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION

The research in nutrition applied to human needs is of relatively recent development. The dissemination of such information is still more recent. As the experimentation has progressed, the importance of certain foods in the diet have been emphasized. This has in turn led to educational campaigns for increased utilization of these foods. An example is the need for and the use of milk. The health programs in schools, the free baby clinics, the programs for child development have all emphasized the need of milk in the diet.

There is little quantitative data available relative to the effect education has had upon food consumption. A publication by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor of New York City shows the influence education on foods needs has had upon food consumption of the families under their observation. This is not typical for the country since it is a selected locality and a small sample, yet it is indicative of the possible effects of education upon the food intake. The study shows the average distribution of expenditures of a series of families in 1914 and the same for 1928. The findings are expressed in terms of percentages spent on the various classes of foods, compared with the suggested percentage distribution, and further compared by influenced and uninfluenced families. The majority of uninfluenced families in 1928 spent a larger percentage of their food money for milk, fruits and vegetables and a smaller percentage for meat and fish than the corresponding uninfluenced families in 1914. All the influenced families showed a tendency to approach the suggested distribution by reduction of the percentage, if that percentage was over, and to increase if the opposite was true. Further, the results of the study showed the influenced families distributed their money among various types of foods in such a way as to obtain diets of higher food value at less cost than the uninfluenced families in a corresponding period.

It is impossible to draw general conclusions from one investigation, and yet it is probable that other studies would reveal like improvement such that it is fair to say that education has been a part of the cause for change in food selection.

As each of the factors discussed is a mingled part of the same whole, and as the quantitative data relative to each are meager, the above list simply suggests those which tend to have some influence upon changing food habits from the point of view of consumption.

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