



ILLINOIS FARM AND FOOD OUTLOOK

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

Urbana, Illinois 61801

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TRENDS IN FOOD CONSUMPTION

AS U.S. CONSUMERS, WE HAVE LARGE SUPPLIES OF FOOD; but we do not eat exactly the same things each year. Sizable changes have occurred over the past fifteen years. For a year, changes in consumption may simply reflect the supply situation. A large supply has to be sold even though the price may be less than the cost of the product. A short crop may sharply reduce supplies. Very little food is carried over from year to year.

Trends in consumption occur for many reasons. Consumer demand changes as incomes rise. The cost of production for an item may be lowered because of increased efficiency in the production process. A new method of handling, such as freezing, may make the item more attractive. Trends in food consumption may indicate an opportunity for farmers; for consumers, they give an indication of prospective supplies of foods.

According to USDA estimates, the quantity of food consumed per person in the U.S. has been relatively stable. Since 1960, the range has been from 1,414 pounds (retail weight) in 1965 to 1,451 pounds in 1972. The record high since 1909 was 1,651 pounds in 1945.

ANIMAL PRODUCTS. Since 1960 the average amount of all animal products eaten per person has changed very little, but the changes in individual items have been large. The consumption of poultry and beef per person has steadily increased; pork has been relatively stable, but with year to year variations; and the figures for eggs and fluid milk have declined. Per person consumption of poultry meat has increased from an average of about 34 pounds in 1960 to slightly over 50 pounds in recent years. Most of this increase has been in broiler meat, but turkey has increased from 6 to 9 pounds. Beef consumption has trended upward from about 85 pounds to 117 pounds (carcass weight) in 1974. Beef consumption also increased this year and will be up next year. There have been year-to-year variations, with the hog cycle, but pork consumption has generally averaged about 65 pounds (carcass weight). This year, the figure will be sharply lower (about 54 pounds) because of reduced hog production resulting from last year's poor corn crop. The average consumption of eggs has dropped from 335 eggs per person in 1960 to only 286 in 1974. There has been a 23-percent decline in consumption of fluid milk and cream, from 322 pounds in 1960 to 247 pounds in 1974, but use of cheese has increased substantially.

CROP PRODUCTS. A slightly larger portion of U.S. consumer's diet is supplied by crop products. Consumers are using more vegetables, potatoes, and vegetable oil than in 1960. Fruit consumption has remained about steady. There has been a decline in the use of wheat flour.

From 1960 through 1974, per capita consumption of vegetables has increased about 10 percent, from about 200 pounds to 220 pounds (fresh weight). Fresh use has remained at about 100 pounds per year. Canned vegetable products have increased from about 80 to 100 pounds; and frozen, from 15 to 21 pounds. The total use of potatoes has increased from 108 pounds in 1960 to 117 pounds in 1974. The increase was in processed products, mostly frozen ones. For fresh potatoes, there was a decline from 84 to about 55 pounds. Total fats and oils has increased from 45 pounds to 54 pounds. The use of butter and lard has declined, but consumer purchases of vegetable oils have increased sharply. Wheat flour has declined from 118 pounds to 107 pounds. The consumption of fruit has remained stable as noted. Citrus consumption has increased slightly. Non-citrus consumption has declined about an equal amount.

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