

THE OBSERVATION POST

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The High Price of Eating Well

MOST AMERICAN WOMEN welcome the prepared and semiprepared foods made possible by recent developments in food processing and distribution. This labor-saving service is a rapidly growing trend in the emancipation of our homemakers from some of the drudgery of kitchen duties. It's like the industrial revolution which substituted machines and lubricating oil for muscles and sweat.

These processing and distribution services cost money. They contribute to the higher cost of living. Other factors also account for the fact that the average family now spends about 27% of its income for food while only 23% was spent in the 1935-39 period. Transportation of foods from farm to factories and from factories to families now costs much more. The index of total transportation costs in 1952 was roughly 285 (1935-39 equals 100). This increase stems from higher rates and other factors, such as larger volume of traffic. Wages all along the processing and distribution lines have also risen substantially. Compared with 1935-39, the index for labor in food manufacturing plans is now 275 while the index for average prices received by farmers was 236 for all crops and 240 for poultry and livestock and

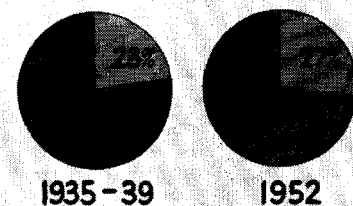
products. These two factors account in part for the fact that farmers now get a smaller percentage of the consumer's food dollar than they did during the pre-war years.

By far the most important factor contributing to the higher food budget is the fact that the average person in the United States is eating a slightly larger quantity as well as more nutritious foods than prewar. In terms of nutrients, the average person eats less carbohydrate, about the same amount of vitamin A, a little more ascorbic acid, and significantly more protein and calcium. Because of the enrichment of grain products there were also appreciable increases in the consumption of riboflavin, thiamin, niacin, and iron. The average American is eating fewer potatoes and grain products, but more meat, fruit, and vegetables.

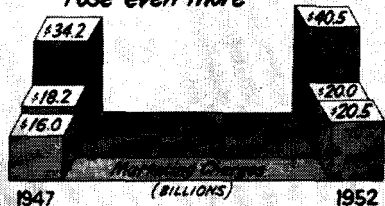
Americans are now fed 12% better (weighted expenditures) than they were in the 1935-39 period (See charts). It will be seen that the 12% increase in index reflects mainly a shift from less expensive to more costly foods.

The improved American diet is undoubtedly the result of several factors, including social and economic changes. However, food science, food technology,

The consumer spends a larger share of his income for food



Farmers' returns are higher ... but food marketing charges rose even more



and education must be credited with a significant part of the gains in national health, vigor, stature, and longevity.

It is almost incredible that results of such momentous significance to our nation could be achieved in such a brief period. Only 60 years have elapsed since the Department of Agriculture began its pioneering work on human nutrition under Dr. Atwater. Ever since, especially in the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, the department has participated actively in studies on the nutritional aspects of food. The findings of nutrition research get to people through schools, the extension service, other adult study groups, industrial feeding and health programs, the private practice of medicine, public health work, and through mass media of journals, newspapers, radio, and television. The food industries as well as federal and state government agencies have contributed both to research and education in nutrition. Because people are now so much concerned with nutrition, it is likely that nutrition teaching will have an increasing influence on our food choices, which should make us a healthier and more productive nation.

12% MORE FOOD PER PERSON SINCE 1939 MEANS WE SHIFTED TO HIGHER PRICED FOODS:

% INCREASED BY 1952

