

“Yon Pork Chop Has a Lean and Hungry Look”

LARD HAS BEEN stronger than SBO recently for two reasons. Farmers cut back early-spring farrowings somewhat farther than expected. This means fewer hogs in the late-summer, early-fall period. This, of course, automatically lowers prospective lard production and reduces the amount of lard that has to be consumed at prices competitive with oils. Buyers consequently have been more inclined than usual to keep inventory levels high.

Yields of lard per hog the last few months have been running below levels of comparable months in other recent years (Figure 1). At first it was felt that lower yields were

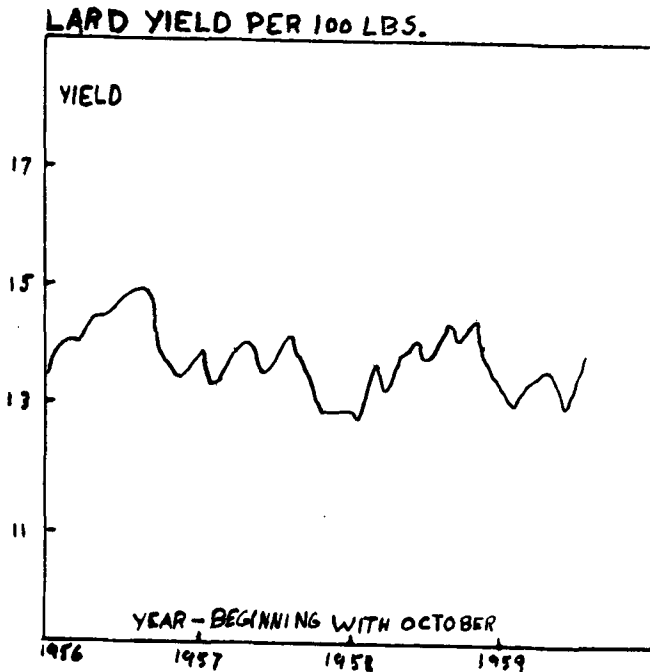


FIG. 1.

simply a random fluctuation and would be offset, or at least return to average, later on. Now however analysts are not at all sure that this is the case. Some long second-looks are being taken at lard yields. In recent weeks U.S.D.A. lowered its season lard-production estimate by 50 million lbs. Presumably this means that the agency is convinced that low yields will be with us for a while.

WHY SHOULD lard yields vary? Well, a number of reasons can affect them. We must try to choose our favorite combination.

Weights. Obviously a fat hog will yield more lard than a skinny hog, other things being equal. However this year weights have been running no lower than in other recent years. The yield per 100 lbs. is down as well as yields per animal.

Cutting Practices. Packers have always been accused of “cutting to and from the tank,” i.e. leaving more fat on pork cuts in times of low margins and/or high pork prices. Undoubtedly some of this still goes on. For despite a fair degree of automation in packing, fat depth is still partly determined by hand trim. So the packing-house department head can exercise considerable control over fat. (Company policy and adverse chain-store reaction to fat pork will act as a partial check-rein). Comparison of killing margins vs. lard yields however shows no strong correlation (Figure 2). This makes it appear that either there is no industry-wide unanimity in changing fat depth or, if there is, the differ-

ence is so small as to be obscured easily by random opposite changes. One segment of trade opinion holds that, in thickness of fat on cuts, small packers have found a strong competitive weapon in their battle with big packers for chain-store business. If correct, this could tend to prevent yields from responding to poor margins.

Fatbacks. Years ago there was a big market for this cut. Now however the fatback business is dying. Fatback price this year is the same as last. In view of the limited fatback market, this price steadiness indicates that there is no general tendency to move fatbacks instead of lard. Over the longer pull the collapse of fatback demand, resulting in the general rendering of this item, may have been increasing apparent lard yields while actually masking other more subtle changes.

How Fat Is a Fat Cut? Obviously chain-store buyers do not really care whether a pork cut is lean or fat. They only care if it sells. Their desires reflect entirely the opinions and demands of their customers, and consumers are demanding lean pork. It is not clear whether this is a reflection of changing taste, atherosclerosis concern, overweight concern, budget consciousness, or a remnant of the old feeling that pork is “poor man’s meat.” This consumer attitude cannot be ignored.

How Lean Is a Lean Hog? Chain stores, packers, animal nutritionists, animal geneticists, university extension specialists, and U.S.D.A. have been preaching “lower market weights” and “meat-type hogs” to farmers. Intermittent efforts have been made to set up a system of premium payments for lower weights and meat-type hogs that will really compensate farmers for the lower returns and greater labor and feed costs involved. However the premiums have lacked consistency, formality, and publicity. Most importantly, the premiums have also lacked size sufficient to constitute a clear economic incentive. It must be remembered that while one arm of U.S.D.A. is preaching marketing light-weight hogs, another arm of the same agency is setting corn supports and acreage at levels that encourage feeding to heavy weights. Corn is, of course, quite fattening. (Heavy supplies of cheap corn in the U. S. as compared to higher protein-lower carbohydrate grains available in other countries is one reason why meat-type hogs have been less prevalent here than in Canada and Europe.)

It has been felt that, in the absence of a clear economic incentive to produce meat-type animals, progress would be

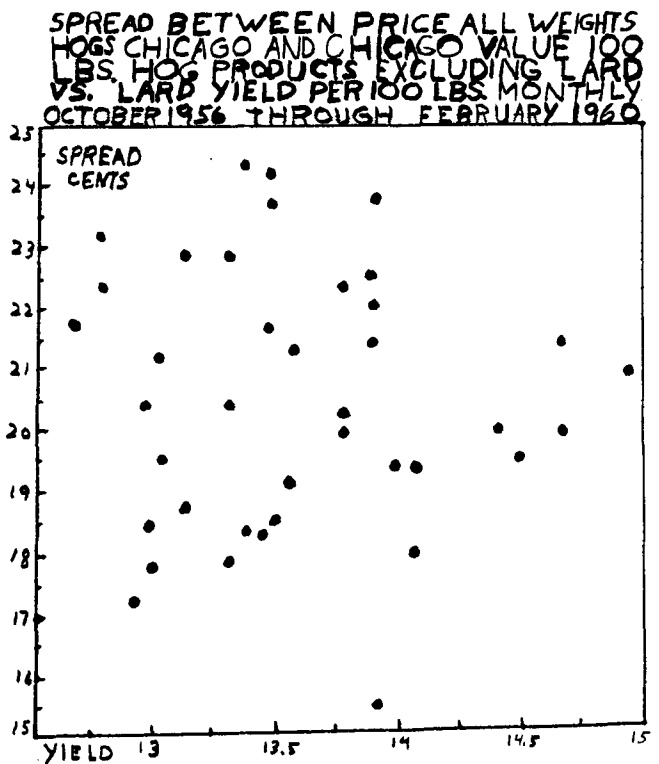


FIG. 2.

slow. However current low lard-yields make one wonder if perhaps all the talk has not had more effect than heretofore realized. A check of a few packers indicates that there has been an increase in arrivals of lean hogs. Unfortunately lack of a conclusive grading method makes it impossible to estimate the extent of the increase. Another factor probably operating in the direction of meat-type hogs is the great growth in recent years of scientifically balanced swine rations. There seems to be an accidental relationship between better nutrition and leaner pork. Feeding for lean carcasses however is still a largely untapped field of investigation. As work along this line develops, as scientific and confinement feeding expand, as better genetic strains circulate, we may some day see pigs so lean that they will look like greyhounds.

Of course, the sad part is that low yields may turn out after all to have been only a random movement and all this heavy thinking will have been wasted.

JAMES E. McHALE, Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner, and Smith Inc., Chicago, Ill.

Classification Schemes Sought

THE COMMITTEE on Special Classifications of the Special Libraries Association and the Classification Committee of the Cataloging and Classification Section, Resources and Technical Services Division, American Library Association, are cooperating in a continuing project to develop and expand a Loan Collection of library-classification schemes originally established by the Special Libraries Association. This Collection covers all fields of science, law, medicine, technology, the social sciences, and the humanities.

New libraries or libraries with special collections are constantly asking for classifications, in all areas of knowledge, and it is imperative that the Collection be kept up to date through the addition of new schemes or with modernized versions of existing classification schedules. Curators of special collections, special librarians, and those individuals who have developed special classification schemes for specific types of material or for special subjects are invited to contribute a copy of their work to the Collection. Classification schemes should be sent to Dr. Jesse H. Shera, Curator, SLA Loan Collection, School of Library Science, Western Reserve University, Cleveland 6, Ohio.

Offers Three Reports

The Office of Technical Services of the U.S.D.C. has announced three types of reports of interest to chemists.

"U.S.S.R. Literature on Air Pollution and Related Occupation Diseases," Vol. 1, by B. S. Levine, is the first volume of a series of survey reports to be completed under a U. S. Public Health Service research grant. Volume 1 contains 38 condensed translations and supplements (60-21049, \$3.50).

Four short Navy reports on various surface-chemistry studies are available at 50¢ each (PB 151808, PB 151936, PB 151994, and PB 151997).

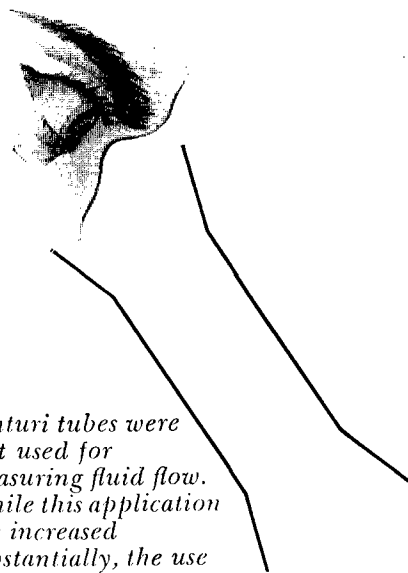
An Army translation of a 460-page compilation and review of Russian literature on aerosols has now been released for sale to the public: "The Mechanics of Aerosols," by N. A. Fuks, translated by E. Lachowicz (59-21069, \$7.50).

These books and pamphlets may be ordered by number, at the stated prices, from OTS, U. S. Department of Commerce, Washington 25, D. C.

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