

The Consumption of Butter and Oleomargarine From 1917 to 1926

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IN 1926 the people of the United States consumed over 2,000,000,000 pounds of butter and more than 242,000,000 pounds of oleomargarine. At an average price per pound of \$.531 for butter and \$.304 for oleomargarine the value at retail of the butter consumed was about \$1,060,000,000 and of the oleomargarine about \$73,500,000.

Data of the monthly consumption of butter and oleomargarine from January 1917 are shown in graphic form in Chart 1. In spite of a slight fall from 1917 to 1918 the curve of butter consumption evinces a marked tendency to rise. The total amount of butter consumed has been greater each year from 1918 to date. Approximately 1,486,000,000 pounds of butter were used in the United States in 1918 (see accompanying table). Eight years later, in 1926, a growth

of over 500,000,000 pounds or about 35 per cent had taken place. In 1926 over 2,000,000,000 pounds of butter were consumed, or more than 17 pounds for each inhabitant of the United States. The curve of oleomargarine consumption (Chart 1) showed a sharp drop in 1921 and 1922. Since 1922 it has been slowly rising. In 1917 about 298,000,000 pounds of oleomargarine were consumed. This figure rose to 360,000,000 in 1920 but dropped to 210,000,000 in 1921 and 180,000,000 in 1922. By 1926 the annual consumption had risen to approximately 243,000,000 pounds which represented slightly over 2 pounds of oleomargarine per person in the United States. Of course, one must not visualize each and every man, woman, and child in the nation as consuming two pounds of oleomargarine. There are many rural sections of the country in

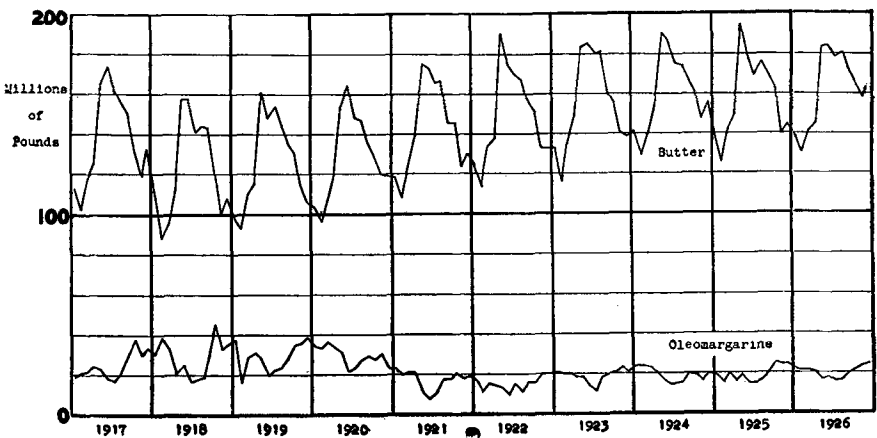


Chart 1—Monthly Consumption of Butter and Oleomargarine 1917-1926

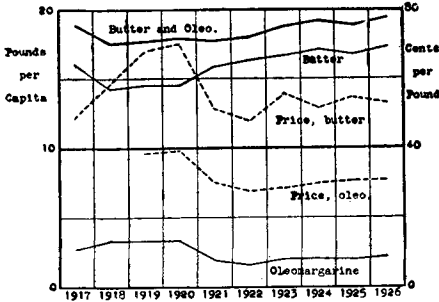


Chart 2—Annual Per Capita Consumption and Average Annual Retail Price of Butter and Oleomargarine, 1917-1926. (Retail price of oleomargarine not available for 1917 and 1918.)

which oleomargarine is an unheard of commodity. On the other hand the United States Bureau of Labor informs us, "In many cities there is as much oleomargarine as butter used."

In order to eliminate the factor of population growth as influencing the consumption of butter and oleomargarine Chart 2 presents curves of the per capita annual consumption of butter, oleomargarine, and of butter and oleomargarine combined from 1917 to 1926. In addition, the retail price of butter is shown from 1917 and of oleomargarine from 1919. The curves of consumption show (1) a drop in the per capita oleomargarine consumption in 1921 and 1922, a rise in 1923, a steady tendency through 1925, and a slight rise in 1926, (2) a general increase, since 1918, in the amount of butter used per person in the United States, and (3) since eight or nine times as many pounds of butter as oleomargarine are used the curve of the per capita consumption of butter and oleomargarine combined reflects largely the movements of the curve of per capita consumption of butter, and here again there is evident a grad-

ual rise in the amount consumed per person since 1918.

If the curves of per capita consumption and price in Chart 2 be compared it is apparent that, in general, when there is an increase in the price of butter there is a decrease in the per capita consumption of butter and when there is a decrease in the price of butter there is an increase in the per capita consumption of butter. It is also seen that the per capita consumption of oleomargarine tends to increase when the price of butter increases and to decrease when the price of butter decreases. The changes in the per capita consumption of oleomargarine are, of course, not so much responsive to its own price (which does not fluctuate widely) as responses to fluctuations in the price of butter.

The nature of oleomargarine as a substitute for butter is shown clearly in Charts 1 and 2. In Chart 1 when the consumption of butter rises that of oleomargarine usually falls and when the consumption of butter falls that of oleomargarine usually rises. The same holds true of the per capita consumption of the two commodities shown in Chart 2. Chart 3

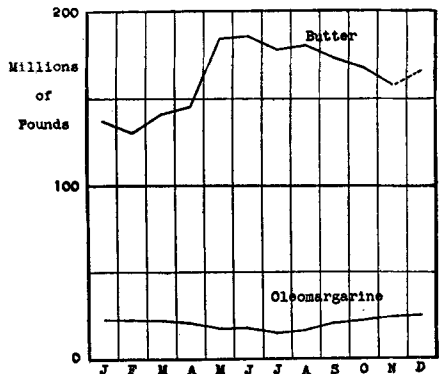


Chart 3—Seasonal Movements of Consumption of Butter and Oleomargarine as Shown by Data for 1926.

Total Consumption and Per Capita Consumption (in pounds) of Butter and Oleomargarine, 1917-1926

Year	Total consumption		Per capita consumption	
	Butter	Oleomargarine	Butter	Oleomargarine
1917.....	1,657,303,000	297,593,000	16.05	2.88
1918.....	1,485,553,000	350,551,000	14.23	3.36
1919.....	1,522,123,000	350,239,000	14.50	3.34
1920.....	1,553,590,000	359,966,000	14.60	3.38
1921.....	1,725,733,000	210,210,000	15.92	1.94
1922.....	1,796,053,000	179,628,000	16.37	1.64
1923.....	1,866,770,000	226,461,000	16.75	2.03
1924.....	1,934,102,000	229,872,000	17.05	2.03
1925.....	1,942,106,000	232,303,000	16.88	2.02
1926.....	2,009,953,000	242,710,000	17.27	2.09

emphasizes the seasonal movements of the consumption of butter and oleomargarine, showing the consumption for each month of 1926. In the case of butter, maximum consumption usually occurs in May and June with minimum consumption in January and February. If the data of monthly consumption be adjusted for the number of days in each month (if, for example, each month be reduced to a 30 day basis) February is no longer the low month, but assumes its place about midway between January and March, and November consumption becomes more nearly

the same as that of October and December. The December 1926 figure, shown by dotted lines on Charts 1 and 3, represents the writer's estimate (166,000,000 pounds) of the consumption of butter for that month. In the case of oleomargarine, maximum consumption usually occurs in the first or last months of the year and minimum consumption in the summer. Here again the increases and decreases in the consumption of butter and oleomargarine move in opposite directions.

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Dr. Schwartz to Conduct Research at Mellon Institute

DR. Edward R. Weidlein, director, Mellon Institute of Industrial Research, University of Pittsburgh, has announced the appointment of Dr. Erich W. Schwartz to the senior incumbency of the Institute's Multiple Industrial Fellowship on Cooking Utensils. Dr. Schwartz is well known scientifically because of his published contributions to the literature of the chemistry and pharmacology of cottonseed, peanut oil, and of metals, especially tin and cadmium, used in the

construction of food containers.

This Fellowship has been recently established for the purpose of making a comprehensive chemical and pharmacodynamic study of the effects of the corrosion of metallic cooking utensils during the preparation of foods therein. The investigation will cover the effect upon the animal body of the metal taken up by and ingested with the cooked food as well as the effect of the material of the utensil upon the food constituents, particularly the vitamins, during culinary, food-manufacturing and sterilizing operations. The reseaches will be conducted along scientific lines.