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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, June 30, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "PAY-CHECKS AND FAMILY DIETS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture; records collected during the Bureau of Labor Statistics 1935 Survey; study in part a W.P.A. project.

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Some new and very interesting facts about the diets of people who live in cities are coming to light as economists of the Bureau of Home Economics analyze thousands of food-records of typical urban families in all sections of the country.

Apparently the pay-checks of city-workers have much to do with their menus -- both how much they eat and what kind of food they eat. The economists state it this way. They say, "How well city people eat depends in large part on the size of the family income."

The records show that city families spent very different amounts for food. Some spent as little as a dollar a person a week; other more than 6 dollars a person each week.

Most of the North Atlantic families -- 90 percent, that is -- spent between a dollar 25 and 4 dollars 35 a person a week. And the records show that those spending about 4 dollars a person bought an average of 2 and a half times the quantity -- or more -- of eggs, cream, ice cream, lamb, poultry, baked goods other than bread, fruits, and succulent vegetables as families spending about a dollar 60 a person a week. Apparently these are the foods that people add to their menus as soon as they have more money to spend. They also usually buy more milk, meat, bread, and baked goods and ready-to-eat cereals as they have larger incomes, for records from the families spending the most showed that these families bought 50 percent more fluid milk, meat, bread, and baked goods and ready-prepared cereals than the lowest expenditure groups.

As you would expect, most families on the lower expenditure levels bought less food and cheaper foods than those who spent more. They spent more of their money for grain products, potatoes, sugar, and the cheaper fats. When they bought grain products, they bought them in the form of flour and meal rather than in baked goods, and they bought less of their cereals in ready-to-eat form. Also they bought more of their fat in forms other than butter. From a nutrition standpoint, they slighted the so-called "protective" foods -- milk, fresh vegetables, and fruits.

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A large number of the families studied were spending about 40 cents a person a day for their meals -- or 2 dollars and 80 cents a week. When the economists analyzed the records to find out whether these people had an adequate diet at the cost of 40 cents a day, they made some interesting findings. They found that about a fourth of these families were providing a good diet at this cost; but that over half -- that is, 65 percent of them -- were getting a diet only "fair" nutritionally; and almost a tenth of them -- 8 percent, that is -- had definitely poor diets in nutritional value. Many families had far too little calcium, vitamin A and vitamin B for good nutrition. But the economists say that these families could have provided the calcium and vitamin A they needed if they had used more milk and leafy green vegetables. More butter and eggs would also have helped supply the necessary vitamin A. And if they had had more dried beans, peas, and other legumes and whole-grain cereal products, they would have had more vitamin B.

The study has also brought to light new facts about the way people in different parts of the country spend for food.

City families in the South spent less for food than those in the North Atlantic or Pacific regions. Half of the northern and western families were spending at least 2 dollars and 50 cents a person a week for food. But less than a third of the southern white families spent that much, and less than a sixth of the southern Negro families. Only 1 family out of a hundred in the North Atlantic and Pacific cities spent as little as a dollar 25 a person a week for food, but 8 times that many southern white families were getting along on this very restricted food budget, and almost 30 times as many southern Negro families.

Food habits as well as spendings differ in different parts of the country, the study shows. North Atlantic city families bought more milk, butter, beef, lamb, and potatoes than southern white families, but North Atlantic families bought fewer vegetables other than potatoes, fewer fruits, eggs, poultry, pork, and flour. As for the difference between East and West, North Atlantic families bought more grain products than Pacific Coast families and also more poultry, pork, and potatoes, but they bought fewer vegetables, except potatoes, and fewer fruits.

Race, too, makes a difference in the diet. White families in the South bought more eggs and milk but less meat and flour than Negro families in the same region who were spending about the same amounts for food.

All over the country families spending very little for food buy very little milk. Since people spend the least for food in the South, southern families buy the least milk. But southern white families buy as much milk as white families in other regions who spend as little for their food.

In all parts of the country, especially in the South, some families are spending too little money to buy a fully adequate diet, no matter how carefully they choose their foods. But the economists say that many families now on poor diets could have adequate diets for the same money if they understood the importance of good nutrition and knew how to select food for its nutritional value.

