

*Report to
Food Comes First
Conference, Okla. City
1958*

One Monday morning last February I sat down to breakfast in the President's Room of the Statler Hotel in Washington, D.C., with about 700 other well-fed people to consider the slogan "Food Comes First." The occasion was the National Food Conference called by the American Farm Bureau Federation and about 50 other sponsors concerned with the American eating habits in ways other than the dining table business.

A. Boyd Campbell of Mississippi, chairman and representative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, explained that the slogan "Food Comes First implies a non-controversial, economically orthodox, physiologically essential, anthropological procedure which accompanies the physical, mental and spiritual development of genus homo."

This theme served as a working framework for the several speakers to discuss various areas of the essentiality of food to human growth and development.

The National Food Conference spotlighted these targets:

1. To focus national attention on food - its economic, social and nutritional importance in the lives of the American people.
2. To make mealtime family time.
3. To place food first in the family budget . . . underscoring the fact that today the American family has the most, the best and the lowest

cost food of any place in the world.

4. To encourage the professional and educational leaders to integrate nutrition teaching in all levels from primary grades through college.

To emphasize these points, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States, said: "The strength of the United States lies in the health of her people. Traditionally, this Nation has been the best fed in the world: thanks to our farmers, processors and distributors who, working together, have made possible good food of better quality in greater quantity - at lower cost - than anywhere else on the face of the earth. This is the story of food, and of America - the greatness of our past, the glory and promise of our future. The story of mothers and fathers and children gathered around the family table in the ritual of mealtime ... The story of the abundance, with which we are blessed -- of spiritual and mental health, of physical strength and well being."

The occasion was unusual in at least one respect. Both the President and Vice-President of the United States appeared for speeches. President Eisenhower originally was scheduled to speak, but because he returned to Washington from Georgia by way of Arizona, Vice-President Nixon substituted for him at the breakfast meeting.

The Vice-President made a good talk in favor of food, including the story of how he learned to like cottage cheese by mixing generous

portions of catsup with it. He commented:

"When I see a gathering of important people like this at 8 o'clock in the morning, the thought runs through my mind: "Is this meeting necessary?"

Charles Shuman, American Farm Bureau Federation, General Chairman, cleared the air with this comment: "We do not contemplate another organization coming out of this meeting," adding that he hoped for follow-through with state and local meetings such as the one being held here today. Several have been held in Oklahoma, including a well-attended state meeting in Oklahoma City in April.

Nixon went on to point out such things as that one-third of the young men called into service in World War II were shown to have dietary deficiencies directly or indirectly. He said these usually were not due to lack of money, but lack of education in eating the right foods at the right time.

Only 28 percent of the American people eat a breakfast that is adequate. Mr. Nixon suggested that all politicians should eat a good breakfast, as it reduces irritability in the morning.

Nixon said that he had visited many countries where many people were born, lived out their lives, and died without ever knowing a day when they had enough food.

Food may prove a more decisive weapon than satellites.

Communism has been a miserable failure insofar as increasing agricultural

production is concerned, and the problem of communism is to get enough food. The United States is stronger over-all than any other power in the world - military, agriculture, over-all production.

In his noon-day speech, Secretary Benson commented that prices of food behind the iron curtain would shock American homemakers. He said that dollar equivalents of prices observed at a market in Karkhov by an American delegation in 1955 were \$4.30 on a pound of fat salt pork, \$2.38 lb. on lean beef, 25 cents each on eggs, and 75 cents a quart on milk.

Benson also compared present food prices with the "good old days" of 1914. Benson noted that rib roast cost 20 cents a pound then, but it took 48 minutes of labor to earn 20 cents, compared to 20 minutes now. It took a workman 2-1/2 times as long to earn a loaf of bread in 1914 as it does today.

"I'm sure that many American women spend far more for beauty aids than they do for milk. Now please, understand, I'm all for beauty. I just happen to believe that such foods as fruits and vegetables, cereals and milk are themselves the very foundation of beauty. Beauty is from within. It is much more than skin deep."

The president of Iowa State College reported that a survey of 681,000 women over 30 years old in that state indicated they are likely to choose diets of inadequate nutritive value. He didn't say how they got that many women to admit they were over 30. He did add that

40 percent of school girls and 31 percent of school boys in Iowa had poor diets, emphasizing that "overweight represents poor nutrition just as truly as underweight."

Dr. David Allman, president of the American Medical Association, laid heavy emphasis on proper diets instead of food fads, with AMA launching a major campaign to expose quackery in this area.

There was a long list of speakers, all of whom came out in favor of food. Nobody arose to speak against it.

Too few, in our population today, fully appreciate the magnificent job rendered daily by the producers, distributors and retailers of foods. Similarly, too many people take for granted the deliciousness, the purity and nutritional values of food in America. This lack of awareness was one of the reasons for interest in the Conference.