

Alfalfa Sandwiches Aren't Popular

By Ferdie J. Deering

Most of the world's people exist primarily on rice. Millions more are limited to cereal grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Generally, this is a matter of necessity, not choice.

Although hunting and fishing have provided mankind with meat since prehistoric times, commercial meat production is relatively new. For centuries, cattle were eaten only when they became too old to till the soil or give milk, and for special occasions. In his excellent book "World Cattle", John E. Rouse says that cattle were not raised specifically for meat until after the Pilgrims came to America.

Production of meat, mostly beef, is now one of the nation's biggest industries. Livestock produce about three-fourths of the cash farm income in Oklahoma and more than half of the U.S. total.

Agriculture officials report that other countries want to add more meat to their daily diets just as rapidly as industrial development will support livestock herds. Japan and Russia are trying hard to expand their meat production at present.

Most Americans have become so accustomed to eating meat that they complain loudly if prices or supplies restrict the selection or amount. Meat is a staple item in every supermarket.

The number of strict vegetarians and organic food faddists is still relatively small, but a movement has erupted to encourage Americans to switch from meat to cereal

rations for other reasons. It is based upon the premise that since other people can't eat as well as we do, we should reduce the quality of our diet to the level of the hungry, have-not nations.

This is not a new idea,



either dietetically or politically. For example, 30 years ago, FORTUNE magazine reported that Cornell University scientists had measured the inputs and outputs and found that man could derive more food value from an acre of corn if he ate the grain than if he fed the harvest to a steer and ate the steer.

This conclusion is statistically correct, providing you feed the steer nothing but corn and disregard the fact that steers can convert into tasty beef great quantities of rough feed that humans either cannot digest or will not eat because it is unpalatable.

The suggestion that we eliminate beef cattle just didn't make sense then, and it doesn't now, humanitarian needs notwithstanding.

As editor of The Farmer-Stockman magazine, I

consulted Dr. L. E. Hawkins, then director of the Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Dr. Al Darlow, and others to gather data. Then we challenged FORTUNE's report and implied recommendation.

That prestigious magazine never did really back down from its position, but the late Ladd Haystead, its Canadian-born farm editor, later admitted that the Cornell experts had overlooked some important aspects of food production. He visited Oklahoma many times before FORTUNE decided to drop its specialized coverage of the nation's basic industry, agriculture.

Recently, C. W. "Bill" McMillan, Washington spokesman for the American National Cattlemen's Assn., has taken issue with those who are deeply concerned about starving people in Africa and Asia, but whose emotions are clouding their judgment.

McMillan points out that, if carried to the extreme, the elimination of ruminants as sources of high protein foods would be very wasteful of the resources we have available.

He points out that we have millions of acres of land that can produce only grass or forage plants, which can be converted to palatable human food only by grazing or feeding to cattle. (I've seen people

eat alfalfa sandwiches but never met anybody who liked them.)

In addition, McMillan notes that crop residues of grains and other crops, including stalks and leaves, can be converted to human food by livestock. The same is true of by-products from processing grain, fruits, vegetables and oilseeds, utilizing materials that would be nutritionally useless otherwise.

Fallacious conclusions sometimes are drawn on the assumption that since it takes about 8 pounds of grain to produce a pound of beef in the feedlot, a 1,000-pound market steer would consume 8,000 pounds of grain. Actually, steers eat little or no grain to produce the first 600 pounds. This growth comes from mother's milk, pasture and forage.

Cereal diet promoters also may overlook the fact that production of cattle utilizes minimal amounts of fossil fuels, while it takes 1/2 calorie of fossil fuel energy to produce 1 calorie of food from cultivated crops.

Young people from countries where meat is a regular part of the diet are generally bigger, stronger and healthier than are youngsters in nations depending primarily upon cereal diets.

Beef is here. It is good. Let's keep on producing and eating it.

Keota, Okla.
June 10, 1974

Mr. Ferdie J. Deering

- Dear Sir:

I read your article in The Daily Oklahoman Sunday
"alfafa sandwiches aren't popular"

I enjoyed it very much as it brought out some very good
thoughts and got right to the point.

It goes along with some thoughts I have had during the last
year about this crazy cattle business.

What I have been thinking about is Baby Beef.
I know you can remember when Baby Beef was
in demand and very popular, and I believe it would
be again maybe more so than before if it was
- produced and promoted.

That is what we butcher for our home freezer and
I think it makes pretty good eating.

It is my opinion it would be very good for the Cow-calf
cattlemen who are the backbone of this cattle business
any way, because, it would take about twice as many
mother cows as now and the beef could be prepared on
mother's milk, grass and other forage maybe creeped 60
days to finish them at about 550 to 700 lbs whatever the demand
was.

I raise registered Polled Herefords for seed stock for the
commercial cattlemen so I am very interested in the welfare
of the cow-calf cattlemen.

I would like to have your thinking on this if you think it
might work maybe you could pass it on and maybe a lot
of good might come of it for the cattlemen.

yours truly
Harry Ward