

People Capable of Choosing Diets

MOST of the Christmas feasts now being planned would be illegal, at least in part, if national diet planners had their way.

Sen. George McGovern's Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, a leading advocate of diet controls, has passed out of existence but it is not dead. Part of its staff and most of its authority are being transferred to a new subcommittee.

In addition, Carol Tucker Foreman, assistant secretary of agriculture, has been making speeches advocating that diet controls be geared into farm programs, alongside food stamps and school lunches. Bills to do this might come up in Congress in 1978.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies for many years have conducted research and published recommendations for better diets. These have been widely accepted, with beneficial results. The new twist is to place individual dining tables under political influence by law.

Briefly, the plan calls for cutting

down on calories consumed, less total fats and more cereals, more fruits and vegetables with less sugar, fewer eggs but more poultry, less meat and more fish. It throws aside what has been taught for decades about eating more protein and less starch.

The "multipurpose food policy" that Foreman supports is accompanied by a scheme to encourage production of "good foods" and to discourage output of "bad foods."

The human body is a marvelous creation. Mankind has survived, not because of legal diet plans, but because people ate whatever was available. Humans can convert many kinds of plants, fruits, roots and animals into food for energy and health.

There's more to eating than providing sustenance, however. Food preferences are related to personality and character, and drastic changes could have undesirable side effects.

Experts say that eating is a form of physical gratification and that

"breaking bread with others" is a strong cultural influence. This certainly seems to be true at Christmas time.

Extensive economic repercussions would be inevitable if bureaucrats were authorized to dictate what people ought to eat.

Great Plains pastures might have to be turned into fish ponds or poultry yards, although chickens would be discouraged from laying eggs. Non-fat cattle might be allowed, but other areas seem to be better suited to growing them.

The fate of wheat growers is uncertain, as more macaroni and spaghetti would be allowed, but fewer wheat products overall. Fruit and vegetable growers would have a heyday, if environmentalists didn't have all pesticides eliminated and leave them at the mercy of hungry insects.

During the holiday season, as well as at other times, people seem to be capable of choosing diets that they will enjoy, without "help" from Washington.