

Farmers Ready to Beef Up Christmas

FOR SEVERAL years, the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, the Oklahoma Farmers Union and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau have been promoting use of "MEAT-CHEKS" as Christmas gifts, with considerable success.

Now, we read that the delicious idea of giving beef has become international. Japanese travelers are taking home steaks as souvenirs of their visits to the United States.

Japanese tourists can't very well take home pens, watches, radios, pocket calculators or TVs as presents for their families, friends or employees. Many of those on the counters were "Made in Japan."

But beef is something else. Japanese like beef, along with their fish and poultry, but they can't buy much of it.

In 1976, beef consumption in Japan was reported to be 5.72 pounds per capita, up from only 3.08 pounds in 1965. This compares with an estimated 118 pounds per person in the United States for this year, which is a big drop from 130 pounds we ate in 1965.

Two years ago, according to reports, Japanera, a New York subsidiary of a Japanese airline catering firm, offered souvenir packages of eight 8-ounce sirloin steaks, packed in dry ice, to travelers headed for Japan.

The gifts have proved to be so popular that Japanera is now shipping 5,000 pounds of beef a month, and gaining rapidly. As personal gifts, they are exempt from import quotas, but this could change. Governments often do things like that.

Beef cattle are Oklahoma's largest agricultural commodity, and government actions have extensive effects on whether cattlemen lose money, merely survive or prosper. They rarely prosper very long.

Market restrictions imposed by governments in various parts of the world hold down export sales. Demand may exceed supplies, but officials have power to determine what people shall eat.

United States Policy is to hold down prices by increasing meat imports whenever market prices tend

to rise toward profitable levels. The president has authority to do this by applying a formula.

The Tokyo round of trade negotiations will include discussions that American cattlemen hope will liberalize trade in beef around the world. They can't see any good reason why everybody should not be allowed to eat as much meat as he or she wants and can afford.

Meat is a staple in the diet of most Americans, and we fortunately don't have to worry about supplies as purchases or gifts.

MEAT-CHEKS are specially designed checks issued by the Oklahoma Retail Grocers Association. They are redeemable through bank channels after being used as gift certificates to buy beef, pork, lamb or poultry at almost any supermarket.

As the ~~Irish~~ ^{Scottish} poet, Robert Burns, wrote: "We hae meat, and we can eat, and sae the Lord be thankit!"

Oklahoma-produced meat would make handsome gifts to give or to receive this Christmas.