

Food for Thought

SECRETARY of Agriculture John R. Block has demonstrated that a family of four could afford an adequate diet on food stamp allotments, intended as aids to the unemployed or low-income families.

But what about the 90 percent of Americans who are working? How do they fare? The answer is that our traditional "cheap food policy" still prevails, even though prices may appear to be high.

Larry Marton of the USDA compared what take-home pay of American workers will buy with the food-buying power of Russian workers. His figures show the average American has to work 7 minutes for a dozen eggs, 5 minutes for a one-pound loaf of white bread, and 21 minutes for a pound of sirloin steak.

The average Russian has to work 62 minutes for a dozen eggs, 7 minutes for a loaf of bread, and 52 minutes for a

pound of sirloin steak. He also may have to stand in line to get the steak.

Similar differences in food-buying power of take-home pay were shown for ice cream, vegetable oil, milk, flour, carrots and apples. In summary, Marton found that Americans can buy as much food with 116 minutes of work as a Russian can with 10 hours and 6 minutes of work.

Canadians can buy almost as much food with their take-home pay as Americans, with West German, Italian and French workers ranking next. Workers in the United Kingdom, Mexico and Japan also rank ahead of the Russians in food-buying power.

Many other countries have even less food-buying power, because wages are lower and inflation is higher. Perhaps we ought to measure our success in terms of food rather than dollars.