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Beef industry trims back fat

By Lisa Williams
Reporter

The American consumer has made it clear that "fat is out and lean is in" and the beef industry has responded by putting 1.2 million pounds less fat in the meat each day.

"The beef industry has gotten out of the business of producing and selling fat," Dr. Russell Cross, a meat scientist with the A&M animal science department, said.

"As a result of meat basket surveys (including the National Household Beef Consumer Study and the National Consumer Retail Beef Study conducted in 1983 and 1986), which expressed consumer demand for lean meat, packers and retailers immediately started trimming beef from one-half inch to one-fourth inch external fat," Cross said.

In fact, Cross said, a 1987 study commissioned by the American Meat Institute showed that 87 percent of retail chains offered cuts with one-fourth-inch trim and that the average outside fat is now one-eighth inch. The study found that 42 percent of beef cuts have no measurable external fat.

"When retailers trim beef of extra fat, as the market basket studies show they are doing, they're helping to make lean meat a more convenient product for consumers," Cross said.

And, he said, retailers are not likely to stop at one-eighth-inch trim, knowing that consumers don't want plate waste. He expects trends to continue, resulting in more boneless cuts, with seam fat and all external fat removed.

He said chains such as Kroger and Safeway have responded immediately to the industry's findings by reducing the amount of plate waste, but said fat inside lean meat, called marbling, is important for taste appeal.

"For acceptable taste, a minimum of 3 percent fat inside the meat is required," he said.

From a nutritional standpoint, national health organizations recommend beef not to exceed 7.5 percent fat inside the meat.

"The beef industry is listening," Cross said, "because almost all the lean beef found in the grocery store falls into a 3 to 7.5 percent fat range."

Cross attributes the leanness in the meat cases today to new, accurate information that comes with updated beef studies.

"Public attention has been focused on misconceptions giving beef a bad name," he said. "Many shoppers are relying on information that is based on studies that are 30 years old. Even the USDA data bases are outdated."

Cross said that in the 1970s everyone thought beef was the perfect product; everyone wanted to buy it; everyone wanted to eat it.

In 1976, 94.4 pounds of beef were being sold at retail outlets per person in the United States. But, from 1976 to 1983, retail beef-cuts declined to 78.7 pounds (nearly 16 pounds less), and by 1987, the weight per capita had fallen to 70 pounds per person.

Dr. Cross relates this decrease in consumption to a flurry of reports prompted by Sen. McGovern's Select Committee on Diet/Health that claimed beef was unhealthy — too high in cholesterol, calories and fatty acids and responsible for the widespread obesity among the U.S. populace.

"For instance," Cross said, "recent reports show that beef, poultry and pork differ only slightly in their cholesterol levels, and certain cuts of beef have fewer calories than most expect."

Texas justice system 'broke,' director says

GALVESTON (AP) — The Texas criminal justice system is "broke" and, despite a massive prison building program, there is no quick fix in sight, the state prison director said Monday.

"We don't have a good solution to the overcrowding problem. We didn't get into it overnight and we are not getting out of it overnight," James Lynaugh, Texas Department of Corrections director, said at the Texas Daily Newspaper Association's summer meeting.

The prison construction program under way includes 2,250-inmate, maximum-security units in Amarillo and Gatesville, four 1,000-bed medium-security prisons and 12 trusty camps, each holding 200 inmates.

Private prisons that will hold several thousand inmates also are in the works.

But Lynaugh said he would ask the 1989 Legislature for money to build 10,000 more beds, or find a way to divert 10,000 felons into other programs.

TDC now can hold 38,900 inmates.

"Ninety-five percent of all my inmates will serve less than six years, the term of a TDC board member," Lynaugh said.

"The criminal justice system in

Texas is not working," he said. "In my opinion, it's broke. We lack an overall goal, and without an overall goal, planning for growth is difficult."

Lynaugh called on communities to improve services for parolees and probationers and for lawmakers to review sentencing laws. He said some felons convicted of less serious offenses should be given a chance to do community service and other projects instead of going to prison.

Lynaugh predicted that the pressure on TDC could increase in coming years with the end of a lawsuit that will force the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation to release people from its facilities.

"I can tell you that TDC will ultimately end up with an awful lot of those people," he said. "They're not really the criminals you think of, but your local police and your local citizens get tired of messing with them and sooner or later they are convicted and I'll end up with them."

At the end of his talk, which was entitled "Understanding the Texas Prison System," Lynaugh said, "I've not painted a very bright picture. As I've said, the system is broke."

"I don't really know how to explain the system."

National Briefs

Forest fire rages in Yellowstone Park

Associated Press

A 2,500-acre forest fire in Yellowstone National Park burned to within nine miles of Old Faithful geyser Monday and two other fires were less than a mile from a closed hotel in the country's first national park.

Altogether, fires burning Monday in Yellowstone had charred roughly 40,000 acres of the 2.2 million-acre park.

"These are conditions that we haven't seen in the recorded history of Yellowstone," park spokesman Joan Anzelmo said.

The National Weather Service said the park is 7.5 inches below normal precipitation for the year and the Old Faithful area got less than an inch of rain in June.

Fires also crackled across hundreds of acres of brush and forest

elsewhere in Wyoming and in parts of Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Colorado and Montana. And 53 fires were burning Monday in Alaska, with firefighters battling only 22 of them. These fires had charred about 1.2 million acres.

Firefighters in central and northern California mopped up dozens of little fires while more lightning strikes were reported in the Sierra Nevada range.

Crews had nearly extinguished a pair of fires in Calaveras County that burned about 11,000 acres and eight homes, state forestry officials said.

Fire strategists met Monday in Old Faithful to map out battle plans against fires in and around Yellowstone.

GOP requests hold on campaign funds

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican officials said Monday that \$46 million in federal campaign money for Democrats Michael Dukakis and Lloyd Bentsen should be held up on grounds there is a built-in conflict in the financing of Bentsen's dual campaigns for the vice presidency and the Senate.

A spokesman for the Federal Election Commission, Sharon Snyder, said, "This will probably add some time to the deliberative process" that must be completed before the money is released to the candidate for use.

She said there probably would

be a ruling on the compliance within 10 days.

Jann Olsten, executive director of the GOP Senate campaign committee, said Bentsen is expected to spend more than \$5 million on his Senate re-election campaign in Texas. These funds would be in addition to those being used to finance the presidential campaign where Bentsen will run for vice president on the Democratic ticket with Dukakis.

An unusual Texas law permits Bentsen to seek both the Senate seat and the vice presidency simultaneously, raising an unprecedented question for the Federal Election Commission.

Drought causes rancher arguments

WASHINGTON (AP) — A simmering feud between beef producers and dairymen has grown more heated as Congress wrestles with legislation to aid drought-stricken farmers.

A group of beef cattlemen has asked Congress to limit concessions to the dairymen, while the nation's largest dairy farm cooperative says additional government help is necessary to avoid milk shortages and higher prices at the grocery store.

James L. Powell, president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, has asked Texas congressmen, including House Agriculture Com-

mittee Chairman Kika de la Garza, to oppose concessions to the dairymen that extend beyond suspension of a 50-cent cut in milk price supports and drought relief assistance programs.

Farmers in some drought-stricken counties are now allowed to graze cattle on land previously set aside as non-productive.

Jim Eskin, spokesman for Associated Milk Producers Inc. of San Antonio, the nation's largest dairy farm cooperative, said the group is asking Congress not only to suspend the 50-cent cut in price supports, but to increase price supports by about \$1.06 per 100 pounds of milk.

Mutation leading to colon cancer found

BAR HARBOR, Maine (AP) — Researchers have identified genetic mutations that lead to the development of colon cancer, a critical step toward the development of better treatments for a form of cancer that kills 53,500 Americans annually.

"You can look at these genetic alterations as the causes of cancer — just as you can look at bacteria as the causes of infection," said Dr. Bert Vogelstein of the Johns Hopkins University School of

Medicine in Baltimore. "Except

it's more complicated in cancer." Just as the polio virus had to be discovered before the polio vaccine could be developed, so these genetic changes must be found before cancer can be prevented.

Vogelstein said Monday in a telephone interview. Research so far suggests that perhaps as many as seven genetic mutations must occur for colon cancer tumors to appear, Vogelstein said.

College grads offered higher salaries

BETHLEHEM, Pa. (AP) — This year's college graduates received higher salary offers than last year's graduates, especially in business fields, but the number of job offers declined slightly, according to a survey released Sunday.

The largest increase was in accounting, with graduates receiving salary offers 10.9 percent higher than last year. The average monthly offer rose from

\$1,812 to \$2,010, for an average

yearly salary of \$24,120. Job offers in accounting went down slightly from 5,478 to 5,264, according to a College Placement Council survey released Sunday.

The data included offers made to students graduating from Sept. 1, 1987, and Aug. 31, 1988. Placement offices at 154 colleges and universities participated in the survey.

Survey: Low oil prices cause concern for U.S.

HOUSTON (AP) — The next step needs to do something about depressed oil and gas prices and the subsequent risk the nation faces in becoming too dependent on foreign oil, according to a survey released Monday.

Arthur Andersen & Co.'s 1988 survey on oil and gas reserves concluded that domestic producers don't have enough incentive to spend more money to explore for additional oil. Those lower prices coupled with depleting domestic reserves could result in dangerous foreign dependence, it warned.

"Current oil and gas reserve replacement trends raise the real possibility that the U.S. will reach the point of no return in our reliance on imported oil sooner than many believe possible," said Michael F. O'Donnell, managing director of the firm's Worldwide Oil & Gas Industry Services

Program.

About 41 percent of the oil used in the United States is imported, and the nation is continuing to increase that amount.

Although he was not specific about the "no return" point, O'Donnell said it would be reached when the nation loses control of the source that meets its energy needs. He could not say when that point might be reached or what might happen to the nation then, adding that the issue is one that must be addressed by the next president and Congress.

The survey — an annual study of 256 publicly owned oil and gas companies — showed that many firms are riding out the price slump by exploring only their best prospects and drilling only those wells with the lowest cost.

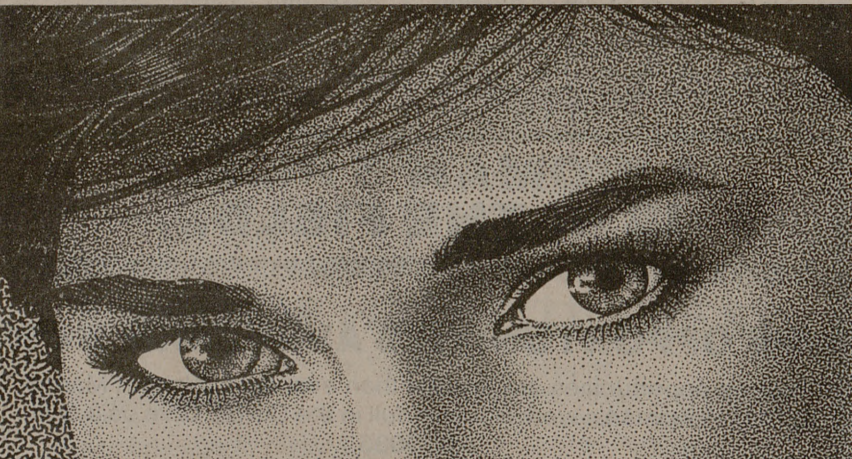
"We believe this is not a strategy that can be

followed indefinitely without risking serious depletion and substantially higher dependence on oil imports," O'Donnell said.

Recent lower oil prices have meant good news to consumers. But if the demand were to outstrip the supply and prices increased, consumers would be the ones hurt, he noted.

"The economic reality is that to find and produce the large amounts of oil and gas the needs to maintain energy independence, companies must have the incentive to take more and to spend more on exploration and they receive an adequate price in return," he said.

"Quick, responsible action will be required to create the alternatives needed to avoid potentially skyrocketing energy prices or continued increased dependence on foreign sources," he said.



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