

**In Praise of All-American Food**

*By Stewart Truelsen*

Isn't it about time we praised All-American food, the food we like to eat at a picnic or outdoor barbeque? We're talking about hamburgers, hot dogs, fried chicken, sweet corn, potato salad, fresh fruit, ice cream and many other favorites.

Yet, we are often made to feel guilty about enjoying our favorite foods. The cheeseburger has become the graphic image for any news story about overeating and obesity. The potato, a staple of the American diet, has been unfairly criticized and threatened with withdrawal from school nutrition programs. Snacking is considered a bad habit and heaven forbid you should want an Oreo cookie.

The drumbeat of negativity in the media about American food and eating habits is nothing new, of course. Throughout the nineteenth century, critics railed about condiments of all things. Mustard, ketchup, salt, pepper and cinnamon were thought to be too stimulating. Sylvester Graham, the food critic of 150 years ago, said, "The stern truth is that no purely stimulating substances of any kind can be habitually used by man without injury to the whole nature."

Today, of course the culprits in the diet are pegged as fat, salt and sugar, and certainly there is scientific evidence to cause us to monitor our intake. But books and articles that roundly attack American food and the way we grow it simply go too far and sound remarkably like Graham and other critics from the past.

Dr. David A. Kessler, a former FDA commissioner, has written a bestselling book, *The End of Overeating*. He takes some of the usual swipes at food companies and marketers, but he adds, "The only eating plan that will work for you is one built around the personal likes and dislikes you have accumulated over a lifetime."

Kessler sees nothing wrong with eating a reasonable-size hamburger or strips of bacon. The problem for Americans is with what he calls "hypereating," or indulging too much. One suggestion he has is to substitute the rewards of healthy exercise for the kind of rewards we get from eating highly palatable foods.

*Fortune* magazine recently honored the hotdog as one of the "100 Greatest Things about America," a well-deserved accolade. We should do even more to praise the All-American foods that are such a source of pride at family gatherings around picnic tables or backyard grills. These are the foods that have become part of the American dream and create so many happy memories.

Summertime brings out the very best of these All-American food choices, including a wide array of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. It's time to stand up for All-American foods and drop the guilt and negativity.