

## ***FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE***

*For the week of: November 29, 2010*

**American Farm Bureau Federation**

### **Is Our Food Too Good?**

*By Lynne Finnerty*

Health officials are sounding alarms about our obesity epidemic. Since 1980, obesity has doubled among adults and tripled among children, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Meanwhile, food purists proclaim foods commonly available from the supermarket at an affordable price to be inferior to foods grown without the use of modern techniques. They say that “authentic” foods produced the way they might have been decades ago taste better and are more nutritious than what’s on the shelf at the A&P.

There’s just one problem. Assuming that people don’t eat food that doesn’t taste good, does the food purists’ assertion run into a wall of blubber?

We have a national obsession with food. There are magazines, newspaper columns and blogs devoted to how to cook it, the best places to eat it and the fanciest tools for making and serving it.

It’s a multibillion dollar business. High-end kitchen products retailer Williams-Sonoma earns more than \$3 billion a year and has just announced robust profits for the most recent quarter, despite the recession. The Food Network is among the most popular cable channels. Professional appliances from Aga, Wolf and Blue Star cost several times the price of more run-of-the-mill ranges, and they’re all the rage.

Maybe the issue isn’t the food itself, but our preoccupation with it.

It wasn’t so long ago that we didn’t have television networks devoted to food, most of us cooked on stoves from Sears, we had fewer restaurant choices and cooking with fresh herbs was the height of foodie-ism.

We also didn’t have quite so many varieties of food. There were two types of potato chips—plain or rippled. Now, there are dozens. All of this choice is not a bad thing, but it can make it more difficult to “eat just one.”

Roasting a chicken used to be a simple affair—salt, pepper and a few other seasonings. Now,

thanks to our insatiable appetite for new, gourmet ways of cooking and a media that feeds it, we're more likely to slip fresh sage leaves and herb butter under the roaster's skin, the pepper is freshly ground, the salt is from the sea, the cavity is filled with lemons and garlic and we might add some white wine to the roasting pan. With all due respect to mom, who put a solid meal on the table more regularly than most of us do nowadays, a 21<sup>st</sup> century gourmet roasted chicken (including that "supermarket bird") is amazing.

Food is just as good today as it's ever been, if not better. And, thanks to modern agriculture, there's plenty of it to go around.

With so many delicious foods and our national fixation on all things food-related, maybe it's just up to us, as it's always been, to decide how much is enough. As much as it's tempting to blame someone else when your jeans feel too tight, there are no mystery ingredients or production methods that have shifted the paradigm or changed the basic rule—calories in should not exceed calories out.

It's the job of farmer and ranchers to grow the food. It's our job to determine how much of it we should eat. Farmers and ranchers are doing their jobs. Are we doing ours?

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