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## *Nutritionally speaking...*

### *we're great producers, but poor communicators*

**O**UR RESEARCH CAPACITY and resulting technical know-how often get ahead of our human capacity to communicate and to utilize new knowledge—and adapt to other changes that must also take place. However, growers, with the help of researchers and extension educators, have continually met all kinds of challenges in producing food for our increasing population. As a result, we have high quality, nutritious food in greater abundance and variety, produced by fewer people, and available with an expenditure of a smaller percentage of consumer income than anywhere else in the world.

Meanwhile, some “incredibles” have shown up on the way to the marketing and in the eventual consumption of our food: the grower’s percentage of the food dollar has declined steadily; farm income has never kept up with the inflationary spiral; surpluses are a problem in many commodities despite the needs of our increasing population; many consumers today believe food costs are high; and dietary nutritional levels have declined generally.

Our lack of follow-through research beyond the production stage, as well as some gaps in communicating the farm food story to the general public must take a good share of the blame. During a period when we should have been reaping the benefits of our abundance of nutritious food, a USDA study released last year (Dietary Levels of Households in the U. S.) showed that only half of the nation’s households had diets rated “good” in all nutrients measured in 1965, as compared with 60 per cent in the 1955 survey. The survey also showed that 21 per cent of the households had diets rated “poor” (as compared with 15 per cent in 1955) because they supplied less than two-thirds of the recommended allowances for one or more of the seven nutrients (protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A value, thiamine, riboflavin, and ascorbic acid). And while 36 per cent of the households with poor diets reported incomes under \$3,000, high incomes alone were no assurance of good diets.

Nine per cent of the households reporting incomes of \$10,000 or more, also had poor diets.

Nutrients most often below minimum allowances were calcium, vitamin A, and ascorbic acid. Thirty per cent of the diets supplied less than the allowances for calcium and about 25 per cent supplied less than the allowances for vitamin A and ascorbic acid. These nutrient shortages were associated with use of less-than-recommended amounts of milk and milk products, vegetables, and fruit—all of which are produced either in abundance, or surplus in California.

Rural and urban households had the same percentages of both good and poor diets. However, the rural farm group in the survey showed a 19 per cent decrease (as compared with 1955) in use of milk and milk products, as compared with a 6 per cent drop for the rural nonfarm group, and 7 per cent drop for the urban group. Citrus fruit consumption (single-strength juice equivalent) declined almost 10 per cent and use of dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables declined almost 20 per cent, as compared with the 1955 survey.

What does all this mean? For one thing, it may mean that we in agriculture—in the business of producing this nutritious food—haven’t even sold ourselves on its value. It also seems that we have one more “gap”—this time, in nutrition education—and that income or family location is not necessarily a determining factor. Food stamps, school lunches, and the direct food distribution programs—plus the Expanded Nutrition Education Program of the Agricultural Extension Service—should have a real impact on the families, youth, and aged in the low-income (and minority) groups. But what about that “affluent” 9 per cent in the above-\$10,000-income group that doesn’t know the value of nutritious food? Our “communications gap” in this day of quick-printed publications plus instant audio-video-teleprint coverage needs more than a little researching to solve this problem.