

CHAPTER TWO

Eating in America Today: Nutrition Implications for the Meat Industry

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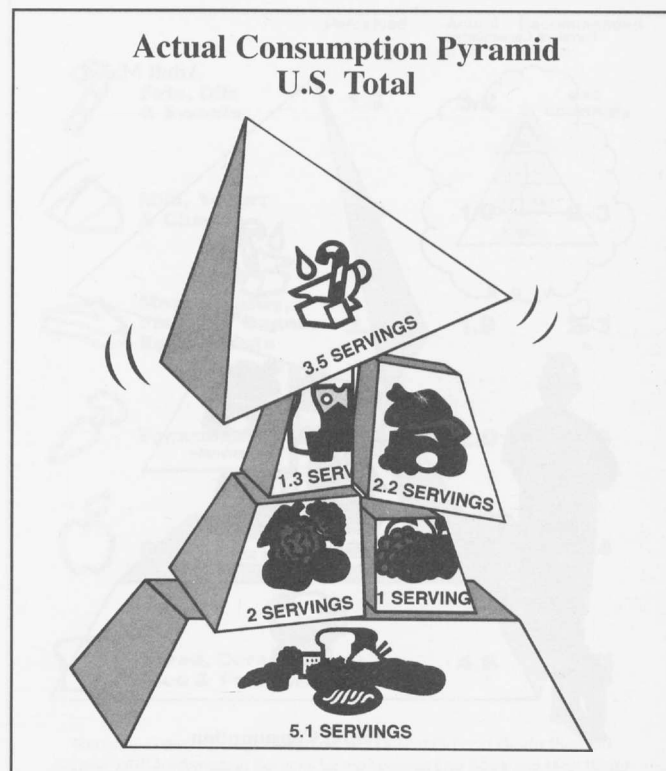
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Is it time to take a new approach to healthful eating? A recent study conducted by MRCA Information Services for the National Live Stock and Meat Board, called Eating in America Today II (EAT), suggests that we need to take a fresh look at our diets—one based on optimizing or adding foods, not eliminating them from our meals. According to the survey, the Meat Group is the only food group in the government's Food Guide Pyramid that is eaten in appropriate amounts. EAT II also found that all segments of the population underconsume foods in the Vegetable, Fruit, Bread and Milk Groups. These findings have important implications because they demonstrate that there is significant dietary imbalance and general nutrition confusion among people, and that old nutrition advice doesn't seem to be working. It's time to refocus our messages.

At the National Live Stock and Meat Board, we need to know as much as possible about our product, particularly when we develop and implement our marketing programs. We know the nutrition composition of our products, but we also need to know how it's being used by consumers in their homes. What products are actually being consumed, and what do Americans really think about meat? That was the emphasis and goal of the Eating in America Today II (EAT) study, a dietary intake and attitude report commissioned by the Meat Board.

As nutrition professionals, we are all trying to help Americans achieve balance: in their diets, lifestyle, food choices and the way they handle stress and exercise. But are we in balance in our diets? American educators have

been communicating education messages that frequently focus on the negative: "Don't eat fat. Don't eat saturated fat. Don't eat cholesterol. And don't eat too many calories." We've been focused on chronic disease-risk avoidance and nutrition elimination. But is this strategy working? Results of the EAT II report help us answer that.

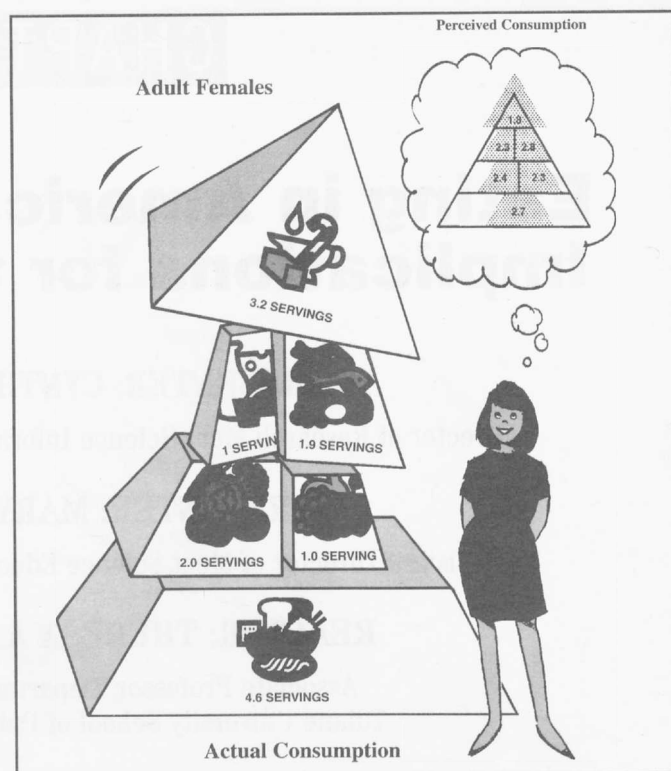
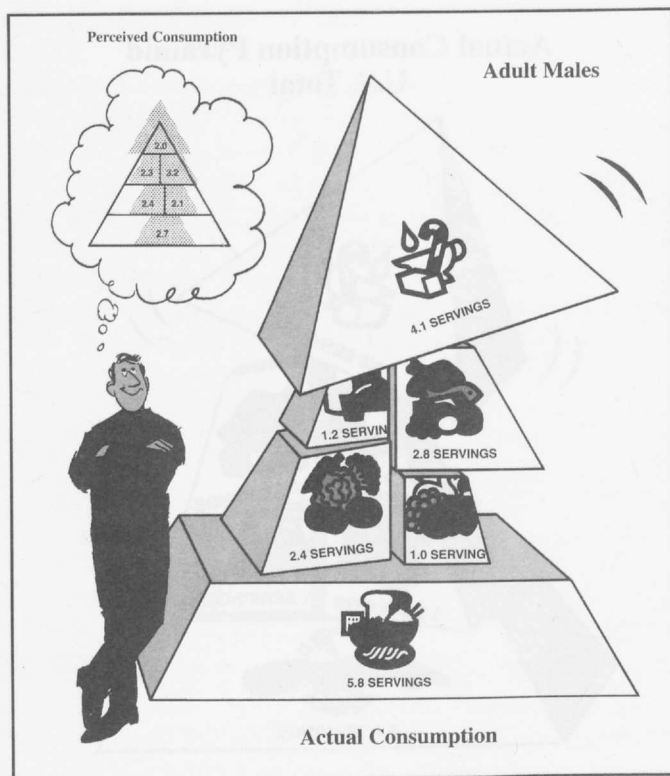


METHODOLOGY

The EAT II study was conducted for the Meat Board by MRCA Information Services, pioneers in food consumption methodology since 1938. For this survey, MRCA used a household panel of 2,000 households, which is the equivalent of about 4,700 people. They were matched to key U.S. Census demographics, and the data was collected across the year. This was a rotating sample: four to five families are started on the study every day of the year, including holidays, to take into account any seasonality or differences in holidays.

There are two very unique aspects about this study. First, the data is collected over a period of 14 days. There are many food consumption studies, yet many of them are either a 24-hour recall or a three-day food record. EAT II actually follows the consumption patterns of family members over a two-week period. Hence, we were able to track eating patterns that we couldn't do in a two-day study.

The second unique thing about this study is that it is the first linkage of food consumption, nutrient intake and nutrition knowledge and attitudes. Three months after the food records were collected, a nutrition knowledge and attitude survey was sent to the adult head-of-households who participated in the study. Thus, EAT II is the first report to link actual consumption and nutrition knowledge and attitudes. In other words, does perception equal reality?



PUTTING IT WITH THE PYRAMID

The USDA's Food Guide Pyramid is the visual representation of the dietary guidelines that nutrition professionals are trying to help Americans meet. The EAT II study found that in reality, our diets resemble a "tumbling pyramid." We have a structurally unsound pyramid that is top-heavy from too few fruits and vegetables and too many fats, oils, and sweets. It is significant for our industry that the only food group being consumed in recommended amounts is the Meat Group. This may be surprising to some of us, because the perception is there that the overall population is eating too much meat.

EAT II sought to determine if people's food perceptions matched the reality of their food choices according to the Food Guide Pyramid. Adult women, for example, believe they do well meeting the recommendations of the Pyramid, with the exception of the Bread Group. But their beliefs are different from what they really eat. They are underconsuming all of the food groups, including the Meat Group. They are over consuming fats, oils and sweets.

Adult men have a similar pattern. They also believe they meet the recommendations of the Pyramid, again with the exception of the Bread Group. The difference is that men are right on target when it comes to vegetables: they think they are eating 2.4 servings of vegetables, and they are. They are also close in the Meat Group: they think they eat 3.2 servings and they eat 2.8. But, like the women, men are eating many more fats, oils and sweets than they perceive.

What men eat compared to what they think they eat

	Perceived	Actual	Recommended
(Average Daily Servings)			
 Fats, Oils & Sweets	2.0	4.1	use sparingly
 Milk, Yogurt & Cheese	2.3	1.2	2-3
 Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs & Nuts	3.2	2.8	2-3
 Vegetables	2.4	2.4	3-5
 Fruits	2.1	1.0	2-4
 Bread, Cereal, Rice & Pasta	2.7	5.8	6-11

Recommended servings based on USDA/DHHS Food Guide Pyramid
Source: MRCA Information Services for the National Live Stock and Meat Board

A LITTLE ATTITUDE

What about attitudes and knowledge of eating habits? Adults were given the attitude knowledge component of the EAT II survey, and the results are interesting.

They tell us that trying to eat healthfully is too complicated and confusing. One third of adults agree that eating healthfully is confusing. Another third, however, didn't know how to answer the question with either "agree" or "disagree." That may mean that this one-third of the adult population believes they can figure out what the recommendations are and know how to eat a healthful diet. But it could also mean that a significant portion of Americans don't care about diet/health relationships.

The Meat Group is our main concern. What are people thinking in terms of meat intake? When asked the statement "I can have a healthier diet by not eating meat," one-third agreed that it was true. In perhaps an even stronger statement, "Adults should eliminate meat from their diet," we found that one-quarter of adults believe this is true.

CONSUMPTION: GETTING THE SPECIFICS

In the Meat Group, EAT II found that Americans are consuming 6.4 ounces per day, which falls in line with the Food Guide Pyramid recommendations of 2-3 servings and no more than 5-7 ounces per day. The survey also shows variety within the Meat Group as well. As a whole, meat constitutes 3.4 ounces a day. Beef tends to be the most popular meat, at 1.8 ounces a day. Average pork consumption was about 1.3 ounces per day, including fresh pork and processed meats.

According to the study, consumers are getting about 1,657 calories a day (not including alcohol). The Meat Group provides 419 of those calories, just 25% of the total amount. Calories from beef, pork, lamb, veal and processed meats provide 15% of the total calories the average consumer is getting today.

What about calories from fat, an important concern? Thirty percent of calories from fat in a diet per day is the recommendation. EAT II participants were given the statements, "No more than 30% of calories in a diet should come from fat" and "No more than 30% of the calories in a food should come from fat." The disturbing finding is that an equal number of Americans agree with both statements. They appear to understand that there is some "30%-fat" rule, but don't know how to apply it. Unfortunately, if the rule is applied to a "food", meat is

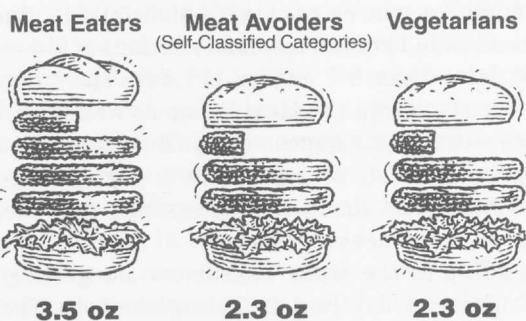
What women eat compared to what they think they eat

	Perceived	Actual	Recommended
(Average Daily Servings)			
 Fats, Oils & Sweets	1.8	3.2	use sparingly
 Milk, Yogurt & Cheese	2.3	1.0	2-3
 Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs & Nuts	2.8	1.9	2-3
 Vegetables	2.4	2.0	3-5
 Fruits	2.3	1.0	2-4
 Bread, Cereal, Rice & Pasta	2.7	4.6	6-11

Recommended servings based on USDA/DHHS Food Guide Pyramid
Source: MRCA Information Services for the National Live Stock and Meat Board

Who's Eating Meat?

Average daily intake of meat* based on a 14-day consumer food diary and food attitude survey



*Beef, pork, lamb, veal and other meats, both whole and processed

Source: MRCA Information Services for the National Live Stock and Meat Board

often eliminated.

As for fat intake, EAT II indicates that we're consuming 67 grams per day, which equals 37% of calories from fat—above the recommended level of 30 percent. But the Meat Group is not the only food source of fat calories. We get fat from all the foods groups. Even fruits and vegetables, naturally low in fat, can become high-fat foods, depending on preparation methods. Thirty-nine percent of the total fat comes from the Meat Group, meaning that more than 60% of fat is derived from the other foods sources in the diet.

Saturated fat is another area of concern for both health professionals and consumers. It is recommended that people should consume no more than 10% of calories from saturated fat.

The survey found that people are consuming 24 grams of saturated fat per day, equal to 13% of calories from saturated fat. Similar to the findings for total fat, EAT II shows that consumers are eating saturated fat from all of the food sources in the diet, not just the Meat Group.

Cholesterol is found only in products of animal origin. But nearly 40% of adults disagreed with that correct statement. On the consumption side, people are consuming an average of 257 milligrams of cholesterol per day, well within the recommendations of 300 milligrams a day.

One of the most important findings for the meat industry—and meat producers especially—is that 15% of calories come from beef, pork, lamb, veal and deli/prepared meats. These meats also provide significant amounts of protein, iron, zinc and B vitamins. It is important to get the message across that meat does not equal fat to consumers and that meat is a nutrient-dense food.

THE VEGETARIAN MYTH

Another critical area of concern for the meat industry is vegetarianism. Even though meat does not equal fat—and EAT II backs that up—there is a perception that it does. EAT II tried to determine who was eating meat and

who was not.

According to the study, 95% of the population call themselves "meat-eaters." Five percent say they are "meat avoiders". When asked the specific question if they "always, never, usually or sometimes" follow a vegetarian diet, just 2% said "always." Hence, within the 5% of people who termed themselves meat avoiders and the 2% of self-described vegetarians, there may be some overlap.

When actual consumption was determined, EAT II found that 99% of the population ate meat—defined as beef, pork, lamb, veal and processed meats—in a 14-week period. The self-described meat-eaters consume 3.5 ounces of meat a day, while the self-described avoiders and vegetarians eat 2.3 ounces.

As for the overall Meat Group, the meat-eaters are consuming about 6.7 ounces from the Meat Group a day. The avoiders are eating about 5.6 ounces from the entire Meat Group, and the vegetarians 5.5 ounces. A pattern thus emerges. The meat-eaters are actually eating more of the beef, pork, lamb, veal and processed meats than the avoiders and vegetarians, as well as more poultry. But the avoiders and vegetarians are eating more other foods from the Meat Group, including seafood, eggs, dry beans and nuts.

Since people seem to make food choices based on concerns about fat and saturated fat, EAT II explored meat consumption and fat intake as it relates to meat-eaters and avoiders. The meat-eaters are consuming 67 grams of fat per day, while meat-avoiders are consuming 54 and the vegetarians are consuming 61 grams.

It's important to put the entire diet of meat-eaters, avoiders and vegetarians in context. Overall, the meat-eaters are eating more food—and consuming more calories—than the other two groups. Meat-eaters are eating 37% calories from fat a day, while avoiders are eating 34% and vegetarians 35 percent. That is a surprising and important finding, showing that this is not a large difference between the groups. The groups also have similar intakes of saturated fat, but meat-eaters are consuming up to 20% more zinc than meat avoiders and self-described vegetarians.

SUMMARY

- The American diet is a "tumbling pyramid." with an inadequate base and a heavy tip of fats, oils and sweets.
- The Meat Group is the only group consumed in recommended amounts.
- Consumers are confused about dietary guidelines and how to implement them.
- There is a very small percentage of actual "vegetarians".
- Self-described vegetarians and "meat avoiders" actually do eat meat.

IMPLICATIONS: REBUILDING THE DIET

EAT II demonstrates that it is time to rebuild the American diet — to shift the tumbling pyramid to the recommended Food Guide Pyramid. EAT II also shows that eliminating foods from the diet are not effective nutrition strategies, given the confusion that exists among the American population.

We are proposing that we believe it is time to consider a new nutrition education strategy: one that focuses on rebuilding the American diet. We can accomplish this by helping Americans make optimal food choices rather than avoiding specific nutrients or foods.

This is a real opportunity for the meat industry because, for the first time, we have a study that demonstrates that meat is not the problem in the American diet. We simply are not eating adequately from the whole pyramid.

Meat does fit into the diet, just as fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy products do. The meat industry can lead this charge by developing a national nutrition partnership with health organizations and other commodity groups to shift this nutrition education paradigm into positive, optimal messages. We can help Americans actually reach their goal and meet national dietary guidelines.

THE BOGALUSA HEART STUDY

Data will be presented on the changes in meat consumption patterns of children in Bogalusa, LA over a 12-year period. The impact of meat consumption on nutritional quality and cardiovascular risk factors in young adults also will be discussed.

APPLICATION

Suggestions will be made on how to relate the results of these studies to the American consumer.

BACKGROUND

How do we lose such a large market share to poultry? There are two generally accepted reasons that have been used to explain the dramatic consumer preference shift: poultry quality production rules facilitated by vertical integration.

Industry at quality and consistency through genetics and management.

The issue behind these reasons is growing and difficult to argue. While there have been efforts to lower costs in the meat industry, quality and consistency are the real keys to regaining share.

They say they're...

Meat Eaters 95%

Meat Avoiders 5%

Vegetarians 2%

But they actually eat meat.



AVERAGE DAILY INTAKE OF MEAT

Meat Eaters 3.5 ounces

Meat Avoiders 2.3 ounces

Vegetarians 2.3 ounces

And when it comes to fat...

TOTAL AVERAGE DAILY INTAKE OF SATURATED FAT AND FAT

MEAT EATERS*

23.9 grams

67.4 grams

MEAT AVOIDERS*

19.1 grams

54.2 grams

VEGETARIANS*

22.4 grams

61.0 grams

* Self-Reported

