

# SECURING MEAT'S PAVING STONES IN NUTRITION'S 'YELLOW BRICK ROAD'

by

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It was in early spring that my section chairman, Lowell Walters, told me I had to forward a title to these remarks to Ken Johnson for the program record. Headlines of that week were on winter's ravages, particularly the condition of the highways and byways, in the nation's frozen snow belt. Potholes and paving were top stories in local papers and the national newsweeklies. So, while I know my analogous reference to "paving stones" for progress is appropriate, I shall try not to belabor it for the next 15 minutes!

Any thoughtful and informed observer of the contemporary food industry scene in America should agree with, in fact, endorse, Dr. Pearson's comments yesterday. He advised us that too often, much energy seems lost in attempts of industry, academic scientists and other offended parties to extinguish brush fires which seem to threaten the flanks of progress. Certainly, I endorse Al Pearson's views on this.

Yet, Al, I know you, too, and the informed faithful here assembled, see it is nonetheless true that the products of our industry are being absurdly questioned, put in the public stocks and pilloried while we are further obliged to listen to the endless, mindless refrains of the "new gospel." It is a litany that I fear is becoming institutionalized . . . that is: "Animal foods are bad for you . . . animal foods are inefficiently produced . . . consumption of animal foods deprives others of food," etc.

It is the gospel according to George of South Dakota. It is gospel preached by Ted of Massachusetts, and more recently (and a bit more absurdly) by Fred of Brooklyn. And alas, it even is being talked up by Robert of Kansas. Yet not a person among them understands the biochemistry of nutrition; or what the long term implications of this 'gospel' to human health or our agricultural economy are; and none has responded affirmatively to good advice which contradicts their gospel, from reputable meat and animal scientists, human nutritionists or medical research people.

They have, indeed, received such good advice, but have accepted none of it. None of them, that is, except, finally Charles of Illinois. When a doggedly determined pork producer from Illinois was turned away as a "vested interest" (instead of heeded as the thoughtful provocateur he was) by an unhearing

Senator, last spring (of 1977), he set about exercising his constitutional franchise as a constituent. After months of effort, and with assistance from other agricultural sources in the state, farmer George Brauer's work came to fruit when Senator Charles Percy developed cognizance of the problem of the glaring failures of "Dietary Goals for the United States." He wrote a divergent opinion in the preamble to the so-called second edition of "Dietary Goals" . . . an opinion supporting the view that the original edition, whatever its noble intent, fell far short of rational, practical solutions in helping the American public establish reasonably achievable goals for individual optimum nutrition. It was in the original, you'll recall, that addeleated advice to "reduce meat consumption" was among other simplified solutions and misrepresentations which were given the dignity of the U.S. Senate's imprimatur.

What has all this to do with the "Yellow Brick Road" to nutrition and the setting of meat's "paving stones"? Is not the document entitled "Dietary Goals for the U.S.," now 16 months since its introduction, forgotten, its impact on the wane?, one might ask. Hardly! "Dietary Goals" has become the indelible manifesto of the nutrition left. It is the omnipresent and even the all-knowing reference for "proving" the need to change America's eating patterns and food availability. It is, for our industry, indeed, for the progress of nutrition science, a man-made roadblock.

Let me refer to an editorial prepared by the editor of NUTRITION TODAY this past November, reviewing the inanity of current fashion in nutrition as exemplified by "Dietary Goals." We mailed it to AMSA members, but it bears emphasis.

"One thing — and little else — is clear after reading the dietary goals that Senator McGovern and his staff want the nation to pursue: Politicians make poor scientists, and scientists make poor politicians.

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"In this document, 'Dietary Goals for the United States,' the politicians would have us believe that they have just discovered the yellow brick road to everlasting life. They tell us that if we will just eat less tender meat, fewer eggs, less sugar, and go virtually without salt, the chances that we will die of cancer will be lessened by 20%, and of heart and vascular disease by 25%. Infant mortality will be cut in half and decaying teeth will become a thing of the past.

"This is quite a rosy picture. There's only one thing missing. They tell how to save ourselves but don't say what for. What *will* we succumb to? Are we to be left, like the Irish mother who, hearing her son, a freshly minted physician, describe the wonders of modern medicine, exclaimed, 'The Saints preserve us; soon me lad, ye'll be takin' away me dyin'!

"Perhaps the solace the Senators offer mankind was neatly packaged by one of the witnesses, a physician of national stature, who, apparently intoxicated by the small of the Senate hearing chamber and the whirl of the TV cameras, said, '*My goal in life is to have people stay young in old age and die free of disease.*'

(Friends, let me repeat that phrase which seems to me to be straight out of the Wizard of Oz: 'My goal in life is to have people stay young in old age and die free of disease.')

"No wonder that, with witnesses uttering such absurdities, the committee wound up with a document loaded with inaccuracies and brimming with hopes that have only the slightest likelihood of being fulfilled.

"The science of nutrition, for all its fascination, is not yet to a point where it can promise to be a panacea. Even with a reasonable doubt, there is as yet no sound evidence that a change in diet will materially alter the course of the "plague of killer diseases" — to use the florid phrase politicians seem to like when discussing atherosclerosis, cancer and the like. There's reason for research but not for conclusion.

"For another thing, as they dabble in science, the politicians are overselling nutrition. The testimony they have heard appears to have convinced them that nutrition is not really a young science of enormous complexity that is just beginning to receive attention. They seem to think that facts sturdy enough to support weighty political proposals have been developed. Trouble is, they

haven't. We are only on the threshold of discovery in nutrition. Nowhere in the testimony drawn up by the McGovern staff in preparing this report do we see scientists expressing reservations about how little we know about the food we eat. Witnesses, and especially those who advised the staff, seem to have ignored the fact that evidence is mounting that even atherosclerosis — the one disease for which there's a great deal of evidence indicating it might be diet-related — may, after all, turn out to have nothing whatever to do with eating habits. These men and women would have done the Senators a great service had they told them that in science one has to be as ready to unlearn as to learn.

"To be sure, many of the Senators' advisors, and others who endorse the goals, acknowledge that we do not have 'absolute proof' to substantiate the recommendations in these proposals. They contend that, despite this lack we should go right ahead and spend the billions of dollars and the untold effort necessary to make the American people change their diet. They say that so many people are dying of cancer, heart disease, and other afflictions that, 'We gotta do something!'

"Do we 'gotta do something'? Is our national health so bad that we must take a chance with such flimsy evidence as we now have?"

Let me depart from that lengthy editorial text at this point to paraphrase and reiterate the points. The entire supporting philosophy for "Dietary Goals" and for all of the diatribes against the food and meat industry related to this and otherwise, have at their basepoint the belief that America eats a pathogenic diet. The introduction to "Dietary Goals" itself made note that it was imperative the American government quickly get together with private industry and the educational sector to put the public on a better, right track toward life-saving nutritional habits.

It was this determination that the editor of NUTRITION TODAY saw as a kind of fantasy, a "yellow brick road."

And yet, this claim, that changes in the U.S. diet in the past 50 years are responsible for the 'epidemic of diseases' cannot be supported by health statistics, according to Harper of Wisconsin and others. This rationale underlying the "Dietary Goals" cannot withstand critical evaluation.

Life expectancy, Harper notes, has increased 20 years during this century. Ten percent of the population is now over 65 compared with just 4 percent in

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1900. Death rates from heart disease and stroke, on an age-adjusted basis, have been declining for over 20 years. Overall death rate from cancer, on an age-adjusted basis, has increased slightly, but largely owing to an increase in lung cancer attributable to smoking. Even life expectancy at age 65 has increased slightly during this century. Employed Americans, including the elderly and those who suffer accidents, lose on the average only 5 to 6 days from work per year.

These are the statistics of a healthy nation. The Population Reference Bureau concluded that improvement in nutrition was one of the important determinants in the decline in mortality rates during this century. Fancy that! Improvement in nutrition!

The Secretary of Agriculture, in a speech given at the Community Nutrition Institute-Family Circle-Food Marketing Institute conference just three weeks ago, said, unmistakably, that the singular interests of commodity producers could not be entrusted with development of proper nutritional goals. How does it feel, fellow reciprocators, to be labeled as enmeshed hopelessly in your tangled bias; to having so strong a tie to your paycheck that you are unable to see the truth; to be so engrained with the spirit of your fathers on the farm that you care not of the public good . . . your credo: to hell with the commonwealth?

The meat industry, along with dairymen, egg producers, even poultry meat producers and yes, the vegetable farmers, too, all have been set aside as self-serving, not to be listened to — and we are read the Gospel according to Bob 'n Carol 'n Ted 'n Fred, telling us, assuring us, that there is a greater good to be served. How, indeed, does it feel?

But it may be that there's no force in the meat industry or elsewhere in the food sector that's going to change this Dietary Goals mentality. It is moving like a self-propelled juggernaut down the road, paving in front of itself. It is clear that the meat industry must set its own stones.

As I sat in this meeting hall yesterday I saw and heard two of the paving stones I came here to talk to you about, being set in front of us. Both Dr. Pearson and Dr. Jensen offered this assembly clear sets of facts and data which we who work in and promote the nutritional and biological sciences must get more firmly placed in the nutrition roadbed.

Is meat the 'ideal' food? Pearson says, no, of course not. There's not a scientist in this room who'd support such a statement. But is it a dandy nutrition package offering the best or near-best of what it offers and often in grand volume? Yes! Is meat time-proven in

man's diet? Yes! Securing that paving stone in the minds of fellow scientists in other disciplines may be one of the very most important achievements that reciprocators here could hope to achieve in the next year.

Is diet a sure-cure for what ails mankind? Change your diet, deliver yourself from atherosclerosis? Jensen says, no, of course not. Again, there's not a scientist in this room who should support such a statement. But the idea of dietary manipulation has been laid on so heavily and spread so thickly that I fear even meat industry scientists sometimes may be caught up in the fashion of such thinking. We know that others are. Let us secure the Jensen stone out there both publicly, and politically.

Another paving stone or two were suggested in the remarks of two earlier speakers here, Virgil Rosendale and Robert Rust. It is the awakening of our own industry—from the grasslands, pastures and slotted floors to the packinghouse trade — to an understanding that our products may be imperfect. I interpreted the remarks of the two to mean that, if anything stands in the way of progress, it is, in part, the sluggishness of our honored and honorable, but tradition-bound industries, the inclination to resist change.

If the public does, indeed, want a leaner beef, or a 'hamburger steer,' then let's figure out how to create it, keeping the gustatory pleasures that today's critter offers, while revising its genetic profile. Surely, a progressive industry will develop the solutions.

How about a better pig? My friends, we already have a better pig! Let's get more farmers producing it and spend more time telling both medical science plus John and Jane Q. Public all about it, its pleasures for the palate and benefits to nutrition.

Still another stone for our road is the program underway this past year, with the National Live Stock and Meat Board, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, seeking to develop a massive nutrient profile for beef, pork and lamb through a nutrient composition study. The beef portion of the project is currently underway; the pork portion, with National Pork Producers Council cooperating, is on the drawing board, so to speak; and lamb is in the future. Completion of this large scale project will identify the "missing" information concerning meat nutrition values so misunderstood by the public and even by nutritionists and dietitians.

There are a score more such stones within our reach and which science, commerce and some of our government agencies can lift into place, if only we'll lift these loads together.

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It was not my purpose here today to stretch the paving stone analogy to boredom by enumerating each of them, but to stimulate this most important of all meat industry conference group to recognize that there are real, not fake, potholes in our road; that they can be correctly and ably filled by our own industry . . . indeed must be filled and paved. They are the concern of all of us.

If we accomplish that — cognition and action — then the “Yellow Brick Road” won’t be a food ac-

tivist’s fancy, but instead the path toward profitability for industry commerce; toward achievement for our sciences and those who practice them; and continuing toward the delivery of public responsibility with food and nutrition benefits to our marketplace.

Sometimes, Al Pearson, I wonder if we’re not borderline paranoiacs, worrying needlessly. But then, I recall, too, the fellow who said: “Just because I’m paranoid, doesn’t mean that someone out there isn’t trying to get me!”