Section B

Food Trends and Meat Consumption
New, Emerging Foods

- Sweeteners
  - Cane sugar
  - High-fructose corn syrup
- Animal fat
- Accompanying decline in legume and complex carbohydrates
### Is Meat Consumption Instinctive?

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Why Do We Prefer Different Foods?

- What WE eat is better than what others eat
- Inherent superiority
- Transcends time and place by virtue of its intrinsic deliciousness

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“Nutritionists know that the palate is trained, that taste and smell are subject to cultural control. Yet for lack of other hypotheses, the notion persists that what makes an item of food acceptable is some quality inherent in the thing itself. Present research into palatability tends to concentrate on individual reactions to individual items. It seeks to screen out cultural effects as so much interference. Whereas…the cultural controls on perception are precisely what needs to be analyzed.”

— Anthropologist Mary Douglas, 1978
Culture

- What transcends time and place is human capacity to perceive a particular food in a particular way at a particular time and to associate from it.

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Gusanos de Maguey (Cactus Worms) by Refracted Moments. Some rights reserved.
Ads Sponsored by the Beef Check-Off Program
Meat in the American Diet

- Soldiers were given meat 21 times per week during WWII
Beef Consumption in the U.S. (Animal Heads)

- 1930
  - 48.9 pounds per capita per year
- 1931–1941
  - Averaged less than 55 pounds
- 1941–1951
  - Stayed greater than 60 pounds
- 1964
  - Reached more than 100 pounds
- 1976
  - 127.2 pounds
- 2001
  - 94.3 pounds
Why Did Meat Consumption Increase So Much?

- Food expectations of returning soldiers
- Deprivation of civilians
Trends in per Capita U.S. Meat Consumption

- Retail, boneless weight

Source: USDA.
Rise in Popularity of Beef

- Pork more efficient and less costly to produce in the 19th century
- After civil war, pastures used for cattle
- Refrigeration allowed preservation
- Beef could be prepared and cooked more easily than pork
- Culture of fast food and automobiles
- Cradle-to-grave marketing
Sexual Code of Food?

- Americans believe in “a sexual code of food which must go back to the Indo-European identification of cattle or increasable wealth with virility”
Beef vs. Carbohydrate Calories

- 8 million calories from sugar cane
  - 1 acre of good land
- 8 million calories from beef
  - 135 acres of good land
- 284 million pounds of beef imported from Central America in 1972
Why Do We Want Beef?

- We tout beef as energy food
- Eating fast is compulsory and laudable
- Beliefs about proper nutrition for soldiers
- Associations with masculinity
- We want beef because we are programmed to want beef!
Summary: Main Points

1. How culture—rather than nature—provides the human background for food choice
2. What is meant when we speak of “natural food”?
3. What does “natural human food” really mean?
4. Whether a basic human cuisine has evolved in broad outline in human history
5. Where protein fits into the overall picture of human food choice