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You ARE what you eat

The politics of food in America

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Contributors

During the Nixon administration, Earl Butz, then Secretary of Agriculture coined the concept of "Food Power." How the most basic requirement of human life has become the object of power politics, rather than the domain of the country farmer, is the subject of the anthropology class, World Food Supply, taught by Dr. Judith Hoch-Smith.

Since the mid 1930's, small rural farms have gradually diminished from 6.8 million to 2.7 million by the early 1970's. Now, small independent farmers produce only a small percentage of the total food supply; The remainder being under the control of agribusiness corporations.

Mammoth, diversified corporations with heavy political clout in Washington, now tie the farmer to tight contracts, which require him not only to sell the corporation his crops at their price, but also to purchase costly equipment and petro-chemical fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, and hybrid seeds.

Many individual farmers cannot compete and are obliged to abandon farming, as in California where agribusiness controls 70 per cent of the farms. The consumer, dependent on agribusiness, becomes subject to oligopolistic limited food selection, price fixing, declining nutrition and ominous chemical hazard.

Another aspect of the political food game is that protein in American culture is construed to mean only meat. During this century, powerful meat and dairy lobbyists have succeeded in brainwashing the consumer and government into believing that more animal protein is not only better but the best part of our diet.

After World War II, our individual meat consumption in America rose from 58 pounds per year to 116 pounds as of 1972. Americans now eat 254 pounds of meat, poultry, and eggs a year per person.

Generally, most civilizations have long fared well on staple vegetable diets in which complex carbohydrates (grains/tubers) complimented by legumes, produce a balanced, nutritional protein. The American Indian diet of corn, beans, and squash is an example of such a diet.

In order to produce enough meat to fill the requirements of current American demand, American farmers plant an astounding 50 per cent of their total acreage in feed crops. U.S. livestock are fed 120 million tons of feed grains each year. Consequently, the average American now consumes the equivalent of 2,000 pounds of grain and soybeans annually, 90 per cent of which is in the form of meat, poultry and eggs.

But in developing countries where most grains and soybeans are used directly as food, the average person consumes only about 400 pounds of grain per year. Hence the birth of one meat eating American has the same effect on world food resources as the birth of

five children in India, Africa, or South America.

Grains and soybeans now grown in the United States as feed for animals, used instead for human consumption could supply a large percentage of the world's protein needs.

Yet another dimension of the food problem in America is junk food. Soft drinks, sugared cereals, cookies, candies, etc., devoid of necessary nutrition and abounding in empty calories have become more prevalent in the average American diet than nutritional fruit and vegetables. The average American eats 150 pounds of sugar a year; empty calories causing debilitating effects, obesity, tooth decay, and contributing to diabetes.

Junk food is systematically incorporated into the American diet through food industry's proven advertising techniques, all part of our free enterprise system which allows processors to proceed unrestrained and sometimes abetted by the United States Government which is in turn coerced by food industry lobbyists.

There are 32,000 food processors in the United States, some multi-national, but only 100 of these make three quarters of the profits. Fifty of that group get 61 per cent of the profits, and place 90 per cent of the television advertising viewed by the American public.

Processors, therefore, have an almost omnipotent control in determining items for sale, quality and price

of food in the average American diet. Four cereal firms alone account for 90 per cent of the market.

Much freedom is allowed processors to adulterate foods with additives for greater shelf life, for synthetic flavor, color and taste, etc., utilizing many inadequately tested chemicals, presenting health and nutrition hazards of unknown proportions.

Today's foods contain more than \$485,000,000 worth of food additives. In 1970 each of us consumed approximately five pounds of these chemicals.

The American diet frequently creates malaise and deficiencies, forcing the consumer to seek relief at the doctor's or with pharmaceuticals marketed by the same companies that manufacture food additives incorporated into almost every food product on the market, and processors exert heavy pressure here.

Government ideally should act as watchdog in the consumers best interest, but power and greed of concentrated big business has prevailed through infiltration of government, lobbying, bribing and promotion of legislation in its favor, to the detriment of the consumer. Agribusiness, huge conglomerates and supermarket chains have been under FTC and Justice Department investigations in recent years for improper practices, price fixing, and elimination of competition, but no major decision against their activities has yet been achieved.

Some isolated investigative congressional committees have done good service to the consumer, such as The Select Senate Committee on Nutrition and

Human Needs, which came out in 1977 with the guidelines and goals for improved diet and health of the American people. That Senate Committee, chaired by George McGovern and verified by medical and educational authorities, recommended an increase of complex carbohydrate consumption, a decrease of meat, high fat foods, eggs, sugar and salt. Meat dairy, sugar industries, junk food processors, related food industries and the AMA indignantly condemned the report, and not surprisingly the Committee recently modified its wording.

Our dinner in America is close to being controlled from seeds to ingestion by large conglomerates. Political pressure by the consumer is needed at every level of government in order to break the monopolistic grasp of these businesses. If a grass roots food movement is to develop, then every consumer must realize that change begins at home; in this case in our own bodies.

There can be no question that what we eat turns directly into what we are, and that at every mealtime we make a political as well as a cultural choice in deciding what to eat. We can continue the American pattern of overconsumption of animal foods, sugar, coffee, and chemically flavored, overpriced, processed foods which make us overweight, anxious, depressed, fatigued and ill, or we can learn to provide the most nutritious and delicious foods that we can for our bodies while at the same time boycotting highly processed foods urged on us by big companies with the

profit motive as the central concern.

The world food supply class has devoted part of its time to natural food processing and preparation demonstrations. These sessions have included the preparation of grain, legumes, seasonal vegetables,

locally grown when possible, and sea vegetables. Several people in the class had never seen an acorn squash, millet, had not tasted brown rice or soy bean products such as fermented soy sauce or tofu.

Imagine a situation in which a country is the world's largest producer of wheat, yet its citizens have never tasted bread. This is precisely the situation in America, which is the world's largest producer of soybeans. However, most people in the United States have never tasted soybeans or soybean products, because the bulk of the non-exported soy crop is fed to animals.

Several students in the class are planning a whole foods day on Friday, March 3, in the FIU cafeteria.

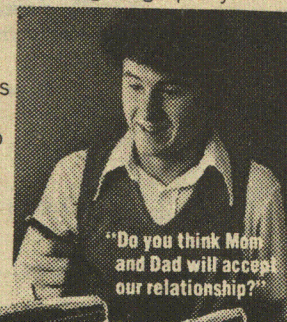
Many of the foods which will be available were purchased through the FIU whole foods cooperative, and the collards being served were grown in the FIU organic gardens.

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Federation of Cuban Students
Fridays 12:30 p.m. UH 316.

Live Entertainment in the Rat.
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International Students come to UH
213E at 12:30 p.m., every Thursday.
International Week is coming up!!!

Student Art Association meets in
VH 131 at 12:30 p.m. every Tuesday.

SFIU meets Monday - UH 212D -
12:30 p.m. - Planning the
International Diplomatic Gathering
and International Week.

All males to compete in the wet-
short contest during the Gong Show
please contact UH 310 ext. 2121.

"Do Dead Humans Have Rights?"
Lecture guest speaker Dr. Raymond
A. Bellotti, Feb. 28 at 12:30 p.m. in
PC 211. Sponsored by Philosophy
and Religion Assoc.

HOST Luncheon, March 1st at
12:30 p.m. - OE 148. Guest speaker
Mr. Halverson, Airport Marriott Hotel.
\$2.50 tickets available now. Contact
DM 470 - Karen at ext. 2591.

sga news

Movie of the Week

"Three Women"

Thursday 12:30 p.m. and
Friday 7 p.m. in UH 140.

One representative needed for the
Handicapped Accessibility Commit-
tee. Students interested contact ext.
2121 or come to UH 310.

Free Tax Assistance: UH Building,
March 7, 8, 10, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
April 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12.

Feb. 22 Meeting
1) Hadar and the American Institute
of Architects are the latest
organizations on campus.

2) New Associates
Dave Tracy, Tony Asbury - Tech.
Tharion Abtahi - Education.

3) Guidelines for proxies were set -
More info in UH 310

4) NCR legislation was recinded.
\$20 will be charged to vendors.

Mary Volansek-Clark spoke from
Student Affairs Adv. Committee RE.
Transcripts showing Grade of
repeated course.

Elections Commissioner position open.
Salary \$45. Interested students
come to UH 150 at 11 a.m. - SGA
meeting.

Seats open:
1 School of Hotel, Food and Travel

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