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## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

# Where's the beef?

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In the latest issue of the USDA magazine, *Foreign Agriculture*, it is noted that the U.S. per capita consumption of beef has fallen significantly in the 1980s. Recent USDA figures show that beef consumption per capita was 94.4 pounds annually in 1976; it has fallen to 79.1 pounds in 1985. For the first time in the history of the country, it appears that Americans will eat more poultry than beef in 1986.

Where's the beef? The U.S. Department of Agriculture should know.

The number of cattle and calves in the United States has been declining throughout the 1980s, and rapidly declining in the past two years. In 1970, there were 112.37 million cattle in the country. The number went up to 132 million in 1975. However, today, the number has fallen back to 112 million, despite population growth. This means that there was .55 of a cow per person in 1970, but today there is barely .46 of a cow per person.

The same picture exists for pork. The numbers of hogs and pigs has been declining steadily in the last 20 years, and plunging in the last year. In 1963, for example, there were 59.8 million hogs and pigs. This number was sustained until 1980-81, and then began falling. Today there are only 48.8 million hogs and pigs.

In 1970, there was about .4 of a pig for every person in the nation. Today there is about .2 of a pig.

The imports of beef and pork have propped up the meat supply temporarily. But the real state of shortages, currently masked by both imports and the media propaganda telling you to "not eat meat," will soon be very evident.

The reasons for the meat output decline lie in the mass bankruptcy or voluntary close-down of cattle and hog producers, under the combined pressure of debt burdens and imports. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have imposed orders on Third World and other nations to export meat—for example beef from Mexico, Canada, and Australia, or pork from Canada and Denmark—to the point of undercutting domestic producers so they must shut down.

Meanwhile, Mexico and other nations have been impoverished in their own food supply, to the point of nutrition collapse and disease outbreaks.

The United States—potentially the largest producer and exporter of meat and herd technology—accounts for only 3% of the world's beef trade. The recent years of IMF-dictated trade patterns has put the United States into a position similar to the last days of the Roman Empire. During that time, Rome and its immediate territory became so decrepit, the empire relied on food "imports" from conquered lands to sustain itself in the home country.

The U.S. beef cattle and hog breeding stock numbers are shrinking at a rate that guarantees severe shortages in the near future. The calf crop is one gauge of this. In 1970, the calf crop was 45.9 million; in 1975, it was 50.2 million. In 1986, the estimate for the calf crop is 40.1 million.

The hog breeding stock in 1963 was 9 million sows. Today, the number is down to 6.4 million. Although the average number of pigs per litter has gone up from 7.1 to about 7.7, this is not enough to compensate for the decline in breeding stock.

The USDA has been part of the "anti-meat" lobby during this time period, altering their recommended amounts of meat in the diet, in deference to bogus fears about harmful effects. The scientific reasons for maintaining animal protein in the diet, especially for children, are well known, but ignored by the USDA guidebooks.

In this atmosphere, the beef producers have taken the step of attempting to counter the anti-meat lobby by conducting their own pro-meat campaign. Beef producers are adopting new merchandising techniques including brand names such as "natural" for products that come from animals without anti-biotics, or "light" for beef which contains 25% less fat than other types of meat.

Campaigns which counter anti-meat food-fadism are useful. But this does not get to the core of the problem. That requires action in two areas.

First, there are food cartel collaborators of the IMF/World bank that have desired the reduction in meat output and availability, in order to gain further control over meat supplies. For example, the nation's top two beef processors—Iowa Beef Processors (IBP), owned by Armand Hammer's Occidental Petroleum, and Excell, owned by Cargill, the grain giant—dominate all beef supplies in many parts of the country.

Secondly, most American households are not eating meat with their "meat and potatoes" anymore, because they are unemployed and can't afford it. To use this depression as justification for allowing meat output potential to decline—as the USDA is doing—is disastrous.



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