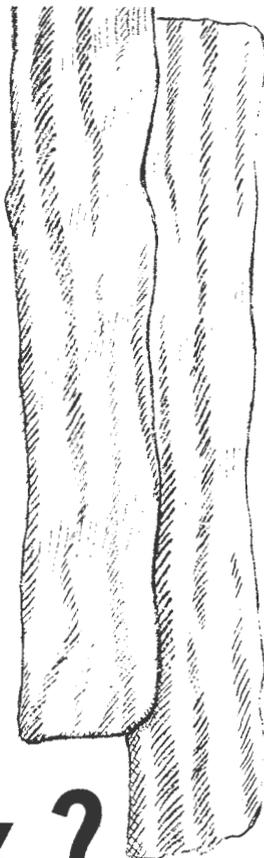


How Often Do Households Use Pork?



This article reports a supplementary study to others made of consumer preferences for and uses of pork. This one deals, not with amounts or quality, but with the frequency of pork use among a sample of urban households.

by **Ardis McMechan**

PORK PRODUCTION has long been a mainstay of Iowa agriculture. But some recent studies have shown that Americans are eating less pork per person than they used to. Still other studies have been made of consumer preferences for certain physical characteristics and other qualities of pork.

To obtain some related information, we studied a group of households in Des Moines to find out *how often* they included pork in their meals at home. We didn't try to measure either the actual number of pounds or the quality characteristics of the pork used. We were interested mainly in the *frequency* with which pork was used in meals at home—regardless of actual amounts.

We obtained information on the

characteristics of different households in Des Moines, on the kinds of pork they used and on how often they served it. Our survey covered 499 urban households in 1955. The results don't necessarily reflect the state as a whole or other urban areas. But they do give us an indication of how often pork is used by different families in the state's largest city.

Among other things, we wanted to find answers from these households to questions like these: Did income make a difference in how often pork was used? Did the ages of the family members influence the frequency of pork use? Did large families use pork more often than smaller ones? What kinds of pork were most often used?

Here are some of the answers we found for these kinds of questions. Bear in mind that we're interested in frequency rather than quantity of pork used and that a high or low frequency in using

pork for family meals doesn't necessarily reflect the relative amounts actually used.

Do families with high incomes use pork less often than families with lower incomes?

Yes and no. The households were divided into four nearly equal groups according to their income. The groupings were: highest incomes, upper middle incomes, lower middle incomes and lowest incomes. Both the lowest and highest income groups reported that they included pork in their meals less often than either of the two middle groups. The high and low groups, however, used meat of any kind less often in their meals than did the people of the middle incomes.

In choosing meat for household meals, what kinds were included most often?

Pork—particularly cured pork—was included far more frequently in meals at home rather than either beef, poultry or fish. "Cured pork," however, includes many breakfast-type meats or meat products which may consist of relatively small servings.

What kinds of pork did the households use?

Though pork is sold in a number of forms, we grouped the responses about forms into three classes: fresh, cured and specialty. Fresh pork included such items as chops and roasts. Cured pork included smoked varieties such as bacon, ham and sausage. The specialty pork classification included all kinds of pork products which contained at least 75 percent pork but had been processed in some way—such as luncheon meat and liver sausage.

What households used specialty pork most often?

The households with children, especially children 11 years old or younger, used specialty pork more often than did households with only adults. About 80 percent of the households with children used specialty pork in the meals at home, while about 55 percent of the households with adults only reported this.

Who used cured pork most frequently?

Cured pork was included in home meals more often than either

ARDIS McMECHAN is assistant extension editor. The information reported in this article is based on her research as a graduate student in home management.

fresh or specialty pork. About a third of all households were relatively high in their use of cured pork. Households composed of adults only — the group which tended to use all meats less frequently than other households—came up to the average in their use of cured pork.

What about fresh pork? How often was it used?

Fresh pork was included in home meals less often than any of the other forms of pork. Households with children were more likely to use fresh pork than households with only adults. There was some indication that households with one or more children over 11 years of age used fresh pork in their home meals relatively often.

Did there seem to be a "taste factor" present in pork use?

Relatively frequent use of cured and fresh pork was reported by about a third and a fourth of all households, respectively—regardless of their income, food expenditure, household size or make-up. Medium rates of use of specialty pork were reported by about a third of all households. In other words, a certain portion of this sample of urban households seemed simply to like pork and to use it regularly — regardless of household characteristics.

As households used other meats more often, did they use pork less frequently?

Not as far as cured pork was concerned. But the use of fresh and specialty pork did decline as households included other meat in their meals more often.

Was there a relationship between the amount of money spent for food and frequency of pork use?

The middle income groups — who had food expenditures averaging \$16-\$24 a week—were more inclined than others to use each of the different kinds of pork. Frequent use of fresh and specialty pork also was reported by households whose food costs averaged more than \$24 a week. For households who spent less than \$16 a week for food, pork as well as other meats were used less often than in households where the food expenditures were higher.

What about the size of the household?

Large households were more likely to use meats most often in general, while small households tended to limit their use of meat. But the small households reported about average inclusion of cured pork and meats other than pork.

What difference did the presence of children make?

Households which included children had a greater inclination to use all kinds of meat more frequently than did those households with just adults. Specialty pork was used more often in households with children younger than 11 years while fresh pork was used relatively often in those households with older children. Cured pork use was about average for these households.

Which households were less inclined to use pork in their meals at home?

Households reporting lower incomes didn't use either cured or specialty pork as often as did the others. The people with high incomes were also less inclined to use specialty pork, but they used cured pork about as often as the households reporting middle incomes. The use of fresh pork, on the other hand, wasn't related to the income levels of the people in this study. Low food expenditures were associated with less frequent use of all pork and other meat types.

Small households and those composed of adults only were less inclined to use either fresh or specialty pork products — though they didn't differ meaningfully from the others in the use of cured pork. Households of adults only were made up of people older, on the average, than households with children. These adult households used beef, poultry and fish less often than the others. But these people reported eating out more frequently and no information was available on the meats used when they ate away from home. It's also possible that with children no longer present in the household, these older folks may place less emphasis on the importance of including meat in their diets.

What had people heard about the health value of pork?

We were also interested in finding out what these Des Moines households had heard about the health value of pork. The comments that were made in response to the question on what had been heard about health values were grouped into those which were "heard nothing" (about 40 percent), those comments which were generally unfavorable, such as "hard to digest," (about 30 percent) and those generally favorable, such as "high in energy," (about 30 percent).

What does it mean altogether?

Pork of any kind, and cured pork in particular, were included in home meals more often than were any of the other meats studied. Fresh pork was used less often than either cured or specialty. But frequency of use doesn't necessarily reflect actual amounts or pounds used. For example, the cured and specialty pork categories include more of the kinds of meats likely to be served in small quantities—such as bacon or sandwich meats — while fresh pork use might be assumed to provide a full serving at each meal.

The frequency of using cured pork didn't necessarily mean less frequent use of either beef, poultry or fish. But as households included meats other than pork in their meals more often, the rate of using fresh and specialty pork declined.

The households' incomes, food costs and size and composition of family were closely associated with one another. As incomes increased so did food expenditures and size of households. There were more children over 11 years of age in the higher income groups. The lower levels of income included primarily households of one or two adults who spent relatively lower amounts of money for food.

A certain proportion of the households used pork regularly regardless of income level, food expenditures, size or composition of family. Households consisting only of adults tended to use pork less often, while families with youngsters tended to include it in their meals at home more often.