

HOLIDAY EATING IS AFFORDABLE

In my last article I referred to an article written by Cyndie Sirekis, a director of news services with the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Sirekis referenced the annual AFBF Thanksgiving dinner survey, first conducted in 1986, when the average cost of a Thanksgiving meal for a family of 10 was \$28.74. This year's average cost of \$38.10 is equivalent to \$18.99 in 1986 inflation-adjusted dollars, meaning the real cost of the Thanksgiving dinner has declined 34 percent in the last 20 years.

As expected, I received quite a lot of feedback from readers. Some suggested I have done very little food shopping in recent years, for if I had, I would know how expensive food really is. I readily admit spending limited time in grocery stores, but still shop often enough to observe an impressive variety of affordable and safe food products. Our abundance is unparalleled in the history of the world. It is a fact that U.S. consumers have never spent a lower percentage of their disposable annual income on food.

Another reader sent a thoughtful response reminding me that today's meals are not only cheaper, they are also more convenient. Most of the preparation has already gone into the food before we buy it at the supermarket.

We don't need to catch (or shoot) the turkey, dress it, and prepare the stuffing before putting it in the oven. The time was, when we wanted green peas for Thanksgiving, we picked the peas in the summer time, shelled them, canned them, put them in the cellar, and opened them when we needed them. We no longer need to mix up the ingredients of a pie crust, roll them out on the bread board and form them into a pie tin. To make the pumpkin pie filling, we no longer need to slice up the pumpkin, peel off the skin and cut the meat into pieces for cooking. The cost of all this processing is included in the price we pay for the food, and it is still more affordable than it was 20 years ago!

The remarkable thing about all this is that no person, or group of persons on this earth knows how to produce and process that Thanksgiving meal and deliver it to our dinner table at the day and hour that we are ready to eat it. It is accomplished by hundreds, or more likely thousands, of individuals acting in their own best interests and in that process meeting the needs and wants of other people.

No person and no group of persons knows how to produce that meal from start to finish. No one or group is capable of directing that food production process, from the manufacture of the tools the farmer and processor uses, through the production processes and the transportation and distribution to the supermarket where we pick it up from the shelf or freezer cabinet. Those countries that have tried to control the food production and distribution through central planning have failed miserably.

Our capitalistic free market system, working in accordance with the natural law, has provided the impressive abundance that we enjoy.

I recall a statement often used by the late Jerry Linton, former Congressman from Missouri. Linton was a polished speaker and raised outstanding Charolais beef cattle. Whenever someone complained to him about the rising cost of food he would say: "Compared to what?" Virtually everything we buy has dramatically increased in cost over the years. A gallon of gasoline, a new vehicle, a house or an education are specific examples. Food costs too high? Compared to what?

American farmers and ranchers continue to provide affordable food for consumers during the holidays and throughout the year. Therefore, please enjoy this good food, festive holiday company and have a wonderful Christmas season.