

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### Where's the beef? It ain't there

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**Y**ou may have seen the new "eat beef" TV ads, begun this month in an attempt to promote more consumption of red meat. James Garner and others have been hired to remind you to eat steak. The campaign is funded by cattlemen through a national cattle sales check-off system that amounts to a self-tax. Similar to the "drink milk," campaign, and the "eat pork" campaign, the premise of the drive is that you, the public, are not eating beef because you had overlooked its benefits and needed reminding.

About the only direct beneficiaries of these efforts are the media and promotion staff who get paid for promoting a cause that should be self-evident. In fact, Americans are eating less nutritious diets—less beef, milk, pork and other animal protein foods—for two simple reasons: 1) Millions of households cannot afford high quality foods because of unemployment and depression. 2) Years of environmentalism and kook ideas have turned some of the public into food faddists.

It is a sick irony that the cattlemen, dairymen, and pork producers have been conned into taxing themselves to promote their products, that ought to "be a natural" to sell. Moreover, the irony in the situation is that if people went out and bought and ate what they should, there would be huge shortages.

The number of meat animals (cattle—steers, heifers, and stags; calves, hogs, sheep, and lambs) overall in the country has gone down from over 42 million in 1976, to 36 million in 1986. This is a huge decline in the amount of meat produced per capita. Meat im-

ports, encouraged under State Department and International Monetary Fund policies, have somewhat compensated to fill our "meat cases," while at the same time impoverishing the diet in the exporting country, and driving American producers out of production.

Although poultry production has gone up over the same time period, nevertheless, the dietary requirement for red meat is not being met.

The decline in meat animal production shows up markedly in the so-called current grain surplus. This is not a surplus at all, but a pile-up of grain that has nowhere to go. It is not going to feed growing livestock numbers domestically, nor to world trade flows, shrunken drastically in the last five years.

The domestic use of feedgrains (corn, sorghum, and others) has dropped from 141.2 million metric tons in 1972, to 131.8 million tons in 1985, while exports of feedgrains have fallen from 71 million metric tons in 1979, to 38 million tons in 1985. It is little wonder that livestock feedgrain stocks appear to be in "surplus," and are deteriorating under inadequate storage and handling conditions. Starting in 1982, feedgrain stocks went up from well under 100 million metric tons a year of "ending stocks," to levels far over 100 million tons. In 1985, there were 128 million metric tons of feedgrains as ending stocks—reflecting the fall in domestic and export utilization. From 1960 to 1980, feedgrain ending stocks ranged between 21 and 78 million metric tons.

The livestock herds of the United

States are more than merely a pool of meat animals for the table, they are a breeding reserve for improving world herds. As the animal numbers are reduced here—because producers have been forced out of operation or forced to cut back—so the potential for supplying high quality stock for world herd improvement is reduced.

The same forced decline in stock numbers is being imposed in Western Europe. The latest policy from the European Community headquarters is a plan to kill off 2.5 million milk cows over upcoming months. These are prize-producing breeding animals.

The perspective after World War II, was to use all possible husbandry techniques—artificial insemination, etc.—to upgrade herds around the world. This was the nutrition side of the Atoms-for-Peace outlook. However, decline in the U.S. meat-animal statistics shows how far from that goal we have been forced to move.

The following are the declines in the national numbers of types of meat animals for slaughter, according to the USDA 1986 "Yearbook Issue" of *Agriculture Outlook*:

**Cattle:** Steers for slaughter have declined from over 19.5 million head in the 1970s, to 16.9 million in 1985. Heifers have declined from 11 to 12 million head in the late 1970s, to 10.7 million head in 1984, and 11.2 million in 1985. Cows have declined from 11 to 12 million ten years ago, to 7.4 million in 1985. Calves have declined from 5 to 7 million in the 1960s and 1970s, to a number for slaughter of 3.3 million in 1985.

**Hogs:** Hog numbers for slaughter have gone from 91 to 96 million up through 1980, down to 84.5 million in 1985.

**Sheep and lambs:** Numbers for slaughter have dropped from annual levels of 12 to 17 million in the 1960s, to 6.2 million in 1985.