

EAT BEAT

by Martha Wagner

Crystal Ball Gazing in Food Land

While many of us contemplate unpaid Christmas bills, income tax forms, post-holiday diets and summer vacations, people who make their living in the food world begin the new year with crystal ball gazing. It's become a ritual, this business of predicting what Americans will be eating this year, what's hot and what's not.

Crystal ball gazing is becoming increasingly difficult, say some of the trend watchers, because Americans are increasingly independent and unpredictable in their food tastes.

Consider, for example, the growing interest in health and nutrition. Consumers are increasingly sophisticated in these matters, food writer William Rice noted recently, explaining that "they know if they are being 'good' or 'bad,' and increasingly, they insist on being both. They consume diet foods and chocolate with equal enthusiasm, spend money on cookbooks, then buy prepared foods, do fast food for lunch and dine in a gourmet restaurant for dinner."

The annual "in-out" lists still attract media attention, but they're regarded with increasing skepticism. Many "in" foods are ignored outside New York and Los Angeles, or don't make it to the hinterlands for several years, while "out" foods like pasta and pesto refuse to go away.

Then, there's the concern over the decline of three square meals a day, and the traditional family dinner. The food industry is hoping microwavable entrees, take-out and delivered restaurant food will be hot sellers among the growing number of people who may want to eat at home, perhaps in front of the VCR, but prefer to save cooking for special occasions.

Bearing in mind the unavailability of prediction lists, I recently perused various publications—from *Food & Wine* to *Restaurants & Institutions*—and put together a list of some most-likely-to-pan-out trends.

- **Fresh produce** will become "the most exciting department in the supermarket," predicts the Food Market Institute. The restaurant trade already lists salads and fresh vegies as today's fastest growing menu items. Demand for unusual fruits and vegies is expected to grow, full-size "adult" vegies are back in favor (the baby vegetable trend hasn't amounted to much), and there's talk of smoked vegetables.

- **Ugly fish** with ugly names will appear on more restaurant menus and in supermarket fish departments, as Americans continue to eat more fish. Catfish, dogfish, wolffish, barracuda, croaker, eel and shark may sound ugly in name and be ugly to look at, but are said to offer sweet eating.

- **Lean is "in."** Watch for leaner beef, pork, lamb, chicken and duck. Watch, too, for lean game on restaurant menus: venison, guinea fowl, rabbit, squab and quail.

- **Calcium** will replace fiber as 1987's hot nutrition commodity in packaged foods. Consumers will find added calcium in their soft drinks, breakfast cereal, margarine, flour, and some dairy foods.

- **Homey food** will make a comeback. Restaurants will serve old-fashioned desserts like lemon meringue pie and hot fudge sundaes, and main dish fare such as stews and meatloaf. Meatloaf "gentrification"—stuffed with salsa, sauced with cilantro pesto, or

wrapped with seaweed as a sushi loaf—is sure to follow, food writer Elaine Tait predicts in jest.

- **Pan-Asian restaurants**, offering a medley of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese fare, will entice diners with promises of health and assertive flavors. Other top ethnic contenders are Caribbean, South American, Catalan from Spain, and the Provençal cooking of France.

- **Regional American cooking** will remain popular. Cajun food is supposedly on the way out, Southwestern food on the way in.

- **The bistro**, formerly known as a cafe or grill, is hot. The food is eclectic, a la carte, moderately priced. The atmosphere stylish, but informal.

- **"Ultras"** will replace "yuppies" as the next high-profile group of restaurant customers, says the trade magazine, *Restaurants and Institutions*. Ultras are 45 to 65, have \$40,000 plus incomes and paid-off mortgages. They eat out often and they value quality. They spend more than yuppies and once they like a restaurant, they become loyal customers.

- **Fast food restaurants** will offer some healthier menu choices: baked and grilled chicken, bran muffins, vegetable and bean soups, and fresh fruit salad bars, predicts *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. Restaurants will provide more, but still incomplete, nutrition information to customers.

- **\$100 microwave ovens** and more products designed for the microwave are changing the look of home cooking. Instead of cooking, "people are just heating things up in the microwave," according to National Eating Trend, a survey company. There are microwave ovens in more than 65 percent of homes.

Despite the food faddishness of recent years and the move away from scratch cooking, no one is predicting the demise of good food or home cooking. Instead, the food gurus see a coming together of good-tasting and healthful food and a growing insistence upon fresh, quality ingredients.

Nutrition Events Planned

Several stores have nutrition events planned in the next month. **Delicious! Market & Deli**, 140 E. Fifth Ave., will host a series of Saturday afternoon events, from 2 to 4 pm. On Feb. 14, the Eugene Clinic Health Plan will offer cholesterol screening for a nominal charge and free blood pressure testing, for the first 50 people. Feb. 21: Laurel Anderson of Surata Soyfoods demonstrates making healthy desserts with tofu. Feb. 28: Les Castle, LMT, offers mini treatments of shiatsu massage and acupressure. March 7: Nutrition instructor Loretta Plaa of LCC offers recipes and tastes of low-fat cooking. March 14: Herbologist Andy Levine offers samples of Yellow Emperor herbal extracts.

The American Cancer Society will promote cancer-prevention nutrition during its "Eat to Live" week at two local **Safeway** stores. ACS volunteers will staff display tables and hand out brochures about diet, cancer and lifestyle at the 18th Avenue and River Road Safeway stores from 10 am to 6 pm, Feb. 27 and 28. Volunteers will also present nutrition information programs to Safeway store employees.

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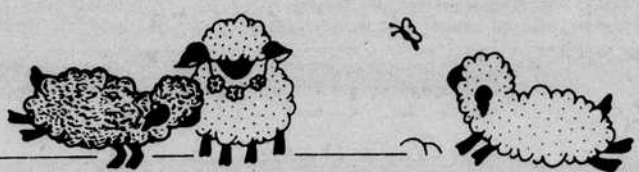
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