



Some indication of the food buying knowledge of homemakers in three Montana counties
by Janice Kay Laidig

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE Home Economics
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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to find some indication of the food buying knowledge and habits of homemakers in three Montana counties to serve as a source of information for the Cooperative Extension Service, home economists, retail grocers, wholesalers, food processors, and others interested in the homemaker's buying habits. Hill, Richland, and Beaverhead Counties were selected as the study area on a basis of population, employment, and location. Three thousand six hundred fifteen (3615) selected homemakers were contacted in these counties by a mailed questionnaire, One-third, 1161, of the questionnaires were returned to be used in the study.

The results indicated that one-fourth of the homemakers were influenced by the brand name of the product when purchasing food. Food sales, family and friends, and newspaper advertising were other major influences in food buying.

Use of food was the major consideration for one-third of the homemakers when purchasing food. Other considerations of importances to the homemakers were brand name of product, grade of product, and cost.

Popular magazines and newspapers served as sources of information about grades and standards for 40 percent of the homemakers. Bulletins and information from home economics courses were other sources used, Montana homemakers were best informed about apple, meat, and egg grades. However, the homemakers were generally uninformed of food grades and -standards. The homemaker's food buying knowledge decreased slightly with age and increased slightly with education and a higher income. The place of residence (urban or rural) did not influence to any extent the homemakers food buying knowledge. Home economics trained homemakers did not show any greater knowledge of food buying practices than those without this training.

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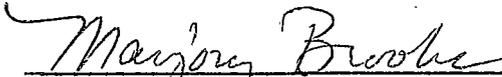
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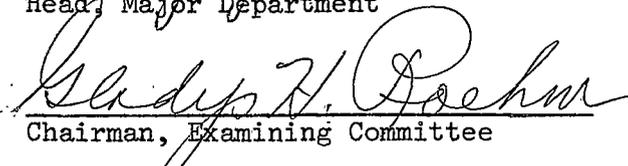
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find some indication of the food buying knowledge and habits of homemakers in three Montana counties to serve as a source of information for the Cooperative Extension Service, home economists, retail grocers, wholesalers, food processors, and others interested in the homemaker's buying habits. Hill, Richland, and Beaverhead Counties were selected as the study area on a basis of population, employment, and location. Three thousand six hundred fifteen (3615) selected homemakers were contacted in these counties by a mailed questionnaire. One-third, 1161, of the questionnaires were returned to be used in the study.

The results indicated that one-fourth of the homemakers were influenced by the brand name of the product when purchasing food. Food sales, family and friends, and newspaper advertising were other major influences in food buying.

Use of food was the major consideration for one-third of the homemakers when purchasing food. Other considerations of importance to the homemakers were brand name of product, grade of product, and cost.

Popular magazines and newspapers served as sources of information about grades and standards for 40 percent of the homemakers. Bulletins and information from home economics courses were other sources used.

Montana homemakers were best informed about apple, meat, and egg grades. However, the homemakers were generally uninformed of food grades and standards. The homemaker's food buying knowledge decreased slightly with age and increased slightly with education and a higher income. The place of residence (urban or rural) did not influence to any extent the homemakers food buying knowledge. Home economics trained homemakers did not show any greater knowledge of food buying practices than those without this training.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem Situation

There was a time when few food items were available on the market and in many cases the money with which to buy them was limited. Today, the problems involved in obtaining goods to consume are more complicated. Food technology is putting more and more food items on the grocery shelves for the consumer to select. Faced with the necessity of decision making the consumer tends to seek the advice of others. Familiar queries of "Which brand of peas is best?" and "Which cake mix is best?", indicate that many buyers want the judgment of someone else. It is impossible to prescribe what is best suited for a particular consumer without knowing the specific purpose of the item.

The homemaker is the chief consumer-buyer of food (1). Her family, various food stores, advertisers, and marketing agencies are continually reminding the homemaker of this important part of family living. In her role as food buyer, the homemaker needs information about the commodities that she buys and an understanding of how to make decisions about what to buy.

As personal incomes continue to increase in the United States, the homemaker probably will use more money in purchasing food items and services. With a large number of homemakers working outside the home, the family income is higher and the family spending patterns are altered. Items purchased by the family are directed toward allowing the homemaker

to have time to serve in this dual role, as well as time for activities outside the home.

Many of the young consumers of today have lived in an environment of abundance. The shopping competence of these young consumers is increasingly important to them, to their families, and to their communities not only because such competence would enable them to feed their families more wisely but also because it would aid them financially.

Food Trends

The variety of food items offered for sale in the American colonial market was comparatively limited. The family and community were self-sufficient in supplying the food which they consumed. During this cracker-barrel era most foods offered to the consumers were fairly simple products, which were produced near the point of sale with virtually no processing or packaging with little attention having been given to variety, convenience, or sanitation. Generally the only people involved were the farmer, the grocer, and the customer. At that time it was easy for the consumer to examine the product and its quality before it was wrapped by the grocer.

Today, with 5,000, 6,000, or 7,000 items in the supermarket, and with the strong possibility that this number will double within the next ten years, this simple, almost personal relationship between the farmer, the grocer, and the customer has been made vastly more complex. The modern big supermarket has about 6,000 items on its shelves. These items include

more than 85 different kinds and cuts of meat---not including cold cuts. Also on the shelves are 262 different combinations of can sizes, brands, and varieties in canned vegetables (2). During the next year it is estimated that an additional 400 items will be added to the 6,000 already on the supermarket shelves.

There is a greater variety of food items today and they are processed and packaged differently than ten years ago. These items have introduced a whole new food vocabulary to the homemaker. For example, foods may now be concentrated, frozen, dehydrated, dehydro-frozen, or irradiated. They require new kinds of storage, new kinds of packaging, and often new standards of identity.

As more and more of the things we buy come to us ready to use, standards of identity are necessary if we are to have confidence in the things we buy (3). It is doubtful that there are many consumer goods that have not been subjected to a variety of standards on their route from the production of the raw materials to the finished product. Frequently the only guides to the contents of the food packages are grades, labels, and brands, which the homemaker must evaluate if she wants to get the best value for her dollar (4). The food problem today is in making wise decisions in selection, purchase, and usage. The ability to purchase food wisely has become a skill and an art (5).

Today's Consumer

According to a survey by "Progressive Grocer" (6), today's food buyer

is a 35-year old wife with two children. The family has an income of \$5,850 a year. She drives two miles to the supermarket to do the weekly shopping on Friday afternoon. Store displays influence her to try a new product, change a brand or "stock up" on an extra supply. She spends about one-half hour per week in shopping and spends about \$1,125 in supermarkets each year for food and other items.

Since we have a consumer-oriented culture, the consumer is king. But in many cases the consumer does not realize the nature or strength of his power. This is especially true of the young consumer. Young people can be taught to figure things out for themselves regarding food purchases and to be proud of their technical knowledge (7). A study has shown that 80 percent of the teen-age girls studied shopped for their family's food and spent one-fourth of the entire family's food budget (6). Hence, the purchasing behavior of the young person is important today. She should be taught the problems, limitations, and opportunities of marketing from the standpoint of the purchaser (7).

Although consumers read or listen to advertisements, they also get information about products and services from friends and relatives (8). The information they obtain from friends and relatives about a product's performance may mean more to them than the information they get from advertisements or from shopping.

A survey of Alabama homemakers (9) indicated that food advertisements in newspapers were one of the most influential promotional media. Homemakers living in small cities (under 25,000) were in general more responsive

to promotional media than homemakers in larger cities. The younger homemaker and the homemaker with nine to twelve years of education were influenced most by their families (children) to buy certain foods.

In a recent survey by United States Department of Agriculture marketing specialists (10) in Greensboro, North Carolina, it was found that most families used 40 percent of the food money for meat, poultry, fish, and eggs. Vegetables and fruit composed 23 percent of the family's food bill. Dairy products made up 17 percent, while 11 percent was spent for cereals. Miscellaneous items amounted to 9 percent.

Researchers in Michigan (11) conducted a study to determine the homemakers' knowledge in six selected areas of food buying. The areas studied were eggs, meat buying, reconstituted non-fat dry milk, grades of beef, apples, and food costs. It was found that the homemakers were the best informed about egg buying and the least about apple grading and the economic aspects of food costs. The homemakers knew top quality eggs when broken from the shell, but were confused about the terminology for egg grading. They incorrectly associated facts such as storage and color of the shell with requirements for graded eggs. They frequently thought that the size of eggs indicated quality. The homemakers generally did not know the answers concerning grades of meat. They thought that the U.S. Inspection Stamp and the U.S. Grade Stamp were the same thing. Those homemakers with higher incomes, more education, and between the ages of 31 to 60 had the highest level of food buying knowledge in most areas. One-third of the Michigan homemakers were found to be misinformed concerning the

difference between "U.S. No. 1" and "U.S. Fancy" grades of apples.

Researchers in California (12) found that convenience in food preparation was valued more highly by the homemaker with the greater amount of formal education than those with less education. Food buyers over 50 indicated a much higher value for the brand name factor than did food buyers under 50. This study gave evidence that homemakers having an elementary or high school education, valued the brand name more than food buyers having a college education.

A study of the shopping habits of young homemakers in all regions of the United States (13), indicated that they used a limited amount of convenience foods. Many of the homemakers did not have any idea of the sources used for information on food buying. Some indicated that newspapers, cookbooks, women's magazines, and food labels were used.

A study of Alabama homemakers (14) ranked as their highest source of information regarding food buying the recipes on the food containers. Urban homemakers between 30 and 50 years old were the most responsive age group to promotional displays found in the food market (14).

Today's food shopper controls the food expenditure of the family (4). She can spend or save depending on her inclination and her information. Since money spent on food is the major living expenditure for most families, the homemaker has the opportunity and the responsibility to influence the health of the family members as well as the health of the family purse.

Many families are developing new tastes, new appetites, new habits, and new horizons. Better foods, new foods, and more foods suggest needed

changes in shopping habits. In this era of supermarkets, customers are "on their own." The customer is the one who must make the value judgments of quality, brand, and price of the food she buys (15).

Montana's Consumer

Montana's population during the past ten years has not increased at the same rate as the nation's. The state's population increased 14 percent between 1950 and 1960, while the population of the nation increased 18.5 percent (16). The urban population in Montana exceeded the rural for the first time in 1960. The 1960 urban population in Montana was 50.2 percent of the 674,767 people. About 15 (15.6) percent of the state's population lived in rural areas and about 34 percent (34.2) lived in rural non-farm areas. The mountain counties in Montana have become more populous in the past 30 years than the plains counties.

Characteristics of Montana's population have also changed in the last ten years. There has been a decrease in working population (between 18 and 64 years of age) and an increase in dependent population (under 18 years of age) (17).

The median 1960 income of Montana families was \$5,403. About 20 percent (20.2) of the families had incomes under \$3,000, approximately 68 percent (68.3) had incomes between \$3,000 and \$10,000, and nearly 11 percent (11.5) had incomes of \$10,000 and over (18).

About one-third (32.6 percent) of the 224,898 women were employed. The women who were 25 years of age and over had completed a median of 12.1 years of school.

Problem Statement

Many people are challenged with helping the consumer learn to purchase wisely from the abundance and multiplicity of the nation's food supply. In order to help the Montana homemaker it is necessary to ascertain the characteristics of her present food buying knowledge. Determining the food buying knowledge of the Montana homemaker will serve as a guideline for the Cooperative Extension Service, retail grocers, wholesalers, food processors, home economists, and others interested in the homemaker's food buying knowledge.

Objectives

The major objective is to determine how well informed homemakers in Montana are about food standards and grades.

Specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the homemaker's knowledge of grades and standards of beef, poultry, eggs, enriched bread, milk, fruits, and vegetables.
2. Identify the sources the Montana homemaker uses to obtain information about food standards and grades.
3. Determine what media influence the homemaker when she buys food.
4. Identify the criteria the homemaker uses in purchasing food.
5. Determine if income, age, education, employment outside the home, completion of home economics courses in foods

and nutrition, and residence (urban or rural) influence the knowledge a homemaker has about food standards and grades.

Hypotheses

The general hypothesis is that homemakers in Montana are generally uninformed, and frequently misinformed, in areas of food buying information.

Specific hypotheses are:

1. Homemakers are influenced most by their families and friends in food buying.
2. Popular magazines and newspapers are the sources most used by the homemaker to obtain information about food standards and grades.
3. Information from friends and that presented at group meetings exerts a degree of influence.
4. Homemakers consider the cost first when purchasing foods.
5. Home economics trained individuals are no more cognizant of grades and standards than are those who have not received this training.
6. Urban homemakers have a better understanding of grades and standards than do rural homemakers.
7. Knowledge of purchasing food is directly proportional to the age, education, and income level of the homemaker.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN

Montana's population is divided about equally between rural and urban places of residence. Nine cities within the state have a population over 10,000. Its topography is varied, but most areas are suitable for farming and ranching. These factors were used as guides in selecting the areas in which the food buying knowledge and characteristics of the Montana homemaker might be studied. Three (Hill, Richland, and Beaverhead) of the 56 counties were selected for the study on a basis of population, type of employment within the county, and location of county within the state (figure 1). The population within the counties is approximately half urban. Towns within the three counties range from a population of only a few to over 10,000. The counties differ in topography: Hill and Richland are mainly plains while Beaverhead has both plains and mountains. Employment varies from farming and ranching to college teaching and business.

The selection of the homemakers for this study was made by choosing every other name in the current telephone directories. This seemed to be the least biased of any available sources of names.

The people selected were mailed a questionnaire (Appendix B) which had been reviewed by college faculty in various departments and pretested with Montana homemakers who had been selected from the Cooperative Extension Service list of Home Demonstration Council members.

The 3615 unidentified questionnaires were mailed to the homemakers with a stamped return envelop enclosed. A news article was sent to

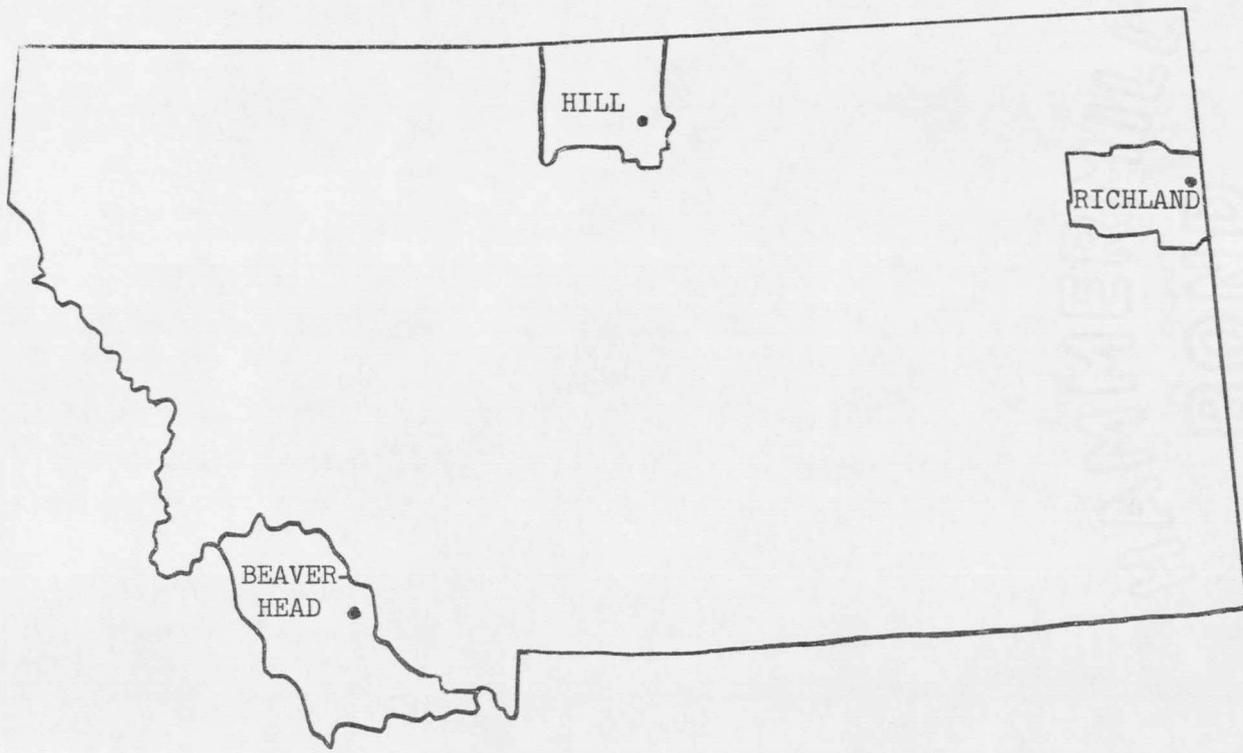


FIGURE 1. Location of counties used in the study of food buying habits of homemakers in three Montana counties, 1965.

newspapers throughout the state to alert homemakers about the study and its importance before the questionnaires were mailed. Results from the questionnaires were recorded on IBM cards for tabulating.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they are used in this study: Grades are the acceptable limits or ranges of food quality at the time of its evaluation (4).

Standards are used as describing the nature and character of a given food product (4).

Influences are those intangible factors that produce a desire to buy certain food items when marketing for groceries.

Considerations are those factors which the homemaker is concerned with at the time of food purchasing.

The corrections of questions concerning food grades and standards (pp. 22-32) were based upon information from U.S.D.A. bulletins and regulations for the State of Montana as they applied to the various foods (19, 20, 21, 22).

Study Areas

The three selected counties compare closely with the general characteristics of the state (table I.).

Beaverhead County, the largest county in Montana, is located in southwest Montana, with Idaho to the south and west. Western Montana College is located in Dillon, the county seat. The total population of the county according to the 1960 census was 7,194 with 24.1 percent rural,

