

LAND OF PLENTY, DENTISTS' PARADISE

New Zealand Women's Food Value League Surveys Food Habits Of 217 Families

New Zealand is predominantly a farming country, and yet the diet of the average New Zealander is often deficient in protective foods. Every survey undertaken shows, for example, that more than half of the people of this "land of plenty" use insufficient milk. The same proportion of people supports an army of dentists, for New Zealand teeth are notoriously carious.

The remedy, it is suggested, lies in educating people to make better use of the foods available. Before suggesting remedies, however, the New Zealand Women's Food Value League, which has headquarters in food-conscious Auckland, decided to secure as accurate a view of the situation as possible. It set out last spring to make a survey of the food habits of a representative selection of families. Its plans were announced at the time in "The Listener." Mrs. W. G. Kite, secretary to the league's housewives' committee, has now sent us a preliminary summary of its findings regarding a cross-section of people covered in 217 replies to the league's questionnaire.

THE majority came from people definitely "food conscious." About half came from members of the New Zealand Women's Food Value League, and many others were in sympathy with its aims. It was obvious that only the very health conscious families would go to the trouble of filling in all the particulars asked for. Some, with the best intention in the world, notably farmers, found it impossible to give all the figures asked for, owing to lack of continuity in expenditure and income.

Facts and figures derived from this questionnaire are not to be taken as average. "Their significance lies in the fact that they are from a food conscious group," says the report, "and when we find such people spending far less on food than they ought to spend, and consuming far smaller quantities of such essentials as milk, eggs, fruit, vegetables and fish than they ought to consume, we know that the standard of the average New Zealander will be lower still.

"The problem is not simply lack of knowledge; lack of means plays almost as large a part for many. The foods that matter are too dear. Rent and fuel costs take a big slice out of a small wage, leaving insufficient money to buy necessary foods. To make matters worse, families on the lower wage generally have more mouths to feed. It is a tribute to the courage and intelligence of housewives that so many of them do manage to provide diets as near as possible to the ideal out of a meagre food allowance. For instance 49 out of 94 low-paid families (i.e., 53 per cent. of them) provided cod-liver oil or some other vitamin preparation for their children.

Amount Spent on Food

"We had 94 families with a weekly income under £5 (after deduction of social security), 103 families between £5 and £8, and only 16 earning over £8. Table A shows how much is spent on food per head every week.

"The groups between 6/- and 10/- are very near the safety margin for good health and can only be kept on the right side of it by good management and a knowledge of food values on the part of the housewives. The group

spending below 10/-, comprising 55% of the low-wage families, 28% of the middle wage, and 14% of the better-off.

"The lower paid group spent 40% of their income on food, leaving little more than half for rent, fuel, clothing, etc. The next group spent 31% (less than one third), while the highest group spent only 22%.

"Twenty-four per cent. of the under £5 group relied entirely upon the greengrocer (some of these had no gardens) while 23 per cent. received all their vegetables from their own gardens. The others relied on their gardens for part of the produce, and in answering the questionnaire many added that they grew little or none during the winter months. In the higher-paid group, 19% grew all their vegetables, only 6% grew none at all, and the majority grew about one quarter of the total quantity used. It should be noted that out of the large group of families spending under 10/- a week on food per head only one quarter of them grow all their own vegetables.

Quantity of Milk

"As the wage increases so does the quantity of milk consumed. The League of Nations standard is one and three quarter pints daily per child, and one

pint per adult. More than half of these families get insufficient milk. (See Table B.)

"Food energy requirements are measured in calories, for which the daily requirements for a man doing moderately hard work are 3,000. We have endeavoured to find out from what foods these calories are obtained in our three wage-groups. If these calories are obtained largely from protective foods (milk, eggs, meat, fish, cheese, potatoes, raw fruit and fresh vegetables) the diet will be fully adequate in minerals and (except in the case of some vegetarians) in animal proteins. If, on the other hand, the bulk of these 3000 calories come from sugar (of which New Zealanders on the average eat three times as much as they should), white bread and white flour, the diet will be seriously lacking in minerals and vitamins, these having been refined away. It may also be lacking in proteins.

"So that unless the carbohydrates (i.e. starches and sugars) are derived almost entirely from potatoes and whole grains, including wholemeal bread and flour (this is seldom the case in New



Alan Blakey photograph

MRS. N. H. GOOD, secretary to the New Zealand Women's Food Value League

Zealand), a low cost diet with a large proportion of calories from carbohydrates must be seriously deficient in both minerals and vitamins, and it cannot therefore maintain perfect health.

Source of Energy

"Out of our low-paid group of 93 families we found two that derived at least two-thirds of their calories daily from sugar, potatoes and bread. The figures for the three groups are given in Table C.

"It is significant that none of the better-paid families fell into either of these categories. The better-off are able to derive their calories from first class sources, and so enjoy a more adequate diet than the lower-paid families whose calories must come from cheaper sources.

"Remarks were often interesting. For instance 'Dentists' bills are a nightmare—take months to pay—and then there's another one.' This was from a family of five, with three children, who had no cod-liver oil, no wholemeal bread, and only 1½ pints of milk daily among them all. Surely this is a case where education in food values, rightly applied, would reduce those dreaded dentists' bills, without greatly increasing food expenditure.

"Compare with this one: A farmer's wife, also with three children, has a weekly food expenditure per head of 7/- compared with 8/5 per head for the former family. The farmer's family, though, have milk, eggs, and vegetables, home grown, and she says 'Family health excellent; children all above average in height, weight and chest measurement, and have perfect teeth.' We find that this family has 56 pints of milk weekly (compared with ten for the last family), two dozen eggs, wholemeal, and cod liver oil."

Analysis of the replies is proceeding and the league plans more extensive work.

A. EXPENDITURE ON FOOD.					
Average Weekly expenditure per head	Under 6/-	6/- to 9/11	10/- to 13/11	14/- to 17/11	18/- and over
Income under £5	17%	38%	24%	5%	3%
Income £5 to £8	4%	24%	46%	19%	7%
Income over £8	0%	14%	50%	36%	0%
B. CONSUMPTION OF MILK.					
	Income under £5		£5 to £8		Over £8
Average amount consumed per head daily	.8 pints		.82 pints		1.2 pints
Families using one pint or more, per head, daily	36%		41%		50%
Families using under 1 pint per head, daily	64%		59%		50%
C. SOURCES OF ENERGY.					
	Under £5		£5 to £8		Over £8
Percentage deriving 2,000 of their 3,000 calories from carbohydrates	2%		0%		0%
Percentage deriving 1,000 of their 3,000 calories from carbohydrates	34%		16%		0%