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### Market basket wisdom

Dorothy Dickins

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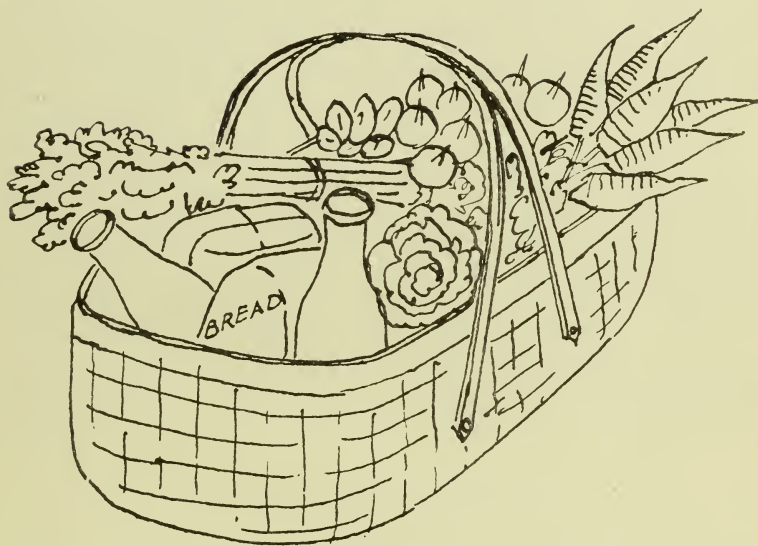
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# MARKET BASKET WISDOM

By

Dorothy Dickins



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# MARKET BASKET WISDOM

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By Dorothy Dickins

Filling the family market basket is an ever present question. For the city housewife, it means making every penny count. For the rural housewife, it means making every minute count.

Mr. Jones of the city makes just enough to buy bare necessities for his family. Rent must be paid in order that the family be housed. A few clothes must be provided for the father and the children so they may go to work and to school. The only place to cut is on the food. Mrs. Jones, not understanding all she should about food values, makes these cuts on the most necessary foods. For instance, she considers milk at 17 cents a quart too expensive yet often buys meat at 30 cents a pound.

On the other hand, Mr. Holcomb from the country makes much less in actual cash than does his city friend. He can, however, provide his family with a good diet at much less cash expenditure, for he has land at his disposal for producing such a diet and obtains a few foods practically as a by-product of his general farm business.

This bulletin will tell how Mrs. Holcomb, a typical housewife of the rural areas of Mississippi, filled her market basket.

## **Adding to Family Wealth**

Mr. Holcomb owned two milk cows. These were freshened six months apart, in fall and spring. Thus, an ample milk supply was insured. In fact, a surplus was produced, part of which was fed to animals, part sold.

A flock of 55 fowls, including young chickens, furnished this family with their egg requirement and some surplus from February through August. However, less than the requirement was produced in fall and winter. Better selection and care would, doubtless, have meant more eggs and

chicken for family consumption, more for sale.

Mrs. Holcomb canned, preserved, jammed, jellied, pickled, and dried enough food stuff to provide about 3 quarts of food per week throughout the year for her family. Considering the long growing season and the short mild winters of Mississippi, this supply was probably great enough to supplement the supply of fresh foods which could have been obtained from the farm.

The Holcombs, however, have a very unsatisfactory garden. Mr. Holcomb excuses himself by saying that it is not worth the work that it takes. We know, of course, that this is not true. A garden with reasonable management is certainly worth what it costs. In fact, one can cite numbers of instances in which very large quantities of vegetables have been produced on small plots of land. Mr. Aser of Choctaw County, has a garden of 1½ acres. Last year it cost him, counting the labor, seed, fertilizer, use of land, and horse work, \$47.57. He supplied his family of four with vegetables throughout the year and sold \$82.20 worth. Mrs. Holcomb says, "A garden is a good thing but it takes all Mr. Holcomb's time to work his crop." We know that a garden can be cared for at times when the work interferes very little with regular farm or home duties. Mr. Randle has a successful garden. Yet, he gives an average of only thirty minutes a day to its cultivation.

The Holcombs have only three fruit trees. These do not produce sufficient quantities of fruit to last throughout the year. A well planned orchard is as necessary as a well planned garden. Proper care of this orchard is also essential, for production decreases when one neglects pruning and spraying. Fruit is a food, not a knick knack to be eaten between meals. Therefore, it behooves Mrs. Holcomb to provide an adequate supply, which includes preservation as well as production.

This family raised and killed enough hogs to provide lard and salt meat for the greater part of the year, but depended, largely, on the town market for their fresh meat supply. The butcher shop bill might have been saved or, at least, reduced by making greater use of unprofitable

milk cows, calves not needed for dairy purposes, and culls from the poultry flock.

Valued at retail selling price, the foods raised on this farm and eaten by this family were worth around \$39.00 a month. However, the question of variety is one of greater importance than that of value. This means that the Holcombs should budget their time among the various food products, allowing a generous share for the garden and orchard.

### Food Costs

This family consisted of a father, a mother, a boy 16 years of age, and two girls, 12 and 7 years of age. They consumed about \$53.00 worth of food per month, which is equivalent to about 35 cents per man per day.

Money value of foods used by the Holcombs during the first two weeks in November:

Foods Purchased		Foods Furnished by Farm	
Apples .....	\$.35	Blackberries (c) .....	\$.50
Beef .....	.55	Chicken .....	.92
Baker's Bread .....	.30	Eggs .....	.87
Cabbage .....	.25	Turnip Greens .....	.44
Cheese .....	.35	Lard .....	1.45
Cornmeal .....	.74	Whole Milk .....	10.08
Flour (white) .....	2.00	Molasses .....	.71
Sardines .....	.10	Peaches (c) .....	.50
Pork .....	1.25	Peanut Butter .....	.35
Sugar .....	.68	Peas (d) .....	.18
		Pickle .....	.30
<b>Edible food from this supply fed</b>		Salt Pork .....	1.04
<b>to animals</b>		Potatoes (Irish) .....	.30
Buttermilk .....	2.90	Potatoes (sweet) .....	1.00
Cornbread .....	.20	Preserves .....	.42
		Sausage .....	.62
		Squirrel .....	.30
		Tomato (c) .....	.50
		Turnips .....	.55

One of the usual methods of valuing home grown products is to use retail selling price in town. This method is used as it gives a good basis for comparing foods purchased with those raised at home. Yet, it results in the money

value of a dietary appearing higher than it really is. In all probability the Holcombs would never have paid \$7.18 in cash for milk and milk products, or 50 cents for canned blackberries.

The food supply of this family furnished all food needs with the exception of iron. A more generous use of vegetables and fruits and part of the money used for white flour spent for whole grained foods would have taken care of this deficiency. A little more time in the garden with no more cash expenditure would have given an adequate dietary.

Indeed, it is possible to provide an adequate dietary for much less cash than was expended by Mrs. Holcomb. Mrs. James, for instance, spent only \$2.21 in cash during a period of two weeks in November. Yet, her dietary was adequate. She purchased sugar, rice, flour, and grits, and obtained milk, eggs, vegetables, fruits, molasses, meat, and lard from her farm. Filling the market basket is then as much a question of what one produces as it is a question of what one spends.

One may purchase a variety of foods and yet have an inadequate dietary. One may purchase only 2 or 3 foods and yet have an adequate dietary. This fact is brought out by a tabulation of foods purchased in February and in November by Mrs. Gay. In February she raised a quantity of food at home, by November she had moved to town and had to depend on the grocery store.

Foods Purchased by Mrs. Gay in February (2 Weeks)		Foods Purchased by Mrs. Gay in November (2 Weeks)	
Flour .....	\$.64	Meal .....	\$.29
Meal .....	.41	Bread .....	\$.20
Sugar .....	.22	Eggs .....	.25
		Turnips .....	.15
		Cakes .....	.25
		Salmon .....	.35
		Corn .....	.40
		Salt Pork .....	1.00
		Lard .....	.75
		Crackers .....	.20
		Butter .....	1.20
		I. potatoes ..	.25
		Buttermilk ..	.80
		Beef steak ..	.40
		Oysters .....	.65
		Pork & beans ..	.15
		Cheese .....	.35
		Pork .....	.50

In spite of the small amount of food purchased in

February Mrs. Gay's dietary was more adequate than in November, the month she purchased a large amount.

Rural families raising little food at home rarely get an adequate dietary. In theory it is possible for them to live adequately from paper sacks. In practice those raising little at home are families with too little cash to purchase a sufficient amount and variety of food to supplement the supply raised at home.

### Meat and Fish

In the period of two weeks mentioned, the Holcombs consumed only \$3.12 worth of meat. This supply included pork, chicken, beef, squirrel, and sardines, a large part of which was purchased.

To supply pork and pork products for the average farm family, at least, one pig should be raised per adult person or equivalent. This would provide around 150 pounds of pork products per adult, enough for the family and a surplus for sale. In addition, the unprofitable milk cows should be turned into beef, calves not needed for dairy and breeding purposes into veal. Such a plan will result in adequate quantities of meat as well as an additional source of income. Because of poor facilities for keeping fresh meat, a large part must, of course, be cured and canned. Families desiring a fresh supply can well follow the community who planned for such a supply by organizing a meat club. The members took turns in providing animals for slaughtering, the different cuts of meat going to the different members in rotation.

The Holcombs or other families living on the farm should not have to depend so largely on the town for their meat supply. Meat can usually be produced on the farm more cheaply than it can be bought in town. Therefore, a plan should be worked out whereby a regular meat supply is assured.

This family did not use meat once a day. Meat is valuable in muscle building, in blood formation, and in stimulating appetite. It is, however, deficient in bone building



materials and in most of the vitamins. Yet, no one food is perfect in every respect. Meat should certainly be included in the family dietary but not too abundantly for excessive quantities are not easily cared for.

Where more meat than is needed is produced, it should be sold, not eaten. Indeed, when cash income is low and meat is produced in abundance, it would often be advisable to sell the more expensive cuts and use the cheaper cuts at home. There is little difference in the nutritive value of the different cuts. The housewife must, however, "adjust palate and purse so that each has its due."

### **Eggs**

During this period of two weeks in November the Holcombs used a little over two dozen eggs, or about one-third of an egg per man per day. In spring and early summer they used more than the standard, an egg per man per day. A flock of 55 fowls should certainly produce an abundant supply of eggs throughout the year. That production is low in fall and winter is partly due to two facts, poor feeding and poor stock. The non-layers should be eaten, canned, or sold. The layers should be fed regularly and well. A surplus produced in fall and winter will bring in much more cash than a surplus in spring.

If Mrs. Holcomb had put away eggs in the spring when they were plentiful for fall and winter when they were scarce, her family would have had an egg per man per day. On the other hand, she could have purchased eggs when production was low. This, she rarely did.

A regular egg supply is important, for eggs are especially valuable in dietaries of children. It is as important in fall and winter when they are 40 and 50 cents a dozen as it is in spring when they are 20 and 25 cents a dozen. Therefore, Mrs. Holcomb should make provision for a regular supply.

### **Dairy Products**

\$7.18 or nearly 29 per cent of the total value of the

Holcombs' dietary went for milk and butter. This allowance provided around a gallon of milk a day and butter in generous quantities. Cheese was the only dairy product which was purchased. However, only 35 cents was paid for cheese. It is well that milk was so generously provided on this farm.

The secret of an adequate and cheap diet is plenty of milk. Milk is our cheapest source of muscle and bone building material. It is almost impossible to get sufficient quantities of bone building material without using milk. One authority says, "spend as much for milk as for meat, fish, and poultry." The milk and butter used by the Holcombs were worth more than twice as much as the meat they used.

Why is it important what this family or that spends for this food or that? Simply because expenditures among the various food groups affect the food value of a diet. A large percent of total expenditures for milk means a diet that is adequate in most of the nutritive factors.

### Fats

The lard, salt pork, and sausage used during a period of two weeks by the Holcombs amounted to \$3.11 or 12 per cent of the total money value of their dietary. In addition, there was butter for which we have no figures. This means that the amount of fat used provided more than the general allowance of three-fourths of a pound a week for adults and six ounces a week for children under ten years of age.

The quantity of fat used was largely due to habits of cooking and eating, partly due to the fact that farm families require more fuel foods than do families doing less strenuous work. It is probable that this family would have been better off from a health as well as a financial standpoint had they sold a part of this fat supply.

### Grain Products

The Holcombs used only three foods from this group:

white flour, cornmeal, and baker's bread. All three of these foods were purchased. Flour was, however, used in larger quantities than was cornmeal. Very little baker's bread was used.

These three foods are among the lower priced cereals or grain products. For instance, a package of four ounces of ready-to-eat cereal may be obtained for 15 cents or one pound for 60 cents. A pound of cornmeal may be obtained for a little over 3 cents. Yet, they yield about the same amount of fuel.

Cereals furnish more fuel for amount expended than do any other class of foods. In this dietary they furnished one-third of the fuel for one-tenth of the money value.

A high cereal diet means a cheap diet but why should this family live on a diet similar in a number of respects to that of Mrs. Jones from the city? The Holcombs can more easily afford from the standpoint of health and finances to put labor into raising vegetables than they can to put cash into purchasing cereals. More starchy vegetables and less flour could have been used. This would have meant a dietary which provided a greater margin of safety, a dietary with less cash expenditure.

Whole grained cereals are especially important in diets where cereals constitute more than one-fourth of the fuel as did Mrs. Holcomb's. Therefore, it is a pity that unbolted meal, a cheap and easily obtained whole grained cereal, was not used. Whole wheat flour and oatmeal are also cheap whole grained cereals. The use of such cereals at least once a day would mean a better diet, but not a more expensive diet.

### Sweets

Sweets are also fuel foods. They owe their popularity to flavor. They furnished 13 per cent of the total fuel value of the Holcombs' dietary for 7 per cent of the total money value. This means that they are cheap sources of fuel. Sweets should not be used too freely in the diet. Too many cause digestive disturbances as well as create an ap-

petite for themselves rather than for other foods. 10 to 12 percent of the total fuel value of the diet from sweets, is a good rule to follow. The Holcombs' dietary furnished a little over this requirement.

Sugar, molasses, and preserves were the only sweets used. Around one-third of the sweet supply was purchased, the rest produced on the farm. Sugar is solely a fuel food, whereas molasses is a concentrated vegetable juice yielding bone and blood building material as well as fuel. Therefore, it is well that molasses was as generously used as sugar.

Preserves contain about two-thirds as much mineral as does the corresponding fruit. As previously stated, food produced on the farm was priced at average retail selling price in nearest town. Thus priced, preserves were a costly fuel. The food value obtained from preserves, jams, and jellies does not justify an excessive use in the diet. Used moderately as by the Holcombs, they have a distinct place in the family dietary, that of giving variety.

### **Vegetables and Fruits**

Increasing the use of vegetables and fruits would have improved the food value of the Holcombs' diet in every point needing improvement. Vegetables and fruits rank next to grain products and milk in the formation of an economical and well-balanced diet.

Over three-fourths of the vegetables and fruits used were produced on the farm. This means that Mrs. Holcomb purchased very few of these foods. Fresh vegetables such as cabbage, lettuce, collards, turnips, beets, carrots, butterbeans, spinach, etc., can easily be grown in the month of November. However, only one or two fresh fruits are available at this time. For this reason, a well planned Mississippi dietary will always provide for the purchase of some fresh fruit at this season.

An increase in the use of green vegetables which are rich in iron and an increase in the use of raw vegetables and fruits which are rich in vitamin C would have meant

a better diet for the Holcombs. Such a diet could have been obtained without greatly increasing cash expenditure for food.

### Getting Better Values

As previously stated, Mrs. Holcomb purchased the following foods: apples, beef, baker's bread, cabbage, cheese, cornmeal, flour, sardines, pork, and sugar.

This study came just before hog killing time and when egg production was low. Provision for such a time, as canned beef, culls from the poultry flock, or preserved eggs would have saved buying meat. Having made no such provision, Mrs. Holcomb did right in purchasing a supply, for meat has a place in the family dietary.

Cabbage was purchased which could have been produced on the farm. Chemical analyses have shown that the green cabbage usually found in the farm garden is richer in iron than the white cabbage which one generally buys.

American cheese as well as cottage cheese can be made successfully on the farm. During certain seasons, Mrs. Holcomb has an over supply of milk. Yet, she can find no market for this surplus of only a few weeks. A yearly supply of American cheese could easily be made at such a time at practically no cost except that of labor.

\$2.00 was a large proportion of total expenditures for a food which adds so few food factors as does white flour. Satisfactory quantities might have been purchased for 75 cents. 50 cents of the amount saved could have been used in purchasing whole wheat flour, 25 cents oatmeal. This would have meant a better as well as a cheaper diet.

Perhaps, the same amount of cornmeal could not have been produced much cheaper on the farm. The same amount of cornmeal produced on the farm would, however, have given more food value, for much food value is lost when the bran and germ of the grain are removed.

In this State, it is possible to produce fruit only seven months in the year. The varieties most easily grown are

not those which will keep for several months. Storage facilities are generally poor. Therefore, for five months in the year one must largely depend on canned and dried fruit. The Food Habits Score Card of the Extension Division calls for fruit twice a day, one of which must be raw fruit or canned tomatoes. In order to meet the fruit requirement during the five months mentioned enough fruit should be canned or dried to serve fruit once a day, enough bought to serve fresh fruit at least three times a week.

Therefore, Mrs. Holcomb is to be considered wise rather than extravagant in purchasing apples for her family. Indeed, tripling her expenditure for fresh fruit would have been justified.

The only foods which should be needed to supplement home products are cereals, sugar, and fresh fruits (for a few months in the year). This involves only a small cash expenditure.

When families fail to take advantage of their land, it means either of one or two things, doing without or purchasing extra supplies. The first course is usually followed, for cash realized from the average farm is not great. Yet, it is better to purchase what the purse can ill afford than it is to do without what the body needs.

### Table Waste

By table waste, is meant food not eaten. It may include plate scraps or edible food uneaten.

The percent of plate scraps varies from little or nothing to 20 per cent of the value of the dietary. Plate scraps amounted to 10 per cent of the value of the Holcombs' dietary. Better cooking, and serving to suit the demands of the individual appetite, would have meant a smaller amount left on the plates.

Mrs. Holcomb, by cooking food in amounts likely to be eaten and using leftovers at a later meal, kept down waste of edible food to the minimum. In two weeks time, there was only \$3.10 worth of edible food not needed for human consumption. This was fed to chickens and hogs as were

plate scraps.

Table waste as long as it is composed of comparatively cheap foods makes suitable feed for animals. Foods like cornbread and buttermilk make healthy animals as well as healthy children. Therefore, the question of reducing table waste to the minimum is not so important to the farm woman who has productive animals to feed.

### **Food Value and Money Value**

Low, moderate, or high cost dietaries can be planned but after all the most important thing for the rural housewife who secures a large part of her food without cash outlay is a dietary which is both adequate and palatable, one that meets the individual needs of her family.

A knowledge of food values combined with a generous supply of home raised products would make it possible for Mrs. Holcomb as well as other housewives to fill their market baskets adequately and cheaply.