From the Farm to Your Fork – What the Food System Brings to Your Plate

If you poured a bowl of cereal this morning for breakfast, stopped at a deli for a sandwich at lunch, had a cup of yogurt for a snack, or heated up a frozen meal for dinner, then you enjoyed some of the many conveniences of our readily-available food supply.

But did you ever wonder just how those foods made it to your plate?

Our food production system – including farmers, food manufacturers, distributors, grocers, foodservice establishments, and others – brings us a variety of safe, high-quality foods that also are tasty, convenient, nutritious, fresh and affordable. Centuries ago, farmers began using selective crop breeding techniques to produce higher-yielding, hardier crops with the highest possible quality and nutritional value. Today, food technologies such as biotechnology imitate this process more accurately and efficiently. The result is a more abundant and nutrient-rich food supply to feed the world using fewer precious natural resources.

Did You Know?

Biotechnology uses various scientific techniques to take the best traits from plants, animals or microorganisms and integrate them into an enhanced food that is more sustainable and nutritious than the original food.

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A Closer Look at the Benefits of Our Food Production System

Food production and technology is constantly evolving to meet consumer demand for new and improved products. Below are examples of benefits our food production system provides:

**High Quality**

Products such as salad greens, deli meat and fruit juices maintain their quality longer thanks to innovations in packaging.

**Convenience**

Foods such as soups and yogurts now come in convenient “to-go” containers.

**Safety**

Processes such as pasteurizing milk, canning fruits and vegetables, and vacuum-packing meats help prevent spoilage and the growth of harmful bacteria.

**Freshness**

Freezing fruits and vegetables helps retain their just-picked freshness.

**Great taste**

Thanks to flavorings, spices and other ingredients, foods such as frozen dinners, veggie burgers and packaged desserts are appealing and delicious.

**Affordability**

Many processed foods are good values. For instance, canned peaches, frozen broccoli and canned seafood are often more affordable than fresh versions. Many cereals, breads and nut butters are good bargains per serving, too.

**Variety and Value**

Varieties of whole-grain cereals, breads, nut butters, and frozen and canned fruits, vegetables and seafood are nutritious, affordable and available all year long.

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**Are You Prepared for an Emergency?**

There may be times when the electricity in your home goes out or you are prevented from getting to the grocery store or quick-service restaurant due to a natural disaster or other emergency. When that happens, you'll need foods on hand that won’t spoil. Foods such as canned fruit, meat and beans; peanut butter and crackers; and bottled water and juice come in handy during emergencies.
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Added Nutrition
Farmers and manufacturers continuously work to develop foods with better nutritional content. For example, fortifying foods with vitamins, minerals and other nutrients helps people to meet their recommended daily nutrient intakes and may support good health in several ways. Examples include adding fiber to foods to help promote digestive health; calcium and vitamin D to help promote bone health; omega-3 fatty acids to help support heart health.

Options for People with Special Dietary Needs
Product developers use innovative ingredients such as approved low-calorie sweeteners and thickeners to provide flavorful options for people who must control their fat, carbohydrate, sugar, and/or cholesterol intakes. Examples are no-added sugar yogurt, light salad dressing, fat-free ice cream, and diet beverages. In addition, foods that use flavorings such as glutamate (or MSG, which can be naturally-occurring or added to foods) can help reduce the sodium content of foods.

Calorie-Saving Ingredients – Sweet!
Many of your favorite foods, such as low-fat flavored yogurt and iced tea, come in light or reduced-calorie versions that can save up to 100 calories per serving compared to the regular version.

Farmers: Information from the Source
Do you want to know more about the farm-to-fork process? Talk with a farmer at a local farm or farmers’ market to get information right from the source.

Did You Know?
Fortification is the process of adding vitamins or minerals to a food to make it more healthful and to help you meet the recommended daily intake of different nutrients.

For more information about modern food production and processing, please visit: http://www.foodinsight.org/understandingourfood.aspx

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