Other Reasons for Rising Prices Cited

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(T-T Bayou Lafourche Bureau)

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — With a “ban the beef” and a “thumbs down” attitude toward meat in general from many quarters in the past week, cattle and chickens, and the pou-
taceans which have zoomed in sudden spiraling popularity are very much in the news.

It is enough to cause one to hie to the history books and try to find out what happened in years of yore with regard to food, finding it, affording it and how and when it first came onto the scene.

Cattle seems to be in the main column of interest at present, with high food prices being blamed on various quarters, including the farmer, and the Louisiana Farm Bureau pleading, “Don’t blame the farmer.”

This organization of agriculturalists headed by James Graungard of St. James, La., points to other reasons for rising food prices, noting that food is not a durable item, that much of a family’s disposable income goes to fixed payments for a home or car, other items.

NOT GROCERIES

Also, points out the Farm Bureau, a fifth of supermarket purchasing is not for groceries, but for something to wear, read, listen to or clean with, and it says, many persons think of these items as part of the food bill.

Turning to the history books it is learned that cattle-raising began in southwestern Louisiana before it did in Texas.

It is thought that the stock of early Texas herds came from that section of the Pelican state. And, even more, the tradition tells that the Longhorn originated in Louisiana, and not in Texas.

Back in the 1730’s, Joseph Blanpain became the operator of the first ranch at what is now Vacherie in St. James Parish, so named because of this fact. He moved cattle from the Attakapas country to Vacherie and then down to New Orleans.

EDUCATED MAN

Blanpain was an educated man in the employ of the Government of Louisiana in its French period, and was a trader, merchant, negotiator, Indian interpreter, land and plantation owner.

Earlier than that, in 1723 beef was scarce in the New Orleans area that cattle had to be imported from San Domingo. The authorities had tried two years earlier to fend off the pending shortage by prohibiting the killing of cattle.

In 1737, it is recorded, the slaughter of livestock was permitted only when an official declaration of intention was made in advance. So Blanpain’s movement of beef on the hoof around that time must indeed have been welcome to those citizens downriver.

The Longhorn, once the most prevalent cattle in Louisiana, has been rapidly vanishing from the pastoral scene, with only minimum numbers surviving along the Mississippi River road.

SPAIN CREDITED

Returning to history, it is noted that Spain is credited with bringing the first cattle to the New World through Columbus, who introduced them to San Domingo in 1493 on his second voyage. Then, three decades later, Cortez carted them to Mexico from Spain.

Statistically, in 1704 there were only 14 cows in Bienville’s colony. By 1738 the count was 50, along with 1,400 pigs and 2,000 hens, and 20 years after the first count, in 1724, the cow count was 1,100.

What else did people eat in those early days? Well, when Bienville and Bienville visited the Bayou Goula Indians back in 1699 they were treated to chickens, the progeny of a stock founded from a wrecked European vessel by another Indian tribe four years earlier.

Hunters made regular journeys to prairies between the Ouachita and Mississippi Rivers for buffalo tongues, salted meats and bear’s oil, which was the chief butter substitute.

There was no effort to develop dairy products in those early colonial days.

GROWN FOR WOOL

In fact, in 1810 sheep were grown for their wool and there was no mention of their food value. Gov. W. C. Claiborne asked the Legislature to introduce into the territory at public expense merino sheep to experiment on their fleece capabilities.

DeSoto carried swine on his expedition. They increased to several hundred and some were left with the Indians.

The early comers to Louisiana discovered oysters in their natural growth on reefs and they gathered them up and promptly made them a food item.

The shrimp industry is a rather late comer to the menu. This delicacy was first commercially canned 106 years ago in 1867 at Grand Terre Island, but, reports history, the industry of packing shrimp is only 65 years old.

Food, the staff of life, is headline material. As it drew recorded comment in the past, today food, along with inflation, the farmer and the finances in the purge, continues to provoke comment.