Keep Food Lockers Working!

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FROZEN ASSETS are a mighty good thing to have—when the assets are meats, vegetables and fruits. And they can be important to war effort by helping to provide an adequate and nutritious year-round food supply.

Refrigerated lockers may result in a real savings for farm families as well as providing them with a food supply of superior quality—if the locker is properly managed. This conclusion was drawn from interviews with 87 Fayette County farm families, patrons of the four refrigerated locker plants in the county.

These plants, with the exception of one, offered complete services to patrons. They were equipped to butcher animals, cut, wrap and freeze the meat, render lard and cure and smoke meat. Extra charges were made to the patrons for these services, however. Fruits and vegetables also were frozen at a minimum charge.

The food stored in the average locker consisted mainly of meat—279 pounds of pork and 163 pounds of beef stored per family.* Although only 18 percent of the families stored vegetables there was a trend toward freezing the ones that are difficult to can successfully, such as corn and peas. One-fourth of the families froze fruits, principally strawberries.

Because of the services offered by the locker plants, farm women found they had more time to devote to other homemaking activities when they froze their meat supply. More than three-fourths of the women interviewed had reduced the amount of meat which they canned and almost half of them cured less meat. However, some curing and canning was continued to provide variety in the diet and to have a supply at home for emergencies. Freezing of fruits and vegetables seemed to be an experiment for most families and had no effect on the quantity of food canned.

Families generally are interested in whether or not using a locker is a saving. The records

The frozen meat supply is neatly wrapped in family-size packages and labeled to tell homemaker just what she’s getting when she visits locker.
 Locker History

In 1861 a man by the name of Piper invented a process of freezing fish. He used an ice and salt mixture placed directly over the fish, which were held in an insulated container. Work of a little different character was done by other men in 1869 and 1870. Since that time many improvements have been made in the quick-freezing process.

As early as 1910 a creamery in Crete, Neb., operated a refrigerated locker. The growth of separate locker plants really began in the Pacific Northwest among the fruit growers and has spread to the Middlewest. Most of the plants are now concentrated in these two places.

Since 1935 when the first locker plant was established in Iowa the number has grown to about 600, placing Iowa at the top of the list of states.

Of 24 families showed an average yearly saving of $11.23, or 2 cents for each pound of meat stored. One family saved as much as $36.43 while four families actually operated their lockers at a loss. These figures were obtained by comparing cost, processing and locker rental for home-produced meat with the cost of the same amount of meat at retail.

The management of the locker determines to a great extent the saving which may be realized from its use. To have the largest volume of food pass through the locker it must be kept as full as possible at all times. To do this it is necessary to butcher animals at frequent intervals.

The peaks for butchering still tend to come in early spring and late fall. It is obvious that this practice fills the locker to overflowing at these seasons and leaves them almost empty in late summer. Neighbors might cooperate with neighbors in spacing butchering dates or purchasing meat wholesale at various times to remedy this condition. To help fill the locker when the meat supply is low, fruits and vegetables might be frozen.

If desirable products are to be obtained, however, the proper kinds and varieties of fruits and vegetables must be stored. They also must be prepared according to certain methods based on careful research. The patrons interviewed depended largely upon the locker manager to provide directions for the preparation of fruits and vegetables; some managers recognized this responsibility and made it a point to have the latest and most reliable information available on this subject.

The Iowa law relating to storing of food in refrigerated lockers has the following specifications:

1. All food stored must be fit for human consumption.
2. All food must be sharply frozen before it shall be stored in a locker.
3. Storage temperatures shall be kept at 12 to 15° F. (This is now interpreted to be not higher than the above temperatures.)

This law not only protects the patron but the operator of the plant as well. Cooperation in observing this law is of benefit to both parties.

Closely concerned with savings in the use of the locker is the distance which must be traveled to the locker. The families in this study made two trips to the locker each week, traveling an average of 4.5 miles per trip. As the distance increased the number of trips to the locker decreased. With good planning and refrigeration in the home, especially the mechanical type, trips to the plant may be kept at a minimum.

Many people who use refrigerated lockers are not so much concerned with the financial savings which the locker may provide but with the improved nutrition and satisfaction derived from the use of the frozen products. Better quality products and variety in the daily diet are frequently mentioned as advantages in using frozen foods. The fact that almost 85 percent of the patrons of the four locker plants of the county were using a locker for at least the second year is proof of their satisfaction with this method of preserving food.

Homemakers say that freezing their home-produced meat supply instead of putting it into jars frees more of their time for other household duties.
Seventeen percent of the families said they were dissatisfied with some of the locker-stored meat. Much of this dissatisfaction reflected back on their own practices, however. Pork and ground meat should be removed from the locker within 3 to 4 months after storage. Poultry must be prepared for the locker by methods that prevent loss of moisture—otherwise it, too, should be kept only 3 to 4 months. Vegetables caused more dissatisfaction than fruits, probably because they were not prepared properly for freezing.

Nutritionists recognize the contribution meat makes to an adequate diet and recommend that it be served at least once daily. The families concerned in this study consumed an average of 145 pounds of meat per person during the year, which is sufficient to meet adequate nutrition standards. Ninety-eight pounds, or about two-thirds, of this meat had been frozen and stored in the locker.

With a few exceptions families had a tendency to butcher animals in late fall and early spring, rather than at all seasons of the year.

The largest proportion of the meat stored was pork. Beef, poultry and lamb were next, in the order named. Preservation of fruits and vegetables was still in an experimental stage for most families. They were stored more for occasional than for regular use. Most of the foods frozen were produced at home.

During the war when it is so necessary to keep every individual in top-notch physical condition the following recommendations for the use of refrigerated lockers may prove helpful in having the best of products and avoiding waste space:

1. To insure large volume, which means keeping the locker comparatively full at all times, one or more of the practices given below may be followed:
   Butcher at all seasons of the year if it is possible.
   Cooperate in sharing meat.
   Store some home-grown fruits and vegetables.
   Purchase meat wholesale from neighbors or locker manager.

2. Prepare vegetables and fruits according to directions prescribed by a recognized authority. (You may write to Iowa State College for information.)

3. Do not allow pork and poultry to remain in storage too long.

4. Obtain from a reliable source information concerning the preparation of food for the locker.

5. Treat frozen foods as perishables when removed from the locker.

6. Freeze those vegetables which are difficult to can and those fruits whose palatability is materially lessened by canning.

7. Store those kinds and varieties of fruits and vegetables which are recommended for freezing.

Most locker plants offer complete butchering, cutting, wrapping and freezing services to their patrons. They also will render lard and cure and smoke meat. After giving a few directions, the homemaker may leave the butchering process, often an ordeal in the home, to the locker plant. A small fee is charged for these services.