

Erin Chalupa: Excellence in Ag Scholarship Essay

How has consumer food preference changed from the past to the present, and how will it change in the future? This is a topic that I wish we covered more in my animal science classes. We talk about how to feed our animals and how to treat our animals, but ultimately, why do these things matter? Why does it matter what we feed our animals? Who does it affect? As animal scientists, I think that we sometimes forget that the fate of our livestock is more times than not, someone's dinner plate. We need to pay attention to what the consumers want because in the end, they are our customers. In my 20 years of life, I have already seen consumer food preference shifting, and I am certain that it will continue to change in the future.

Although this is a topic that we do not discuss much in class, I have learned and researched the changing consumer preferences on my own time and during my internship at the Iowa Cattlemen's Association. I think that it will be the best to split this essay into three divisions: how it was, how it is, and how it will be. So let's dig in: How has and how will consumer food preference change over the years?

How it was:

Times change so quickly. Even hearing stories from when my parents were young makes the world today seem like we are in a totally different universe. When I think back to my past, or hear stories from others, I notice many differences in food preference. When I was young, my mom almost always had lunch and dinner cooked for us to eat together every day. There was usually a meat and two side options, and this was pretty common around my friends and other families. This has greatly changed. Today, my younger siblings are lucky if they get a homecooked meal three nights of the week and those meals rarely contain all food options that we had. The US culture has gotten much busier and spends less time making home cooked meals

and more time buying something fast and convenient. Another idea correlating with less homecooked meals is that more mothers are working full time instead of staying at home. Consumers are looking for convenience and accessibility.

How it is:

While the food consumer today is still concerned about convenience, there is also a lot of focus on safety, health and the path their food took to get to their plate. Scrolling through social media, walking down the grocery aisle or watching the news, it is unavoidable not to see something about grass fed beef or antibiotic free or organic foods. Food consumers are getting more interested in the process that their food went through and more individuals are looking into more natural, old-school systems of food production. Health and fitness are becoming very prevalent when choosing food as well. News articles and health documentaries are always being published promoting meat free diets or different dieting methods such as intermittent fasting or much smaller portion sizes. All of these things change the way consumers select their food.

How it will be:

I project consumers to be even more aware of where their food comes from in the future. There will be more people looking into niche diets or food options such as free range or chemical free. Convenience, small portion sizes and nutrient content will also be very important factors to consider when producing food for the upcoming consumer. Whether we agree with it or not, this is the way that things are changing. Although these things might be inconvenient or hard for producers to adjust to, if we want to keep being a producer for the US food consumer, we must abide to the preferences of consumers. The world moves so fast with changing technology and a growing population. Preferences are changing just as fast and I am certain that we will find a way to keep up with them.