

THE CHANGING AMERICAN DIET

A REPORT CARD

BY BONNIE LIEBMAN

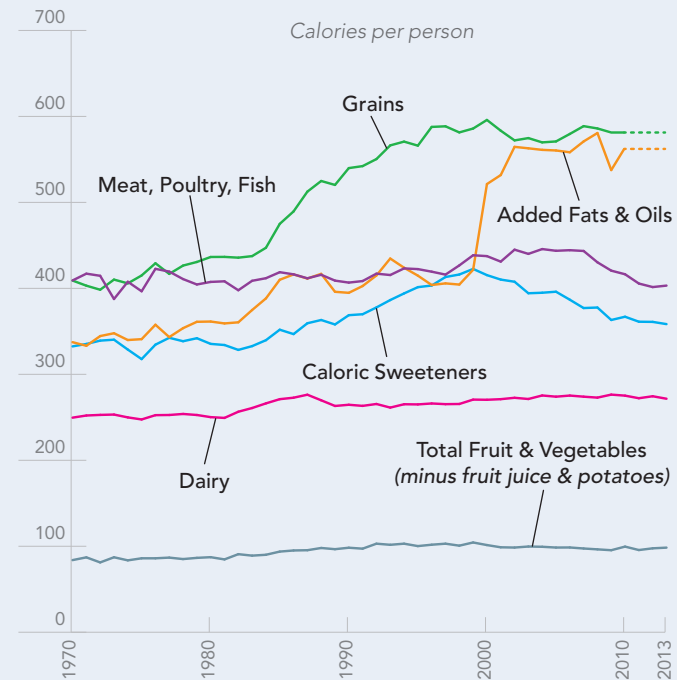
How is the American diet doing? Let's just say it's not about to crack the honor roll.

For starters, we eat too much. The average American consumes about 2,500 calories a day, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates of how much food companies produce (adjusted for waste and loss). In the 1970s, before the obesity epidemic took off, we ate 2,000 calories a day.

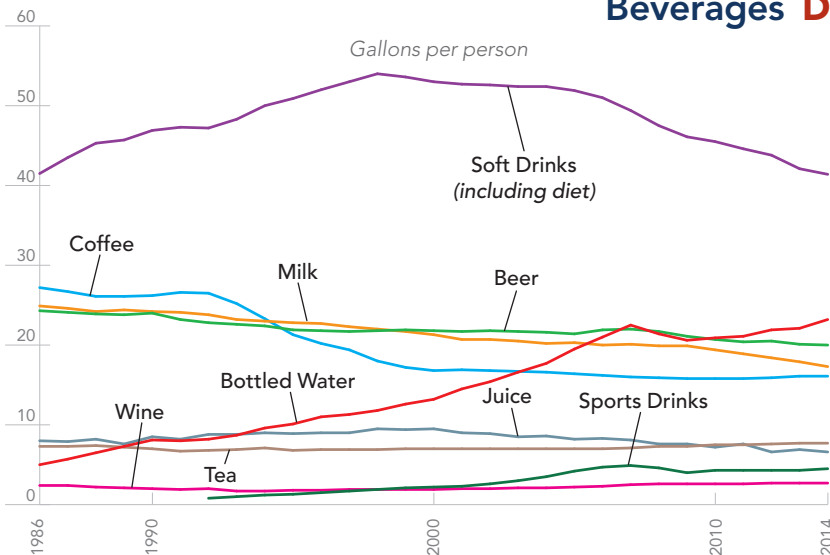
(In 2011, the Census Bureau stopped collecting data on fats and oils, so the USDA has no estimates since then. That's why we've given fats and oils an "Incomplete." Our dotted line assumes that fats and oils have stayed stable. We did the same with the grains line to reflect missing rice data.)

Clearly, it's not just *how much*, but *what* we eat that needs work. We've made only so-so progress in reversing the surge in white flour and sugar that began in the 1980s. We're ignoring advice to fill half our plates with vegetables and fruits. And we're eating too much meat, especially beef, for both our health and the planet's.

Let's get with the program, people! It's time to leave some calories behind. 🍌

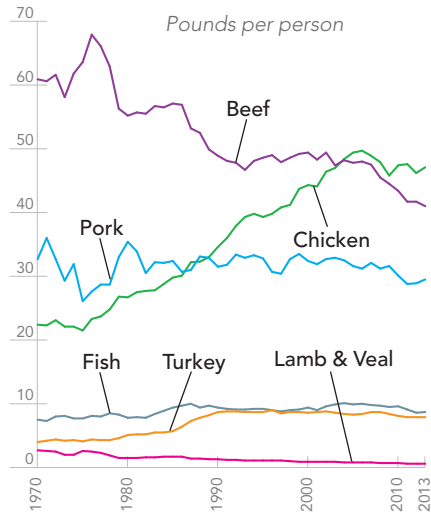


Beverages D+



Soft drinks are still way too high, but they've dropped 23 percent since their 1998 peak, says data from *Beverage Digest*. (The USDA has no numbers for most beverages, but it says that sweeteners—including high-fructose corn syrup and ordinary sugar—are also down, by 14 percent, over that time.) Note: "Soft drinks" includes diet sodas, but they've stayed at about a quarter of the total. Too bad there's no line on the graph for "fruit drinks," which are as unhealthy as soda. The upside: it looks like bottled water has resumed its upward march.

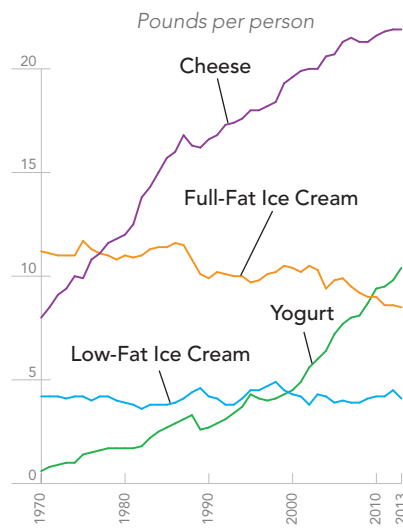
Meat, Poultry, & Seafood D+



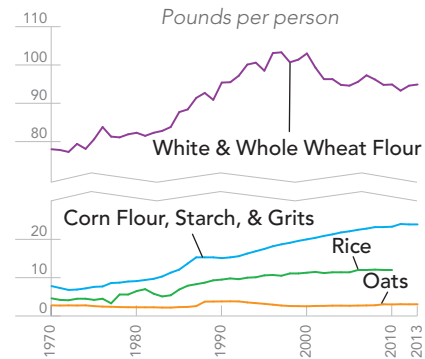
Chicken edged out beef starting in 2004, but red meat (beef, pork, lamb, and veal) is still king. Red meats—especially processed meats like bacon, ham, hot dogs, and sausage—raise the risk of colon cancer, heart disease, and stroke. At least beef continues its decades-long decline.

Dairy C-

Cheese is on a roll...and on nearly every sandwich, salad, pizza, taco, and burrito served in restaurants. That's not good news for arteries or waists. Full-fat ice cream still trounces low-fat. On the upside, yogurt has doubled since 2000 and quadrupled since 1985.



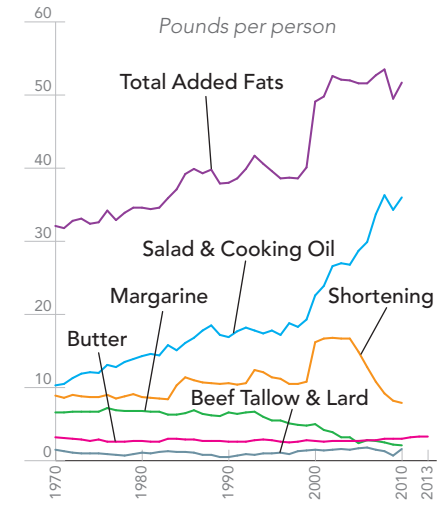
Grains C-



You've heard the advice to replace refined grains with whole grains. But we'd also be better off with less grain, period...say, back where we were in 1970, before companies upped their servings of (mostly white-

flour) bagels, buns, tortillas, pasta, muffins, cupcakes, doughnuts, cookies, pizza crusts, etc.

Fats & Oils INCOMPLETE

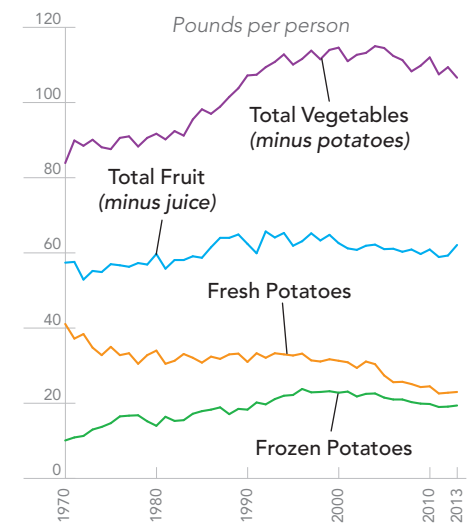


No one knows if we're eating less (or more) fat than we ate in 2010. Only butter data is recent. But odds are, we still eat far more fat than in 1970. (In 2000, the number of firms reporting data jumped, so the real rise was likely less steep than it appears.) The good news: we've mostly

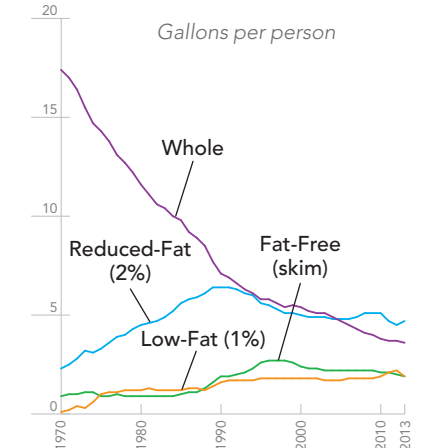
bumped up (unsaturated) oils, not shortening, margarine, or butter (which since 2013 has climbed only 14% from its low level, says [industry data](#), despite the "butter is back" buzz).

Fruits & Vegetables B-

Veggies (minus potatoes) climbed in the late 1980s, but have been inching down since. Fruit (minus juice) has been fairly flat. Ever heard about experts' advice to fill half your plate with fruits and veggies? Most restaurants haven't.



Milk B+



Total milk has slid from 21 gallons to 12 gallons per person per year since 1970. Whole (3.3% fat) and 2% fat milk still outsell 1% fat and fat-free. And we're still eating whole milk's milk fat...in cheese, whose rise shows no signs of slowing.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture (all graphs except Beverages), Beverage Digest Fact Book 2015 (Beverages graph).