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FINDINGS

Carrot Consumption Varies With Age, Income, and Race

People choose which vegetables to eat based on vegetable prices and individual incomes and preferences, which reflect certain demographic characteristics, such as people's age, education, race/ethnicity, and where they live. These demographically shaped preferences are noticeable in the consumption patterns for one long-time American favorite—the carrot.

Carrots are a favorite American vegetable because of their versatile culinary uses and rich nutritional content. They are a common ingredient in stews, soups, stir-fry dishes, and salads. The development of convenient, fresh-cut carrot products, such as baby carrots, has helped secure the carrot's place as a healthy snack option and lunch-box mainstay. A recent ERS study examines where and how many fresh and processed carrots are eaten and links this consumption to various economic, social, and demographic characteristics of consumers.

In 2006, the amount of carrots available for U.S. consumption stood at 12.0 pounds per person—8.7 pounds of fresh carrots and 3.3 pounds in canned, frozen, or other processed uses. For both fresh and processed carrots, retail sales for at-home consumption dominated. The away-from-home market accounted for 2.2 pounds per person, with more than half of that consumed at sit-down restaurants.

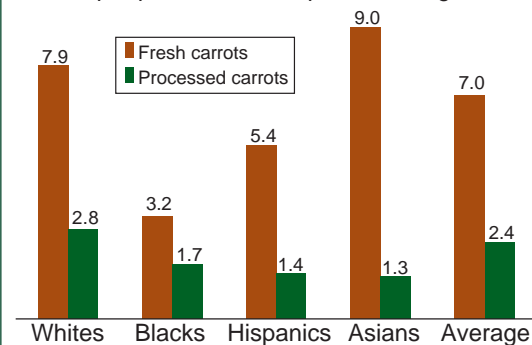
Using data from nationally representative surveys, ERS researchers found that preferences for carrots vary by race and ethnicity, age, and income. Non-Hispanic Whites ate 10.7 pounds of carrots per person at home in 2005, and Asian Americans ate 10.3 pounds per person. Asian Americans ate the most fresh carrots among the racial/ethnic groups (9.0 pounds per person). Non-Hispanic Blacks consumed 3.2 pounds per person of fresh carrots but were the second largest consumers of processed carrots at 1.7 pounds per person.

At-home carrot consumption rises with age and income. For example, those 65 and older ate 13.3 pounds of carrots per person in 2005, compared with 6.8 pounds per person for those younger than 40. Households with incomes over 350 percent of the Federal poverty level consumed 11.1 pounds of carrots per person, compared with 7.8 pounds per person in households with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty level.

America's appetite, like its population, is always changing. The country is becoming more ethnically diverse, with an influx of Hispanic Americans who tend to eat fewer carrots than the national average. At the same time, the U.S. population is growing wealthier, older, and more educated, factors which bode well for greater carrot consumption. ∞

Carrots are more popular with Whites and Asians

Pounds per person, fresh-equivalent weight



Source: 2005 consumption derived from ERS Food Availability data and USDA's Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, 1994-96 and 1998.



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Informing Food and Nutrition Assistance Policy

Since 1998, Congress has provided ERS with funds to study and evaluate the Nation's 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs. These programs provide participants with food, the means to purchase food, and nutrition education. In recent years, about one in five Americans, at some time during the year, have participated in at least one of these assistance programs, which account for over half of USDA's annual budget.

ERS established the Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) to carry out the evaluation. Findings from FANRP studies include the following:

- A 1-percentage-point increase in the Nation's unemployment rate results in about 700,000 more food stamp recipients during the year following the increase.
- Over half of all new entrants in the Food Stamp Program exit the program within 8 months.
- In 2006, 11 percent of U.S. households were food insecure, including about 30 percent of households headed by single women with children.

Food Stamp Benefits Provide Fiscal Stimulus

The Food Stamp Program is one of the Federal Government's countercyclical assistance programs—expanding benefits during an economic downturn and decreasing benefits during an economic expansion. In fiscal year (FY) 2007, USDA provided \$30.4 billion in food stamp benefits to needy Americans. During a downturn, the program is an automatic fiscal stimulus, without congressional action, by providing benefits to new participants. For example, food stamp benefits increased by about \$6 billion (in 2007 dollars) between FY 2000 and FY 2003, as participation rose during the recession of 2001.

An increase in food stamp benefits was considered in early 2008 as part of a fiscal stimulus package in response to a potential economic downturn. In these proposals, food stamp benefits to recipients would be temporarily increased beyond current levels. Increasing benefits would provide an immediate stimulus because food stamp recipients are likely to spend the additional benefits quickly and fully. While the

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Factors Affecting Carrot Consumption in the United States, by Gary Lucier and Biing-Hwan Lin, VGS-319-01, USDA, Economic Research Service, March 2007, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/vgs/2007/03mar/vgs31901