

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC MECHANISM OF REGULATING DIFFER-
ENTIATION OF CONSUMPTION
FOOD: DEVELOPING THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT²**

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Differentiation of food consumption is one of the most important types of socio-economic differentiation of the population. It most clearly indicates the existence of problems in the social sphere, is a factor in increasing social tension in society, signals a decrease in the country's food security. It also has a clearly pronounced economic aspect associated with a decrease in the economic availability of food for a significant part of the population, and, consequently, with a decrease in the volume of effective demand, which reduces the interest of producers in expanding their activities.

The deterioration of the most important nutritional characteristics of the Russian population, the growth of food poverty, have become one of the most negative results of the reform of the agri-food sector. In conditions when a course is taken to ensure a new quality of growth in the agri-food complex of Russia, an objective analysis of the causes of the current situation in the field of food consumption, an assessment of the adequacy of the existing food consumption management system to the requirements of today's realities of the socio-economic development of the state is necessary.

An increase in consumption of basic food products per capita was identified as an important result of the implementation of the priority national project "Development of the agro-industrial complex". Particular attention in this document is paid to the consumption of livestock products. At present, Russia significantly lags behind the developed countries in terms of per capita consumption of meat and meat products: in the USA it is 115 kg per year, in France - 94 kg, in Germany - 86 kg, in Russia - less than 53 kg. If we take into account that this is an

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average characteristic of the consumption of this product, it is obvious that the situation in the low-income strata of the population is much worse.

The Government of the Russian Federation within the framework of the priority national project "Development of the agro-industrial complex" has identified a wide range of tasks and ways of their implementation in the field, first of all, increasing the commodity supply of livestock products based on the support of domestic producers. It is also extremely important to coordinate the growth of the commodity supply of agricultural products with the value of the effective demand of all groups of the population for a real increase in living standards by optimizing one of its most important parameters - food consumption to ensure the economic availability of those food products that are necessary for the normal functioning of the human body.

A comprehensive analysis of the sphere of food consumption in one of the typical regions of southern Russia - the Saratov region - indicates the presence of multidirectional trends in it in recent years.

As an undeniably positive phenomenon in 1997-2004, the decrease in the average per capita consumption of bread products, potatoes and vegetable oil, the so-called "Giffen's goods", can be estimated by 0.9, respectively; 26.6 and 15.2 percentage points, and an increase in the average per capita consumption of meat products and vegetables - by 28.2 and 11.3 percentage points. At the same time, a negative tendency can be noted to reduce the average per capita consumption of dairy products and eggs (by 18.1 and 18.6 percentage points), since it is these products that are the source of the protein component of nutrition, primarily for low-income strata of the population.

The presence of certain problems in the consumer and food market of the region is evidenced by the decrease in the "savings quota" from 6.1% in 2003 to 4.4% in 2004 and 3.6% in the II quarter of 2005, the calculation of which is carried out according to the data of the income and expenses of the population of the Saratov region. In addition, in the first quarter of 2005, a situation was noted that disrupted the smooth functioning of the consumer market, which manifested itself in an excess of expenses over incomes in the amount of 0.03% of the amount of expenses, which was atypical for the post-crisis period. In the future, the considered ratio of income and expenses was again established at the level of 9% - 10% of the amount of cash income.

An analysis of the consumption of basic food products by the population will be incomplete and insufficiently objective if a differentiated approach is not used based on data from budget statistics.

In accordance with the recommendations of the FAO (World Food Organization), the normative caloric intake of the diet should be 2600 kcal per day, the critical calorie content is estimated by experts as 2000 kcal per day. 2002 - 2004 there was a decrease in the calorie content of the entire population of the region from 2934.9 to 2718.0 kcal. In 2004, in the first and second income groups, the calorie content of the diet was below the threshold value, amounting to 1461.7 and 1938.8 kcal, respectively.

An important part of a healthy diet is its chemical composition. 2002 - 2004 the consumption of proteins by the population of the region lagged behind the norm, moreover, during this period there was a decrease in the consumption of proteins in the daily diet by 6.4 percentage points, while the consumption of fats and carbohydrates also decreased - by 3.5 percentage points. and 9.7 p.p. Fat consumption, although it decreased in 2004 compared to 2002, did not exceed the norm by 51.6%. The consumption of carbohydrates was 12.3% less than the norm. Differentiation in the consumption of proteins, fats and carbohydrates was 2.6, respectively; 2.9 and 2.3 times. In the first income group, the consumption of proteins was 2.4 times lower than the norm, fat - 1.5 times, carbohydrates - 1.9 times.

A positive point is that in 2002-2004. the downward trend in the ratios of funds for the consumption of basic food products continued. Reducing the gap in food consumption in the extreme decile groups is associated with an increase in real incomes of the population, which makes it possible to better meet food needs. Obviously, the coefficients of the non-food stocks tend to increase.

Differentiation of food consumption also takes place in the territorial context (city, village). In 2004, urban households consumed more basic types of food than rural households, except for grain products.

It should be noted that the differentiation of food consumption was more pronounced in rural areas than in cities. Thus, the ratio of funds for the consumption of meat products in the city was 2.7 times, and in the countryside - 14.7 times, for the consumption of sugar and confectionery - 2.3 and 6.4 times, respectively.

The comprehensive analysis of the sphere of food consumption on the example of the Saratov region allows us to conclude that the existing management system does not help to overcome the negative trends in the growth of food poverty and the reproduction of an irrational diet of the population.

Improving the socio-economic mechanism for regulating the differentiation of food consumption should be based on a serious theoretical and methodological foundation for the study of basic categories.

The problem of differentiation of food consumption, as a special case of socio-economic differentiation of the population, being an integral attribute of market relations, was during the first years of economic reform in the shadow of more global problems. But, turning into a real factor holding back the pace of economic development, in recent years it has attracted more and more attention of scientists. However, when considering this problem, there are many controversial points, differences in definitions, in the assessment of the current socio-economic situation. So, according to Doctor of Economics. A.E. Surinov, Russia in terms of the Gini coefficient can be attributed to the countries with the average value of this indicator, along with Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, China and the United States.³ ...

Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences N.M. Rimashevskaya notes that "inequality in Russia is comparable to those observed in some Latin American countries, which are characterized by the highest degree of polarization."⁴... And if A.E. Surinov relies on the data of official statistics, then his opponent rightly shows the inaccuracies in assessing the state statistics of the processes of socio-economic differentiation. It is important to expand the system of indicators for assessing the level of socio-economic differentiation, especially at the regional level, improve the methodology for calculating traditional indicators, in particular, the coefficient of regional differentiation by income.

The social protection system in our country is in the stage of active reform, and here it is important to use the positive experience that exists in countries with different models of social protection. In particular, it is advisable to focus not only on providing financial assistance to the poor, but also on carrying out specific work to organize a normal level of nutrition (the food stamp system in the United States).

Promising is the formation of a state policy in the field of rational nutrition, including the promotion of healthy nutrition through the mass media, the spread of a culture of reasonable consumption as an important element of a healthy lifestyle. And, of course, an urgent problem is the change in state policy in the field of income and taxation in order to create conditions for the necessary reforms of the health care system and housing and communal services. It is also obvious that there is a need for a transition in the regulation of the social sphere

³See: A.E. Surinov. The standard of living of the population of Russia: 1992-2002 - M.: ISC "Statistics of Russia", 2003, p. 170.

⁴See: Social protection of the population // Ed. N.M. Rimashevskaya. - M., 2002, p. 42. (Institute of Socio-Economic Problems of Population).

from a living wage, which is a budget for survival in crisis conditions, to a minimum consumer budget that ensures the normal life of a person, preserves his health and satisfies the most important socio-cultural needs.