

12-16-93  
Shortgrass

McDonald's opens a new place every eight hours somewhere in the world. The biggest hamburger joint going stays alert to expand the profits on pickled relishes and smashed hamburger grindings. I read all this the other day in a financial journal, including the note that the chain was experimenting in selling hamburgers at gas stations. Probably tacking on a grill to grease racks and flat tire department was discovered by a survey on how many times young families have to stop for restrooms and wait so long, they need to fulfill their other priority of eating hamburgers and french fries.

Over at Mertzton, competition varies too much for franchises to determine the demand. About any vacant storefront is subject to becoming a temporary hamburger enterprise; however, the market limits the life expectancy of these businesses to about two rollovers of the table cloths.

One lady has managed to keep a cafe open in Mertzton in spite of the uncertainties and hardships of depending on fossil fuel miners and the scattering of herders to support her coffee pot and hamburger grill.

The restricted menus of chicken fries and cheeseburgers of Shortgrass cafes has had deeper influence than imagined. One of the underlying reasons, for example, for the Mertzton Bank chartering a branch in San Angelo was caused in part by a top officer trying to balance his ration dining on taco salads five times a week at the local cafe.

This is the first time a major financial decision, and as it turns out a very successful move, transpired because of a pastry shell full of chopped vegetables dressed in picante sauce and wilted in hamburger meat.

Last week I lunched with one of the bank's advisory directors from Dallas and the Chairman of the Board on home grounds, hoping the pastry shells rubbing against the plates and the change from the plush Dallas spots might cause them to let a fragment of money business slip, or a sliver of free tax advice surface.

Years ago, the Museum of Natural History filmed a whale hunter poised to shoot a harpoon in a raging Arctic Sea. Braced in the prow of the ship, black oilskin boots firmly planted on the icy decks, the look on the harpooner's face was exactly like those two flashed if I tried to penetrate the sacred walls of bankdom, or dared to pry lose a word of free tax knowledge.

Further out west of Mertzton, the standards of chili joints goes unappreciated. No less than the Texas edition of the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that far West Texas used 300% more lard than the nation's average, proving grills and griddles west of the Pecos on I-10 aren't recycling grease, like Houston and Dallas, which rate several percentage points below the nation's consumption of lard.

I picked up the check for the lunch. Not often an opportunity arises for such an excellent deadpan performance off the stage for only 15 bucks. One thing for sure, they were on to my game. Not once did they ask for my opinion....