

Where's our beef

In the hierarchy of essential things in America, it appears, cheeseburgers rank near the top. The president's recent declaration that meatpacking plants are "critical infrastructure" speaks volumes about this country's attachment to an abundant supply of beef and pork even amid a pandemic.

The perceived essentialness of cheeseburgers and other meat products is also a function of certain distinctly American food habits and beliefs.

Both have deep roots. As the English writer Frances Trollope describes in a 1832 travel book, Americans were indiscriminate in their love for animal protein. Beef, pork, lamb and mutton were all consumed with *relish*.

relish 享受; 爱好; 调味品

According to dietary surveys conducted at the turn of the 20th century by Wilbur Atwater, father of American nutrition, Americans ate a phenomenal 147 pounds of meat a year on average; Italians, by contrast, consumed 24.

During World War I, the idea that American *vitality* was tied to a meat-heavy diet dictated how the troops were fed. To give them a fighting edge, tremendous quantities of beef and pork were shipped overseas, enough to provide soldiers with 20 ounces of beef a day or 12 ounces of bacon. The cost was staggering, but the Army refused to trim meat *rations*.

vitality 活力; 生气

ration 配给; 份额

It's no coincidence that the archetypal American hero, the cowboy, is a cattle herder, or that we claim hamburgers as the *quintessential* American food. Much of what has defined us as Americans is expressed through our meat consumption.

quintessential 典型的; 完美的