

Butz Says We Will Buy Beef

Chicago

Scoffing at "scare talk" about a widespread consumer rejection of beef because of high prices and shortages, Agriculture Secretary Earl L. Butz yesterday predicted shoppers will soon begin buying heavily again.

"Beef remains the prestige meat," Butz said in a speech to a meeting of the American Meat Institute.

He said the recent lifting of beef price ceilings will bring an increased supply flowing from farmers who had been holding back cattle.

"Some scare talk developed while the price freeze was on. Some said eating habits changed during the period of scarcity and people are turning away from beef.

"There's a little truth to this, but not much. When

prices are very high or when meat counters are empty, people do buy other foods," Butz said.

But he said today's affluent consumers prefer meat when they can get it and predicted "they will buy all we slaughter."

"As . . . supply lines fill up again, consumers will respond by increasing their purchases of beef," Butz said.

Butz, who has blamed the use of price controls for this summer's disruption of meat supplies, said per capita meat consumption this year will be down from 1972. But he predicted growing supplies as farmers respond to high prices and predicted beef consumption per person by 1985 may reach 140 pounds annually, up one third from last year.

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