From excess to processed food: evolution of meat consumption in Spain since the second half of the 20th century

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Introduction

Economic history has linked meat consumption to two related processes:

- a) Modern nutritional transition: once famines have been eradicated, societies tend to shift from a plant-based diet to an animal-based diet (Popkin, 1993).

- b) Different food consumption models: the first model is characterized by the increase of calorie intake and the rise of consumption in processed, elaborated and sophisticated foodstuff (Malassis, 1997).

Evolution of meat consumption in Spain: a comprehensive view

There are notable differences between the FAO series and the rest of the sources. Given that FAO bases its series on indirect estimations, we can consider that it is not a reliable source in order to study the main trends in meat consumption.

There are two different patterns of meat consumption in Spain with a rupture around the '80s. Starting from a really low value in the '50s (around 10.15 kg per capita), during the sixties there was a dramatic expansion of meat consumption lasting until the '80s. In that decade, consumption per capita was around 60 kg, which is a respectable quantity. In other words, consumption in Spain grew threefold in only twenty years. However, the picture from the '80s onwards is rather different. From that decade, meat consumption stagnated for ten years and started to decrease thereafter. The patterns of dairy products and meat consumption in Spain during the same time are remarkably similar (Collantes, 2014).

Thus, we can not state that meat consumption in Spain from the sixties is featured by a big expansion as most of the literature has affirmed.

Concluding remarks and main references

- The intensive use of different sources in Spain has allowed us to present a reliable and systematic series of meat consumption in Spain.
- Once the nutritional transition culminated (around the eighties), Spanish citizens lowered meat consumption. This fact has been misinterpreted by the literature, which has displayed a scenario of steady growth in meat consumption in Spain since the sixties.
- The second consumption model is characterized by an increase of processed meat over the total meat consumption.