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CONSUMER COMPLAINTS AND PRIORITIES IN A VIRGINIA CONSUMER STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FOOD EXPENDITURES

by

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PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Consumer Concerns and Complaints

METHODOLOGY UTILIZED

This study (utilizing a modified Dillman approach) reflects data gathered from a study of 2,000 completed mail questionnaires in metropolitan areas of Virginia (Roanoke, Tidewater, Richmond and Northern Virginia, i.e., suburban Washington, DC) in 1977 and again in the fall of 1981.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

To the individual family, high cost of food ranked fourth among their ranking of various problems. Note that high prices of many products was also rated high (No. 2) as was failure of many companies to handle complaints properly. Consumers also rated among the top twenty complaints: a) poor quality, b) misleading packaging or labeling, and c) absence of reliable information.

Households which reported high food prices as being a major concern tended to have significantly larger households and lower income.

Consumers to show their dissatisfaction: a) stopped buying a certain brand--62.5%, b) changed principal

place purchased groceries--38.6%, and c) talked to a store manager or employee--22.7%. Utilizing government offices or Better Business Bureau showed practically no change between 1977 and 1981 whereas action such as changing place of buying groceries (33% to 38.6%) and stopped buying a certain brand (58.5% to 62.5%) increased significantly.

Households that changed their principal place of buying groceries were significantly younger, higher income, and better educated than "non-changers." They also were more likely to have: a) talked to a store manager or employee about some product or service, or b) contacted a government agency about an unsatisfactory service or good.

Also noticeable is that households which changed grocery stores rated significantly higher in their concerns regarding: a) not knowing what to do if something is wrong with a purchase and also b) failure of companies to handle complaints properly.

Over nine percent of consumers wrote in that they wanted some type of a local agency, i.e., a local consumer information bureau.