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THE GROCERY INDUSTRY UNIT LOAD COMMITTEE

by

J. W. Speers
General Mills, Inc.

Background

In May 1978 at a Grocery Industry Distribution Liaison Committee Meeting in Atlanta, representatives of the four major trade associations--CFDA, FMI, NAWGA and GMA--indicated a concern for the preservation of the GMA 48" x 40" wood pallet spec, should the Grocery Pallet Council cease to exist. As you know, the GPC folded their tent on January 1, 1979.

The Associations agreed to (1) endorse the GPC pallet specifications minus the inspection, branding, and licensing provisions, and (2) to form a new committee for the purpose of reviewing the present spec's and endorsing any future specification changes.

The Grocery Industry Unit Load Committee

Through GMA I was asked to form such a committee. We called together suggested Committee members from the four trade associations in a meeting in Chicago, February 28, 1979. Several decisions were made relevant to the future of this Committee. The Committee was named the Grocery Industry Unit Load Committee. I was elected Chairman.

These objectives were established:

1. Secure financial support from participating associations.
2. GMA is to provide administrative support.

3. The Committee is to be open to other associations of the food industry with the same general interest.
4. Problem solve industry distribution concerns.
5. Improve pallet exchange program and monitor grocery industry pallet specifications.
6. Study integration of slip sheets into truck receiving operations.

We met briefly in Houston on April 25 during the GMA Distribution Committee/Distributors Joint Conference. This session spent its time doing some future planning. The committee decided there were three areas of immediate concern.

They are:

1. Wood pallet exchange
2. Slip sheets
3. Equipment for truck unloading of slip sheet loads.

Task teams were established and planning objectives outlined, the whole idea being to add clarity to what is being done in the industry in these three important areas and to seek possible solutions to some of the dilemmas confronting the food industry. These teams have been at work. They will be brought together again on October 25 in

Philadelphia, following the NAWGA Productivity Conference to hear the task team reports. After hearing these reports, it will be the Committee's job to determine a course of action. Such action might take the form of seeking endorsement of the executive committees of the Trade Associations Meeting in this effort; dissemination of information; or pursuit of probable solutions to joint problems facing the industry.

Observations

I notice the program indicates I am to give an industry report on the use of slip sheets. Since that report is not yet in my hands, my comments at this point are only personal observations. You have heard some excellent reports from other members of this panel on the subject of slip sheets.

It is my observation that:

1. The current detention rules of the ICC are inhibiting the growth of unitization of truck loads, i.e., failure to recognize the slip sheet as a unit load base. Many petitions have been filed for change of those rules but none have been forthcoming.

2. Hand unloading of slip sheet loads is counterproductive, causing trucks to be detailed at docks for many hours while the driver unloads piece by piece.

3. Manufacturers are getting out of wood pallet ownership because of high costs, thus leaving the customer and the carriers to support wood pallet programs, if any.

4. There are new lift trucks with slip sheet attachments on the market for unloading trucks. Yet there is reluctance on the part of the food distributor to invest in them, thus reducing the efficiency of their receiving operations.

Each of the issues I just mentioned are causing concerns in our industry. If the Grocery Industry Unit Load Committee can in some manner find a way in which these unit load systems can be made acceptable and interchangeable at truck docks, as they are at rail docks, productivity would be greatly enhanced. We will give it our best shot!
