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PROJECT CONSUMER CONCERN — USDA — NARGUS DEMONSTRATIONS

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Explains the project and discusses examples of successful work using the demonstration techniques.

Project Consumer Concern is an effort on the part of the USDA and the food industry to follow through on their combined commitment to furnish consumers an adequate supply of wholesome food.

What is Project Consumer Concern?

Specifically Project Consumer Concern is a joint program effort between the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Association of Retail Grocers and has three basic objectives: (1) to impress three closely linked segments of the food marketing chain...retail, wholesale, and consumer...of the importance of their contribution toward an improved environment, in assuring a wholesome food supply, and the necessity of working together to achieve them; (2) to illustrate what is being done and what can be done to improve our daily lives with a more efficient and concerned food marketing system; and (3) to effect improvements of food handling, storage, and distribution.

Some of the proposed problem areas we are investigating:

1. To obtain actual operating data for handling food products at retail stores. Included will be the identification and description of handling practices, sanitation procedures, and operating policies. To examine the condition of merchandise as it is received from suppliers at the supermarket and make preliminary recommendations to management upon completion of the detailed in-store studies.

2. Obtain information on proper environmental requirements and handling practices for food products by major food product categories. Sources of information include Federal, State, and local health departments and USDA and FDA research publications and personnel. Initial emphasis will be placed on meat, delicatessen, produce, dairy, bakery, and frozen food items. Emphasis will be given to the proper work methods and equipment needed to safely handle the products, the best methods for effectively sanitizing the storage, preparation, and display areas.

3. Coordinate the development of consumer educational materials dealing with product selection and use, proper handling techniques from supermarket to consumption, nutritional value and complementary items for balanced diets.

4. Develop guidelines to encourage effective handling and use of solid waste with emphasis on recyclability or reclamation. The handling of returnable bottles and reusable containers will be included.

To Use Demonstration Store Technique

In following through with this commitment it was decided by the USDA—NARGUS Wholesome Food Committee, made up of representatives of the USDA and three NARGUS Directors, to use the Demonstration Store technique. The Demonstration Store is an educational device that has been used for many years successfully by the Extension Service. It uses the result demonstration principle in which improvement based on research results are established in one store of a firm or group of stores and extended by various means to other stores in the firm or group of stores. The Demonstra-

tion Store becomes the focus for the firm-wide or group-wide program. It simply is an educational vehicle to aid in the extension of research information to the entire firm or group of stores. The Demonstration Store program is the total educational effort with the cooperating firm or group using the Demonstration Store as a vehicle to aid in the extension of research results within the firm or group.

In moving ahead with our Demonstration Store approach it was agreed to evaluate and explore opportunities for consumer education programs as it relates to care in handling and storing meats, delicatessen and prepared foods, produce, frozen foods, dairy, grocery and bakery products.

Objective for Total Sanitation Program in Supermarkets

During the week of September 25, Dr. Harold Ricker of the Agricultural Research Service and I had an opportunity to work with representatives of the Pennsylvania Extension Service in initiating our first Demonstration Store. One of our first accomplishments was to agree upon an objective for the Demonstration Store which was agreed to be: "to implement a program of procurement, cleanliness, and careful handling that will assure all food products reach the table of my customers in a safe and wholesome condition."

Also during the week we had an opportunity to meet with key decisionmakers within the firm to explain and discuss the program. We also met with department heads who will have the responsibility for the program in the supermarket. Agreement was also reached as to who the supermarket liaison man would be...that is, the individual within the firm who would have the responsibility for implementing the total sanitation program.

We discussed the objectives of the program and local health requirements with State representatives from the Bureau of Food and Chemistry who have the responsibility for food store inspections. Meetings were also held with representatives from the Department of Environmental Resources who have the responsibilities for water, waste disposal, sewage, and sanitation in food

service and restaurant establishments. Others we met with during the week included Extension Specialists, food distribution, food science, and consumer marketing.

Pennsylvania Demonstration Store

During the week in Pennsylvania the following was accomplished:

Developed plans for a retailer sponsored consumer education program. This program will include concise suggestions for care and storage of food so as to assure its safety and maintain wholesomeness from store to consumers table. It will be promoted in the weekly advertisements of the retail food firm. Leaflets will be made available at the store and from the Pennsylvania State University. These leaflets will be referred to in the advertisements and go into greater detail relative to the subjects for that week. It is planned to test this program for twelve weeks. At the end of this period the program will be evaluated so as to determine customer comprehension and use. Plans are also being made to include bag stuffers and shelf talkers in this phase of the program.

In addition, it was planned to hold retailer sponsored meat workshops for consumers at which the selection, preparation, and care of the meat will be discussed.

A list of objectives for a total in-store sanitation program was agreed upon and a draft of a check list developed. Plans were made to train store supervisors and department managers in the use of the check list and the application of improved sanitation practices through in-store training sessions.

Plans were also made for expanding the total program to multi-store groups by utilizing the materials and techniques tested in the demonstration store.

Extension plans also to provide the leadership in coordinating the food sanitation educational program with the Bureau of Food and Chemistry and with the Department of Environmental Resources.

Sanitation Problems Found in Stores

Since defining the problem is so necessary in getting the job done, I thought you might be interested in some of the problems that we have observed not only in Pennsylvania Demonstration Store but also in supermarkets in Ohio and North Carolina that have been selected for Demonstration Store purposes.

Sanitation Problems:

1. There are no uniform guidelines being used for sanitation programs for any department.
2. There are no formal training programs on sanitation purposes or practices for store level personnel.
3. There is often disagreement among State, county, and city health departments as to equipment, facilities, materials, and standards of cleanliness.
4. The regulations and the inspectors for restaurants and snack bars are often different than those for meat, bakery, dairy, and other departments within the same store.
5. There is no follow-up on sanitation training.
6. Cleanup was generally done by part-time workers.
7. No established method for cleaning and sanitizing.
8. No procedures established or check list for managements' use in control of sanitation programs.
9. Difficulty in getting cleaning equipment serviced.
10. No agreement on the types of cleaning equipment to use. Some of it was custom made and of questionable value.
11. General agreement that the biggest program was supervising employees to see that the sanitation goals are achieved.

Perishable Products--Refrigeration and Handling:

1. Considerable uncertainty as to proper refrigeration temperatures and where in the case and cooler temperatures should be checked.
2. There is a need for better temperature indicators in all refrigerated cases.
3. There is a need to improve the ease of servicing refrigerated equipment.
4. Freshness codes expiration dates were of little use to employees or customers.
5. Little knowledge of the effect of lighting on meat quality.
6. Improper temperatures for meat processing areas, egg storage in the backroom and egg displays in sales areas.
7. Frozen food temperatures range from 10 degrees above zero to 40 below. Ice cream was generally held at 20 to 25 below. Frozen foods had snow and ice in and on the packages. No programs for rotation of frozen foods. Large amounts of frozen food cases on the sales floor waiting to be put into display cases.
8. Dairy products travel with dry groceries in wholesalers truck with no refrigeration.
9. No plan to protect perishable foods relative to their location in the store.

Consumer Information:

1. Virtually non-existent.
2. There was general agreement that the consumer does not know how to handle or take care of perishable food products.

Groceries:

1. No understanding of code dates of groceries and no rotation plan.
2. Some are attempting to keep pesticides and dangerous chemicals separate in the display area but lack follow through.

Waste and Bottle Handling:

1. Lack of standards for incinerators.
2. Solid waste in uncovered containers.
3. Difficulty in establishing a system for reusing cardboard, since wholesaler is reluctant to take leadership.
4. Returnable bottles. One area has 95% returnables and another is trying for 0% returnables. Returnable bottle systems are inefficient.

At this point in our development of Project Consumer Concern, the following

challenges are evident: the enormity of the job, especially in getting food retailers who are in a profit squeeze to spend additional money for sanitation; to get follow through in stores even after convincing top management of the necessity of good sanitation; the need to get the many regulatory agencies coordinated as it relates to the standards; convincing consumers of their role in the proper handling of perishable products; and also to motivate various research and educational groups to provide us with facts to fill the voids that now exist in the whole area of sanitation and refrigeration so as to provide safe and wholesome foods for consumers.
