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STRATEGIES FOR THE 1980'S

Chairperson: Lynn Robbins

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

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Introduction

This paper is the result of a workshop session during the 1982 Food Distribution Research Society meetings. The workshop participants were charged with developing a list of educational challenges and changes for the 1980's. A group discussion among the participants resulted in the following list.

The challenges listed below are enhanced by the following translation and interpretation as determined through discussion during and after the workshop.

Challenges for the 1980's

The workshop discussion resulted in four general audiences being addressed. The four audiences were (1) consumers, (2) students, mainly college or university students, (3) business managers, and (4) other individuals. Each of these groups will be discussed in more detail.

Consumers. The challenges for consumer education in the 1980's suggested by the workshop attendees included the following:

(1) Attitudes toward technology. There is a perceived need for the educational activities which favorably influence consumer attitudes toward technological developments in food marketing. Scanning, food preservation, storage and handling technologies, as examples, represent developments in food retailing and wholesaling which can create problems for

the industry due to a lack of understanding or misunderstandings on behalf of the consumer.

(2) Methods and Costs of Food Marketing. A better understanding, by consumers, of the costs and profitability of food marketing is not in general well understood. Attitudes and levels of expectations of the industry in these economic times should better reflect the realities of doing business. Likewise, it was felt that a better understanding of how the industry works would help in the consumer's understanding of price changes.

(3) Size and Bigness. The misconceptions of bigness and what size can mean for "economies" of size for the consumer as well as for managers pervade much of the consumer segment of the population. A better understanding of the need for size in order to increase capital use efficiency and benefits from buying advantages by the retail and wholesale firm is assumed to be beneficial for the food industry.

Students. The challenges for students, especially college students, education for the 1980's were several. The workshop participants included the following.

(4) Technology Application and Integration. The dissemination of information on technological developments is important among all groups, including students who presumably will

be buyers and users of same in the years ahead. The educational efforts associated with the dissemination of technological information should, according to the workshop participants, include information on its application, including its integration into the total food distribution system.

It was suggested that this be accomplished through multidisciplinary projects or educational efforts.

(5) Industry Impacts of Political Issues. There was the feeling that educational efforts should include more analysis of the economic and social impacts of political issues debated or proposed in our society today. This effort should result in a greater ability to make decisions regarding these issues as well as afford individuals the opportunity to debate pro or con the issues involved in various politically proposed items influencing the food industry and food marketing.

(6) Less Theory and More Application. This educational challenge is an age-old one which will not be debated in this article. The time and place for both must be carefully evaluated. The purpose and goals of any educational activity will, or at least should, dictate the resulting theoretical or applied content of the endeavor. All of one and none of the other is not usually a part of an educational endeavor.

(7) Productivity and Simulation. The FDRS meeting reinforced the present educational efforts of one attendee and plans for a future course to be taught by the same attendee. Productivity and the use of computers were two topics repeatedly discussed during the previous meeting sessions. One attendee is presently teaching a food marketing productivity course and plans to teach a course based on computer simulated management decision making exercises. Both of these areas of education were perceived to be needed and a challenge to future educational efforts.

Business Managers. The third area of concern and the third category of educational challenges was the business management group. Due to a great deal of discussion about convenience stores, a number of persons suggested educational efforts focused on this group.

(8) Utilizing the Micro Computer. This educational effort was mentioned particularly as it relates to the manager of the convenience store. This is by no means the only group that would benefit from this type of educational effort. The micro or mini computer is perceived to be more applicable to the small type of store, and the convenience store falls into this category.

(9) Implementing the UCS. The Universal Communication System is being developed for more extensive application in the food industry. It was felt that more educational effort is needed to obtain greater cooperation and use of the system for the benefit of the total channel of food distribution and the industry in total as well as the consumer.

(10) "Quality Circle" Formation and Supervision. The increasing use and implementation of "Quality Control Circles" prompted the suggestion that more of an effort be made in educating more firms in the food industry on the formation, implementation, and efficient utilization of this participative management technique.

Others. In addition to consumers, college students and business managers, challenges were perceived to exist for public servants and for all persons involved with and in the food industry.

(11) Public Transportation. It was suggested that public servant awareness of transportation issues should be increased through educational efforts. It is proposed that public officials at the State and local levels be provided with more information on transportation issues and developments as they related to the food industry.

(12) Selling Education. A challenge for the 1980's will be the ability to sell education to both potential users and financeers of educational efforts. Education efforts are needed to assist educators in selling the impacts and marketing the value of education. Educational efforts are needed to create an awareness of the concerns of the public in continued investment of time and taxes in education.

Conclusion. This paper notes several of the education challenges of the 1980's faced by persons involved in the food industry, producers, distributors, retailers, educators, researchers and government representatives. These challenges represent the opportunities for all persons in the industry. Efforts and initiative will convert these opportunities into beneficial results for the food industry and consumers.