UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Thursday, April 30, 1931.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "The Canners' Bill." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Menu and recipe from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Publications Available: "Service and Regulatory Announcements, F. D. No. 4;" Mimeographed copy of radio talk by Dr. P. B. Dunbar, "The Canners' Bill."

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I wonder how many of you read the Congressional Record religiously, and know all about all the bills that are passed by the National Legislature. Or how many of you read in your newspapers a year ago that the Congress had passed and the President had signed an amendment to the Federal Food and Drugs Act, known as the Canners' Bill, setting up new labeling requirements for certain canned foods.

Probably very few of you. So most of you won't have at the start much understanding of this bill which is soon to be put into effect so far as canned peaches, peas, and pears are concerned. But the bill really is important to you, as purchasing agents for your families.

So this morning I want to tell you the facts about the bill, as I got them from Dr. P. B. Dunbar, the assistant chief of the Food and Drug Administration.

I found Doctor Dunbar in a reminiscent mood. "Aunt Sammy," said he, "Aunt Sammy, did you ever stop to think about the change in canned foods during the past twenty-five years?"

He didn't wait for an answer, but went on, "Twenty-five years ago, when the housewife donned her poke bonnet and went to the store for, say, a can of tomatoes, she was entering into a deal that had all the earmarks of the long chance. She asked for what she got and she put her money down in good faith. Maybe she got what she wanted. Maybe. But not always.

"But in 24 years' enforcement of the national pure food law, a change has come about, Aunt Sammy. An amazing change for the better in the quality of canned foods on the American market. And the public, long-suffering, it is true, but highly appreciative of a good turn, has fallen to and bought more and more of these foods that come in cans. The food and drugs act specifies that foods be unadulterated, wholesome, and honestly labeled. The canning

industry as a whole has supported this law admirably. The law has helped the public. The law has encouraged ethical and profitable business."

"But Doctor Dunbar," said I, "I know all that, having talked with you and your men on sundry occasions. What I want to know now is about this new Canners' Bill."

"Precisely," answered Doctor Dunbar. "Precisely. My recollections of the early days of the century and of methods of food marketing then were inspired by the fact that the canning industry was the power that put through this new bill. The canners fought for legislation that puts more rigid restrictions on themselves."

"Now what does that mean to consumers?" I wanted to know.

"It means," answered Doctor Dunbar, "that the industry is going to be solidly back of a governmental effort to see that the purchaser of canned foods gets her money's worth. How? Well, suppose we go back to tomatoes.

"You go to the store and ask for a can. If you are one of the many who read labels, the chances are that you will get just about what you ask and pay for. But there are many kinds of canned tomatoes. Some cans contain better tomatoes than others. They may all be wholesome and good to eat. But some are better than others -- and the buyer has a right to know just what kind she is getting.

"Now, this Canners' Bill authorizes legal quality standards for all canned foods except milk and canned meat and meat products. The Bill gives the Secretary of Agriculture authority to set standards of quality, condition, and fill of container of all canned foods with the two exceptions I have mentioned.

"And here is the heart of the new law. If a product falls below the standard of quality, it must bear a plain and conspicuous statement of such a nature as to advise the buyer that the food is below standard. The designation has been set.

"Aunt Sammy, tell all your friends to begin looking, soon, for these words on canned foods: BELOW U. S. STANDARD -- LOW QUALITY BUT NOT ILLEGAL. Do you get it? BELOW U. S. STANDARD -- LOW QUALITY BUT NOT ILLEGAL.

"Now you won't find those words on labels of all canned goods right away. For each product we must formulate standards. Then 90 days after the standards are formulated, the statement must go on labels of canned foods not meeting the standards."

"How soon will we look for this buyers' guide?" I asked.

"Pretty soon now on peaches, peas, and pears," was the answer. "Standards for these have already been announced by the Secretary of Agriculture, and they go into effect May 18. Standards for other canned foods will be officially announced as soon as possible."

"Generally speaking, Doctor Dunbar, what will the enforcement of the Canners' Bill mean to the buyer?" I queried.

"Three things:

"First: That quality and condition standards for practically all classes of canned foods except meat and meat-food products and canned milk will eventually be set by the Secretary of Agriculture.

"Second: That a standard fill of container for such products will be enforced. This standard of fill has been drawn up already, thus guaranteeing the housewife against slack-filled cans.

"Third: That the buyer of canned foods will not have to worry about slack fills and, as standards for each class are formulated and promulgated, about getting an inferior or below-standard product for the price she pays for a standard quality or superior food. Remember that canned goods falling below the standard will be labeled: BELOW U. S. STANDARD -- LOW QUALITY BUT NOT ILLEGAL.

"But don't get the idea that you need shy away from the canned goods bearing that label under fear that they are unwholesome. The Food and Drugs act prohibits sale in interstate commerce of adulterated, misbranded, or injurious foods. If you want a cheaper product for some particular reason, you will be perfectly safe in buying canned foods that bear this low standard label.

"We feel that the housewife with a limited budget should be enabled, under the terms of the Canners' Bill, to buy a substandard product within the reach of her pocketbook which will carry the nutritive, if not the aesthetic value of standard canned foods -- provided she reads intelligently the labeling required by the law to appear on the can.

"Let me make that clear again. The Food and Drug Administration believes that it was not the purpose of Congress, in passing this bill, to make the labeling for substandard foods stigmatize unduly the article to which it is applied. The law makes it very clear that its purpose is to let the consumer know what goods are below the standard, but the substandard product will be wholesome and edible, even if not so palatable or attractive as the standard product. If the food were unwholesome or inedible, its distribution would be illegal under the terms of the national pure food laws."

"Doctor Dunbar," I interrupted him, "I understand that. Now I want some help for my poor, faltering memory. Where can I get a statement of the standards already announced for canned peas, peaches, and pears, and the fill-of-container specifications required by the bill?"

"Here you are, Aunt Sammy," he answered. And he handed me a circular called SERVICE AND REGULATORY ANNOUNCEMENTS, F. D. NO. 4. I'll get you a copy if you wish, and also a copy of a radio talk Doctor Dunbar recently made about the bill.
