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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM THE F. & D.A." Facts from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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Homemakers, hardly a week goes by, in the summer time, that you don't hear me -- or some other home economist -- emphasize the importance of using a pressure canner, for canning the non-acid foods. The non-acid foods, as you know, include all the vegetables except tomatoes, rhubarb, ripe pimientos, and pickled beets.

Now -- why do we so often state: "The steam pressure canner is an absolutely essential piece of equipment for safe canning of non-acid foods." . . . Well, here's why: It may take six hours or more, at boiling temperature (212 degrees), to kill certain dangerous bacteria, but at 240 degrees, in the steam pressure canner, these bacteria may be destroyed in 30 minutes. Under home canning conditions, without the steam pressure canner, many stubborn and dangerous bacteria may never be killed.

And then what?

Then, if the dangerous bacteria are not killed, we may read of such tragedies as this, included in today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration:

DEATH OF THREE ATTRIBUTED TO HOME-CANNED BEANS

"Denver press dispatches recently reported one person dead and two dying from botulism poisoning, resulting from eating home-canned string beans, states the Denver Station of the Food and Drug Administration. Dr. D. Costigan, health officer at Trinidad, Colorado, near which the fatalities occurred, had taken samples of the home-canned beans to which the poisoning was attributed, and his culture of a sample had definitely established the beans as the causative agent."

Now, quoting our correspondent directly: "There is absolutely no cause for alarm, if you follow the correct rules for canning vegetables at home. And if you do not know the rules, you can get them in a bulletin published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, 'Home Canning of Fruits, Vegetables, and Meats.'"

The next item in today's report deals with tomato catsup, and how the Government scientists check up on its wholesomeness. Quoting our official reporter:

"Do you know that it's possible for the analysts in the Federal Food and Drug Administration to tell whether catsup was made from moldy

tomatoes -- from cracked or sour tomatoes -- or from sound fruit? No matter how red and how free from defects the catsup may seem, to the untrained eye, it can't fool the Government analysts who have learned the Howard method of mold counting.

"A flattened drop of tomato catsup, puree, paste, sauce, or soup, placed between two plates of glass, may show filaments of mold, when observed through a microscope. The analyst examines successive 'fields of view' by moving the slide on the microscopic stage. He then calculates what percentage contains mold -- commonly referred to as the 'mold count.' If the count is beyond normal for good tomatoes, prepared under suitable manufacturing conditions, the shipment represented by the sample, and also the man or the company that shipped the tomato product, are subject to legal action.

"The Howard method of mold counting has a high standing in the courts, as evidence of decomposition of tomato products. Many packers also use the method to check up on their employees who sort and trim tomatoes. One reason for the reliability of the method is that products like catsup and puree are remarkably uniform in composition. In the hands of an experienced mold counter, several drops of catsup or puree, taken at random, will give a mold count that is accurately indicative of the whole batch from which the sample came.

"Tomato products continue as the most important field for the mold counter's activities. However, the Microanalytical Division of the Food and Drug Administration also uses the method for jams, jellies, fruit butters, strained vegetables, butter, and other foods.

"Federal officials believe that the continued development and adaptation of the mold count method to an increasing variety of prepared foods will enable greater consumer protection, under the Food and Drugs Act."

And this concludes today's report, from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, Washington, D. C.

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