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FOOD NEWS

FOR CONSUMERS

United States Department of Agriculture Volume 1 Number 1
Summer 1984



Schoolchildren
Are Learning About
Good Health — Are You?

Also Featuring:

How to Complain about Food Products —
And Get Results

Poultry is Plentiful — Just in Time for Summer Cookouts

A New Test May Detect Early Sign of Kidney Disease

FOOD NEWS

FOR CONSUMERS

Summer 1984
Vol. 1, No. 1

This magazine is published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service.

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On the Cover:

Winning Poster in USDA's 1984 Food Safety Poster Contest drawn by Michael Walkup, age 10. The fourth grader at Kingston Elementary School, Kingston, Ma., was a finalist in the contest and was awarded a Food Safety Ribbon and Certificate of Merit.

PERSPECTIVES

Dear Reader:

From cover to cover, *Food News for Consumers* is new. Our magazine now presents not only a different look, but an expanded array of articles.

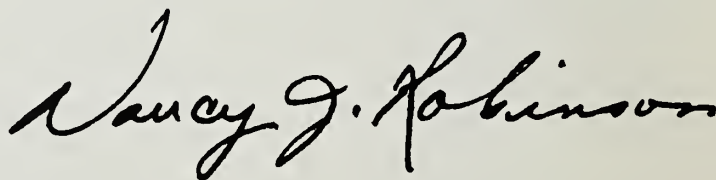
A sample survey of our readers last year prompted us to think about change. And based on that survey and additional research, we have revised the magazine's format, organization and scope. We will also be providing an annual index. These improvements are aimed at making the magazine an even more effective resource for you.

The articles on food — safety, nutrition, eating trends, etc. — are still here. But more information on subjects like consumer education, health aspects of food, and availability and cost of food — topics you requested — will now fall within the range of *Food News for Consumers*.

Moreover, we plan to have regular contributions from the Director of USDA's Office of the Consumer Advisor, Ann Collins Chadwick. As USDA's chief spokesperson on consumer matters, she's in a unique position to provide helpful advice. Her article this issue — how consumers can effectively complain to food companies — should make interesting and useful reading.

We hope you continue to find *Food News for Consumers* gives you the information you need — but in an even more useful way. We appreciate the helpful suggestions you've provided us in the past. We welcome and encourage your comments on our new approach.

Sincerely,



Nancy Robinson, Director
Information and Legislative Affairs

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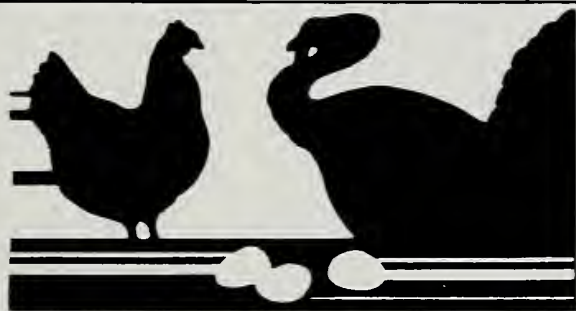
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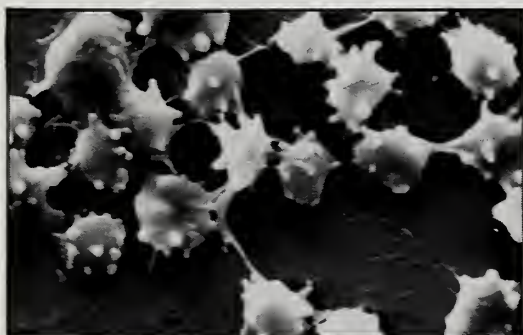
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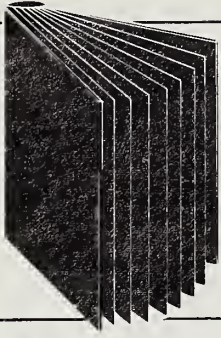
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CONSUMER EDUCATION

How to Complain About Food Products

What do you do when you have a complaint about a food product? Do you return the product to the store for a refund? Do you let the food company know about the problem? Or do you just dispose of the product, thinking no one cares.

Most people who have complaints that are serious enough to justify contacting the store or the company will tell friends about their unhappy experience. But they don't tell the people who are most anxious to know — the store or the food company.

In fact, 96 percent of consumers do not take the time to complain to the right people when they are dissatisfied with a product.

As a consumer, you have both a right and a responsibility to let a company know when you are not satisfied with its products. When consumers file complaints with the right people in the right way, retailers and processors have an opportunity to make

amends to unhappy customers and to find out where improvements are needed.

The purpose of registering a complaint is to allow the store or company to make amends to you for the unsatisfactory product and to enable the company to make changes that prevent future mistakes.

When you have a complaint about a food product, save the container and any uneaten portion of the food until your complaint has been resolved. Cover or wrap the product and container and refrigerate or freeze it. Mark it clearly so that no one will eat it by mistake.

It is possible that the company may wish to have a representative evaluate the unsatisfactory product. The product and container can be disposed of after the problem has been settled.

Next, decide whether the problem occurred at the processing or the retail level. If the problem is with freshness — for example, spoilage before the freshness date on the package has expired — you should return the product and the container to the store.

Return the unsatisfactory product as soon as possible and take your cash register receipt with you. When you enter the store, ask to see the manager or the supervisor of the department where you purchased the product. Tell that person when you purchased the product and what you feel is wrong with it. Point out the "Sell by" or "Best if used by" date.

Reporting your complaint in this way allows the store to replace the product or refund your money, and it alerts the manager to any changes that might be needed to ensure freshness of products.

If the problem apparently occurred during processing, you should contact the company that produced the product.

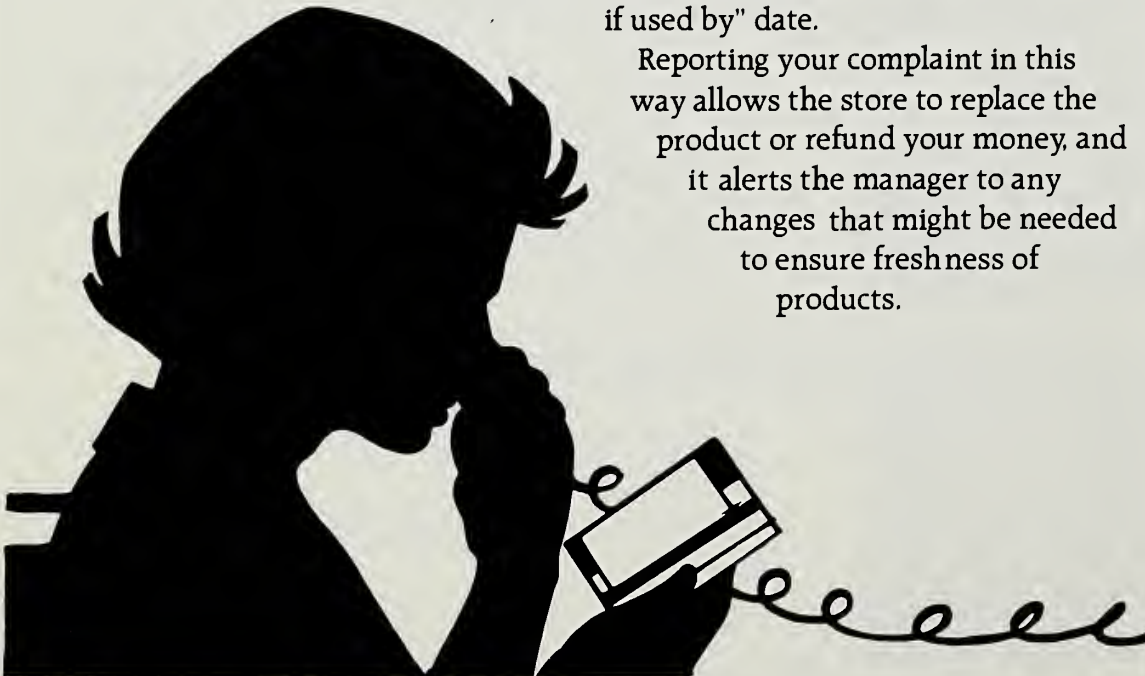
Some companies include a toll free telephone number — an 800 number — on the label so consumers can contact them when they have complaints, questions or suggestions.

For most problems at the processing level, however, it is best to write a letter. The name and address of the company are on the label. When you write, address the letter to the Consumer Affairs Department. This will help the company handle your complaint more quickly.

Most companies assign the responsibility for resolving complaints to one person or department. Complaints are reported to company executives and managers who use them to improve the quality of the products.

Your letter should include:

1. A description of your purchase:
 - a. the name of both the company or brand name and the specific name of the product;
 - b. the size purchased;
 - c. any code marks from the container, such as a series of letters and numbers stamped on the end of a can, the lid of a jar or bottle, or elsewhere on a wrapper or package.
2. The date and place of purchase.
3. A specific, accurate statement of the problem.
4. A statement of exactly how you expect the company to resolve the problem.
5. Your name, address and phone number.
6. Identifying documents or packaging material:
 - a. the label or portion of the package or container with code marks;
 - b. proof of purchase or guarantee of satisfaction information;
 - c. the cash register receipt.
7. A statement of whether you still have unused portions of the food or the container.



8. Any other information that will help the company solve the problem to your satisfaction.

Do's and Don'ts for Complaining Successfully

DO

- Be brief.
- Be accurate.
- Be sincere.
- Be firm.
- Be courteous.
- Properly store and mark any uneaten food until you have heard from the company.
- Let the company know if a product you have purchased many times seems different in a way that detracts from its quality.
- Enclose labels or other identifying materials, when possible.
- State exactly what you want the company to do to resolve the problem.
- Include all the information the store or company needs to respond to you properly and to find out exactly where production mistakes might have occurred.
- Type or write clearly so that your letter is easy to read.
- Keep a copy of your letter.
- Include your name, address and phone number.
- Be reasonable in your expectations.

DON'T

- Be sarcastic or hostile.
- Threaten the store or the company.
- Exaggerate the seriousness of the problem.
- Assume the store or company doesn't care about the quality of the product or your complaint.
- Assume the store or company deliberately misled you. Remember, they want you as a customer.
- Make unrealistic demands that are not in keeping with the seriousness of the complaint.
- Contact a third party, like a government agency or other source of assistance, before you give the store or company a chance to resolve the problem. If the complaint is not han-

Sample Complaint Letter

*J. Smith
1234 Elm St.
Denver, Colo. 88992
Phone: (301) 447-9113
July 2, 1984*

*J. Jones
Consumer Affairs Department
Fresh Air Farms
P.O. Box 4321
Sacramento, Calif. 99882*

Dear Ms. Jones:

Last week I purchased a 16-ounce can of Fresh Air Farms Early Browneyed Peas from the Oak Street Market, 1122 Oak St., Denver, Colo. The code BPO 9876 was embossed on the lid.

Although I have used this product for several years without any problems, I noticed the texture of the peas in this can was much softer than usual. I have frozen the peas in case you need to examine them. The product label and the cash register receipt are enclosed.

Please provide me with a credit for another purchase of this product or a refund of the purchase price.

Thank you for your help in solving this problem. I know that your company wants to know if the quality of a product does not meet your standards.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

J. Smith

Enclosures (2)

dled properly, it is your prerogative to then ask a third party for assistance.

In unusual situations, you may want to notify the company or appropriate government agency by telephone instead of by letter. Call the food company, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or the Food and Drug Administration immediately (see "Other Sources of Help for Consumer Problems and Questions"):

- if you think you have food poisoning,
 - if a food looks or smells strange,
 - if there are glass or metal fragments in a product, or
 - if a container is leaking, bulging or spurts liquid when you open it.
- Never taste food that looks or smells strange.

Other Sources of Help for Consumer Problems and Questions

Sometimes knowing where to turn to ask a question or to look for an answer about the wholesomeness and safety of food can prevent problems later. The following government sources can help consumers in this regard:

(1) The U.S. Department of Agriculture answers questions about the safety, labeling and wholesomeness of meat and poultry products. Phone (202) 472-4485, or write: Meat and Poultry HOTLINE, Room 1163 South, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

(2) The Food and Drug Administration handles questions about most foods other than those containing meat and poultry. Contact the FDA Consumer Affairs Office in your area by checking the telephone listings under U.S. Government.

(3) The U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs has published the "Consumer's Resource Handbook" to help consumers solve problems. Single free copies may be obtained by writing to Handbook, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colo. 81009.

For more information, contact: Ann Collins Chadwick, Director, Office of the Consumer Advisor, Rm. 232-W Admin. Bldg., U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 382-9681.



The Summer's Winning Posters

Perhaps the Fourth of July is now just a memory of Aunt Edna's "perfect" fried chicken and of an equally delicious victory over a rival softball club, but the need to know how to care for perishable foods — particularly meat and poultry — and everyone's need for exercise continue.

And those are exactly the health messages school children across the country were asked to illustrate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 1984 National Food Safety Poster Contest on "Summertime Food & Fitness."

Commenting on the high quality of this year's winning entries, Agriculture Secretary John Block said, "These posters show how successfully the students linked several important concepts — the proper care of food in hot weather when food poisoning incidents rise sharply, and the critical relationship between diet and exercise."

Billy Edeen's picnic poster shows he grasped both ideas. The lush spread, properly protected by the cooler, urges safe food handling. The baseball mitt, of course, is meant to encourage exercise.

The U.S. Department of Agricul-

ture's Food Safety and Inspection Service sponsors the National Food Safety Poster Contest, which reaches every public and private grade school in the country — all 72,000 of them.

First-place winners for 1984 are: Josh White, 7, a second grader at Grace Christian School, Birmingham, Ala., for grades 1-2; Joseph Miller, 10, a fourth grader at the Alexander Robertson School, New York, N.Y., grades 3-4; and Jeff Starratt, 11, a sixth grader at South Londonderry School, Londonderry, N.H., grades 5-6.

This year's prizes? First place winners and their teachers receive \$200 U.S. Savings Bonds. The winners, their parents and teachers win a free trip to Washington for the August awards ceremony. And the winning children's schools get \$400 for library or audiovisual purchases.

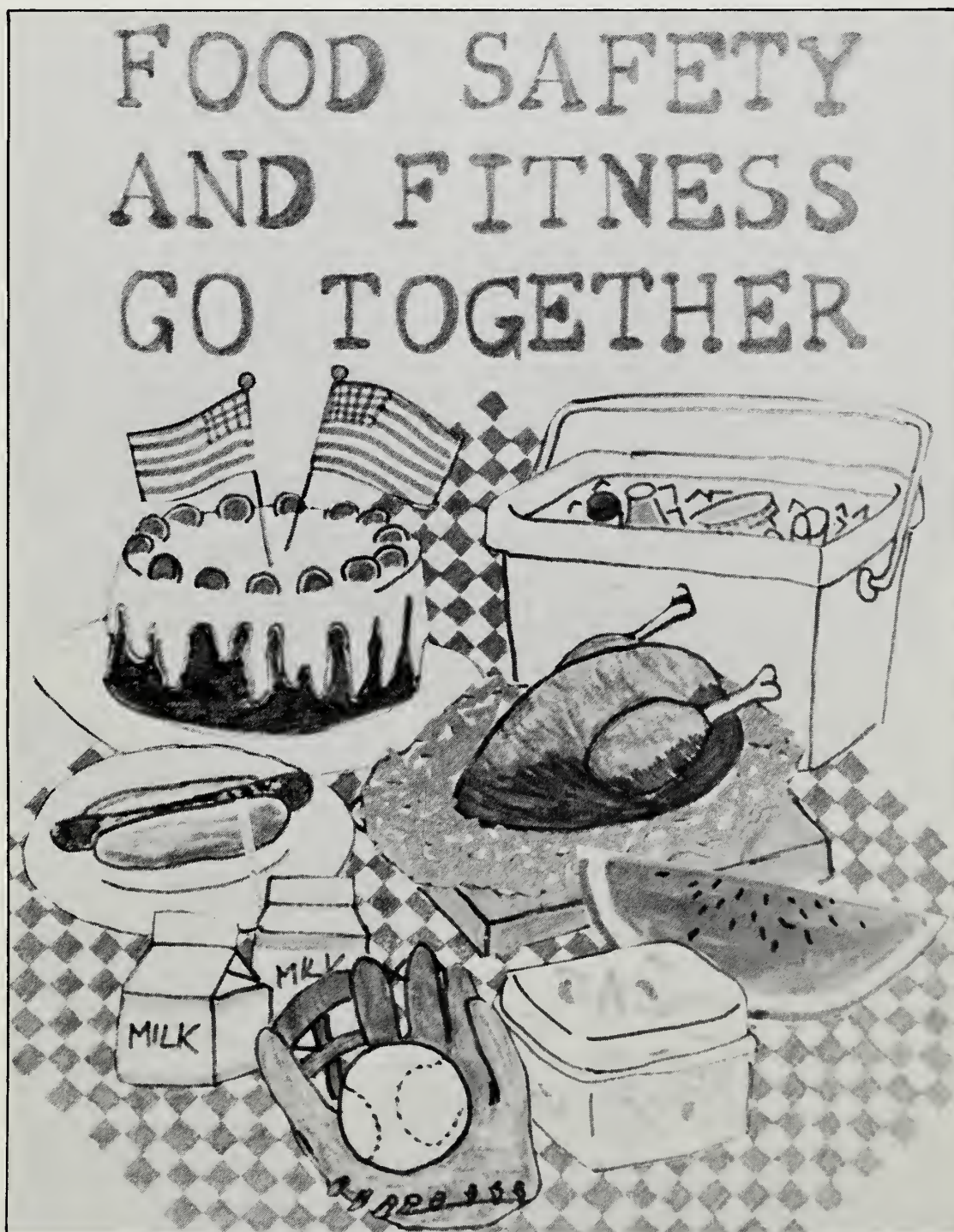
The three second place winners and their teachers win \$100 bonds. The three third place winners and their teachers, \$50 bonds.

For more information on this year's winners, or color and/or black-and-white photos of their posters, call Mary Ann Parmley (202) 447-9113.

Books! Books! Books! New, FREE Food Safety Booklets Tell the Reasons Why

Consumers have learned to rely on USDA for assuring a safe meat and poultry supply, but — as two new USDA publications point out — careful handling of food in the home is essential to make sure it remains safe to eat.

The books — one covering general food safety and the other focusing on storing and preparing turkey — reflect the growing consumer sophistication about cooking, nutrition and basic food handling techniques. They not only cover basic safety recommendations — on everything from canned goods to microwave ovens — but they also emphasize "why" you need to observe the sometimes-tedious food safety rules.



"Flag-waving" picnic by 3rd-place winner Billy Edeen, 10, of Pacific Grove, CA.

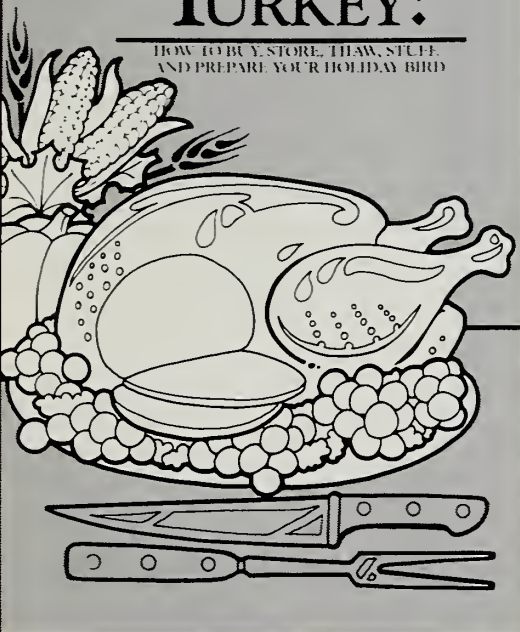
The SAFE FOOD Book Your Kitchen Guide



United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service

TALKING ABOUT TURKEY:

HOW TO BUY, STORE, THAW, STUFF, AND PREPARE YOUR HOLIDAY BIRD



FSIS carries out federal meat and poultry inspection, and the publications are aimed chiefly at teaching people the proper care of meat and poultry products after they get them home from the store. This is vital information, because most food poisoning is caused by food handling mistakes made at home.

Specifically, **THE SAFE FOOD BOOK**, a 30-page kitchen reference

with entertaining cartoon art, gives consumers the latest information on: 1) how food spoils, 2) how food poisoning bacteria work, 3) kitchen sanitation, 4) safe microwave cooking for meat and poultry and 5) special care for foods that need special attention — hamburger, ham, poultry and stuffing, eggs and egg-rich foods, marinades and mayonnaise. A final section explains how to report food illness.

And **TALKING ABOUT TURKEY**, a 24-page booklet emphasizing food safety, takes the reader step-by-step from selecting a bird to preparing and storing leftovers. There are easy-to-use thawing charts, cooking times and temperature tables, drawings on how-to-carve, and even recipes. You might want to try such interesting twists as the apple-based fruit stuffing or the turkey-and-broccoli casserole. Directions for the more familiar stuffings, a salad and a turkey gumbo are here, too.

Single copies of the two booklets are available free-of-charge from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colo. 81009.

To request bulk orders, write or call: FSIS Publications, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Room 1163-S, Washington, DC. 20250; telephone (202) 447-9351.

Deaf Persons Receive Food Safety Tips Via TDD Hotline

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has added a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) to its Meat and Poultry Hotline. The Meat and Poultry Hotline — operated by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service — answers questions about the safety, wholesomeness and labeling of meat and poultry products.

A telecommunications device for the deaf allows hearing-impaired people to communicate in written, rather than oral, messages. For example, if the sender types on a home keyboard, "How long can fresh ground beef be

safely stored in the refrigerator?," the question is transmitted via telephone to the hotline receiver. When the question appears on the hotline video screen, a response is typed and transmitted to the caller's home screen.

The TDD number is (202) 447-3333. FSIS is publicizing the service to the hearing-impaired community through such groups as the National Association of the Deaf and the Conference of Educational Administrators Serving the Deaf.

For more information, contact: Judy Liggett, FSIS Public Awareness, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 1163-S, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 447-9351.

Food Stamp Recipients Learn New Ways to Make Food Dollars Count

Secretary of Agriculture John Block has announced *Make Your Food Dollars Count*, an important new initiative to help food stamp participants buy and prepare less expensive, more nutritious food. The initiative carries the message of smart shopping and good nutrition directly to low-income groups.

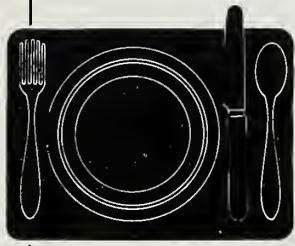
The theme is "Buy Better, Eat Better."

For the new campaign, USDA is publishing pamphlets in English and Spanish on shopping skills and nutrition information. Four million copies will be available as part of a national information effort that also will include posters, radio public service announcements, workshops and slide presentations. These will be used in an effort to get the nutrition message directly to food stamp participants and other persons who could benefit from the information.

This initiative builds on experience gained last summer when USDA sponsored seven regional workshops for nutrition professionals and community leaders. The participants received meal plans, food buying tips

and instruction in counseling low-income buyers. As a result of those workshops, many state and local agencies are now conducting their own workshops on the "make your food dollars count" theme.

For more information on "Buy Better, Eat Better," contact: Office of Information, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Dr., Alexandria, Va. 22302; telephone (703) 756-3286.



HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Tips for Good Health at USDA's Food and Fitness Fair

"Keeping physically fit in combination with eating properly is essential to good health" — that's the U.S. Department of Agriculture's message for its 1984 Food and Fitness Fair. The fair will be held August 16-18, on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

The 1984 Food and Fitness Fair is a part of USDA's effort to increase consumer awareness about the abundance and variety of food available through American agriculture and to emphasize the wise use of these foods with sound physical fitness programs. According to Agriculture Secretary John Block, this is the key to a healthier nation.

To get this message across to all Americans, the fair will feature exhibits and demonstrations on food, nutrition and physical fitness.

Also, Block will award prizes to the winners of two contests for school children — an essay and food safety poster contest. The contests helped school children learn more about food and exercise.

USDA's Extension Service sponsored an essay contest for students aged 13 through 18. To learn about the

abundant food supply in this country, these students wrote essays on "Food — America's Growth Industry." The food safety poster contest, sponsored by the Food Safety and Inspection Service, taught elementary school children (grades 1-6) proper handling of perishable foods to maintain safety and wholesomeness. The students drew posters on "Summertime Food and Fitness."

This year's fair concludes a year-long food and fitness campaign, which opened last August with a fair that attracted 100,000 visitors. Over the year, participation in the food and fitness campaign increased tremendously:

In Eugene, Ore., a July 20-22 fair is planned in cooperation with the Oregon Food and Agriculture Council, the Oregon State Department of Agriculture and the 1984 Olympic Scientific Congress.

More than 40 state governors as well as many mayors, commissioners and local government officials have signed food and fitness proclamations urging food and fitness observances.

One thousand South Carolina 4-H'ers participated in a county food and fitness camp.

The Iowa Cooperative Extension Service hosted a cooking school, held workshops for exercise leaders from area hospitals and the YMCA, and cooperated with the Iowa Pork Producers Association in an in-service training program for 4-H leaders.

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service held a diabetes screening clinic in seven counties. Ten percent of the more than 1,000 people screened were referred to physicians for further testing.

An "INSIDE/OUT" videotape on the importance of good nutrition and physical fitness to good health was developed by USDA. Each State Extension office has a videotape for state and county use. Additional copies may be purchased from the National Audiovisual Center, General Services Administration, Attn: Order Section, Washington, D.C. 20409, or call (301)



Secretary Block participated in the one-mile celebrity run in last year's Food and Fitness Fair. A variety of other activities were available to help consumers learn the importance of diet and exercise in maintaining good health.

763-1896 for more information. The 30-minute videotape is available in VHS (A09529), Beta II (A09528), or ¾" video-cassette (A09527). Purchase Price: \$80.00.

Other activities include: special promotions by commodity groups and private industry and a visual data bank of food and fitness materials, accessible by computer, sponsored by USDA's Extension Service.

The nationwide effort is sponsored by USDA, the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and private industry. Leaders from the Cooperative Extension Service are coordinating Food and Fitness Programs within the states.

Additional information on food and fitness activities in local communities may be obtained from local cooperative extension service offices, listed in the phone directory under "State or Federal Government," or from the coordinator, USDA Food & Fitness Campaign, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 447-8824.

Gray Panthers Reach Out with Nutrition Help

Stir-fried tofu and mushrooms. Five-spice chicken. Zucchini and cheese soup. To most of us, these foods sound exotic — and a little expensive. But the San Francisco Gray Panthers — through their "Cheap and Nutritious" project — teach senior citizens and disabled people how to prepare meals like these easily and cheaply.

Several times a month, Gray Panthers visit senior centers, housing projects and low-cost hotels to provide 1-hour cooking demonstrations. Most of the meals are very simple and require just one pot or pan for preparation; but, like the foods above, they are interesting and tasty.

They gear their recipes toward persons on very tight budgets, keeping per serving costs at 50 to 75 cents.

The Gray Panthers developed their project, in part, from an August 1983 workshop designed to teach food stamp recipients and low income persons how to make their food dollars go further. Directed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service, the San Francisco workshop was one of a series presented around the country.

The Panthers are also writing a cookbook on cheap and nutritious foods. It should be available next fall.

The Gray Panthers are a national organization working for better health care and nutrition, affordable housing and accessible transportation for senior citizens and low-income people of all ages.

For more information on the "Cheap and Nutritious" project, contact: Miriam Blaustein or Lynn Fitzwater, Gray Panthers of San Francisco, 50 Fell St., San Francisco, Calif. 94102; telephone (415) 552-8800.

and contributed to rising prices.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service now expects plentiful supplies of broilers and adequate supplies of turkeys and eggs for the remainder of 1984. Moreover, prices should be very reasonable.

Problems for the poultry industry — and consumers — began with a severe drought over the eastern portion of the United States in the summer of 1983. Then, a serious outbreak of avian influenza that autumn resulted in the loss of over 12 million chickens and turkeys in Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Mother Nature added once again to the industry's problems, however. The western states experienced unusually early heavy snowstorms and frigid temperatures in November, and December was the coldest on record for many parts of the East. These adverse conditions further disrupted the production and marketing of poultry and eggs.

By mid-May, however, the avian influenza problem had diminished; the weather had returned to normal; and the broiler and egg industries rapidly stepped up production.

Producers placed more broiler

chicks on farms last spring. As a result, the supply of frying chickens is now about 5 percent greater than at this time last year. That's a lot of broiler meat for the summer cookout season.

The outlook for turkey is not quite as good. The number of hens in the breeding flocks have declined. So, it will take longer for any increase in the turkey supply.

Nonetheless, turkey production this summer is almost equal to last year. And since production during this season usually exceeds consumption, there will be ample supplies for consumers, and some accumulation of birds for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Last winter, egg production was down 4 percent from the previous year. But, production by April was unchanged from a year ago. And with more replacement pullets entering the laying flock every day, egg production this summer is exceeding last year's level.

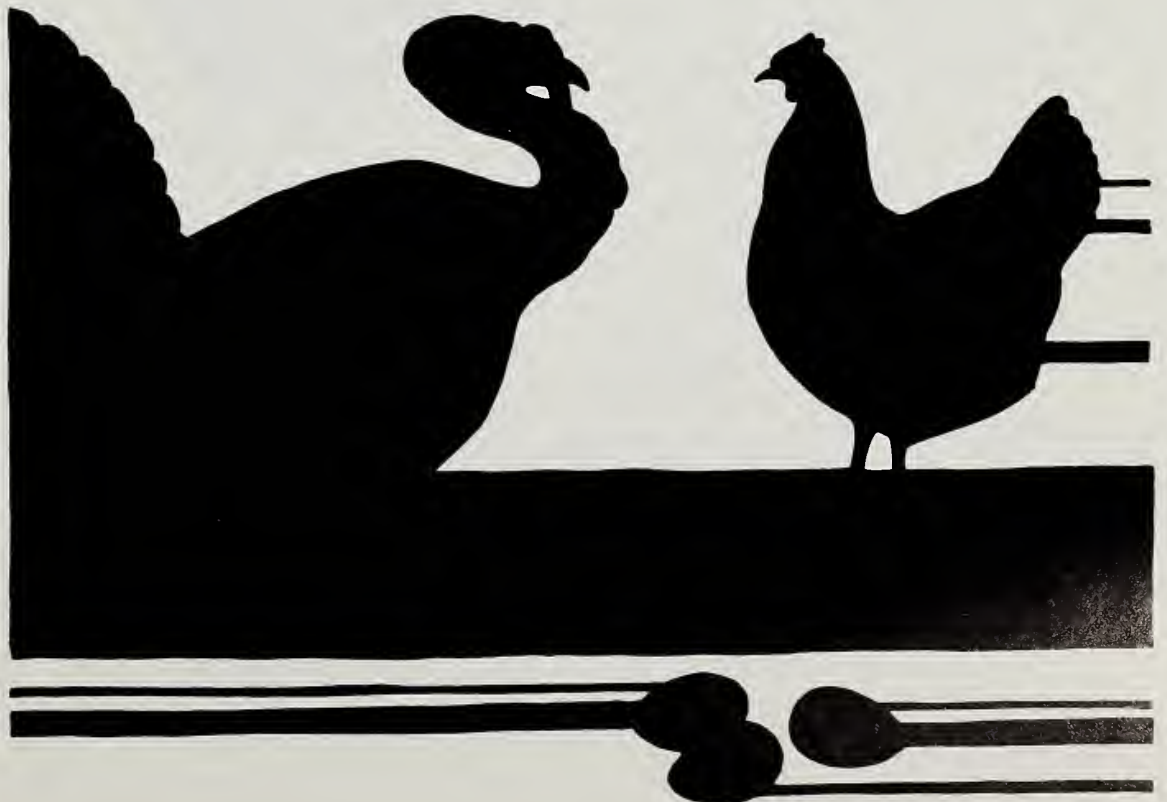
For more information, contact: Edith Hogan, Director of Consumer and Marketing Affairs, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rm. 2648 South, Washington, D.C.; telephone (202) 447-4046.



BUYING AND EATING TRENDS

Plentiful Poultry, Egg Supply Seen This Summer

Poultry and eggs are now plentiful and available at attractive prices for consumers. This is an improvement over the past 12 months, when bad weather and an outbreak of avian influenza adversely affected supplies





LOOKING AHEAD

New Technique "Traps" Drugs In Blood Cells

Red blood cells might be used in the future to store and circulate medical drugs for slow release in the blood stream. This could allow humans or animals to retain drugs longer than with conventional injections, thereby lengthening the drugs' therapeutic value.

Biochemists with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service reported "promising results" from encapsulating a short-lived

cancer drug called cytarabine within the red blood cells of dogs. The encapsulated cytarabine maintained a therapeutic level for 10 days, compared to two hours for a conventional injection of the same dose.

The new system turns red blood cells into "storage depots" that protect the drug from quick destruction and elimination. With regular injections, drugs are rapidly destroyed or excreted by animal and human systems. The new technique allows a drug to remain where it can do its job longer than it would if injected.

This new drug-therapy system might someday be used to treat cancer and tropical diseases in humans and mite and tick infestations of livestock.

To encapsulate the drug, researchers take blood from an animal and isolate the red blood cells. Then cells are placed in a dialysis bag, where they are made to swell until microscopic pores develop within the cells'

membranes.

At this point, they remove the red blood cells from the bag and mix them with the drug. When the salt concentration of the cells is restored, the cells shrink to normal size. The small cell pores then close, trapping the drug inside the cells.

The scientists then remix the red blood cells containing the drug with the whole blood and inject it back into the animal. The drug then circulates freely — with the blood cells — and maintains a therapeutic level for days or even weeks.

For more information, contact: John DeLoach, Biochemist, U.S. Livestock Insect Laboratory, Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 232, Kerrville, Texas 78028; telephone (512) 257-3566.

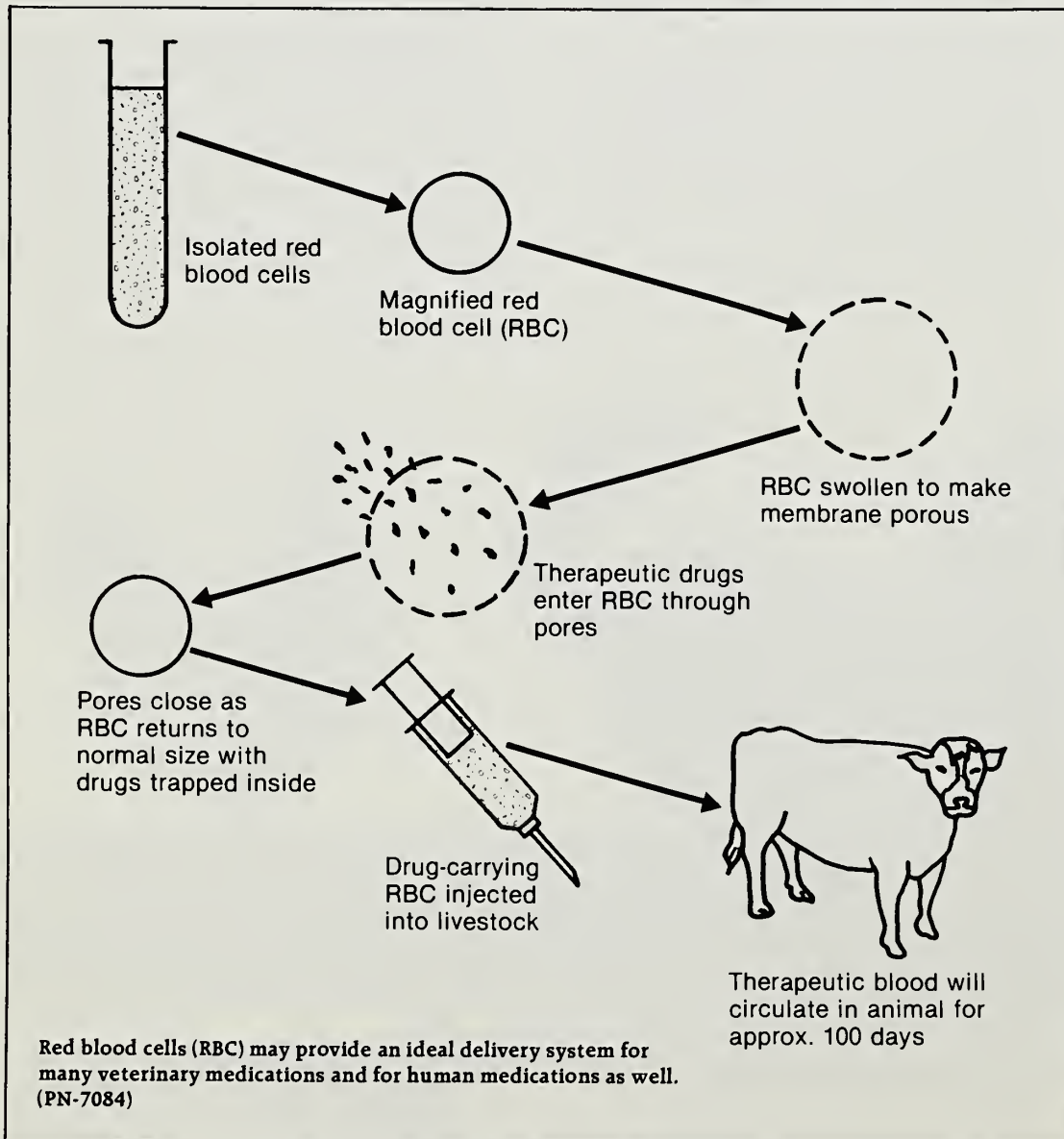
"Bridges" of Blood Cells Could Be Early Sign of Kidney Disease

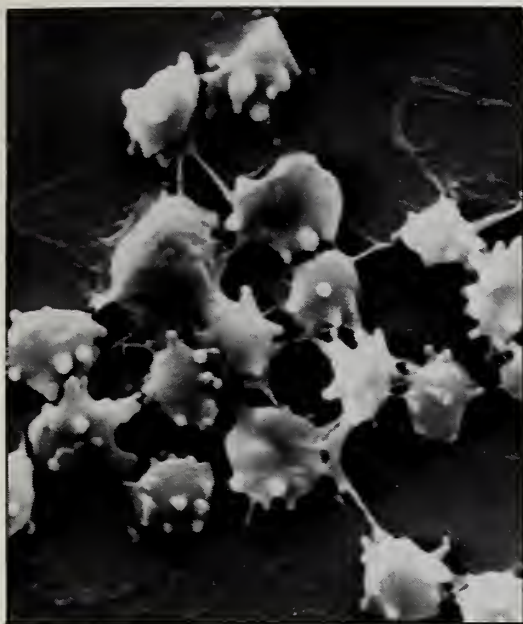
Scientists may have found a way to help doctors in the future detect kidney disease in humans at an early stage.

U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers found that red blood cells from sheep and swine with acute kidney failure are interconnected by "bridges." These bridges appear to be extensions of a coating that forms on red blood cells of certain animals with diseased kidneys.

Since humans are higher vertebrates — like sheep and swine — they might also exhibit bridges at the onset of kidney failure, as well as during the disease. However, no tests have been done yet with humans.

The researchers — with USDA's Agricultural Research Service — do not have the final answer to what causes the bridges to form. It appears, however, that the chemistry of blood flowing through damaged kidneys causes bridges to form between red blood cells, when the blood is withdrawn from the animal.





USDA researchers found that red blood cells interconnect to form "bridges" in sheep and swine with kidney failure. The discovery may help detect kidney disease early in humans.

The bridges appear in large numbers even in animals with minimal kidney damage and appear several hours to days before any indication of damage can be detected by traditional clinical tests. Even more interesting, the bridges decrease in number as kidneys regenerate during recovery from disease.

Conventional clinical tests for kidney dysfunction are more cumbersome and time consuming. If researchers find that the bridges appear in humans — as they do in animals — doctors one day could have a quick, simple and more sensitive indicator of kidney dysfunction.

For more information on this research, contact: Shirlee Meola, Veterinary Toxicology and Entomology Laboratory, P.O. Drawer GE, College Station, Texas 77841; telephone (409) 206-9339.

Less Means More When Water Is Taken From Fruits

Anyone who sprinkles sugar on a bowl of fresh strawberries has the delight of watching moisture from the fruit ooze into the sugar, making a delicious syrup.

Scientists call this process osmosis. And based on that principle, researchers with the U.S. Department of

Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service have found they can cut by half the weight and volume of apples, peaches and apricots without seriously hurting the fruits' flavor, color or texture. That's good news for both fruit producers and consumers.

"Osmotic concentration" allows more fruit to be shipped at lower cost than is presently possible. Moreover, frozen osmotic-concentrated fruit has a longer shelf life than other non-frozen dehydrated fruits.

Once at its destination, the fruit can be reprocessed. For example, water can be added to the fruit again, making it a tasty canned fruit or filling for pies. Or it can be used in its dehydrated form in pastries.

The researchers dehydrate the fruit by putting 1 pound of cut-up fresh fruit into a container of 5 pounds of concentrated sucrose sugar syrup. After cooking the mixture for 6 hours at 160°F, enough moisture had gone from the fruit to the syrup to reduce the fruit's bulk and weight by 50 percent. The syrup can be reused at least five times.



Osmotic concentration is one of the most energy efficient ways to remove moisture from fruits because the water does not have to go through a phase change — water to steam — as it leaves the product. One common technique for moisture reduction — hot-air drying — consumes large amounts of energy. When water is removed from the syrup, it is done in energy efficient evaporators. Osmotic concentration requires 75 percent less energy than hot-air drying.

For more information, contact: Dr. Charles Huxsoll, Western Regional Research Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 800 Buchanan St., Berke-

ley, Calif. 94710; telephone (415) 486-3484.

Grow Them Better, Faster: Scientists Try to Borrow Useful Genes to Improve Trees

Scientists are looking for ways to grow better trees faster through biotechnology, which includes gene splicing, microculture and genetic engineering.

Instead of using conventional tree breeding methods to improve tree growth, wood quality and resistance to insects and disease, the researchers hope eventually to be able to transfer single genes or groups of genes from one kind of tree to another. Growing new trees from tissue-cultured single cells is called "somacloning."

This already has been done with some microorganisms and herbaceous plants, according to scientists with USDA's Forest Service. But they have a long way to go to do the same in trees for forests.

The researchers will grow groups of similar cells from trees in glass containers inside the laboratory. Varieties of poplars will be used first because they are relatively easy to culture and because scientists already know a great deal about how they grow. Later, they'll use jack pine, larch, red pine and, possibly, southern pine.

The scientists have set three objectives for their endeavor:

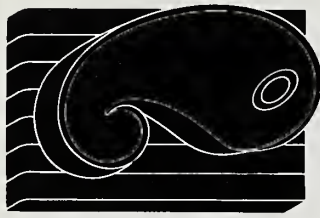
1) Find cells with genes which allow them to grow into complete tree seedlings when cultured in a nutrient-rich mixture. This ability may be controlled by only a few genes — not hundreds, as had been believed.

2) Use these cells to screen for mutations in genes which control resistance to chemicals, particularly herbicides. Seedlings which resist weedkilling chemicals will have a better chance of surviving their first few years.

3) Grow masses of tree cells in cultures and subject them to the toxins

or poisons from fungi that attack trees. Cells which survive the toxins will be microcultured into fungus-resistant tree seedlings.

For more information on Forest Service research in biotechnology, contact: Neil Nelson, North Central Forest Experiment Station, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 898, Rhinelander, Wisc. 54501; telephone (715) 362-7474.



FOOD SAFETY

USDA Asks for Stronger Inspection Law Authority

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has submitted legislation to Congress that would strengthen USDA's authority to deal with the small minority of meat and poultry plants that violate federal meat and poultry inspection laws.

The legislative proposal would amend the federal meat and poultry inspection laws by expanding the grounds on which USDA may withdraw or refuse inspection service, the

strongest legal sanction available to USDA.

Present law authorizes USDA to withdraw inspection from a plant if it or its responsible officials are convicted of one felony or two misdemeanor charges. However, USDA cannot act until the plant has an opportunity for an administrative hearing and judicial review, which can take several years to complete.

Also, USDA inspectors can temporarily withhold inspection if a plant fails to destroy a condemned product or does not maintain sanitary conditions. Plants can resume operations once they've corrected deficiencies.

The legislative proposal expands the grounds for actions to withdraw inspection or to refuse to provide inspection when:

- A plant, its owner or other responsible officials have been convicted of a single misdemeanor involving food or of any felony;
- USDA employees performing official duties are subjected to threats of forcible assault, forcible assault, intimidation or other interference;
- Individuals or plants have recurrently failed to comply with the inspection laws including sanitation violations, product contamination or economic adulteration.

The proposal also authorizes USDA, in those cases needed to protect the public health and welfare or the safety of inspectors, to suspend or deny in-

spection pending a USDA administrative hearing and judicial review.

The legislative initiative is part of a five-point program announced by USDA in December to strengthen the meat and poultry inspection system.

USDA is also tightening eligibility requirements for plants selling to the federal government, instituting more intensive inspection in plants with a poor history of compliance, and working with the U.S. Department of Justice to assure faster, more effective prosecution of violators. In addition, USDA contracted with the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences for a study of the effectiveness of inspection procedures.

For more information, contact: Nancy Robinson, FSIS/ILA, Room 327-E, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 447-7943.

USDA Proposes Changes in Meat and Poultry Canning Regulations

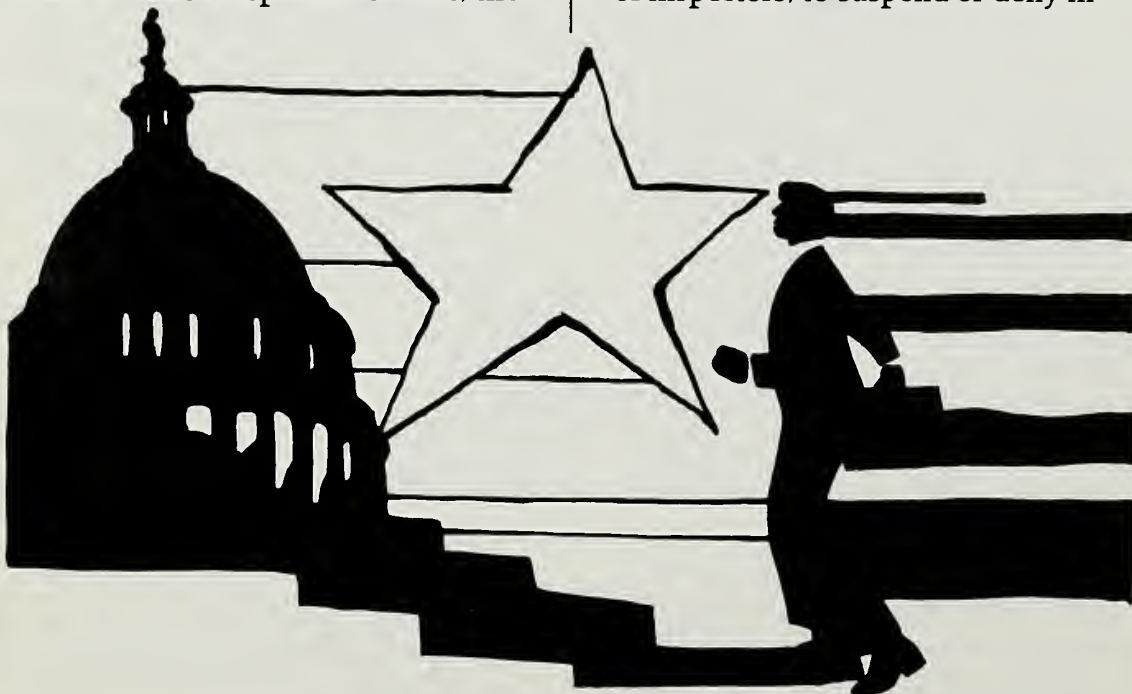
The U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing to modify federal meat and poultry inspection regulations for canned meat and poultry products to keep pace with technological changes in the canning industry.

The comprehensive regulations would cover heat processed meat and poultry products packed in hermetically sealed — airtight — containers.

The proposed regulations embrace the most important aspects of canning, including container inspection, heat processing equipment and procedures, processing and production records, container coding, examination of finished product and recall procedures.

The proposal includes detailed requirements for canning operations which would reduce the probability of processing errors.

It would also enhance USDA's ability to enforce its canned product safety requirements by consolidating





information needed to monitor plant operations. Currently, many requirements are scattered in various agency bulletins and other written instructions, making it difficult for both inspectors and the industry to locate pertinent information.

The proposal would also make the regulations more consistent with U.S. Food and Drug Administration requirements, which cover many canned products other than meat and poultry. In addition, it contains many of the principles found in a proposed international code of practice for canned foods, now under development by the Codex Alimentarius Commission of the World Health Organization/Food and Agriculture Organization.

The proposal also responds to a number of points expressed in a September 1981 petition from the National Food Processors Association. The petition requested that USDA develop proposed canning regulations that address such topics as examination of containers for defects, documentation of corrective actions taken when defects are found and maintenance of records on canning procedures.

For more information, see: Press Release #396-84, "USDA Proposes Changes in Meat and Poultry Canning

Regulations," (4-9-84) and Background Paper, "Proposal to Amend Meat and Poultry Canning Regulations," (April 1984); or contact: Information Office, FSIS/ILA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 1160-S, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 447-9113.

USDA to Regulate Amount of Curing Solution in Ham and Other Cured Pork

Beginning April 15, 1985, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will regulate the amount of curing solution in ham and other cured pork products by requiring minimum protein levels.

USDA has found that measuring protein in the finished product instead of estimating the amount of curing solution used in processing the cured pork products will provide a more accurate basis for determining compliance with the federal standards that assure wholesome, accurately labeled products.

Current regulations permit no more than 10 percent curing solution in a finished cured pork product labeled "Water Added." Under the new regulation four categories of canned ham will be allowed and could be labeled:

- "Ham" if the product is at least 20.5 percent protein, the amount previously found in fresh hams;
- "Ham with Natural Juices" if the product is at least 18.5 percent protein, the amount previously found in products labeled in this way;
- "Ham — Added Water" if the product is at least 17.0 percent protein, the level found in hams with 10 percent added solution; or
- "Ham and Water Product — XX of Weight is Added Ingredients" for any canned ham less than 17.0 percent protein. The XX would be the actual percent for that product.

Processors have found that many consumers prefer more moist pork product. The new rule responds to that market demand by formalizing a 1979 waiver of "added water" restrictions in the current regulation. That

waiver allows any amount of curing solution in cured pork products, as long as they are accurately labeled.

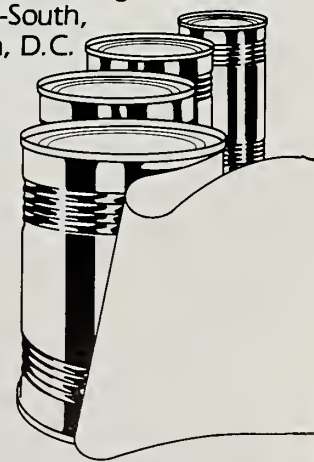
The new rule will assure consumers of a minimum protein content in their traditional cured pork item. Moreover, because the curing solution dilutes the protein content of the fresh, uncured pork item, the rule will provide control over the amount of solution used.

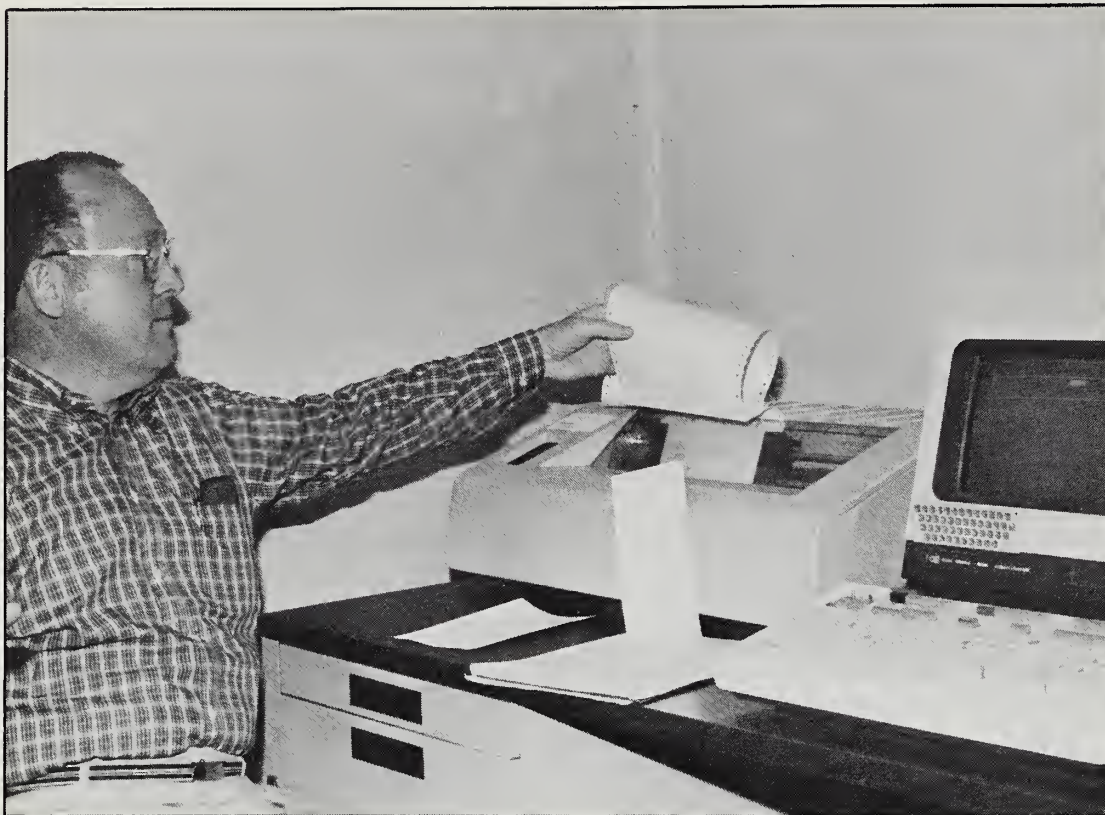
Curing solution consists of a mixture of water, salt, nitrite and phosphate and is added to pork during processing to cure it — to help preserve the meat and to impart the traditional flavor and color.

For more information, see: Press Release #389-84, "USDA to Regulate Amount of Curing Solution in Ham and Other Cured Pork," (4-12-84) and Background Paper, "Protein Requirements for Cured Pork Products;" or contact: Information Office, FSIS/ILA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 1160-S, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 447-9113.

Meat & Poultry Labels Wrap It Up With What You Need to Know

If you have questions about the fresh and processed meat and poultry you eat, read the labels. But you should know that there's more to the name and pictures, ingredients statements, inspection symbols, nutritional claims, and special handling and storage instructions than you might realize. So, for help on reading labels—and fully understanding them—send for the Department of Agriculture's new, free consumer pamphlet, "Meat and Poultry Labels Wrap It Up." Write Labels, Department of Agriculture, Room 1163-South, Washington, D.C. 20250.





USDA Proposes Automated System for Import Inspection

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is reviewing comments on a proposal updating the inspection regulations for imported meat and poultry to reflect USDA's use of a computer support system and compliance-based random sampling techniques.

The Automated Import Information System (AIIS), in use since 1979, allows USDA to concentrate more inspection resources on products and plants that present the highest risk. This increases inspection efficiency and reduces cost, while maintaining consumer protection.

When a plant begins exporting to the United States, its products receive all possible examinations. During this period of full inspection, a history of compliance is established. Thereafter, the AIIS provides a new inspection plan for each shipment, based on the plant's compliance history, the nature of the product and the size of the shipment.

USDA may reduce the frequency of inspection for product from plants consistently producing safe, wholesome products that satisfy U.S. stand-

ards. For shipments from these plants, the system provides statistically valid random sampling plans that tell inspectors which lots to sample, which examinations to conduct and the random numbers to use in selecting samples.

In addition to authorizing the use of the AIIS and this compliance-based sampling technique, the proposal clarifies the inspector's duty to examine all lots for general condition and proper labeling. The proposal also instructs inspectors to perform a complete inspection on any lot that looks suspicious. For example, an inspector who detects an indication of spoilage would conduct a full inspection and take samples for laboratory testing.

USDA has the authority to use statistical sampling techniques. However, in June 1983 the U.S. General Accounting Office recommended that the inspection regulations should specifically authorize the compliance-based sampling technique.

For more information, see: Press Release #399-84, "USDA Proposes Automated System for Import Inspection," (4-13-84) or contact: Information Office, FSIS/ILA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 1160-S, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone (202) 447-9113.

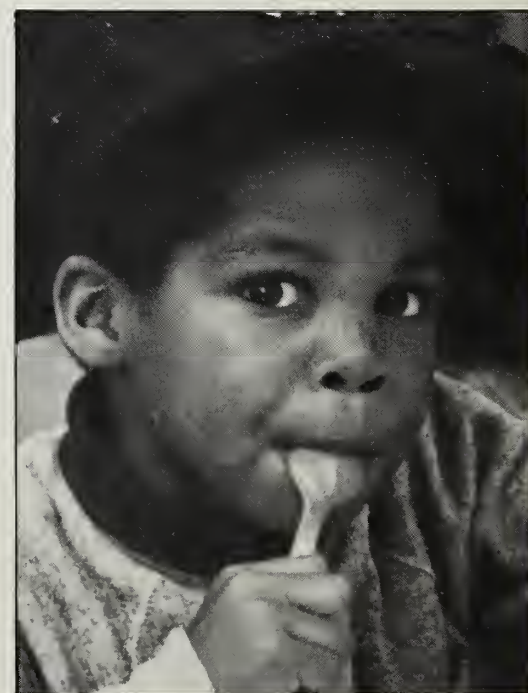


FOOD PROGRAMS

School Lunch Is More Like Home Cooking in Vermont School

Thick-sliced bread warm from the oven is a luxury in most households. But it's an everyday part of the home-style meals served to 300 hungry children at Neshobe Elementary School in Brandon, Vt.

The school's food service director, Sadie LaRock, selects bread recipes from a well-thumbed notebook in her kitchen cabinet at home. It includes such favorites as Italian bread, brown bread, zucchini bread, pear bread, corn muffins and pumpkin bread. Some are



old family recipes. Others are adapted from those that catch her eye in magazines.

Since many children have to be led gently into liking anything other than white bread, LaRock frequently combines whole wheat and all-purpose flour.

But good school food doesn't stop with "home-cooked" bread. LaRock and her three assistants also tempt the children's tastebuds with other special foods. For example, they use ethnic meals to illustrate foods typical of countries being studied. Occasional "fast food" days indulge the children's love for hamburgers, pizza, chicken nuggets and french fries.

The rules of the lunchroom are just like home: if you want a second helping of brussel sprouts or, more likely, another freshly baked cookie, you have to clean your plate first.

Almost 80 percent of the children at Neshobe eat school lunch daily, a sign of the children's and the commu-

nity's support. That's no mean feat in this semi-rural area on the western slopes of the Green Mountains that some call "meat 'n potato" country.

The school participates in the National School Lunch Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. Schools in the program receive

This Year's National School Lunch Week is October 14-20.

food donations and cash reimbursements for the meals they serve.

For more information on the Neshobe school lunch program, contact: Office of Public Affairs, Food and Nutrition Service, Northeast Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Burlington, Mass. 01803; telephone (617) 272-9292.

States to Test Ways to Improve Food Stamp Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has signed agreements with North Carolina, Vermont and Maryland to test changes in the food stamp program that are expected to help states run more efficient programs.

Each state will test a different idea for cutting costs and reducing fraud and error in the food stamp program.

— North Carolina will test a new computer-assisted interview for people applying for food stamps.

— In Vermont, eligibility workers will be trained to detect fraud and errors through improved interviewing skills.

— Maryland will use brochures and videotapes designed by advertisers to reach the food stamp recipient. These messages will tell food stamp applicants what information they must report to the caseworkers.

USDA and the states will share responsibility for developing and evaluating the projects. Field testing is expected to begin this fall, with final reports due to USDA a year later.

Durham, Person and Alamance counties in North Carolina will take part in the project. In Vermont and Maryland the sites have yet to be announced.

Projects were selected on the basis of documented organization and implementation strategies, cost, error impacts and transferability to other states.

USDA has contracted with Applied Management Sciences, a Silver Spring, Md., contracting firm, to provide technical assistance for the design and evaluation of the projects. The firm also will produce reports that USDA can use to help other states learn successful techniques.

For more information, contact: Jill Herndon, Food and Nutrition Service, Family Nutrition Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Alexandria, Va. 22302; telephone (703) 756-3387.



