Section News

Additives' value debated

Divergent viewpoints about the benefits and risks of food additives were heard during the Northeast Section's Symposium on Food and Cosmetic Additives, held Feb. 13-14, in Elizabeth, NJ.

Approximately 150 persons attended the section's 17th annual symposium. Attendance was hurt somewhat by snowy highways and forecasts of more snow.

Speakers agreed that food additives have helped provide more food to more people than would be possible without their use, but questions arose as to whether some additives' benefits justify their use, and when government is justified in restricting additive use.

Edgar A. Smith, a staff member for New Jersey Congressman Andrew Maguire, argued that additives without a nutritional purpose should be banned, specifically mentioning coloring agents. Government cannot always wait until scientific evidence is certain before acting to restrict suspected carcinogens, said Dr. Smith, who is on a one year leave of absence as provost of the University of Massachusetts Medical School to work with Rep. Maguire. "Congress must decide on the basis of limited scientific data," he said. "Government can't wait for bodies to pile up before acting. The public is confused and despairs of sorting out the truth."

Dr. Smith said other nations that have been more restrictive than the U.S. on use of additives are making do with fewer additives.

From another viewpoint Sanford Miller and Paul Hopper argued that increasing government regulation is stifling innovation in the food industry.

Dr. Miller, of the nutrition and food science staff at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said that as the world's population becomes increasingly urbanized, there is more dependence on food processors in the lengthening food chain reaching from farm to dinner table.

Dr. Hopper, corporate director for strategic technical planning for General Food Corp., said government regulations already have reached the point where the "cost is becoming prohibitive for new formulations."

There was agreement that consumers are wary of additives.

Some speakers suggested it was the unfamiliarity with the chemical terms by which additives are identified on labels—"If water was identified as hydrogen hydroxide it would scare a lot of people," Virgil Wodicka, former Bureau of Foods director, said.

Dr. Miller suggested that when the public sensed that food company's marketing efforts gained ascendancy over food quality efforts, the public began to mistrust what food companies said.

Dr. Miller also noted that mankind's first efforts at food preservation—drying, salting, fermenting, etc.—evolved over a long period of time spreading gradually. Today's new food additives can theoretically move from discovery to nationwide distribution in a matter of months, which may account for consumer distrust, he said.

There also is a difference in perception of safety by toxicologists and the public, Dr. Miller said. Toxicologists can determine whether an additive kills the test animals, but the public wants to know not only if a substance is toxic, but whether it has any side effects over long term use, whether it affects the quality of life.

Benjamin Borenstein, corporate director of consumer research and development for CPC International, estimated food additive usage at 1.2 billion pounds year (with a value of about $1.2 billion) and compared that with the 12 billion pounds of oranges from Florida consumed each year. Dr. Borenstein cited a 1977 report from a federal review panel that said, "When all the commercially added food ingredients are ranked in terms of quantities consumed, the

Edgar Smith, left, of Rep. Andrew Macguire's staff, talks with symposium registrant following Dr. Smith's talk.

Press conference panel members were, from left, William Bernholz; Dr. Nicholas Pintauro, Rutgers University; M. Eijadi, symposium chairman; Dr. Virgil Wodicka, private consultant; and Dr. Sanford Miller, MIT Department of Nutrition and Food Science.

Participating in symposium were, from left, William Bernholz, PVO International; Paul Hopper, General Foods Corp.; and James Akerson, Clairol Research Laboratories.

Speaker Ben Borenstein, CPC International, addresses question to another speaker; seated is symposium co-chairwoman Ann Metzger of Hoffmann-LaRoche Inc.

Joyce Kern of Fatty Acid Producers Council, symposium publicity chairwoman, talks with Everett Pryde of USDA's Northern Regional Research Center.

median consumption averages about 0.5 mg per person per year."

The Delaney Clause, which bans addition of any substance in any amount to food products if that substance can be shown to be carcinogenic in animals at any feeding level, was discussed briefly also. Dr. Hopper said he thought it was unlikely the Delaney Clause would be modified since "no member of Congress wants to be on record as voting for cancer." Dr. Miller agreed, saying government generally would tend to take a conservative attitude, seeking to avoid potential risk.

Howard Roberts, acting director of FDA's Bureau of Foods, discussed food and cosmetic ingredients in his talk "Food and Cosmetic Safety–Scylla and Charybdis."

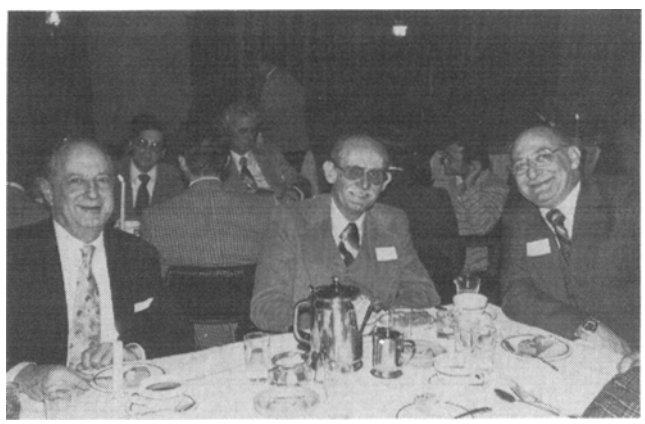
Noting that there is no such thing as absolute safety, Dr. Roberts said he did not expect concurrence with all of FDA's regulations in coming months, but he was asking for your understanding as well as your help in improving both the science and law within which it must be applied.

"Current cosmetic legislation can and should be changed to remove the coal-tar hair dye exemption, require premarketing safety testing and, in addition, to require registration of cosmetic firms, product formulation disclosure, and adverse reaction reporting," Dr. Roberts said.

He also said his agency is investigating whether benzidine and nitrosodiethanolamine (NDELA) pose a problem in cosmetics.

"There are several scientific studies in various stages of completion which will cast doubts on the safety of cosmetic ingredients, especially hair dyes," Dr. Roberts said. "This will not escape the attention of the Congress, and it is entirely possible that the near future will bring changes in the cosmetics provisions of the Food Drug and Cosmetic Act."

Other speakers and their topics at the conference included James K. Akerson, Clairol Research Laboratories, "Cosmetic Additives Use–Consumer Rationale of the CTFA Directory"; Carl Eifert, Consumer Products Safety Commission, "The Government Role in Enforcement Legislation"; Dr. Virgil Wodicka, food consultant, "The Realistic Protection of the Consumer"; Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, "Food and Cosmetic Additives–Medical, Biochemical Considerations for Assurance of Safety"; Dr. Nicholas Pintauro, Rutgers University, "Academic Point of View–Food and Cosmetic Additives Importance to Today's Products"; Dr. Joseph P. Brown, Dynapol Inc., "Use of Short-term Microbial Mutagenicity Tests in Development of Nontoxic, Nonadsorbable Food Additives"; Dr. Hans Kaunitz, Columbia University, "Are Polyunsaturates Carcinogenic?"; Dr. K.K. Carroll, University of Western Ontario, "Possible Role in Atherosclerosis (and Carcinoma) of Major Protein Nutrition"; Norman Sonntag, Southland Foods, "Recent Emulsifier Developments, Food and Cosmetic Applications"; and E. Richard Sherwin, Eastman Chemical Products, "Recent Antioxidant Developments, Food and Cosmetic Applications." ●



Among those attending the Northeast Section's Jan. 10 meeting were, from left, Past President Frank White, Foster-Wheeler Corp.; Don Fritz, Woburn Chemical Corp., and Earle Fritz of Union Camp. William Bernholz of PVO International spoke on "Synthetic Fats and Oils"; program chairman was Roger Logan of Union Camp. The meeting originally had been scheduled for Dec. 13, 1977, but was rescheduled after the first major storm of the winter hit the Northeast.

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