I welcome this opportunity to discuss, from the standpoint of the consumer, some of the issues of current concern.

In preparing this paper, I took special note of an item in the January, 1956, issue of Food Processing which listed new developments in the food field. Progress was assessed in terms of the employment of professionally trained food technologists in management positions in food plants, and the growth of a new profession—plant sanitarian—which had joined the other branches of sanitary engineering. The growth of this industry in the intervening dozen years, in terms of both quantity and expertise in keeping with advancing technology, as well as the establishment of the professional academy for sanitarians, appears to parallel the consumer concern about the growing complexity in the marketplace. We share an objective.

THE MARKETPLACE

Our marketplace—for all its greatness and perhaps because of it—has become a massive and mysterious place, so vast and complicated that the consumer too frequently does not really know what it's all about.

This wasn't always true. Our grandmothers, and some of our mothers knew what ingredients went into the bread they baked, set their own standards of sanitation, and were all too familiar with the value involved. It wasn't true when the storekeeper was on the local scene, rather than an impersonal supermarket offering items grown, prepared, distributed, and cleverly labeled by unseen hands.

But the computer age gradually changed all that, and with typical American optimism, consumers for years have blithely assumed that somebody up there is watching over them, and that the miracles of the marketplace are blessings. To many, it has been a rude shock to find that even miracles have their drawbacks, and that there are gaps in consumer protection that may result in real hazards. Moreover, these are hazards with which the consumer cannot cope alone.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

The consumer's confidence in available products, and indeed in his environment, was affected when he found that there was inadequate inspection of his meat, his poultry, and his fish; that coverage of the law protecting him from flammable fabrics was limited; and that some of the products in his home were poorly designed in relation to safe use. And certainly, if my mail is any indication, the idea of a color TV set being a radiation hazard, endangering the health of the family, really has the consumer concerned.

While issues involving economic values, like the Truth-in-Lending law, seem to get more attention from the press, the fact is that most of the progress in consumer protection in the last few years has related to safety. When President Kennedy delivered his landmark consumer message to Congress in 1962, he enunciated four consumer rights, the first being the right to safety. More than half of the legislative objectives listed in the consumer messages delivered by President Johnson in 1967 and 1968 concerned safety. Indeed 7 of the 10 recommendations enacted into law during 1967 and 1968 concern safety.

LEGISLATIVE PROGRESS

Because of this legislation, the consumer will now benefit from the work of the National Commission on Product Safety which will investigate the adequacy of measures employed to protect consumers against unreasonable risk of injuries from hazardous products, such as a child's doll with legs affixed by three-inch spikes; improved standards for clinical laboratories in interstate commerce; extended coverage of the law relating to the flammability of fabrics to such items as baby blankets and drapes; an improved and expanded program of meat inspection; research on improved techniques in fire prevention; safety standards for gas pipelines; and improved inspection of poultry products. Moreover, we are hopeful that some progress will be made on fish inspection and standards for electronic products to protect the consumer from hazardous radiation.

That's quite a gain for safety in just a 2 year period! It reflects the continuing concern of the Govern-

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ment for the problems besetting the consumer, and the support of the consumer himself who, once described as "seen but never heard," has become quite adept at acting in concert.

IS LEGISLATION ENOUGH?

Should the consumer rest on his legislative laurels? You—of all people—know better. You know that the beneficial effects of a law depend on both the efficiency with which it is administered and the cooperation of the system to which it relates.

For example, basic standards for the food industry have been in the law for many years. They have been amended and up-dated from time to time. They have been administered by a group of dedicated people, within the limitations of authority and funding. Yet it is estimated that the true incidence of food poisoning approaches a million cases a year, even though standards have improved and continue to improve.

It is unrealistic to think that 275 billion lb. of food per year could be produced, processed, distributed, stored, and sold with a public official watching over the shoulder of the provider all the time. Consequently, the fundamental concepts in the industry are just as important to the consumer as any law.

In reading the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) recent materials, I noted continuing emphasis on procedural operations, industry-State-Federal partnerships, and experiments in voluntary compliance. Within these concepts, the attitudes of the leadership in the industry become even more important to the consumer who must rely on unseen controls.

COMMUNICATION NEEDED

As professionals in this field, you are not only in a position to exercise continuing leadership in maintaining a sound market, you can provide the kind of communication that will send a confident consumer to the store. There is a gap in positive information. Generally, the consumer only hears about the problems. No one tells him about the processor with an outstanding record for the elimination of health hazards. (And ads are more likely to tell him "ho! ho! ho!" than anything designed to create consumer confidence.)

To effect better communication, it might be helpful to include the consumer in some of these partnerships once in a while, at least to the extent of being sure the consumer organizations know of work in their behalf, and putting an occasional consumer on some of the advisory committees.

SANITATION

For the most part, I have been talking about health and safety, but I certainly wouldn't want to slight sanitation. I am not sure that these two things are as separable in the mind of the consumer as they appear to be to the professional. I know they aren't in my mind.

As I understand it, foreign matter in food may be a matter of sanitation rather than health and safety because, while unpleasant, it probably won't kill you. This always reminds me of some of the basic cases on negligence in law school which had to do with foreign matter, usually a thumb or a toe, found in soda bottles. For some reason, the person who wound up with the adulterated soda pop was always a pregnant woman, and the cases involved damages resulting from a miscarriage. Consequently, to me, foreign matter can be dangerous.

And to give you an idea of what goes on out there, the mail containing consumer complaints relates more to sanitation than health and safety, because this is what the consumer can see.

I would like to report a complaint which was received by the President's Committee on Consumer Interests. It may not be typical, but it is relevant. A lady in Boulder, Colorado, had purchased a package of frozen goods in her supermarket and was not altogether satisfied. "According to the package label," she wrote, "it contained simply chicken gizzards 'thoroughly cleaned and ready for cooking.'

"Upon opening, the package was found to contain 9 1/2 oz. of chicken gizzards and 6 1/2 oz. of chicken fat.

"For those customers who like to stuff their freezers with chicken fat, it would be helpful to have the gizzards/fat ratio of this great little package specified on the label.

"The package contained one human hair 2.5 inches in length. Although my appetite for human hair is modest, I do not complain for this one hair occupied little space in the package, and I am confident that it, too, was 'thoroughly cleaned and ready for cooking.'"

While this lady had a little lighter touch than some, the letter does reflect consumer thinking. Nothing will turn the consumer on faster than a hint of filth, rats, roaches and the like, as Upton Sinclair proved when he started this whole thing.

The goal President Johnson has set is to assure every American a fair and honest exchange for his hard-earned dollar. When the consumer thinks he is paying for good food prepared under appropriate conditions, and finds that somebody shaved a point on those conditions, he feels cheated.

Too, as the letter illustrates, the consumer feels
cheated when he is fooled by a label. Actually, it was the labeling problem that gave form to the current consumer momentum. The consumer effort was sporadic for years, and some suggested that the consumer interest was too intangible to serve as a rallying point.

**Fair Packaging Law**

However, there was a flood of support for the Fair Packaging law. During that legislative campaign and subsequently, with a win to its credit, the consumer movement organized. There are now between 30 and 40 State and city consumer organizations, and a national federation of these organizations and others with a consumer component.

As an aside, it may be of interest that St. Louis helped lead this effort. The St. Louis Consumer Federation and the Missouri Association of Consumers were among the first and strongest consumer voices. Too, the first consumer conference in cooperation with the President’s Committee on Consumer Interests was held in St. Louis.

It is well known that the purpose of the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act was to solve some of the problems that the housewife was having in the supermarket. She was annoyed when she couldn’t read the weight without a magnifying glass, and confused by peculiar designations like “jumbo quart.”

The basic requirement in the law is simply a clear statement of the contents and size of a package. This seems to me so reasonable that I sometimes wonder what the dispute was about. Since the regulations became effective just last month (July, 1968), consumers have pretty much put this one in limbo until the results are in.

One of the major concerns related to proliferation of package sizes. This matter was handled in terms of voluntary product standards under a procedure to be instituted at the Department of Commerce. I understand that approximately 50 committees are at work on standards for various products and that several agreements have been reached on the reduction of the number of package sizes, beginning with the instant coffee and edible oils industries.

But it is true that there’s no such thing as a little deception, and that some deceptive practices have become commonplace (in ads, repair cheats, phony sales tricks) because a majority will put up with it. It’s also true that groups endorsing the consumer cause, along with their natural allies like this organization, are fast becoming—if not a majority—at least sufficiently influential to make some progress on the worst of the abuses.

This has been called the consumer era. They are on the move. But in truth it will take a great deal more effort from all sides to establish the consumer ethic in our daily transactions.

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**NEW ALL-DAIRY LOW FAT SPREAD**

Developers of a new all-dairy, low fat spread said consumer surveys have been encouraging for a new dairy product which was released nationwide May 1 to processors through the Agricultural Experiment Station at South Dakota State University.

S. W. Seas, assistant professor, told of results of 1 survey in a South Dakota community in which consumers liked the product and rated it right next to butter in preference. “While families still like the fine flavor of butter, they were enthusiastic over spreading properties of the new product and felt that it was superior to margarine,” Seas reported.

He disclosed that during the survey slight changes made in formulation of the product were guided by information obtained from the consumers.

“We found they preferred a medium level of color, similar to butter, plus a salt content of 1.25%, he said. “They also liked the distinct cultured butter-like flavor.”

He added that consumers used the product mostly as a spread although some other uses in cooking and serving were reported. Prior to release of the product, dozens of recipes in which it was used were developed and tested by SDSU home economists. Versatility is a characteristic of the product for use as a spread, in baking, in sauces and in other ways.

Co-developer Kenneth H. Spurgeon discussed technical aspects encountered during the past several years while the two South Dakota State scientists worked with the spread.

First commercial introduction of the product in South Dakota was in early June by a dairy in Brookings.