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Political, Economic Factors Influence Food Decisions

Third in a Series

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An employe of the Food and Drug Administration has sharply criticized the agency for its regulation of food additives.

Dr. Jacqueline Verrett of FDA and Jean Carper, a science and consumer writer, published "Eating May Be Hazardous to Your Health" in August '74. Dr. Verrett is a biochemist who has worked for FDA for 15 years. She is still employed by the agency.

In her book, she attacked FDA for too strong a relationship with the food industry and not protecting the public. The authors claim that the Government's decisions about food additives are made not on a purely scientific or legal basis or in the interests of public welfare, but largely on political and economic factors. The book emphasizes problems that have existed and been solved and others that must be faced and resolved.

Dr. Verrett criticized the use of monosodium glutamate (MSG), the flavor enhancer used in a wide variety of foods, especially Chinese cuisine. According to Dr. Verrett's evidence, MSG induced brain damage in infant mice, rats, chicks and monkeys.

Other reports in scientific literature substantiate that brain damage has been observed in newly-born rodents usually following massive doses. However, higher species of animals, whose nervous systems more closely resemble man, have been tested with MSG and there was no occurrence of brain damage.

According to the Verrett book, a color additive, Red 2, can kill fetuses. Since 1969, Red 2 has had very limited use, primarily in maraschino cherries. There has been extensive research on the additive. FDA cites six animal research studies that indicate no evidence of birth defects or cancer in rats from the additive. Fetal death studies are in progress and near completion.

Poisonous polychlorinated biphenyls (PBCs) are an incidental additive that occurs in fish in industrially polluted waters and also in foods when transferred through a manufacturing process. PBCs are used in multiple manufacturing processes: As a heat transfer substance; in carbon paper and inks; in recycled cardboard and in paints.

FDA recalled a baby cereal that was being contaminated with PBCs from the recycled cardboard box. Macaroni had absorbed PBCs from the ink printing on the box. The problems were solved by lining the boxes, separating the food from the cardboard and ink.

Corn in some states, not Indiana, was found by FDA to contain the poisonous substance after storage in silos painted with paint that contained PBCs.

the drug manufacturers had not been given a hearing prior to the banning, and therefore the ban had to be revoked pending an adequate hearing.

Currently FDA is trying to develop more accurate methods for detecting drug residues before conducting that hearing. In the meantime, FDA is working with the USDA meat inspectors to see that the DES in meat does not exceed tolerance levels previously established.

Not waiting for the hearing, HB 324 has been introduced in Congress to ban DES as a growth promotant for animals. Numerous other bills include a ban of the use of DES both for animals and humans.

What danger is there from DES? One of the two forms of the substance is the so-called "morning after" contraceptive. It was used during the '40s to prevent morning sickness in pregnant women. Later it was observed that the daughters of some of these women developed vaginal cancer.

Diethylstilbestrol (DES) is a problem still unresolved. DES has been used as a growth promotion substance in animal feeds and as an implant in animals. FDA banned its use as a feed additive on Jan. 1, 1973, and as an implant on April 27 of the same year.

First a farm group challenged the ban, then drug manufacturers took the issue into the courts. On Jan. 24, 1974, the courts overturned FDA's ban on DES both as an additive and as an implant. The courts ruled that

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