

What's Gone Wrong With Our Food?

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FROM CAMDEN, N. J.

First it was Bon Vivant soup: One man died, his wife was paralyzed when they tasted *vichyssoise* containing an incredibly dangerous poison, botulism.

Last week it was, of all things, Campbell's Soup. Botulism was detected in some Campbell's chicken-vegetable soup, and 200,000 cans were snatched back from stores in 16 Southwestern and Southeastern states, without fatalities.

Moreover, since early July the Government has announced a recall of a large amount of Armour & Co. Genoa salami containing dangerous staphylococcus bacteria. It also announced that PCB, a potent DDT-like chemical used in paints and adhesives, had contaminated unknown numbers of chickens and eggs that consumers bought.

Then Ralston Purina Co. said last week it was recalling all of its fish food, which it sells principally to commercial trout and catfish farmers. The company said it feared the food would cause "ill effects to consumers," for it, too, contained PCB.

Fail-Safe Methods

All of this in a food-processing industry that has boasted for years that its fail-safe methods have all but eliminated food contamination, especially from botulism.

It's undoubtedly true, of course, that the vast bulk of the foods produced by U.S. packers is safe. Nonetheless the inevitable public questioning began: Why did these things happen? What product will be next? What has gone wrong with our food?

If consumers knew the full story they would be even more distressed. In generally unpublicized moves in the past two months, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recalled large lots of contaminated frozen crab cakes, canned shrimp, noodles, soft drink, and lemonade concentrate.

Since last Jan. 1 the FDA has condemned more then 100 food items. The total comes from tallying actions listed on the seldom-perused "FDA Weekly Recall Reports," a letter-size publication available to the public. The many call-backs of foods officially found to contain rat feces or insect remains aren't included in the total. The list does include certain recalled shipments of such products as:

- Kraft Foods Cos. American cheese containing pesticide residue.
- Pepsi Cola, listed simply as "contaminated."
- Meadow Gold bulk-packed Neapolitan ice cream containing gasoline.
- Blue Plate Foods grape jelly containing glass particles.
- Candy bars with metal shavings in them.
- Whole wheat flour containing mercury.
- Breads, beverages, eggs, nuts, and condiments bearing various toxic bacteria.

None of these recalls rivals the latest botulism incident in importance. Nor is any as mystifying.

Campbell Soup Co., headquartered here

Staff writers August Gribbin and Patrick Young reported this story, which Mr. Gribbin wrote.

Homemade Botulism

The botulism furor of recent weeks has involved commercially canned products, but in fact the greatest danger from botulism can be found in foods put up, or preserved, improperly at home. Almost overlooked in last week's excitement over Campbell's Soup, three persons in Philadelphia became ill after eating home-canned pickles containing botulism. At week's end, one of the victims remained critically ill.

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