

February 8, 1940

Dr. Tom D. Spies
Hillman Hospital
Birmingham
Alabama

Dear Tom:-

We shall be sorry not to have you at the Research Club meetings, but it will not be necessary for you to let us know as to the date of your return since I shall probably know it more or less automatically.

On the subject of the lead content of foods, I believe there is nothing of significance to be said at this time. There are no new developments, so far as I know, which will involve any likelihood of increasing the contamination of food materials with lead in the near future. Indeed I am quite confident that the attention which has been directed to this subject has been such as to inspire greater caution on the part of the manufacturers and processors of food materials. I feel certain that we can expect some improvement in the situation rather than any increasing difficulties.

We have never found any evidence that food materials as generally available are dangerous from the point of view of their lead content. Obviously the spray residues on fruit, and more particularly on leafy vegetables, constitute a problem which will have to be kept under fairly close surveillance. The chief difficulty here lies in the fact that Federal regulations apply only to commodities in inter state commerce, whereas these same materials handled commercially within any one of the states is entirely exempt from Federal supervision except as the state itself sets up regulatory mechanisms comparable to those of the Federal government. Despite this difficulty, however, there has been very little actual evidence of injury to the public health, and although I feel that the problem is important, it is certainly not a situation which requires radical or emergency action at this time.

You may be interested in knowing that we are making a rather comprehensive investigation of the lead content of general food materials. Through local

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avenues which run to distant points in this country, we have been able to obtain samples of a more or less cross-sectional character. It would take us years to complete this work but we shall eventually know a great deal about the common sources of contamination. As an example of our procedure, we have collected a large number of the materials which enter into bread stuffs and pastries, beginning with the grain itself in various stages, then with certain general cereal products of an intermediate type, and finally with the commodities of this sort which are generally available, such as bread stuffs, cakes, pastries etc. We expect to use the general category of food materials in this fashion, determining not only the lead content of these materials, but the tin, aluminum, copper, manganese and silver content as well. Obviously we are not spending all of our time at this, but are simply working it in as opportunity offers itself. Eventually, however, as you can see, we shall have a very significant bit of information.

I have gone into some detail above since I felt you would like to know for the information of the Council on Foods that such work was in progress and that information was being made available.

I should like nothing better than another chance to visit your clinic, and if the opportunity should afford itself on one of my jaunts over to Baton Rouge or New Orleans, I shall drop in on you if I may do so without being a nuisance to you.

Sincerely yours,

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Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.