

Dorothy M. Sherrill, Chairman
American Home Economics Association Consumer Interests Committee
and
Home Management Specialist
Oregon State College Extension Service

I've noticed that good things often seem to come in pairs. I've thoroughly enjoyed every minute of this second visit to Minneapolis - the first having been when you were hosts to the American Home Economics Association at its annual meeting in 1955.

If my theory that good things come in pairs continues to hold I expect this first opportunity to participate in this conference of the Council on Consumer Information will bring an opportunity to meet with you again soon. This has been a privilege and a pleasure and a great value to me in getting the overall view of our many interests in the consumer.

All of you have contributed so much to my thinking. Someone once said "If you are going to eat an elephant the first thing to do is cut him into little pieces."

I appreciate the way that each of you on the program have cut the consumer movement into pieces we can easily digest. I have more new ideas from this conference than we can shake a stick at -- but we know that "ideas are something that won't work unless we do." So the ideas received here are ideas on which we in AHEA intend to work.

Last night Dr. Persia Campbell gave us so much of value and not only were her comments thought provoking but they were so charmingly presented that I am sure all of us benefited in many ways.

She reminded me of the need for evaluation, for setting some priorities, for having some concrete aims. If we have had a major fault in AHEA I would say it is that of having our consumer efforts channeled in too many directions.

Some words of wisdom I think of often go like this -- "It's not what you do, it's what you get done." I am sure we all find it takes a lot of doing to get something done these days; but I am firmly convinced that with some thinking, some planning, some organizing, some direction we should be able to streamline the doing so we really get more done.

Standing here as a representative of the more than 25,000 members of The American Home Economics Association presents a real challenge - for this representation is of our members in teaching, in the field of business, in the Extension Service, institution administration, social welfare and public health and research. In addition we have a large membership of home economists in homemaking -- those professionally trained home economists who are engaged in the most challenging and the most rewarding field of all, that of homemaking. We would be remiss if we

did not mention the 21,000 college club members who are in clubs around the United States. These are the young people who will carry our concern for and interest in consumers of the future.

The American Home Economics Association is an organization of both men and women who are engaged in the fields of art, family economics, home management, family relations and child development, foods and nutrition, textiles and clothing, and housing and household equipment.

Someone recently called AHEA an "organized group of professional consumers." I feel free to say this since it came from a man outside our association. I rather imagine he substantiated this thought with the idea that AHEA is an organization of people whose training and work delves into every phase of home and family life. Furthermore, our interests range from basic science to the immediate and everyday problems of families everywhere.

From the beginning of home economics, families have looked to the home economist for help in the selection and use of goods and services. We realize that our responsibility to consumers is a big order. The consumer is a generalist with a wide array of interests. We have accepted our responsibility by giving consumers such information as is available, by helping them understand the marketing system and the way in which their behavior influences the market and by contributing to the development of suitable grades, standards, nomenclature and other devices that make for efficient marketing and satisfied consumers.

Last year the American Home Economics Association celebrated its golden anniversary. To commemorate this 50th year, a committee on philosophy and objectives reviewed our past achievements and set forth the new direction for home economics. The course they charted has twelve guideposts - and three of these are specifically related to our interest in the consumer. We believe that we should help individuals to:

- . . . Make and carry out intelligent decisions regarding the use of personal, family and community resources.
- . . . Purchase consumer goods and services appropriate to an overall consumption plan and wise use of economic resources.
- . . . Take an intelligent part in legislative and other social action programs which directly affect the welfare of individuals and families.

When we consider the make-up of the membership of our association and the interests of its members could there be a more natural direction for our attention to turn than toward the consumer? Because of the very nature of our work we are in a position to teach and reach the consumer. Early in our association's existence we realized the lack of standards which a consumer could use as a basis for comparing values offered.

The textile section of the American Home Economics Association was the prime mover in seeking a way to set standards for consumer goods and in 1919 initiated a sub-committee on standardization. One of the earliest reports

of this committee outlined its work to include a study of purchasing habits, development of minimum standards, support of protective legislation and an educational program to help women and girl consumers select quality. Within the year the committee attacked vigorously the development of a standardized wearing test for textiles. Determined home economists secured an agreement from a manufacturer to make petticoats from silk that met certain specifications. Many among the faithful of that day recall the buying and wearing of those 800 iridescent beruffled petticoats made from 1,800 yards of silk bought at a cost of approximately \$5,400.

This was a courageous undertaking for a committee so young and so small, from an association which, at that time, was also small; but reports from the wearers and laboratory tests gave the committee material for its start towards its object -- that of finding ways to eventually help the ultimate consumer to know a fabric's content and its suitability to its proposed use. Little did these pioneer home economists know that they were forerunners to our later work on textile fiber products identification which we are newly enjoying today.

It was logical that consumer problems were not a monopoly of the textile section. The efforts of the standardization committee called forth other activities until today our interests and work revolve around consumer legislation, consumer education and promotion of standards of quality and the use of these standards by both industry and consumer. We also promote informative and descriptive labeling in advertising of consumer goods. In addition we support programs for consumer protection against misrepresentation, misleading advertising, and fraudulent and unfair practices in buying and selling.

This broader expanse of program areas called forth another name and today the American Home Economics Association has as one of its standing committees -- the Consumer Interests Committee, which has taken the welfare of the consumer as its specific responsibility. This is a revolving committee of 12 members representing all subject matter groups within the association. It is this Consumer Interests Committee which I represent. Our committee takes its clues for action from each of the subject matter sections in AHEA and at the same time initiates its own consumer programs.

The Consumer Interests Committee serves as somewhat of a clearing house for all of the consumer activities carried on within our association. You can well imagine that work of the members of our association varies so widely that we really at times must take a consumer interests poll within our own group on many matters. It is well that all of our committees work through the Consumer Interests Committee so that our actions truly represent the entire association. We work quite closely with the AHEA Legislative Committee. The work of the National Committee is also supplemented, supported and inspired by the work of State Committees throughout the country.

Our association and our committee feel especially privileged to have members in such a wide variety of fields. Certainly their constant work with consumers helps us keep a finger on the pulse of consumers everywhere and this same work gives us channels for getting information to the consumers everywhere.

Newspaper home economists answer millions of consumer telephone calls in which information is requested or complaints are handled each day. They have pages of print each week on which to inform consumers.

Equipment and utility home economists make untold numbers of home service calls each week and also help consumers decide their wise choice in the appliance market.

County extension agents meet with millions of rural, suburban and city people in untold numbers of groups each year on consumer problems from A to Z.

Research home economists in industry, education and government put consumer products through their paces every hour of the day and in turn relay the findings to consumers in better products or in information to help them in wise choice of products.

Teachers keep alert and help young people and adults understand the importance of consumer awareness and the place of the consumer in the market.

Home economists in homemaking keep an open ear to comments of people in almost every community in the nation.

All these and more contribute to the consumer pulse we get and provide avenues through which we get information to consumers.

It is not our intention to recite long lists of our accomplishments through the years. There is neither time for, nor interest in, this kind of enumeration. However, it might be effective in pointing out the kinds of work we do to give some examples of our activities through the years.

Work in standards has been a constant part of our agenda. Much of this has been done through our membership in the American Standards Association. AHEA pays each year what to us is a large sum for membership in ASA. We are, I believe, the only consumer group with a membership that entitles us to serve on the council and to vote on American Standards Association matters. We started our membership in 1929 and continue it today because we realized then as now that standards can be developed and revised only by the cooperative efforts of experienced producers and distributors and consumer representatives who know how families use products and what their desires are in regard to them.

In addition to our regular membership on the ASA council, AHEA has had frequent requests to provide resource home economists to assist in developing specific standards. One of our members recently represented consumers generally and AHEA in particular at a conference called to establish simple, standardized terms for additives to food.

Today all consumers can benefit from availability of standardized cooking and baking utensils -- a standard which was proposed by the American Home Economics Association. The basis for our sponsoring such a standard grew out of the fact that recipes from test kitchens had been developed

with standard equipment and techniques so that they should have been used successfully by anyone who followed directions. It was obvious with the introduction of cake mixes that this was far from true. There was great variety in dimensions of baking utensils and the statements of liquid capacity of measuring cups and spoons left something to be desired. AHEA was supported in its efforts by companies that make these utensils and by home economists from colleges, magazines and food manufacturers, all of whom worked on the project. These standards included not only baking and measuring utensils, but also top-of-the-range cooking utensils.

In recent years, AHEA has also been a supporter for L-22 covering performance and care of rayon and acetate. It is our hope that L-22 will be broadened to cover other fabrics and that performance standards will be developed for household equipment and other consumer goods as well as fabrics.

Reports are that we are on the threshold of an expanded version of L-22. The new standard will cover performance qualities of all textiles, regardless of fiber type. What a joy to the consumer to buy a fabric or a garment with confidence in its care and performance. This is evidence of real progress from those first petticoat tests which reported the silks "too soft and light for constant business wear, but quite satisfactory if worn for best." The years in between have shown AHEA dedicated to development of performance standards such as these.

Numerous other efforts for improved standards have been a part of our work through the years with the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Commerce and other agencies or associations preparing standards for consumer goods. We also cooperate with and support agencies that administer and enforce standards. Our members have been called upon often to participate in hearings as representatives of consumers.

We really give quite a workout to home economists in Washington and the neighboring areas. The Home Economics Association does not have large budgets for unlimited travel. Our members work for groups that do not always pay for association activities even though many do. In short we might be considered to have "budget trouble." Have you heard the latest definition of budget trouble? It's when there's too much month left over at the end of the money. We in AHEA find that we must carry out our programs efficiently if we are going to continue our large consumer program on the funds we have.

We are proud to find listed among the twenty-two significant achievements of the association from 1909 to 1959 one which says that AHEA "supported legislation which culminated in the passage of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938 and its subsequent amendments." I believe that Wallace Jarssen will agree with the current support which our committee gives to FDA. Some of our most outstanding work has been in the field of food facts and fallacies.

We are pleased to have had these and other opportunities to participate in the development of standards and cooperation with agencies administering standards. But in addition we have considerable evidence that recognition

of the strength of our 25,000 members as consumer leaders and educators has been influential in bringing acceptance of the higher quality when different qualities are under consideration.

Thus far, we have been talking about sponsoring standards and voicing an opinion in legislative matters ourselves. In other cases we encourage the ultimate consumer to voice an opinion in the standards making process or in legislative affairs.

At the close of World War II AHEA launched the "Consumer Speaks" project which gave consumers an opportunity to "speak their minds" concerning what they expected in goods going into production again after years of shortage. Almost 300,000 consumer opinions came from over 11,000 consumer groups in this period when consumer opinion could have such a great effect.

A current example is our word to consumers about the Food and Drug Administration proposed peanut butter standard now underway. Since peanut butter is a mainstay in the diets of children in million of American families, we would hope to alert consumers to a need for voicing their opinions about this important standard. A recent move toward discontinuing grading of lamb is another area in which AHEA took active measures to alert consumers to the need for them to "speak their piece." The pending credit bill is meat for both our legislative and Consumer Interests Committee. Several of our members have been called upon to testify before the Senate Banking sub-committee.

We have always felt that one of our major contributions is through giving information to consumers -- giving them facts on which they can base intelligent decisions about actions of importance to them. We tell them what the situation is and they make the decisions. This has been a mainstay of our total work through the years. We feel too that standards and labels will have little meaning if the ultimate consumer is unaware of them. We now have a tremendous job to explain the whys and wherefores of the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act. We take further responsibility for encouraging the consumer to express to business and industry the value she finds in the standard products and the properly labeled products they sell.

An article on the "Significance of Consumer Complaints" is ready for our coming issue of the Journal of Home Economics. Consumers will be alerted again by this article to their part in development of quality products. Our homes serve as the ultimate testing laboratories for the many new products which come to market each year. Well presented consumer complaints can serve in large measure to speed the development of the quality consumers expect in the goods they buy.

Another means of getting consumer opinions to industry is through the frequent reprints of our Journal articles by business. Most recent use of reprints has been of our series of articles on consumer credit and on care and handling of frozen foods.

A further objective of the American Home Economics Association Consumer Interests Committee has been to support programs for consumer protection against misrepresentation, misleading advertising, and fraudulent and unfair practices of buying and selling. As early as 1929 AHEA petitioned the Federal Trade Commission regarding the need for consumer representation at trade practice hearings. Later years show frequent participation in these hearings.

Work in the areas of trading stamps, statement of credit charges, fictitious pricing and bait advertising has come in for a large share of attention. We were indeed pleased to have Dr. Richard L. D. Morse, a past chairman of the Consumer Interests Committee and a member of this association, represent us recently at the Federal Trade Commission Conference on public deception. His comments there certainly indicate a consistent pattern of interest in consumer protective measures.

Good labeling has long been an aim of our association. Currently we are engaged in a program for improved ham labeling. A record of consumer dissatisfaction with existing ham labels has caused us to take action which we hope will bring an end to the hodge-podge of misleading labels now in use. These cause misunderstanding and confusion not only in the purchase but in the cookery of hams.

Smoked hams carry a variety of labels including "ham," "smoked ham," "uncooked ham," "regular ham," "ready-to-eat ham," "tenderized ham," "tendered ham," "ready-to-serve ham," and "fully cooked ham," to name only a few. In addition to the confusion created by the great variety of names, there is further misunderstanding brought about through the use of terms such as "ready-to-eat" and "ready-to-serve" on smoked hams which need more cooking to develop the flavor and texture the consumer expects from the term "ready-to-eat."

I am sure that any of you who have ever attended a church supper where slick textured ham with anemic white fat has been served will agree that changes in labeling are needed.

We believe that the names "cook before eating" and "fully cooked" provide the only terms needed to adequately cover the types of ham available. Furthermore adoption of these simplified terms could lead to specified cookery methods suitable and safe for each type of ham.

Recommendations about ham labeling were prepared by our committee and sent to our members, to various departments of our government, to packer and industry organizations, to retail grocer associations, to individual packers and retail grocers, and to various women's magazines. Response has been most gratifying and recommendations adopted by the American Meat Institute indicate that considerable progress has been made. However, voluntary adoption of these simplified terms is far from the complete adoption we would like. Our work continues with industry and government to bring a complete solution to this consumer problem.

The aim today has been to point out a few of the consumer activities of the American Home Economics Association. The pattern of activities is shown very clearly in our complete program of work presented in the

September 1958 Journal of Home Economics. Not only is it our guide but we feel it presents a rather complete outline for anyone concerned with consumer problems.

Dr. Arch Troelstrup tells me that a large percentage of the charter members in this association were AHEA members. It is interesting to see that today many home economists are members of CCI and active in the association.

It is obvious from our two days here that there are many who represent the consumer and do it well. Each of us takes special pride in the way in which we carry out this important assignment. AHEA takes its special pride in the firsthand contact its members have with families of all economic and social levels. Because of the very nature of our work we find ourselves in a position to bring about two-way exchange of information. We can see what the homefront problems are and direct our efforts toward solving them. AHEA serves as a liason and catalyst as well as a prime mover in getting these jobs done.

Let me thank you again for the privilege of being here. The conference has been so worthwhile and filled with so many ideas that it is rather difficult to know where to begin. I for one intend to begin by sharing this conference with all who are members of the American Home Economics Association.