

REMARKS

Eleanor Ordway

I would like to say at the beginning that I will confine my remarks to the protection offered to Canadian Consumers by the Food and Drugs Act of Canada.

I believe that consumers want honest and informative advertising and labelling of food and drugs and suitable standards for these products. I think it is of prime importance in the administration of this law, that our Food and Drug Officers should know what the consumer wants and thinks and also that the consumer should know what the Food and Drug can do and cannot do for them. I have noted in the press and have heard from other sources that there is a great deal of public interest in your country about the consumer and her wants. There is

also in my country a growing awareness of consumer wants. No longer is the consumer a "NEGLECTED CHILD" and in a thriving economy she is and should be an important figure. I am, of course, pleased to see that consumers are coming into their own. I also feel that consumers must be well informed. Their demands must be well founded and reasonable, so that their complaints will receive the serious attention of the manufacturer or the Government. I think it is very important that consumer know that there are things that we as a government department cannot do, either because the authority is not given by the law or because we should not do such things in a free enterprise economy. Furthermore, there are some things consumers can do better themselves. We in the Food and Drug Directorate try to give the consumer protection, and certainly recognize the importance of the consumer view-point. This is evident in the establishing in our organization of a separate Consumers Section. I do not feel that it is my function to publicize the Food and Drug Directorate. We are there to give consumers information on which they can base sound opinions and reasonable requests. Opinions from uninformed consumers may be based on false information and therefore be useless as guides to proper action or even lead to undesirable actions. Governments will learn to disregard consumer opinion if it is not reasonable and based on adequate information. If consumers do not know the facts they may want things that are unreasonable and unrealistic from the standpoint of government and industry. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with information about types of products and about the possibilities and limitations of (a) government authority and (b) the capabilities of industry in specific instances and also about the possible consequences if their opinions are taken or their wants fulfilled.

We in our Food and Drug Directorate work to these ends. Consumers are encouraged to present their complaints, criticisms and suggestions. These are studied, classified and tabulated for consideration by us. If they are justified the action taken may be amendments to standards, label requirements or increased enforcement action in a specified area.

Recently, I have conducted a national survey of consumer opinions in respect to labelling, packaging of foods and the use of chemical additives. The results have been published and I hope will be useful to government, industry and consumers themselves. They do point out the fact that a considerable proportion of the public in Canada know surprisingly little about what one would expect them to know. The people surveyed were not a select group. They represented urban chain store customers taken at random. Nevertheless, the results of the survey pointed definitely to a number of errors in packaging, labelling and chemical additives with which the government and industry can see that many consumers are dissatisfied.