

Book Reviews

Food Toxicology: Real or Imaginary Problems? Edited by G. G. Gibson and R. Walker. Taylor and Francis, London, 1985. 403 pp. Price: £40.00.

Anyone fresh to toxicology reading this book, which is a compilation of the papers presented at the University of Surrey's second International Food Toxicology Conference held in July 1983, could be forgiven for thinking that food toxicology has created a whole host of imaginary problems, but has failed to cope with the few real ones.

Although permitted antioxidants, preservatives, artificial sweeteners and colourings have through thorough testing been shown to be safe for food use, regulatory toxicologists are still bogged down with resolving trivial issues, often fueled by statements from well intentioned scientists or by media-conscious activists. In the words of one of the contributors, '... we now have a safer food supply than ever before in human history. Yet we are far from achieving public acceptance of this fact'.

On the other hand, the causes of the Spanish toxic oil syndrome which occurred in mid-1981 and which claimed hundreds of lives as well as permanently incapacitating many thousands, have defied identification even using the bewildering array of analytical and other sophisticated techniques available to today's toxicologist.

But there are grounds for optimism: novel foods or processes can now be evaluated for safety before they are introduced; the body's defence mechanisms against the many natural toxicants present in food are being

elucidated, and a number of vegetable components have been shown to exert cancer-protective effects.

The contributions are grouped into sections concerning legislation and regulatory control, carcinogens, mutagens and interaction products, and additives and contaminants, their technical content being very variable. Therefore, there is material of interest for both specialist and non-specialist, with a good selection of pithy statements which I am sure will be quoted by others, hopefully in context. Unfortunately pages 302-304 were missing from the review copy and I am disappointed that the book did not appear much sooner after the conference, though this does not detract from the relevance of the majority of the papers.

David Snodin

Review of Processed Meats, 2nd edn. By A. M. Pearson and F. W. Tauber. AVI Publishing Co., Westport, CT, 1985. 427 pp. Price: US \$55.00.

Although the authors claim that their updated and expanded version of the earlier edition is intended as a textbook for students entering the field of meat processing, it will continue to be a valuable reference source for anyone with interests in this increasingly important part of the meat industry. Wherever possible, it emphasises the scientific principles underlying the techniques and procedures involved in processing. In this respect, the authors go deep enough to give background without losing sight of the practical consequences. Readers wishing to go further are directed to the extensive and well-documented bibliographies at the end of each chapter. This approach allows fairly comprehensive coverage of the whole area of meat processing in a single volume.

Understandably, the text is directly related to the US meat industry but much of the detailed information can be applied to the industry of other countries. The first two chapters, 'Introduction to Meat Processing' and 'Composition and Nutritive Value of New Materials and Processed Meats', are particularly US-orientated with almost all the economic background and nutritional data derived from USDA and trade association handbooks. Even so, they give a good, general appreciation of the development of meat processing and its important role in any meat industry.

The following chapters, 'Curing', 'Smoking', 'Meat Cooking and