

Ag and Food NEWSLETTER

Chemicals in Foods

INDUSTRY INTEREST in getting sound and practical legislation on chemicals in foods is at a high point of activity. Both the Manufacturing Chemists' Association and a group of leaders from the milling, dairy, meat, and baking industries are working on legislative approaches and tentative drafts of bills. Now through the leadership of Charles Wesley Dunn, prominent authority on food and drug law, cooperative effort will be made to develop a satisfactory combination of the various approaches which will provide a basis which can be supported by all groups.

Materials for Methionine

SYNTHETIC AMINO ACID PRODUCTION is due for another boost: a big source of methyl mercaptan near Du Pont's Texas plant for methionine. Pan American Refining is planning a plant at Texas City to make 5 million pounds a year, initially, of methyl mercaptan from hydrogen sulfide and methanol. Du Pont's \$4 million methionine plant near Beaumont will get methyl mercaptan from Pan Am.

Cold Sterilization Nearer

THE FIRST SHIPMENT OF FISSION WASTE products from "A bomb" manufacture for cold sterilization experiments has been shipped from the Argonne National Laboratory to the MIT Food Technology Laboratories. The radiation source, a block of concrete prepared with solutions of radioactive fission products, will have a shorter half live and lower energy level than the cobalt 60 used for previous cold sterilization studies. Difficulties in preparation stemmed from concentrating the hot fission products 100 fold, however Argonne will make other blocks for experimental purposes if demanded. MIT researchers point out that if cold sterilization is ever commercially undertaken it will probably be with sources of this type and they want to learn how to use them.

Dwarf Corn

PLANT GENETICISTS at the University of Illinois are encouraged by progress in the development of dwarf corn. Project was initiated in 1948 to adapt corn plant to harvesting by machine of "combine" type. Excessive stalk height now hampers design of machine of this type. Goal is a short corn, to be harvested like wheat. So far yields with dwarf variety are only about two thirds those for "tall corn," but increasing planting density may enable smaller variety to match tall counterpart in over-all yield per acre. U of I team says development is not "revolutionary" yet, but with note of cautious optimism grants "that it could be."

World Surpluses

A WORKING PARTY OF THE UN Food and Agricultural Organization is now meeting in Washington to draw up recommendations on disposal of world agricultural surpluses. Consisting of representatives of Argentina, France, India, The Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States, the party's recommendations will be submitted to the FAO in June. All the member nations seem to agree that surpluses should not be dumped into world markets and upset international trade. Distribution and market development seem to be two principal problems for surplus disposal. Actually they believe that recommendations for stimulating agricultural production are in order.

Fats for Feeds

UNSTABLE PRICES may be a major stumbling block to continued increased use of the U. S. surplus production of animal fats; 1.2 billion pounds were acquired in 1953. Gordon Newell of the Stanford Research Institute told a recent meeting of Western meat packers that animal feeds could consume about 2.4 billion pounds of fat if used to extent of 3% by weight. Feed formulators apparently will be hesitant about venturing into the unstable price arena for fats. Tallow and grease sold for 4 to 5 cents per pound last year, rose to 8.5 cents early in February. With corn at 3 cents per pound, Newell says fats would have to sell for 7.5 cents to be equivalent on a caloric basis.

Fluorine Pollution Licked

ALCOA'S VANCOUVER, WASH., aluminum reduction plant has licked the fluorine effluent problem alleged to have caused considerable damage to the farm land and animals in the area. In interest of better community relations and at request of neighboring farmers, Alcoa sponsored 18-month study (cost \$153,000) at Oregon and Washington State Colleges to see if scrubbers installed at cost of \$1.5 million were effectively removing fluorine. Report of the evaluation group last month said that no essential differences in fluorine content could be found in pastures adjacent to the plant and those in control areas.