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A New FDA Commissioner

THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION has a new head. George P. Larrick is now Commissioner, succeeding Charles W. Crawford. The matter of career man versus political appointee, which has been a subject of some conjecture, has been settled. Larrick is a career man.

The responsibilities that pass from the shoulders of Mr. Crawford to those of Mr. Larrick certainly are not simple. The purity and integrity of our food and drugs are very important to the health and welfare of our people. The people are aware of this in a vague sort of way but most have very little idea of the complexities involved in looking after the matter. With increasing population, food production is growing. What is even more important to the Food and Drug Administration, the demand for better foods, for new types of foods and for labor-saving preparations on the market increases the amount of attention that is needed, for the opportunities are increased for undesirable modifications in foods. Unfortunately it also increases opportunities for sensationalism condemning foods which are changed from the "natural" and for raising a cry against "chemicals in foods." It is the responsibility of the Food and Drug Administration, under the administration of the commissioner, to maintain a sense of balance in an atmosphere which is not always calm, logical, and reasoned. The commissioner, on one hand, must be very careful to avoid the doctrine of allowing the "play of the market place" to settle what shall be foisted upon the public as did the Secretary of Commerce with grim results in the battery additives case a year ago. On the other hand, he has a responsibility to see that an atmosphere which encourages improvement is maintained. Rulings against new products or new additives to old products must be based on carefully developed evidence and sound conclusions, if the enthusiasm for research and progress is not to be dampened.

In the face of these responsibilities, the commissioner's problems are not lightened by what appears to be a gradually losing battle to maintain budget funds. During the past 4 years, reduction of the FDA budget has amounted to more than 10%. This has forced a personnel reduction of 11% since 1952. The policy, according to the new administration, will have to continue to be that of protecting the health, if not the pocketbook.

We compliment the Department of Health, Education and Welfare on its selection of George P. Larrick as the new FDA Commissioner, and we wish him well.

Some Criticism of FDA

IN AN ADDRESS before the recent meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists at Los Angeles, Charles Wesley Dunn, eminent leader and expert in matters of food law, made a number of significant comments about trends in the Food and Drug Administration and its activities. While he paid high compliments to the FDA as a highly efficient and a basically just administrative agency, he also pointed to a few matters which he felt merited constructive criticism.

Mr. Dunn's first critical comment was that the FDA does not adequately inform the public on sound compliance with the 1938 act. He said that the public is not sufficiently informed that this act is largely and duly self-enforced by the industries themselves or that violation is an exceptional fringe circumstance or that they actually provide our people with the highest food and drug standards of living ever attained, as a rule. Violations are reported, he admitted, but his point was that these violations apply to a relatively minute part (perhaps less than 1%) of the whole annual interstate commerce subject to the act. What the FDA says about the small badness of this commerce far outweighs what is said about its general goodness, according to Mr. Dunn. He also expressed the opinion that the FDA should take much more educational action directed toward aiding the food and drug industries in the self-enforcement of the 1938 act on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Dunn was complimentary in his reference to beneficial improvement in the administrative procedure under the 1938 act for promulgating food standards and establishing safe tolerances. Here he referred to the recently passed Miller bill relating to pesticide residues in natural food. That bill provides for *ad hoc* advisory committees selected by the National Academy of Sciences.

Among FDA trends observed by Mr. Dunn is the growing disposition to transform the 1938 act into one of government-permission control. This began with drugs, with the advance batch control over insulin and has extended temporarily to certain antibiotics. But even now, with the manufacture of those antibiotics stabilized, the FDA refuses to sanction removal of the control. This approach has continued and has led to an FDA recommendation of an analogous control over new chemical additives in food and cosmetics.

Consideration of, and attention to, these matters is of vital importance to the food and chemical industries. They should put forth a greater effort than ever before to make their point of view understood with the new commissioner and to try to understand his. The two industries should work together closely to encourage sound and satisfactory food additives legislation, keeping in mind the Food and Drug Administration's responsibilities, trends, and philosophies. At the same time, effort should be devoted to clarifying to the Food and Drug Administration, and to the public, the technical and industrial problems involved in achieving better nutritional standards.