

LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

Swedish Food Law Summarized

THE PROSPECT OF new developments in legislation dealing with chemicals in food, with new bills likely to be introduced at the next session of Congress, has helped fan interest in the month-long U. S. tour of Ernst Leopold Abramson, noted Swedish physiologist and nutritionist. Abramson, an internationally known authority on public health and food law, visited this country as guest of the Food Law Institute. The FLI organized his speaking tour, and collaborated with the Institute of Food Technologists in bringing to interested groups in this country Abramson's views on public health, nutrition science, and food law in Sweden and Western Europe.

Sweden's interest in food legislation actually dates from as far back as the Middle Ages, according to Abramson, although the present Swedish food law is quite modern, dating only from 1952. Like the United States, Sweden has come face to face with a number of potentially explosive problems in this connection, but on the whole, has managed to handle them with a minimum of emotion and maximum application of common sense.

In the matter of chemicals in food, for instance, Sweden has long recognized the need of some additives, says Abramson, but at the same time recognizes its responsibilities in the protection of its people's health. In most countries, Abramson comments, chemical additives are generally considered acceptable unless proved deleterious, but this approach has not been too successful; the list of prohibited materials, he says, is nearly always out of date as soon as it is published.

To cope with this problem, Sweden some years ago took the rather drastic step of prohibiting, in effect, the addition of any chemicals, except those specifically included in a list of permissible additives. Under Sweden's new law, this list is revised and reissued annually. Manufacturers wishing to use a specifically approved additive are given a public license to do so; if trade secrets are involved, a license may sometimes be issued without the requirement for publication.

This legal approach was worked quite satisfactorily in Sweden, according to Abramson. Additives may be removed from the list only on very careful consideration, and with the knowledge and collaboration of the manufacturers involved. Any additive manufacturer whose product is removed from the list

is free to present his views on the issue to any or all of the several official bodies consulted in preparation of the permissible list. If no agreement can be reached, he may ultimately carry his case to the courts for decision. However, in his 16 years as director of the Swedish Institute of Public Health (since its founding in 1938), Abramson notes, only two or three cases of this type have been carried to court.

Additive manufacturers, he says are not required to present evidence of exhaustive investigations in order to have new products added to the list, although approval of a given chemical is generally granted more quickly if the manufacturer has made an investigation or if some other competent organization (the USFDA, for example) has previously made an investigation and found the chemical harmless.

The Swedish law does not require labels to list all additives, Abramson notes, except in a few special food classes. All constituents of baby foods and few other specialties must be itemized on the label.

The greater part of supervision and implementation of the Swedish food law is handled on a local basis, with only the large slaughter houses and a few other major installations subjected to federal inspection and supervision. The exceptional homogeneity of Sweden's population of some 7 million greatly simplifies administration of the law, since there are

few major differences in either food processing procedures or dietary practices between different communities. In addition, the relative uniformity of the economic status of families throughout the country (Sweden has very few families who are either very rich or very poor) tends further to simplify food law problems.

Abramson has high praise for the U. S. Public Health Service and for the Food and Drug Administration. Although Sweden's problems are perhaps simpler, says Abramson, the two countries have many problems in common, and many of these problems are shared with other countries as well. Abramson would like to see much more extensive international collaboration in order to decrease the amount of overlap in food and nutrition research, standardize research methods between countries, and improve the over-all efficiency of food law design and administration. Such cooperation, says Abramson, would benefit the people of the nations involved, would be of great value to the manufacturers of foodstuffs and chemical additives, and would help promote international trade.

Abramson returned to Sweden in mid-November. His speaking itinerary in this country included public lectures in New York City, Atlanta, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Washington, D. C., as well as appearances at many universities and colleges. Among the latter were Harvard, Yale, Columbia, New York University, Johns Hopkins, George Washington University, Emory, Cornell, and the universities of North Carolina, Minnesota, Illinois, and Michigan.



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