PERSONAL

profile...

The head of the Food and Drug Administration leads administrative policy in approach to food legislation

GEORGE P. LARRICK's appointment, two years ago, as Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration was received with applause by the great range of industries and individuals whose activities are affected by the pure food and drug laws. In the 31 years he had served in his organization he had become widely known and proved himself conscientious, capable, and effective. A modest and mild-mannered man, he knew his business and pursued it industriously. Since August 1954, he has been chief of his organization, which means he carries a great responsibility and must live constantly in the midst of a great welter of opinions springing from many strong interests. In this sometimes thorny position, the mild-mannered and modest Larrick has proved that he has a deep and vigorous strength of principle and opinion; he is not one easily upset by difficulties in finding solutions or easily shifted from a conviction by vigorous difference of opinion. He must meet on one hand a public easily stirred up over the safety of its food and drugs and on the other hand industry which constantly is concerned with the possibility of too much government control. Such a position calls for some steadfastness.

Larrick's ideas and points of view are of great importance to virtually all segments of the industries related to the growing, processing, and packaging of foods, as well as the drug industry. While he doesn't make the pure food and drug laws of the country, he is in charge of their administration and therefore a very considerable factor in their development.

The new approach to the regulation of pesticides embodied in the Miller Pesticides Amendment was being worked out as Larrick came into office. The long, and currently sagging, effort to get happily workable legislation for the regulation of chemical additives to foods is likely to be pushed to some sort of ending during his term of office. It is Larrick's duty to lead administrative policy in the approach to food legislation.

He is convinced that the greatness and strong position of this country are closely related to progressive achievements in the direction of mass production. The inventiveness and ingenuity that have provided greater productivity with less effort have done a great deal to put us where we are, he believes, and such progress should be expected to continue at a rapid pace. He points to increased life span, shorter working hours, and more time for what an individual may consider the finer things of life.

But he also emphasizes increasing need for caution as we apply the products of our ingenuity, particularly to the things we eat. With chemical additives to foods he feels that safety, not merely absence of known harmful qualities, must be proved. We must search diligently, he declares, for exact and less time consuming methods of analysis. Furthermore, the toxicological and pharmacological procedures of today, which tend to show what a chemical does not do in the body, such as no damage to kidneys, blood, lungs, etc., are not sufficient in his opinion. He hopes for techniques to show and prove exactly what a chemical does do as it passes through the body: what changes it effects, what organs it contacts, its actions, and its ultimate fate. He believes this kind of research would be less burdensome than the technique in use today.

This point of view is the cause of some concern to those in the producing industry who contend that since we do not have all of this information for some of our traditional foods, it is too much to ask and will discourage research for new ingredients.

Proof of Safety

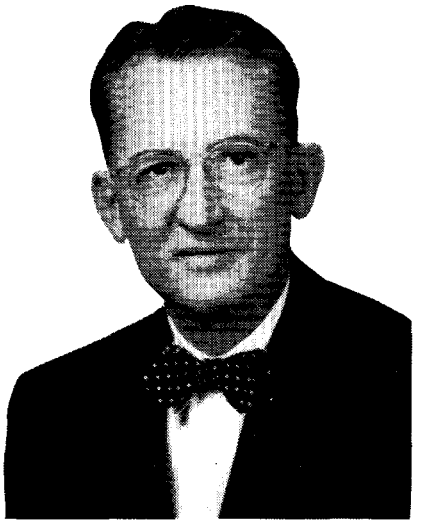
But the Commissioner is firm. Less than a month ago before the annual meeting of the Food and Drug Officials of the U. S., he presented the views of his department on food additives legislation:

It "should require the manufacturer to submit to the FDA evidence of the safety of his product, when used as proposed, before it is shipped in commerce.

"If the additive is a poison it should not be permitted even at an apparently safe level, unless it serves some useful purpose.

"The court review should be the conventional one which has served so well in the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act since 1938.

"The law should permit initial decisions on complex questions to be made by scientists rather than by lay courts and juries."



George P. Larrick

Born, Springfield, Ohio, 1901. Wittenberg College, 1919–21, Ohio State University, 1921–23; FDA Inspector, Cincinnati, 1923–28; FDA Inspector, Washington, D. C., 1928–30; FDA Senior Inspector, 1930–39; Chief Inspector, 1939–45; asst. commissioner, 1945–48; assoc. commissioner, 1948–54; Commissioner, 1954 to date.

Agriculture First Hand

While Larrick certainly is an experienced professional in his work, he also maintains significant amateur status on the other side of the line. He is a week-end farmer, maintaining five acres at Dahlgren, Va., on the Potomac River, where he has an orchard and extensive vegetable garden, several grass-mowing sheep, and a crab line that delivers sea food. Much of the produce is canned or frozen for consumption.

Larrick had some early life on the farm too, but he aimed for the medical profession. After working his way through two years at Wittenberg College, he took a premedical course at Ohio State. The opportunity to get a temporary job as a federal food and drug inspector at $1600 a year and his need for money for medical school attracted him to the FDA.

As the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the pure food and drug laws reaches its climax this month, Larrick will be much in the spotlight. But that isn't likely to take his mind off the fact that he is carrying heavy responsibilities important to the growing of food and feeding of our population. Many ears will be keenly tuned for his utterance that might suggest future trends in FDA policy.