

OIL & FAT INDUSTRIES

The Editor's Page

Why Substitutes?

OUR Federal Government bureaus should be leaders in the constructive thought of the Nation, and, we feel, should avoid carelessness of designation in official documents, particularly where such carelessness is likely to implant or perpetuate unreasoning prejudices in the public mind.

A case in point is a recently issued report of the Bureau of the Census announcing the total production of "Lard Substitutes" and Vegetable Cooking Oils in 1929. We object most emphatically to this implied accusation that more than a billion pounds of wholesome, clean refined vegetable and animal fat products were produced only as "substitutes" for the fat of the hog.

Lard is lard, shortening is shortening. Lard may be shortening, but shortening does not have to be lard. Any assumption that a shortening or cooking fat must be a "lard substitute" is not only wrong per se, in the light of modern knowledge, but is also without foundation upon any historical fact. That the peoples of antiquity used olive oil, sesame oil and the fat of goats and sheep for frying and shortening purposes long before swine were domesticated, is a matter of common knowledge. Should the official language of our Government Bureaus be permitted thus tacitly to condemn as "substitutes" an entire class of food products which are sold to the consuming public solely upon quality and merit and without claim of substitution for any other competing product?

Shortening and cooking fats may be produced by rendering the fat of various domestic animals, by blending such fats with selected vegetable oils, or by refining the vegetable oils alone, or by refining and hydrogenating these or other vegetable oils. It is surely not readily apparent why one of these shortening and cooking fats, namely lard, should be selected by the Bureau of the Census for the honor of an individual name, while all the others, though just as wholesome and suitable for their purpose, and sold in volume at least of the same order of magnitude, must be content with the sweeping designation of "substitute." This seems to us to belong in that class of reasoning

which might call the automobile a substitute for the horse and buggy.

That the "man in the street" can be deceived by specious reasoning is a foregone conclusion, and for this reason, those who prepare our Government census bulletins should exercise especial effort to avoid inaccuracy in the wording of their documents.

A suggestion from manufacturers of shortening may be all that would be required.

Scraping Bottom

THE turn of the year saw the world's animal and vegetable oil prices at the lowest ebb since 1913, in some cases even lower than the average which prevailed in that year. Lard and linseed oil, the indicators of trends in the edible and technical fields respectively, both closed the year with outstanding weakness. Tallow, the soap-maker's barometer, seemed to be an outcast, with no demand at any price, certainly none at any price which would leave the producer a margin of profit. Cottonseed oil, second only to lard in volume in this country, was moving sluggishly to a market which was none too anxious to absorb even light offerings. China wood oil met no demand and fish oils likewise were unpoplar.

In seeking the reason for these extremely low prices, we have encountered the usual long-familiar explanations. They are uniformly to the effect that world stocks of oils, fats and oil-bearing seeds are extremely large, in the face of a demand far below normal.

To us this time-worn excuse leaves much unexplained, for after all the ultimate customer demand can not have been entirely assuaged by volumes of material but little, if any, greater than those delivered to consumption in the previous year. The population of the world is not decreasing in these times of almost universal peace, so the demand for edible and inedible fats cannot possibly cease, or be cut in half, or even be reduced by one-quarter, all of a sudden.