

## Summary of Discussions on Session C

### Current Developments in Protein Food Regulations – Nutrition and Standards of Identity

**W.H. TALLENT**, Recorder, Northern Regional Research Center,  
SEA/ARS/USDA, Peoria, IL USA

Chaired by Leonard Roberts, the panel for this Round Table Discussion included five other speakers from Plenary Session C, Professor Ward, Ms. Brincker, Mr. Kinch, Mr. Hutchinson, and Ms. Grose. Three additional panel members were: 1. William Pringle of The British Arkady Co., Ltd. and Cochairman of Plenary Session E; 2. Michelle Fondu, Associate Director, Food Law Research Center, University of Brussels; 3. Eugene I. Lambert, Partner in a Washington legal firm specializing in food law; 4. Frank Anderson, Director, Food Standards' Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, London.

In his opening remarks, Chairman Roberts expressed the intention of covering nutrition and standards of identity in Round Table Discussion C-1 and saving for C-2 questions and answers pertaining to labeling.

However, the intensity and scope of discussions made this impossible. A portion of the time allotted to C-1 was taken up by four presentations. As perusal of the accompanying printed versions will confirm, these brought out issues falling in three main categories, into which most of the discussion that followed can also be subdivided.

- a. Appropriateness of and extent of general agreement with the recommendations in the Report of the Study Group on Vegetable Proteins for Human Consumption, in Particular in Meat Products. This EEC Study Group Report prepared for the Commission on European Communities, while subject to much debate and disagreement with specific parts, does seem on the whole to provide a good point of departure for further deliberations and for more precise delineation of issues and problems.
- b. Relative merits of standards of identity vs. common and usual names accompanied by clear and informative labeling. Points and questions that surfaced in this category dealt with protectionist aspects of standards of identity, complexity that makes them impossible to understand by the average consumer, and the adequacy of labeling instead of these standards. How well can people understand labels? How much does this understanding vary among different consumer groups? To what extent do people read labels even if they can understand them? How can labels be made sufficiently informative and uncomplicated to adequately protect consumers without standards of identity? Must some product names continue to be protected by standards of identity in spite of shortcomings of this approach? Are standards of identity essential for developing nations?

In spite of the diverse views and aspects indicated during the extended discussion of these questions, a discernible trend seemed to favor a gradual and qualified shift away from standards of identity toward common and usual names plus appropriately informative labels. More on this under Round Table C-2.

There was general agreement on the need for consumer education. In this regard the audience was made aware of a teaching kit developed by the European Vegetable Protein Federation (EUVEPRO). Aimed at home economics teachers, the kit provides information

concerning vegetable protein products: what they are and how they are used?

- c. Pros and cons of the need to fortify to achieve nutritional equivalence with the food being replaced. Put another way, would it be better to accept vegetable protein products as unique foods with their own nutritional attributes and depend upon dietary variety to achieve adequate levels of micronutrients? Advocates of the affirmative answer to this question argued that to require nutritional equivalence of soy protein products with meat would be analogous to insist that spaghetti be nutritionally equivalent to potatoes, because consumers interchange these two foods in their diets. They pointed to technical problems in fortification of soy products to meat equivalence and contended that the cost of overcoming these problems would substantially outweigh the benefits. On the other hand, concern was expressed about long range nutritional impact of a major change in diets that might come about as a result of extensive substitution of vegetable proteins for meat and milk products if nutritional equivalence is not required. Fortification of margarine with vitamins A and D is an analogy cited in favor of this side of the argument.

A few questions and comments were offered that do not fit neatly into the above categories. One such question concerned the adequacy of analytical methods to enforce existing or new regulations pertaining to use of vegetable proteins in meat products. In response it was pointed out that while better methods are needed and research toward them is underway, an existing microscopic method has been successfully used to prosecute a violation in the U.K. (Further information on the microscopic and other methods is given in W.J. Olsman's paper under Plenary Session D.)

Two other questions were related to each other and introduced two additional dimensions into the discussion, namely, future vs. present needs and worldwide consumer preferences and nutritional requirements vs. those in developed nations. Are the regulatory concepts currently under consideration sufficiently visionary, given that they will undoubtedly influence food availability and consumption for the next 20 years, during which time world population will increase by at least 50 percent? Do they encourage development by industry of new food products sufficiently imaginative to accommodate dietary needs and eating habits of people in developing nations? Discussion followed on whether or not the existing approaches focused on present affluent markets and consumers - shortsighted and selfish as they may appear superficially - are not in fact the most effective. Technology and public acceptance being generated under the economic incentive of affluent markets may provide the best background for subsequent development of know-how that will prove useful in meeting the challenge of feeding less affluent people and keeping up with increasing nutritional needs of a growing world population. In fact, earlier efforts targeted specifically on the needs and customs in developing nations proved abortive.