

## Session J Round Table Discussions

### An Industry Approach to Market Growth

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During the past few days, we have heard much about *future* opportunities for vegetable protein, but less about their recent exploitations. There are good reasons for this. In some countries where vegetable proteins are established, we have seen a slowing down in their growth rate, largely reflecting meat price trends – though this is often wrongly presented by the media as a market collapse. In other countries where vegetable proteins are not established, we are seeing, in some cases, moves towards changed food regulations to allow these products to play the useful functional and economic role they can perform. In both instances, we are looking at a market still very much in its infancy, and there is a real need for an *industry* approach to the development of the vegetable protein market. What I mean by this, very simply, is that it is essential to have a *constructive* and *responsible* approach to help stimulate market growth. To illustrate this point specifically, in selling vegetable proteins, we are not – or *should* not – be *competing* with meat however much the less enlightened elements of the agricultural press or farming community suggest that we are. As an industry, we have a clear responsibility to get across the *right* message: that, to a significant extent, the growth of vegetable proteins depends on a healthy processed meat products' industry. We must get this message across to the media, to other trade associations, to civil servants and to the meat processing companies themselves. In a very real way, this is a responsibility that is very difficult to exercise as an individual company.

There are several key areas where an industry approach to market growth is required – and I should like to illustrate these mainly from our recent experience in the U.K. These areas are, primarily (a) provision of consumer information to a wide audience involving full use of the media and public relations activities; and (b) provision of technical-nutritional information often to a more limited audience. The provision of *consumer information* is often of a short term, tactical nature. It can be as simple as providing a background leaflet on vegetable protein including a list of commercially available products that can be bought in the supermarket or other food shops. This is a simple informative leaflet – and unbiased, to the extent of listing products from the few nonmembers of the U.K. Vegetable Protein Association. This gives it some authority and makes it more acceptable to consumer advice bureaus, for example. Consumer information is also provided to the media in general via press releases, press conferences on selected topics, and more selective briefings to consumer organizations. We regard this as a key role for our trade association in the U.K.; not just to inform the housewife as a potential buyer of retail products, but also as a mother or wife of others who, for example, may be eating vegetable protein in schools or canteens.

Another important aspect of consumer education where an industry approach has particular benefits is in the

education of *tomorrow's* consumers. In the U.K. we have put considerable effort into producing a teaching kit for use in schools. This is designed to show the role of vegetable protein in the context of the diet and food trends against the background of the world food situation and general nutritional requirements. The emphasis is on providing information, getting the children to think about the reasons why vegetable proteins are used, including their long established functional roles, and what the benefits and problems are. The objective is to make children and others using the kit better informed to enable them to make their own decisions on their attitudes toward these products.

Turning to another even more important aspect of information, a major *industry* role is the provision of technical and nutritional information often to a limited specific audience. A considered industry response is important to key proposals such as the F.S.C. Report on Novel Protein Foods in the U.K. and the very recently published report of the E.E.C. Committee of Experts under the chairmanship of Prof. Ward.

I believe that a realistic and constructively critical response to the F.S.C. Report in the U.K. has helped to bring an increased recognition of the real role of vegetable proteins. Also, a responsible industry approach to labeling, including clear declaration on menus by caterers, will eventually help produce a sensible arrangement so that the requirement for adequate consumer safeguards with proper labeling (which we fully accept in principle) is properly met without unwieldy labeling requirements. When products contain a significant amount of vegetable protein, the housewife or canteen customer must be advised. Misleading consumers cannot be to the advantage of either customer or supplier. However, I do believe that it must be permissible to describe these products in the simplest possible term with the minimum number of words, i.e., simply as "vegetable protein" in the "appropriate designation." Further details may be required in the ingredient list, but I cannot see how technical distinctions between "extruded" and "spun" products, for example, can really be significant for consumers.

I recognize that, in the end, much of the responsibility for sensible and workable labeling requirements must lie with the food-processing industry itself. I believe that a real recognition of our responsibilities to consumers as an industry will engender the necessary confidence from regulatory authorities to introduce regulations on compositional requirements, labeling, etc., to balance as fairly as possible the sometimes conflicting needs for protecting the consumer and not imposing unrealistic and unnecessary demands on the food manufacturer. This is essential, not just for the development of the vegetable protein industry but, more importantly, to help the profitable growth of the food-processing industry. A responsible industry approach is essential for the growth of an industry still in its infancy, and we all have a role to play here.