

## From Washington

### Hearing on tropical fats

Richard J. Ronk, acting director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, told a House agricultural subcommittee considering labeling regulations for tropical fats that the "so-called tropical oils cannot be classified together on the basis of their effects on blood lipids." The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) spokesman and others gave testimony Sept. 10, 1987, on the possible ramifications of House Resolution 2148, a bill proposed by Congressman Dan Glickman that would require all tropical oils to be labeled as saturated fats.

In his testimony before the Wheat, Soybeans and Feed Grains Subcommittee, Ronk added that it would be overly simplistic to assume that any vegetable product containing a saturated fat in any amount would have an adverse consequence on blood cholesterol. Citing research published in the *Journal of Lipid Research*, the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Nutrition Reviews*, Ronk said, "One recent study suggests that palm oil, even when fed at the high level of 40% of total calories, had much less effect on

plasma cholesterol compared to coconut oil. The recent article on palm oil in *Nutrition Reviews* states, "The animal experiments and human studies mentioned here clearly indicate that palm oil, although it contains some 50% saturated fatty acids, does not behave as a saturated oil." Ronk stressed the need for more research before the relative effects of different fats and oils on blood lipids could be determined.

Ronk also noted that petitions from the American Soybean Association (ASA) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) requiring mandatory disclosure of the presence of palm oil, palm kernel oil and coconut oil raise "an important issue with possible public health implications that is worthy of serious consideration." However, he also said that the "question on the possible impact of more specific labeling for the so-called tropical oils on domestically produced oils is generally beyond our responsibilities." Details: *Food Chemical News*, Sept. 14, 1987, pp. 33-34.

The Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (PORIM), in cooperation with edible oil producers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), testified in opposition to the bill. According to a special report from the National Institute of Oilseed Products (NIOP), PORIM said the legislation would protect U.S. industry by forcing a non-tariff barrier on imported oil and also ignores research findings on palm oil. Kurt Berger, a PORIM representative, supported disclosure of total grams of any type of fat or oil on a food label. However, he said, the bill is protectionist because it would require that tropical oils be listed as the only saturated fats in ingredients listed on labels.

ASA testified that tropical oils were hiding behind "the good name of vegetable oils and that vegetable oils are very low in saturated fat and high in blood cholesterol-lowering polyunsaturated fats," the report said.

The National Sunflower Association (NSA), the National Cotton Council (NCC) and CSPI also presented their views to the subcommittee.

### Dietary fats symposium

The Northeast Section of the American Oil Chemists' Society will sponsor an all-day symposium on dietary fats on Dec. 1, 1987, at the Holiday Inn Jetport, Routes 1 and 9 South, Elizabeth, New Jersey.

The symposium will feature the following presentations:

- How Fats and Oils are Made: A Processing Primer, by M. Deborah Meiners, Best Foods;
- What Are We Eating? by Robert Rizek, Human Nutrition Information Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture;
- Obesity, by Steven Heymsfield, St. Lukes-Roosevelt Hospital Center, Columbia, University;
- Cancer, by David Kritchevsky, Wistar Institute;
- Cholesterol and Heart Disease, by Margaret Cobb, Rockefeller University;
- Summary (including comments on fish and olive oils), by Mark A. Bieber, Best Foods.

Bieber is serving as general chair for the symposium, geared for dietitians, nutritionists, allied health professionals and anyone interested in fats and oils.

Cost is \$50 for reservations made by Nov. 25, 1987; after that date, the fee rises to \$60. For reservations, contact Mark A. Bieber, Best Foods, 1120 Commerce Ave., Union, NJ 07083, telephone 201-688-9000.

### Labeling plan draws criticism

The American Soybean Association's (ASA) proposal that all foods containing imported tropical oil be labeled specifically for that content has drawn criticisms from groups such as the National Institute of Oilseed Products (NIOP) claiming that the measure is protectionist. NIOP has sent a letter to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Energy and Commerce Committee of the U.S. Congress stating that ASA's proposal is based on trade protectionism rather than food safety.

NIOP contended that ASA's petition proposing the prohibition of "vegetable oil" classification for all tropical oils "goes beyond truth and labeling." It said NIOP's members "strongly oppose labeling require-