

Reflections on the Conference – European View

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It is a great honor and pleasure to me that I have been invited to give you a European reflection on the Conference you held this week. When asked to do so, I did hesitate for a moment; well, this is no uncommon thing, you will probably say, for almost every speaker turns out to be a conqueror of hesitation. However, my hesitation changed into fright when I learned from the program that many scientists and technologists of international fame were to speak. Then I felt like a fish out of water!

For, who am I, that I should give a reflection on all this—and, furthermore, from a European angle—as I have practically no concern with the scientific or technological side of fats and oils. Moreover, I have the nationality of a country which covers only about one-hundredth of Western Europe, with a population of about 4% of that.

However, I got over that hesitation rather quickly. Why? Well, not being hindered by any special knowledge of these facts, one is inclined to speak more easily about them; and, being a Dutchman, I am also a European and I am personally prepossessed in favor of the European integration.

To this brief introduction I may add that I'm here in my capacity of president of the Commodity Board for Margarine, Fats, and Oils, which is a public law industrial organization. I can imagine you would wonder what this actually means. Briefly, a Commodity Board is instituted by the Dutch Industrial Organizations Act of 1954 for groups of enterprises which have different functions in trade and industry with regard to distinct products or groups of products. This organization is run by a committee, consisting of employers and employed on a basis of parity. Recently, France followed suit by setting up a similar organization for fats and oils, the "Interprofession Oleagineux."

Having made myself known in this way, I will confine myself to my task: to give a reflection, as a European, on your scientific and technological conference.

In the Netherlands the technique of seed-crushing has been known for centuries. You have made an excursion to the "Zaanse Schans," situated in a district which can be considered the cradle of the oil industry. Why, exactly, just there?

Because it is situated in the neighborhood of Amsterdam—at that time a world trade center, as you've seen at the opening session on Monday—but also because The Netherlands was a typical cattle-breeding country, where agricultural land has always been scarce and, consequently, additional feeding with oilcakes was necessary. This week, several speakers have made it clear that these products are very good protein sources for feedstuffs for animals. During the excursion, you might have seen yourself how oil was produced in former days.

This week, we have learned from you how strongly science and technology have influenced the processing of oil-bearing materials and oils and fats, the improvement of the finished products, and the widening of the scope of possibilities for use of all these products. Once I read, "The progress of milling is practically the history of civilization." This Conference, in my opinion, has given the proof of these words.

Primarily, the object of the oil industry was to produce oilcake—the cows stood, as it were, craving for cake at the door of the oilmill—for in the beginning there was only a small demand for oil for human consumption. The oil was

mainly used for lighting and for the manufacture of soap and paint.

At that time, there were no technical processes for refining, hardening, fractionating, deodorizing, etc. It has been a long way from the windmills to the modern plants and to the technical abilities which we have nowadays; in my opinion, several speakers have made a contribution to further steps in the development of processing this week.

Owing to the technical improvements, oilcake again has become the most important product of the oil industry. In 1974-75, the production of oilcake and meal in Western Europe was about 10 million metric tons; the production of unrefined oils and fats about 4.6 million metric tons.

The protein-containing oilcake and meal get an increasing production for human consumption in the form of edible proteins for the food industries. On Tuesday, very rightly attention was given to this aspect. Also, for the exhibits concerning edible protein, people showed very much interest. Generally speaking, the exhibits have given a good survey of the development in the processing, controlling, etc. The Netherlands is not lagging as to edible proteins. As Dr. Samkalden already pointed out in his opening address at this Conference, in this very town is a mill which is producing these edible proteins to such an extent that our good friend Ad Blankestijn, who was to give this reflection, is so busy that I received the great honor to address you in his place today.

Speaking to you as a European whose country belongs to the Common Market, I draw your attention to the fact that the EEC is the biggest importer and crusher of those raw materials which were in the limelight during your congress.

The position of Western Europe in the world market of fats and oils has been undeniably strengthened as a result of the integration between the member states during the past 20 years. Compared to the U.S.—which will commemorate its 200th anniversary of the confederation this year—the cooperation within the European Community is still young. However, in my opinion, it has been proved within this short time that in Western Europe the integration is not to be neglected. This does not remove the fact that the bonds between the member states of the European Community, and even between the several sectors of production, are often put to the test. A recent example is the way in which the European Commission intends to get rid of the skimmed milk powder surplus, namely, by imposing a deposit on oilseeds and meal. This deposit will be released only on purchase of a certain quantity of skimmed milk powder from EEC stocks.

At your congress, attention has also been paid to the improvements in the production, processing, and sale of fat and oil products. Such measures do interfere with the advantages of modern technological developments. Also, they have a negative influence on the research for new animal feedstuffs.

Thinking of the availability and the price-movements of raw materials during the last few years—in his clear address at the beginning of the Conference, Mr. Mielke provided us with interesting data as to that—I consider it of exceedingly great interest that the scientific and technological development created a large flexibility, which also is obvious from the lectures given at your Conference.

This flexibility made it possible for trade and industry to meet the needs of man, animal, and technique again and again in the most efficient way and, dependent on the supply, with a pack of various products. It is not for nothing that the feedstuff industry is using a computer to calculate the composition of compound feedstuffs of a

certain quality of the available materials at the lowest possible prices.

The needs and interests of the consumer have been under discussion when at this congress, you were dealing with finished products and additives in finished products—an important thing, I believe. The consumer wants to know what he is eating, and the producer should have to know how he can meet the justifiable requirements of public health and the interest of the consumer.

Aside, I remark that, exclusively from economical or commercial political motives, various interest groups and sometimes even the authorities use public health as an instrument to check new applications of, for instance, oils and fats and new products obtained from them. As an example of this, I refer to the proposal of the European Commission with regard to a prohibition to replace milk fat in dairy products by vegetable fats and milk protein by vegetable protein.

Taking up the thread of my speech, I will point out that much research is necessary yet and that there is still much confusion as to whether certain qualities of oils and fats and judged positively according to the aspect of health.

I am thinking of the significance of polyunsaturated fatty acids in checking heart and vascular diseases and to what extent erucic acid may be injurious.

I want to say to you all: you are active in a branch of production which is taking up an exceedingly important place with regard to direct human consumption and to feedstuff industries which are in their turn important supplying industries for direct consumption. Although, at

this Conference, discussions were not directly affecting the consumer, for whom the greater part of the products obtained from the raw materials are destined, I want to point out the influence which the consumer has on the ultimate sales of the products. In the beginning of the Conference, Mr. Mielke mentioned the problems which increasing production is creating with regard to sales, for he is expecting that demand will fall considerably behind supply. Although the consumer's demand can certainly be increased by various processes and modifications, there is, on the other hand, the problem of public health and the phenomenon of a further interest in so-called "natural products." Both induce restrictions on the possibilities to make an unlimited use of new methods. Both technicians and chemists do aim to obtain a good product. Your Conference has pointed out that it seems to be possible—in cooperation with good marketing—to provide oils and fats with an increasing share in the total food pack, certainly in countries with a low income and a low fat consumption.

As a Dutchman, I express the hope that you not only have enjoyed taking part in this congress but also have taken pleasure in visiting The Netherlands and particularly Amsterdam.

I wish you the very best in the continuation of your research, and I hope that it may lead to a further improvement of our products.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this reflection. Particularly, I thank your organization for choosing The Netherlands as the meeting place for the first World Conference on Oilseed and Vegetable Oil Processing Technology.