

Despite the progress research has made in recent years, every once in a while it is astounding to hear of enormously important decisions being made, involving millions of dollars of investment, without the aid of highly relevant facts that research could so easily supply. This certainly does not imply that research will become a substitute for administrative judgment. It must be suggested, however, that failure to inquire into available or procurable facts before reaching any important conclusion is hard to reconcile with either a scientific or a business-like approach. Far from being a substitute for administrative judgment, research must be considered a powerful and extremely effective ally not only as a means of testing hypotheses and assumptions, but also in stimulating creative imagination in new and highly promising directions that would never have occurred to anyone otherwise.

In turning to our more specific area of inquiry here today, what research can contribute to fish merchandising and marketing, it depends of course upon what you already know and what you want to achieve for the industry as a whole and for the individual producers. Granting the premise, however, that primarily you want to sell more fish at better prices, there are important services that research can render you. The need for research often cannot be ignored, for the more energetic and progressive activities of competitors may well make serious encroachments which will prove far more costly to repair.

Basically, research can discover for you genuine opportunities to increase sales. These opportunities may lie in many different directions, as, for instance, the capturing of new markets that could be induced to use particular types of fish products, ways to increase the frequency of serving fish, the ways of overcoming objections to the use of fish, ways of enhancing the attitude that fish are a major source of needed nutrients. Even more important, perhaps, research can delineate and describe the types of mental and emotional obstacles which stand in the way of greater use of fish. Thus, research can point the way towards their elimination.

All of these things, and many more, can be achieved, not as a result of a single research project, but as a long range result of a well conceived and executed program of research having many different facets relating to different products, different market groups, and different areas of inquiry.

Solving Problems in National Merchandising of Seafoods

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THERE ARE MANY PROBLEMS in merchandising seafoods. The seafood industry seems, at times, to be overly blessed in this respect. In fact, the word merchandising itself is a problem to define. What does it mean to the food technologist, the scientist, the packer, or the grocery clerk? To me it simply means leaving no stone unturned to sell more products.

The seafood industry is one of the oldest industries, with some of the oldest properties, oldest ideas, and oldest methods in the country. In spite of its age,

the industry is sorely inadequate in its informative advertising as to the nutritive values and health-giving qualities of seafoods, inadequate in education in the art of preparing appetite-appealing seafood dishes, inadequate in buying and marketing guides for the consumer, the retailer and the wholesaler. This is especially true today with the many frozen and prepared products on the market.

Instead of guiding customers, the industry tends to confuse them; instead of protecting its products at all levels of distribution, it tolerates their abuse; instead of sales being motivated on merits of quality, their promotion is based on price. While all of these things present problems, the solutions are comparatively easy. When we dig a little deeper, we find the "unturned stones," which, in my opinion, present our greatest obstacles. The matters of faith and confidence, sanitation and handling, stigma, dietetic information, and research and recognition, are worth investigation.

I was impressed with the objectives expressed by The Marine Laboratory in the letter inviting me to make this presentation. They said: "We are convinced, . . . that there is a great deal of research information which could mean money in the pockets of the industry, but which is not being used because its significance is not understood. On the other hand, scientists are sometimes inclined to work on problems of little use to industry, unless they keep in close touch with the real needs."

It seems strange that a group of technologists and scientists would invite men from the merchandising field to discuss what they feel is a mutual problem. Scientists would be happier, so I thought, discussing among themselves calories, proteins, other nutritive factors, enzymatic action, etc. However, I find that under the circumstances it is even stranger that the merchandising segment of the seafood industry did not invite science and technology to its meetings long ago. We still have the basic problem of how to increase per capita consumption of the food products our industry produces. The real needs so vital to solving that basic problem are so many we could make a long list. It may be better to set up just a few, in big print, so we could examine them thoroughly, analyze them, and then inaugurate a program that would add vitality, vigorous growth and inspiration to our efforts. This is essential before any sound merchandising plans can be developed.

Time will not permit a complete analysis, but for the sake of discussion, take a look at such items as faith and confidence on the part of the consumer, faith that we will produce food of the highest nutritional value, temptingly delicious, produced under the highest quality standards that technical and scientific minds can create.

The consumer is interested in consistency in seafood purchased as to flavor, freshness, food value and preparation. Can the consumer have faith in the product whether she buys it today under one brand, and next week under another brand; can the consumer have confidence in all types, species and brands of seafood? With some exceptions, I think not, until the entire industry comes under some semblance of rigid government inspection. High uniform standards must be maintained before and after the catch, at the dock, in the packing plants, in warehouses, on delivery trucks, and in the stores. This requires a far-reaching program exacting vigilance at every turn, but it can achieve objectives we seek if we will but remember that to put the finest product on the table we must start at the boat.

An even greater deterrent to increasing per capita consumption of seafoods is the ever present problem of the stigma attached to the word "fish." Consumers who rarely serve fish at home put up a barrier at the thought of fish. Apparently they promptly think of fish odors, burnt grease, messy kitchens, and anything else distasteful that they, at some time or other, encountered in the preparation of fish. If we ever hope to eliminate such mental pictures, we must attack this problem with every resource at our command. Perhaps the scientists and technologists can come up with a solution.

Rigid government inspection of all seafoods will bring about a new confidence and faith in our industry as a source of food, but it won't do the job alone, nor will its benefits reach out and secure new consumers for us, in whose minds the familiar stigma of the word fish still exists. It may even be advisable to remove the word fish from the industry's advertising and merchandising vocabulary.

Information expounding the healthful qualities of seafoods, how to care for them after purchase, instructions on the proper preparation of each species, and more promotional activity creating appetite appeal for products from the sea by new and different recipes glamorizing seafood dishes will help the merchandisers of the industry dispel some of the fixed ideas of the public as to seafoods. Some work has been done in this direction by government agencies. The Fish and Wildlife Service has done an excellent job with the school lunch program, and has assisted in an effort on the National Fisheries Institute's recent national fish and seafood week, together with contributions from various state agencies. The newspapers, too, gave us tremendous support in their food pages during our recent promotion.

Information to retail outlets is also essential to create a desire at that level for more prominent and attractive seafood displays. In terms of profits, our products play an important part in the economy of the nation's food business, but a little information through only a few existing channels, is not enough. More of this will have to be done, more money will have to be spent, and more consumer advertising will have to be purchased.

The basic fact remains that it is ridiculous to spend huge sums of money for advertising until the products themselves are basically right and readily acceptable in every way. Once this is achieved, we can go ahead with work on merchandising in the more practical sense, and gain all sorts of rewards. One in particular is imperative before the full impact of any merchandising efforts can be realized, and that is recognition by the top management of the business firms upon whom we rely for final distribution of our goods. But recognition is a reward that must be earned by acts and deeds for common good to be of value. Those of us connected with national fish and seafood week can tell you that except in a few isolated cases the seafood industry just does not command much attention where it is needed.

In the past several years I have attended conventions of the National Association of Food Chains, Super Market Institute, Cooperative Food Distributors of America, and Frozen Food Distributor Associations, and in all of them combined, our industry has not rated over 90 minutes of discussion. Even within our own industry we are almost totally lacking in the cooperative spirit so vital to the success of any national campaign.

We have several jobs to do and many problems to solve before adding practical merchandising ingredients to any sales motivation program. Paramount to

the many other more practical activities, the real needs of the future of the industry are:

1. Encouragement of industry-wide government inspection.
2. More research and education at all levels.
3. More consumer faith and confidence.
4. Removal of the stigma attached to the word fish.
5. Organization of our forces wholeheartedly for promotion of all seafoods on a national scale.

We must earn recognition, with the fervent hope that it will help us achieve any goal we may set, in an atmosphere of warm cooperation within the industry.

The Kind of Promotion that Food Editors Like

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FOOD EDITORS ARE an important link in food producers' efforts to tell the consumer the best ways to use their products. You may see the impact of a food editor in your own household. Your wife has two or three books and lots of recipe leaflets and pamphlets. She refers to them once in a while—on how long to roast a turkey or for a hot roll recipe. But who plants the thought of a new food—one she's never tried before—in her menus? A food editor, more often than not.

A newspaper is thrown on your doorstep at least once a day. Maybe a women's magazine comes to your house each month. Your wife sees a recipe in that newspaper or magazine for, as an example, baked mullet filets.

If this woman were not a fisherman's wife she may never have seen a mullet, much less cooked one. The filets in the newspaper picture look appetizing. The food editor describes the delicate flavor of mullet, its high quality protein at low cost. The recipe looks easy enough to follow.

"I think we'd like that," the homemaker says to herself.

If somebody doesn't wrap the garbage in the newspaper before she clips the recipe this woman tries mullet.

A good food editor makes sure the recipe is reliable before it is published. If the homemaker follows it carefully, she is a lifelong mullet customer. A food editor is your pipeline to the bride who has never cooked fish or seafood. She is your pipeline to the older housewife who doesn't like fish because she never learned that overcooking ruins flavor and texture. She is your pipeline to the woman who doesn't cook fish because she thinks frying is the only way—and frying makes the kitchen so hot. A food editor knows there are many ways to cook fish other than frying, but she wants help from you in telling the story.

Possibly a description of a food editor's job will show you how material from fisheries authorities can help her. Her prime interest is service to her readers, so any promotion of any industry should be aimed at the great reading public, with its quirks and great variety of interests. Her job is a busy one. I don't know a food editor in America who has time for everything she would