

Down to Earth

You Are What You Eat

by Jane Taylor

The following is based on a series of articles in recent issues of the L.A. Free Press, to whom I give credit and thanks for; especially for the figures, facts and percentages. The people of the Free Press have been into much detailed studies to come up with the facts about the food we eat, what goes into it; and what the results can be and are. The Free Press, being something between an underground paper and a "real" paper (the latter due to its influence and its large amount of subscribers and readers), has made and is still making a very strong battle against the use of packaged, processed, "enriched," canned, frozen, and otherwise no-food-value foods.

This writer suggests that, the next time you go grocery shopping, you take your time, wander up and down the shelves, and take approximate count of all the foods ("foods" being a loosely used term, in this case). Many have been added to, made "easier to prepare", doctored-up, vitamins-added, and those that are totally invented by the food industry.

The food industry, as you would probably guess, is the largest single retail industry in the U.S., doing over \$125 billion worth of business in sales annually. It also is responsible for between 50% and 80% of all packaging materials (a HUGE source of good old American waste).

On this tour of a local, air-conditioned, "everything-packaged-for-safety," super modern grocery, you will find the food industry is gallantly going at its best to sell us more food than we need for even the "3 basics" (which this writer is certainly NOT condoning as any kind of a basic necessity for any human animal); and then including the snacks, or fourth and fifth meals, by making them so attractive to the poor addled consumer, that he/she just can't pass them up. Then they slide in all the DIET foods, designed to alleviate the effects of all of the above.

In 1919, the Food and Drug Administration issued a list of Generally Recognized As Safe products called GRAS. Cyclamates were among the 183 compounds on that list. Recently, Nader's Raiders have been attacking the validity of the entire test, for the list was based on responses from 355 scientists out of a group of 900 questioned in an FDA questionnaire. Not only was THAT group small, but only 194 of the responding scientists had NO COMMENT on most of the items listed! This would seem to imply that, as far as the U.S. goes, the system of GRAS works in that a chemical is innocent until proven guilty. As we all well know, cyclamates became a part of the identity of "diet" drinks and foods, also of jams and jellies, and many other sweet prepared foods, since it's a much easier way to mass production than is sugar, much less honey. Evidence had been indicated to the FDA prior to 1950 about the possible dangers in cyclamates, but the FDA chose to ignore it. In 1950, they reviewed a drug application for

sucaryl. It was later noted that cyclamates in tests with experimental animals showed a high frequency of lung tumors as well as other rare malignant growths.

In 1966, Japanese scientists found that cyclamates were transformed in the body to give another chemical (CHA) which is capable of producing abnormalities in embryos similar to that of thalidomide. In 1969, two members of the FDA staff reported similar findings, but the good old FDA still did not react. However, to save the day (or better yet, to help save our health), Walter Finch, Sec. of Health, Education and Welfare announced that cyclamates were no longer GRAS.

Doesn't that perhaps make you a little uneasy about a lot of other so-called food additives? The original flour maturer, agene (nitrogen trichloride), was removed from use after it was found to have caused running fits in dogs.

Another prime example is MSG, or Monosodium L-Glutamate, which is the sodium salt of an amino acid that occurs in most living things. It may serve as a chemical messenger link from one nerve cell to another. About 60 million pounds of MSG are sold annually in the U.S. MSG is an enhancer or intensifier, not a flavor itself. It makes sweet things sweeter, etc. However, in addition to adding flavor, MSG has been known to cause brain damage in small animals. When young mice were fed MSG they developed a peculiar abnormality of the brain. MSG has been added to many baby foods, not because babies like it, but rather the mothers who feed the babies like it better. Due to bad publicity, rather than due to any scientific finds.

Now, neither chemical, MSG or cyclamates, in any adult human being will cause him to drop dead. However, if used in excess, or if given in excess to young children can cause either permanent or temporary abnormalities. YET, neither chemical increases the nutritional value of food, and both are used for concealing inferiority or making a good product seem to be more than it actually is.

On your grocery store trip you might pass (out of 8,000 - 10,000 items in a grocery store of a fairly large size) some of the artificial look-like, taste-like substitutes for old favorites, such as "Bacos," little red bits of something the writer doesn't even want to know about, that can be added to scrambled eggs, or just about anything. Despite names that hint at what the product is supposed to be like, it is an amazing gimmick in a world in which 2/3 of the people are suffering from hunger. Only in over-fed, over-weight, North America are efforts to sell extra and cheap protein products clearly ridiculous, since they are trying to stuff the full even fuller.

It is hard to draw a conclusion with all this information pouring in from everywhere—I suggest that the readers refer to publications such as "Consumers Guide", "The Plain Truth," the L.A. Free Press, "Science for the People," for more information.

In the meantime, I shall be trying to put together some of the findings and conclusions to pass along to you, the reader. Some common sense in dealing with the food industry is necessary... we should not pay for junk we don't need, we should read the labels carefully, and learn more about nutrition. We should also be very cautious of food with additives... remember the slogan—"grow, make, bake, brew what you can." Also, avoid prepared foods (Such rip-offs with almost zero nutrition), patronize health food stores (there's one in Greensboro on Lee Street just a block from Tate, the "House of Health), experiment with a less carnivorous diet—try vegetable proteins like nuts, beans, and whole grains. Treat yourself to some homemade whole-grain bread—there is nothing like it. (I'll try to include some recipes in future articles).

Eat well to live well. You are what you eat!



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