

# CONSUMER RESPONSIBILITY



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**S**CIENCE and technology have given the United States one of the best food supplies in the world, whether measured in terms of quantity, quality, variety, or availability. Not only do we—as consumers—take this for granted, we make increasing demands on the persons and processes that provide our food.

We expect agriculture and the food industries to put on the retail market an abundant supply of every kind of food we need or want. We expect the food to be nutritious and highly desirable in flavor, color, and texture. We expect it to be clean, unadulterated, and handled under sanitary conditions.

WE EXPECT these qualities even if the food must be transported thousands of miles and stored for long periods in order to give us seasonal foods the year around.

We expect to be able to choose from an almost limitless variety of every kind of food at any stage of preparation. We expect this food to be appropriately packaged in convenient forms and informatively labeled. We expect it to be available to us at any food

store where we choose to shop during any hour of a 10- to 12-hour day, or any day of a 6- or 7-day week.

In addition, we want all these products and services for a reasonable price. We don't want to have to wait in line at the checkout counter to pay for it. We even want the option of ordering by telephone and having the food delivered promptly to our kitchen when we choose to.

Foods and related services in the U.S. marketplace meet most of these expectations.

Our dependence on many persons in many places to produce, store, process, and partially or fully prepare our food, places the consumer "a far piece" from the origin of his food. Some consumers view this separation with alarm and are afraid that procedures and materials may be used which will adversely affect the wholesomeness of food.

Occasionally there has been a crisis when some link in the chain of activities to protect food from the time it is

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produced until it is eaten has weakened or broken. Occasionally some threat has come from an unknown or unexpected source.

More widespread and dangerous than any crisis, however, are the extremists who try to undermine our confidence in our food supply. They try to discredit the protection that has been given us over the years and the work that is being done constantly to protect and improve our food supply and our health.

GREAT STRESS is being given to the rights of the consumer—the right to safety, to be informed, to choose, and be heard. Equal stress might well be given to the responsibilities of the consumer who enjoys such rights.

Government, through a relatively small number of public leaders, can make decisions and take action to insure a safe food supply, a safe water supply, adequate sanitation, and to keep hazardous food products or processes out of the channels of trade.

Government can provide information to help the consumer make satisfying choices. It can provide opportunities for the consumer to voice his views at public hearings or through correspondence to those who can take them under proper consideration.

But if as a Nation we are to benefit

fully from all that is done to protect our food supply, action by the individual consumer is essential.

THE VALUE of almost every protective measure used from farm to table can be erased, deliberately or unintentionally, if the consumer fails to take responsibility for the right action.

Nutritional value and eating quality of any food can be seriously reduced, or a safe and wholesome food can become hazardous, by improper storage and preparation in the home.

Much is done to keep the cost of food down to a reasonable level. This benefit is lost, however, by the consumer who buys food carelessly and allows excessive waste.

Another loser is the uninformed consumer who spends money on food fads and nutrient supplements when customary foods meet nutritional needs.

Our food supply is abundant and varied enough to adequately nourish the Nation. But it is only when we as individual consumers take responsibility for right action—in this case, wise food selection—that we can enjoy and benefit from our abundance to the fullest.

Fortunately, the majority of consumers take personal responsibility for wise food selection, and for supporting and safeguarding all that is done to protect the Nation's food supply.

A consumer examines a product at a Washington, D.C., supermarket.

