

# Nestle's not stirred

by Chris Schlattner  
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Nestle products contribute to the deaths of thousands of infants each year. As the largest producer and seller of infant formula in Third World nations, Nestle is the biggest offender.

The World Health Organization recognized the cause against infant formulas in May, 1980, when it recommended that advertising, promotion and distribution be discontinued. Nancy Hawley, national co-ordinator for INFACT Canada and its representative at the 1980 Geneva conference, says that is not enough. INFACT is trying to have the recommendations passed as regulation.

Problems with infant formula occur in Third World nations when unclean water is mixed with it, making the formula unsafe. Conditions for proper sterilization and refrigeration don't exist in these countries. Literacy is also a problem because the mothers can't read the directions to prepare the formula properly.

Because of unsafe formula, about ten million infants a year suffer from intestinal disorders, middle ear infection or dehydration, and about one million die. The formula also does not contain the necessary enzymes and anti-bodies that breast milk contains.

Women in Third World nations are bombarded by advertisements that depict healthy babies drinking formula. Billboards, T.V. and radio advertisements, and even vans with loud speakers lead women to believe that formula is better for their babies than their own milk. When women enter the hospital for delivery, they are confronted with more posters and are given a free

sample of formula called a "breast milk pack" to start their babies off.

After they return home from the hospital and their breasts have dried up, the women are forced to continue formula feeding.

In Peru, the cost of feeding a four month old baby is 50 percent of the average per capita income. In Guatemala it is 80 percent. Because of the high cost, mothers are forced to dilute the formula with water. This causes malnutrition.

Nestle sells approximately 50 percent of the formula sold in Third World nations. This revenue comprises an estimated two percent of Nestle's \$12 billion income from world food sales.

INFACT is the organizer of the Nestle boycott. The boycott has been endorsed by over 500 chapters of the U.S. and Canadian Council of Churches, Canadian Nurses Association, OXFAM Canada and many other local and national organizations.

Nancy Hawley says, "The boycott of Nestle was to send them a message economically because they couldn't be reached any other way."

The purpose of the World Health Assembly (WHA) was to formulate a code which would govern the marketing, advertisement and promotion of artificial baby foods and breast milk substitutes, particularly in Third World nations. All 30 members of the executive board of

World Health Organization (WHO), part of the United Nations, were in favor of the code, but there was no consensus as to whether it should be passed as a recommendation or a regulation. As a regulation the code would be legally binding and would have more clout than a recommendation.

According to Hawley, "The code has already been revised four times." She told the meeting, "We feel that four drafts are enough and that it is ready to be passed."

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) documented 331 violations of the WHA's recommendations in October 1979. Most were committed by Nestle. In response to this report the industry has labelled IBFAN as "reds" and "Marxists."

Fred Sai, chairperson at the WHO/UNICEF meeting, said of the recommendations, "I think there is enough specificity in what we have done for industry not to carry on as usual."

The recommendations however have put no impact on the industry, and the violations continue. According to Nancy Hawley, "Industry has shown us that they have separated themselves from infant health in that they have said they found this code to be unacceptable."

Obviously it is the loss of two percent of their total revenue that Nestle finds unacceptable.



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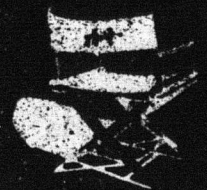
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