

reduce their food budgets by shopping carefully provided the retail food markets available to them are truly competitive. The conclusion of your Committee is that if consumers are well informed and discriminating in their shopping practices they can reduce their food bill appreciably in many cases. Consumer education is a matter of such importance for the welfare of individuals and families that increasing attention should be devoted to it in the Canadian educational system beginning in the secondary schools. A vast amount of information useful to consumers is available through newspapers, magazines and the publications of government departments. Your Committee's opinion is that increased efforts should be undertaken by the government departments involved to distribute as widely as possible attractive and informative material which will help the Canadian housewife to be a well informed and careful shopper.

#### Recommendation:

That increasing attention be devoted to consumer education both through the educational system and by the wider distribution of information useful to consumers through government channels.

#### 6. Consumer Standards and Consumer Protection

The problems of the consumer in the market place are accentuated by the changing nature of retailing itself. The rise of the supermarket has meant that for a wide range of commonly purchased items retailing has become impersonal. At one time the retailer was a source of information about the products he sold but the modern supermarket offering many thousands of products usually relies on the consumer to select her own purchases on the basis of her own knowledge.

Product information must be provided. Consumers must be informed about physical properties or products they are buying such as weight, volume, quality and number of units and this information should be immediately available at the time of purchase and should be expressed clearly and unequivocally.

Your Committee could cite many examples taken from letters received from dissatisfied consumers about merchandising and packaging techniques which annoy the consumer and make it difficult if not well nigh impossible for the consumer to compare price and quality of different products effectively and quickly.

Facts should be presented in a prominent place on the package or container in a form

which is legible and free from graphic distortion. Where applicable, the ingredients should be revealed both by name and percentage of composition, and the consumer should also know about the quality of the product.

#### In particular:

(1) the product should be described by its generic name where this is meaningful;

(2) where products are of a certain type, variety and quality, they should be graded;

(3) packages should be designed in terms of size, shape or dimension in a way that will not deceive or mislead retail purchasers;

(4) the net quantity of the contents in terms of weight or measure should be expressed as simply as possible and in terms which can be easily interpreted;

(5) the essential information about a packaged product and its physical contents should be stated in a prominent place on the label.

It is essential for the government to take all measures within its power to foster the welfare of the consumer. In particular, the government has a responsibility for protecting the consumer against all forms of exploitation.

One aspect of this responsibility was referred by the Government in July, 1966 to the Economic Council of Canada for investigation. The terms of reference of the study to be carried out are:

"In the light of the Government's long term economic objectives to study and advise regarding:

- (a) the interests of the consumer particularly as they relate to the functions of the Department of the Registrar General;
- (b) combines, mergers, monopolies and restraint of trade;
- (c) patents, trade marks, copyrights and registered industrial designs."

In the normal course of events the findings of the Economic Council of Canada will not be available until late 1967. Your Committee, however, feels that the function of consumer protection is of such urgency as to require the establishment of a Department of Consumer Affairs. Because of the special responsibility of the Department of Health and Welfare, the Department of Agriculture, the Department