

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 con-

tents 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 of Fisheries and the Department of the Registrar General, your committee is not prepared to recommend the nature of the administrative structure for such a department until the Economic Council of Canada reports. However, because of the need for consumer protection, for co-ordination of existing legislation and for the immediate establishment of machinery to receive and investigate consumer complaints, the Economic Council of Canada should be asked to report on item (a) of their reference as soon as possible.

Additional legislative authorization may be necessary ultimately for the protection of the consumer but this should not stand in the way of immediate action which could be carried out under existing regulations. Your committee reached certain specific conclusions, which are:

(a) with particular respect to food, that the establishment of standards and grades should be extended to cover all commonly purchased foods for which standards or grades would be useful to the consumer.

(b) that a standardized nomenclature for designating grades for different