

Consumer Information Catalog lists some of the evidence. Consumer products from foods and clothing consisting almost entirely of synthetic materials to electric drills and washing machines and color television sets that use solid-state components, modern-day producers are taking advantage of our electronic and space age technology. In such a marketplace the consumer is an innocent babe in the woods. He couldn't make a rational choice to save his life or even his economic well-being. The very fact that products last a long time and that the state of the art changes rapidly makes it impossible for him to build a body of experience to draw on when he has to make his next purchase. The consequences are not inconsequential. It has been estimated that if consumers purchased products on the basis of objectively determined values, savings of as much as 50 percent could be realized.

Perhaps even more important is the role of an informed consumer in acting as a balance wheel to keep a free economy viable. Classical economic theory assumes an informed consumer, rewarding the producer of a better quality or equal quality but lower priced product and punishing his less competent competitor. Without good information about the product the consumer gives his patronage to the wrong producer. The reward goes to the clever advertiser, the ingenious packager, the wily "motivational" researcher, the most seductive credit plan and not to the most efficient producer of the best product. The consequences to our economy are waste of natural and human resources to the detriment of all.

I do not want to leave the impression that the consumer's need for information is completely unsatisfied. Much is available. Your own committee's studies, published in 1961, provide the most definitive descriptions of these activities. In addition, information is available from private publications such as our own *Changing Times*, the women's and so-called shelter magazines, the specialized product magazines dealing with photography, "hi-fi" equipment, automobiles, and others. Also disseminated but somewhat more biased is material from trade organizations like the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, American Gas Association, and others. Advertising, whose avowed reason for being is to inform consumers about a product or service, fulfills this mission only occasionally, but rarely in a useful way for the consumer.

And the word-of-mouth sharing of experience, though sometimes extremely effective, also often falls into the "old wives' tale" category—so a concerned consumer can never really know when to believe it and when not to.

In sum, it seems clear that the gap between the demand for information and supply of it is large. Every day a new magazine joins the ranks of product information disseminators. Legislators say that their mail on consumer problems is heavy and increased Government concern—manifested, among other ways in hearings like this—is evident.

Many suggestions have been offered, both long term and short, for reducing the consumer's areas of ignorance about the products he buys.

And this brings me to the heart of today's inquiry.

Many Government agencies have in their files, as a spinoff from their normal day-to-day activities, a great deal of information that would be directly useful to consumers. It is my belief that a systematic review of the activities of Government agencies for purposes of learning which of them develop information on consumer products by type and/or brand name would reveal a mine of such information which, when tapped, would prove of inestimable value in helping the consumer improve his buying effectiveness. My belief is based on the tip of this iceberg we can see even now from a cursory survey of this kind that has already been done. In Senate Report 2216, "Price of Hearing Aids—Report of the Committee on the Judiciary, 1962," appendix A contains a "Summary of Precedents for Government Product Testing and Publication of Comparative and/or Evaluatory Data on Various Brands of a Product." A portion of this material is submitted as an appendix to my testimony for your ready reference.

You will note references to tests and evaluations done by one or another agency of the Federal Government on such important consumer products as hearing aids, batteries, tires, floor waxes, lamps, various building materials, washing machines, detergents, home freezers, and others. The Senate study makes clear that these are only examples. The shortness of notice of this hearing today has not allowed me to search the files of Consumers Union exhaustively for any additional examples it may contain. From memory, however, subject to check of detail, I can add that the Bureau of Fisheries of the U.S. Department of Interior does tests on frozen fish products in consumer packages, that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has information on the effectiveness and toxicity of insecticides, that the Food and Drug Administration tests such important consumer products as clinical thermometers and condoms, that the laboratories of