

Now coming back to some examples of how the Bureau data could be presented more usefully to the consumer, I list five or six examples in my statement.

1. Prices of many items have pronounced seasonal fluctuations. This means that the items are better buys at certain times of the year. From its historical records, the BLS could develop seasonal patterns of prices, to advise consumers how they could save by making their purchases at specified times of the year. How much are prices generally reduced for sheets and towels during the January "white sales" or for furniture during the usual semiannual sales? When are prices reduced by closeouts of seasonal items of clothing and shoes? A family might want to wait until winter to buy a used car if it knew that car prices are usually significantly lower in February than in July. For many food items, particularly if freezer space is available, advance buying during the seasonal low periods can result in considerable savings. It may be helpful to remind consumers that in some parts of the country fresh fruit and vegetables are higher in price in July when current crops have not reached the market in volume. A few weeks later, prices for these items will drop considerably.

2. Bureau data could be made more meaningful by presenting more information on actual prices in dollars and cents. In my statement I say actual prices in dollars and cents. I might add it might be possible also in the major areas to present some more information on the range of prices for a given period, the range of prices encountered by our field collectors in the stores or other establishments which they sampled. For example, the food component of the Consumer Price Index went up in May, partly because lettuce prices increased. This kind of information is not nearly as meaningful to the consumer buyer as if he were to be told that the average price of lettuce in his home city went from 29 to 39 cents per head. I might add that it might be even more meaningful if he were told that among the stores in the BLS sample during July lettuce prices ranged from 25 to 45 cents per head. Thus he would know whether the price he has been paying is at the high end or low end of the range or above or below the range which we encountered in our sample.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. What could he do once he had that information?

Mr. ROSS. This would be information. This would be along the lines of consumer education and of course would be up to him and his family to decide what to do with it.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. Could you give us an example of how he could best put that information to use?

Mr. ROSS. Well, I suppose if he should learn from this information that he was purchasing at a price at the high end of the range available in his community, he would look around and purchase it at another store where he would get it at the average or the low end of the range. In other words, it would, I think, put him on notice that he might be able to obtain the same item more advantageously. This information could be tied in with publications regularly issued by the Department of Agriculture on the supply and price outlook for food of all kinds, to assist the consumer in planning his food budget. The same kind of information could also be provided, at least on a national or regional basis, for many other consumer items, such as men's suits, women's dresses, refrigerators, hospital rooms, etc. I emphasized the