

Dr. MEHREN. Yes, we do. We have a continuing inspection of the raw material that comes in. It is, in fact, a reinspection. Occasionally, a third reinspection, if it's an imported product.

Mr. WYDLER. As far as you know, these particular dinners sold could have been bacteriologically contaminated when they left the plant.

Dr. MEHREN. That is not impossible, but it would be most unlikely.

Mr. WYDLER. But that statement is totally inconsistent with your prior statement that you knew that when they are inspected and approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, that they are fit for human consumption.

Dr. MEHREN. I think if you refer back to what I said, it was that essentially there is very high likelihood—of course, errors can occur in USDA inspection or anybody else's inspections. We don't routinely try to make bacteriological analyses of every item that goes through a plant.

I stated further why we use and how we use and to what purpose we use. I state again that our major mechanism, where the assurance of a wholesome product involving meat or poultry products, is to assure clean, inspected, and reinspected raw materials, and then a clean plant and appropriate processes within that plant, plus appropriate quality control mechanisms in the plant itself.

We use the bacteriological testing on the only basis it is operationally effective to use, as a check and a flag.

Mr. WYDLER. I will point out to you once again that you stated in your layman's opinion and in Dr. Goddard's opinion that these dinners are not fit for human consumption. We know they were approved by the Department of Agriculture and were so stamped when they left the plant. And we don't know whether or not they were contaminated with this bacteria at the time they left the plant.

That, to me, does not add up to the fact that we know, when we put that stamp on those packages, whether they are fit for human consumption or not. It's a guess to some extent, or a calculated risk on your part and on the part of the Government.

Dr. MEHREN. Certainly there is a calculated risk in any inspection process, Mr. Wydler, including the item-by-item examination of slaughter which is quite different from processed foods, but we minimize the risk. While it may be difficult and unpleasant to accept the fact, there is risk in any police activity.

Mr. WYDLER. That is what I wanted to hear you say.

Dr. MEHREN. I don't know; again, it's most difficult to disprove a hypothesis. I can't prove there was no bacterial infestation at the time our people stamped it. I know if there were any organoleptic symptoms they would not have gone through, but they could have gone through.

Mr. WYDLER. I think we should have for the record, a copy of the inspection records that were made on this particular batch. I would be interested to read those.

Dr. MEHREN. I think they are available.

Mr. WYDLER. If it does turn out these biological tests were made and the particular shipment was cleared, it may require some further investigation.