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ROLE OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE IN PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF FOOD-BORNE DISEASE

(By John H. Fritz¹)

Food protection in the United States, except where interstate commerce is involved, has traditionally been a function of State and local governments. The authority of the Federal Government in this area relates to foods introduced into interstate and foreign commerce and to the provision of technical and consultative assistance to the States, local governments and industry in the development and maintenance of effective food protection programs on a nationwide basis.

Since the Public Health Service is the agency at the Federal level having primary responsibility for health matters, the States and food industries have looked to the Service for leadership and guidance in the identification and resolution of health problems associated with the human food chain.

In fulfillment of this role, the Service has engaged in a number of coordinated and related activities which are broadly grouped as follows: (1) development of program guides, particularly model laws and regulations intended for State and local adoption, (2) research and investigation, (3) technical and consultative assistance to State and local programs, (4) education and training, (5) development of food equipment standards and recommended laboratory methodology, and (6) voluntary interstate program certification activities.

While the objective of the PHS program, that is, the prevention of food-borne illness, remains unchanged, its specific program activities and priorities are continually being modified meet the health needs of a rapidly expanding and changing technology, as well as changes in the socio-economic pattern of living in this country. Adequate State and local control legislation, strict, uniform enforcement and industry support of and day-to-day compliance with Federal, State and local laws and regulations continue to be the major bases for effective preventive programs. However, the rapid expansion in the percentage of our foods which move interstate has created a situation which requires increased participation by the Federal government if adequate control over the safety of our food supply is to be effected. More than ever before a Federal-State-local agency-industry partnership is needed to cope with the many unresolved and emerging food protection problems currently facing the Nation.

As noted above, the adoption of uniform laws and regulations by State and local governments is an important factor in the establishment of effective control programs. Over the years the recommendations in the form of model ordinances, laboratory methodology, and so forth of the Public Health Service have been incorporated into many State and local laws and ordinances and Federal regulations. Being health oriented they constitute minimum health criteria which

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