

FOOD DISTRIBUTOR

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The Food and Packaged Goods Industry in the 21st Century

by C. Manly Molpus, President and CEO, Grocery Manufacturers of America

Each and every day, America's food and consumer products industry is helping put food on the family table and consumer goods on the store shelf.

As we approach the new millennium we can be proud that our industry is using the most advanced technology in its manufacturing processes to provide the safest, most abundant food supply to all consumers.

At the same time, our industry is looking

ahead toward some challenging milestones I'd like to offer for your consideration:

Creating the Healthiest Meal-Functional Foods

Today, the food industry is laying the groundwork for the introduction of foods that go beyond supplying basic nutrition, so-called *functional foods* that researchers say can actually prevent dis-

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ease when eaten as part of a low-fat diet and healthy lifestyle. These new foods—which could include everything from breakfast cereals to TV dinners—are likely to be fortified with anti-oxidants such as vitamins A, C and E, as well as other beneficial ingredients that may block cholesterol or fight cancer.

As the nation's "Baby Boom" population ages, the FDA must streamline its ability to approve in a timely manner health claims for these *functional foods*. Once that happens, we will be able to respond to the enormous consumer demand that will exist for foods that can

help prevent heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and cancer—foods that can improve the quality of life and help reduce the cost of the nation's health programs.

Using Irradiation, Educating Consumers

Recently approved for use with red meat, irradiation is likely to be generally accepted by Americans and be as useful to their health and safety as pasteurization was for milk decades ago. The food industry will work hard this year to educate consumers about the irradiation process, which could have prevented *E. coli* outbreaks

Continued on reverse.



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and other food-borne illnesses in 1997, had it been in use.

Combined with the highest possible quality assurance programs and common sense, irradiation can significantly improve consumer protection. However, it is not a panacea. The truth is, no amount of governmental regulation, no vast army of inspectors and no amount of money or technology can prevent illness if consumers do not store, handle and prepare foods properly.

In 1998 and into the 21st century, consumers can expect to see an explosion of useful information in the mass media about the connection between foods and health in the marketplace. Meanwhile, food companies will respond to growing consumer concerns about food safety, doing everything possible to protect the food supply, increase the nutritive value of food and inform

people about how to handle and prepare food safely.

Maintaining the Most Effective Food Safety Programs

Thanks to continued cooperation and open dialogue between federal and state regulatory agencies and the food industry, consumers are actually going to be better protected by the multi-layered safety net surrounding the foods they eat.

Contrary to some alarmist reports about the safety of our food, America's vast and complex food supply system remains secure and well protected. And it's improving all the time. For example, the food industry and federal regulators are implementing a highly successful Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points program that assures food safety at critical junctures—from the farm to the processing plant to the store shelf.

Where problems are identified, food manufacturers and regulators are responding swiftly and seriously to correct them.

Enriching the Global Food Supply

Ours is truly an international food supply. A year-round supply of affordable fresh fruit and vegetables is now a necessity, not a luxury. As a result, millions of American workers are employed to manufacture thousands of food products or ingredients sold in every marketplace throughout the world.

Giving U.S. producers and foods manufacturers the chance to compete effectively around the world would be enhanced by "fast track" legislation. Our president needs to have the ability to negotiate timely trade agreements that would create tremendous growth opportunities for our industry. Fast track legislation must be a top priority for Congress and the White House this year.

While the trends for the future I have outlined are generally favorable, our industry cannot take growth and prosperity for granted. We must keep a keen and constant eye on our consumers and their needs—and then meet those needs as efficiently as possible. If we do that, the grocery manufacturing business will continue to enjoy success well into the 21st century. ☺

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