

# Information for Consumers

By Ruth Moyle

*EDITOR'S NOTE: We have here the first of a series of articles by Miss Ruth Moyle, recently appointed to the staff of Home Economics Extension Service to work in the field of Consumer Information.*

*Miss Moyle was born near Paris, Ont., and grew up on a ranch in Alberta. She is a graduate of Macdonald Institute and took her degree in Home Economics at the University of Washington, majoring in Nutrition and Child Care and Development. Her postgraduate studies include clothing, textiles and consumer problems.*

*Experience as a rural school teacher, home economics teacher in a high school, and nutritionist in a city health department contribute to Miss Moyle's understanding of the consumer problems of the homemaker. For the past six years she has been Consumer Consultant with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and her radio programmes under the name of "Ruth Harding" are well known to women all over the province. We anticipate a keen interest in this column.*

**I**T MIGHT be a good idea to explain how I found out what some Canadian housewives think about the quality of our processed foods.

As Miss Chapman explained, for six years, as "Ruth Harding, Consumer Consultant" I had a morning programme, carried daily on CBC from Newfoundland to British Columbia. In this capacity, I was invited to speak "as the voice of the Consumer" to the Canadian Institute of Food Technologists and later to the Ontario Food Processors to bring to them the Canadian Woman's Opinion of the quality of processed food.

Accordingly I mentioned this on my programme a number of times asking interested listeners to write in their opinions on the subject. In all some four to five hundred letters came to me at CBC. Many were from individuals—men as well as women. Others came from groups—Women's Institutes, Provincial C.A.C. groups, Guilds, Homemaking Clubs and so on.

I feel it is only right to emphasize the fact that these comments came only from a small percentage of today's consumers. To have gathered a wide cross-section of opinion would have required a full-time research programme.

I was somewhat nonplussed to note that actually very few of the letters had anything to say about the **quality** of food. Rather they dealt with such factors as "Food Additives and Preservatives," "Packaging," "Labelling," "Sales Gimmicks" and certain types of advertising—to mention only a few.

This raises a question: Does this fact, that only a very few women mentioned quality, mean it is always satisfactorily high? Or does it mean there

are other Consumer problems of greater importance?

I tried to impress the Technologists and Producers with this fact—that to become a discerning buyer takes a lot of time, that housewives are not only Consumers and keepers and spenders of the family income—they're Mothers and Homemakers as well.

I suggested that the wide variety of foods on the market today, the great number of trade names one sees everywhere and the persistent flood of advertising—some of which is frequently meaningless and uninformative—continues to make it increasingly difficult for Canadian women to become as expert buyers as we would wish.

Add to this all the glamorous packaging, which often makes it difficult for us to decide which is the most nutritious and economical buy, and it's easily seen that the Consumer's greatest problem today is to keep pace with the hundreds of items that crowd the shelves of modern stores—each one of which makes such a strong bid for our food dollar.

Certainly today's shopper must be alert and aware, if she is to know which goods are of consistently high quality, which processors stand behind their goods and which labels and advertising give us accurate information and actual descriptions.

Changes in food shopping habits add to our problems. Some time ago the manager of a Toronto supermarket stated that 65% of his week's business is done between six and nine o'clock on Friday evenings. Well, such a crush as that, with the whole family in attendance to "help" Mother with the week's shopping undoubtedly helps to contribute to our susceptibility to sales pressure, to gimmicks and to impulse buying.

So, how do we buy—by grade, trade name or labels, by premiums, advertising, on impulse or by quality?

Here is what these women told me:

As you'd expect I didn't find any objections to any of the time-saving, labour-saving foods that have been prepared for us. Certainly for the busy housewife in these days of little or no help, for the part-time housewife, for emergencies and in living situations where limited space and equipment is available, these have proven a great boon, even if somewhat more expensive.

By and large most letters expressed appreciation of the Food and Drug Department of National Health and Welfare, for the watch they keep over the ever-increasing use of food additives—chemical preservatives, insecticides and so frequently housewives asked for a continuing and an even more closely controlled programme.

At the same time I found that many consumers are becoming somewhat dubious, if not skeptical on this point—the fear that more emphasis is being placed on the improvement of appearance