

## THIS CAN'T BE ALLOWED TO GO ON

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FARMERS are as much interested in protecting the public health as anyone. But with respect to feed additives, pesticides and similar tools of modern agriculture, we have an intolerable situation.

1. We have a law that needs changing--the Delaney Amendment, or "additive" to the Food Additives Act. It specifies that no substance which has ever caused cancer, in so much as a laboratory mouse, can be added to feed. It doesn't matter that the substance requires massive doses over an extended time; it doesn't matter that as little as one part per million of the additive may show up in meat, milk or eggs, or that absolutely none shows up! Congress--not scientists--has said this is dangerous and can't be allowed. The trouble with the law is simple: It leaves no room for scientific judgment.

Never before has the Food and Drug Administration been hamstrung this way. It has allowed tolerances of some 2,000 potent substances which are judged by scientists to be safe in negligible amounts. Why not continue to let scientists decide?

Actually it has been proved that salt, pepper, eggs or glucose solutions can produce cancer in experimental animals as readily as diethyl stilbestrol, which produced the recent poultry scare. Other estrogens, which act much like stilbestrol, occur naturally in alfalfa hay, corn and wheat. Are we to stop feeding them too?

The result of the cancer scare is that Food and Drug is not approving any new feed additive. Manufacturers are now required to prove not only that their product hasn't yet produced cancer but that under no conceivable circumstances could it do so--obviously impossible of proof. Hence progress with new and better feed additives has almost ground to a stop. The pesticide world has been thrown into confusion.

2. We have an able, though understaffed, Food and Drug Administration which is not completely running its own show. Decisions, if they have any publicity value, are being made by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. In the more spectacular instances, the pronouncements come from him, too --by press conference.

FDA is responsible to a cabinet officer, who is a political appointee, part of a political administration. We can't say whether Arthur S. Flemming, Secretary of HEW, is influenced by political motives or not. The point is he could be. And if he weren't, his successor might be. The Secretary of HEW doesn't have many opportunities to make the front page. When something like cranberries or capons comes along, it's a temptation to call a press conference, toss the word "cancer" about, suddenly achieve headlines and emerge as the great defender of the people.

What can be done? Well, first, we need a change in the Delaney Amendment. Second, we need a change in the administrative set-up. Third, farmers must absolutely follow labels--the responsibility is on them, too.

As to administration, we need to remove from the hands of any one man, particularly when he is a political office holder, (1) the power to panic American consumers with a mere ill-advised statement and (2) the power to lay low with one blow an entire segment of agriculture.

How can we do it? We might make FDA an independent agency like the Federal Trade Commission. We might equip FDA with better advisory bodies than it already has--let these bodies assay the danger, make recommendations, and take over the function of announcing such news to the public. We might bring in the U. S. Public Health Service. Agriculture ought to have a voice somewhere--at least it should be heard. Maybe we need a new broad-based commission.

Certainly we need something better than we've got. The present situation cannot be allowed to go on.