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Wiley Pure Food Laws—a 50th Anniversary

On the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Food and Drug Laws and the Meat Inspection Law, the Post Office Department issued a special commemorative stamp carrying a picture of Harvey W. Wiley, often and deservedly referred to as the "father" of the pure food laws, for it was his unrelenting crusade that led to the enactment of the first of the laws in 1906. Scientists, government officials, and industrial representatives participated in the celebration, which was held in Washington on 27 June. Some of the participating members of Congress remarked about the unusual situation in which a group of laws are, by common consent, not identified by the name or names of their Congressional sponsors, but rather by that of an "outsider," Harvey W. Wiley. Despite many amendments and modifications since their first introduction, the laws still are identified as the Wiley Pure Food Laws and thus honor the name of the man who fought for their passage in the face of public indifference and industrial opposition.

Perhaps the best proof of the wisdom of Wiley's course is in the current whole-hearted support and sponsorship of the anniversary celebration by the industrial and commercial firms that are subjected to regulation.

This acceptance by industry indicates that we have come a long way since 1906 in matters of government protection of the public health. It is also encouraging to note evidence of cooperation between producers and processors of food, drug, and cosmetic materials and the regulatory agencies authorized to review or control the quality and content of their products. There is often at present a spirit akin to that which prevails in preventive medicine, a spirit that we might term one of "constructive enforcement." An example of this is the common practice of a producer or processor who asks advice in advance about the solution of problems within the regulatory limits. Such advance consultation often precludes the need for litigation to enforce compliance with the laws.

The original Food and Drug Act of 1906 has had to be amended and revised many times, as it will have to be in the future to cope with conditions not expected in the past. New processes of production and processing, such as the production of frozen foods and sterilization by radiation, pose new problems of safe standards for foods, as does the introduction of new pesticides and insecticides.

Although Wiley was best known popularly as the "father of the food laws," his influence in basic science was wide and important. He held doctorate degrees both in chemistry and medicine and was recognized by his fellow-chemists by election to the presidency of the American Chemical Society in 1893. He was a member of the AAAS for 58 years and vice president of Section C (Chemistry) in 1886.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science is pleased with the recognition accorded to one of its outstanding past members, Harvey W. Wiley, and glad to congratulate the appropriate government agencies on the completion of 50 years of advances in the administration of the food and drug laws.—W. R. B.

