enced in the field of poverty law show that such dangers are very real. Safeguards would probably have to include the creation of a board prestigious and independent enough to protect the program's integrity.

In the final analysis, public interest law is not likely to flourish unless the public accepts the concept that its interests are in the main well served by vigorous representation of all reasonable viewpoints on public issues. Such an attitude requires no little tolerance and sophistication.

Consider, for instance, an opinion rendered recently in the Alaska pipeline case by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. The court held, by a 4 to 3 majority, that the environmental groups that brought the suit should recover attorneys fees from the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company and the state of Alaska. The majority found that this suit had benefited the public by furthering compliance with NEPA and calling attention to the requirements and deficiencies of the Mineral Leasing Act. The minority, much to the contrary, believed that—with motorists waiting in line at the gasoline pump—the public had been ill-served and that to shift the burden of attorneys fees would be to invite reckless and ill-advised litigation on a grand scale. Yet the outcome of public interest litigation is not determined by the litigants but by the language of the law and its interpretation by the courts. And no judge need entertain frivolous suits.

In sum, now to overlook the social value of private attorneys general would seem perverse in light of the evidence that many of the officials charged with enforcing the law actually have been flouting it. The great white whale of official corruption won't be harpooned this year or next, but more public interest practice could reduce the chances of its sinking the ship.

—LUTHER J. CARTER

Food and Nutrition: Is America Due for a National Policy?

In this land of fruited plains and amber waves of grain, most people have taken plentiful food and good nutrition for granted. Recognition that many poor people weren't getting enough to eat dawned in the 1960's. But more recently nutrition professionals, consumer advocates, and policymakers have been saying that the nation as a whole needs to formulate a food and nutrition policy.

The complexity of the food picture has increased dramatically over the past dozen years. Despite new regulations on food additives, and advertising and food labeling requirements, people have less and less idea of what in fact they are eating as supermarket shelves are inundated each year with literally thousands of new, highly processed products of questionable nutritive value. The rabbit-like multiplication of fast food chains—for whom bad nutrition often equals good profits—and the decline of the family meal have contributed to a deterioration of Americans' eating habits.

These developments, deleterious as they may be to public health, are pretty much a result of voluntary choices among consumers, most of whom, as conventional wisdom has it, make choices based more on pleasure and convenience than on nutrition.

There are many things to be said for the effectiveness of distribution and quality control in the present American food supply system, but as with energy, the emerging awareness that resources are finite means that the United States will no longer be able to tolerate the frivolity and waste that inevitably are a product of uncoordinated policies on food production, consumption, and trade. The situation, as Raymond Goldberg of the Harvard Business School says, has changed over the past year and a half "like day and night." Farm surpluses have evaporated and this year is seeing record plantings. Crop failures throughout the world last year have caused international commodity prices to soar. The Food for Peace program has dwindled to a trickle as trade replaces aid, and European countries and Japan are buying up U.S. commodities, leaving little left over for poor countries.

In other words, it is impossible now to talk about national nutrition policy apart from its interrelationship with the world food situation. As Senator George D. Aiken (R–Vt.) said last year, "Every farm program from now on will be a major piece of foreign policy legislation with our own family food budget seriously involved."

People have been carping for years about the need for better public education, for the teaching of nutrition as preventive medicine in medical schools, for better epidemiological research, for improved distribution of food to vulnerable groups such as the poor, the young, the old, and the pregnant. Now it is becoming evident that the whole American diet will have to undergo a gradual change. High prices and energy shortages have already caused the corner to be turned on meat consumption, which reached an all-time high of 189 pounds per capita in 1972. Now vegetable protein substitutes, mainly in the form of soy products, are making their way into the market, and even Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, a great steak man, has acknowledged that more emphasis will have to be put on the production of vegetable as opposed to animal protein. The infiltration of textured soy into the hamburgers of school lunches is only a harbinger of a large and strange generation of new foods that is looming on the horizon.

All this means that some fundamental shifts are required to bring the elements of the economy concerned with food production and consumption in line with each other.

The changing scene lends a special urgency to the National Nutrition Policy Conference to be held by the Senate on 19 to 21 June under the auspices of the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, headed by Senator George McGovern (D–S.D.). Chairman of the conference is Jean Mayer of Harvard, America's nutrition superstar, who also ran the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health in

1969. Unlike the White House conference, which came up with every recommendation the human mind can conceive, the Senate conference will channel its attention into six basic topics, two of which, "nutrition and food availability" and "nutrition and the international situation" reflect the way the situation has altered since 1969.

What, in the broadest sense, would a "national nutrition policy" involve? According to conversations with various nutritionists, policy-makers, and nutritional militants, it would involve, at least, the following:

- The Department of Agriculture. One of USDA's missions is nutrition, but most outsiders would say its primary allegiance is with food producers. It has not, for example, used its powers to stimulate higher grain production and lower beef production, despite the fact that seven people could be fed on the amount of grain it takes to feed one person on beef. Besides, Americans' excessive consumption of meat increases susceptibility to cholesterol and fat problems and, possibly, to bowel cancer. The USDA also opposes the proposal, contained in a bill introduced by Senator Hubert Humphrey (D–Minn.), to set up national grain reserves, a measure that others maintain is essential to stabilize prices and ensure an adequate supply for export.
- The State Department. While the USDA sees food trade in the relatively narrow context of making deals to best benefit the farmer, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sees food as an increasingly crucial tool in foreign policy—or, as Mayer put it, "a most powerful tool, short of war. . . ."

There is some behind-the-scenes friction between Butz and Kissinger, who went behind Butz's back in calling for the World Food Conference to be held in Rome in November.

- Congressional agriculture committees. These, like USDA, are interested in keeping farmers happy. Rodney Leonard of the consumer-oriented Community Nutrition Institute in Washington, D.C., gave one example: The Sugar Act is up for renewal this year. Import and production quotas and pricing policies are set by economic tenets, without regard to the dietary impact of what some nutritionists regard as the number one scourge of the American diet. Per capita consumption of sugar—which is linked with, among other things, dental decay, obesity, diabetes, and nutritional worthlessness—has grown to 110 pounds a year, compared to 2 pounds a year in the 18th century.
- Agribusiness. Farmers cultivate crops with an eye to productivity, disease resistance, ease of packaging, taste, appearance—everything but nutrition.
- Regulatory agencies. The Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission have been working on such matters as advertising, food definitions, enrichment guidelines, and nutrition labeling. But they can hardly keep up with the leaping imaginations of the food industry. The FDA needs help in deciding whether a "junk" food such as cream-filled cupcakes should be allowed to be fortified with vitamins and advertised as nutritious. Basic foods such as bread and milk are clearly appropriate and have been fortified for years. But more and more foods of marginal or nonexistent inherent value are being beefed up. The FDA is now preparing a major policy statement on fortification. But it has not yet come to grips with how to regulate new foods made with nutritious textured vegetable protein. In fact, says Nevin Scrimshaw of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, some FDA regulations have, if unintentionally, raised obstacles to the development of such foods, some of which could prove to be superior to the ones they replace.
- The food manufacturing industry. All industry is based on growth, but since per capita food consumption has declined as a result of sedentary living habits, manufacturers resort to "fun foods" and convenience foods to stimulate consumption. Manufacturers spend $3 billion annually on advertising, most of it to push the dolled-up overpriced products, made from cheap basic materials, from which they derive their greatest profits. (By contrast, the federal government puts some $20 million a year into nutrition education.) Doris Calloway, nutrition professor at the University of California at Berkeley, contends that if Americans changed to better regimens—less fat and refined carbohydrates, more fiber and fresh fruit and vegetables—the great majority of processed foods would be superfluous.
- Medical education. Few medical schools have courses in nutrition, and doctors usually do not concern themselves with patients' eating habits until after the heart attack. Yet, the greatest reduction in the nation's health bill could be effected by better preventive care. According to one set of figures developed at USDA, better diets might reduce the problems of diabetes by 50 percent, heart disease by 20 percent, obesity by 80 percent, alcoholism by 33 percent, and intestinal cancer by 20 percent.
- Nutrition research. Many people are fond of observing that we know better how to feed animals than people. Joan Gussow, nutrition educator at Columbia Teacher's College, observes that plenty of research is done on mice and molecules, but that little is known on the human epidemiological or ecological level. Mark Hegsted of Harvard says this is the first generation in history to be suckled on a diet so rich in fat, salt, and refined carbohydrates, and its long-term effects are not known.
- Public education. Nutrition education in public schools is a bore. As for the increasing number of Americans who are developing an interest in nutrition, facts are hard to come by. Those seeking good information are pulled this way and that by the proliferation of fad diet and nutrition books, vitamin crazes, and health food publicity. There is no generally accessible and authoritative source to which they can turn.

Getting It Together

How are all the pieces of this gigantic puzzle going to be juggled into place? Says Scrimshaw, "There is no mechanism in the U.S. government for thinking about these things, much less dealing with them." There are vague rumblings among nutritionists to the effect that a nutrition agency be set up in the federal government to centralize activities which are now scattered, as Hegsted says, "from hell to breakfast," throughout the government.

No grand plans are as yet in evidence, although the newly formed National Nutrition Consortium is about to unveil a set of recommendations suggesting new directions in their areas of expertise. [The consortium, headed by Hegsted, is composed of the American Institute of Nutrition (AIN), the American Society for Clinical Nutrition, the American Dietetic Association, and the Institute of Food Technologists.] Recommendations, according to O. L. Kline of AIN, will cover four basic areas: accumulation of better knowledge of American nutrition problems through continuing surveillance and monitoring; the integration of nutrition into the health care system, from medical education to routine evaluation at the doctor-patient level; nutrition education in schools and for the general public; and an intensified research effort.

There are a number of ways leverage can be applied for change. Leonard, for example, believes a good place to start is with the agriculture committee in Congress, perhaps by transferring some of its authority to the committee overseeing the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Mayer believes that a key to change lies with regulatory agencies. Others, such as Aaron Altschul of Georgetown University, believe no radical changes are necessary and that the way to get Americans eating better is by changing demand through education. Altschul contends that the food industry is just as willing to put out good food as schlock, and the sugar-coated monstrosities that litter the shelves of supermarkets are there because that's what the uneducated consumer wants. This amounts to the same kind of vicious circle that operates with television programming. TV producers say they are giving the public what it wants; however, in their role as formers of habit, they are also creating a demand for their tasteless confections.

Clearly, any new policy that cuts across the agricultural, industrial, foreign trade, regulatory, and scientific sectors will have to originate in Congress and may take years.

Meanwhile, the growing consumer movement is preparing the ground. Activists in the field of nutrition operate under something of a handicap, since most activists are not nutritionists, and most nutritionists are not activists. Mayer, who writes a widely syndicated newspaper column, is a rare example of a man with feet planted firmly in both camps. But, as Mayer says, it happens too often that those who know don't talk and those who talk don't know. Besides, people like health food author Adelle Davis or Irving Stillman (whose "water diet" was recently blasted in a Harvard Medical School study) are much more fun to have on TV talk shows than are scientists, who constantly equivocate.

Nonetheless, there is a lot of information and raised consciousness being spread around as a result of the activities of people such as Michael Jacobson, a director of Washington's Center for Science in the Public Interest. Jacobson, a chemist, has written several readable books on food additives and has devised a rating system for various foods, adding points for nutrition and subtracting them for fat, sugar, and offensive additives.

Last fall, Jacobson inaugurated a campaign believed to be the first of its kind—an effort to kill a new, sugar-laden breakfast cereal in the test marketing stage in Buffalo, New York. The cereal, called Mr. Wonderfull's Surprize (sic), consists of little balls filled with a goo of sugar (which accounts for 30 percent of the total content) and saturated fat (12 percent). Under Jacobson's urging, nutritionists at State University College at Buffalo, together with citizens' groups, launched a campaign against Mr. Wonderfull as a means of educating the public and possibly halting the product "before it escapes to the rest of the nation." Press conferences, meetings with General Foods officials, and extensive publicity notwithstanding, the cereal has, at last report, spread to several other cities. But the campaign has attracted the attention of groups in other parts of the country who wish to try similar projects.

Sugar-Coated Breakfasts

Candied breakfast cereals are regarded as exceptionally appropriate for attack by nutrition activists. They primarily affect children and thus can help mold a lifetime of corrupt eating habits; they are advertised incessantly on children's television programs, which provides ammunition for those who would like to see child-directed food advertising sharply curtailed; their sugar is especially pernicious because it is in a form that sticks to the teeth; and natural nutrients have been processed out and a combination of vitamins and minerals (which omits potentially important trace elements) added so the food can be advertised as "vitamin-enriched," which gives manufacturers the excuse to as much as double the price. What's more, says Jacobson, their designation as "cereal" implies they are a valid food where some say they should properly be categorized as snack.

Food manufacturers are careful to show their concern for nutrition by admonishing mothers to serve the cereal with recognized components of a good breakfast, but some nutritionists say the breakfast would be better if the cereal were omitted.

Food manufacturers do not feel they can afford to take into account this point of view. At a recent meeting of the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences, for example, a representative from General Mills described how sensitive the company is to consumer reaction. They are constantly asking the consumer (always referred to as "she"): Are our dehydrated potato buds too wet, too dry, too grainy? But, as Doris Calloway retorted, General Mills does not want to hear from the consumer who says potato buds are a frivolous, energy-intensive, overpriced product.

There is cohesiveness neither among "consumers" nor professionals. To the food industry the consumer is a fickle type with unfathomable propensities when it comes to such matters as packaging, coloring, and "mouthfeel," and who doesn't like 70 percent of the new products manufacturers try out on them each year. To activists, consumers are people who would buy wholesome, reasonably priced products if they had enough information on which to base decisions.

A skirmish with Mr. Wonderfull may appear to be a frivolous activity when one backs off again to view the big picture. But, as one observer puts it, "the American diet is up for grabs." In the near future, consumption of nutritionally inefficient foods will increase the proportion of marginally or malnourished people in this country.

In the long run, the prospects could be frightening, particularly because the "experts" have shown no more foresight in the past few years over the matter of food than they have over energy.

If such a thing as a national nutrition policy is to emerge, more cohesiveness will have to develop among groups with ostensibly the same interests. Dieticians will have to become less timid, nutrition scientists will have to get out of the lab once in a while and find out what's going on in the rest of the world. As Mayer points out, most nutritionists don't know what's going on in the regulatory area until they read it in the papers. Political awareness, of course, does not mean solidarity, for nutritional science continues to be a very murky field.

Many underdeveloped countries have more highly developed and coordinated food strategies than does the United States—because they have to, if only to keep their governments from being overthrown. But this country has been able to feed most of her people very well despite the lack of coordination among production, manufacture, trade, and distribution policies. It may be that high prices, spot shortages, and the awareness that abundance even in the United States is not infinite will prove a better impetus for action than any amount of education.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN