Food Additives: Industrial Uses, Value and Safety

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ABSTRACT

The present paper surveys the industrial uses of 'food additives' and their value to the Food Industry, and to the public in general. 'Contaminants' are also discussed but not in detail.

The author takes the view that there is a place for food additives in the Food Industry of today provided that (i) they are toxicologically safe; (ii) there is a real need for them, whether economic or technological; (iii) they are used only in specific products at no more than permitted concentrations, and (iv) that they are not used to 'cover-up' inefficient processing in manufacture. Their value to the Food Industry of today (processing, transportation, distribution, sale and storage in the home) is not in doubt, provided that the above provisos are adhered to.

The assessment of the safety of food additives and their control-in-use by legislation and by the Industry are also discussed, as well as the close co-operation which exists in practice between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Food Industry and its various Trade Organisations.

Although legislation and legislative guidelines exist and have to be implemented, it is even more important to have government-by-consensus. This is both more efficient and more likely to be implemented.

The purpose of this paper is to survey: the industrial uses of 'food additives'; the way in which they should be used; their value to the
society in which we live; the advantages and disadvantages which are inherent in their use; and their 'safety-in-use'. This has been done largely with reference to the position in the UK. No attempt has been made to survey the vast literature on this subject; this is now well beyond the scope of a short paper. An excellent source of information on this subject are the many reports published by the 'Food Additives and Contaminants' Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Table 1), and the legislative 'Statutory Orders' which usually follow. The reports especially contain a great deal of information not easily accessible elsewhere. No attempt has been made to deal with accidental contaminants; this, too, is a field of its own. A recent useful paper on the harmonisation of legislation on foods, food additives and contaminants in the EEC has been published by Haigh.

In addition to the UK legislation, there are also the directives and recommendations of the EEC Commission, which are ultimately incorporated into our legislation unless the UK Authorities disapprove sufficiently strongly to veto a particular proposal. Much valuable and detailed information on the use of additives and their criteria for purity has been published by the WHO and FAO. A short summary of the present position has recently been published by the British Nutrition Foundation.