Editorial

Food, Fallout and the Future

THERE is a school of thought that finds something worthwhile even in a calamity. This "Pollyannaish" attitude may yet prove to be the saving faith in this atomic age.

Current preoccupation with community fallout shelters has its counterpart in a multifaceted study of nutritional stockpiling. The several Governmental agencies concerned recommend that a two-week supply of food and water per person be kept in an appropriate shelter. In addition, they make suggestions for a balanced menu. Thus one table[1] lists milk, canned meats, poultry, fish, cereals, fruit, vegetables, fats and oils, spreads, beverages, and "sugars, candy, nuts and instant puddings." Presumably, those of us fortunate enough to hide while bombs are bursting in air will be able to eat in our usual epicurean style.

Indeed, sample meal plans recommended by the U. S. Department of Agriculture[2] feature soup, ham spread, potato salad, crackers, milk, and a candy bar for lunch, followed by canned beef and gravy, noodles, peas and carrots, pudding, and hot tea or coffee for dinner. It is even possible that some persons will eat better below ground than above.

Of course, the vision of subterranean picnics must be modified. The Food and Drug Administration of the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare has recently reported that it has expanded its program of monitoring the levels of radioactive contamination in foods resulting from "peacetime" nuclear testing.[3] The significance of the problem is shown by the fact that I^{131} is appearing in fresh foods, particularly milk. (To date, however, the quantities of radioiodide have not exceeded dangerous levels.)

One aspect of the food-for-survival program, which, however, has great potential for good, is in the field of food technology. There is a need (recognized by the Pentagon and a number of food processors) for inexpensive nutritious, palatable food products which can be stored and transported easily. A "survival biscuit," for example, is currently under active study by our cereal makers. Millions of pounds of these crushed wheat wafers are to be stockpiled in community shelters. Similar projects may be expected to be under way now or in the near future.

From the optimistic viewpoint, these activities afford a unique opportunity to develop many types of food products which would be acceptable to the millions of poorly nourished people all over this radioactive globe. A promising start has already been made, *viz.*, *Incaparina*[4] (a low cost vegetable, high protein mixture of cottonseed flour, corn and sorghum), various fish-protein cakes, and similar products. The progressive food industry will not fail this new assignment.

In short, the threat of annihilation by radioactivity may lead to the development of food products in the well fed countries which, originally devised for their own survival, subsequently would make a new way of life available to the have-nots. It would also reduce the exorbitant food surpluses in the process. There may well be a revolution just ahead—after centuries of food practices suitable for small populations in primitive times (but hopelessly inadequate for large populations in emerging nations), after centuries of tradition and habit—man may find that in order to survive he will need new kinds of foods, products of modern nutritional science and technology.

Indeed, *our* survival food products may yet prove to be the survival foods in areas free from radioactivity and for future generations.

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