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Response of the food industry to minority demands

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It is perhaps a little late in this symposium to define 'minority groups', but there are some people who have not received a mention and who can claim to constitute minority groups in so far as they place upon the food industry a demand which is different from that of the majority. For the purposes of this paper such people as diabetics, obese persons, phenylketonurics, and so on, but not infants and the aged, will be included as minority groups.

This paper cannot, however, be claimed as an exhaustive survey of the contribution made by the food industry in these areas. The term 'food industry' may be taken to include not only the manufacturer but also the distributor and retailer. The response considered will be mainly that on the part of the manufacturing section of the industry, and the author is indebted to the Food Manufacturers' Federation and to The Nestlé Company for assistance in collecting information. References will also be made to products made by firms not in membership of the Federation.

Any manufacturer who is going to stay in business, and it is no good if a minority demand is to be met by one who is going out of business tomorrow, has got to run his business for profit. Without profit he cannot improve his existing products, cannot introduce new products, and he certainly cannot afford the services necessary to survey the market for a new product. Now the food industry consists of large companies and very small companies with, in comparison with other industries, few medium-sized companies. It is in the large companies or at the head office of a group of companies that one would expect to find market intelligence. Many of the larger companies are comparatively newly established or newly integrated, and in some their technical efforts have so far been directed to products with large-volume sales. They have, therefore, not been able to devote attention to the demands of minority groups. In general it seems that the food companies cater for popular demand and carry only very few, if any, products in demand by minorities. The large companies do not, however, dismiss the demands of minority groups lightly, in some cases

very careful surveys of the potential market have been made, only to lead to the conclusion that it would be grossly unecomonic to enter such a market. In relation to minority groups with special dietary requirements, one manufacturer believes that such people can meet their requirements by selecting general-purpose foods and supplementing these with vitamin or protein concentrates, or with both, and that they should not expect the industry to manufacture a multiplicity of small lines for them. In fact some companies provide literature giving dietary guidance in which their own product(s) assume a minor, in terms of quantity, but important rôle.

At first sight this seems to be a somewhat unsympathetic approach, but this is not so when it is looked into a little further. It is obviously in the manufacturer's interest to make his product appeal to as large a proportion of the community as possible. One large manufacturer makes a special point of formulating his recipes so as to satisfy the needs of as large a majority as possible and, therefore, to use ingredients acceptable to all members of the public. Having done this the manufacturer in question prepares data sheets for members of the Jewish faith, vegetarians, and so on giving an indication of the suitability of the products to these minority groups.

So far reference has been made only to manufacturers who have surveyed the market and not to any who have dared to dip their toe into the water. It is of interest to consider the case of a large manufacturer who prepared a range of foods especially for those who require a low-salt diet. This venture was entered into not so much because there would be any commercial advantage, but rather because, as a company with major interests in an allied field, it was thought appropriate to do something to fill a gap which was understood to exist. Seven products were marketed but the sales were so extremely small that after about 2 years the products were withdrawn and the experiment was stopped because there was insufficient turnover in the shops. Why the products did not move more quickly is a question which the manufacturer has not had satisfactorily answered.

To some measure, therefore, the provision of foods for minority groups has been the activity of the small manufacturers who can afford to have small-selling lines. There is evidence that some of these small men have gone out of business in the process.

The consumer may be faced with the problem of locating products which will meet their minority demand. Inquiries regarding specific products can be addressed to manufacturers and, in many cases, these will be dealt with either by the supply of special literature or in the form of an individual letter. In the case of groups such as the Jewish community and vegetarians, guidance can be obtained from the central office of the appropriate organization.

Products meeting food laws and customs

The Jewish dietary laws create problems not only for the food manufacturer but also for the Jewish housewife. Any plant used for the manufacture of non-kosher foods or ingredients cannot be used subsequently for the manufacture of kosher

foods unless it is koshered under rabbinical supervision. This is a process akin to sterilization but with particular requirements. Thus the manufacturer may have to keep separate any plant used for the manufacture of a kosher product and ensure that it is not used for any other purpose. Many manufacturers find it impossible to give this guarantee. However, some manufacturers do, and meet the requirements of the Beth Din and Kashrus Commission, this body needing to satisfy themselves that the recipe and manufacturing process is suitable and requiring the facility to make periodic inspections of the plant. Whereas some foods require official sanction and are marked accordingly, other foods, and these do not present a particular problem to the manufacturer, are permissible for consumption because their manufacture does not contravene the dietary laws.

It is interesting to note that, in the case of kosher jam, one requirement is that there should be no maggots in the fruit used for its manufacture. This is a particular problem with raspberry jam. Sanction is given only if precautions to eliminate this possibility are considered adequate; most reputable preserve manufacturers would like to think that they could meet these requirements.

Vegetarians and vegans may purchase from the office of The Vegetarian Society a food guide which lists in a classified form the products which, at the time of the inquiry of the manufacturer, met with the appropriate requirement. The booklet includes the names of quite a large number of different food firms. In particular, wheat germ and yeast extract are important ingredients of vegan and vegetarian diets.

The situation in regard to food for immigrant groups is somewhat different. Such products as are available in this country are almost entirely imported and, where necessary, are prepacked by the retailer. The situation is said to be somewhat better in the London area than it is in other parts of the country, but one distributor has stated that the Indian and Pakistani communities are extremely well provided for by many hundreds of Indian grocery shops throughout the country. Another distributor, however, runs a mail order department to supply people unable to obtain supplies locally. It has been suggested that the continental-type dish, being more highly seasoned than the average English dish, tends to appeal to the oversea immigrant groups. Owing, it is alleged, to the increase in holidays taken abroad by Britons there has been in this country in recent years a development of products with continental origin, continental dishes in the home constituting, it is said, a status symbol. It is suggested, therefore, that the immigrant groups are now better catered for than they were previously. One or two manufacturers are developing products designed for the Indian and Pakistani immigrant, but it appears that these products are not well accepted, not so much because of any lack of quality but because the consumers prefer to buy their own raw materials and prepare the cooked food according to their own particular liking.

Dietetic and special-purpose foods

By far the largest contribution on the part of the food industry in meeting minority demands has been in this field. However, problems have arisen from the claims made in advertisements for such foods. The Food Manufacturers' Federation

makes representations on behalf of the food industry to the Food Standards Committee when matters such as these arise. The importance attached to this part of the activity of the food industry is perhaps reflected in the fact that the Food Manufacturers' Federation have set up what is known as the 'Infant, Invalid and Dietetic Foods Section'. The significance attached to these foods on the international level is illustrated by the fact that there is a Codex Alimentarius Committee on dietetic foods. The Codex Committee has proposed a classification of dietetic foods which may possibly be improved upon, and the following is basically a modification of the Codex proposals.

I

Foods meeting physiological needs for use:

- A. Under special physiological conditions, such as:
 - Foods for (1) Infants
 - (a) cereal or carbohydrate based foods
 - (b) dairy product based foods
 - (c) vegetable, fruit or flesh based foods
 - (2) Pregnant and nursing mothers
 - (3) The aged
- B. Under conditions of unusual stress, such as:
 - Foods for (1) Convalescents
 - (2) Athletes
 - (3) Expeditions
 - (4) Astronauts

II

Foods suited to pathological conditions for use:

- A. Under close supervision by the medical and allied professions, such as:
 - (1) Foods meeting specific compositional requirements
 - (2) etc?
- B. In diets based on general recommendations of the medical and allied professions, such as:
 - (1) Foods from which one or more constituents or types of constituent have been eliminated as far as practicable, such as:
 - (a) Low-sodium foods
 - (b) Low-carbohydrate foods
 - (2) Modifications of general-purpose foods suited to special purposes such as:
 - (a) Foods for diabetics
 - (b) Low-calorie foods

From the manufacturer's point of view it is essential that any classification such as this should be flexible and that it should not be introduced in such terms as to prohibit new types of products merely because there is no place for them in the classification. The words 'such as' are therefore considered to be very important.

For the purposes of this paper no reference will be made to foods for normal infants or pregnant or nursing mothers or for the aged.

Table I. *Manufactured special-purpose foods classified according to use*

Products for weight control*	Gluten-free products	Products for allergic conditions
Bisks (2)	Arobon†	Allergilact
Cambridge Formula Loaf	Beurlact†	Eledon†
Celacol gum†	Celacol gum†	Granolact†
Chekwaite drinks (3)	Courlose gum†	Plamil Plantmilk
Complant†	Eledon†	Rite-Diet (gluten-free) products (4)
Courlose gum†	Energen Gluten-free Wheat Starch	Rite-Diet (protein-free) products (2)
Dalrose C.G.†	Farley's Gluten-free Biscuits	
Dietade products (13)	Prosolt†	
Energen foods (8)	Rite-Diet (gluten-free) products (4)	
Formula 21†	Soyolk Flour	
Granose rolls	Sprulact†	
High Protein Cereal, Special K	Velactin†	
Hy-soy flour		Products for gastro-intestinal disorders
Limmits Biscuits (5)	Low-constituent products	Arobon†
Limmits Chocolate (2)	Low-calcium:	Beurlact†
Limmits Crackers (3)	Locasolt†	Heudebert Biscottes
Lo-cal squashes (4)	Low-calcium Milk Food†	Celacol gum†
Mini-Bisks (7)	Low-fat:	Courlose gum†
Pastils 808† (3)	Lacidac (separated)†	Dalrose C.G.†
Plamil Plantmilk	Low-lactose:	Eledon†
PLJ Lemon Juice	Galactomin (Formula 17, 18, 19)†	Galactomin (Formula 19)†
Ritters Wheat Diet (cereal) (2)	Low-lactose Milk Food†	Lacidac (half cream)†
Robinson's low-calorie drinks (2)	Plamil Plantmilk	Lucozad drink
Rose's Dietetic products (4)	Velactin†	Nesmidat†
Simbix (11)	Low-phenylalanine:	Nestargel†
Slim-Easy rolls	Albumaid X.P.	Pelargon†
Slimline drinks (8)	Cymogram†	Peptalact†
Slimms crackers	Minafen†	Prolact†
Heudebert Symbred	Rite-Diet (protein-free) products (2)	
Soyolk Flour	Rite-Diet (protein and salt-free products) (4)	
Heudebert Starch-reduced slices	Low-sodium:	Products for diabetics
Trihexitin capsules†	Barmene (low-salt)§	Cambridge Formula Loaf
Trimetts Biscuits (4)	Dietade low-salt products (4)	Chekwaite drinks (3)
Trimetts Trebles (chocolate biscuits)	Edosolt†	Cooper's diabetic products (16)
Trimetts Wafers (2)	Marmite (salt-free)§	Cadbury's diabetic chocolates (3)
	Heudebert Symbred (salt-free)	Diajel diabetic table jellies (4)
	Yeatex (low-salt)§	Dietade products (13)
		Energen low-sugar preserves
		Heudebert Starch-reduced slices
		PLJ Lemon Juice
		Slim-Easy rolls (2)
		Slimline drinks (8)
		Soyolk Flour
		Wander diabetic products (11)

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Table 1 (continued)

Products for other conditions	
Anaemia:	
Hemolact	
Eczema:	
Allergilact	
Marasmus:	
Daltose C.G.†	
Lacidact	
Prematurity:	
Beurlact	
Eledon†	
Frailact	
Nestogen†	
Prodieton†	
	Renal failure:
	Hycal (flavoured syrups) (6)
	Rite-Diet (protein and salt-free products) (4)
	Spruc:
	Allergilact
	Sprulact
	Products for convalescence (institutional use only)
	Bifti§
	Peptalact
	Special Hospital Extract§

Figures in parentheses indicate number of products or flavours available.

* Includes products manufactured specifically for use in the control, in either direction, of weight.

† A powder requiring preparation.

‡ Not a food in stricter senses of the word.

§ A meat or yeast extract in paste form.

|| Includes only products approved by the British Diabetic Association (see also *Balance* the quarterly journal of the BDA).
Special note: Some general-purpose foods also find use under one or more of the above headings but such products are not produced as a response to minority demands and are therefore not included in this table.

Table 1 lists, in a classified form, the names of special-purpose foods which are at present available on the market in Britain.

A number of the products included in Table 1 are intended for use as part of a slimming diet. They are included here because some may be useful to the diabetic in controlling his or her calorie intake, while consuming a diet with greater variety than was previously possible. It is doubtful whether slimmers may justifiably be regarded as a minority group.

Diabetics are undoubtedly a minority group and perhaps the one best provided for in terms of readily available products. One company has for many years provided a quite comprehensive range of products suitable for the diabetic, namely, three marmalades, five jams, three jellies and five canned fruits. These contain sorbitol as the sweetening agent but no added sucrose. Another manufacturer provides a range of five canned fruits similarly prepared together with six chocolate-based products. On the other hand there is another and rather smaller manufacturer who markets a range of seven canned fruits to which no carbohydrate is added in the canning process. Many other manufacturers, of course, offer a diabetic version of one or more of their main products so the diabetic seems to be fairly well provided for by the food industry.

By way of contrast reference may now be made to a group which manufactures a range of products, mainly for use in infancy, for a variety of purposes. Table 2 indicates the number of products available for certain conditions or for use in

Table 2. *Number of products available for certain conditions or diets*

Condition	No. of products	Diet	No. of products
Anaemia	1 (1)	Gluten-free	11 (3)
Gastro-intestinal disorders	15 (6)	Low-calcium	2 (2)
Marasmus	2 (1)	Low-fat	1 (1)
Prematurity	3 (2)	Low-lactose	6 (4)
Sprue	2 (2)	Low-phenylalanine	9 (1)
		Low-sodium	13 (1)

Several of the products included in the total numbers are for use by adults. Figures in parentheses show the number of products made by one group of manufacturers.

certain diets. This is a specialized field and it is perhaps not surprising that there appears to be only one concern offering such a wide range of products of this type. One of the manufacturers of low-sodium foods points out that the demand for these products is very small and has to be promoted with the help of dietitians. Of the four low-sodium products made by this particular manufacturer, 40% are sold through 'Boots the Chemists' and the other 60% through hospitals. Reference was made above to a range of seven products which had to be withdrawn from the market after 2 years of very poor sales.

Finally there is a minority group which may not be very well defined but which can be described as convalescents. There is probably a multitude of products on the market which would be regarded as suitable for use by such a group. There is no

doubt whatever that some of these are of considerable value during convalescence but it seems inappropriate in this paper to enter this very controversial field.

Summary

Therefore, it would appear that the food manufacturing industry is alive to the existence of minority groups whose food requirements for one reason or another lead to the need for specialized products. The larger firms need to be assured of fairly substantial sales if they are to set aside production facilities for such materials. It may, therefore, be left to the smaller man to cater for minority groups. The difficulties inherent in this operation may well lead to a situation in which the small man may have to abandon manufacture or go out of business.

In the case of immigrant populations, however, it may be that it is only a matter of time before they become integrated to the extent of accepting the type of food eaten in the country of which they have become citizens. At first, and even in the longer term, perhaps they would prefer to make their own dishes to a large extent from foods available in the country, together with imported foods and spices from their own country. After all the importation of food into Britain is far from a new concept.

In the field of special dietary foods, perhaps there is some need for co-ordination which might result in agreements between manufacturers as to who would manufacture one type of product and who the other. However, although this would seem to have the advantage of maximizing the turnover of any product which a manufacturer undertook to market, it has the disadvantage that each manufacturer would have to have available to himself specialized personnel whose output would be limited if restricted to one product only. The solution may therefore be for subsidiaries of pharmaceutical companies to handle the manufacture of dietetic and special-purpose foods, as of course some already do. This is not to say that the food industry is shirking or would wish to shirk any responsibilities it may have in this direction but it is perhaps a concept worthy of serious consideration.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Food Manufacturers' Federation or to the manufacturer of any of the products mentioned.