

THE CONSUMER CONSULTANT PROGRAM--1964

by

Carla S. Williams

Chief, Consumer Consultant Branch
Division of Consumer Education
Bureau of Education and Voluntary Compliance
Food and Drug Administration

Mr. Trawick has very ably described FDA's new Division of Consumer Education, of which the Consumer Consultant Branch is an integral part. The Consumer Consultant Program was FDA's first, and therefore is the oldest, of the agency's education programs. This program was created in 1953, and now 23 Consumer Consultants are serving FDA's 18 Districts. These professionally trained women are talking to a variety of women's groups across the United States. As announced in the CCI bulletin several months ago, we have actively recruited for professional women, ideally with home economics and nutritional training, to fill these positions.

Perhaps you would be interested to hear the most recent analysis of consumer comment and query which has been gathered during the past year. The appraisal included nine categories, "broken down" in the statistical order which follows: The use of chemical additives in foods; pesticides and the possible presence of residues on foods; labeling and packaging practices; interpretation of the newly enacted drug legislation; "quack" products and practices; food standards and grade labeling; the intricacies of FDA's enforcement of the food, drug and cosmetic act; cosmetic products; and last, the differing jurisdictions of the various other consumer protection government agencies.

Were it a matter of analyzing all areas of discussion, the overall subject of advertising, television commercials, etc., would have to rank high among the nine mentioned categories. Advertising, of course, comes under the jurisdiction of the Federal Trade Commission.

Again, this information is vitally important to the FDA in conducting its present programs and planning future policies. But, at the same time, as indicated before, it is discouragingly evident that FDA's consumer education programs cannot accomplish the prescribed task alone. The assistance of people like you--professionally trained, educated to discuss sensible buying practices, wise economic attitudes and sound living habits, and in the position to reach variegated publics--is vitally needed.

However, those of us associated with the Consumer Consultant Program confess that thus far we have reached, with some few significant exceptions, only an "elite," middle, upper middle class public. Working with and through existing organizations, we have not succeeded as we would desire in reaching the under-privileged and "most-in-need-of-assistance" consumer. Thus it is that the expansion of the Consumer Consultant Program, and, in fact, the creation of an entire Division of Consumer Education is a healthy and heartening development. Hopefully with added staff and various new materials and aids, we can begin to reach wider publics--low-income groups,

labor union organizations, the Negro population, the aging, the sick, the poor.