

The Consumers' Corner

By Mary K. Simmons

Many of the goods and services once produced in the home are now being purchased. Families today are being confronted with many choices as they purchase the necessities and luxuries for the home and family living. A bewildering variety of goods and services compete for a share of the family income.

Linked with this multiplicity of goods and services is the highly pressurized advertising that encourages the consumer to buy. Consumers need basic information about commodities which are for sale, and an understanding of how to make decisions about what to buy.

In addition, they need information about marketing costs, credit costs, and pricing policies so they can make decisions so that the family will obtain the maximum satisfaction for the money spent.

The number of homemakers working away from home, and the number of activities in which family members are concerned, continue to increase. Both of these factors mean more time pressures for homemakers and other family members, which result in increased services as well as goods.

Do You Get What You Pay For?

We often hear the statement that "You get what you pay for." In actual practice we find one gets what one pays for only when one knows the product and frequently tests for specified requirements. Price is not necessarily a criterion of quality. Those who buy on this basis frequently pass up products because of their low prices.

Mrs. Simmons, home economist in the Gila County Agricultural Extension office, at Globe, is a highly competent home economist with two degrees from Montana State University, experience as a utility company's home economist in two different states, and as an extension worker also in two states. She has great enthusiasm, wide experience, an eagerness to work with homemakers, and has consented to furnish this regular series of articles for *Progressive Agriculture* in Arizona. The current article is first in the series.

Surveys show some hospitals refusing to buy a high quality waterproof sheeting at 65 cents a yard because they expected that good sheeting came at \$1.50 a yard. In this instance an imposing name, as well as high price, seemed more important than economy.

To prove that people will pay more for highly advertised brands, Cannon towel company conducted a test placing Cannon towels side by side with unbranded towels of equal quality. The Cannon towels were 10 cents higher and outsold the unbranded towels at the rate of 3.6 to 1.

According to Professor Borden of Harvard, author of "The Economic Effects of Advertising," competition is ineffective in selling drugs, toilet goods, and cosmetics. The margins between the manufacturing costs and selling prices of these goods are high. Consumers do not have any basis for judging the quality of these products.

Because of their lack of knowledge, consumers are willing to pay high prices for brands they think are dependable. In the absence of standards for judging quality of these goods, consumers tend to trust the assertion of producers.

The above statements would indicate that price is *not* a good quality guide. Contrary to the "laws" of demand, many consumers are attracted by high prices. Nominally the United States is a one-price country, but the bargaining system is in wide use. This confusion of practice operates to the disadvantage of consumers.

Effect of Advertising

Many advertisements are designed to impress rather than inform, to make prospective buyers think highly of the products rather than to provide a basis for comparison with other brands. Advertising is geared to awaken a sense of need. Emotions

are aroused, advertisers may stress sex appeal, shame and fear.

To create a lasting impression, advertisers depend upon the strength of the emotion aroused. The rhythm of words, a catch phrase, may put punch into advertising so that in the mind of the consumer a certain need or purpose recalls at once a specific brand.

No amount of advertising can force any large number of people to buy things they do not want. Advertising can only create a new market for products which fill a genuine though often unexpressed or latent, consumer want. In other words, advertising cannot develop a consumer want, except where the need or desire previously existed—even though it may have existed in unrecognized form.

Some people may say that what people are unaware of, they don't want. In the sense "ignorance is bliss," that is true. But people won't buy a great many things that they might be made aware of. The basic desire must be there to begin with. Advertising cannot sell a poor product—it might induce people to try it once, but it cannot build an enduring business on such a product.

As long as consumers make advertising profitable, producers will continue to spend billions of dollars annually on questionable advertising. Effective controls on undesirable advertising and elimination of unnecessary advertising apparently cannot be secured by laws; the *final responsibility rests with the consumers*.

If consumers continue to pay the advertising bill because they are unaware of quality and the comparative merits of different goods, then the charge of waste because of aggressive selling is a serious one.

A consumer may be enticed to buy a product once, but if it fails to give satisfaction, seldom will advertising induce a consumer to repeat the mistake.

The consumer's power lies in his decision of where to spend his money—advertising can't sell a poor product for very long. People might try it, but a thriving business cannot be built on such a product. No one has so much money nor so little time that he can afford to be an uninformed consumer.

Extension Service information for consumers, or any other available information, will help only if the consumer makes use of them. The final responsibility rests with you—the Consumer!

NEXT ISSUE: Competition for the Consumer's Dollar.