

A SURVEY OF METROPOLITAN FOOD HYGIENE AND CONTROL¹

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Introduction

PRESENTLY, Ghana is in the process of establishing food laws to augment to existing food handling and marketing regulations of its local councils. These laws are intended to check fraud and other malpractices by food manufacturers and also ensure that wholesome foods are offered for sale to the public under the most sanitary conditions.

To provide some background for this, a survey was organised by the Food Research Institute in which research personnel were attached to teams of food inspectors from the offices of the Medical Officers of Health (M.O.H.) of selected urban centres. This survey describes some of the observations made in the Accra metropolitan district.

Procedure

Visits were made to food establishments routinely inspected by the M.O.H. teams. Among these were slaughter houses, bakeries, aerated water factories, provisions stores, hotels, restaurants and department stores. Interviews were made with both management and the working staff and impressions and observations recorded in note book. Existing local ordinances on the handling, preparation and sale of food were also compiled in the survey.²

¹ This paper is based on a report entitled *Study of existing conditions in food hygiene and control of sale of foods in Accra* submitted by the author to the Institute in August, 1967. The study was one of several in food industry problems undertaken by university students during their academic holidays.

Copies of the original report have since been passed on to health and municipal authorities for study.

² The ordinances or regulations collected in Accra included:

Control of Restaurants and Eating Houses Bye-laws, 1945;

Control of Prepared Foodstuffs Bye-laws, 1947;

Sale of Palm-wine and Corn Beer Bye-law, 1953;

Slaughter House and Sale of Meat Bye-laws, 1962.

Observations

Food preparation establishments

Two slaughter establishments were visited: the municipal abattoir at Jamestown and the new slaughter house at Tema.

Both establishments carry out ante-mortem examination of all livestock and post-mortem evaluation of the carcass—and unhealthy specimens are condemned.³ The animals are generally slaughtered early in the morning and dressed in time for the market. The carcass and offal components (primarily the glands and organs) are examined for infection and other pathological disturbance. For example, a healthy liver must be soft—without hard patches, otherwise it is condemned. The lungs, similarly, must be free from clots of blood and the kidneys, from stones. In all carcasses, parasitic cysts (such as those of *Taenia* which are common in pork) are looked for and eliminated.

At the Jamestown abattoir, dressed meat was observed to be carried on the shoulder or head by untidily dressed men. A so-called “Hygienic Meat Van” provided by the municipality to convey meat to the market was observed to be in a most unsanitary condition. There were no facilities for meat storage and there appeared to be too much handling and inevitable contamination of meat by the butchers and their aides at all stages of slaughter and dressing. The hide or skin which is sometimes edible, was often dragged along the contaminated floor.

On the other hand, at Tema, the standards of abattoir services were highly satisfactory. Here, many of the operations were carried out mechanically with minimum human handling. Each animal was immobilized mechanically (cattle) or electrically (pig) prior to sticking and bleeding. The workers were clean and neatly dressed in white overalls. As many as six large cold rooms were available for meat storage. However, the establishment is extremely under-utilized, although it could handle several times the volume of business it appeared to be handling at the time.

Food factories

Among the food factories selected for inspection was another meat establishment in Accra. This company processes mainly pork sausages, for which fresh pork is purchased from local dealers each working day. Upon arrival in the morning, the product is stored immediately in cold rooms. Carriage of pork from storage to the processing halls is always by trawlers. The personnel were always neatly dressed.

Two aerated water factories were also included in the tour—one privately owned and the other state-controlled. The former was very poorly equipped and had a most undesirable appearance. Storage rooms (for raw materials and bottles) were lacking, and ordinary (untreated) tap water appeared to be used for bottling.

Conditions at the state-owned factory, on the other hand, were satisfactory. Water was treated with chlorine ferro sulphate and lime prior to use in the preparation of soft drinks. The mixing and bottling of the drink was carried out at low temperatures, presumably to render most of the micro-organisms present inactive. Carbon dioxide which has some preservative effect was added under pressure—in a process entirely mechanically executed.

³ The job of municipal food inspection is vested officially with Health Inspectors. To qualify for this position requires three years of training (at the School of Hygiene in Accra)—beyond the middle primary education.

Retail outlets

A number of retail centres including a provisions store and a public market were also visited. The chief abnormality observed in the stores were the number of swollen tins (containing processed food) still on sale to the public. At the public market (Salaga) fresh foodstuffs (tomatoes, garden eggs, fish, pepper, etc.) on display for sale were infested with flies and dust particles. Generally though most of the cooked foods such as rice, yam, kenkey and bread were contained in glass boxes or polythene containers.

Catering houses

Among the catering establishments visited was a drinking (palm-wine) bar housed in a fly-infested wooden structure—and whose proprietress operated on an expired licence.⁴ And among the number of hotels and restaurants seen were some with kitchens turned into bedrooms.

Editor's Note.—The problem of sanitation in food establishments can be tackled not only through regulations and the means by which these are enforced, but by adequate and sound public amenities. Among these are water supply, well-ventilated market stalls with sufficient lighting and an efficient waste disposal system. Improved design and location of facilities are also essential.

Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that a great many of our problems are not man-made but result from the circumstances of our environment. For example, the high humidity and temperature characteristic of our climate, support food deterioration and unsanitary influences of various kinds. Thus an understanding of these problems—coupled with a sound public education and the fullest co-operation of all, could go a long way toward strengthening the regulations of the future.



⁴ A cross-section of local council regulations indicates that the Accra-Tema City Council expects all persons involved in the manufacture or sale of food items to possess a licence of some kind. And such licences must always be kept on the premises and produced on demand by health officers.