

Open Dating Start Delayed Until Dec.

The date on which the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) new regulation on "open dating" for meat and poultry products will take effect has been moved from Sept. 8 to Dec. 8.

Officials of the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service took the action since some processors and retailers have initiated open dating programs coupled with consumer education aimed at letting shoppers know the meaning of the open date they are using. The September 8 date would force a suspension of these programs, since federally-inspected suppliers could not obtain the necessary equipment to make changes in their current open dating of meat and poultry products.

To stop the use of open dates in many cases would not only disrupt these ongoing education programs, but in some instances would mean that firms would be in violation of state or local laws on open dating.

During the extension period, the National Association of Food Chains has agreed to cooperate with USDA to urge retailers and processors to increase their consumer education programs on the meaning of open dating on meat and poultry packages, through newspapers, broadcasting, and food columns. Industry consumer advisors and home economists are also being asked to emphasize open dating in their programs.

To make full use of the transition period, retail food stores will be urged to launch in-store promotions explaining open dating through posters and bag stuffers.

Further extension may be granted on an individual basis to those federally-inspected suppliers of food chains who take all possible steps to comply by Dec. 8 but, because of unavoidable circumstances, are unable to meet that deadline. APHIS officials emphasized, however, that they do not plan to grant extensions unless requesting packers document the actions taken during the 90-day extension period.

Under the new USDA regulations—which were announced Aug. 8 (USDA release 2234-74)—any calendar date used on meat or poultry products processed under federal inspection will have to be identified in terms of a "packing date" or "use

before" date or "sell by" date. These dates may be further qualified by phrases such as "for maximum freshness," or similar terms. The new regulation, however, does not apply to fresh meats that are cut up and packaged in the individual retail stores.

The new regulations will provide consumers with significantly more information on the freshness or shelf life of meat and poultry products. The ultimate quality and safety of such products, however, depends on how carefully they are handled between

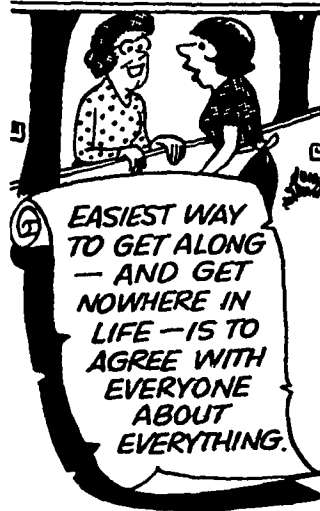
the processing plant and the consumer's dinner table.

APHIS officials proposed the "open dating" amendment March 21, 1973 (USDA

news release 889-73). An overwhelming majority of the more than 400 comments received strongly supported the amendment.

Official notice of the extension of the effective date of the new regulation was published in the September 3 Federal Register.

PUNCH LINE OF THE WEEK



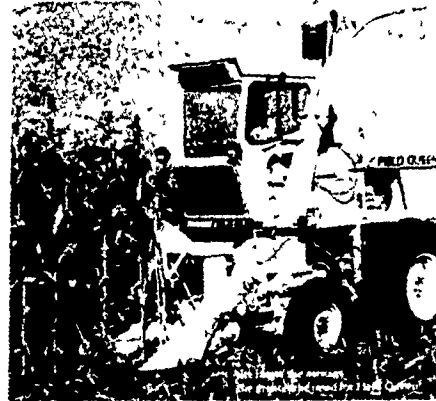
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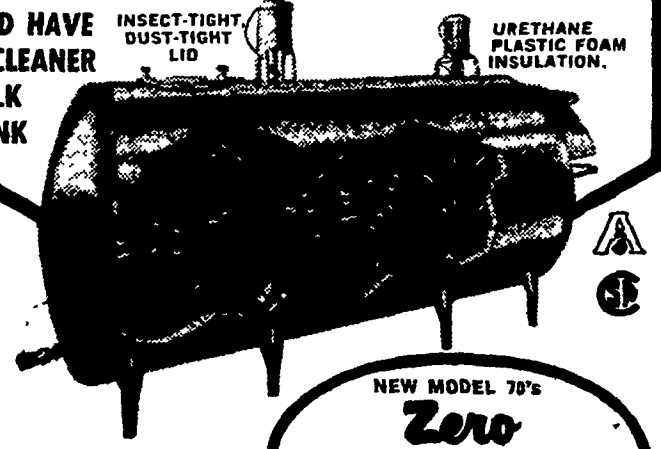
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