

... and get away on-n-n-n Food Day

Are companies milking the Third World?

By HEATHER McCLENAGHAN
Of the Emerald

Zambian mothers place cans of the Nestle corporation's infant formula on their babies' graves because they believe the mother's milk substitute was the most valuable possession their children ever had.

It killed them.
Infant milk companies — notably Nestles (Lactogen), Abbot Laboratories (Similac and Isomil), Wyeth Pharmaceuticals (SMA, S-26, Nursoy) and Bristol-Meyers (Enfamil, Olac, Prosobee) — faced with a declining birth rate at home, spread their profit opportunities to the Third World where population is still increasing rapidly.

But while bottle feeding is considered safe in the developed world, in Third World nations the corporate push away from mother's milk is deadly; infant mortality for bottle babies is reportedly double that of breast-fed infants.

Bottle feeding is expensive and requires careful attention to hygienic detail. Few mothers using the formula can provide the necessary refrigeration, sterilized bottles and clean water the powdered formulas call for. Because of the economic facts of life the mothers are forced to live with, overdilution of the expensive powders is rampant: some mothers stretch a can of the formula meant to last four days over a three-week period.

The result is the "bottle illness syndrome" characterized by severe diarrhea and dehydration. Because the artificial milk has none of the natural antibodies of mother's milk, a malnourished baby succumbs quickly.

None of this has stopped the foreign multinationals from milking millions of dollars from the third world market.

The use of slick advertising techniques and high-pressure merchandizing is "possibly the single most important reason for the rapid decline in breast feeding in developing countries in recent years," said Dr. Michael Latham of Cornell University. In the Third World, placing an infant on the formula is "tantamount to signing the death certificate of the child," Latham said.

The merchandizing techniques include radio and television spots and a barrage of calendars, billboards, contests and free samples. The formula is presented as an appealing way to achieve "Western sophistication."

"They push it the same way they sell Coke or anything else," says Peg Kehrer of the local Hunger Information Center. "The corporations try to equate use of the product with modern advancement and progress. And the reason the promotion is so

effective doesn't have anything to do with the people being ignorant or inferior. After all, your grandfather bought snake bite remedies that were just colored water. It's only recently that we have realized the power of advertising."

One advertising practice is to outfit salespeople as nurses. The salespeople are sent to visit mothers and health workers in hospitals and in villages to promote the product.

According to a Consumer's Union report,

in countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, hospitals, clinics and doctors offices are permeated with materials and people promoting the sale of the formulas. Because the promotion takes place inside medical establishments, it carries the implication of scientific endorsement.

Booklets published by the corporations push the products to expectant mothers. One pamphlet, "Your Baby is Coming Soon!" put out by Abbot Laboratories tells mothers: "Before you go into labor you should know how you are going to feed your baby." Breast feeding is not mentioned as a possibility.

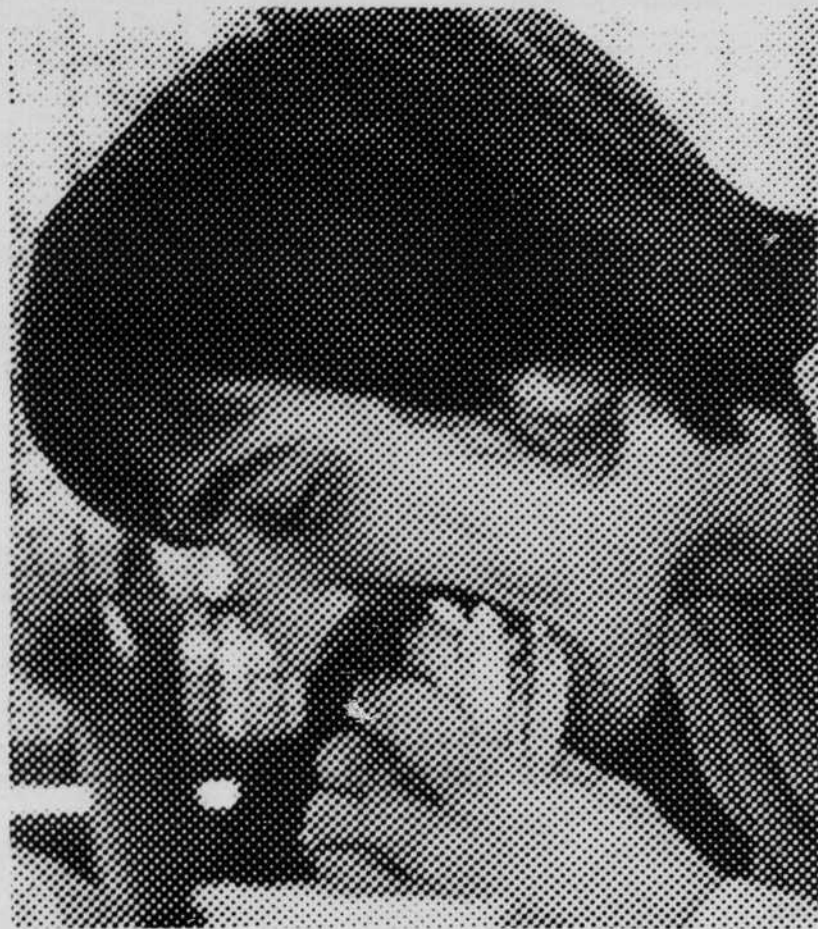
When a woman does not breast feed her baby, her milk supply dries up. When lactation ceases, a woman's chance of conceiving improves quantitatively — producing yet another mouth to be suckled on powdered formula.

"This is only one example of modernization leading to an increased demand for unnecessary consumer items in the Third World," Kehrer says. Kehrer's work with the Hunger Information Center has brought her up against people who sharply disagree with her call for increased governmental and legal supervision and regulation of American based multinationals in the Third World.

"I've had the free market system defended down the line to me on the baby formula problem. But we have tight restrictions on the sale of drugs and cigarettes in this country. You can't make a child an addict legally in this country."

Legal action against Bristol-Meyers is part of a national educational effort being conducted by a coalition of church and citizens groups. Locally, the Hunger Information Center will show the British documentary film "Bottle Babies" on campus next month.

In addition, Kehrer and a member of the Eugene La Leche League are available for public speaking engagements and as information resources. The Hunger Information Center is located in the Koinonia Center, 1414 Kincaid St., 485-1755.



Unprocessed foods higher in price than processed

By MARTHA BLISS
Of the Emerald

Flavored yogurt made a great debut on the grocery store shelves a few years back, but now it's under mass attack as a gross intrusion into food wholesomeness.

Quite conscious of this attack and yet disliking plain, blank yogurt, I thought to myself as I wheeled my grocery cart up to the dairy section: I'll outsmart them all. I'll buy plain yogurt and add my own flavors without all those preservative pests.

Feeling so smug, I reached for the plain yogurt.

Wait a sec, I thought. Plain yogurt costs the same as the flavored. It'll cost me more to flavor plain yogurt myself. And with my shoestring budget, forget it.

I tossed a carton of red raspberry yogurt into my cart and wheeled away.

Shopping, cooking and eating nutritiously isn't easy with today's distorted food prices. The discounts for eating right just aren't there. In fact, there's usually a financial penalty.

Somehow, somewhere, the food pricing game went haywire. Unrefined and less processed food items came out on the short end, costing more than their refined and

highly processed counterparts. Yogurt isn't the only example.

Check out the flours.

Whole wheat flour — which omits the germ extraction process, thus retaining the original vitamins, minerals, salts and fats of the wheat — runs about 23.8 cents a pound in the ordinary grocery store. That is, if it's even stocked.

Bleached, "enriched" flour, on the other hand, flourishes on every grocery store's shelves and can be found as low as 13.8 cents a pound. In addition to being bleached with chlorine dioxide, this flour

contains only four of the many ingredients known to have been removed in the milling process.

Perhaps most ironic of the flour prices is the cost of cracked wheat. This product, which is merely cracked and cleaned wheat, costs most of all wheat flour products — 38 cents a pound.

This story's the same for sugar products. The highly refined white granulated variety runs as low as 22 cents a pound (in bulk) while less refined brown sugar costs 38.5 cents. And the coarse brown sugar — even less refined — tops them both with 47.5 cents a pound.

The price distortions are everywhere, and what's more, ordinary grocery stores further their reinforcement of the process items by carrying unequal supplies. Bleached flour comes in bags as heavy as 25 pounds each. Whole wheat flour, on the other hand, rarely appears in bags larger than five pounds.

Sugar fares no better. Neither does rice nor peanut butter. This large-scale stocking only drives the prices of the processed items down even further.

Food co-ops are good escapes from this refined food mania. Giving the more "natural" food items equal if not greater play on their shelves, these organizations handle most of their items in bulk, thereby freeing the consumer from the hassles of predetermined quantity.

Eugene is lucky to have quite a few food co-ops and the like. To mention a few:

Grower's Market, 454 Willamette St.; West End General Store, 1525 W. 6th Ave. and Willamette People's Food Co-op, 1391 E. 22nd Ave.

Survival Center to spread composting gospel

By GREG WASSON
Of the Emerald

Wasting things seems to be a part of the American way of life and it's something most of us do very well. But as the world's population grows and its resources shrink, waste is something we can ill afford. One highly beneficial way to reduce waste is to compost organic scraps and yard clippings.

To call attention to the need for such recycling, the Survival Center is planning to compost as much of today's EMU and dorm garbage as possible.

"What we're trying to do," says Cindy Cutler, organizer of the composting effort, "is raise the consciousness of people and show them that food can be used as a benefit to the soil instead of being thrown into the land fill."

Recycling on a large scale would require some major changes in the way University kitchens are run. Not all food composts

well, and because the University uses plastic cups for some of the drinks it serves, the refuse would have to be thrown into separate cans.

The refuse collected for today's demonstration will be taken to the site of the University's urban farming class and composted there. The class uses organic techniques, such as composting for fertilizer. While it will take a great deal of effort to get composting started in such a large place as the University, such an effort in Eugene's homes would be relatively simple.

The standard layering method of composting involves building walls of some kind (stakes surrounded by wire fences works well) and then filling them with alternate layers of grass clippings, manure and kitchen wastes (don't use meat as it attracts animals).

It's best to build two bins right next to each other, so the composting material can

be turned by moving it from one bin to the next. According to the Lane County Extension Service, the bins should be four to six feet high, three to five feet wide and any convenient length. Once the bins are constructed, line the bottom of one with a six to twelve inch layer of grass clippings or other organic material. On top of this layer put a layer of dirt or manure and then build your pile by alternating between the two.

Water is important to the composting process as it increases the heat in the pile, and some limestone or phosphate rock will help speed up the process too. Once the bin is full, pack the material tightly around the edges, but only slightly in the middle. After three to four months of moderate to warm weather, the material should be turned by moving from the first bin to the second.

Once the material is composted, it can be spread on the garden where it serves as fertilizer and an excellent mulch.