

"There's a worm in my strawberries!"

By Janese Low

Finding a worm in the strawberries is certainly not an appetizing experience. This happened recently to a student in the Hamilton complex. It seemed like one of a long series of complaints endemic to the food service in the dorms. The story, however, is not as simple as the question of whether dorm food is bad. What should concern the dorm resident is the question of choice and responsibility. Institutionalized food will always have its drawbacks. But UO dorm residents no longer have the same restrictive service their counterparts received in the 50s. Students today do not have portions of food slapped on their plate as they walk through the lines in Carson. Instead, they can choose from a salad bar, a hot entree line and a selection of breads and cereals.

Some students have complained the low quality of food available and the manner in which the food is prepared. Just where does the problem lie? First, a look at the system behind the food supply. Most of the meats and vegetables purchased for the dorms come from local distributors. In the case of fruits, it depends on what is in season. Cereals used in the dorms are the kind you would normally find on supermarket shelves. For example, those made by Kelloggs, Post and Ralston. Most of the baked goods come from local bakeries such as Williams Bakery. Sometimes, food salesmen introduce a new product which the food service would try. According to Fred Babcock, University Food Service Director, the food service has been modifying

its meat purchases such as buying extra-lean ground beef and less breaded products. Another idea that is relatively new is "Fresh Fish in Season." After planning for fish in the menu, the purchaser calls up local suppliers the week before the meal to check what kinds of fish will be available. On the day of the meal, the fish is delivered fresh.

Food preparation is another area which has undergone a few changes. The elimination of some breaded products has resulted in fewer deep-fried entrees. Fish is also mostly broiled instead of fried. Food preparation and menus are discussed weekly in meetings held by Elva Koepp, the central kitchen food manager (and also the only nutritionist on the payroll), and the supervisors from all the dorm cafeterias. The group goes over menus from the previous year (and from about the same month) and replaces items that were not popular with new recipes or other favorites. The feedback on such items usually come from the cooks and the

supervisors. Information from the suggestion boxes are also evaluated. Some of the recipes, however, date back to the 50s!

So why the gripes? According to Fred Babcock, one of the reasons is that the current dorm population is mainly composed of freshmen. These students, he says, are conditioned in high school to believe that institutionalized food is awful. He also notes that the complaints come in cycles. There are usually more complaints at the end of terms and in the middle of winter. When the weather is warm, the complaints slack off. What about complaints that there are too many deep-fried foods? With the specter of heart disease hanging over our generation, there is rising concern about the amount of saturated fats in the American diet. The food service uses a quantity of red meats and deep-fried products - shouldn't changes be made? According to Elva Koepp, the food service tried providing fish and chicken entrees more often but the students

Pesticide Alert

The reason given for the worm in the strawberries was that the food service chose to buy fruit with less pesticides. However, other chemicals can also be inadvertently ingested. For example, all the oil used for frying and in salad dressings in the dorms is cottonseed oil. Since cotton is not a food crop, the pesticide restrictions on regular food crops do not apply to cotton. As a result, oil that is pressed from cottonseed may contain large amounts of chemicals.

What can you do?

The first thing is to be informed. You can ask the supervisors in your dorm where the produce comes from. They can usually tell you because packing regulations require such information to be printed on the side of the box.

You can also visit or call OSPIRG at EMU Suite 1

x 686-4377