

The 1954 National Conference on Shellfish Sanitation

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SANITARY control of growing, harvesting, and processing of shellfish in the United States is achieved by a unique cooperative program operated jointly by the Public Health Service, the States, and the shellfish industry.

This cooperative shellfish sanitation program had its start in the wake of a serious oyster-borne typhoid epidemic. Late in the winter of 1924, simultaneous outbreaks of typhoid fever were noted in Chicago, New York, Washington, and several other cities. In all, 1,500 cases of typhoid fever and 150 deaths in excess of the normal incidence for the disease were reported. A comprehensive epidemiological investigation implicated fresh oysters as the vehicle responsible for the outbreak (1).

The resulting adverse publicity caused sales of oysters and clams to drop virtually to zero in some areas, and the shellfish industry was soon in a state of economic collapse. To reestablish public confidence in raw, fresh shellfish as food, the industry and certain governmental agencies appealed to health authorities for assistance.

Accordingly, the Public Health Service called a public meeting in Washington, D. C., on

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February 19, 1925, to formulate a plan for sanitary control of the shellfish industry. The meeting was attended by many State health officers, city health officers, and representatives of other interested State and Federal agencies and of the shellfish industry.

The result was the development of a system of shellfish sanitation which placed responsibility for shellfish sanitation with the States and which is coordinated by the Shellfish Sanitation Section of the Public Health Service.

The Public Health Service was to develop standards, conduct research, review State programs, and advise receiving States of the effectiveness of shellfish sanitation programs in the producing States. This last responsibility has been fulfilled in recent years by distribution of a periodic compilation of State-certified shellfish shippers. The program is considered supplementary to the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (2), and is universally supported as necessary because of the sanitation problems peculiar to shellfish growing and harvesting. In the program, shellfish is defined to mean only oysters, clams, and mussels. The shellfish certification system does not apply to crabs, lobsters, or shrimp.

The success of the shellfish sanitation control program is indicated by the absence of major outbreaks of shellfish-borne typhoid or enteric disease during the 30 years it has been in operation. Despite this long period of successful operation there has been need for a critical re-

view of the shellfish certification system by participating organizations. This need resulted from technological advances in food-handling methods and from the realignment of State health department environmental sanitation activities.

To Review Certification Program

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, at its 1953 meeting, adopted a resolution calling on the Public Health Service to sponsor a conference for review of the shellfish certification program.

Acting on this request, the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service invited State and Federal agencies, the shellfish industry, and the Canadian Government, because of our interrelationship with Canada's shellfish certification program, to send representatives to the National Conference on Shellfish Sanitation, in Washington, D. C., September 9 and 10, 1954. The chief and deputy chief of the Bureau of State Services, Public Health Service, presided at the conference.

The conference was attended by 8 State health officers, 28 representatives from State agencies having interests in shellfish sanitation, and 20 from the shellfish industry. Four members of the Canadian Government were present. Our Government was represented by officials from the Department of State, the Department of Interior (the Fish and Wildlife Service), and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (the Food and Drug Administration and the Public Health Service). Only 3 interior States were represented; there were no representatives from the east coast clam industry.

To achieve an orderly discussion of all major topics, a 14-member representative committee had prepared an agenda, which included:

- Problems in sanitary control of shellfish production.
- Problems in sanitary control of shellfish marketing.
- Public Health Service participation in shellfish sanitation activities.
- Different sanitary regulations for intrastate and interstate shellfish shippers.
- Importation of shellfish.
- Classification of growing areas.

- Need for specific sanitary requirements for various species of shellfish.
- Future operations of shellfish control programs.

Discussion of these topics led to several general conclusions, most important of which was the indication of satisfaction with the cooperative control program which was expressed by all present at the conference. It was apparent that everyone concerned with shellfish sanitation was convinced that the certification system had been most effective in controlling the spread of shellfish-borne disease and that the system should be continued.

The problem of maintaining interior State interest in shellfish certification was discussed at length, but no conclusion was reached regarding a method of obtaining such interest. The question of breaded-shellfish certification was similarly discussed, but no positive conclusion was reached. However, it was apparent that there was a division of opinion on need for certification of prepared shellfish products. Several State representatives stated there was insufficient public health justification for extending certification to the breaded product.

While it was decided that problems related to shellfish importation (3) should be further discussed among the interested Federal agencies, the State representatives were unanimous in their opinion that shellfish imported into this country should meet the same sanitary standards as required for domestically produced shellfish.

The Future of the Program

The following resolution, unanimously adopted, expresses the sense of the conference:

Whereas, to safeguard public health, there is a continuing need for a program for sanitary control of shellfish processing and distribution in receiving areas, and

Whereas, the establishment of adequate control measures in both producing areas and receiving areas will assist the shellfish industry and provide protection for the ultimate consumer, therefore, be it resolved:

1. That the present policy of Federal-State and industry cooperative relationship be continued, including the listing of certified shell-

fish dealers by the United States Public Health Service, based on its endorsement of the various States' programs.

2. That the Public Health Service develop specific minimum requirements for endorsing States' shellfish programs, which shall take into account varying geographic and other conditions and the various species of shellfish grown therein.

3. That the certification of shellfish packers and repackers, with endorsement of satisfactory State programs by the United States Public Health Service, be developed in all receiving States.

4. That all States be encouraged to require that only shellfish from certified dealers be permitted to be sold.

5. That the program for sanitary control of the shellfish industry be maintained throughout the year in both producing and receiving States.

6. That the Public Health Service maintain a staff to carry out its responsibility in this program, including the necessary research and consultation service.

Action to implement the several sections of the resolution will be initiated by the Public Health Service. However, the ultimate measure of value of the shellfish certification program will be determined by the States' action in refusing to accept shellfish having a questionable certification status.

REFERENCES

- (1) Lumsden, L. L., Hasseltine, H. E., Leake, J. P., and Veldee, M. V.: A typhoid fever epidemic caused by oyster-borne infection (1924-25). Pub. Health Rep. Supp. No. 50.
- (2) Food, Drug, and Cosmetic No. 1, Revision 4; 21 U. S. C. 301 et seq.; 21 C. F. R. 1.1 et seq.
- (3) Green, R. S.: Shellfish importation into the United States. Pub. Health Rep. 70: 415-418, April 1955.

Syphilis Serology Courses

Nine laboratory refresher courses will be offered at the Venereal Disease Research Laboratory of the Public Health Service in Chamblee, Ga., September 1955-May 1956.

Six of the courses cover the serology of syphilis in general. They include lecture, demonstration, and participation classes in the most widely used American methods for the serodiagnosis of syphilis, including the latest developments. They are to be held on the following dates:

September 26-October 7, 1955	February 6-17, 1956
October 24-November 4, 1955	March 12-23, 1956
January 9-20, 1956	April 2-13, 1956

Tests for syphilis using *Treponema pallidum* as an antigen source are the subjects of two

courses offered October 31-November 10, 1955, and April 16-27, 1956. There will be some class participation in the complement fixation, agglutination, and other such tests.

A course in the management and control of syphilis serology by the regional laboratory, designed for assistant laboratory directors and senior laboratory staff members, is scheduled for April 30-May 11, 1956.

Applications for any of these must be signed by a State health officer or laboratory director, or by a medical officer in charge in the Public Health Service. Application forms may be obtained by writing to: Director, Venereal Disease Research Laboratory, Division of Special Health Services, Public Health Service, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, P. O. Box 185, Chamblee, Ga.