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From Corn-Fed to Fruit-Minded

By Kathern Ayres Proper, '26

CHANGING a corn-fed Iowan into a fruit-minded Californian takes imagination to say the least. But L. B. Williams, Director of the California Dried Fruit Research Institute, has never been lacking in either courage or imagination. So he attempted that very thing when he annexed me to the Institute staff nearly five years ago.

What I knew about all seven of the dried fruits—raisins, prunes, apricots, peaches, figs, apples and pears—could have been said in seven minutes then, but the Institute is a great place to gather information. And I have written many thousands of words about the health value, menu interest, economy and appetite appeal of all of them. Yes, my part of the work at the Institute has to do primarily with writing.

But speaking of appetite appeal, there's nothing that equals the glorious gustatorial satisfaction of a trip to the Institute kitchen. Monterey, where I live, is 125 miles from San Francisco, where the Institute is located. I make the trip to the city at irregular intervals to gather information and confer on writing schedules. Of course, I know a few days ahead when I'm going and I "save up" space just as one does for a Christmas dinner.

The raisin cinnamon rolls, fresh from the oven, crisp salads, fruit short cakes, frozen fruit puddings and fruited meats prepared there would wring raptures of praise from the most crotchety connoisseur.

Fruited meats, by the way, have been widely popularized by the Institute. We merely took a leaf from the books of foreign cookery, Americanized the ingredients and methods, and the result has taken hold in American diets to the benefit of health as well as appetite satisfaction.

While many tricky, new recipes are created at the Institute, the most important phase of activity is turning out new ways to dress up simple everyday dishes, made with the average pantry supplies.

One outstanding accomplishment has been to publicize the fact that overnight soaking and long cooking of dried fruits are no longer necessary, due to the more modern methods of processing in the packing plants.

The Institute, under the direction of Mr. Williams, sponsors and supervises research projects in a number of universities. These studies have resulted in the discovery of many new and significant facts concerning nutritional values. But speaking of appetite appeal, there's nothing that equals the glorious gustatorial satisfaction of a trip to the Institute kitchen. Monterey, where I live, is 125 miles from San Francisco, where the Institute is located. I make the trip to the city at irregular intervals to gather information and confer on writing schedules. Of course, I know a few days ahead when I'm going and I "save up" space just as one does for a Christmas dinner.

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Results of the research on prunes appear in a publication, "The Nutritive Values of California Prunes," which has been reviewed and accepted by the Committee on Foods of the American Medical Association. The most revolutionary information it contains is the proof that prunes are not "acid" in reaction. Feeding tests show that as much as 18 prunes a day in the usual diet does not increase or decrease the alkalinity of the blood stream beyond normal variations.

Our organization's clients include all the leading dried fruit packers in the State. Since its establishment nine years ago, the Institute has come to be known as the outstanding authority on California dried fruits. Food editors, nutritionists, home economists in constantly increasing numbers are turning to us for assistance in solving dried fruit problems.

Below: Joyce Ellen Proper, H. Ec. '56 (?)