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Foods Work Intrigues a Home Economist

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Foods Work

Intrigues a Home Economist

Ruth Kunerth, '39, finds that a variety of talents are necessary in commercial home economics duties

Winning nation-wide competition means a package must be above the ordinary—must have shelf appeal, eye appeal and sales appeal. Package improvement typifies a national trend in food companies to keep containers modern and streamlined.

In a national contest attracting 30,000 entries, two of the five "Junket" Brand Food Products received the 1941 American Packaging Award, in the opaque wraps division, for greatest improvement, best use of materials and designs. Clothes may not always make the man, but they do add glamour to food products.

While the new wrappers represent the cooperation of all company departments, it's the back of the package that the home economics department is more directly connected with—the directions and recipes. These must be tested and made as simple, yet as explicit, as possible. Clear directions are a proven necessity according to past experiences. When writing them, one needs to anticipate a homemaker's interpretation which is not always easy.

A wide variety of contacts helps in understanding people. Selling experience is a great asset in this as well as in other parts of the work. Every person you meet is a member of the group called the consuming public—our first interest.

A sketchy outline of our work may help you to decide what courses to take if you are planning on commercial home economics. Our daily theme song centers on what a homemaker does, needs and likes and how we can be of most service to her. It decides our choice of recipes for booklets, the kind of literature we print, the composition of the products and methods of selling. How to find out?—surveys, advertising, direct contacts and letters.

Daily we try new recipes in our experimental kitchen. For example, we just finished testing some fruit ice creams and sherbets made with our freezing mix. Now we are developing more institutional recipes for pie fillings, puddings and fruit soups.

Soon we'll be doing all this in a new testing kitchen planned this winter. It has been interesting to visit several testing kitchens in other companies before making plans for ours, and now the pounding and hammering has begun.

Also in the "kitcheneering" is sometimes included the training of new company representatives. They
learn to make desserts using the five products here in our experimental kitchen. That's one time they do the cooking and we just do the eating.

Developing recipes combines a need for a thorough understanding of theory with a practical food sense. It combines the "by grams" and the "by guess" cooking. For comparisons, one needs to know what good food standards are; what causes failures. Here lies a moral behind summer jobs, preparing and cooking food at home, in camps and resorts. When a recipe is not acceptable, we want to know why, and what we should do to improve it. Actual experience helps to solve such problems.

Some of the recipes developed are our own inspirations and some are suggested by others. All are judged by a special group of tasters.

The morning mail brings a daily contact with homemakers, doctors, dietitians and home economists. There are requests for tested recipes, questions and news about other companies. Learning to answer mail is almost an art by itself.

Writing letters is not the only kind of writing we do—there is copy writing for the recipe release, "The Home Servicer," booklets such as our "Mother..., What About My Diet?", various recipe cards, form bulletins used in large mailings and the ever present miscellaneous or odd jobs.

Writing always involves proof reading. This is about the same the country over and demands accuracy. We check radio scripts, revised or new literature, diet lists, recipes and package inserts.

We conventioneering go in the spring and fall. Vivian Richie, '32, travelling supervisor of consumer promotional activities, is in charge at most of these displays. Miss Richie also does much of the training of our new women in different areas in the field, appears on frequent radio programs and gives demonstrations before large groups. She was a supervisor of our exhibit at the New York World's Fair last summer. Frequently she is in Little Falls for conferences to exchange ideas and make new plans.

To be of real help, reference files on many subjects must constantly have additions. This means reading magazines, journals and other publications for general knowledge—for new ideas either to use now or to be filed for future reference. We subscribe to a great number of magazines and often find news notes helpful.

Kitchen experiments also belong in the subject of filing, as do the approved recipes. Our system has been developed to fit our particular needs with a cross reference file. We can quickly look for a recipe either under the name of the product it uses or under an alphabetical list of foods.

No day is exactly like any other. Sometimes we talk to a home economics group and help to take them through the new air-conditioned, glass brick factory, where they actually see the food products made. Sometimes we give demonstrations. It may be that we attend a sales conference of territorial representatives.

There are never dull moments. Work with food products is always interesting for everyone likes to eat and experimenting with food is engaging.

The variety in a home economics department of a food company makes each day different from the last. One uses every sort of knowledge in widely scattered fields. An ability to write well helps in preparing company booklets and advertising material. Artistic ability is needed in planning attractive demonstrations while a general knowledge of human psychology put into practice, is an influential factor.

The technical part of the home economics department may sound dry and uninteresting but it is one of the most fascinating parts of our work. It is not only the basis of the experiments, the results of which determine our final product, but is a sure method of learning something new every day.

Possibly the most interesting part of our work comes in seeing practical application of classroom facts which we originally saw as abstract ideas. It's a good idea to retain those facts, for you'll use them all in any phase of professional home economics.

It is this variety in work which demands various abilities and good general home economics training.

Left, Ruth Kunerth samples products with another home economist. Right, Miss Edwina Nolan, equipment expert, and Miss Kunerth discuss plans for a new kitchen for testing the recipes.