

idea corner

A Public Service at the Food Market Level

This is an idea. It would benefit at least three components: the consumer, the home economics students, and the food market.

Often we're asked to provide field experience for home economics students. How about a mutually beneficial plan with the local market manager whereby one or more home economics consumer education students be given an opportunity to be "consumer helpers" during the peak hours in a food market?

The students must have sound knowledge of food and nutrition and/or household goods, be able to give help in selection, know the use of a certain item, and know about objective comparison buying. They aren't pushing one product over another, name brand over store brand, but state the facts. The shopper makes the decision.

The student consumer helper may wear an ID. She/he may be located near the vegetable counter, the meat department, or where canned foods are shelved. She/he may walk up and speak to a baffled shopper and offer help. Usually, the hurried shopper isn't inclined to seek help.

The students will, of course, have to be familiar with the information of the merchandise. This requires a plan and an agreement between the Extension home economist and the store manager. The store should pay for the services of the student consumer helpers, spell out the the store policy and procedures in

working with shoppers, and provide up-to-the-day information on any item (dated specials for instance), etc. The Extension home economist will cooperate with the school in preparing students for such a task, coordinate schedules, and evaluate experiences on a regular basis.

I believe this could be a real service to the consumer, a meaningful experience for the students, and a profitable endeavor for the food market.

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