

TRANSPORT VEHICLE IMPROVEMENT RELATED TO PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION

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Of the many challenges to the food industry in the physical distribution field, perhaps none is more important and has a greater potential for payoff than the improving of transport vehicles so as to make them better serve the needs of our constantly changing food distribution system. As compared to the transport vehicles which our transportation system uses to serve the needs of various other industries, there has been relatively little functional engineering to better fit trucks, trailers, and rail cars to the physical distribution needs of the various segments of our food marketing system. There are, of course, many reasons for this situation, but we should not allow them to cloud our thinking on this subject or use them to rationalize the present state of the art in this important area. The need for and benefits of a positive, well-coordinated and supported research and development program in this problem area are too great to be long ignored by those who stand to benefit most from its success.

Among the many important benefits that can be derived from functional engineering of the vehicles are: (1) Reduced overall transport costs, (2) speeding-up of service, (3) improved cleanliness and sanitation, (4) improved handling of products, (5) better product protection, (6) improved employee safety, and (7) better customer relations. The relative importance of and the distribution of such benefits among different segments of the food distribution

industry derived from such an equipment improvement program will depend upon: (1) The extent of the functional engineering, (2) the nature of the improvements in the vehicles, (3) the type of firms that might use them, (4) the type of distribution operations in which the equipment is used, and (5) the quality of management used in exploiting the equipment's advantages.

How well such a program of vehicle improvement by functional engineering might succeed will be directly proportional to: (1) The extent of the food distribution industry participation and support it may enjoy, (2) the quality of planning, coordination, and management that might go into the program, (3) the extent of carrier and manufacturer participation and support, (4) the extent to which the results of the program might be applied in the food distribution field.

It is time for the food distribution industry, as a whole, to take a hard look at this problem and the advantages to be gained from an industry-wide approach to its solution as compared to the present individual-firm approach. If this is done the odds are that, with adequate leadership, a successful industry-wide program could be developed
