

How Many Times Do I Have To

By Art Buchwald

Under President Ford's new edict, every government department must have a consumer affairs adviser. It is not generally known, but the CIA has had a consumer affairs adviser for years, but she has never granted an interview before.

Her name is Sarah Mataharry and under the Freedom of Information Act, I was given permission to visit her out at CIA headquarters at Langley in her test kitchen.

There were a dozen people working in the kitchen as Ms. Mataharry gave me a tour.

A chef was just placing a dish in the oven.

"What's he doing?" I asked her.

"He's testing a new recipe for Oysters Rockefeller. The oysters were all har-

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vested during a month without an R in it."

"But isn't that dangerous?" I asked.

She didn't say anything. We walked along and someone was whipping up a cake. "We test all our cakes right here."

The pastry chef was pouring in an entire box of cyclamates.

Ms. Mataharry got very angry and yelled at the chef, "Didn't you get the directive? All cyclamates have been declared safe. That means we are not allowed to use them any more."

She then took me over to a cupboard. It was filled with canned vichyssoise.

"Remember the scandal a few years back about botulism in vichyssoise? Well, we bought up the entire stock. Our agents say their victims can't get enough of it."

"It looks good enough to eat," I said.

"I wouldn't if I were you." She reached into a soup kettle and gave a teaspoon of it to a white rat who staggered for a few moments and then keeled over.

Tell You, Go Heavy on Red No. 2

"That's fantastic," I said.

"I think it needs more salt," she said. Then she took me over to a counter. "Here's something I think you might be interested in. It's a fortified breakfast cereal with vitamins, minerals, dried fruit and a special powder that will make your hair fall out."

"You people here really know your stuff."

"My job is to see that the CIA doesn't get cheated when we buy something. For example, the other day we ordered frozen pizza that was supposed to be sprinkled with lead. We discovered that instead of lead the food processor was using an inferior brand of arsenic.

"We got a consent decree from them saying that they would list the amount of lead on the package so every secret service organization would know the exact contents of the pizza."

Ms. Mataharry said the consumer affairs adviser at the CIA was not just concerned with food. "We also police drugs very closely. For example, the drug people were putting a top on their bottles of LSD so children couldn't open them. The problem was our people in the field couldn't open them, either. So we have a law passed that bottle tops on any drugs offered for sale to the CIA had to have tops on them that a 3-year-old could open."

"You do good work," I said.

"This is interesting," she said, taking me into a room where eight people were scratching themselves. "We're testing a new itching powder that will drive people crazy."

"Didn't you have an itching powder you were going to plant on Castro?"

"Yes, but it didn't do the job. We had to recall a million cans of it. The company that made it was forced by the court to pay for full-page advertisements saying its product could not guarantee the fantastic itch it promised. If there is one thing the CIA insists on, it's truth in advertising."

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