



The audience at the hearings in the Stanford Court Hotel ballroom listened intently to the speakers

By Joseph J. Rosenthal

Attack on Food Prices

Big business involvement in agriculture and food distribution drew most of the blame yesterday at a hearing here on soaring food prices.

The California Food Action Campaign, a coalition of consumer activists, heard half a day of statements from federal and state officials and farmers and consumers.

The hearing was conducted in the same Stanford Court Hotel ballroom where one of the campaign's declared foes, Del Monte Corporation, will be holding executive meetings today.

Del Monte representatives

declined to appear at the hearing, but did release a statement in which Corporate Chairman Alfred W. Eames Jr. said the company resents "being singled out as the scapegoat for the rise in the cost of living by individuals and groups whose motives, if not political, certainly aren't altogether clear."

Eames, who said the firm would not debate the issues "in a forum that is not concerned with the facts," also said that only two and three-quarters cents of every dollar earned by the firm last year represented a profit to the corporation.

The campaign contends that 100 of the approximate-

ly 32,000 food manufacturing firms in the country, make 71 per cent of the industry's profits.

Because of this concentration of power in the food industry, the campaign charges, "consumers are being overcharged... food supplies are being manipulated, food quality is on the decline, more than a thousand family farmers a week are squeezed out of business and meanwhile food middlemen are enjoyingsoaring corporate profits."

"This is not a fight against the family farmer or the small and pop store or the small capitalists," Assemblyman John Burton (Dem-

S.F.) said, "it's a fight with the large conglomerates."

But Raymond Lloyd, Regional Director of the Federal Trade Commission, argued that since 1967, enforcement of antitrust and trade laws have cut into corporate concentration in agriculture. He also said enforcement policies are being studied further.

William Matsun Roth, University of California Regent and Democratic gubernatorial candidate, suggested the need for more farm and retail cooperatives and the introduction of the European system of turning small plots of open land into mini-farms on the outskirts of cities.

The Food Action Campaign, which set up headquarters here last summer, is attempting to launch a public letter-writing and lobbying assault on lawmakers to head off alleged increasing concentration and lack of competition in the food industry.

The group includes among its advocates Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture James McHale who joined other speakers yesterday in blaming federal agriculture policies and corporate giants for at least part of the rise in food prices.

"There is need for national concern," McHale said, "and it has to start on a local level."