

# Co-ordinator Plans Parties For Consumer, Manufacturer

Planning six educational and social functions in three days for over 500 guests would be a big task for most women.

But for Mary Zehner, marketing specialist of Michigan State University's Department of Agricultural Economics, this is all part of the job.

Miss Zehner is the co-ordinator for all of Michigan's Consumer Preference Panels, and as the 40 Observerland women who attended the recent West-

land panel will attest, her parties are smoothly run and well-organized.

However, says Miss Zehner, months of preparation must go into each series of panels.

IN CONSTANT CONTACT with Michigan manufacturers, she begins selecting the products for evaluations three months in advance.

"We try to get a variety of products so I will be more interesting to the ladies," she explained.

"With all the new products coming out, we need the consumer's opinion. We must explain to those who actively participate, and discuss their working with the consumer, we need to have close contact with her," she said of the panels.

With the selection of the products, questionnaires must be worked out with the manufacturers. These relate to information about the homemaker's reactions to packaging, taste, appearance, amount of usage, price, and preferred size.

PANEL SITES are first arranged for general areas throughout the state. Specific sites are then arranged within this general area. In the Detroit area, two sessions a day were planned for Royal Oak, Westland, and Grosse Pointe.

About two months before the planned event, invitations are sent to all the women who have attended previous preference panels. Other invitations are sent to persons selected by random sampling. (The fifth name on each page of the phone directory) and general invitations are extended within area newspapers. Everyone is requested to respond if she will attend.

"Sometimes we get more people saying they will attend

than we have room for. In that case, we have to send another letter telling them there isn't enough room," Miss Zehner said.

WITH THE groundwork laid, small details must be arranged. A room is needed with adequate seating and display space, Food, silverware, paper plates, napkins and samples must be gathered.

One of the products must be selected as the topic of an extensive lecture by Miss Zehner. Research must be made on

all the products so that any questions by those attending may be answered.

"Transporting a freezer from place to place can be a problem," she said. "It's very difficult to get one in and out of a car."

A minor crisis came up at Westland when no one could find the rubber bands.

"I know my secretary packed some. Look in that box on the right," she directed one of her assistants.

WHEN THE PANELS finally begin, names are taken several times to be sure that the women who attend will be sent the final statewide evaluations. The questionnaire must be explained and questions answered.

At the close of each meeting, someone always asks, "When will you have another one of these?"

With a small sigh of relief Miss Zehner answers, "Just give us six months to recuperate from this one."



LOOKS GOOD — Mary Zehner arranges samples of fruit for the ladies attending one of the Consumer Preference Panels which she co-ordinates on a state-wide basis. (Observer photo)

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