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No adequate substitute has been found for agar, the gelatinous substance which comes from certain seaweeds, for bacteriological work although adequate substitutes for some of its industrial uses are now being employed, Dr. Leslie A. Sandholzer, technologist of the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior, said today in a paper read before the American Public Health Association in New York.

"Until the attack upon Pearl Harbor, the United States had been dependent on the Orient for most of its supply of agar (92 percent from Japan and China in 1941)," the paper, prepared by Dr. Sandholzer and Leonard S. Stoloff, also a FWS technician, declared. "Of this supply, 13 percent was used for the preparation of bacteriological culture media. The War Production Board, recognizing the potential menace to the health service of the nation by loss of the Oriental imports, restricted the use of agar to bacteriological purposes. The scarcity of agar and the purchase of it by the Defense Supplies Corporation to establish a stockpile have stimulated domestic production to a level believed adequate to meet the domestic requirements for bacteriological media. There are sufficient facilities to maintain production and careful screening of Lend-Lease demands is contributing to the maintenance of an adequate stockpile."

The technicians are now at work to obtain a definition of the physical and chemical properties of agar. Lack of an adequate scientific description of the substance has previously handicapped searches for a satisfactory substitute for its bacteriological uses. Preliminary work on these investigations has now been completed and it is expected that a final report will be ready within a matter of weeks.

It is hoped, Dr. Sandholzer said, that "promulgation of standard test methods and specifications for bacteriological agar will accomplish two purposes. First, it will direct present searches for bacteriological agar toward a definite goal. Second, it will provide the bacteriologist with a product upon which he can rely for uniform results."

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