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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO ENCOURAGE CLINICAL RESEARCH ON ANTI-CHOLESTEROL AGENTS IN FISH OILS

Following up its successful research findings on the usefulness of fish oil fractions in reducing high blood-serum cholesterol levels in animals, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Ross Leffler today announced the details of a stepped-up research and technical assistance program in this area.

Mr. Leffler explained that the plans of the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service include making available to interested medical and pharmaceutical researchers relatively large samples of purified fish oil fractions and the screening of 25 species of edible and industrial fish to determine whether the types of fatty acids present in these fishes are those useful in dietary and medical treatment of elevated cholesterol levels.

Other investigators are studying the effects of highly unsaturated oils on fat utilization by the body as well as the amount of dietary fish oil necessary to cause a useful reduction in serum levels, Mr. Leffler said. Nutritional advisory services on fish oils and edible fish products are being made freely available to dieticians and medical researchers engaged in formulation of special anti-cholesterol diets.

Donald L. McKernan, Director of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries stated that the Bureau has had many expressions of interest from researchers in utilizing fish oils and fishery products for human feeding trials. Large quantities of these oil fractions have not been available. To remedy this situation, the Bureau is undertaking the preparation of such oil fractions utilizing a pilot-scale centrifugal molecular still and will make oil samples available, free of charge, to responsible researchers.

The key findings of recent research which the Bureau hopes will encourage full scale clinical testing by responsible medical staffs are (1) the abundance of what are known as "unsaturated" fatty acids in the body oils of many species of fish, (2) proof that the feeding of these "unsaturated" fatty acids to test animals reduced the highly elevated content of cholesterol in their blood sera to "normal" levels, and (3) that the more "unsaturated" the fatty acid used, the more effective it was in normalizing levels of serum-cholesterol.

This latter finding was of most immediate interest to fishery researchers since fish oil fatty acids contain up to six points of unsaturation as compared to two points of unsaturation in linoleic acid, the active cholesterol-depressant agent in vegetable oils. Use of a properly prepared concentrate of these highly unsaturated fatty acids from fish would permit effective anticholesterol treatment with a minimum of added fat intake.

Bureau researchers pointed out that these unique "soft fat" features of fish oils make fishery products especially valuable for inclusion in diets designed to bring about a better nutritional "balance" between the hard and soft fats in the American diet. Many medical authorities have pointed out the desirability of increasing soft fat consumption as a possible means of controlling blood-cholesterol levels.

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