Executive Summary 1

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**Baby Food and Technological Progress**

From roughly 1850 to 1950, infant feeding changed dramatically as science, doctors, and motherhood were transformed by an industrializing and modernizing society.

- In the preindustrial western world, 95% of children were breast-fed, usually for a year (94).

- Only light, simple, thin gruel mixtures were given to children before 12 months of age (95).

- By 1950s, average age doctors recommended solid food was 4-6 weeks.

As early as late 1880s, forerunners of infant formulas appeared on the market (98).

Around 1900, but more prominently in the 1910s and 20s, we start to see a "medicalization of motherhood", meaning that scientists, doctors, and nutritionists argued that they knew better than mothers what's best for babies (97-99).

- Formula feeding was easier to measure and regulate.

- Medicalization stoked fears among mothers that their milk was inadequate.

By 1920s, home economists and dietitians were introducing Americans to vitamins and their importance in diet (99-102).

- Fruits and vegetables became a more essential part of a baby's diet.

- The general thinking was that if they were good for us, the sooner the better.

- Although Gerber promoted its product's high vitamin content as a selling point, it wasn't any higher than regular canned vegetables.

- As we've seen throughout the course, advertisers frequently overstated the nutritional value of their foods.

As canning industry grew and canned goods were increasingly accepted by consumers throughout the early 1900s, there emerged a market opportunity to mash up vegetables already being canned and market them as baby food.

- By the 1930s, canned goods were affordable, familiar, and advertising was hitting its stride (103).

- The rapid rise of baby food sales encouraged the Fremont Canning Co. to focus solely on baby food to change its name to Gerber Products Company (103).

- Production rose quickly in terms of number of cans produced (kind of like canning in general).

- 1930: 842K; 1931: 1.31M; 1932: 2.26M (103).

During 1930s, baby food marketing emphasized purity and wholesomeness, convenience, economy, and modernity (105).

- As with many other new products coming on the market, convenience was perhaps most emphasized.

- Gerber placed full-page ads in *the Journal of the American Dietetic Association* to persuade doctors to recommended baby food (106).

Advertisements played on mother's fears about not being the best mother they could.

- Advertisements argued that mothers were doing their baby's a disservice by spending too much time preparing food when they should be paying attention to their child (107).

- Advertisements also argued that women would be more attractive and desirable to their husbands if they worked less (108).

The creation, marketing, and success of Gerber baby food helped drive down the age when babies would start eating solid food.

- Baby food became both a supplement and a substitute for breast milk.

- The article focuses on Gerber but mentions other companies (like Heinz, which sold dozens of canned goods) as well. It's not clear how much Gerber is driving this change as opposed to the industry as a whole.

The story of baby food obviously depended on the growing success of the canning industry, although not much about canning in general was mentioned in the Bentley article, particularly how the industry built consumer trust through science.

- Similarly, there was very little attention to consumers' response to seeing more baby food on shelves. Did they trust it? Was there any positive or negative feedback like there was in the response to banning saccharin in 1977?

- Did the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, affect how much consumers might trust corporations to produce quality food for their children?

The emphasis on purity in baby food advertising parallels how health reformers of the early 1900s called for purifying milk and improving nature through technology.

- Milk was made "pure" and "wholesome" through techniques like pasteurization and homogenization were advertised as superior to the raw product.

- Milk, however, was becoming harder to produce and distribute safely as cities grew and dairy farms grew further from the city, whereas baby food was recommended more out of fear or precaution.

The emphasis on convenience and modernity of baby food echoes the kind of advertising used to sell refrigerators.

- Both were frequently pitched as something that was not only helpful but in fact essential, even when everyone was used to living without them.

In sum, the rising popularity of baby food illustrates middle-class Americans' wish to improve nature, make it more convenient for everyday life, and trust in a process sanctified by "science".