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UTILIZATION OF SYNTHETIC GUMS IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

BY MARTIN GLICKSMAN

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I. Introduction	284
A. Economic Background	284
B. Cellulose Derivatives	287
C. Completely Synthetic Gums	289
II. Microcrystalline Cellulose (Avicel)	2 90
A. Background	290
B. Food Applications	291
III. Sodium Carboxymethylcellulose (CMC)	294
A. Background	294
B. Properties	295
C. Dairy Applications	297
D. Bakery Applications	302
E. Salad Dressings, Sauces, and Gravies	305
F. Confectionery	307
G. Dietetic Foods	308
H. Processed Foods	310
I. Dry Package Mixes	311
J. Food Preservation Applications	312
K. Miscellaneous	313
IV. Methylcellulose and Hydroxypropylmethylcellulose	314
A. Background	314
B. Properties	316
C. Bakery Products	317
D. Dietetic Foods	320
E. Dehydrated Foods	322
F. Frozen Foods	324
G. Edible Protective Coatings	327
H. Miscellaneous	327
V. Other Cellulose Derivatives	328
A. Hydroxyethylcellulose (HEC)	328
B. Ethylcellulose (EC)	330
C. Ethylhydroxyethylcellulose (EHEC)	331
D. Carboxymethylhydroxyethylcellulose (CMHEC)	331
E. Klucel—Mixed Cellulose Ether	332
VI. Polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP)	333
A. Background	333
B. Properties	334
C. Food Applications	336



284

MARTIN GLICKSMAN

VII.	Carbopol											 			, ,		 						 	
	A. Background																							
	B. Properties					٠.						 ٠.		٠.		, .	 						 ٠.	
	C. Applications			٠.,								 					 ٠,			 			 	
VIII.	Gantrez An											 		٠.		 	 			 			 	
	A. Background											 					 ٠.		٠.				 	
	B. Properties .	,		. ,	,			.,				 					 						 	
	C. Applications		. , .		,		, .					 					 			 		,	 	
IX.	Polyox											 	٠.				 			 			 	
	A. Background								. ,		٠.	 					 			 			 	
	B. Preparation											 	.,			 	 	,		 			 	
	C. Properties									. ,		 					 			 			 	
	D. Applications											 					 				٠,		 	
\mathbf{X} .	Research Needs					٠.						 					 . ,						 	
	References																							

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Economic Background

Gums or hydrophilic colloids have been used in foods and in the food industry for hundreds of years to impart various functional properties to food products and thereby enhance over-all palatability and acceptability. The term "gum" has often been used incorrectly and ambiguously and has been applied to various rubbers, resins, etc., in the paint, rubber, and oil industries. In the food industry, the term "gum" is more specifically defined as any material that can be dissolved or dispersed in a water medium to give viscous or mucilaginous solutions or dispersions.

In the past, most gums were natural materials derived from seaweed extracts, tree and bush exudates, plant seed flours, and similar sources, and were almost all polysaccharides or mixtures of polysaccharides. Today a new and growing category of gums, which is still in its infancy, is that of the synthetic gums. Although synthetic gums are currently only a small fraction of the total gum market, comprising about 100,000,000 pounds of the total 3,000,000,000 pounds of water-soluble gums sold domestically (Anonymous, 1961a), they are steadily pressing at the position of the natural gums and enlarging their foothold in the field as newer and better gums become available.

Proponents of synthetic gums point to the giant advances of organic chemistry and feel that, as silk was replaced by nylon, rubber by neoprene, waxes by plastics, so the natural gum polymers are targets for the synthetic organic chemist. Although exact duplications may not be possible, or even desirable, sufficient of the functional properties can be reproduced synthetically to create marketing opportunities for these new materials.

As starting materials, the synthetic chemist has available two of



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