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In the 1860s, cottonseed oil was classified as toxic waste.

This is not hyperbole. Cottonseed oil, the oil pressed from the seeds of the cotton plant, was a byproduct of the American textile industry. The cotton was processed for fibre. The seeds were left over, in enormous quantities, and the oil they contained was considered a useless and mildly poisonous industrial residue.

It was bitter. It contained gossypol, a natural toxin that had been used experimentally as a male contraceptive. It was unfit for human consumption in its raw form. It was used to lubricate machinery and fuel lamps until petroleum displaced it even from those applications.

Procter & Gamble, in the 1870s, had been experimenting with vegetable oils in their soap manufacturing. The cottonseed surplus was cheap. They found a use for it.

In 1907, they acquired the rights to a German chemical process called hydrogenation: the forcing of hydrogen into liquid oil under heat and pressure, with a metal catalyst, to produce a solid fat. The initial aim was better soap. The result looked like lard.

That was the commercial insight.

They patented it as a food product. They named it Crisco: short for "crystallised cottonseed oil." They launched it in 1911 with a marketing campaign of considerable ingenuity, positioning it not merely as a cooking fat but as a modern, scientific, pure alternative to lard and butter. Pure because it was plant-derived. Scientific because it was chemically processed, which in 1911 still read as innovative rather than alarming.

They published a cookbook, The Story of Crisco, and distributed it to American households. Sales were 2.6 million pounds in 1912. By 1916, Americans were buying 60 million pounds annually.

A waste product had become a pantry staple.

By 1948, the American Heart Association was a small, financially struggling organisation. In 1948, it received a substantial donation, approximately $1.7 million, equivalent to roughly $20 million today, that transformed it into the most powerful cardiovascular health body in the country.

The source of that transformation was Procter & Gamble. The AHA, newly resourced and national in ambition, became the institutional voice for dietary guidance on heart disease.

In 1961, they issued their first formal dietary recommendation: replace saturated animal fats with polyunsaturated vegetable oils.

The makers of Crisco now had the American Heart Association recommending their product category as heart-healthy.

Ancel Keys, whose cherry-picked fat hypothesis had been looking for institutional credibility, joined the AHA nutrition committee the same year.

The dietary guidelines that followed: the guidelines that are still, in their essential conclusion, the guidelines of today, were developed in an environment in which the world's largest vegetable oil producer had seeded the most influential heart health body with $20 million.

Nobody mentioned the conflict of interest.
Nobody mentions it now.

The toxic waste is still in your kitchen.

It's called vegetable oil.

The heart on the label was paid for.