

The prime exhibit was a new method of magnetic levitation devised by a team led by Dr B. V. Jayawant of Sussex. For the demonstrations on show, the term might more properly have been magnetic suspension. They were objects weighing up to several pounds hanging a few millimetres below a.c. electromagnets. So far, the weight limit is 10 pounds, but Professor J. C. West, the director of the institute, optimistically says "We can float anything anyone wants, from a pin up to fifty tons". And heavy hints were dropped about levitated trains. The essence of this method of magnetic levitation is to include the electromagnet as part of a resonant circuit, and this arrangement overcomes the oscillations of the suspended object which arise with d.c. electromagnets. The profile of attractive force versus distance from the magnet can be arranged so that the circuit departs from resonance if the suspended object comes too close, whereupon the attractive force decreases and the suspended object falls. But if it falls too far, the circuit approaches resonance and the attractive force increases. At Sussex this week there was talk of using the principle as a magnetic bearing, in an ICI fibre plant and in an anemometer for the US Bureau of Mines.

The Inter-University Institute of Engineering Control meets with the approval of the SRC, and the director of the council's University Science and Technology Division, Mr C. Jolliffe, was at the celebrations to say that control engineering—like radio-astronomy—has been picked out by the council for generous support. He was unsure precisely how much the council spends each year on control engineering, but it is somewhere between £500,000 and £1 million, and the institute receives between £50,000 and £100,000. But it is still not clear how the institute fits in with the council's avowed intention to concentrate its resources at the control engineering group of Cambridge, Imperial College (London) and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. At Sussex this week it was jovially denied that the institute is just another way of persuading the SRC to part with its money. Apart from what sounds like an excellent MSc course which involves students in eight weeks of lectures at each of the three universities before they settle down at the department of their choice, it is hard to detect any concrete examples of the benefits of cooperation. A glance at the annual report reveals no examples of multiple authorship of papers by members of the institute who come from different departments, and the SRC is said to be disappointed that there is no large project involving all three departments. Mr Jolliffe, nevertheless, commended the arrangement to other universities. The chief obstacle to effective cooperation must be the distances between Bangor, Brighton and Warwick, but there seems no reason why departments in, say, the closely-packed universities of Yorkshire and Lancashire should not pool their resources.

SAUSAGES

Chicken with Everything

THE US Department of Agriculture has decided that the all-American hot dog may contain as much as 15 per cent chicken without anyone being the wiser. But if the hot dog, or frankfurter, contains any greater amount,

its chicken content must be advertised in small print on the package. The National Broiler Council, which had been hoping for a 25 per cent limit on unlabelled chicken, believes that a label of "frankfurters with chicken" is unfairly discriminatory to the poultry industry. Presumably it feels the same way about "chickenfurters" and "chicken dogs", names which advertisers have designed to combine honesty with sales appeal.

There is also a category of sausage sold under the euphemism of "all meat", that does not mean that the sausage is all meat (it contains fat, water and cereal), but rather that the meat is all meat. (Meat that is not all meat is meat mixed with fat and skin.) Under the new American rules, to go into effect in November, chicken skin may not be used in all-meat sausages; in frankfurters, it may appear in proportions no greater than that which it appears in the chicken itself. There must be no poultry kidney or sex glands minced into cooked sausages (a definition which embraces a number of other delicacies such as bologna, Vienna sausage and knockwurst) and no more than one per cent of bone residue, but these last simply extend existing regulations.

The real battle, one which President Nixon has joined, concerns the fat content of the frankfurter. He is allied with the anti-cholesterol faction who want to see no more than 30 per cent of fat in hot dogs. The Agriculture Department is plumping for 33 per cent and the industry 35 to 37 per cent. The final decision should be announced soon. The water content will probably remain stationary at 10 per cent.

What goes in the favourite national sausage is never a dull subject. The battle over water content raged in Germany a few years ago and Britain's own rules are spelled out fairly meticulously in the Sausage and Other Meat Product Regulations of 1967. Simply to read it, however, may put one off processed meat for life. Anything described, for example, as "meat curry with rice" need have a meat content of only 15 per cent and even the "meat" is given the broadest possible definition: the flesh, including fat, skin, rind, gristle, sinew and permitted offal. In Britain as in America, there is a superior category known as "lean meat" which means the total weight of lean meat free of visible fat. The interest in the new American rules is not only that they classify chicken as a second-class sort of meat but that they govern what must be printed on the packet. Rules laid down by governments for the producer are one thing. Rules that insist that consumers (at least those willing to risk myopia in the supermarket) be allowed to know what exact proportions of fat, meat and water they are buying when they choose cheap, quickly cooked foods are something else again, and something better.

ANIMALS

Fewer Tortoises in Britain

A SIGN that the craze for exotic pets in Britain may be on the decline can be found in the latest figures for the issue of import licences in 1968 published by the Department of Education and Science (HMSO, 4s). Tortoises are the chief beneficiaries. In previous years, the Advisory Committee set up by the Animals (Restriction of Importation) Act, 1964, has complained about