Grocery chains join sugar protest

By ROBERT DIETSCH
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WASHINGTON — About 30 supermarket chains have joined in a growing effort to persuade consumers to use less sugar and to buy goods with relatively little or no sugar in them.

According to Albert E. Rees, former Princeton University economist who directs the government's Council on Wage-Price Stability, soft drink producers have joined the "save-on-sugar" campaign by trimming prices of their low-calorie products below those for high-sugar drinks.

REES NOTED that "U.S. sugar consumption is 102 pounds per person per year. Three-quarters of this sugar consumed is contained in such products as soft drinks, breakfast cereals, candy, bakery items and canned goods."

At the beginning of 1974, sugar retailed for about 18 cents a pound. Today, it retails for about 65 cents a pound.

That increase has brought outcry from consumers, some supermarket rationing and a pending two-day public investigation by Rees' agency. Hearings are set for Nov. 25-26 in Washington.

The sugar price rise has been linked to rising demand in the face of falling supply, speculation by Arab countries and adverse weather conditions which cut into beet sugar crops in Europe and the Soviet Union.

BUT REES insists: "We've heard all the rumors — that there has been hoarding by consumers, hoarding by refin-