

TENTH ANNIVERSARY SUMMARY

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The first Nutrient Data Bank Conference was convened in Seattle, Washington on April 15-16, 1976. It was jointly sponsored by the American Dietetic Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. The attendees invited to participate in this initial conference were actively involved in the use of computers in nutrition. The individuals represented health care organizations, universities, and federal agencies. They were nutritionists, dietitians, physicians, economists, and computer programmers. The thirty participants were divided into four task forces to consider the following issues: (1) record formats for data transfer, (2) data needs, (3) software capabilities, and (4) mechanisms for data dissemination.

During the first session of the initial conference, Dr. Robert Rizik discussed the plans for revision of USDA Handbook No. 8 and the creation of data bases to maintain the individual and aggregated food composition data. Much of the time spent in task force sessions focused on these proposed plans. Some recommendations were offered relative to the length of keys on the data records and conventions for loading data on magnetic tapes for distribution.

As conferees we were both excited and frustrated. All were excited by the prospect of more adequate food composition data and by accounts of innovative ways to use the computer in the field of nutrition. We were frustrated because so much work remained before the new data would be available.

Several participants agreed to share samples of their computer outputs by analyzing the same one-day dietary record. Joan Karkeck, editor of the proceedings, appended the sample output to the report of the conference. Much to our surprise, the results differed greatly. This situation caused us to realize that we must be concerned about methodological problems as well as food composition data.

The Nutrient Data Bank Conference became an annual conference when participants were invited to Utah State University in Logan, Utah in 1977 to continue the deliberations initiated in Seattle the previous year. Representatives from the food industry shared information about their role as data generators and data users. Subsequent conferences were held

Annually in Arlington, Virginia, Cleveland, East Lansing, Omaha, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Amherst, Massachusetts. Each of these conferences occurred as a result of the dedicated and voluntary effort of individuals living in the vicinity of the meeting site. Contributions to support the conferences have come from government, academic institutions, food industry, and software developers.

The Nutrient Data Bank Conference has remained viable during the past decade as a collaborative effort without a formal, legal structure. Although an organizational structure was proposed in 1979, the majority of the participants favored continuing to convene as a group of mutually concerned users of nutrient data without the requirements of a formal organization. Participants were encouraged to volunteer for a number of committees. A steering committee was formed with representation from each of the committees and the conference hosts. At each conference, individuals are offered the opportunity to volunteer for a committee. Each year more people learn about the conference and become actively involved in the collaboration. A mailing list maintained by Betty Perloff has grown to include over 900 names. After this conference, that number will exceed 1,000. Periodically, newsletters are sent to share information about conference activities and other topics of interest. Instead of dues, participants donate their time and effort and support of the conference activities.

The programs for the conferences have focused on the use of food constituent data in a variety of settings for numerous purposes. The generation and availability of nutrient data has been described by USDA staff. Dietary surveys conducted by USDA and HHS have been described. Data quality and analytic techniques have been reviewed. Methodological issues have been addressed relative to dietary record data collection and computation. Numerous applications for nutrient data bases have been described.

During the past decade, developers have been active in packaging their data bases for use by others. The advent of the microcomputer has hastened expansion in the software marketplace. Through the efforts of Donna Hay and Tony Fisher, the Nutrient Data Bank Directory was initiated as a project of the Conference to provide comparative information about those data bases. The first edition of the directory, prepared in 1980, included 28 systems. In 1982, the second edition contained 39 systems; in 1983, the third edition included 55 systems; in 1984, the fourth edition included 69 systems; (this year's supplement to the fourth edition added 18 new systems for a total of 87); and when the fifth edition is released in 1985, over 90 systems will be included.

The conference also fulfills an educational role for novices who are interested in learning about computerized nutrient analysis functions. Several years ago, a pre-conference program was instituted to meet the needs of inexperienced users. Although this program was elementary in nature, many experienced users continue to attend this portion of the

conference also. This year's conference has devoted a half-day session to the needs of new users.

International visitors have attended the conference to learn about developments in the United States and Canada. As the conference has grown in size and stability, we have been invited to represent North American interests in the International Network of Food Data Systems (INFOODS). Several participants in the Nutrient Data Bank Conference have been invited during the past year to serve on INFOODS working groups.

Responsible use of nutrient data is a concern of individuals active in the Nutrient Data Bank Conference. We have encouraged editors of professional journals to assure that references to nutrient data bases are appropriately documented in manuscripts. In 1983, conference participants began to deliberate the desirability and feasibility of standards or guidelines relative to the use of nutrient data bases. This issue continues to be unresolved.

The conference continues to be a forum relevant to those of us interested in nutrient data and analysis systems. We have seen much transition during the past decade and anticipate much more. We welcome new attendees to the conference. We hope that you will assist others to understand the issues surrounding the use of nutrient data and will help facilitate accomplishments in this area.

Our Bay Area hosts are offering a lovely setting for our Tenth Anniversary celebration. We anticipate an outstanding program supplemented by opportunities to address issues and exchange ideas. We are assured of an enjoyable experience as we conclude our first decade of the National Nutrient Data Bank Conferences here in San Francisco.