

# APPENDIX IV

## Statement of Dr. Robert Nesheim Chairman, Nutrition Panel of the Food Advisory Committee

### Nutrition Information Assessment

Although Congress has passed dozens of bills affecting the nutritional status of Americans, surprisingly little is known about the nutritional status of this Nation. In an effort to alleviate hunger and the manifold problems related to it, numerous food delivery programs have been legislated and implemented. These programs are aimed at providing food to the target populations believed to be most in need of supplemental nutritional assistance. Thus these programs attempt to provide a level of nutritional sufficiency to the target population. This assumption raises many poignant questions relating to the quantity and quality of the information which Congress received prior to making these determinations. How is the target group

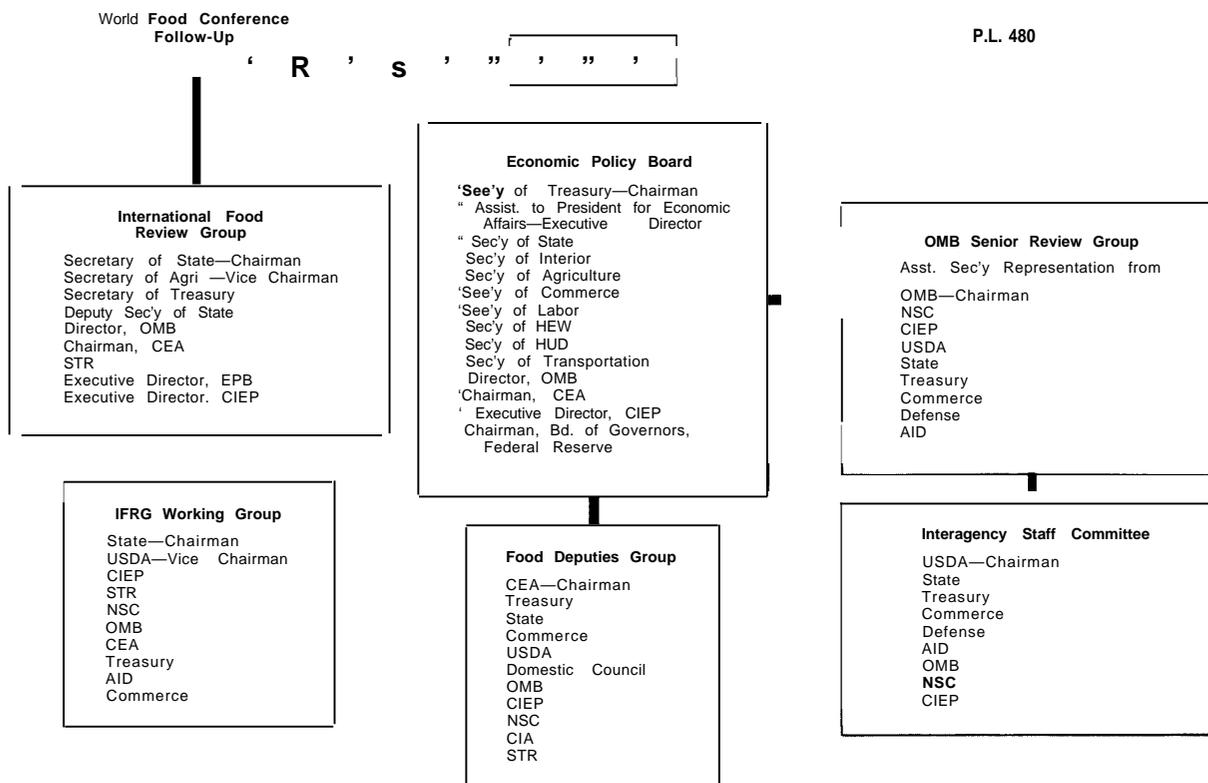
selected? Who are the nutritionally deficient in this Nation? What are their deficiencies? Why do deficiencies exist in their diets? Reasons include:

- a. Inadequate purchasing power,
- b. Poor selection of food items from money available,
- c. Cultural food habits,
- d. Inadequate preparation facilities, etc.

What are the nutritional requirements of the population? Are these programs, in fact, meeting their intended objectives?

Because of the serious implications these questions raise as to the adequacy of channels of nutrition communication and the quality of information

Figure 21.—Executive organization for food issues



\*Executive Committee Members

available, the nutrition panel will explore in depth the nature of available and necessary nutrition information and examine how it might be used in Congress.

In an effort to assess the extent and adequacy of nutritional information, it is essential to study the various components of the nutrition process and the information flow related to it?

Although several studies are presently being undertaken or considered which involve analysis of various components that we will evaluate, it is important to note from the outset that their thrust is not identical to ours.

The National Center for Health Statistics, HEW, is now administering Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (HANES) to obtain data for use in national health program planning. Although the information is being collected on a rather small scale, this will be among the information networks that our assessment will evaluate. Furthermore, the Administration is considering the establishment of a multiagency Federal food consumption data bank. It is anticipated that our assessment will be of assistance in establishing and implementing such a system. It should also be pointed out that the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences will be updating the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) guidelines in the near future. Such an effort, however, will not overlap or infringe upon the nutrition panel's proposed undertaking.

This assessment will, in fact, analyze the information input and utility of the RDA to the consumer and, if necessary, propose improvements. It is anticipated that our assessment may utilize and analyze other studies being done, but it is not expected to duplicate the research efforts of these studies.

Before Congress makes any decisions regarding food delivery programs, members should be aware of the nutritional state in this Nation. Thus it is imperative that a knowledge of the nutritional status of the population and its various segments be obtained. Several attempts have been and are presently being made to accomplish this formidable task,

Presently, there are government agencies gathering varied and often overlapping nutrition information. Both the USDA and HEW are involved in food delivery programs and have, to some extent, gathered nutritional information and statistics

relating to the Nation's population. There is, however, no clear, concise understanding of exactly what or how much information each agency collects or distributes or whether the frequency of the surveys is adequate. Neither has there been an analysis of the collection processes. If a national surveillance system is to be implemented, an evaluation of the information presently being collected would be a first step. This system should indicate the magnitude and extent of nutritional deficiencies by geographical area, income level, age group, ethnic group, and other identifiable characteristics. It would be necessary to evaluate proposals for surveillance systems considering such questions as: How should the sample to be monitored be drawn? Are there particular groups which should be observed because of suspected nutritional problems? Should the information be gathered by a government agency or through a contractual agreement with a private firm?

How often should the information be reported? How shall it be collected? Moreover, it would be necessary to consider the type of information which might be collected: Should the monitoring be conducted on a random sample of the population or merely on certain specified target groups? Should the existing food delivery systems be monitored for effectiveness in their ability to reach their target groups and/or for the nutritional quality of the food delivered? Nutrition surveys tend to be expensive and time-consuming. Are there innovative approaches that can yield timely and useful information on a cost-effective basis?

These are some of the most obvious questions, the answers to which would help Congress determine if a survey and surveillance are feasible, or even desirable. Our objective will be to explore the questions that would have to be addressed in establishing a surveillance system, evaluate the information that we have presently and/or need to obtain, and outline the alternative surveillance options available to Congress.

### **Food Consumption**

Since people require nutrients but eat foods to obtain these nutrients, it is important that we have sound information on what people eat. First, we must collect and analyze the existing surveys of food consumption, most notably the USDA's Household Food Consumption Survey (HFCS). This should be evaluated with regard to the adequacy of

the survey's consideration of differences between the total household consumption and the consumption level of individual family members, as well as differences between consumption levels based on age, sex, ethnic group, income, and geographical area. Varying food consumption habits result in deviations in nutrient intake.

Thus, it is essential to monitor food consumption habits to maintain information on the nutritional status of key segments of the population and thus gain some insight into the nutritional status of the population. In this respect, we should analyze the differences in quality and type of food consumption for each group and the effect of these differences on the health of individuals within a particular group. The end result will be to state the options available for implementing a survey of food consumption with cost and feasibility alternatives.

We will, at the same time, attempt to synthesize the existing information into a cohesive framework. In doing so, we will gain insight into the quantity and quality of information that is currently available, how these sources of information contrast with each other, and how they can be improved.

### **Food Composition**

Because people eat food but require nutrients, it is essential to determine the nutrient composition of specific foods, both processed and unprocessed. Many recommendations have been made as to possible methods of analyzing food composition. It is important to determine what these theories are, how they relate to each other, and where they differ. Additionally, these must be assessed in terms of their ability to be implemented in a continuous and consistent manner for all foods.

The USDA has for years been determining and recording the composition of a broad spectrum of the foods available for American consumption. Known as Handbook 8, this volume has been relied upon by all segments of the food delivery chain for ready reference on food composition. Thus, one task before the nutrition panel will be to examine Handbook 8 to determine if it provides a comprehensive analysis in terms of foods surveyed and nutrients enumerated, ability to remain" current, validity of findings, and dissemination of information to the public in a comprehensive manner.

Consideration should also be given to the following:

- Which nutrients are or should be included 'in the analysis?
- Does the handbook properly reflect the influence of processing and storage on nutrient content of foods as delivered to the consumer?
- Does the processing and storage technology differentially affect the nutrient content of food? What are the trade-offs in terms "of food availability, nutrient preservation and economic viability?

Thus, the assessment should evaluate whether it is, in fact, possible to analyze the nutrient content of foods, validly and in a meaningful manner, in light of the technology applied in the marketing process, and to summarize it effectively.

### **Nutrition Requirements**

Nutrition is intrinsically related to health. It is impossible, however, to recommend nutrient intake levels for individuals without an evaluation of the nutrient requirements of these individuals. Moreover, an assessment of nutrient requirements should evaluate the feasibility of considering the varied requirements of different segments of the population based on age, sex, present state of health, and environmental situation,

Any assessment of nutrient requirements should also examine the RDA—what it is, what information it utilizes and provides, and how effective it is. Particular attention should be given to the RDA and its users, since this is used extensively in measuring adequacy of nutrient intakes, recommending diets, and evaluating nutritional needs. Other suggestions for establishing nutrient requirements should be considered and analyzed with attention to ease of obtaining information, cost, timeliness of obtaining results, and the validity of applying the information to the target population.

What we must bear in mind in considering each of these components is that this assessment will deal with information options rather than with policy alternatives. By enumerating the nutritional components and evaluating the available information in terms of quantity, quality, what information is needed and how, or if, it can be obtained, we will have completed the first step toward helping Congress to formulate a nutrition policy. If this is to be achieved, it is only with quality information in sufficient quantity that responsible decisions can be made.