

FNM News

FOOD AND NUTRITION MONITORING NEWS • NUMBER 2 • NOVEMBER 1994

Progress on key indicators

In the last issue of *FNM News* we invited readers to participate in the process of developing a set of key indicators for monitoring changes in the food supply, food intake and nutritional status of Australians. We asked readers to send us a priority listing of the 10 food and nutrition-related objectives for which they considered it most important to have key indicators for national monitoring purposes.

Having distributed over 800 copies of the newsletter, we were somewhat surprised that the response rate to our request was only around 1 per cent!

There are a number of reasons why this might have happened. One possible reason is that the purpose of food and nutrition monitoring is not well understood or not seen to be useful by the majority of those working in the area. If this is the case, we will clearly need to address this issue in a future newsletter. Another possibility is that our readers are very busy people and found it difficult to find the time to respond to our request. We would, however, still like to encourage you to send us your views, particularly those of you who are in day-to-day contact with the food and nutrition needs and concerns of communities.

Please note that your priority list need not have 10 objectives. Initially we limited lists to no more than 10 to emphasise the fact that monitoring is self-defeating if it requires so much information that the resulting data are not readily obtained or rapidly available for appropriate decision-making.

What priorities have been identified so far?

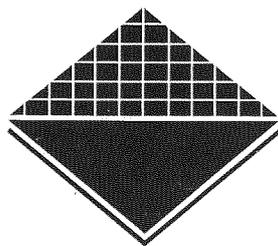
Fifteen priorities for monitoring identified in more than one of the responses so far received are shown in the adjacent table. The asterisks indicate how often a particular priority was mentioned.

From these responses it is clear that the main priorities are seen to be the weight status of Australians of all ages, the consumption of core cereals, fruits and vegetables and the extent and duration of breastfeeding.

The 1995 National Nutrition Survey will provide data on weight and height of a nationally representative sample of Australians aged two years or more. In addition, national information on self-reported weight and height of adults and on breastfeeding will also be obtained as part of the 1995 National Health Survey and, hopefully, future national health surveys will provide the opportunity for monitoring time trends in both weight-for-height status and breastfeeding.

Data on food and nutrient intake, including core cereals, fruit and vegetables, will also become

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AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

Priorities for national food and nutrition monitoring

Nutritional status

Iron deficiency	**
Overweight/underweight/ growth retardation	*****

Nutrient intake

Fat	**
Saturated fat	***
Salt/sodium	**
Folate	**
Calcium	**

Food intake

Core cereals, fruit and vegetables	*****
Breastfeeding	****

Food supply and environment

Number of products with reduced fat	***
Informative labelling of processed foods	**
Proportion of elderly (in need) with access to shopping/meal services	**
Food security	**
Food prices by areas	***

Knowledge/awareness/education

Proportion of schools providing nutrition education	**
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available from the National Nutrition Survey, however, at this stage it is not clear when the next such food intake survey will occur. There is thus a need to develop an approach for monitoring trends in food and nutrient intake that is not dependent on a future national nutrition survey but that can be implemented in the context of population health surveys at the regional and local level. With this in mind, the Nutrition Monitoring Unit at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is currently preparing a draft for a *Handbook of standard definitions and survey questions* which could be used for monitoring trends in food supply, food intake and food habits. Two versions of a questionnaire module which might be used to monitor core cereal, fruit and vegetable intake, based on approaches used in United States Behavioural Risk Factor Surveys, will be included in the Autumn 1995 SA Omnibus Survey. The timing of the survey will enable us to compare the results from the questionnaire modules directly with data from the National Nutrition Survey.

Because other population-based surveys to be conducted during 1995 will provide similar opportunities for testing questionnaire modules related to food habits and food intake against data from the National Nutrition Survey, we are trying to complete our first draft of this handbook by the end of 1994. If you have any suggestions for topics or questions to be included, please respond **immediately** you receive this newsletter so that we can incorporate **your** suggestions into this draft.

Contact:

Mrs Ingrid Coles-Rutishauser,
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Phone: (06) 243 4024

Survey news

Perth Dietary Survey

The 1994 Perth Dietary Survey (coordinator Margaret Miller) is in progress and results are expected by late 1995. Two thousand Perth residents are being surveyed using a 24-hour recall method. The dietary survey is being conducted in conjunction with the Perth MONICA study, which means that health data will also be available for analysis.

The survey organisers have also used the survey to validate a semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire against the 24-hour recall method. This questionnaire is to be used in conjunction with a nutrition attitudes questionnaire in the WA Nutrition Attitudes Survey, scheduled for late 1994. It will survey 1000 urban and rural people, focusing on some of the Dietary Guidelines, particularly fruit, vegetable and cereal consumption, maintaining an appropriate weight, and issues such as food security and television advertising of foods.

Contact:

Cathy Campbell, Health
Department of Western Australia

Phone: (09) 222 2057

1988 and 1993 Australian Health and Nutrition Surveys

Dr Katrine Baghurst, Head of the Social Nutrition, Epidemiology and Food Policy Program of the CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition, has informed us that results from these surveys should be available by early 1995. The two surveys were of national samples selected from electoral rolls and thus covered the population aged 18 years and over. The survey instrument was a semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire and a health questionnaire. The 1988 data have

been re-analysed to ensure comparability between the two surveys.

Contact:

Social Nutrition, Epidemiology and Food Policy Program

Phone: (08) 303 8876

1994 Australian Supermarket Institute Trends in Australia survey

The Australian Supermarket Institute is responsible for reporting on a series of consumer surveys that have been conducted in 1990, 1992 and 1994 and which will continue on a biennial basis. The latest survey results were released in October. Topics of interest include the weekly grocery bill, shopping patterns, an overview of shopping behaviour, nutrition, and food safety.

The 1992 survey was supported by a contribution from the National Better Health Program and the 1994 survey was supported through the National Health Advancement Program. This enabled an expansion of the questions about nutrition and health. In 1994, self-reported height and weight data were collected for the first time and are due to be analysed later this year.

Survey methodology

Data were collected from 1000 telephone interviews conducted in June 1994. Respondents were selected on three qualifying criteria: head of household; having primary or equally shared responsibility for food shopping; and having shopped for groceries in the past fortnight. The sample is stated to be 'a nationwide cross-section of shoppers, and all subpopulation percentages are projectable to the Australian shopping public as a whole'.

50 per cent of shoppers 'on a diet'

One question asked: 'Which of the following best describes your usual way of eating?' The choices were no special way of eating, low fat plan, vegetarian plan, low calorie plan and 'other' plan. An example of the data is shown in Figure 1 (in the figure, vegetarian and low calorie are aggregated with 'other').

A total of 41 per cent of men (n=301) and 55 per cent of women (n=699) indicated that they usually follow a 'diet plan' of some kind. The overwhelming proportion of those following a diet plan reported following a 'low fat plan'. In contrast, only 5 per cent (for both sexes) indicated that they followed a 'low calorie plan'. The proportion with 'no special way of eating' tended to decline with age, although a different question showed that the proportion of those

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who felt their diet could be 'healthier' also declined with age, as can be seen in Figure 2.

The 1994 (and 1992) results show that 80 per cent of respondents were confident that the food supply was 'safe'. The main food safety concerns were about chemical contamination (pesticides, residues etc.), spoilage and passing the use-by date, and presence of additives or preservatives.

The report of the 1994 survey is titled *Trends in Australia: consumer attitudes and the supermarket 1994*. Where they are comparable, data from the 1990 and 1992 surveys are given in the 1994 report.

Contact:

Australian Supermarket Institute

Phone: (02) 299 6126

Brief book review

Food and nutrition in New South Wales: a catalogue of data

Beth Stickney, Karen Webb, Cathy Campbell and Alison Moore put this substantial compendium together for the NSW Better Health Program. It succeeds in its aim of increasing 'the availability and use of current data in developing policies and planning programs'.

The catalogue is divided into five subject chapters: agriculture; food processing, food retailing and food service; food habits; nutrients and other food components; and diet-related ill health. By far the largest section is that on diet-related disease, and the authors have endeavoured to present, where possible, information based on the New South Wales area health services and rural health districts. The chapter on food retailing and food service in New South Wales presents an extensive coverage, of rural as well as urban areas. The chapters on food habits and nutrients (etc.) present New South Wales data wherever possible. They include local survey data and analyses of the State component of national surveys, particularly the 1985 National Dietary Survey of Schoolchildren and the 1983 National Dietary Survey of Adults.

Another useful inclusion is a section on the main data sources used. These are arranged by topic and include a brief discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the sources.

In all, a genuinely interesting book for nutritionists anywhere. Its use should extend beyond New South Wales political boundaries as do many of the nutrition-related factors covered.

Contact:

Beth Stickney

Phone: (02) 663 6067

Figure 1: Proportion of subjects following a low fat or other special dietary plan

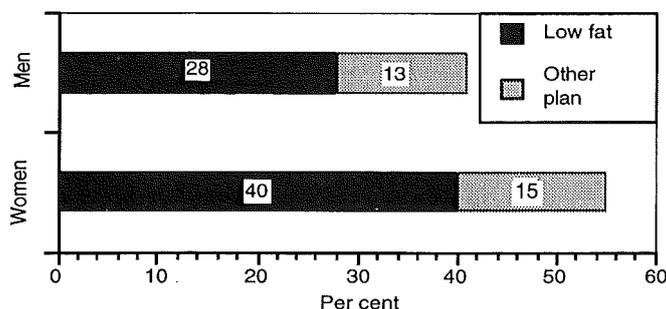
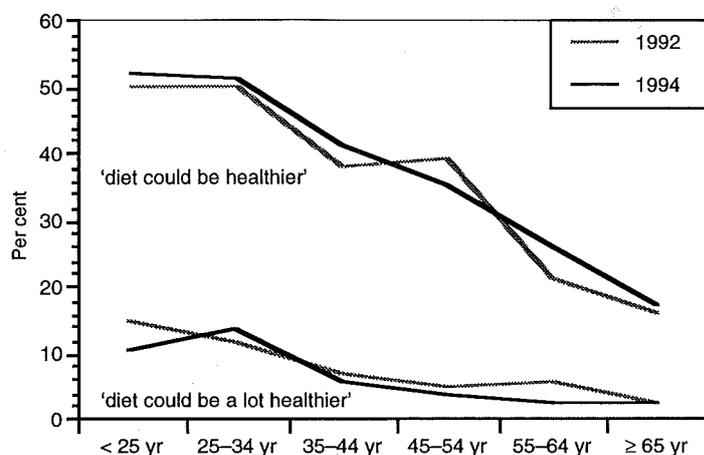


Figure 2: Proportion of subjects who felt their diet could be healthier



Publications of interest

From the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare maintains mailing lists for its regular bulletins and newsletters, as well as a list periodically advising of new publications. Those interested should request inclusion on the mailing lists.

Contact:

Publications Officer, Publications Section, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Phone: (06) 243 5037

Among the Institute's recent output are the *Health Outcomes Bulletin* (Nos 1 and 2), the *AIHW Australian Health Indicators Bulletin* (No. 1), the *Aboriginal Health Information Bulletin* (No. 18) and the monograph, *Assessment of self-reported height and weight and their use in the determination of body mass index* by Anne-Marie Waters.

The following Institute works are published through the Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS) and are available from AGPS bookshops.

Contact:

AGPS Mail Order Sales, GPO Box 84, Canberra ACT 2601

Australia's health 1994: the fourth biennial report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Health differentials among adult Australians aged 25-64 years (Health Monitoring Series No. 1) by Colin Mathers.

Trends in Australian mortality: diseases of the circulatory system 1950-1991 (Mortality Series No. 2) by Edouard T d'Espaignet assisted by Michael de Loooper and Carolyn Merton.

Cancer in Australia 1986-1988 (Cancer Series No. 2) by Paul Jelfs, Graham Giles, Dace Shugg, Richard Taylor, Anton Bonett, Judy Thompson, Ian Ring and Gypsy Durling.

From other institutions

Survey News: a newsletter published by the Nutrition Branch of the (UK) Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is issued twice a year and provides information on the methodology and content of national dietary, nutrition and health surveys in the United Kingdom. Part of each newsletter is devoted to information about the ways in which the data from these surveys are being used and to answers to user queries about the survey data. The April 1994 issue contained reports on Diet and smoking; Who are the 'low energy reporters' in the Adults' survey; Food frequencies and nutrient intake; and Reported energy intake, haem and non-haem iron and food choice in adolescents.

Copies of this newsletter are available on request from the Nutrition Branch.

Contact:

Miss Susan Lee, Nutrition Branch, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Room 260, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR, England

Health Statistics News: a quarterly information bulletin produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Health Section. It provides information on various aspects of the Australian Bureau of Statistics program of health surveys including plans for future surveys,

details of survey content and expected dates when results will become available. Contacts for information about specific surveys are also given. The September 1994 newsletter contained information about the 1995 National Health Survey, the National Nutrition Survey and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS). Those interested should request inclusion on the mailing list.

Contact:

Mary Patton

Phone: (06) 252 6429

The Food Standard: the regular bulletin of the National Food Authority. It is published every two months and provides information on the current activities of the National Food Authority, including details of applications and proposals to vary the Food Standards Code. The September 1994 issue contained information regarding developments in the Food Recall Protocol, Country of Origin Labelling, Functional Foods and recommendations on the addition of vitamins and minerals to foods.

Contact:

Adriane Seaborn

Phone: (06) 271 2244, or

The Information Officer, National Food Authority, PO Box 7186, Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2610

Australia's Mothers and Babies 1991

(Perinatal Statistics Series No. 1)

by Paul Lancaster, Jishan Huang and Elvis Pedisich.

Contact: The Publications Officer,

AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit,

Edward Ford Building (A27), University of Sydney NSW 2006

FNM News is produced as part of a National Food and Nutrition Policy project, funded through the National Health Advancement Program of the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.