

is a really good idea, especially now when nutrition problems are so universal and so complex. Barriers between 'hard' nutrition science and 'soft' social, behavioural, environmental and policy sciences no longer serve either side. This Project should be required reading for everyone who investigates or applies nutrition science. I, for one, will use this volume in my classes. Cheers to *PHN* and to the IUNS for taking this on.

Marion Nestle

New York University  
Email: marion.nestle@nyu.edu

DOI: 10.1079/PHN2005885

### Indigenous harmony

Sir,

I am now promoting *The New Nutrition Science project* and its findings and recommendations with members of our island food community here in Pohnpei in Micronesia, working in collaboration with and under the guidance of Professor Harriet Kuhnlein. We are documenting and promoting indigenous food systems in a global health project, whose aims and objectives are in harmony with those of *The New Nutrition Science project*.

Lois Englberger

Collaborator, IUNS Task Force on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and Nutrition  
PO Box 2299, Kolonia, Pohnpei 96941, Federated States of Micronesia  
Email: nutrition@mail.fm

*The New Nutrition Science project* holds much promise to develop our thinking in the nutritional sciences about the issues of people living at the 'grass roots' in the real world of global environmental and economic, and hence nutritional, change.

The IUNS task force I chair works with 12 indigenous peoples' rural communities located in all global regions<sup>1</sup>. The research is to understand how cultural, ecological and environmental knowledge of indigenous peoples have developed sustainable food systems, and how this knowledge can be supported and enhanced to ensure nutritional status, without excessive dependence on industrial foods or pharmaceuticals.

Harriet Kuhnlein

Chair, IUNS Task Force on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and Nutrition

Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE)

McGill University, 21,111 Lakeshore Rd, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, Canada H9X3V9

Email: Harriet.kuhnlein@mcgill.ca

<http://www.cine.mcgill.ca/IA.htm>

DOI: 10.1079/PHN2005908

### Reference

- 1 Kuhnlein H. IUNS task force: Indigenous peoples' food systems and nutrition. Report, May 2005. Available at <http://www.iuns.org>

### Reducing and integrating

Sir,

*The New Nutrition Science project* is a welcome initiative, given what still remains the dominant paradigm of biochemical- or chemical-nutrient-level reductionism. The reductive focus on nutrients and biomarkers (whether these be protein, the glycemic index or body mass index) removed from all other contexts and frameworks of understanding food and the body – which I call *nutritionism*<sup>1</sup> – still dominates most nutrition research, dietary advice and policy formulation, and much lay thinking.

Nutritionism provides scientific legitimacy for, and drives the development and marketing of, nutritionally-modified processed foods, functionally-marketed foods, fad weight-loss diets, and nutritionally-modified GM crops<sup>2</sup>. It is now also being overlain by genetic-level reductionism in the form of nutrigenomics, or 'genetic nutritionism', likely to pave the way to development of nutrigenomically-marketed processed foods. Thus, nutrition science is now used to facilitate the adaptation and integration of populations and individuals into an unhealthy, inequitable, unsustainable corporate-industrial agri-food system.

Neither the quantification of the chemical-nutrient composition of foods, nor the official 'Food Pyramids' originated in the USA<sup>3</sup> which largely consist of wholefood categories, have equipped citizens with adequate terminology or conceptual frameworks for interpreting and resisting the flood of ever more processed, reconstituted and 'fortified' foods. There is a pressing need for clear distinctions of foods in terms of their levels and types of processing. The late Ross Hume Hall, for example, recently proposed a ranking of four nutritional quality levels largely based on the degree of processing<sup>4</sup>.

*The New Nutrition Science project* rightly emphasises the need to integrate cultural and ecological dimensions with

biochemistry. I suggest this requires development of alternative approaches also *within* the biological dimension. One way of framing these alternatives is to engage with food primarily at the organic or wholefood level, and to subordinate and recognise the inherent limitations of the chemical and genetic levels<sup>5,6</sup>. This implies the need not only to *eat* wholefoods, but also to *think* wholefoods.

Gyorgy Scrinis

Globalism Institute, RMIT University,  
GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne 3001, Australia  
Spokesperson, GM Foods, Friends of the Earth Australia  
Email: gyorgy.scrinis@rmit.edu.au

DOI: 10.1079/PHN2005909

## References

- 1 Scrinis G. Sorry Marge. *Meanjin* 2002; **61**(4): 108–16.
- 2 Scrinis G. Engineering the food chain. *Arena* 2005; **77** (June–July): 37–9.
- 3 US Department of Agriculture (USDA). *The Food Guide Pyramid*. Washington, DC: USDA, 1992.
- 4 Hall RH. *The Unofficial Guide to Smart Nutrition*. New York: Wiley, 2000.
- 5 Trichopoulos D, Lagiou P, Trichopoulou A. Evidence-based nutrition. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2000; **9S**: 4–9.
- 6 Leitzmann C. Wholesome nutrition: a suitable diet for the new nutrition project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 753–9.

## Nutrition and evolution

Sir,

The special issue of *Public Health Nutrition* on *The New Nutrition Science project* was presented at the 18th IUNS Congress in Durban in September. This was welcomed. It is hoped that public (health) nutrition will be an important part of the agenda of IUNS congresses.

My comments will be limited and will basically focus on the article by Cannon and Leitzmann<sup>1</sup>. Other articles in the same issue take up some elements presented by them, but they make little or no reference given to those contributions. However, any article should be judged on its own quality and scientific merit.

*Historical bias*: The description in the article could be understood as if the centre of the nutrition universe is UK, Germany and the USA. Little of the rest of the world is given much merit for contributing to the nutrition sciences. From a history of science perspective that is not justified. Such a bias may be detrimental and lead to negative reactions from scientists working with the history of science<sup>2,3</sup>.

*The Giessen Declaration*<sup>4</sup>: The centre-piece of this *Public Health Nutrition* issue is *The Giessen Declaration*. The Cannon and Leitzmann<sup>1</sup> article starts every issue by

citing the Declaration. The Declaration is written in a normative manner, but cannot be seen as a landmark definition of public health nutrition.

There are few references to similar efforts in the relatively recent past. In addition to the writings of Allan Berg, Susan George and Francis M Lappé (see Box 1), one of the first formal discussions on public nutrition was linked to the IUNS Congress in Montreal 1997. Mason *et al.*<sup>5</sup> had published a letter to the editor of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, with a response to this in 1997<sup>6</sup>. A follow-up meeting was organised in Vienna at the IUNS Congress in 2001. At that time the IUNS was not interested in the topic and only reluctantly allowed a short meeting to discuss follow-up. The interest was so high that not everybody who wanted could attend; the room was simply too small.

The lack of such references in *PHN* Vol 8(6A) is a major flaw. The content, format and credibility would have been improved if the authors had used and given references to similar efforts and declarations produced over the years.

*Policies and politics*: Many asked in Durban about the political dimension. The response was that it was included in 'social science'. In Box 2 policy is however treated as a separate issue. Nutrition surveys are often used as a basis for planning, but expose also policy and programme failures, and uncover wrong or good political decisions. Food and nutrition policy is a specific element of public nutrition and should thus be included explicitly.

*Nutrition and evolution*: The paper includes puzzling formulations. On p 680, Box 3: '... the new nutrition science is not centred on *Homo sapiens*, any more than the universe has planet Earth as its centre.' What then is this new nutrition science all about? This creates concern about the ideas and philosophy of the 'New Nutrition Science project'. Concerns for the environment, the impact on global warming, globalisation, etc., are important<sup>7</sup>. They are considerable threats against the livelihood of people throughout the world. However the concerns are taken out of context and signal other ideas. Is this New Age, Gaia Theory, or something similar? If so, maybe this is not at all about public health nutrition and thus misplaced in the journal of *Public Health Nutrition*?

*Genomics, nutrigenomics, proteomics*: The importance of those areas in molecular biology and molecular nutrition research is growing. Such research provides increased understanding of how nutrients communicate with genes, how that determines the impact of what we eat, and provides new diagnostic possibilities. The description by Cannon and Leitzmann is only critical and negative to such an extent that those who know the science well would not take the text seriously. In the eagerness to describe challenges and pitfalls, but excluding the positive aspects, the authors may alienate many researchers who are well aware of the potential dangers. The text underlines the moral obligation of scientists, which I agree with. However, when this big scientific area is reduced to