Nutrient Data Base Survey Update

Tony Fisher

I am glad to be here, and I feel rather proud to be a part
of this organization thats gone as far as it has, representing
the interest of a large number of people throughout the country.
The topic of my report is Nutrient Data Base Survey Update. You
might be wondering what it is that I'm updating. I'll do a brief
recap of where my subject has been over the last four years. The
first meeting in Seattle allowed us to get to know one another
and come to some common agreement on where we wanted to start
heading as an interested group of professionals in this particu-
lar area. We set some pretty ambitious objectives that year and
the following year in Logan, Utah. It was in Utah where we came
up with the idea to do a survey of nutrient data bases. One of
the objectives of this group of individuals represented here
today has been to strive toward some mechanism of standardization
or means of sharing data. We thought a good first step in that
area would be to document what was being done right now. That
was the basic objective of the survey. We developed a manual
form designed to collect as much data as we possibly could. The
seven page questionnaire went to as many people at that time that
we knew about who might be doing something in this area. Last
year, at our conference in Washington, D.C. sponsored by USDA,
we presented the initial results of this survey. We'd collected
information from twenty-two institutions throughout the country.
Since last year's conference we've collected information from
fifteen other institutions. We've also identified twelve more
institutions which have some type of system. So we've identified
a rather large population which would ultimately be involved in
the final survey.

Information from thirty-seven respondents has been entered
into a computer so that we could keep track of it better, have a
simple mechanism for updating it, and, perhaps most importantly,
be able to cross-reference the various surveys. As an example,
if we kept track of the types of computers that each one of our
institutions was running its system on, then we could come up
with cross-reference listing which would tell us what kind of
computers are being used. A subset of persons using IBM 370 com-
puters, for example, could share information on programming. An
even more important question, and one that's been posed to me
several times in the interest of those doing research, "Who has
information on what nutrient?". People might want to know who
has information on some of the various amino acids. Having all

this information documented in a machine readable form was to be the answer to those areas of concern. Using the computer and its retrieval capabilities, we could provide this information in a published format on demand. These were some of the goals that we established for ourselves last year. We've developed a report format. I don't have samples of the format with me but some draft copies of it have been circulated to a few of the individuals here. It was my intention to distribute copies here but my baggage did not arrive with me today. The Proceedings of last years conference contains a report of the first survey which shows the type of information collected.

Our objective, which we have not reached yet, is to revise the questionnaire. Hindsight always being 20-20 vision, we thought after we collected the information from three dozen institutions that "wouldn't it have been nice to ask this question, or we should have reworded this second question to make it a little more explicit-based on the types of responses we got we could see that it wasn't asked in the proper way because we were getting misleading answers". The revised questionnaire will be sent to the people that have already responded and to those institutions which had not participated in the original survey. We have had four basic objectives: automate the questionnaire, revise it, resubmit it and then publish the results. We have achieved the first objective which, looking at it now, I believe was monumental. The information we've collected is computerized and we have the mechanism for easily updating it and adding more information to it. In the meantime we have learned of other similar surveys. Ida Jacqua from Los Angeles Valley College published a rather extensive survey containing basically the same type of information that we were collecting. A couple dozen institutions were surveyed by her. Darlene Myers for the University of Washington also published a survey of some hospitals related nutrition analysis systems.

The recommendation that I would make to this group today would be that these efforts be completed. I recommend that they be completed under the official auspices of this group whatever this group ends up being at the end of this conference. I suggest that a committee or a task force be comprised of all those individuals who have been working on these surveys up to this point. Information from each of the surveys could be entered into the computer system I have described. There is still a handful of institutions which have not responded to any of the three surveys. The three surveys are not redundant. Some institutions responded to all three but that is not the majority case. I think it is in the interest of all of to put these three exercises together and come up with one conclusive document.

The information collected up to this point will be made available not only to all those who provided it but to all participants in this conference.