Food Industry

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I'm going to start out by addressing three main points today, those being, first of all the current uses that we have for our computer system, secondly, a special project that we did last fall utilizing market research data, and last of all some possible uses we may have for data bases in the future and some ideas on expansion.

Back to my first point, on some of our current uses of data bases, probably our primary use of it right now is in support of our nutrition labeling function. Other uses include calculating the nutrient content of recipes and menus, as well as intake studies.

Being a food producer, we're most interested in what people eat, what their food habits are, and what the net effect is on the total nutrient intake of the diet. Last fall, in response to a request from our cereal division, the marketing research department along with the nutrition department undertook a study to determine the impact that ready-to-eat cereals have on the total nutrient intake of children. In order to conduct the study, we needed dietary intake data, which we acquired from the Market Research Corp. of America. We used the most recent menu census which was conducted in 1975. We also needed a new data base that would be more complete than what we had at the time, so after evaluating several different ones, we chose Case Western's as being the most comprehensive and perhaps the best one for our particular use. The data from Market Research was collected over a two week period from a nationally selected random sampling of some 2000 households. This included approximately 1200 children in the age group from 2 to 12. The data that comes from MRCA lists the foods consumed only, so we had to go about determing the nutrient contribution from that data. Food records covered both in-home and out-of-home eating and altogether some 3500 different food items were consumed by the population studied. Then we had the task of coding the data which took about three weeks. Since there were not 3500 items in the data base, we were faced with the situation where there was not an appropriate code or a code that exactly matched what we wanted. So in those cases we would use a number of codes from the data base that were representative or would be the characterizing ingredients and components on a pe centage basis. Appropriate portion sizes were then assigned for each food item consumed in terms of either base

dish or additive use; and base dish meaning they consumed it as a main dish and additive use whenever that food item was added to another. We tested out the system and when that checked out we ran the entire study. The two things that we were most interested in were, first, the daily nutrient intake of children ages 2 to 12 versus teenagers and adults and secondly, to see how the daily nutrient intake of children who consumed ready-to-eat cereal compared with those who did not. The results of the study proved interesting and useful to us. I won't go into detail on results, other than from what we can tell, the children among us seem to be eating better than the adults. It's probably because the adults channel all their well intentioned requests on the children who probably don't end up having alot of choice. And those of us who do have a choice, tend not to always exercise the best judgement, perhaps.

Although we did not really concentrate on the demographics of the group that we studied, I see a great potential for learning many different kinds of things by combining these types of data. For instance, in the future, we may be able to learn something about the nutrition knowledge of the American people by seeing the types of food choices they are making in light of increasing inflation and tightening economic conditions.

In terms of future uses for nutrient data bases, one direction we may be able to expand in is the area of nutrition labeling. Throughout the nutrition labeling hearings, several persons from industry have brought up the thought that perhaps Handbook data could be used in some cases for nutrition labeling. The most applicable area to that may be in the area of produce type items. This would be a great benefit, perhaps to many people, in that it would be an inexpensive way of expanding nutrition information, both from the standpoint of the consumer and the producer. I've heard it mentioned many times today that it would be desirable if we could increase the information available on a number of nutrients. I have one suggestion in that regard. If we can concentrate our effort on generic types of foods, we'll probably accomplish more. I think relative to the types of products put out by the food industry, they are very susceptible to change. Just about the time you think you have a handle on what's in a particular food it changes and I'm sure that's frustrating to you and it also makes it difficult for us in providing that information to you. We don't like giving out antiquated information either.