

THE USES OF NUTRIENT DATA BASES

IN ANY INDUSTRY SITUATION

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Nutritionists working for industry are in a unique position. Their jobs encompass a variety of activities from nutrition labeling and nutrition claim documentation, to the nutrition education of their fellow employees as well as consumers in general. Because of this wide variety of functions there are a number of uses for a nutrient data base.

General Mills' nutritionists first started using a nutrient data base in the early 1970's with the introduction of nutrition labeling. Since that time, the data base has been expanded to encompass the wide variety of the company's needs. The current system now runs on a Hewlett-Packard computer with an interactive terminal and printer in the department.

The primary source of the nutrient information is the Michigan State Nutrient Data Bank. Additionally, the nutrient analyses for every General Mills ingredient and food product have been included in the data base.

A number of programs were developed to enable the nutritionists to readily access this nutrient data. These programs include:

1. View Ingredients - Enables user to look at or compare the nutrient content of any foods on the data base on a 100 gram, per serving or percent RDA basis.
- 2.. Update Ingredients- Allows user to enter new foods, change nutrient values of existing ingredients or delete ingredients from the data base.
3. Update and Compute Formulas - Enables user to enter the combination of a number of ingredients either for a product formula or consumer recipe and view the resultant nutrient content on a 100 gram, per serving or percent RDA basis

The development of this system entailed many dedicated hours both on the part of the programmer as well as the staff. However, through the process we learned how to best handle such a situation. There are four basic suggestions for a person in the process of or considering developing a new nutrient data base access system:

1. Train the programmer so that he/she fully understands how the data is to be used by the staff.
2. Designate one staff member as the contact person within the department for the programmer.
3. Initiate weekly status meetings with the system's programmer to evaluate the system's progress.
4. Insist that the programmer clearly document the system. This makes future updates much simpler.