

SETTING UP REGIONAL NUTRIENT DATA BANK USERS GROUPS

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Working in the areas of nutrient data banks and dietary methodology can be confusing and overwhelming but also fun and challenging. Sometimes we are presented with problems of new terminology, conflicting terminology, new technology, conflicting technology, and lack of nutrient data. To share some of the pain as well as some of the gain, a group of us in Texas have set up a regional nutrient data bank users group.

Our main purpose in setting up such a group was to identify nutrient data base users in the Texas area and establish a communications network. We felt that a communications network would allow nutrient data bank users to share information and resources so that we are not all re-inventing the wheel.

We identified nutrient data base users in Texas from four sources: attendees of previous National Nutrient Data Bank Conferences; attendees of a Regional Nutrient Data Bank Conference hosted by The University of Texas System Cancer Center, M.D. Anderson Department of Cancer Prevention, Houston, 1983; all universities in Texas with programs in nutrition and dietetics; and local (that is, Houston) dietetic association members.

To publicize our first meeting which was held last October, we sent letters to individuals identified from the above sources and put notices in the newsletters of the local and state dietetic associations. The first meeting was held in Houston at the University of Texas School of Public Health. We had about 40 attendees at our first meeting.

The Program for the first meeting included a brief history on the use of nutrient data banks as well as a perspective on future applications. These perspectives were further illustrated by 2 case studies presented. One case study was presented by a new user - - a dietitian from the Texas Department on Aging who was just beginning to become involved with nutrient data banks. It was her responsibility to find and implement a nutrient data base/nutrient analysis program for use in analyzing meals at feeding sites for the elderly. The nutrient analysis was important to show compliance with government nutrient standards. Among her many other constraints, was the fact that the software had to be compatible with Texas Instruments' computers because these had been donated to her agency!

Dietitians from the Texas Department of Mental Health-Mental Retardation highlighted some of the problems of "old" users including decisions to switch to newer technology (even when doing so would mean the re-analysis of hundreds of recipes and many hours of re-training time).

At the users meeting, we divided into discussion groups by application area: food service/government, clinical, education and research. Each discussion group was asked to identify problem areas. Some of these included: lack of management/staff commitment to maintaining the nutrient data base; competition for use of terminals to access the system; long turn around time; lack of nutrient data for ethnic or regional foods; and lack of educational software

for the university level such as a least cost menu program in the food service management area.

At our first meeting, we obtained information from each attendee including mailing information, specific information about the nutrient data base currently being used, and ideas for projects.

Numerous potential projects were identified. We have developed a mailing list of approximately 100 nutrient data base users in the Texas area. The mailing list has already been used 3 times - to distribute proceedings of the first meeting, to inform users of a Hispanic HANES Workshop held in February at the University of Texas School of Public Health, and to remind users of this meeting in Georgia.

Users were very interested in having a microcomputer software demonstration whereby dietitians (users) could demonstrate systems they were using, pointing out positive and negative features. Although this project has not been initiated yet, we plan for each user to analyze the same standard menu using different nutrient analysis systems and compare results.

Another project we hope to implement is a newsletter. The purpose of the newsletter is to announce professional meetings, announce and possibly review new publications, report the progress of special interest groups such as the ethnic foods group, and have a question and answer column.

Several attendees expressed a need for an ethnic foods interest group. As many of you may have seen yesterday in the workshop presented by Pat Pillow and Linda Hicks, the many ethnic groups in Texas present special problems to nutrient data base users.

Another project of our users group is to be a resource to nutrient data bank users who are not nutrition professionals such as elementary and secondary school educators and researchers in the diet and behavior area.

A suggested library bookshelf is being planned. Hopefully, this will identify important written resources for new users in particular.

Although we have not initiated all of the projects, we are pleased with the interest and response. The communications network has been beneficial already as users with similar needs and interests have been linked in several specific instances. We feel that our users group will be invaluable next year when Houston is host to the 12th National Nutrient Data Bank Conference. Please consider this a formal invitation to attend next year.