Perspectives on Data Quality -- an NCHS Perspective

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NCHS has used the USDA Survey Nutrient Data Base (SNDB) to code and report Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (HANES) dietary intake data since 1982--beginning with Hispanic HANES, 1982-84. NCHS recently reported mean total fat and saturated fat intakes based upon NHANES III-Phase 1 24-hr dietary recall data which were collected between 1988 and 1991. NCHS plans to release data tapes and reports on total nutrient intakes estimates later this year. The Phase 1 estimates were computed using the USDA Survey Nutrient Database food composition data.

The survey databases which are used to code, quantify, and compute dietary intake estimates are an important source of documentation for HANES data users. HANES dietary data have been used to estimate total nutrient intakes, to examine changes in nutrient intake over time, to explore diet-health relationships, and to examine food sources of nutrients and other food components. Research applications such as these require well-documented food composition databases whose data can be traced to reliable and accurate data sources.

NCHS references or releases the food composition database used for each HANES. As the demand for information about new food components increases, so will the need for a flexible survey database system which is capable of providing rapid turnaround on emerging health and safety concerns involving the U.S. food supply.

NCHS supports efforts to improve the quality and specificity of the USDA food composition database. NCHS staff participate in several National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Program (NNMRRP) activities including the Interagency Working Group on Food Composition Data and the National Nutrient Data Bank Users Group. Resources and support from data users are needed to achieve the long-term goal of a comprehensive U.S. food composition database system.