

THE OBSERVATION POST

Philip H. Groggins



Human Nutrition at Home And on the Highway

DURING THE SUMMER months, milady and I took a coast to coast trip across the United States. A few days before departure, we read Ted Shane's article "Fare Warning: Roadside Indigestion" in the *Readers Digest*. According to that author, millions of motorists retain resentful memories of bad cooking and greasy meals instead of recalling visions of magic scenery.

Ted Shane does have some justification for his tirade. He probably wanted to make time, which is usually tantamount to making wrong restaurant selections. Furthermore, it is reasonably certain that he neglected to take his wife (if he has one) as co-investigator and adviser on eating establishments.

Calling BHN&HE: USDA

During the course of our travels we had an opportunity to mull over our experience with roadside restaurants. We wondered whether any government agency is concerned with this problem. Considering the number of travelers and the effect of indigestion on the disposition of many drivers, the matter certainly deserves consideration. I now find that no agency has specific responsibility for safeguarding the nutritional welfare of tourists as the Quartermaster Corps protects the physical well-being of soldiers at home and in the field.

Nutrition at Home

But we do have the U. S. Department of Agriculture—an agency with many-sided responsibilities in the field of foods and nutrition. In cooperation with state agricultural experiment stations, state extension services, and other groups both public and private, the department carries on a program of research and education related to many phases of production and marketing of food and to food utilization, including human consumption and nutrition.

Federal research in human nutrition began in 1894. That year, the Congress appropriated \$10,000 to enable the Secretary of Agriculture "to investigate

the nutritive value of the various articles and commodities used for human food, with special suggestions of full, wholesome and edible rations, less wasteful and more economical than those in common use." The responsibility for planning a program was assigned to W. O. Atwater, director of the department's experiment station work, whose own research was in nutrition.

From this nucleus of nutrition research, an Office of Home Economics—later to become the Bureau of Home Economics—was organized in 1915, in response to demand of extension workers for more scientific facts in nutrition and other phases of home economics.

A generation ago, the Bureau of Home Economics was a pioneering organization. Its emissaries and bulletins brought the results of painstaking research to homes all over the country. The findings of the bureau served to improve our way of living. Our people became more conscious of balanced diets and the value of proteins and vitamins. An educational campaign against malnutrition became possible.

Nutrition Research Expands

Since 1915 many federal, state, and industrial laboratories have become active participants in nutrition research. To a substantial extent these scientific studies have contributed to the increase in life expectancy. Properly fed people resist disease better and live longer.

During World War I, the nation became especially aware of the practical value of scientific knowledge of food and nutrition in a world crisis. By this time government officials and leaders of industry had come to realize that the best-fed nation is the most productive nation. Our military leaders also were fully mindful of the adage that "an army travels on its stomach." Notwithstanding the quips of cartoonists, statistics show that our warriors eat well. Thus in peace and war, nutrition plays an important role in raising performance standards. During World War II, the

Secretary of Agriculture and the Quartermaster General acted promptly and effectively to ensure the production of an adequate quantity of nutritious foods to give our military and civilian population and our allies a definite advantage in the conflict.

Objectives of USDA Work

According to USDA nutritionists, the goal of a national nutrition program is a well-fed population. To attain it, a nation must produce enough food and a proper assortment of food to meet the needs of health within the framework of food habits and standards. This food supply must be effectively marketed, for it must be available at the times and places dictated by consumers and in forms suited to their purposes.

Finally, and this is important, the public must be well enough informed nutritionally to select foods that will support good health and to use these foods in a manner that will provide the best nutritional returns.

Improvement in the National Diet

We can take considerable pride in improvements that have taken place in the quality of our national diet. Credit for these advances must go to the many groups active in formulating and implementing nutrition programs. But the pioneering contributions and subsequent leadership of the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, USDA, must not be overlooked.

Our Government has assumed considerable responsibility for programs and services that promote more effective production, marketing, and use of food. It fulfills these responsibilities through research, regulatory, educational, and service programs.

The Department of Agriculture, working with many other groups, both public and private, has made tremendous progress in achieving the production, distribution, and consumer choices needed to improve nutritional quality of diets in this country. Because a well-fed population is so important to national welfare, continuing progress toward nutrition goals is a proper concern of public policy.