

Letters to the Editor

At the most recent meeting of the Journal Editorial Board held in Durban in September 2005, it was agreed that efforts to encourage scholarly communication relating to research and views published in this journal, and other topical public health nutrition issues and events, be facilitated via this letters section. Letters in response to research and views expressed in papers in this journal will be supplemented with author's right of reply, to encourage active exchange in this section.

A recent special issue of this journal introduced *The New Nutrition Science project*¹, summarised in *The Giessen Declaration*², the outcome of a workshop held at the University of Giessen. This work states that to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, nutrition science needs an enlarged conceptual framework, including the 'classic' biological dimension and also social and environmental dimensions. A new definition, with principles to guide the science and its expression in food and nutrition policies, was proposed. *The New Nutrition Science project* remains a joint initiative of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences and the World Health Policy Forum. The project was presented in two plenary lectures and a linked symposium at the 2005 Durban International Congress on Nutrition (ICN).

Claus Leitzmann and Geoffrey Cannon, co-convenors of the project and co-editors of the special issue, report that at the Durban ICN, almost 100 delegates asked to contribute to the conceptual and practical development of the project, and that reactions from younger delegates, and from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, have been particularly positive. This dialogue and debate is important because regular re-conceptualisation of the core business or direction of our field is important and required.

The 'newness' of *The Giessen Declaration* and the challenges it presents is open to debate. This first letters section for 2006 continues this important reflection and re-positioning of how we think about nutrition science and its applications to public health nutrition. Bring on, join in and enjoy the debate.

Roger Hughes
Letters Editor

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References

- 1 Leitzmann C, Cannon G, eds. The New Nutrition Science project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 667–804.

- 2 The Giessen Declaration. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 783–6.

Building capacity

Sir,

*The New Nutrition Science project*¹ is very timely. I would like to see more involvement of young nutrition scientists and public health nutritionists in its development. I am one myself, and we are tomorrow's leaders, who will drive the agenda, so we should be involved now. For example, a summer school could be organised with young nutritionists to discuss, develop and further the project. I would be happy to help in the organisation of such an event.

On the project itself as so far presented, I suggest that more attention be given to the impact of rapid population ageing, especially in middle- and low-income countries. This can be done with an emphasis on overall life-course nutrition, which is often depicted using a spiral model, the motif of *The New Nutrition Science project*.

I write here in my personal capacity.

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Reference

- 1 Leitzmann C, Cannon G, eds. The New Nutrition Science project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 667–804.

Comment on New Nutrition Science project

Sir,

Public Health Nutrition has performed a great public service in publishing the papers that comprise *The New Nutrition Science project*. For those of us long in this field, the issues addressed by these papers are strikingly familiar. If anything, the New Nutrition restates well known ecological models of public health nutrition. But these have never commanded the attention they deserve, and it is high time to take a fresh look at them. Besides, expanding the definition of nutrition science to encompass social, economic, political and environmental dimensions

is a really good idea, especially now when nutrition problems are so universal and so complex. Barriers between 'hard' nutrition science and 'soft' social, behavioural, environmental and policy sciences no longer serve either side. This Project should be required reading for everyone who investigates or applies nutrition science. I, for one, will use this volume in my classes. Cheers to PHN and to the IUNS for taking this on.

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Indigenous harmony

Sir,

I am now promoting *The New Nutrition Science project* and its findings and recommendations with members of our island food community here in Pohnpei in Micronesia, working in collaboration with and under the guidance of Professor Harriet Kuhnlein. We are documenting and promoting indigenous food systems in a global health project, whose aims and objectives are in harmony with those of *The New Nutrition Science project*.

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The New Nutrition Science project holds much promise to develop our thinking in the nutritional sciences about the issues of people living at the 'grass roots' in the real world of global environmental and economic, and hence nutritional, change.

The IUNS task force I chair works with 12 indigenous peoples' rural communities located in all global regions¹. The research is to understand how cultural, ecological and environmental knowledge of indigenous peoples have developed sustainable food systems, and how this knowledge can be supported and enhanced to ensure nutritional status, without excessive dependence on industrial foods or pharmaceuticals.

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DOI: 10.1079/PHN2005908

Reference

- 1 Kuhnlein H. IUNS task force: Indigenous peoples' food systems and nutrition. Report, May 2005. Available at <http://www.iuns.org>

Reducing and integrating

Sir,

The New Nutrition Science project is a welcome initiative, given what still remains the dominant paradigm of biochemical- or chemical-nutrient-level reductionism. The reductive focus on nutrients and biomarkers (whether these be protein, the glycemic index or body mass index) removed from all other contexts and frameworks of understanding food and the body – which I call *nutritionism*¹ – still dominates most nutrition research, dietary advice and policy formulation, and much lay thinking.

Nutritionism provides scientific legitimacy for, and drives the development and marketing of, nutritionally-modified processed foods, functionally-marketed foods, fad weight-loss diets, and nutritionally-modified GM crops². It is now also being overlain by genetic-level reductionism in the form of nutrigenomics, or 'genetic nutritionism', likely to pave the way to development of nutrigenomically-marketed processed foods. Thus, nutrition science is now used to facilitate the adaptation and integration of populations and individuals into an unhealthy, inequitable, unsustainable corporate-industrial agri-food system.

Neither the quantification of the chemical-nutrient composition of foods, nor the official 'Food Pyramids' originated in the USA³ which largely consist of wholefood categories, have equipped citizens with adequate terminology or conceptual frameworks for interpreting and resisting the flood of ever more processed, reconstituted and 'fortified' foods. There is a pressing need for clear distinctions of foods in terms of their levels and types of processing. The late Ross Hume Hall, for example, recently proposed a ranking of four nutritional quality levels largely based on the degree of processing⁴.

The New Nutrition Science project rightly emphasises the need to integrate cultural and ecological dimensions with