TEACHING ASPECTS

EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NUTRITION

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The previous speakers have discussed problems in many areas of nutrition. We have heard about food production and the availability of food, about the interdependence of food and health, and about malnutrition which may, in part, be caused by poor eating habits and aggravated by food faddism. There is no doubt that nutrition problems are world-wide.

In the developing countries nutrition is a primary problem. There, a low intake of calories and a deficiency in various nutrients: proteins, vitamins, and minerals, result in the so-called deficiency diseases. These have almost completely disappeared from the European continent and from the United States, but in their places are nutritional problems which fall into the field of social medicine, having resulted from rapid changes in living conditions, specifically urban concentration, industrial development, and technical advances which have increased the life span. We must consider how to fight malnutrition wherever it exists, whatever its nature, and whatever its causes.

Awareness of nutritional problems led to recognition of the need for scientific research in this field. In the Western countries centers for the study of nutrition problems, institutes for specialized research, and scientific associations, both in universities and under private auspices, have been created.
This burgeoning interest in food and nutrition has spread to other disciplines including medicine, biochemistry, agriculture, and technologies related to food production. Nutrition was recognized as a separate science about twenty years ago when the International Union of Nutritional Science was created within the framework of the International Unions of Sciences. However, in Europe as well as in the United States training of teachers in nutrition and dissemination of nutritional information have not developed to the same extent as has research.

From the teaching aspect one must differentiate between nutrition training, which is mainly professional, and nutrition education, which deals with the education of the public.

Originally specialists in this field were essentially self-taught, and for a long time this seemed sufficient. However, about a decade ago, when research programs were extended and numerous forms of collaboration developed, the need arose to consider how to teach as well as who to teach.

To find ways to meet this need two international groups, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) organized a symposium which was held in December, 1959, at Bad Hamburg, Germany. Twenty-four European countries sent over sixty representatives to discuss problems related to both professional and vocational teaching and training in the field of nutrition. These questions were considered from the viewpoints of nutrition and applied dietetics, medicine and public health, home economics and domestic sciences, and agriculture.

One of the resultant recommendations was that a mission be sent to assess the status of nutritional education in various European countries, by discussing the problems with the government authorities and the personnel engaged in the field of nutrition training and teaching.

In 1961, when I was Chief of an Applied Nutrition Branch, I was responsible for creating such a mission. I spent a week in each of the following countries: Belgium,