Book Review

Food and Nutrition: Sustainable food and health systems

Edited by Mark L Wahlqvist, Danielle Gallegos
Publish by Allen and Unwin (Sydney, Australia) 4th Edition, 2020

The first edition of Food and Nutrition with Cassell as publisher and Professor Mark L Wahlqvist as Editor appeared in 1981. Its contributors were the Foundation staff in Human Nutrition at Deakin University. Deakin was the first Australian University to have a Department of Human Nutrition, commencing in 1977, and its staff had the opportunity to shape the scope and place of human nutrition studies in late secondary and higher education. Food and Nutrition enabled them to do this, together with other developments which included the formation of the Nutrition Society of Australia, formed in 1976, the advent of a Division of Human Nutrition in CSIRO (Commonwealth Science and Industry Research Organisation), headed by Professor Basil Hetzel, a Sydney University “Boden Human Nutrition Unit” in 1979 and the beginnings of Nutrition Australia (The Australian Nutrition Foundation). Until this time, nutrition studies were to be found in Home Economics in secondary education, and in Animal Nutrition, Nutritional Biochemistry and Physiology, and incidentally in a range of Medical, Dental, Dietetic and Health studies. Food and Nutrition found a home in most of these domains.

Its early editions helped underscore the importance of food habits and science in other wise nutrient-o-centric health studies. This is because it was sound in its food regulatory, food chemistry and science, sociology of food, life stage nutrition, and food and health chapters. The inevitable challenge for the sole editor, Mark Wahlqvist, until the penultimate 3rd edition to be published by Allen and Unwin in 2011 was to keep all these domains alive and coherent. It was achieved in part by a growth in page numbers. The 4th edition in 2020 has taken a radical step to introduce a reconceptualisation of nutritional biology as socioecological, highly relevant to the lives and careers ahead for young people. A former co-author, Professor Danielle Gallegos has become Co-editor with Mark Wahlqvist.

With her strong background in educational methodology, and in social nutrition, the book is robust on these fronts. It uses a professional toolkit device for learning so that life-long learning in food and nutrition may be established, for whatever workforce sector the student may aspire to realise. It adopts the IUNS (International Union of Nutrition Sciences) “New Nutrition Science” recommendations for the dimensions of nutrition, namely biomedical, environmental, societal and economic. These run throughout, identified by the relevant icon. The book uses an ecosystems approach to human health, which is a strategy to shift our thinking away from traditional, one-dimensional biomedical approaches towards a new transdisciplinary and integrated approach (Heasman & Lang 2015). Perhaps the most significant change in this edition is its emphasis on the future sustainability of food and health systems, which is its sub-title. This is reflected in less clinical nutrition detail and a more in-depth understanding, integrative and action-centred approach to food and health problems as ecohealth disorders. In these disorders, the pathways between the environment and disorder are understood by the reconceptualisation of nutritional biology. The editors have fortunately resisted the dismemberment of food, nutrition and health studies underway in the tertiary education sector as, for example, food science, life stage nutrition and community or public health nutrition are hived off to courses and books of their own increasingly science-disconnected making. It is a book that can still bridge secondary and tertiary studies, which was its aim almost 40 years ago. It is a salient food and nutrition foundation for, not only general biology and health, medical, dental, public health and dietetic studies, but also for agriculture, food science and technology, environmental science, food security and nutritional economics studies. This edition will be a timely resource for educationists and scholars mindful of the escalating global challenges in food and health.

Reference

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