

A CATALOGUE OF DATA ABOUT FOOD AND NUTRITION IN NSW

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Rational planning for community nutrition requires that policy-makers and service planners have convenient access to information about the food and nutrition system in the local area. A catalogue of existing data about food and nutrition in NSW was compiled, as an initiative of the NSW Better Health Program (Stickney et al. 1994). The major components of the catalogue were agriculture, food processing and related sectors, food retailing and food service, food habits, nutrient intakes, and diet-related diseases and conditions.

Sources of data included national census and survey data relevant to the food supply, food consumption and health (disaggregated by State, where possible) and several secondary analyses of these data; State-wide surveys of particular aspects of the food supply and nutritional status and market research reports. Local area studies were included where State-wide information was unavailable. Data were compared, where possible, to standards, or desirable practices (for food supply data) and national targets and/or current dietary recommendations (for nutritional status data).

Much of the information contained in the catalogue is not new, but some interesting results were obtained from secondary analyses of data, and from less well-known sources. The following are a series of examples of this information. In the most recent Household Expenditure Survey, NSW households in the lowest income quintile spent less on extras, take-away foods and 'meals out' than did families in the highest income quintile. Market research data revealed that school canteens were the greatest wholesale purchasers of prepared meals and snacks, such as meat pies, and also purchased large quantities of cakes and desserts. Initial breastfeeding rates varied among studies in NSW, but in most cases were above 70%, however, in nearly all studies the duration of breastfeeding fell well short of the recommended six months. The Consumer Price Index data showed that foods for which increased consumption is recommended, such as cereals, fruit and vegetables, increased in price at a faster rate than food overall.

Considerable information about food and nutrition in NSW is available, yet many gaps are evident. Compilation of data in this way affords an opportunity for people involved in food and nutrition research to identify areas where they can best make a contribution.

STICKNEY, B., WEBB, K.L., CAMPBELL, C. and MOORE, A.R. (1994). 'Food and nutrition in New South Wales: a catalogue of data' (NSW Health Department: Sydney).