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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY  
EXPECTED AT 9:00 A.M. EDT  
~~THURSDAY, MAY 14, 1981~~  
24 JUN 1981

STATEMENT OF  
BRIAN CROWLEY, SENIOR ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, RESEARCH, AND TECHNOLOGY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
AND  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS,  
RESEARCH AND FOREIGN AGRICULTURE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE  
ON  
A NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING SYSTEM

MESSRS. CHAIRMEN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEES:

WE ARE HERE TODAY AT YOUR REQUEST TO DISCUSS PRIOR GAO REPORTS  
RELATING TO NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING AND OUR ON-GOING  
WORK ON NUTRITION RESEARCH PLANNING AND COORDINATION. I WILL DISCUSS  
NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING FIRST.

NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING IS A SYSTEM OF OBTAIN-  
ING INFORMATION ON THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF THE POPULATION AND  
ITS SUBGROUPS. HOW EXTENSIVE ARE NUTRITIONAL IMBALANCES? WHAT  
ARE THEY? WHY DO THEY EXIST? WHO IS AFFLICTED AND WHERE ARE THEY  
LOCATED? WITHOUT SUCH INFORMATION THERE IS LITTLE BASIS FOR PLANNED  
DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT OF NUTRITION POLICIES  
AND PROGRAMS. THERE IS LITTLE ASSURANCE THAT CURRENT FOOD ASSIST-  
ANCE PROGRAMS COSTING ABOUT \$14 BILLION IN FISCAL YEAR 1980 ARE  
WORKING EFFECTIVELY AND ECONOMICALLY AND ARE CONTINUING TO ADDRESS  
THE TARGET GROUPS.



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A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE HAS THE FOLLOWING FOUR BASIC OBJECTIVES:

- PROMPTLY IDENTIFY NUTRITIONAL IMBALANCES IN THE GENERAL POPULATION;
- PINPOINT, WITHIN NARROW GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES, SPECIFIC TARGET GROUPS THAT HAVE NUTRITIONAL IMBALANCES;
- PREDICT FUTURE AREAS OF NUTRITIONAL CONCERN; AND
- PROVIDE DATA WHICH FEDERAL AGENCIES CAN USE TO MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE THE NUTRITION, HEALTH, AND FOOD CONSUMPTION OF VARIOUS POPULATION GROUPS.

CURRENTLY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS PROGRAMS WHICH ADDRESS PARTS OF THESE OBJECTIVES BUT NOT IN A UNIFIED OR COORDINATED MANNER.

PRIOR GAO REVIEWS OF FEDERAL NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING

IN RESPONSE TO THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 1977, THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) AND HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE (HEW)--NOW HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES--FORMULATED AND SENT TO CONGRESS IN MAY 1978, A JOINT PROPOSAL FOR A NUTRITIONAL STATUS MONITORING SYSTEM. THE DEPARTMENTS SUBSEQUENTLY AGREED TO PROVIDE THE CONGRESS AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO A GAO RECOMMENDATION. THE PROPOSED SYSTEM WOULD MEASURE OR MONITOR (1) NUTRITIONAL AND DIETARY STATUS OF THE U.S. POPULATION; (2) NUTRITIONAL QUALITY OF FOODS; (3) DIETARY PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE; AND (4) IMPACT OF NUTRITIONAL INTERVENTION ON SPECIFIC TARGET GROUPS.

THE PROPOSED SYSTEM WAS TO BE BUILT AROUND EXISTING SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING PROGRAMS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE PROPOSAL WAS

A GOOD FIRST STEP IN ESTABLISHING A TRUE NUTRITIONAL SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM, BUT AT THAT TIME WE IDENTIFIED FOUR AREAS OF MAJOR WEAKNESSES IN THE PROPOSED SYSTEM: (1) LACK OF SPECIFICITY AND AGREEMENT BETWEEN HEW AND USDA, (2) LACK OF AGREEMENT ON THE COLLABORATIVE, DECENNIAL SURVEY, (3) INADEQUATE CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO EVALUATION OF NUTRITION INTERVENTION PROGRAMS, AND (4) INADEQUATE COORDINATION MECHANISM.

LACK OF SPECIFICITY AND AGREEMENT  
BETWEEN HEW AND USDA

A LACK OF SPECIFICITY IN THE PROPOSAL MADE IT DIFFICULT TO MAKE A DETAILED EVALUATION OF PROPOSED SOLUTIONS. IN SOME INSTANCES A SOLUTION TO A PARTICULAR PROBLEM WAS A PROMISE TO TAKE CARE OF THE SITUATION WITHOUT DESCRIBING HOW OR WHY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE PROPOSAL IDENTIFIED A LACK OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION ON HIGH RISK GROUPS AS A PROBLEM. THE PROPOSED SOLUTION WAS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SURVEILLANCE ACTIVITIES AIMED AT HIGH-RISK POPULATION GROUPS WITH NO FURTHER DETAIL ON HOW TO BEST ACHIEVE SUCH SURVEILLANCE.

THERE WAS NO AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENTS ON SEVERAL ITEMS OF REAL IMPORTANCE--THE NATURE OF THE DECENNIAL SURVEY (AS DISCUSSED BELOW), THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE PROPOSED 5-YEAR USDA NATIONWIDE FOOD CONSUMPTION SURVEY WOULD COLLECT PHYSIOLOGICAL DATA, AND THE EXTENT AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING OF THE COORDINATED RESEARCH EFFORT ON DIETARY AND PHYSIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF NUTRITION STATUS.

LACK OF USDA/HEW AGREEMENT  
ON THE DECENNIAL SURVEY

THE CORNERSTONE OF THE PROPOSED SYSTEM WAS TO BE A DECENNIAL SURVEY COMPRISED OF THE EXISTING HEALTH AND NUTRITION EXAMINATION SURVEY CONDUCTED BY HEW AND THE NATIONWIDE FOOD CONSUMPTION SURVEY CONDUCTED BY USDA. THIS WAS TO BE A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT, BUT THERE WAS NO AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENTS ON HOW IT WOULD BE CARRIED OUT. HEW TOLD US THAT BOTH SURVEYS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED SEPARATELY BUT WITHIN THE SAME TIME FRAME AND HAVING CERTAIN COMPARABLE COMPONENTS AND SURVEY METHODOLOGIES AS OUTLINED IN AN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE REPORT. USDA PREFERRED CONSIDERATION OF A SINGLE SAMPLE WITH USDA GATHERING ALL DIETARY DATA AND HEW TAKING A SUB-SAMPLE TO GATHER THE SPECIFIC DATA NEEDED FOR THE HEALTH AND NUTRITION EXAMINATION SURVEY. WE WERE RECENTLY TOLD THAT THE TWO AGENCIES ARE NOW CONSIDERING A PILOT SURVEY WHICH WOULD COMBINE THE TWO SURVEYS.

INADEQUATE CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO EVALUATION  
OF NUTRITION INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEMS OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION ARE THE VARIOUS FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS SUCH AS FOOD STAMPS AND SCHOOL LUNCH. ABOUT 12.5 BILLION DOLLARS IS BUDGETED FOR FISCAL YEAR 1981 FOR THESE PROGRAMS, BUT LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THEIR NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS ON A NATIONAL SCALE. NEITHER THE HEALTH AND NUTRITION EXAMINATION SURVEY NOR THE NATIONWIDE FOOD CONSUMPTION SURVEY HAVE YET PROVIDED USEFUL INFORMATION IN EVALUATING THESE PROGRAMS ALTHOUGH THE CURRENT SURVEYS WILL PROVIDE SOME DATA ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE FEEDING PROGRAMS.

HISTORICALLY, HOWEVER, PROGRAM EVALUATION HAS NOT BEEN A PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF EITHER SURVEY. THE PROPOSED SYSTEM EXPANDED EMPHASIS ON EVALUATION OF NUTRITION INTERVENTION PROGRAMS AS ONE OF ITS FOUR MAJOR ELEMENTS, BUT IT WAS STILL THE LEAST SPECIFIC OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL; POSSIBLY BECAUSE MUCH HAS YET TO BE LEARNED ABOUT HOW TO EVALUATE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

COORDINATION MECHANISM NOT ADEQUATE

OUR 1978 REPORT, "FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL NUTRITION INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM," (CED-79-5) IDENTIFIED POOR COORDINATION BETWEEN HEW AND USDA AND A LACK OF PROCEDURES ON HOW TO SETTLE DISAGREEMENTS AS MAJOR PROBLEMS IN THE PROPOSAL. SINCE THAT TIME, WE HAVE NOT AGAIN REVIEWED THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN HHS AND USDA REGARDING THE PROPOSED SYSTEM, BUT FROM OUR OTHER WORK, WE UNDERSTAND THAT COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TWO DEPARTMENTS HAS IMPROVED.

HOWEVER, THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN WHICH WAS TO BE DEVELOPED HAS STILL NOT BEEN SUBMITTED FOR CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL, INDICATING PROBLEMS IN RESOLVING DIFFERENCES EITHER WITHIN OR AMONG THE DEPARTMENTS. WE BELIEVE 3 YEARS IS A LONG TIME FOR THE DEPARTMENTS TO DEVELOP AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.

GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

IN 1978 WE RECOMMENDED THE FOLLOWING STEPS BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE PROPOSED NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM.

- A DETAILED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN SHOWING WHEN AND HOW THE PROPOSAL WILL BE IMPLEMENTED AND HOW MUCH IT WILL COST.

--A DETAILED DISCUSSION ON ALL ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL, ESPECIALLY THOSE SECTIONS DEALING WITH THE DECENNIAL SURVEY AND PROGRAM EVALUATION.

--PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT ON HOW THE PROPOSAL IS TO BE IMPLEMENTED.

--REGULAR, INSTITUTIONALIZED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN AND WITHIN THE DEPARTMENTS.

THE AGENCIES AGREED WITH THESE RECOMMENDATIONS AND SAID THEY WOULD BE CONSIDERING THEM AS THEY CONTINUE DEVELOPING THEIR PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN. WE ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES REVIEW THE STATUS OF THE PROPOSED SYSTEM AFTER AN APPROPRIATE PERIOD OF TIME. WE SAID THAT IF AT THAT TIME SERIOUS EFFORTS HAVE NOT BEEN UNDERTAKEN TO MAKE THIS AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM, THE CONGRESS SHOULD DESIGNATE EITHER THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE OR HEW AS A LEAD AGENCY HAVING PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY IN NUTRITION INTELLIGENCE GATHERING. AFTER 3 YEARS, THE DEPARTMENTS STILL HAVE NOT RELEASED AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN. IT SEEMS TO US THAT AN APPROPRIATE PERIOD OF TIME HAS PASSED AND THAT IT IS NOW TIME FOR THE AGENCIES TO DEVELOP A PLAN BY A CERTAIN DATE OR FOR THE CONGRESS TO DESIGNATE A LEAD AGENCY FOR ENSURING THE COMPLETION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN. (ATTACHED TO MY STATEMENT IS A LISTING OF OUR PRIOR WORK ON NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING.)

ONGOING GAO REVIEW OF FEDERAL NUTRITION  
RESEARCH PLANNING AND COORDINATION EFFORTS

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO TALK ABOUT OUR WORK ON A RELATED ISSUE, THAT IS, OUR ONGOING REVIEW OF FEDERAL NUTRITION RESEARCH PLANNING AND COORDINATION EFFORTS WHICH WE ARE DOING AT THE REQUEST OF

THE SCIENCE, RESEARCH, AND TECHNOLOGY SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE 96TH CONGRESS UNDER CHAIRMAN GEORGE BROWN. IN SEPTEMBER 1980, CONGRESSMAN BROWN REQUESTED THAT WE LOOK AT THE AREA OF NUTRITION AS A CASE STUDY IN DETERMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIFIC WAYS TO FACILITATE PLANNING IN ONE AREA OF SCIENCE. AS HE POINTED OUT, CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS AND REPORTS ON HUMAN NUTRITION BY GAO, OTA, THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY, AND THE EXECUTIVE AGENCIES HAD IDENTIFIED A COMMON THEME. THAT THEME CONCERNS THE NEED FOR A GOVERNMENT FOCUS, AND ASSOCIATED COORDINATION MECHANISMS TO DEVELOP A COHESIVE NATIONAL NUTRITION EFFORT, WITH AN EFFECTIVE WORKING PARTNERSHIP AMONG THE VARIOUS NUTRITION PROGRAMS AND THEIR AGENCIES.

THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR STUDY IS TO REVIEW AND ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NUTRITION RESEARCH PLANNING AND COORDINATION. WE ARE LOOKING AT THE ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN NUTRITION RESEARCH OF THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY. WE ARE ALSO REVIEWING THE NUTRITION SEGMENTS OF SEVERAL PLANS PREPARED BY THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY, THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION.

WE ARE ALSO LOOKING AT THE MANY COORDINATING MECHANISMS THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED, PARTICULARLY AS A RESULT OF THE CONGRESS' MANDATE IN THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ACT OF 1977. OUR REVIEW INCLUDES A LOOK AT THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF ADVISORY BOARDS AND SCIENTIFIC COUNSELORS TO FEDERAL NUTRITION RESEARCH LABORATORIES, THE RELATIONSHIP AND INTEGRATION OF FEDERAL NUTRITION

RESEARCH, AND THE DISSEMINATION OF NUTRITION RESEARCH ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THE EFFORTS OF USDA'S FOOD AND NUTRITION INFORMATION AND EDUCATION RESOURCES CENTER.

OUR TENTATIVE FINDINGS ARE THAT THERE IS STILL NO OVERALL FEDERAL NUTRITION RESEARCH PLAN, BUT THAT MUCH HAS BEEN DONE BY THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY (OSTP), USDA, AND HHS TO SET THE GROUNDWORK FOR A COORDINATED PLANNING SYSTEM, WITHIN THE CURRENT MULTIAGENCY APPROACH OF SUPPORTING AND CONDUCTING NUTRITION RESEARCH. FOR EXAMPLE, THE OSTP JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE, ESTABLISHED IN SEPTEMBER 1978 AND MADE UP OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM 9 AGENCIES, HAS BEEN ACTIVE, MEETING 11 TIMES SINCE IT WAS ESTABLISHED. IT HAS DEFINED HUMAN NUTRITION RESEARCH IN AN ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS THE BUDGET-CATEGORICAL PROBLEM FACED BY THE CONGRESS IN BEING ABLE TO GET RELIABLE INFORMATION ON THE SIZE OF FEDERAL EXPENDITURES FOR NUTRITION RESEARCH. IN DECEMBER 1980, THE OSTP SUBCOMMITTEE, REPORTED ON CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN SEVERAL AREAS. THE OSTP SUBCOMMITTEE MADE FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS ON INTERDEPARTMENTAL RELATIONSHIP, INTEGRATION, AND COORDINATION, OF FEDERAL HUMAN NUTRITION RESEARCH. THEY ARE:

- REVIEW, SIMPLIFY, AND STRENGTHEN EXISTING COORDINATION;
- INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF A DATA BASE OF ALL FEDERALLY-SUPPORTED HUMAN NUTRITION RESEARCH TO FACILITATE COORDINATION, PLANNING, AND REPORTING;
- PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOINT WORKSHOPS, CONFERENCES, AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS WHEN APPROPRIATE;
- ESTABLISH AN ANNUAL MEETING OF THE DIRECTORS OF ALL FEDERAL NUTRITION RESEARCH LABORATORIES FROM THE



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, AND THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION TO DISCUSS RESEARCH PROGRESS AND FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS; AND --COMPLETE TWO REPORTS ON INTERNATIONAL NUTRITION RESEARCH AND ON NUTRITION EDUCATION RESEARCH.

THE SUBCOMMITTEE AND THE AGENCIES ARE CURRENTLY WORKING ON THE TWO REPORTS AND PLAN TO ISSUE THEM IN JUNE 1981. ALTHOUGH WE SUPPORT THESE EFFORTS, THERE IS STILL NO REAL OPERATIONAL NUTRITION PLAN. WHILE THE RECENT OSTP REPORT ON HUMAN NUTRITION IS A GOOD, INITIAL DOCUMENT THAT DESCRIBES THE ROLES AND ACTIVITIES OF 9 DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES AND IDENTIFIES SOME CRITICAL ISSUES IN HUMAN NUTRITION RESEARCH, IT IS NOT A NATIONAL NUTRITION PLAN WHICH IDENTIFIES GOALS, SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING THESE GOALS, AND ASSIGNED AGENCY ACTIONS AND NEEDED RESOURCES.

WE BELIEVE THAT IF THE NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING SYSTEM HAD BEEN IMPLEMENTED, THE OSTP JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE EFFORTS COULD BE FURTHER ADVANCED AND BE MORE EFFECTIVE.

#### CONCLUDING STATEMENT

IN DISCUSSING OUR VIEWS, TODAY, ON THE NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING SYSTEM PLAN AND OUR WORK ON FEDERAL NUTRITION RESEARCH PLANNING AND COORDINATION, I WOULD LIKE TO RECAP A CONCLUSION ON PLANNING IN A 1976 GAO REPORT ON THE "LONG-RANGE ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES IN SEVEN FEDERAL AGENCIES," (PAD-77-18, DECEMBER 3, 1976). WE BELIEVE LONG-RANGE PLANNING IS NOT A PANACEA, BUT IT CAN BE OF GREAT ASSISTANCE IN IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS AND

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONS AND SOLUTIONS. ALSO, THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN ASSURING HIGH-QUALITY, LONG-RANGE ANALYSIS IS THE INTEREST OF DECISIONMAKERS IN BOTH THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND THE CONGRESS, SUCH AS YOUR SUBCOMMITTEES, WHO WANT IT AND WILL USE IT.

THIS CONCLUDES MY STATEMENT. MY COLLEAGUES AND I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE.

PRIOR GAO WORK RELATING TO NUTRITION  
SURVEILLANCE AND MONITORING

1. Letter reports to the Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare and Agriculture recommending that the HANES and HFCS survey be merged, July 30, 1971.
2. "Evaluation of Efforts to Determine Nutritional Health of the U.S. Population," B-164031(3), November 20, 1973.
3. "Nationwide Food Consumption Survey: Need for Improvement and Expansion," CED-77-56, March 25, 1977.
4. Statement on nutrition surveillance and monitoring in the United States before the Subcommittee on Domestic and International Planning, Analysis, and Cooperation, House Committee on Science and Technology, July 1977.
5. Letter to the Honorable Lawton Chiles, U.S. Senate, on a proposed nutritional status monitoring system, April 11, 1978.
6. Letter reports to the Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare and Agriculture on nutrition surveillance, CED-78-144, CED-78-145, June 29, 1978.
7. "Future of the National Nutrition Intelligence System," CED-79-5, November 7, 1978.