FISH in NUTRITION

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Edited by

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PREFACE

URING the past ten years FAO has devoted considerable time, energy and expenditure to the study of the world's fishery resources and to the problem of how best to exploit and utilize them. Its Fisheries Division has promoted a number of useful studies and published their results in a series of books.

The present volume is the outcome of an FAO Conference on "Fish in Nutrition" held in Washington in September 1961. This Conference, as the title indicates, had a broader scope than any previous one, inasmuch as its theme included the study of human nutrition as well as animal nutrition.

The Conference, which was attended by about three hundred participants from many countries, aroused keen interest throughout the world. Seventy papers were submitted by experts from twenty-four nations, and the majority of those attending took part in the discussion. I believe that the information thus collected is of such value that it should be made available to a wider public. With this end in view, the proceedings of the Conference are now being published in the form of this book.

The Conference, among other things, focused attention on the problems of human nutrition the urgency of which has been brought to the fore through the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. A large proportion of the world's population suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition. Protein deficiency is one of the major causes of malnutrition, and it is obvious that fish, a protein-rich food, could be an important factor in reducing the incidence of malnutrition. Yet, the present harvest of fish is still below 40 million metric tons, that is, less than one per cent of the total world food production. It would seem then that quantitatively fish plays a negligible part in the world's food supply, a situation that lends itself to vast improvement through a more rationalized exploitation of the resources of the sea for providing human nutrition.

It would be appropriate here to recall the message which was sent to the Conference by President Kennedy. He said: "A first responsibility of the human race is to see that its members have enough to eat. . . . Nutritional problems are not peculiar to countries where food is scarce. Protein malnutrition is, in fact, a serious disease affecting nearly two-thirds of the world's population. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the exploitation of what is probably the major untapped source of food: products from seas and inland waters. . . . Your part in the task that lies ahead, like that of other dedicated people in commerce, in laboratories, in factories, farms and fishing boats, is to recreate the miracle of the loaves and fishes—a miracle no less spiritual for being scientific."

I am glad to have this opportunity of adding my own thanks, and those of FAO, to the many tributes already paid to all those who helped to ensure the smooth running and success of the Conference. Finally, in commending this book, I must express the hope that its study may soon result in a marked increase and improvement in the use of fish and fisheries products in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

B. R. SEN
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INTRODUCTION

HE FAO Conference on Fish in Nutrition was unique in so far as it brought together for the first time on an international platform people working in fisheries, in production as well as research, with specialists in nutrition and animal feeding. Its object was to evaluate some of the existing knowledge of the rôle of fish in human and animal feeding, and to stimulate further study and exploration.

One such matter which emerged was the possible rôle of fish protein concentrates in human nutrition, a product which is not only needed now to relieve animal protein shortage in diets, but will become more and more necessary in nutrition as population density increases. It may be said that fish protein concentrates furnish a way of making directly available to man the richnesses of the multitudinous "small fishes" which abound in the ocean but are only slightly used in contrast to the larger and more expensive forms of fish which at present mark consumer taste.

The Nutrition Division and the Animal Production and Health Division of FAO, who are vitally concerned with developing a more extended use of food from the sea, collaborated extensively and, while it was left to the Fisheries Division to take the lead, the effort and the result must be regarded as the outcome of a joint undertaking.

The Conference was fortunate in having as its Chairman Mr. Donald McKernan, Director of the U.S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. This Bureau indeed was largely responsible for stimulating the interest and active support of the U.S. Government and of other national bodies. Thanks must also be expressed to the U.S. National Institutes of Health, whose grants made it possible to bring to Washington such an impressive number of distinguished experts.

Many people shared the work, not only of preparing the original papers, but also of getting these into suitable shape for presentation at the Conference. Amongst those who must be especially mentioned are A. G. van Veen, Nutrition Division of FAO; J. C. Shaw, Animal Production and Health Division; D. G. Snyder, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, U.S.A., who acted as associated editors, assisted by A. D. Ingram-Schirato, and M. R. Khan, Fisheries Division, who prepared the index. Other tasks fell to members of our staff: M. Laing, P. McLaughlin, P. Andrews, D. D. Tapiador, M. C. de Freitas. The translations were done by P. M. Frances and A. M. Rosfelder.

Conferences such as this one serve to catalyse action. It is to be hoped that the rate of progress will be an increasing one and that steady advances on many fronts will be made to the end that man may harvest and put to better use a crop which is, after all, a gift of nature.

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NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

"HE seas offer a wealth of nutritional resources. They already are a principal source of protein. They can provide many times the current food supply if we but learn how to garner and husband this self-renewing larder. To meet the vast needs of an expanding population, the bounty of the sea must be made more available. Within two decades, our own nation will require over a million more tons of seafood than we now harvest."

This statement, made by President Kennedy in a message to Congress in March 1961, delineates in a few words the theme and objective of the FAO International Conference on Fish in Nutrition, held in Washington, D.C., on September 19-27, 1961.

This Conference was indeed convened to discuss how the living resources of the sea—first harvested by our fishermen and then processed by our fish plants—have contributed in the past and can contribute in the future to man's health and welfare.

In fact, FAO has recently postulated that these marine resources even now produce a larger supply than that from cattle and swine on the land. The stark realities of the world population explosion and of world hunger cannot be longer ignored. Viewed against this background of hungry multitudes, the discussions and presentations covered in this book assume historic importance. Few question the estimates of demographers that world population is increasing at a rate never before experienced in the history of man. It has been estimated that in A.D. 1600 the population of the earth was 300 to 400 million people. Two centuries later this figure had doubled and from then on population growth accelerated at an ever-increasing rate. By 1900, the population had risen to about 1,500 millions and during the last 60 years that figure doubled again. An indication of what is going to happen in the future is given by many experts, who forecast that within the next 40 years we will have reached the 6 billion mark.

On the other hand, nutritionists from the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, and other international agencies, in assessing the present state of food production in the world, estimate that two-thirds of the present world population does not receive an adequate daily diet.

One child dies of hunger every second of the year; of the 900 million children under 15 years of age, more than 500 million live and die critically undernourished and the catalogue of associated miseries could be continued over many pages, with statistics collected from all the continents.

Hunger can mean many things to various people. The term commonly describes conditions ranging from acute, extreme starvation to the symptoms of "hidden hunger". By and large, however, the dietary nutrient most lacking in deficient diets all over the world is good quality protein.

What is understood by this term "good quality protein"?

In man's long and arduous struggle to understand the nature, composition and function of food-stuff, he at least learned that Hippocrates was wrong when he said, some thousands of years ago, that man required nothing but energy to subsist. We know today that the human body requires a large number of different components which it cannot synthesize itself. Among these are certain protein components, called essential amino acids, and it is the combined presence and proportions of these in foods that determine their value. Only animal proteins contain all the essential amino acids that man cannot synthesize himself, and only animal proteins are, without supplementation, considered to be "good quality proteins".

Good quality proteins are not universally available in sufficient quantities in the form of agricultural products. Furthermore, land resources for crops and animal grazing are not inexhaustible; only one-fifth of the total available crop land is left unutilized and this, at best, could only supply enough food (predominantly vegetable) for presently underfed peoples—and this only if the most modern agricultural methods could be applied world-wide. Even if this could be achieved—and great capital expenditures and major educational and technological efforts will have to be made in this direction—there would still be a serious deficit in the supply of animal proteins to supplement adequately the diets of today's population, let alone that of tomorrow's additional millions.

In view of this, it is not surprising that, in their quest for food, scientists and industrialists all over the world have again focused their attention upon the seas as a vast potential source of nutrients.

The high nutritive value of fish protein has been recognized since earliest times, but notable utilization of this food has always been limited to certain areas owing, in part, to the extremely perishable nature of fish.

As the first topic to be considered at this Conference, it seemed logical to review the rôle of fish in world nutrition. It seems strange with over three-quarters of our globe covered by the sea, and with living matter found not only in the surface film but to some degree at least at all intermediate levels even down to the great depths within the ocean, that such a small amount of our present total food supply is contributed by the sea. Our present-day harvest of some 40 million metric tons of fish and fisheries products provides only a small part of the food consumed in the world today. This figure is significant in view of the fact that the current annual food deficit has been estimated to be greater than the present total world fish production.

We considered at this Conference to what extent the sea could contribute to this great need for food for the future. We examined the potential productivity of the sea and the practicability of doubling or even tripling the harvest of its living resources. We went even one step further and examined briefly what means or methods, what research and engineering, are going to be necessary to bring about the full use of the living resources of the world's oceans.

Our second topic at the Conference was to examine the chemical composition of fish and fisheries products in order to ascertain their wholesomeness and the desirability of using fish protein to an increasing extent in the human diet. We wanted to know to what extent is knowledge available which will allow us to assess the nutritional attributes of fish protein, and are there unique qualities in fish which can be helpful in overcoming the protein deficiencies in the human diet?

Experts present at this Conference discussed the present state of knowledge concerning how fish should be prepared to provide maximum nutritional benefits. We know there are nutrient losses in the preparation and processing of fisheries products. Can we develop specific information on how these losses occur and in what directions must we go to maximize, by special processing, the benefits from the fish resources harvested? How can we use existing information, and develop new information, to provide a maximum amount of the kinds of nutrients which are needed in various national diets?

The third general topic concerned the contribution of fish and fisheries products in the various national diets. It is obvious that we need to assess the present contribution, to determine what limitations exist, and what can be done to overcome these limitations to the greater use of fish in nutrition.

This Conference, as represented by the present book, has attempted, for the first time, to bring before the world the various means for increasing not only the harvest of fish but also the number, variety, and nutritive value of the products manufactured therefrom, and thus permit fish to assume, on a worldwide basis, its rightful rôle in human nutrition.

The realization of these objectives has taxed the energies of all participants, but I believe that the set goals have, to a large extent, been reached. This Conference and the concerted, international

efforts that it represents can, of necessity, be only a modest beginning. Much remains to be done, for the overall task of providing additional food for our world's peoples is urgent and the obligations compelling. It is our hope that this book will inspire continued efforts to make the benefits of nutritious foods available to all of mankind.

Great credit is due the FAO for its foresight in having perceived the need for this Conference and for the organizational work associated with it as well as to the respective FAO-member nations for their enlightened support of its objectives. Congratulations are due also to the many people who have contributed so freely and wholeheartedly of their time and effort in order that this valuable reference text could be made quickly available to those in need of information on the nutritive value of fish and shellfish.

Donald L. MKernan.

Chairman, FAO Conference on Fish in Nutrition

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