

8 Beaumann C, Cannon G, Elmadfa I, *et al.* The principles, definition and dimensions of the new nutrition science project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 673–94.

Welcome

Sir,

Professor Oshaug is a distinguished academic who advises UN agencies, the government of Norway and non-governmental organisations, and who has a special interest in human rights¹. He is critical of *The New Nutrition Science project* in general², and of the paper introducing the project of which we are co-authors³. We first respond to his general remarks.

Nothing new is new in all ways. As a rule all innovative concepts and theories have precursors^{3,4}. *The Giessen Declaration*⁴ proposes a new definition, additional dimensions and relevant principles not for another speciality, but for the whole of nutrition, seen equally as a biological, social and environmental science. In this way 'classic' biochemical nutrition scientists are encouraged and enabled to give their work more relevance, meaning and impact in the circumstances of this twenty-first century.

Two comments made at the International Congress of Nutrition in Durban last September by delegates who support the project, and also by Professor Oshaug, were that it so far understates the importance of politics, and also of human rights. This may be so. As editors of the special issue we have tried to be inclusive and balanced, but cannot always have succeeded. Besides, projects are work in progress.

That said, politics as a social science is contained within the new nutrition, and food and nutrition policies are discussed throughout the special issue. There is a difference between inclusion of politics within a conceptual framework, and advocacy of specific political ideologies. On rights, *The Giessen Declaration* states that the overall principles of nutrition are and should be ethical. The science should 'be guided by the philosophies of co-responsibility and sustainability; by the life-course and human rights approaches, and by understanding of evolution, history and ecology'. The theme of human rights is included in a number of the papers in the special issue, including the two of which we are co-authors^{3,5}.

The Giessen Declaration begins by acknowledging confluences which, as well as the work of individuals and institutions, include public health nutrition and public nutrition (which are not the same), nutrition ecology, wholesome nutrition, eco-nutrition, and ecologically integrated nutrition. Most of these specialities are themes of papers in the special issue^{6–9}, and all are summarised and cited in the two papers of which we are co-authors, or in introductory text^{3,5,10,11}.

A paper agreeing that public nutrition fits within the new nutrition science⁶ cites the 1999 special issue of *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* edited by Nevin Scrimshaw¹²; and also the 1996 letter to the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* signed by John Mason, Jean-Pierre Habicht, Peter Greaves (not Graves), Urban Jonsson, John Kevany, Reynaldo Martorell and Beatrice Rogers¹³.

Professor Oshaug thinks that nutrition science does not face a crisis and is proliferating nicely. The signatories of the *Declaration* might invite him to think again. It states that the persistence of nutritional deficiencies and relevant infectious diseases, the explosive global increase in early-life obesity and diabetes, increasing insecurity and inequity, depletion of the planet's life-support system, and other factors, amount to a real world crisis. The *Declaration* also states that nutrition can effectively address the fundamental determinants of well-being, health and disease, but only when it is reformulated as a social and environmental as well as a biological science.

Professor Oshaug is puzzled by an evolutionary approach and by a conceptual framework that includes personal, population and also planetary health, which therefore is not centred just on the human species. These are challenging concepts, and he is invited to read some of the relevant papers and to follow up their citations^{3,5,14}.

We now respond to his criticisms of the introductory paper of which we are the authors³. He was given a draft of this paper early in 2005 with a request for comments, and it is a pity that he did not then have the time to make any response. The paper in its final form takes into account comments of a number of readers who did respond, and also the conclusions of the Giessen workshop, and in these respects is a group effort.

He rightly says that the paper does not include definitions and principles. These are not hard to find: they are contained in the *Declaration*, in the multi-authored paper 'The principles, definition and dimensions of the new nutrition science'¹⁵, and in a more exploratory paper, 'Dimensions, domains and principles of the new nutrition science'⁵.

He claims that the paper denigrates genomics. This is not so. It emphasises the importance and potential of genomics, and says that its value and credibility, in common with other domains of nutrition currently usually perceived as mainly biological in nature, will be enhanced when it fully takes into account its social and environmental aspects.

He says the paper implies that most nutrition science comes from Britain, Germany or the USA. No, it does not. It points out that modern nutrition was developed on biochemical principles up to the mid-twentieth century as a result of external pressures including the industrial revolution and the expansionist policies of the leading

European powers, with their empires and spheres of influence, and later also by the USA.

He says little reference is made to Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts. This is so. Kuhn's best-known ideas are mentioned and cited, but more positive and integrative systems approaches such as that of Kurt Lewin are preferred¹⁶.

He suggests we make too much reference to our own work. His eight citations include a modest 25 per cent to Oshaug A. He cites the writings of the Sri Lankan polymath Susantha Goonatilake twice, perhaps not as carefully as might be expected, for their relevance certainly in one case¹⁷ is obscure. The 154 citations in the paper he criticises include 13 to our own work, of which four cross-refer to other papers in the special issue. He says one of us cites his own work instead of relevant UN reports. This is not so.

Studies of systematic change in the making observe a range of negative reactions inherent in the process, whose vehemence varies with the depth of entrenchment of the critic. These include 'this is nonsense', 'this is damaging', 'these people don't know what they are saying', 'why wasn't I told?', 'everything is fine as it is', 'I thought of this first', 'leave this to the experts', 'there is nothing new here' and 'everybody knows this already'. Professor Oshaug's letter is somewhat of a collector's item in that it includes or implies all of these reactions, while failing to support any of them. He also does not justify his tendency to a formula rather familiar in knockabout debate in scientific journals, epitomised as 'I am scientific, you are subjective, they are biased'.

Change happens as a result of irresistible pressure of circumstances, like that now exerted in this age of linked global revolutionary electronic, genomic, political, economic and environmental developments^{18,19}. Such pressure accelerates formulation of new ideas and theories that become agreed and adopted as they are found to be more accurate, interesting, useful, relevant and appropriate.

The new maps and new explorations needed for us, our children and their children, to live well in this new world, are being prepared by those willing to pool resources, with receptive minds and generous spirits. *The New Nutrition Science project* is not a closed shop, but an open door. Welcome in.

Geoffrey Cannon

World Health Policy Forum, Brazil
geoffreycannon@aol.com

Claus Leitzmann

Justus-Liebig University, Giessen, Germany
ClausLeitzmann@aol.com

DOI: 10.1079/PHN2005904

References

- Oshaug A. Developing voluntary guidelines for implementing the right to adequate food: anatomy of an intergovernmental process [Chapter 11]. In: Eide W, Kracht U, eds. *Food and Human Rights in Development. Vol. 1. Legal and Institutional Dimensions and Selected Topics*. Antwerp: Intersentia, 2005.
- Leitzmann C, Cannon G, eds. The New Nutrition Science project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 667–804.
- Cannon G, Leitzmann C. The new nutrition science project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 673–94.
- The Giessen Declaration. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 783–6. Also available at <http://www.iuns.org>
- Leitzmann C, Cannon G. Dimensions, domains and principles of the new nutrition science. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 787–94.
- Beaudry M, Delisle H. Public(s) nutrition. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 743–8.
- Leitzmann C. Wholesome nutrition: a suitable diet for the new nutrition science project. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 753–9.
- Wahlqvist M. The new nutrition science: sustainability and development. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 766–72.
- Lang T. Food control or food democracy? Re-engaging nutrition with society and the environment. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 730–7.
- Anon. Confluence. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 699–700.
- Anon. Agreement. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 781–2.
- Scrimshaw N, ed. Public nutrition. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 1999; **20**(3): 279–343.
- Mason J, Habicht J-P, Greaves P, Jonsson U, Kevany J, Martorell R, Rogers B. Public nutrition [letter]. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 1996; **63**: 399–400.
- McMichael A. Integrating nutrition with ecology: balancing the health of humans and biosphere. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 706–15.
- Beauman C, Cannon G, Elmadfa I, *et al.* The principles, definition and dimensions of the new nutrition science. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 695–9.
- Lewin K. In: Lewin G, ed. *Resolving Social Conflicts. Selected Papers on Group Dynamics*. New York: Harper and Row, 1948. See also <http://santafe.edu>
- Goonatilake S. *Crippled Minds. An Exploration into Colonial Culture*. Second impression. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Lake House, 1984.
- Uauy R. Defining and addressing the nutritional needs of populations. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 773–80.
- Castells M. *The Information Age*. Three volumes. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

Obesity and corporate responsibility

Sir,

The state of affairs is obvious to everyone. The increase in obesity seen in all parts of the world is challenging our ways of thinking about individual responsibility concerning health, the role of the state and the responsibility of the food industry. Solutions should focus on lowering energy intake and increasing expenditure, as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO)¹.