

# The New Nutrition Science project

I have been asked by the Editor comment on the article "The New Nutrition Science project" by Cannon and Leitzmann in the previous issue of the Scandinavian Journal of Food and Nutrition (SJFN) (1). The project was first published in a special issue of Public Health Nutrition (PHN) (2) and later presented and discussed during the IUNS Congress in Durban, 2005. The article by Cannon and Leitzmann in SJFN gives adequate information about the content of the project, the presentation in Durban during the recent IUNS Congress, and the fact that one person has responded critically to PHN, namely me (3). However, the text in the SJFN article (1) referring to these critical comments is very short, basically saying that I was not happy. Therefore, I feel that it is appropriate to repeat some of the issues that I raised. Those can briefly be summarized as follows.

- *A historical bias*: pointed to the ethnocentricity of the article, because the focus of discoveries and research, according to the authors, basically took place in the UK, Germany and the USA.
- *The Giessen Declaration*: I argued that this is presented as a normative landmark definition of public health nutrition, with which I cannot agree.
- *Use of references*: the authors fall into the trap of referring unduly to themselves and omit some important references on early formal discussions on public nutrition, in particular at earlier IUNS Congresses.
- *Policies and politics*: the text on these issues is very brief and they are not addressed adequately.
- *Nutrition and evolution*: my main question, based on a formulation in Box 3 in the PHN article (2), was what this new nutrition science is all about if it is not centred on humans, particularly since negative environmental impacts will threaten the livelihood of people throughout the world.
- *Genomics, nutrigenomics and proteomics* are presented in a very biased way: there is no discussion on how these new technologies and methodological approaches can provide increased under-

standing of how nutrients communicate with genes, how that determines the health impact of what we eat, and the new diagnostic possibilities provided by such techniques.

- *Human rights* are mentioned, which I underlined as positive, but making the Giessen Declaration a key reference document regarding nutrition and human rights is not justified, while at best it makes some references of limited use to the issue.

Finally, I asked the question of whether this really is a new nutrition science, as it claims to be. I stated and still think that the project as described gives much ammunition to critics. There was limited but carefully selected reference to the topics discussed. In my view the original article (2), to which the paper in SJFN (1) refers, is not raising new issues, but is basically a summary of selected issues that have received increased attention over the years. I ended my comment by stating that the special issue of PHN, Volume 8(6A) raises a number of challenges of great importance for the further development of public (health) nutrition, and that the discussion should continue.

Having read their response to my comments (4) and the new article in SJFN (1), and reread the original paper (2), I have not changed my view. I hope there will be a constructive discussion since this issue is very important to both research and public nutrition work in general.

## References

1. Cannon G, Leitzmann C. The New Nutrition Science project. *Scand J Food Nutr* 2006; 50: 5–12.
2. Cannon G, Leitzmann C. The New Nutrition Science project. *Public Health Nutr* 2005; 8(6A): 673–94.
3. Oshaug A. Nutrition and evolution. *Public Health Nutr* 2006; 9: 96–7.
4. Cannon G, Leitzmann C. Welcome. *Public Health Nutr* 2006; 9: 98–9.

## Arne Oshaug

Professor in Public Nutrition  
Akershus University College  
Norway  
E-mail: Arne.Oshaug@hiak.no