

USDA probes role of nutrition in aging

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In 1950, the average American could expect to live to the age of 68. Today we anticipate 73 years of life and by the year 2000 we can expect to live well into our 80s.

Research has shown that good nutrition is a major contributor to health and fitness," said Hamish Munro, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Human Nutrition Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston.

Scientists at the center are studying the relationship of nutrition to the aging process.

Munro said researchers are focusing on three primary questions: Does nutrition influence the rate of loss of various bodily functions as people grow older? Does nutrition influence the development of chronic disabilities associated with aging? And, what are the nutritional needs of older people?

Much of the nation's health care and social services are directed at diseases associated with aging.

"The elderly as a group use health resources to a greater

extent than other adults. In 1977, their personal health care expenditures amounted to \$41.3 billion, about 28 percent of the total for all Americans. Sixty-seven percent of the cost of health care for adults over 65 was financed by public funds," Munro said.

A \$30 million nutrition research center where problems related to the aging process will be studied is under construction, with completion expected during 1982.

The building site is adjacent to Tufts University dental, medical and veterinary schools and the New England Medical Center. USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Tufts University, and the National Institute on Aging will cooperate in the research to be conducted there.

"Not only will nutrient requirements of the aging be investigated, but also the ways in which an optimal diet, in combination with other factors—genetic, constitutional, psychological, sociological and environmental—may contribute

to health and vigor over the

lifespan," Munro said.

Housing for human subjects in the center will be fully equipped to study the nutrient needs of adults. There will be a laboratory for testing physiological functions as well as equipment for studying metabolism and body composition.

While the center is under construction, a limited research program is underway. A study is being made to determine the nutritional status of the elderly. About 400 human volunteers in the Boston area are being evaluated.

One area of research concerns osteoporosis, or loss of bone calcium, which occurs frequently in older adults, especially older women. Scientists at the center are studying the specific relationship of diet to the loss of calcium in the skeletons of menopausal women.

Other scientists are looking at protein and energy metabolism in aging humans to determine the significance of protein in maintaining tissue functions as aging progresses.

Studies have been made on the metabolism of albumin, a blood

protein, in younger and older subjects receiving different levels of dietary protein. Other studies have looked at the role of muscle in protein metabolism to see what effects a change in diet or hormonal status has on the maintenance of muscle tissue.

"For the individual, the deterioration of health that often comes with advancing years greatly affects, if it does not dictate, the quality of life. I expect the prognosis to greatly improve over the coming years," Munro said.

Snowmobilers must register with the state

HARRISBURG — Rep. Noah W. Wenger today reminded Pennsylvania citizens of special rules and regulations on snowmobiles.

"In Pennsylvania you must register if you wish to operate your snowmobile on property other than your own," he said.

"If you ride on state-owned land or on local roadways you must register or face a possible fine."

Rep. Wenger said first-time snowmobilers can apply for registration by contacting the Snowmobile Unit, a part of the Department of Environmental Resources. Most snowmobile

dealers and notaries also have the necessary forms.

Citizens with questions about various aspects of snowmobiling should dial these numbers: safety, training, trails and grooming, 717-787-2014; dealer orders, safety training supplies and film scheduling, 717-783-9226; general information, 717-783-1364.

Wenger urged snowmobile enthusiasts to use designated trails.

"According to DER statistics, over the last four snowmobile seasons only 10 percent of the snowmobile accidents have occurred on designated trails and roads," Wenger said.

Lettuce seeds can be stored

ATLANTA, Ga. — The best way to store lettuce seeds is to dry them to less than 7 percent moisture, seal them in moisture-proof containers that exclude oxygen, and then freeze them at 10 degrees Fahrenheit, said plant physiologist Louis N. Bass with U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, Fort Collins, Colo.

Bass, Director of the National Seed Storage Laboratory on the Colorado State University campus, recently addressed the 73rd annual meeting of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America.

Lettuce seeds are one of the most difficult of all U.S. agricultural crop seeds to store by using conventional techniques. Special care, more than mere storage in temperature- and humidity-controlled rooms, must be used to insure successful germination after storage.

"Just drying lettuce seeds to less than 7 percent moisture and sealing them in moisture-proof metal cans extends storage time up to 3 years compared to 2 years for seeds stored in paper bags at room temperature," said Bass.

By freezing at 30 degrees Fahrenheit, lettuce seeds in sealed cans still germinated after 8 years. Dropping the temperature to 10 degrees further extended storage to 20 years.

Bass cooperated with CSU graduate student Lindy Seip and ARS plant physiologist Eric R. Roos on the study.

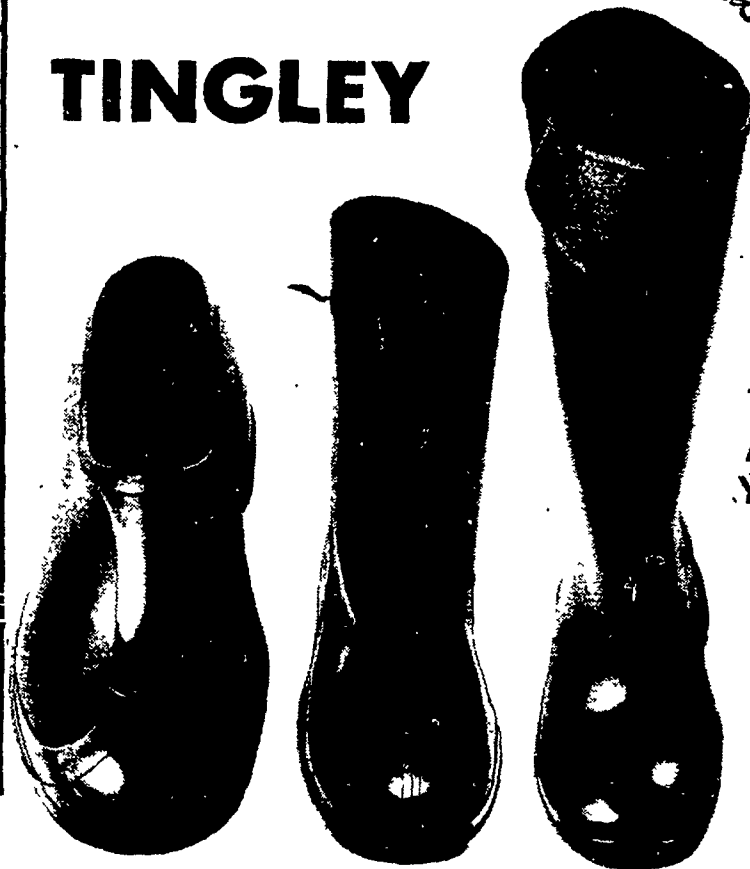
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