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INFORMATION

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THE PACIFIC ISLAND FOOD COMPOSITION PROGRAMME

The Pacific Island Food Composition Programme (PIFCP) is a project for production, management and dissemination of up-to-date and comprehensive data on the nutrient composition of Pacific foods.

Why do we need nutrient data on Pacific Island foods?

There are many nutritional problems in the Pacific. Not only are there the classic diseases of protein energy malnutrition, anaemia and goitre, related to inadequate diet, but also there are the problems relating to over-consumption or an unbalanced diet, such as coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

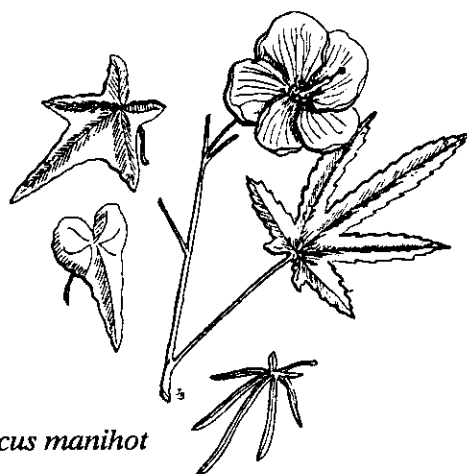
To plan Pacific island food supplies, the diets of individuals and nutrition education programmes for the community we need reliable and comprehensive data on the nutrients in Pacific Island foods.

Nutrient composition data are also needed to study the dietary patterns of the Pacific and how disease patterns may be related to them.

The information is needed to plan agriculture and to promote consumption of local rather than imported foods. This will help Pacific islands to become more self-sufficient.

Some foods are only found in the Pacific region. We cannot borrow information on them from other parts of the tropics such as the Caribbean. Getting information on the unique foods of the Pacific and promoting island food recipes will boost regional pride and the economy.

Checking on the composition of imported foods will help to put a stop to dumping of poorer quality foods in the Pacific.



Hibiscus manihot

Why is NEW information needed?

The current tables are out-of-date, inadequate in their coverage of foods, inadequate in their coverage of nutrients; the sources of the data are mostly unknown (many are probably from other parts of the world), and it is not known whether the data are reliable. Methods for sampling and analysing foods have improved and can be used. Once we only needed to know about a dozen nutrients in foods, now we need to know about many more nutrients. These nutrients include dietary fibre, different forms of vitamins, and trace minerals.

Why do this work in the Pacific?

The Pacific needs its own laboratories to study its own foods. We need to build up our own technical facilities and abilities. This will aid regional co-operation and upgrade our technical skills.

PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

What data do we have already?

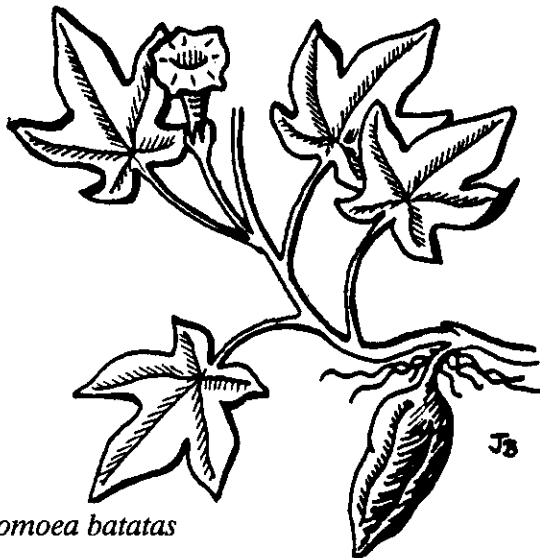
A review is being carried out of existing published and unpublished nutrient data on Pacific foods. This will help to identify gaps in the information. Some of the data will be useful and will be used in producing the Programme's database and new food tables.

What foods and nutrients should be analysed?

Users are being asked what their needs are for nutrient data and for foods requiring analysis. The Programme must listen to the needs of users, and keep users informed about progress.

Which foods will be analysed first?

Users have already indicated they want some imported and processed foods studied, particularly processed meats. Green leafy vegetables and Pacific fish are also high on the list of priorities. Discussions took place at a regional meeting to make some of these decisions.

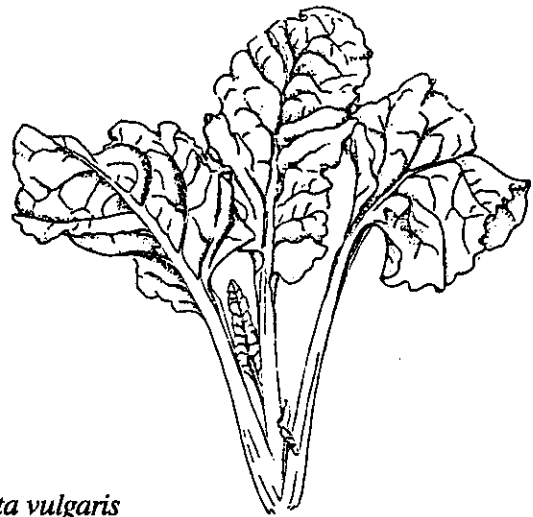


Ipomoea batatas

Where is the work being done?

Regional laboratories are being involved. Two have been assisted in purchasing equipment and received some staff training in 1988. They are the National Agricultural Chemistry Laboratory in Papua New Guinea and the Institute of Natural Resources in Fiji. They are now doing a pilot study on some foods and will

compare their results. It is hoped that these laboratories will begin to produce data in 1989 under contract to the Programme. Further training is planned for each year to keep the analysis up-to-date and expand the laboratories' technical skills. It is hoped that other laboratories will become involved, as the Pacific is a vast region and two will not be enough to cope with all of the work.



Beta vulgaris

Where will the foods be collected?

Collecting and transporting foods from all around the Pacific is going to be a challenge! We hope to sample foods from three main areas: atolls, high islands and urban areas. Food collectors will have to be identified and trained. A start will be made with the more densely populated and accessible areas.

When will the new data begin to come out?

Hopefully we can start to circulate some of the good data from the literature in 1989. Producing our own analytical data will take longer.

How will the data be circulated?

Data will be circulated in a newsletter which will start publication in 1989. Meanwhile, we hope a data bank will be set up in 1989 to contain all the good data from the literature and from the laboratories. These will be printed eventually in a new set of food composition tables, and will be made available to computer users on disk.

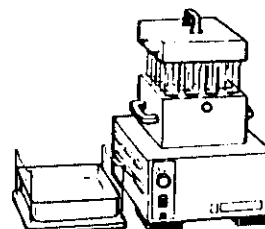
What about all the different languages in the Pacific?

Work will be needed to collect information on local language names for foods. We hope to make simple tables available in the major languages of the Pacific as well as comprehensive tables in English and French.

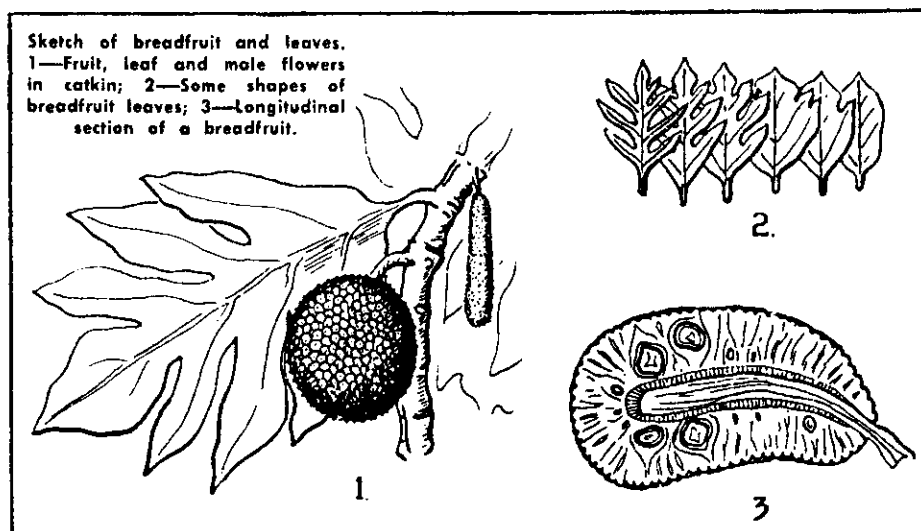
END USES OF THE PIFCP ACTIVITIES

1. *Quantitative nutrient surveys:* So far only qualitative surveys have been carried out in the Pacific Island region. Appropriate, up-to-date analytical data on commonly eaten foods are now urgently needed for epidemiological studies of diet-related diseases.

4. *Improved technical abilities:* Personnel in Pacific laboratories will be able to undertake a wider range of chemical analyses. This would be of great benefit to tropical agriculturalists and soil scientists in the region who need reliable soil analysis data and information on the nutrient contents of the different food crops and varieties for their computer-based agronomic trials.



5. *Food legislation:* The ability to analyse food is an important prerequisite for any enforcement of a food legislation policy.



2. *Food production policy:* A knowledge of the nutrient composition of different crops and their different varieties would enable food production policy-makers to decide which are the most appropriate food crops to promote. This would ensure that the best use is made of the limited land resources of the Pacific Islands.
3. *Economic value: import substitution:* A comparison of food quality data for the major food crops would enable Pacific Island people to understand the relative food value of their different foods and thus might encourage increased consumption of local food and decrease the need for imports.

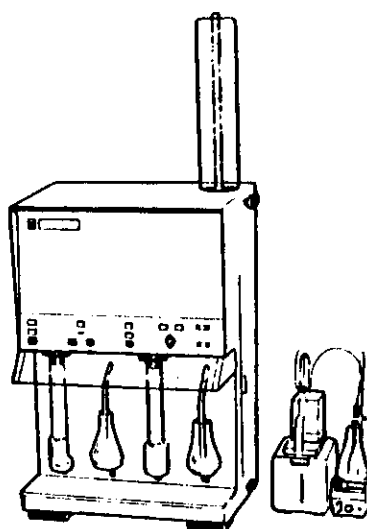
There is growing concern that poor quality food, especially processed food, is finding its way to the Pacific region.

6. *Economic value: cash crop support service:* The ability to provide a sound analytical support service would be a valuable asset to cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, tea, sugar, rubber, oil palm and copra. All these primary products need technical back-up at some stage in their production or quality control stages. Leaf and soil analysis are vital for correct and economic fertilizer policies for all these crops. Quality control analyses are essential for cocoa, rubber and other products, to ensure that international

quality standards are followed, thus securing consistent sales and optimum cash production from these crops.

7. *Health protection:* Well-equipped and adequately trained and staffed Pacific laboratories would be able to monitor imported and locally produced food-stuffs for harmful substances such as toxins, pesticide residues and heavy metals.

8. *Data bank:* The PIFCP will create a unique, comprehensive body of knowledge and data on the nutrient content of Pacific foods. This will be of great value to health, agricultural, economic and education sections of the different Pacific Island countries and indirectly will bring lasting benefit to the people in the region.



Produced by John Bailey, SPC Food Composition Co-ordinator, and Heather Greenfield, former Co-ordinator, now with the University of New South Wales, Australia

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