

various nutrients can be obtained from a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and meats consumed in many different combinations. Individuals, based on their tastes and preferences and market prices, will choose widely different combinations of goods to satisfy specific nutritional goals. This poses several problems for planners attempting to base agricultural policy on nutrition facts. First, there is no way for the nutrition planner to determine how much of which foods everyone in the country *should* eat. Second, when allowances are made for differences in individual tastes, and the wide range of ways in which various foods are eaten, "nutrition facts" provide little guidance concerning which foods to promote through public policy. Third, the proposed approach ignores political realities which will inevitably arise when congressional action is taken to reduce beef, tobacco or peanut consumption.

The idea of basing levels and types of agricultural production on nutritional needs ("translating nutritional needs into production terms") can only be successful if there is a way of insuring that the nutrition plan is implemented. Thus, to successfully translate nutritional needs into production terms, the Foreman-Bergland plan must determine which foods constitute the "national diet," the amounts re-

quired of those foods, and then ensure that those foods are produced and consumed—it must dictate individual diets.

The Planner's Illusion

Secretary Bergland has stated that the "USDA does not intend to dictate diets for the people." However, the USDA has been noticeably silent as to how nutritional needs will be translated into production terms so as to meet "nutrition and trade needs."

Nutrition planning faces the same limitations as other forms of central planning. The idea that a central planner can determine a nutrition policy based on nutritional requirements and then develop a food policy based on these requirements is an example of what Professor Hayek calls "scientism"—the extension of scientific techniques and methods applicable in natural sciences beyond their proper boundaries to include all human activity. In the present context, there is a basic difference between nutrition planning for livestock and for people.

The concept of nutrition planning is being successfully applied in feeding livestock. Mathematical programming techniques are used to formulate least cost diets for cattle, broilers, hogs, and so on. The animal scientist can provide information on nutrient requirements for various classes of livestock and feed

specialists have information on nutrients provided from various feed sources including corn, oats, wheat, protein supplements, and the like. Given data on nutrient requirements, nutrient availability from various feed sources, and market prices of the product and various feeds, the least cost diet is reduced by a mathematical problem which can be rapidly solved by electronic computer.

The analogy between formulating least-cost livestock rations and planning human diets, however, quickly breaks down. Most people would insist that palatability considerations are much more important in the diets of people. Furthermore, allowances for individual variation in tastes and preferences in human diets are crucially important in all but the most totalitarian of human societies.

If consumer choice is deemed to be important, there is no way for the nutrition planner to determine optimal diets for individuals. If the planner were *given data* on consumer tastes, prices, and nutrient requirements, nutrition planning is reduced to a mathematical problem and nutrition planning is possible. These data are, of course, *not given* to the planner. Furthermore, no alternative to the price system has been discovered as a way of coordinating and transmitting information concerning individual tastes

and preferences from consumers to producers (or planners as Hayek demonstrated 40 years ago). Rational nutrition planning of the type visualized is impossible in the same sense that central economic planning is impossible—it is not consistent with the aim which it is intended to serve. There is no way to successfully "translate nutritional needs into production terms" while maintaining individual freedom of choice.

The Variability of Needs

Despite the seemingly obvious problems of nutrition planning, the illusion that central planners can plan production for consumers more efficiently than the market does hard. Unless individual freedom and choice are ignored, human action cannot be planned and predicted in the same way as phenomena in the natural sciences. The idea that the planner can obtain enough information on nutritional requirements, individual tastes, production requirements, trade flows, and the like, in such a way as to determine "what levels and types of production are necessary to meet those needs" represents an illusion which has much potential for mischief even though it is incapable of achievement.

Government policies can surely affect the pattern of agricultural production. However, there can be