

**30th Anniversary Celebration
of the
Children's Nutrition Research Center
Baylor College of Medicine
Houston, Texas**

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Chief Scientist, USDA
Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics**

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Thank you Dr. Bier. Good morning. It's a special pleasure for me to be here to help celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Children's Nutrition Research Center.

This is my second visit. Among my first visits to Agricultural Research Service laboratories was a tour of this facility. I was impressed by both your research and the dedication and enthusiasm of your staff.

Today, I want to congratulate Drs Bier and Nichols and all the staff at the Center, both past and present, on their achievements and thank them for their commitment to helping improve the health and lives of children everywhere.

I also want to thank our colleagues from the Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital for their partnership in support of one of USDA's most important goals: to "*Improve the Nation's Nutrition and Health.*" This is especially important for the children of this country.

This remarkable partnership has allowed us to leverage our resources and to take advantage of the intellectual capitol of one of the Nation's foremost colleges of medicine and one of the Nation's top children's hospitals.

Thanks are also owed to the many people who championed the formation of this Center more than thirty years ago, especially members of the Texas Congressional delegation, some of which are in this room here today.

Legislation dating back over 100 years established USDA as the lead agency for agricultural research, including human nutrition research. The Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, mandated the establishment of a separate and distinct mission within the USDA for research into food and nutrition.

That legislation enabled the establishment of not only this Center but four other USDA nutrition research centers around the country.

USDA's history in nutrition research however, dates back much further to the ground-breaking work of Wilbur O. Atwater on the composition of foods in the 1870s-1890s.

Dr. Atwater was also the Director of the first Agricultural Experiment Station in the U.S. in Connecticut and later became the Director of the USDA Office of Experiment Stations; although he is better known as "the father of American nutrition science."

In Atwater's time, very little was known about the role of food in health.

Vitamins were unknown.

A few major minerals, such as calcium and phosphorus, were recognized as somehow essential, but their role in the body was unclear.

Atwater defined the caloric equivalence of protein, fat, and carbohydrates; which are still used today. His work on food composition, food intake, human health and economic well-being established USDA's primacy in nutrition research.

USDA and other scientists continued to make advancements in nutrition research throughout the early 20th Century, including the discovery of the first vitamins, Vitamins A and B, by researchers at the Wisconsin State Agricultural Experiment Station.

Today, nutrition is still a relatively "new" science. For much of its history, research focused on eliminating hunger and diseases caused by malnutrition.

We have been very successful in those efforts and undoubtedly, the science of nutrition helped improve the health and well-being of Americans and contributed to the increase in our life expectancy from an average of 47 in 1900, to more than 77 years today.

Despite this success, only since the last 30 years have we begun to appreciate and better understand the role of nutrition in chronic disease prevention and the health and well-being of individuals.

We do know that good nutrition is especially important to children and women even before conception and birth.

So this Center, with its unique focus on mothers and children, plays an important role in ensuring the health and well-being of future generations.

Currently that future is being threatened by a national health crisis the World Health Organization has called, "*one of the greatest neglected public health problems of our time with an impact on health which may well prove to be as great as that of smoking.*"

Today, nearly 65 percent of Americans are overweight; and more than 30 percent are obese. About 17 percent of our children are overweight.

The Children's Nutrition Research Center has a critical role in USDA's Obesity Prevention Research Initiative.

The Center is conducting important research to identify factors that influence the body composition of children and to develop body composition standards for children.

Scientists here are also seeking to determine what factors influence children's eating habits and how can we help children and families adopt healthier habits to avoid long-term health problems.

The Center also has an important outreach component that brings valuable science-based nutrition information to parents, health professionals, and the national media.

Now more than ever, the Children's Nutrition Research Center is vital to the Nation's future. We must ensure that we do everything we can to put a halt to the curable epidemic of obesity.

I have no doubt that this unique Baylor-USDA-Texas Children's Hospital partnership will make important discoveries in our fight against obesity.

I know this Center will continue to be at the frontier of nutrition research in years to come adding to the already prestigious reputation of the Children's Nutrition Research Center.

Congratulations, again to Drs. Bier and Nichols and all the Center scientists and staff on this 30th Anniversary and on all your achievements.

We recognize and appreciate the excellent work and commitment by you and each of your staff.

Good luck and best wishes for the future.