

Towards Enhancing Sri Lankans Lives through Better Nutrition ...

In 1920, the De Soyza Bacteriological Institute (presently known as MRI) was established. Dr. Lucian A. Nicolas founded the Department of Nutrition in 1926 in order to calculate wages by looking at food patterns in the county.

During the dietary surveys, many deficiencies were identified throughout the Nation. To overcome these issues, 'Thripasha' was invented and distributed throughout the country while maintaining a regular monitoring system. Over time, 'Thripasha' was accepted internationally as a world-renowned supplementary food. Throughout the years, the Department published Food Composition Tables of Sri Lanka using available food analysis to identify the nutrients in Sri Lankan food. Along with this, social benefit programmes (Coupon systems, Food Rations, Samurdhi), consumer Recommended Daily Allowances and estimation of the amount of food needed for the country were established.

The Department contains the field unit, laboratory and research co-ordination and information unit. The field unit consists of highly recognised staff involved in; data collection, anthropological surveys and measurements, sample collection and dietary surveys in the field. The accredited laboratory unit possesses urinary iodine, salt iodine, food and vitamin and mineral testing facilities with highly trained staff. We also have the wealth of experienced data analysts, statisticians, and consultant community physicians that contribute to our Department.

Throughout the years, we have done abundant surveys such as monitoring childhood Vitamin A status, malnutrition states and iron deficiency both routinely and in emergency situations. We have essentially reached iodine deficiency elimination throughout Sri Lanka. As well as successful surveys, the Department is involved in undergraduate and postgraduate training of medical and non-medical personnel, conferences, media seminars, and public education via official website and blog, printed and electronic media and the Nutrition Information Centre.

Currently, we are in the process of employing novel approaches for bettering the nutritional status in Sri Lanka, such as to eliminate iron deficiencies through Double Fortification of Salt.

Overall, we have gained many successes with the involvement of all the medical and non-medical sectors, advocacy for policy makers and capacity building of health personnel. The Department of Nutrition is the pioneer Department of conducting nutritional related research in Sri Lanka, since 1920s and we hope to achieve more in the future for bettering the nutritional status in our Nation.