

President Scored on Nutrition

By William Rice
Washington Post Staff Writer

Senate hunger hearings concluded yesterday with a sweeping accusation of Nixon administration indifference to a national nutrition policy.

"Isn't there someone at the White House or somewhere in the federal government who knows we face a serious nutritional problem?" asked Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), chairman of the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, sponsor of the three-day hearings.

His question was prompted by the report of an advisory panel on nutrition and government headed by Harvard nutritionist Dr. Mark Hegsted. The report contained the following observations.

- "Nobody in the executive office of the President is in charge of the nutrition policy question.

- No single focus exists anywhere in the executive branch of government to assess and advocate nutrition policies.

- No overall coordinating machinery exists at either the executive office level nor the interdepartmental level for nutrition planning, program management, or research and development.

- The executive office senses no urgency to create policy planning, coordinating, or surveillance arrangements.

Amplifying, panelist Aaron Altschul of Georgetown University's Department of Community Medicine said nutritional well-being is a more sophisticated concept than preventing famine. "We haven't dealt with the nutrition education of the politician," he said, urging creation of a "current, steady available body of information" on nutrition as a first "political action becomes easier."

Much of the panel's report was devoted to outlining specific areas in which such information is not now available or is processed too slowly. To ensure government action, the panel called for formation of a high-level food and nutrition policy board and an office of nutrition to implement and coordinate programs.

McGovern seconded the office of nutrition concept, likening its potential role to that played by the Federal Energy Office. But Hegsted, who began his remarks by saying it was "disgraceful to have serious undernutritations" in the United States wondered: "Can you impose something on the executive office if they really don't want to listen?"

The panel set as its first priority the compilation and release every three years or less of a statement on food practices and nutrition-related health conditions "as they are and as they are changing."

Other vehicles information suggested were a food data bank, ongoing analysis of representative foods and diets and a system to monitor the nutritional status of "high-risk groups" and others in different parts of the country.

Turning to nutrition education, the panel recommended that the government support 100 teaching institutes in nutrition and food at an annual cost of \$5 million. The six-week programs would be patterned on science teaching institutes of the National Science Foundation. The number of institutes, and the cost, would double after the initial year.

It called as well for a minimum of six nutrition education centers at established institutions, and a resources information center for nutrition supported by the Office of Education. The annual price tag for the education centers would be \$3.6 million; for the resources center and its satellites \$2 million.

"Hunger has indeed been alleviated, but nutrition has made no headway," the panel wrote in summing up progress since the White House nutrition conference in 1969. It cited "shaky" information now available to policymakers as "disastrous for the prospects of any breakthrough on national nutrition policy."