

An approach to enhancing a food and nutrient database to include foods unique to Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, and Somali cooking traditions in the U.S.

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Background: Those who immigrate to the U.S. bring food traditions that are passed to future generations and to broader American society. Consequently, it is important to ensure foods from these cooking traditions are reflected in U.S. food and nutrient databases. This need is acute for Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, and Somali cooking traditions because nutrition and health inequities exist for immigrants from these countries.

Objective: In 2020 the University of Minnesota Nutrition Coordinating Center (NCC) launched an initiative to ensure the NCC Food and Nutrient Database includes foods unique to Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, and Somali cooking traditions. This effort encompasses popular main dishes, side dishes, desserts, and beverages as prepared in the U.S.

Description: University of Minnesota students familiar with the aforementioned cooking traditions were hired to collaborate with NCC staff in identifying foods and appropriate recipes for these foods. The foods and recipes identified by student collaborators were reviewed by NCC database scientists to determine whether the food item already existed in the database. For foods that were already in the database, food names were reviewed and modified as needed to align with the cultural food names identified by the student collaborators. The recipe, variable ingredient, and food unit reporting options were also reviewed to identify any needed changes. Work is underway to add foods that were not already included in the NCC database. These additions will be completed for inclusion in the 2022 release of Nutrition Data System for Research (NDSR), a dietary analyses software used for research in the U.S.

Conclusion: Food and nutrient databases should include foods unique to the cooking traditions of those who have immigrated to the U.S. Individuals familiar with the eating traditions of the immigrant group should be included as paid collaborators to ensure the addition of relevant foods and use of appropriate recipes.