Introducing the Food-Based Approach to Alleviation of Vitamin A Deficiency in South Africa

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Introduction

Vitamin A deficiency causes retarded growth and development, night blindness or total blindness, susceptibility to diseases or even death. The problem occurs mostly in children, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly. In South Africa one in three children has a low vitamin A status, with children in rural areas being affected worst. It is caused by dietary intakes based on staple foods, where fruits, vegetables and animal products are seldom eaten.

Purpose of Poster

To present the establishment of food gardens to increase the availability of vitamin A-rich foods as solution to vitamin A deficiency, as opposed to fortification and supplementation.

To sensitize extension organizations to the important role they can play at grassroots level in such a program.

Methodology

• Analyze the situation and prepare participatory action plan with the community.
• Identify and train community members/extensioners that will serve as advisors to mothers on how to grow vitamin A-rich crops.
• Establish demonstration gardens/community gardens with butternut, carrot, orange-flesh sweetpotato and spinach to demonstrate cultivation; monitor production through visits.
• Establish nutrition education program to teach mothers the importance of consuming vitamin A-rich foods; recruit and train health monitors to monitor growth of children

Conclusion and Educational Importance

The critical factors in the food-based program are: (i) that the community members take ownership of the project, (ii) nutrition education is given together with the establishment of vitamin A-rich food gardens, and (iii) effective collaboration between research and extension.