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Home Economist Promotes Pan-Americanism

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Home Economist
Promotes Pan-Americanism

Victoria McKibben tells of June Leith Nordin's work in advancing nutrition training in Brazil

JUNE LEITH NORDIN, formerly of the Foods and Nutrition Department, recently returned from Brazil after helping to organize a nutrition course to improve the Brazilians' diet.

As nutritionist in the Food Supply Division of the Office of Coordinators of Inter-American Affairs, Mrs. Nordin went to Rio de Janeiro last July and supervised a course designed to train young women from all parts of Brazil for practical nutrition work in government agencies. The training which included classroom instruction in nutrition, dietetics, food preparation, hygiene and social service was similar to the United States home demonstration service.

A series of nine lectures on practical nutrition for the Municipal Public Health Nurses in the city was another project conducted by Mrs. Nordin in Rio de Janeiro. Proof of the interest in the lectures was shown by the fact that 45 heard the first talk and 75 attended the final one.

Among the new nutrition literature prepared in Portuguese is an adaptation made by Mrs. Nordin of the "Vita-Min-Go," a game used to arouse interest in personal diets and to show in a simple way how to improve them. Free sets of the game are distributed to primary pupils to take home where it may improve family nutrition.

Women from almost every state in Brazil were awarded full scholarships to the nutrition school which Mrs. Nordin supervised. Fifty-one students completed the course and are now in extension or advanced work. It is believed that if each one teaches her newly acquired knowledge to a few others, nutrition education will be gradually disseminated throughout Brazil.

Most of the nutrition work in South America in the past has been conducted by medical doctors specializing in nutrition, according to Mrs. Nordin, and this is the first time that many women have been given more than superficial training along this line.

A permanent project resulting from Mrs. Nordin's work is the home demonstration training school which is being established in Fortaleza, Brazil. Following a special study period, a selected group of nutrition course graduates will become the nucleus of the school's staff. By that time they will have had advanced class work and experiences in teaching foods classes and conducting home demonstration courses.

The home demonstration school at Fortaleza will offer a year's course of thorough training to a limited enrollment of twenty-four students. Women admitted to the school will be chosen from towns and villages in the interior of Brazil.

The four phases of work in the home demonstration training school course include principles of nutrition, food preparation, and meal planning; home management; child care and feeding and methods of home demonstration work.

After completing the course the extension women will teach Brazilian homemakers how to gain the most benefit from the use of local products in feeding their families. These women will cooperate closely with the Agricultural Extension Service in promoting the production of nutritious foods.

When Mrs. Nordin left Brazil in March the school was merely a plan for the future. Much of her time in South America was devoted to the preliminary and temporary training course in Rio de Janeiro.

Other activities included trips to various communities where Mrs. Nordin surveyed nutrition programs and the publication of nutrition articles in the country's magazines and newspapers.

Mrs. Nordin obtained her B.S. degree in foods at the Texas State College for Women and after taking further study at Iowa State received her Master of Science degree in nutrition in 1942. An essential part of her training for work in Brazil, however, was her past residence in Rio de Janeiro. Besides spending much of her life there, she had taught home economics at Colegio Bennett in Brazil, where she learned to speak the language almost as well as English. Knowing the customs of the country, she was able to conduct nutrition programs which were adaptable to Brazilian habits. Although the present nutrition was first planned as a wartime measure, it is now a long-time project.

Mrs. Nordin found that Brazil's nutrition problems could be traced to the lack of emphasis on food production and the improper use of the existing food supply. Evidence of poor nutrition is shown by the stunted growth of the populace, widespread deficiency diseases and general poor health.

"Possibilities for nutrition work in Brazil are infinite," Mrs. Nordin says, "and on the development of these possibilities depends the health and well-being of the Brazilian people." So far the best way to develop such possibilities seems to be to train natives of the country and allow them to educate the people.