July 2, 2024, marks 50 years since the signing of the Civil Rights Act, which guaranteed equal treatment of every American regardless of race, color, sex, and national origin. The passing of this act was not easy and working toward equity and inclusivity in America is still a work in progress. At JNEB and SNEB we are using this 50th anniversary to reflect on our past, present, and future.

A BRIEF HISTORY

JNEB and SNEB were founded in the 1960s during increased recognition of “hunger in America,” which led to the formation and expansion of federally funded food assistance and nutrition education programs including food benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, child nutrition programs, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. Thus, a strong food safety net and opportunity for nutrition education have always been the foundation of our work.

TODAY

Over the last five years, there has been a conscious effort to expand Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives within JNEB and SNEB. This led the SNEB to adopt a DEI statement in 2022 that not only pushed DEI work forward in the Society, but also made a call for members to reflect on and include DEI in their work. The formation of the DEI committee is to assist in ensuring that SNEB remains vigilant in its commitments surrounding its work around racial equity, commitment to openness, and respect within the organization. Since its inception, the committee established a criteria for committee members and committee members’ terms of service. The DEI resolution was passed which set the foundation to ensure that the DEI concepts and strategies continue to be woven throughout SNEB especially, within strategic objectives, the Divisions, research, and Annual Conference proposals.

JNEB also continuously works to incorporate DEI in all aspects of the publishing process. Specifically, JNEB’s work includes:

- Incorporating the utilization of person-first language in the guidelines for authors
- Increasing inclusivity on how race/ethnicity and gender identity are reported in studies
- Expanding the Board of Editors with a conscious effort for more diversity, across many different factors (broadly)
- Initiating and recruiting for a Mentored Editor position focused on qualified candidates, with special attention to those historically underrepresented in research.

FORGING AHEAD

Our next steps are addressing systemic issues. First, as researchers and practitioners we need to be aware of our positionality and acknowledge how our social identities influence our perspectives, beliefs, and assumptions, and be...
critically aware of food access, availability, and cultural appropriateness. Second, we need to appreciate how systemic barriers create inequitable access to health-promoting food.\(^5\) If we do not, we could, albeit inadvertently, blame people for their food choices, when their choices are limited. Third, while we need to meet people where they are at, such as not recommending food items that are out of reach in a community, we cannot stop there. If we do, we have a double standard. To do this best, we need to understand what works for communities, taking a strengths-based approach, and in shared partnership let them lead the way to identify solutions. We must continue to advocate for food system change, including maintaining and expanding core food assistance programs, until everyone in all communities has access to and can afford foods that promote health, ecological sustainability, and social justice. We have to see the connection of other systemic challenges that go beyond food to create a more inclusive and equitable future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

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REFERENCES


