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Dr. Elmer V. McCollum (1879 - 1967)

“The single foremost contributor to the basic concepts, primary discoveries and methodologies, and wise application of knowledge in nutrition...”

As a Yale University graduate, with a Doctorate in organic chemistry, Elmer V. McCollum set up the first white rat colony for experimental nutrition studies in the U. S. in 1908. The introduction of the albino rat for appraising biological value of foods was one of McCollum’s most significant contributions.

In 1913, with a research associate, McCollum published a paper reporting a “fat soluble” factor in butterfat or in the fat of egg yolks which supported growth in young rats that failed to grow on a partially purified diet. By 1917 he linked the eye disease accompanying deficiency of this factor in rats with xerophthalmia in humans – and discovered VITAMIN A.

In 1915 McCollum discovered the anti-beriberi factor which he called “water soluble B”. In 1917 Dr. McCollum joined the newly established School of Hygiene & Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, as head of the biochemistry department.

By 1921 McCollum’s research led to the discovery of the fat-soluble antirachitic substance VITAMIN D. Other studies established the specific nutritional functions of the inorganic elements magnesium and manganese in 1931. This was followed by establishing specific nutritional functions of the elements, calcium, phosphorus, fluorine, aluminum, iron, zinc, sodium, potassium, boron, and cobalt.

Dr. Elmer V. McCollum was on the Scientific Advisory Committee for the Hoover Food Administration during WWI. Through the years he was a committee chairman or member of 23 national and international bodies having to do with food and nutrition.

For further Information, please see his autobiography: “*From Kansas Farm Boy to Scientist*”. See also: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/9692936/elmer-verner-mccollum> for Elmer’s family connections.



Photo, The Gazette On Line,
The newspaper of Johns Hopkins University