

PRICKLY PEAR (*Opuntia ficus indica* L.) CACTUS AS A SOURCE OF VITAMIN A¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to VILLAREAL (13) there are regions in the world where the climate conditions are so extreme that for various years the rainfall is very reduced. The resultant low moisture extremely limits the development of many plants. In this case, the prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus indica* L.) is almost vital to man and other animals that live in desert areas, for it provides water, a rare diet component during droughts made even more severe because of the need for it during the consequent high temperatures.

When there is no drought in the "nopaleras" (*nopal* in Aztec language designates all *platiopuntia*), prickly pear cultivated fields

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4. SUMMARY

Indian populations surviving on meager diets used prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus indica* L) as the sole source of green vegetable. Vitamin A deficiency was observed. The total carotene content of green prickly pear pads was analyzed and averaged only 31.2 micrograms, or 52 international units per 100 grams (about one tenth of the "Recommended Daily Allowance" for adults). The complete analytical methodology is described in detail, and some considerations are made.

5. RESUMO

(PALMA-DOCE (*OPUNTIA FICUS INDICA* L.) COMO FONTE DE VITAMINA A)

As populações indígenas do Norte do México e Sul do Arizona, sobrevivendo com dieta muito pobre, têm na palma-doce (*Opuntia ficus indica* L.) a sua única verdura. Deficiência de vitamina A foi observada. Os carotenóides totais de palmas-doces verdes foram analisados e apresentaram um valor médio de apenas 31,2 microgramas, ou 52 unidades internacionais por 100 gramas (cerca de um décimo da RDA - porção diária recomendada para adultos). A metodologia analítica está descrita com detalhes e algumas considerações foram feitas.

6. CITED LITERATURE

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