

Chuck booze off the checkouts

Not so well done to Iceland supermarkets – yes, they chucked snacks off their check outs – only to replace them with cut price vodka.



Be careful what you wish for...

Our **Action on Additives** campaign seems to have had some unfortunate side effects in that promising one's products are free of artificial colours has become a marketing pitch for processed foods such as these high sugar Kellogg's Coco Pops. This ad runs in London bus shelters, and the front of pack labelling reminds us too – without the benefit of traffic light labelling to make the high sugar message just as noticeable. Sadly, our regulators' approach to labelling and advertising somewhat mimics the 5th amendment of the US Constitution – whereby you cannot be forced to testify against yourself.

Enjoy cookery TV programmes from the comfort of your sofa!

July will see the release of *Ready Steady Cook: The Game* on Nintendo Wii and DS format. That's right, the computer game of a television show about cooking. Players will apparently be able to choose a virtual value bag, compete with a virtual rival cook against the clock, assist with virtual chopping and present their finished dish to the virtual audience who will vote on the winner. Finally, a solution for all those readers who've been suffering the horrors of playing the boring old game of 'making dinner' from the discomfort of their kitchens. As long as they're only virtually hungry of course.



It looks like a crisp, it smells like a crisp...

It's official, Pringles are crisps, and will be liable for VAT. The Court of Appeal has ruled that the 'potatiness' of the product means that Procter & Gamble has finally failed in its long legal challenge to keep its product VAT free. The company had argued that the snack did not taste like a crisp or behave like one – claiming that it was, in fact, really more of a cake, and therefore not liable for VAT. But the appeal judges begged to differ, arguing that the 42% potato content was enough to take the view that the product was in fact made of potato. After diversions into philosophical questions such as the essence of potatiness, the judges bumped back down to earth, suggesting that a child would be able to see more quickly to heart of the matter. P&G will now be liable for around £20 million of VAT a year.



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Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Why GM food is hard to swallow

INSIDE
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Fat's no joke

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Bad science

The following outrageously misleading and shameful question has appeared on a GCSE Chemistry exam paper. It invents an unpleasant baby feeding campaigner, a non-existent campaign issue, and a saintly company (*My Baby Food*) whose product can apparently completely supplant breast milk as the baby food of choice in the developing world. The question reads:

"Calcium carbonate occurs naturally as marble and limestone. They are important building materials and are often used for gravestones. Calcium carbonate is also an essential mineral for good health and is present in many baby foods in small amounts.

My Baby Food is recommended as being the closest to a mother's own breast milk. It is given free to mother's in the developing world – without it their babies might die of malnutrition. *Responsible Mothers Are Us* (RMAU) is a United Kingdom pressure group. They want to ban chemicals in baby foods. The group was founded by Mrs I. M. Right who has made a career in 'goodness' and is paid from donations given to RMAU by members of the public.

When interviewed she said: "Calcium carbonate is a chemical and so it is a pollutant. *My Baby Food* must be banned to prevent the mass medication of babies. I don't feed my baby the stuff of gravestones."

Many people do not agree with Mrs Right's ideas. Suggest why."

A reader has complained about the question to the AQA, the awarding body for GCSEs, and her daughter's school will also be following it up. To find truthful, interesting, and hard hitting information on the subject of baby feeding, and baby food companies, see *Baby Milk Action* at www.babymilkaction.org



Famously poor role models

A reader of the magazine wrote to us recently to ask if we could report more good news, and I have been thinking about that. I hope, first of all, that we do inspire you – by telling you about many projects and people all over the world who put their principles before profit, who give endless hours of their time to run community projects on a no profit basis, and who use their intelligence to uncover stories that are otherwise buried by misinformation and spin. Whilst these stories might not always be ‘cheerful’ I hope that they are at least cheering. We wish ‘Big Food’ would give us more to be cheery about.

Perhaps I am somewhat coloured by my own upbringing – one of my father’s expressions was, “Don’t p**s on me and tell me it’s raining.” As a lifelong native of Brooklyn his language could be to the point, but what he did give me was a belief that we all at least own our own brains, whatever else we are lacking in material circumstances, and we should use them critically.

That is perhaps especially true when people are trying to sell you things – and it’s advice I wish our government had taken when they hooked up with companies as part of the Change4Life campaign. To say the least, some of our current food and health policies make me feel that government is running one long pep rally with the food industry – and anyone who questions whether the rally’s a good idea is a party pooping misery guts.

The idea of being classed as ‘misery guts’ is somewhat easier to live with when we think back to the past – most food companies did not willingly change from the appalling practices outlined in historical articles by Bee Wilson (FM82 Let the buyer beware) and Sheila Dillon (FM75 Still a jungle), in the pages of this magazine. No, it was down to those who devoted their time to fighting for those changes. While the battles we fight are often now on different grounds – the magazine still demands that government and companies improve the nutritional quality and standards of foods on offer in the UK.

The last edition of *The Food Magazine* drew your attention to celebrities who sell their image to promote foods that are high in fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt (FM84 Famously poor role models?). Our article drew sharp comment from Kellogg’s – which sent us a letter explaining how their cereals are an excellent start to the day; and requesting that we meet various of their senior staff. However, *The Food Magazine* does not generally have private meetings with food companies – our view is that these businesses have advertising, packaging, and PR machines, often spending multi-millions, – all to tell us just how fabulous their products are.

The food industry sometimes suggests that we use ill-defined criteria for criticising their foods – but we analysed the foods in our article using the government’s own nutrient profiling model – we stick to recognised criteria when criticising foods. So, for example, if Ofcom would not allow Kellogg’s to sell Bran Flakes (high sugar) during TV programmes with particularly high child audiences, we asked why, for example, Chris Hoy would want to be involved in selling that product to anyone, in any marketing format. This seems a reasonable question to us.

And, we think it’s the sort of question that our regulators should be asking, but, of course, as Kellogg’s letter reminds us, they are Change4Life partners and our outgoing Public Health Minister recently launched the Breakfast4Life programme at one of their breakfast clubs in Bristol. It is perhaps not a stretch of the imagination too far to see that appearance as a full endorsement of the brand.

We are not too cheerful about that either, and why should we be? We humbly add *The Food Magazine* to the great muckraking tradition – not always the most cheerful, but we hope useful, and, at least occasionally, humorous.

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The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of The Food Commission.

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Food Commission websites

Food Commission: www.foodmagazine.org.uk

Action on Additives: www.actiononadditives.com

Chew on this website: www.chewonthis.org.uk

The Food Commission consists of the charity The Food Commission Research Charity (registration 1000358) and the not-for-profit company The Food Commission UK Ltd, which permits the organisation to undertake trading activities. The idea is that any surplus income from trading, such as income from *The Food Magazine*, is used to support our campaign work. Donations to the charity are used to support our education and health promotion work, including those aspects of campaigns which are of an educational and health promotional nature. The two sister organisations have separate accounts and separate meetings of their trustees/directors. This combination of a trading company and a charity is fairly standard among non-governmental organisations, and is recommended by the Charity Commissioners.

Advertising: *The Food Magazine* does not accept commercial advertising. Loose inserts are accepted subject to approval – please contact Anna Glayzer at The Food Commission for details. Call 020 7837 2250 or email anna@foodmagazine.org.uk

Additive laden products expose weakness of ‘voluntary ban’

More than a year after the Food Standards Agency (FSA) called for a ‘voluntary ban’ on six artificial colours, The Food Commission’s Action on Additives campaign manager found **110** products containing these ingredients in just over an hour in a busy south London shopping area. Shops visited included Iceland, Lidl, a newsagent, three small grocers, Poundland, Tesco and WH Smith. The products purchased included sweets, drinks, flavoured drink syrups, desserts, savoury snacks, food colourants and other processed savoury items.

In the last issue of *The Food Magazine*, we revealed that major companies Cadbury and Mars were among the larger manufacturers continuing to sell sweets containing one or more of the colours **E102**, **E104**, **E110**, **E122**, **E124** and **E129** that the FSA has accepted are associated with increased hyperactivity in susceptible children. Indeed our survey shows that Cadbury products containing the colours **E104**, **E110**, **E122** and **E129** are still readily available.

However, although products from household names such as Cadbury are prominent in the market, around 85% of the items purchased were from smaller, less well-known manufacturers, many of which are outside the UK and indeed the EU. In fact, the labels on the products purchased give details of more than 40 different companies. Around half of the products gave a clear indication of country of origin and within these products 13 different countries were listed including China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Jamaica, USA, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, Ghana, Pakistan, New Zealand, Thailand, Malta and the UK.

Many of the labels were very difficult to read due to tiny or unclear fonts, or the shape of packaging. Some of the products found were sold loose – and so had no labelling information on packaging – with information having to be searched for on storage tubs. We came

across a handful of illegally labelled products including Serge Island Eggnog, on sale in Tesco, that failed to specify which additives the product contained, simply listing “artificial colours.”

So, just why are our shelves still groaning with products containing these colours - when regulators had hoped that by the end of 2009 there would be largescale, voluntary withdrawal? The FSA now publishes a list each of caterers (2), manufacturers (37), and retailers (6 in their own label brands) which offer products that do not contain the additives. However, the list is not easily accessible online; only includes UK manufacturers; and is small in comparison to the size of the market. The site is also not particularly consumer friendly, as it does not on the whole specify products, listing, for example, manufacturers such as: Green Bay – Green Bay Products. Not that much help if you have no idea what the company is or what it sells.

Presumably the big household name brands will wise up to the good publicity to be gained from selling products as artificial colour free, especially once warning labels start appearing on products containing the colours in around

a year and a half’s time. “May have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children” will have to be squeezed onto the packaging of foods and drinks thanks to a decision by the European Parliament. While welcome, it is questionable whether the warning label will have a hugely deterrent effect – our survey shows it may well be nigh on invisible on some packaging; and just where is the PR incentive or information campaign to bring on board the many small manufacturers worldwide, and the small retailers that we found in our survey? Especially when penalties for ignoring labelling regulations are notoriously weak.

Meanwhile, the seventh additive implicated by the so-called ‘Southampton Study,’ sodium benzoate or **E211**, continues to escape any action at all. The weight of evidence was considered weaker in relation to **E211**, and as the preservative was seen by the FSA’s Board to fulfil a non-cosmetic function in foods and drinks it was felt that it would be harder for industry to phase out its use. The FSA Board resolved to give further consideration to action relating to sodium benzoate, however, one year on has given no indication



of any firm plans to do so. Clair Baynton, head of novel foods at the FSA, told us: “The FSA has met with stakeholders to discuss the continued use of sodium benzoate. The soft drinks industry in particular is seeking suitable alternatives.”

The Action on Additives campaign maintains that a compulsory ban on the colours is the logical step – if they have ill effects, and are nutritionally unnecessary, why allow them? The voluntary ban was a brave first step on the part of the FSA, and the campaign supports its ongoing work in this area – but the fact remains that the colours are still out there on a large scale. The campaign is also working on a report looking at the catering industry and its use of the colours – the area is poorly regulated in terms of publicly available information on the ingredients of its products.

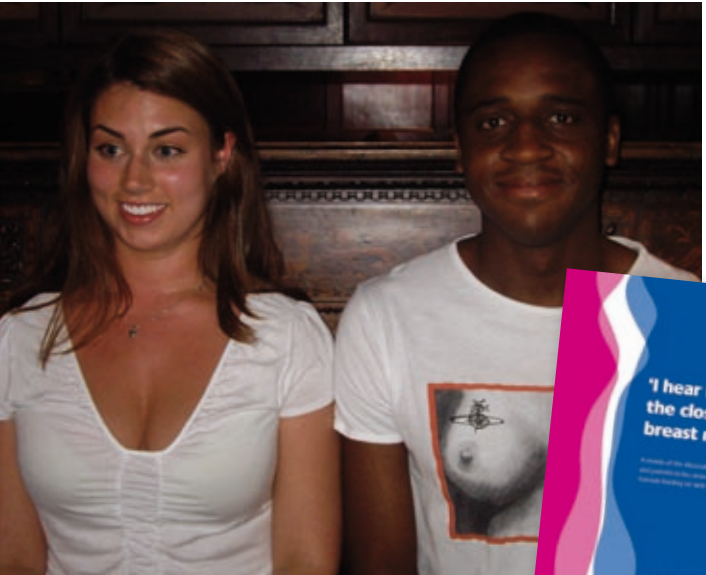
Check out our Action on Additives campaign website
www.actiononadditives.co.uk and sign up for free updates.

Breast is better

You can now download Jessica Mitchell’s report; *I hear it’s the closest to breast milk*. The report reviews the discussions of parents, and parents-to-be, around formula and formula feeding on web discussion sites.

The report (published by the Caroline Walker Trust) shows the extent to which formula companies influence parents to trust, and then purchase their products despite clear health guidance that breastfeeding is best for babies.

To download, visit the CWT website at www.cwt.org.uk



Signpost labelling wrangle continues

On 3rd May 2009 the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) independent Project Management Panel (PMP) released its long anticipated report evaluating front of pack labelling schemes. Not surprisingly, the main conclusions of the report were that shoppers would prefer a single uniform labelling scheme rather than the mixture of different types in place now. The scheme found to be the strongest was one which combined the traffic light colours with the words 'high, medium and low' along with Guideline Daily Amount percentages or 'GDAs.' The report was described by the chair of the PMP and head of the Government Social Science Research Unit, Sue Duncan, as, "the most comprehensive and robust evaluation of front of pack signpost labelling published in the UK and internationally to date."

The PMP report was commissioned by the FSA in an attempt to provide a definitive answer to what form of labelling consumers find most helpful when they are making healthier food choices. The panel was made up of independent experts in nutritional and social sciences, including market research. Until now the FSA and health campaigners have favoured traffic labelling, while representatives of the food industry have been the main proponents of GDA labelling. When the PMP started work in January 2007, Deirdre Hutton, chair of

the FSA, said: "The FSA, together with its industry and health charity partners, is committed to standing by the results of the independent study and will encourage all manufacturers and retailers to adopt whatever system is shown to be the most effective in helping shoppers to make healthier food choices."

The PMP report was welcomed by the National Heart Forum which noted: "For over 20 years, public health groups, consumer organisations and MPs have been calling for clear, consistent traffic light labelling on front of pack. Most retailers and manufacturers provide nutritional labelling on their products and many use traffic light labels, but it remains a lottery whether or not consumers get information in a form they can easily interpret and use."

The FSA's food industry partners however, have been less welcoming of the report. Industry GDA supporters told *The Grocer* recently that they intended to resist any FSA action until after there had been a European vote on the Consumer Information Act. One regulatory affairs manager for a major multinational said; "There is no way anyone is going to change now, knowing the EU is working on this proposal."

Conveniently for some, any European action on labelling seems a long way off. The FSA's press office told *The Food Magazine*: "European discussions are at an early stage in a very long process" and they "really could not say" when a resolution is likely to be brought about. Meanwhile, the FSA plans to convene a working group at which the FSA Board and members of the PMP

panel will discuss the report and the Agency's next steps.

At the time of going to press the meeting had not yet been scheduled. When it does take place it will be filmed and published for viewing on the FSA website. More news and the PMP report itself can also be viewed on the Agency's website. www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/may/fsaresponse

Meanwhile the government's recent Health Committee 'Inquiry into inequalities' report has demanded the following: "We are appalled that, four years after we recommended it, the Government and FSA are continuing to procrastinate about the introduction of traffic-light labelling to make the nutritional content of food clearly comprehensible to all. In the light of resistance by industry, and given the urgency of this problem, we recommend that the Government legislate to introduce a statutory traffic light labelling system. This should apply to food sold in takeaway food outlets and restaurants as well."

Drink water not soda

Researchers from New York's Columbia University say there is clear evidence that cutting back on sugary drinks strongly impacts on calorie consumption in children and young people. In a re-analysis of data from the 2003-2004 *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey* of children aged 2-19, Dr. Y. Claire Wang and colleagues found that when American kids substituted sugar-sweetened beverages with water, total calorie intake went down, without a compensatory increase in the form of increased consumption of other foods or drinks. Wang and her colleagues have estimated that cutting out sugary drinks, and replacing them with water, could cut an average of 235 calories from young people's diets each day.

Y. Claire Wang et al. (2009) Impact of Change in Sweetened Caloric Beverage Consumption on Energy Intake Among Children and Adolescents. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2009 ;163(4):336-343.

Food Magazine news

Many, many thanks as ever to you for supporting us through donations, and your subscriptions. We are finding the economic times tough for a small not-for-profit organisation – but your support allows us to continue campaigning for safer, healthier food through our projects and journalism.

We hope you like the new colour look of *The Food Magazine* – expect to see a few more style changes in our upcoming issues. New print technologies mean that we can bring you all of the wonderful photos we collect in colour – for about the same price as black and white used to cost us. We have also shifted our magazine schedule in response to many reader requests – expect magazines in March, June, September, and December. What won't change is our commitment to taking no ads of any kind, and to well-researched stories.

We hope you enjoy the magazine, and that you rightly feel a part of our campaign work. We could not do it without you. Please share the magazine and encourage others to subscribe – every new subscriber helps to keep us keeping the food industry and policy makers on their toes.



Calorie information on UK menus

The Food Standards Agency's voluntary scheme to get catering establishments to sign up to calorie labelling at point of sale aims to show some action by the end of June. KFC, Subway, Wimpy, and Pizza Hut are amongst the so-called early adopters promising to offer, according to the FSA, "clear and easily visible calorie information at the point where most people choose their food."

The Food Commission has been actively campaigning on this issue, most recently delivering a presentation on it in Brussels at the annual meeting of the Trans Atlantic Consumer Dialogue. However, we have been calling for mandatory requirements for calorie labelling – at point of sale, ideally on menu boards or on menus right next to item descriptions, in font as large as the item price. This follows success in American cities such as New York, where such labelling schemes are already showing evidence that consumers use the information to make lower calorie choices.

It remains to be seen how much success the UK's voluntary scheme will have – where chains have not even promised that all of their branches will offer such information. This seems particularly unreasonable in light of the fact that Yum! Brands (owner of KFC and Pizza Hut) have begun a massive roll out of such information in their restaurants all over the USA. A recent visit to a KFC and a Pizza Hut here showed nothing on offer at the Pizza Hut, and nutritional information on the underside of the tray liner at KFC. Staff in neither restaurant had any idea that their company were early adopters, although Pizza Hut staff said they had a new menu coming out soon. We will keep an eye on developments – it could be that the next few weeks will make all the difference.

Meanwhile The Food Commission has also called for action on point of sale information about salt. A recent survey of pub meals by the group Consensus Action on Salt & Health showed many such meals were hugely salty – but there is no sign that the chains surveyed have signed up to work with the FSA.

Professor Graham MacGregor, Chairman of CASH and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at St George's Hospital in London said: "Food retailers in the UK have agreed to new 2012 targets for ready meals of 1.13g salt (maximum), 0.63g salt (average) per 100 grams, set by the Food Standards Agency. CASH would like to see the same 2012 targets set for all pub and restaurant chains and other meals eaten outside the home."

To read The Food Commission's report *Ignorance is not bliss when eating out* see www.foodmagazine.org.uk. To find out more about the excellent work of CASH see www.actiononsalt.org.uk.

Children's Food Festival

The Food Commission & *The Food Magazine* has a stall at the Children's Food Festival near Oxford on the weekend June 27/28th. We will have cartooning for young people, an additive-free tombola, and displays about our work.

We are also hosting a debate in the main tent on the subject of celebrities and food promotion, and will be launching our own charter to encourage celebrities to give up junk food marketing. Take note of one of the latest celebrity marketing campaigns – Mars Balls Get Britain Playing – which has signed up John Barnes, Austin Healy, Darren Gough and Pat Cash.

So far our amazing line up includes the actress Greta Scacchi (to oppose ads for junk foods), two students from Dunraven School, and Sheila Dillon, presenter of BBC Radio 4's *The Food Programme* as chairperson. See www.foodmagazine.org.uk or www.northmoortrust.co.uk for more information.

Advertising junk



2-a-day the smoothie way

Many readers got in touch with us to ask about the new TV ad campaign for Innocent smoothies – "A gentle nudge towards your 5-a-day."

Our readers were not alone in thinking that government health advice confirmed that smoothies, like juices, can count for just one portion of your 5-a-day, once a day. The public health nutritionists we spoke to thought so too.

The Food Magazine has asked the Department of Health (DH) to clear this up for us – but at the time of going to press there has been no word from them to settle the confusion. Their 5 a day website (www.5aday.nhs.uk) completely skirts around the issue. This is despite the fact that Dr. Shilpee Mehrotra, a nutritionist at Innocent, has confirmed to us that they company are in fact in possession of a letter from DH, dated 20th March 2009, confirming that, so long as their smoothies are composed of 80grams of crushed fruit, and 150 millilitres of pure fruit juice – and nothing else – they can in fact count as 2 a day.

According to Mehrotra the company engaged in a more than two year process of discussion with DH, finally submitting a dossier of supporting evidence considering matters such as: the contribution of smoothies to diet; the effect of smoothies on teeth; fibre levels; and exact portion / ingredient composition. Mehrotra says that DH are not yet coming clean to the public about this as: "there is as yet apparently no pan-European definition of a smoothie." She suggests DH are wary of altering their dietary advice to the public before this happens.

There is also still the issue of whether 2-a-day smoothies can count more than once a day – at the moment Innocent say they have no plans to say anything about this in their advertisements, but that DH has said nothing either way – so presumably they could. If smoothies really are so good for us then this is a missed opportunity for the DH to promote consumption. At least our government regulators should let us in on the secret.

Junk food ads account for around half of television advertisements for food that are shown when children are likely to be watching in the UK, researchers have told the European Congress on obesity. A study of 11 countries shows the UK is by no means worst, with Germany and the United States leading the pack at 90%.

"Internationally, children are exposed to high volumes of unhealthy food and beverage advertising on television," Bridget Kelly, a nutrition researcher at the Cancer Council NSW in Australia, and colleagues told the European Congress on Obesity in Amsterdam this May.

Ofcom published a review of the effectiveness of UK controls on such advertising in the new year which suggested a decline in the amount of ads for high fat, saturated fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) foods viewed by children. However, Jane Landon, deputy chief executive of the National Heart Forum suggested the figures be viewed with caution due to how they were compiled.

Landon, also chair of The Food Commission & *The Food Magazine*, renewed calls for tighter controls: "It is encouraging to see that children's channels have more than offset a decline in food and drink advertising revenue with increased advertising revenue overall. This should now silence the dire warnings from broadcasters that food and drink advertising restrictions will kill off children's TV, and it ought to help stiffen government resolve to implement a full restriction on HFSS food and drink advertising up to the 9pm watershed."



It isn't just chicken

A Food Standards Agency (FSA) study into the composition of so-called injection powders used to retain water in chicken breast products has shown the presence of unlabelled beef and pork proteins in these products supplied mainly to catering businesses.

The use of injection powders containing meat proteins is legal, so long as the ingredients are labelled. The problem was, the injection powders being examined by the FSA claimed to contain only chicken protein. The addition of water to some chicken and chicken products is also perfectly legal, so long as products with more than 5% added water list it as an ingredient, and so long as water is declared in the name of the food. Water cannot legally be added to fresh meat you buy off the counter at butchers or in supermarkets.

The injection powders used to keep added water in chicken commonly contain salt, phosphates, and hydrolysed animal proteins. These ingredients may well be declared on the label of packets sold to caterers, but it is unlikely that consumers in catering establishments know just what they are getting.

The FSA says it has no reason to suspect that their findings indicate a widespread problem, but it is conducting further research in conjunction with European partners.



Read yourself thin

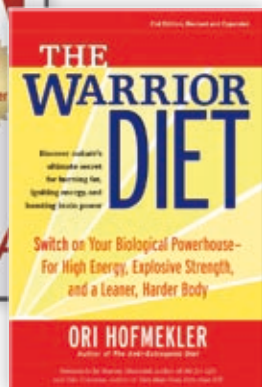
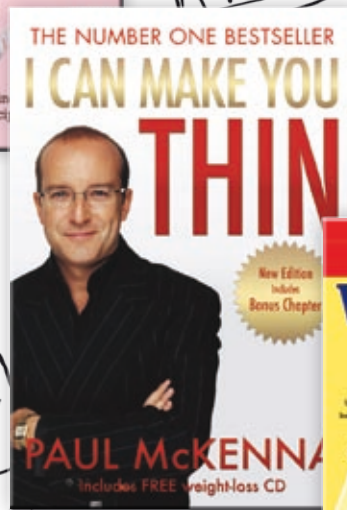
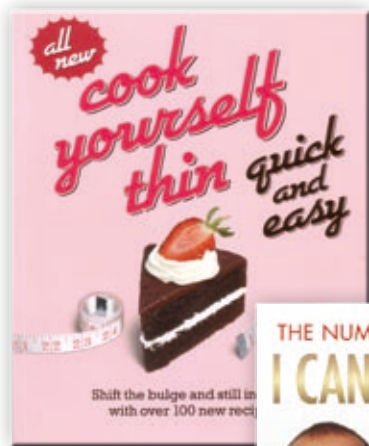
Fresh
Gibberadish

**Or, as one self help weight loss guide suggests:
Cook yourself thin. Jessica Mitchell wonders, didn't the
Spanish Inquisition think that up first?**

Summer diet season is upon us and the nation's publishers and publicists have gone slimming crazy. According to them I have anywhere between one and six weeks to whip my diet and exercise regime into shape if I am to have my proud-to-be-me beach lounging *Bikini Body* (Collins & Brown).

Not a day passes when I don't learn that I can get that body by following one of a multitude of regimes. *The Warrior Diet* (North Atlantic Books) recommends night-time eating – in defiance of conventional wisdom that raiding the fridge in the wee hours helps you pile on the pounds. Something to do with the author's radical discovery about a special night-time metabolism of foods. *The Chopsticks Diet* (Kyle Cathie) figures that if you cannot control your eating urges, the least you can do is make it difficult to feed yourself – perhaps try eating with your toes, that might slow you down even further.

If I feel I need a somewhat more military approach, I could always go on Gillian McKeith's *Boot Camp Diet - 14 days to a new you!* (Penguin), or attend a seven day so-called GI Jane residential bootcamp (www.gijanebootcamp.co.uk), where I could apparently lose up to a stone. Sadly, I am double-booked for that week.



I may prefer to see if I can have myself hypnotised thin as advised by Paul McKenna in the rather sinister sounding *I can make you thin* (Bantam Press), but I almost feel like throwing in the towel anyway, as apparently *French Women Don't Get Fat* (Vintage) – so there, you sad, sad British women.

For those not convinced by any of the above titles, take a visit to your town centre bookstore. The one I visited had more than 500 on the shelf – if you are feeling mentally challenged on the day you can always purchase the *Idiot-Proof Diet Cookbook* (Penguin). The helpful clerk kindly printed me a list of the top 20 sellers in their diet section – and then asked me if I was from a rival bookstore chain. She noted that from her experience the books were mostly purchased in conjunction with other self-help books.

I have mentioned some of the titles above, and you can see the full list on *The Food Magazine's* website. It is truly an encapsulation of human hope, desire and an indication of our will to believe. When was the last time your doctor advised you to eat like a stone age man, as suggested in *The Paleo Diet* (John Wiley & Sons)? Or how about as advised by the store's top seller – *Eat Right For Your Type*, of blood that is? You may as well eat right for your shoe size or hair colour.

There is nothing to stop the diet industry creating castles in the air to make money – so long as they don't recommend anything outrightly dangerous. However, we could all get a grip of ourselves. There is more sensible, safe advice on offer about how to eat healthily whilst cutting calories moderately, and exercising more – if your doctor really feels you need to do so. But, if you prefer to *Juice Yourself Slim* (Harper Thorsons) or to follow *The Fat Flush Plan* (McGraw-Hill) or go to *From Flab to Fab* (John Blake Publishing) – I tell you what, I've got a bridge I'd like to sell you.



Change4Life...

**Dr. Helen Crawley, of City University's
Centre for Food Policy, asks if the
£75million of government money spent on
Change4Life will change family food habits
for the better...**

The Department of Health (DH) launched its £75million Change4Life campaign in January 2009. Change4Life brings together health and education professionals, industry and the voluntary sector with the shared aims to improve children's diets and levels of activity so reducing the threat to their future health and happiness. The goal is to help every family in England eat well, move more and live longer. To do this, it is hoped that national, regional and local partners – health care professionals, teachers, charities, government agencies, the media, big businesses and community organisations – will help build Change4Life into a 'movement'.

Change4Life is a social marketing campaign, the idea being that you can use the same marketing principles used to sell products to consumers, to 'sell' healthy ideas, attitudes and behaviours. The majority of the funds spent by the DH to date have been in advertising campaigns on television and in the media; a helpline, which is outsourced to private contractor;

a marketing campaign asking parents to provide details of their children's lifestyles and in return receive individual health improvement plans; and in promoting links with other organisations.

It is difficult to argue with the laudable aims of the campaign: there is a consensus among health professionals that the rise in obesity will lead to greater levels of ill health and premature deaths among the current generation of children. There are no simple solutions, campaigns, activities or schemes which have been shown to reduce obesity across population groups, and Change4Life has risen from a relative policy vacuum. To date there have been relatively few critics of Change4Life as experts have waited to see how the campaign evolved: but there is growing unease about the failure of Government to actually tackle the issues at the heart of an obesogenic environment – most notably the cheapness, availability, and heavy promotion of high fat and sugar foods.



There are a number of areas of contention around the Change4Life campaign;

- Are the messages it is promoting based on sound evidence?
- Can the emphasis on increasing activity levels lead to a significant reduction in obesity?
- Will a partnership approach with the food industry enlighten, or confuse, the messages of the campaign?
- Can a 'social marketing' approach move the mountain of obesity in our children simply through increasing awareness?
- As one public health commentator noted, 'preventing obesity is not like selling soap powder'.

Who is Change4Life aimed at?

The Change4Life campaign is aimed at 'families,' although there is some confusion as to who the messages are aimed at. The Department of Health claim they are aimed at 5-11 year olds, but this is not explained on the literature, and the helpline staff questioned on a number of occasions say they give advice for 2-16 year olds.

For parents of under 2s there is a small leaflet called 'Getting off to the best start' which covers pregnancy, breastfeeding and weaning. This leaflet, however, only provides some very simple messages, and fails to even mention some of the key issues related to nutrition in pregnancy and during breastfeeding – such as the need for folic acid when planning a pregnancy and in the first 12 weeks, and the need to take vitamin D supplementation. We were told by the DH that they are planning a new campaign for under 2s called 'Start4Life' – but have no plans at the moment to provide information for 3-5 year olds. The lack of clarity over who the messages are aimed at is causing confusion among health professionals, particularly those who deal with difficulties of underweight among the under 5s, which can be a significant problem in some areas of the country.





What evidence has been used to underpin Change4Life?

Data on projected obesity rates which formed the rationale for the Change4Life campaign was collated for the *Healthy Weight Healthy lives* report published in 2008. This report used the evidence collected by the Foresight committee which used calculations to predict how obesity might impact on the population over the next 40 years. In this report they suggest that of the current 10 year old boys and girls in England:

By their 21st birthdays in 2020:
41% of boys and 34% of girls will be obese
42% of boys and 32% of girls will be overweight.

By their 50th birthdays in 2049:
60% of men and 50% of the women will be obese
35% of men and 34% of women will be overweight.

It is these latter figures that have been used by Change4Life to say that '9 out of 10 of our kids risk growing up to have dangerous amounts of fat in their bodies'.

In fact, Foresight predicted that whilst 95% of men might be overweight and obese by 2050, this was likely for 84% of women. Whether it is accurate to say that all adults with a Body Mass Index over 25 have 'dangerous amounts of fat which can cause life-threatening diseases such as cancer and heart disease' could however be debated. The simplifying of the data to '9 out of 10' of our kids, and advertising suggesting that children risk an early death from eating cakes or playing computer games, has angered some who have complained to the Advertising Standards Authority that the Change4Life campaign is scaremongering.

What are the main Change4Life policies around food and exercise?

The campaign has eight key messages aimed at parents;

- Sugar swaps (choosing low sugar foods and drinks)
- Me size meals (eating proportional to your size)
- Meal time (eating at meal times with the family and not skipping breakfast)
- Snack check (cutting down on the number of snacks children have each day and replacing sweets, crisps, biscuits, chocolate and cake with healthier alternatives)
- Cut back fat (choosing low fat options, grilling instead of frying)
- 5 a day (showing that it is easy to include 5 child sized portions of fruit and vegetables a day)
- 60 active minutes per day
- Up and about.



Test calls to the Change4Life helpline

Some of the responses given by the Change4Life helpline to one mum who called them highlight the confusion about what appropriate dietary messages are for children of different ages, and the potential danger of a general helpline staffed with minimally trained staff.

Jo has 3 children aged 7 years, 4 years and 18 months. She called the Change4Life helpline three times on different days in May 2009, and asked a number of similar questions for each child. The helpline advisors were happy to answer questions for all the children, even the youngest. She asked whether it was alright to give low sugar foods to the children and was told that this was fine for all of them and it didn't matter how much they had; she asked if low fat foods were suitable and was told again for all three children that these were good choices. She asked about drinks that she could use and was told for all three children that fresh fruit juice and smoothies were the drinks of choice (only after she prompted them did they acknowledge that milk and water were also suitable). She asked if dried fruit was a suitable snack and was told that it was a good choice for all three children. **This information contradicts advice given elsewhere for children.**

Is exercise the key to the obesity crisis?

The last two relate to physical activity, and the overall message of Change4Life is that 'moving – any kind of moving' is better than sitting around. Promoting activity as a way of reducing obesity has long been the message of choice from the food industry which sees this as a way of avoiding discussions around eating less of items that they produce.

Whilst exercise is essential, and everyone agrees that children and young people should be as active as possible, it takes a considerable amount of activity to lose weight and there has to be a reduction in calorie intake for most people as well. It was suggested at The European Congress on Obesity in Amsterdam in May 2009 that there was a need to re-focus obesity campaigns on diet and the availability and over-promotion of highly calorific foods rather than on activity. So far there is little evidence that promoting activity to children increases the amount that they do.

Researchers from the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Research at Deakin University suggest that there has not been the decline in activity in recent times so often suggested as the root cause of obesity. Over-eating is almost entirely to blame for the rise in obesity in the developed world, and Professor Boyd Swinburn from Deakin suggests that for the US population to return to leaner 1970s levels, children would have to cut their intake by about 350 calories a day — equal to a can of fizzy drink and a small portion of chips, and adults by about 500 calories — about the same as a Big Mac burger. Alternatively children would have to walk an extra 2½ hours a day, and adults nearly two hours.

Do Change4Life messages contradict other policy?

Sugar swaps

The sugar swaps campaign encourages diet drinks, sugar-free squashes and unsweetened fruit juices as well as sugar free and low sugar foods such as desserts, yoghurts and cakes. A call to the Change4Life helpline in May 2009 by a parent confirmed that according to Change4Life 'all low sugar choices are fine for children'. Advice given by health professionals however recommends that no drinks other than milk or water are safe for children's teeth, and all fruit based drinks including juices should be restricted to meal times.

Food Standards Agency advice also says that 'if you give concentrated soft drinks that contain sweeteners to children aged under 4, it's important to dilute them more than you would for an adult. This is to avoid children having large amounts



of sweetener'. In addition it is recommended that 'carers should limit the amount of dilutable drinks that contain cyclamate given to young children to no more than three beakers (averaging about 180ml) a day'.

Ad lib advice on low sugar drinks therefore seems to fly in the face of Government policy. More worryingly perhaps is the idea that it is absolutely fine to continue to habituate children to the very sweet taste of foods and drinks with artificial sweeteners in rather than to reduce the amount of very sweet foods and drinks in the diet.

Me size meals

According to Change4Life, children need 'a lot less' to eat at mealtimes than adults. We are encouraged to base their portions around their proportionally smaller size, and there is an assumption that parents typically give 'adult sized' meals to children at home. Whilst it may well be that older children have adult sized meals when eating out, there is no evidence that we can find that shows that it is the portions of food served at mealtimes which are leading to high energy intakes among children. In fact, it is probably because children are not eating big enough portions of starchy foods like bread, potatoes, rice and pasta at their meal times that they are snacking on higher fat and sugar foods between meals.

Consider a 7-10 year old, a 11-14 year old, and a 15-18 year old. The energy needs of boys in these age groups are about 80% , 90% and 110% of an adult male. The energy needs of girls in these age bands are 90%, 95% and 110% of an adult female. Children need energy for growth and activity and therefore have proportionally greater needs than an adult for their body size. To suggest that you restrict food at meal times to growing children seems to be the opposite message to one which many nutritionists would suggest: namely that children should eat well at meal times, with a significant proportion of starchy foods and fruit and vegetables as well as a meat or alternative, as these meals will provide the bulk of the important nutrients that children need.

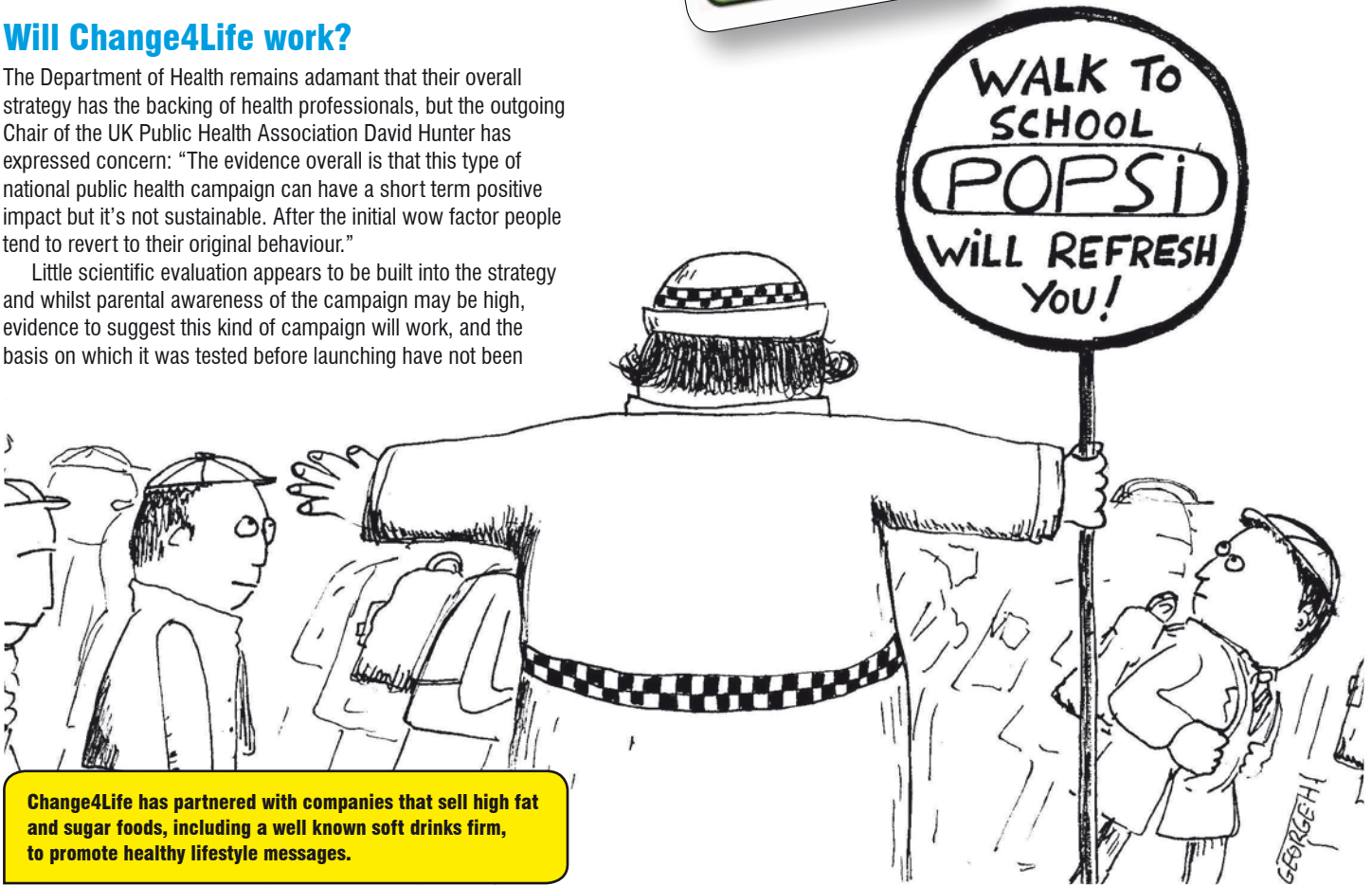
Will Change4Life work?

The Department of Health remains adamant that their overall strategy has the backing of health professionals, but the outgoing Chair of the UK Public Health Association David Hunter has expressed concern: "The evidence overall is that this type of national public health campaign can have a short term positive impact but it's not sustainable. After the initial wow factor people tend to revert to their original behaviour."

Little scientific evaluation appears to be built into the strategy and whilst parental awareness of the campaign may be high, evidence to suggest this kind of campaign will work, and the basis on which it was tested before launching have not been

made publicly available. It could be argued that £75million might have been better spent in ensuring that good food and drink choices are available to children in nurseries and children's centres, in sports centres and in other public places that they spend their time. One of the campaign messages could have been around encouraging parents to take up new, healthier school meals.

Without a reduction in the availability of high fat and high sugar foods, we are unlikely to see sustainable behaviour change. If Change4Life fails to turn the obesity tide then it will join other such campaigns across the globe which have also attempted to use a blunt instrument to crack a complex problem and which have been conveniently forgotten about when the initial enthusiasm dies down. There are many campaigners in the UK, however, who could have thought of other ways to spend such a large amount of taxpayers' money.



‘Fat’ prejudice is not ok

Dr Rebecca Puhl of Yale University says Western prejudice towards overweight and obese people shames us all, and does nothing for public health.

Obesity has become a public health priority around the world. Scientists, health professionals, policy makers, and government leaders are spending considerable efforts to identify effective strategies to prevent and treat obesity. Unfortunately, an often overlooked issue in these efforts is the widespread stigmatisation toward overweight and obese persons, who face prejudice from multiple sources. Weight bias is a pervasive problem for thousands of children and adults, and can be detrimental to their emotional and physical health.

People who would not consider racist or sexist humour acceptable may nonetheless make ‘weightist’ jokes. In the UK, and the USA, the media takes a generally negative tone about the contribution of overweight people to our society. This year alone there have been reports that obese persons are partly responsible for global warming, increasing fuel prices, and promoting weight gain among their friends.

What is weight bias?

A person who is the recipient of negative attitudes from others because he or she is overweight or obese has been the target of weight bias. Weight bias refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about body weight that become manifested in stereotypes, prejudice and unfair treatment toward children and adults because they are overweight or obese. Weight bias can be expressed in a range of ways, including verbal comments (e.g. derogatory remarks, pejorative language, teasing), social exclusion (e.g. being avoided, ignored, or excluded from activities) and even physical aggression (e.g. being shoved, pushed, kicked).

Weight bias also translates into inequities and discrimination in employment settings, health care facilities, and educational institutions, often due to widespread negative stereotypes that overweight and obese persons are lazy, unmotivated, and lacking in self-discipline. These stereotypes are prevalent and are rarely challenged in Western society, leaving obese persons vulnerable to negative societal attitudes, unfair treatment, and substantial social disadvantages.

What is the impact of weight bias?

Weight bias can lead to numerous negative consequences for emotional and physical health of people who are affected. First, weight bias may lead to unhealthy behaviors that contribute to obesity. There tends to be a public perception that stigma is justifiable because it may motivate obese persons to be healthier and lose weight. However, research suggests that the opposite is true. As obesity rates have worsened over time, so too has weight-based stigmatisation. Overweight youth and adults who are victimised or teased by others because of their weight are more likely to engage in unhealthy weight control practices and binge eating behaviours.

Weight bias has worsened as obesity levels have risen

As an example, in our own research we studied over 2400 overweight and obese women, and asked them about their experiences of weight bias and how they coped with this bias. Seventy-nine percent of women reported that they had coped with weight bias by eating more food, and 75% reported that they refused to keep dieting in response to bias. Furthermore, it appears that people who internalise negative stigma (e.g. blame themselves for existing stereotypes) are especially at risk of engaging in binge-eating behaviours. Weight bias may also lead to avoidance of physical activity, as those who have been targets of stigmatisation report less motivation to exercise, and may engage in lower levels of strenuous and moderate physical activity. Overweight youths who are teased about their weight are less likely to participate in physical education classes, where teasing from peers is common.

Secondly, weight bias also has concerning implications for emotional well-being. Overweight and obese persons who experience weight bias have poorer body image, lower self-esteem, and higher risk of depression. Especially concerning is that obese youth who are victimised by peers because of their weight are 2-3 times more likely to engage in suicidal behaviours compared to their overweight peers who are not teased.

Finally, weight bias may contribute to poorer health care experiences for obese persons. Research shows that obese patients have decreased utilisation of health care services as a result of experiencing weight bias in health care settings. Specifically, obese women report avoiding and delaying preventive health services because they have experienced

negative attitudes and disrespectful treatment from their providers, medical equipment that was too small for their body size, and embarrassment about being weighed. These barriers to health care were especially common among the heaviest patients.

Why does weight bias occur?

Weight bias has become a socially acceptable form of stigma in our society. The roots of weight bias can be found in many places, but several contributors are especially important to highlight. First, perceptions of personal responsibility for body weight are prevalent in our society, and these views can reinforce blame of obese persons that perpetuates stigma. Public perceptions commonly view obesity as simply an issue of personal willpower or lack of self-discipline. These stereotypes are reinforced by a billion-dollar diet industry, which is based on the premise that body weight is easily malleable, and that people can achieve whatever body weight or shape they want. These messages ignore and drastically oversimplify the causes of obesity, which are much more complex. Obesity is caused by a complex interaction of environmental, genetic, and biological factors, and individual behaviours are only one piece of this complex puzzle. Increasing awareness and understanding of the complex causes of obesity is important in efforts to shift negative societal attitudes about obese persons.

It is also important to consider media portrayals of overweight and obese individuals, who are often negatively stereotyped and ridiculed in television,

film, and the internet. In both children’s and adult’s media, obese characters are portrayed as the target of ridicule or humour, and are depicted as being lazy, out of control, sloppy, eating junk food, and lacking in social and romantic relationships. When we consider how much media our culture consumes, it’s not surprising that such negative societal attitudes have emerged. This may be especially true among youth, who are more likely to express bias toward overweight peers if they are exposed to more television and fashion magazines.

Finally, without legal sanctions to prohibit weight-based discrimination, societal stigmatisation of obese persons is tolerated. In the United States, where prevalence rates of weight discrimination have increased 66% in the past decade, there is no federal legislation to protect obese persons from unfair treatment, and only one state has passed a law. Thus, unlike other forms of more widely recognised social stigmas related to ethnicity, or gender, or age, there are no legal sanctions to protect obese individuals from weight discrimination. If we allow weight discrimination to continue against obese persons, shifting societal attitudes and reducing stigma becomes an even steeper challenge.

Weight bias is a public health priority

Historically, government responses to public health issues (such as tuberculosis, influenza, polio, and HIV/AIDS) have included large-scale efforts to reduce stigma associated with these diseases. While there is significant consensus that stigma undermines public health, this principle has not been applied to the obesity epidemic. Weight stigma threatens the psychological and physical health of obese individuals, interferes with effective efforts to prevent obesity, and contributes to health disparities. However, common societal assumptions about obesity, including the notion that obese individuals are to blame for their weight, contribute to the disregard of these public health consequences of weight stigma.

It is important to recognise that our social constructions of obesity play a central role in defining policy responses to this problem. By limiting government responses for obesity to victim-blaming or only providing information about nutrition and physical activity, then we ignore important societal, economic, and environmental causes of obesity that require intervention, and weight stigma and discrimination are equally disregarded.

In order for the public health community to address the widespread social disadvantages and health disparities faced by obese people, we must move past the victim-blaming approach and instead implement comprehensive obesity prevention strategies that include efforts to reduce weight-based stigma and discrimination. Increasingly, youth-based obesity prevention programs are beginning to address stigma and its consequences. It is essential that anti-stigma messages become standard components of obesity prevention campaigns, and that the primary focus of interventions becomes ‘health’ for individuals of all sizes, as the main motivator and desired outcome for change.

Rebecca Puhl, Ph.D., is the Director of Research and Weight Stigma Initiatives at the non-profit Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University.

For more resources on weight bias, including research articles, videos, tool-kits, handouts, weblinks, and powerpoint slides, please visit www.yaleruddcenter.org.



Unhealthily thin

Recently, two Year 10 students from the Ridgeway School, in Swindon, got in touch with *The Food Magazine* about their concern over media obsession with celebrities’ weight.

Charlie Robson and Jess Oakley also sent us a fictional drama piece they had written, called *Unhealthily thin*, it is about two anorexic friends. This is an edited excerpt where one has just been told by her parents that her friend has died.

“All I can hear is the voice in my head, showing its disgust at how fat my body is, letting me know I’m not worthy of oxygen because I am so gross. Chloe was better than me, and that’s why she died. The voice, a muted whisper now, echoes around my head using all its persuasive powers, drawing me in deeper and deeper. Anorexia is my only friend now, the only one I can trust.”

Jess told us: “This is a topic that I feel strongly about as it plays a part in my life, as a curvier teenager I see all these stick thin women and wonder why aren’t I like that. I am very aware of the measures young girls will go to get a skeletal frame as they desire to be like their role models. I think that girls with eating issues and weight problems understand well enough what they are doing to their bodies but they can’t stop; desperate to be size 0 they will do anything and eventually the compulsion takes over and they are no longer in control. I chose this topic as I didn’t think it was known enough about, the research we did proved that students aren’t taught about these life affecting illnesses. We need to educate impressionable young minds against eating disorders and what to do if they are worried.”

Charlie told us: “This topic raises strong emotions for me as I have had a friend who has suffered from the eating disorder. Although she is now back at her school having undergone treatment for a year she still has a constant battle with the anorexic voices in her head. The evidence

shows that due to the media’s constant scrutiny of celebrities and their body image a whole generation of young girls is under pressure to lose weight and be abnormally thin. It’s time to stop this and get young women to feel good about themselves whatever their natural size is. Eating healthily is important as teenagers are still developing and the media needs to change focus and celebrate women of all shapes and sizes. Recently there have been a number of ads and TV programmes that use real women as models and get women to feel comfortable in their own bodies but this is still small compared to the images that bombard young people of the super skinny. If we can do a little to change things and save just one young person then that is a start.”

Both Charlie and Jess told *The Food Magazine* that they think information about food and health needs to be communicated to young people but in a way that does not make people feel bad about themselves whatever size they are.

Rebecca Puhl says that she agrees: “My perspective is that we need to promote healthy lifestyle behaviours among everyone – regardless of their weight. Poor nutrition and physical inactivity occur in people of all sizes, and we need to make sure that we don’t make generalisations or assumptions about a person’s health simply based on their appearance – there are many people who are overweight but who engage in healthy lifestyle behaviours, and many people who are thin who don’t.”



Why GM food is hard to swallow

Negative attitudes toward genetically modified (GM) food and crops just won't disappear, no matter how hard Monsanto and Syngenta try to wish them away.

The companies that market GM seeds have been bombarding us for more than a decade with advertisements and 'news items' where 'specialists' like farmers and white-coated scientists tell us that GM crops can solve hunger and nutritional difficulties around the world by helping to control pests, crop diseases and weeds, and by offering better nutritional quality. The recent world food crisis has provided a great opportunity for industry to step up the propaganda blitz to an even more fevered pitch. But all is not well for Industry.

This year Germany became the sixth country in Europe to prohibit planting some or all GM crops inside its borders, thus joining Austria, Greece, France, Hungary and Luxembourg. Beyond those six, Italy and Poland have moratoriums on GM crops. These countries have largely stopped GM crops by banning the MON 810 variety of genetically engineered maize, patented by Monsanto, which so far is the only GM crop to be authorized by the EU. In April Monsanto filed a suit against the German government in the administrative court in Braunschweig in northern Germany, against what a Monsanto spokesman called an arbitrary ban that violates EU rules. Family farm, environmental groups and scientists all fear that pollen from GM maize planted in Europe will compromise non-GM crops. They say that GM and non-GM just can't coexist.

Meanwhile, 22 senior scientists blasted the Tufts University School of Medicine for violating medical ethics by testing GM rice on unwitting school-children in China. These scientists are concerned about possible negative health effects on the kids.

See: www.i-sis.org.uk/goldenRiceScandal.php

With GM thus back in the headlines, it seems like a good time to update ourselves on the issues the GM raises for the environment, for food production, and for our health. It turns out that evidence from Mexico indicates that GM and normal GM maize indeed cannot coexist, while a number of reports and studies on GM and human health suggest that the scientists who criticized Tufts had good reason for their concern. Finally, GM crops have a dismal track record in terms of providing any significant increase in food production.

GM: A poor track record

It may surprise many to learn that GM crops hardly produce any more than conventional crops. A recent study by the Union of Concerned Scientists in the United States summarised 20 years of experimental data and 13 years of actual production data. They looked at the two main categories of GM crops. Chemical companies are locked into a global battle for market-share of weed killer sales. Each company now markets GM seeds that only tolerate their own company's herbicide, forcing farmers to buy that brand. The idea is to kill the weeds without killing the crop.

But for these crops that have been engineered to tolerate these proprietary brands of weed killers, which make up about 70% of all GM seeds sold, the scientists found no increase in

production whatsoever when they were used. Most of the other GM crops have been engineered to produce their own bug killers. For those seeds, like MON 801 that contain their own insecticide, they found somewhere between a 3 and a 4% boost in production, not enough in most cases to even cover the higher costs of these seeds.

Thus there is no reason whatsoever to believe industry claims that GM seeds produce more. Worse still, planting GM seeds can put our future food supply at risk. This turns out to be because of the way that scientists engineer GM crops.

Lousy news for humanity, great news for a company

Genetic engineers face a very basic obstacle when they try to insert a foreign gene into a crop plant. Because all organisms, including plants and humans, are attacked by viruses that stick foreign DNA into our chromosomes, Mother Nature has seen fit to equip all of us with 'suppressor genes,' that simply switch off any foreign gene they do not recognise.



Image © Nico Porelundo

The GM Freeze campaign is currently working to encourage Trading Standards to do more about GM oil being used by chip shops, and other take aways, but which is not labelled on the menu (illegal). GM Freeze suggests *Food Magazine* readers ask if GM oil is being used – if it is, and is not labelled, contact GM Freeze, and let your local Trading Standards department know.

GM Freeze www.gmfreeze.org

Patients warned off GM foods

Doctors in the United States are starting to tell their patients to avoid GM foods. The evidence about food allergies and adverse health effects caused by the GM soya and GM maize in US diets is so strong that this week the American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) called for an immediate moratorium on GM foods. AAEM wants more US doctors to be able to recognise the symptoms of negative reactions to GM foods, so that they can advise patients to avoid them.

The AAEM base their position on seeing reactions in their human patients, as well as extensive and numerous studies on animals, which show disturbing effects from GM feed.



This protects us, and plants, from many genetic diseases. The earliest attempts at genetic engineering were met with failure, as the inserted genes failed to function. But scientists realised that viruses have been fighting this particularly evolutionary battle for millions of years, and have evolved 'promoter genes' which flip the switch back to 'on.' So when they insert a gene of interest – like tolerance of weed killers – they now stick it in along with a promoter gene. The promoter gene makes sure it works. Unfortunately this also presents a new risk for most of us, a risk which is actually a benefit for the company.

When organisms reproduce sexually, our chromosomes very occasionally break into pieces which recombine in new ways. Most of these new combinations do not work, as they break up groups of genes that have evolved to work together. The offspring with these changes are typically still-born, or in the case of plants, are seeds that just will not germinate.

In Nature, this is about a one-in-a-million occurrence. But with the promoter genes used by genetic engineers, chromosomes tend to break much more frequently. This means that seeds from GM crops at best do not breed true from one generation to another, or at worst do not produce fertile seeds at all. This is great news for the company, because it means the farmer cannot save his or her own seed for the next planting, but must go back and buy new seeds every time. It is not such great news for humanity.

© Peter Rosset



Mexican peasants protest against the World Trade Organization ("OMC" in Spanish) for forcing countries to accept imported GM seeds. Here they make an offering of their native maize varieties.

GM can damage Mexican peasant maize, guarantor of our future food supply

Plants cross-breed by pollen that blows around or is carried by insects. In the case of Mexico, where I live, for years it was illegal to import and plant GM maize. That did not stop a few GM seeds from getting planted anyway, and the pollen from these contraband plants has now blown around and contaminated many of the local, traditional varieties of maize that peasants and indigenous people have carefully bred for generations. Now those varieties are at risk of loss, because the GM promoter genes may lead them to produce infertile seeds and plants with genetic diseases.

This puts the food supply of all humanity at risk. Mexico is where maize was domesticated by indigenous farmers some 10,000 years ago, and it is home to the largest reservoir in the world of natural genetic diversity of maize varieties and wild relatives. In the intervening years maize has spread around the world, and is now one of the most important food crops in every continent. Whenever a new challenge to maize production, like climate change or a new pest, arises anywhere, in Africa, for example, local maize breeders look to Mexico for diversity to breed in. Because of the abundant variety of maize types in Mexican peasant farms, there is bound to be some form of resistance to the new challenge that can be found and bred in through traditional, non-GM crop breeding.

But if we lose the Mexican varieties, we lose our resources for the future. GM puts our food supply at risk. The Mexican experience with widespread contamination

of maize, after just a few clandestine GM plantings, speaks volumes to the debate in Europe. GM and non-GM maize cannot coexist, even at a continental level. Germany and the other countries are right to take action.

Down on the pharm?

The issue of contamination of food crops with GM pollen takes on significance for human health when we consider crops that have been genetically modified to produce pharmaceuticals – dubbed 'pharm crops.' Because the chemical synthesis of drugs is costly, companies are increasingly finding it easier to insert genes into crops that turn the plant into tiny drug labs. The drug is produced inside the plant's cells, and is then extracted and purified by the company. But imagine if a pharm crop spews its pollen forth into the wind and it falls in a farm where food for consumers is being grown? Who is to say we will not accidentally get a dose of a dangerous drug in our next meal? This is only the tip of the iceberg with GM health concerns.

Don't look, don't find

There are a number of reasons to be concerned about GM products in our food. The key word is concerned, as industry is quick to point out that little has been proven. Little has been proven, in turn, because industry lobbyists have seen to it that little funding is available to test for GM health risks. But by the same token, we can say that the safety of GM foods is far from proven, while recent years have seen many suggestive, though not conclusive, studies with alarming though preliminary results.

Every alarming study draws an unconvincing firestorm from pro-industry pundits and scientists bankrolled by

In the supermarket

Food Magazine reader Joanna Clarke sent us a Hershey's Nutrageous bar purchased 18th March at a Sainsbury's in Holborn. As she points out, it is legally labelled, "***contains genetically modified sugar, soya, and corn.**" But, as she also points out – the label is so crammed, and the font so small, it is no easy feat to see the warning.

The Food Magazine contacted Eve Mitchell at GM Freeze, the campaign on GM food, crops and patents, to find out more about GM products on our shelves. She told us: "In the UK all foods intentionally containing any amount of GM must be labelled. GM laws, however, also permit a certain level of 'adventitious' presence of GM – any such 'accidental' GM content below 0.9% does not need a label. Testing procedures and enforcement of these laws is patchy, and tests of unlabelled products do find GM contamination. Foods from animals fed a GM diet (like milk, eggs or meat) do not require a GM label, so consumers don't know where this is used and find it difficult to choose a non-GM alternative."

GM Freeze currently lists just five GM labelled products on UK supermarket shelves: KTC cooking oil, Hershey's Nutrageous, Pride cooking oil, Schwartz Seasoned salad topping; and General Mills Bacos Bacon flavour soya chips. Thanks to tough campaigning, just 2% of all crops grown globally are GM, and UK consumers are still quite well protected.

Check out the GM Freeze website www.gmfreeze.org for their latest list of GM products, or to report any you find.



industry research funds. A recent such 'scandal' revolves around a rat study carried out by Russian scientist Irina Ermakova. She found that young rats whose mothers were fed a diet of herbicide-tolerant GM soybeans, had higher mortality rates and lower body weight than normal rats. This has led to outcry concerning the risk that GM food may pose for human newborns. Dr. Ermakova, who is a senior scientist at the Russian Academy of Sciences, has been roundly criticized for being 'unscientific' in industry-linked journals like *AgBioWorld*. Like many other scientists who have tried to tell the public about the risks of GM foods, she has since had her research funding cut and been 'strongly advised' to drop her investigations. Despite such tactics, however, there is accumulating evidence that GM food might be harmful.

What we don't know won't hurt us?

In India, hundreds of farm workers and cotton handlers had severe allergy attacks after exposure to GM cotton. Thousands of sheep also died after grazing on GM cotton residues. In Australia, scientists at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization found that eating GM peas causes inflammation in the lungs of mice. In Italy, scientists at several universities published reports indicating that GM soy affects cells in the pancreas, liver and testes of young mice. In the U.S., a leaked, confidential Monsanto research report showed that rats fed on a GM maize developed serious kidney and blood abnormalities. And in the Philippines villagers suffered severe respiratory illnesses, and five died, when a Monsanto GM maize flowered and shed pollen in the wind. Subsequent blood tests revealed antibodies to a GM protein in their blood. All of this has happened the past five years.

So, would you eat the stuff, or want it growing next door?

Peter Rosset, Ph.D., is a researcher at the Center for the Study of Rural Change in Mexico (CECCAM), and is co-coordinator of the Land Research Action Network. www.landaction.org

A magic roundabout for recycling food

Jessica Mitchell investigates better uses for your 5-a-day scraps rather than throwing them in your bin...

Food waste recycling on a commercial scale is so logical when you think about it, that it is hard to believe it is still so uncommon. More than 20 million tonnes of food is thrown out a year in the UK, and although definitive figures are hard to put together, the government admits that the vast majority is simply sent to landfill.

That includes some perfectly edible food, but also bits such as bones, fruit and veg peelings, and coffee grounds. However, all of that is perfectly compostable – when put through the proper systems that can turn it into hygienic organic matter excellent for fertilising new fruit, vegetable, and animal feed crops. So, a perfect cycle – a magic roundabout of waste renewal if you will.

The lack of concerted action to get more of this waste composted, and recycled into usable fertiliser, is down to a few factors. It is still cheaper for commercial contractors to landfill waste; there is no national requirement for businesses or individual households to take part in such recycling; and commercial food waste recycling is still somewhat more complicated, as the systems are not fully in place to enable it.

However, there are pioneering initiatives around the UK that are changing our approach to food waste recycling. This activity is partly driven by the European Union Landfill Directive which has committed the UK to an initial target that by 2010 **biodegradable** municipal **waste** landfilled should be reduced to **75%** of that landfilled in 1995. It is not likely that this will be met on time, but progress is being made, and the cost of landfill is going up each year – providing an incentive to recycle.

Aardvark Recycling is a not-for-profit social enterprise that supports individual households, and commercial businesses

to recycle food waste. Aardvark has a contract with a council in London to collect on some estates, so the service is free to householders, but businesses pay waste disposal charges themselves, with the cost of recycling currently slightly more than simply sending waste to landfill. If councils committed more budget to supporting food waste recycling, social enterprises such as Aardvark could work to the benefit of us all. Development manager Natasha Harris says: “Demand for the compost we produce outstrips what we can supply – we currently make around 2 tonnes a month, and have a waiting list for around

An estate in south London now has an organic fruit and vegetable garden that uses compost from Aardvark. The not-for-profit company works with many such community projects on a low cost or free basis.



Whitechapel Market is a thriving, inner-city, multi-cultural delight for food shopping – where all of the food waste is now recycled.

Miah Kosru has been a stallholder for years and says the recycling scheme is a great idea.

3 tonnes.” Even in the borough where it is based, large local schools and markets simply landfill their organic leavings.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets does have a pioneering project in Whitechapel Market – where around 15 fruit, veg, and fish stallholders are required to recycle all of their food waste. Special bins are placed strategically behind each stall, and collected at least twice a day, six days a week, delivering nine tonnes of food waste every week for recycling. Paul Morris, senior market officer, says the scheme took awhile to settle in but works well: “We did a lot of consultation first to make sure we got it right, and I talk to stallholders regularly to sort out any problems. I think most of the market traders are very proud of being involved, as many have children who learn about these kind of issues in school.”

That pride was confirmed by all of the traders I met, with Miah Kosru saying: “It is a good idea, and no problem. We tell the customers about it, and they say they do it at home too.” The scheme is the brainchild of the borough’s head of markets, David Saunders, who says: “I am very pleased with the start that we have made in Whitechapel Market and our plan is to roll recycling

out to our other 9 street markets. It took a lot of hard work to set it up, however, the great thing was everyone could see why we should do it.” Many other boroughs from around the UK have visited the market to find out how they can get started.

If you are interested in finding out more, ask your local council about home and commercial schemes in your area.

You can also check out the work of Aardvark www.aardvarkrecycling.org.uk or Whitechapel Market by emailing streetmarkets@towerhamlets.gov.uk



1/3rd of all food we buy in the UK is thrown away

Why is it important to cut back on food waste and to recycle what we do throw out?

According to the government’s Love Food Hate Waste campaign, in total, annual food waste in the UK is around 18 - 20 million tonnes, with household food waste making the single largest contribution (6.7 million tonnes).

Retailers are believed to generate about 1.6 million tonnes of food waste, food manufacturers about 4.1 million tonnes, with food service and restaurants producing about another 3 million tonnes. The remainder comes from the agricultural and horticultural sector, and commercial food waste (e.g. from hospitals, schools, etc).

If we all stop wasting food that could have been eaten, the CO2 impact would be the equivalent of taking 1 in 5 cars off the road. If we recycle the rest – inedible bones, peels, coffee grounds – the positive environmental impact would be even greater. See www.lovefoodhatewaste.com



Aardvark has branched out into low cost fruit and veg boxes as part of its food waste recycling scheme. You can get a box, and have your scraps collected.



Contamination of food waste streams with non-compostable waste can be a problem – as shown by these bins in a large London park. However, commercial composting schemes are working with participants to reduce this contamination, and find most people and businesses very willing to be educated.



This is what the food waste at Aardvark Recycling looks like after around two weeks in the Rocket – a special machine that heats and grinds the material. The raw material can include meat, bones, cooked meals, just about anything your average householder or business throws out. It is still not ready for use – under animal by-products regulations it gets sent off to specialist veterinary laboratories to ensure it is disease free and safe for use. It also needs to mature for several weeks, and be sifted to ensure a good texture. By the time it has finished, the original waste has reduced been reduced by 75% in weight.



Any fish discarded from this stall on Whitechapel Market is now recycled to compost.



Raymond is one of just 6,000 householders that Aardvark collects food waste from on a weekly basis. The company has a contract with Lambeth Council to work with the householders. Aardvark provides the bins, biodegradable bin liners, and information about the work. All the householder needs to do it to put the bin outside their house once a week. Raymond says: “It is no problem at all. I am happy to do it.”



It might be a better idea to eat your 5-a-day rather than sculpt with it, but at least be sure to recycle your creation when it wilts.

There is so much potential for increasing food waste recycling. For example, there is no evidence that waste from school meals is composted on any great scale.



On the net:

www.wasteconnect.co.uk/
www.organics-recycling.org.uk/
www.recycling.co.uk/food-waste
www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/

A nation fit for pregnancy?

The Food Magazine investigates pregnancy and health...

Most people would agree that eating well during pregnancy is important for the health and well being of both the mother and her child, but there is increasing concern that this message is overlooked by our current generation of mothers-to-be. We know that poor nutrition from conception onwards can impact on a child's health, and poor diet is also linked to low birth weight. The percentage of low birth weight babies born in the UK remains one of the highest in Europe. In addition, growth restriction in the womb is thought to be related to ill health for that child in later life, increasing the risk of diabetes, stroke, cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis.

In addition, increasing evidence suggests that the nutritional status of a mother going into pregnancy can impact on a safe pregnancy outcome, with increasing numbers of overweight mothers putting their own health and the health of their infants at risk. With many mothers at the extreme of body weight (both too thin and too fat), young women striving for slim body shapes by restricting their food choices and many younger women consuming a diet high in pre-packaged and take-away foods, it is no wonder that people are beginning to ask – are we a nation fit for pregnancy?

How well nourished are young women in the UK?

Despite increasing affluence and greater information about the importance of nutrition, a number of population groups in the UK have poor nutritional status. Recent reports show that teenagers and young adults, particularly those from poorer households, both eat less well and are more likely to be malnourished. Amongst young women of childbearing age, many have low intakes of iron, zinc, calcium, folic acid, vitamin C, riboflavin and vitamin A. In addition, the intakes of fruits and vegetables are much lower than the 5 portions a day recommended and intakes of sugar, salt and saturated fat are high. Increasing numbers of young women are regular alcohol consumers and many young women in the UK have few skills when it comes to cooking which means they rely on ready prepared foods, soft drinks and snacks. As activity levels are low, many women eat small amounts of food to maintain their slim shapes making it very difficult for them to get all the nutrients they need.

How does poor nutrition affect fertility?

It is likely that poor diet and being too fat or too thin impacts on fertility for both men and women. For men, poor diet is associated with lower sperm quality and quantity. Being either overweight or underweight can also impact on sex drive and performance among men. Among women, being either underweight or overweight can cause irregular or infrequent menstrual cycles and reduce the success of fertility treatments.

Diet and lifestyle of young adult women in the UK

Among women aged 19-24, almost all (96%) consume fewer than the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, with the average daily consumption being 1.6 portions per day. Dietary fibre intakes are low and over a third (36%) have diets that exceed maximum recommendations of food energy from sugars, with soft drinks being one of the main sources. The amount of salt in their diets is also high, with 83% consuming more than the recommended maximum of 6g per day. The low iron status and low vitamin D status seen in almost three out of ten women in this age group are also of concern. Almost 40% of women aged 16-24 years exceed the current guidance on alcohol consumption.



Ida Fabrizio

How does what a mother eats in pregnancy impact on her baby?

For many years there have been suggestions that women in the UK who eat poorly during pregnancy are more likely to have a low birth weight baby and may be at risk of more complications in pregnancy. Babies that are born at less than 2.5Kg are less likely to survive and many will be impacted for the rest of their lives in terms of their health and well being. Whilst not all experts agree that poor diet in pregnancy is linked to low birth weight, in some poorer population groups it is likely that poor diet aggravates other social and health factors to make low birth weight more likely. Mothers who eat less well at the beginning of pregnancy are more likely to have a baby who does not develop normally since the first 12 weeks are the time in which all the organs develop. Mothers who eat insufficient energy in the last trimester of pregnancy are more likely to have a small baby.

To prevent neural tube defects (NTD) such as spina bifida, women are advised to take a daily supplement of 400µg of folic acid when planning a pregnancy and during the first 12 weeks of their pregnancy, or to take a much larger dose if they have had a previous NTD affected pregnancy. Women who are obese are thought to be at increased risk of NTD births.

Low iron status in pregnancy is associated with low birth weight as well as prematurity and problems from blood loss after birth and low iron intakes and low iron status are common among young women. Essential fatty acids are crucial to fetal development and for brain development in particular and there is increasing evidence for the importance of a good source of these fatty acids in pregnancy, particularly when a mother may have diabetes.

Increasing evidence about the importance of Vitamin D in pregnancy for long term bone health of the baby, as well as the mother, has led to a recommendation that all pregnant women in the UK should take a vitamin D supplement throughout pregnancy. Many mothers may be unable to make enough Vitamin D from sunlight if much of their pregnancy falls in the winter months, if they are darker skinned, if they rarely go outside or if they wear a lot of clothing when they do.

In addition there are other dietary considerations during pregnancy. Consumption of high levels of caffeinated drinks

such as coffee, tea and cola have been associated with reduced fertility, miscarriage and low birth weights and pregnant women are advised to have no more than 200mg a day, equivalent to no more than 2 mugs of coffee or 3 mugs of tea. or 5 cans of coca cola. Pregnant women should avoid alcohol, or limit intakes to the equivalent of a glass of wine no more than twice a week as high intakes of alcohol in pregnancy are linked to learning disability in infants.

Other dietary advice for pregnant women is summarised [in the box below]

How does obesity in women impact on birth outcome?

There are currently no national statistics to tell us just how many women are entering pregnancy with a body weight that we would consider to be unhealthy. Some studies suggest that somewhere between 11% and 20% of pregnant women enter pregnancy already obese in the UK, which equates to somewhere between 80,000- 150,000 births annually in the UK to mothers who are obese. We have little good information on underweight women in pregnancy.

There is now convincing evidence, however, that pregnant women who are obese have an increased risk of a temporary form of diabetes during pregnancy called gestational diabetes. Gestational diabetes increases the risk of the mother developing diabetes later in life and babies born to mothers who have gestational are also more likely to develop obesity, glucose intolerance and type 2 diabetes in later life

In addition, obesity in pregnancy increases the risk of the life-threatening condition pre-eclampsia which can lead to very high blood pressure towards the end of pregnancy and potential serious outcomes for both mother and baby if not treated. The risk of developing blood clots, gallstones, of needing a caesarean section, and of excessive bleeding following delivery are all higher among mothers who are obese. Infants of mothers who are obese are more likely to be miscarried and to die after delivery. Data published in 2007 showed that among the small number of mothers who died during childbirth or within 42 days of giving birth, over half were either overweight or obese.

How does the Government support good nutrition in pregnancy?

One national initiative introduced in 2008 and aimed specifically at supporting women to eat a healthy diet after they have become pregnant is the Heath in Pregnancy Grant (HiPG), a universal one off payment from HM Revenues and Customs of £190 per pregnancy. The Department of Health's (DH) Healthy Start scheme also supports pregnant women and young families who receive income support and some other types of benefit, as well as all mothers under 18 years of age, by providing vouchers worth £3.10 per week which can be exchanged for milk, fruit and vegetables at participating retailers. Under the Healthy Start scheme, women and children can also claim Healthy Start Vitamins containing vitamins A, C and D (for children) and vitamins D, C and folic acid for pregnant women. Whilst the uptake of the vouchers has been good (In March 2009 there were over 500,000 individual women and children within approximately



Dietary advice to women around pregnancy

All women should take a supplement of 400ug/day of folic acid when they start planning a pregnancy and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Women with a previous experience of a NTD affected pregnancy or any other health problems should seek advice from their GP.

Women should try and achieve a healthy bodyweight before pregnancy where possible and during pregnancy should eat a good variety of foods including at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day, following the advice we give to the rest of the population.

Women should stay active in pregnancy and this will help to ensure weight gain is not too great. Women should not diet in pregnancy and should seek advice if they are worried they are gaining weight rapidly.

All women should take a vitamin D supplement throughout pregnancy and when they breastfeed. Healthy Start vitamins contain vitamin D and folic acid,

Women should avoid alcohol in pregnancy, but if they do drink, should limit this to the equivalent of 1 glass of wine no more than twice a week.

Women should limit caffeine intake to 200mg /day, avoid liver and liver pate, dishes containing raw eggs, soft unripened or mould ripened cheeses and limit intakes of some types of fish. For up to date advice on foods to avoid or limit in pregnancy see www.eatwell.gov.uk



420,000 families receiving healthy start vouchers), there is a question mark over the uptake of the vitamins.

"The Healthy Start voucher scheme is well used, but is not quite achieving its objectives," says Eleanor McGee, Public Health Nutrition Lead at Birmingham Community Nutrition and Dietetic Service. "The idea is to use early contact with health professionals to get diet and weaning advice to women but there is no dedicated time for it. A busy midwifery clinic doesn't have time to give nutrition advice. Health visits are dominated by child protection and domestic violence."

Eleanor McGee has particularly been working to promote uptake of the Healthy Start vitamins in Birmingham following the re-emergence of rickets and hypocalcaemia in young children caused by Vitamin D deficiency.

"It's amazing how tricky it is to give something away free," says McGee. "We're trying to give Healthy Start vitamins out to all pregnant women and children in the area, not just those who receive the Healthy Start vouchers. Besides the challenges of raising public awareness, barriers to the campaign have been access and availability of the vitamins themselves, with the Healthy Start running out of stock of the vitamins; and awareness of NHS staff about how the scheme is administered due to high staff turnover and competing priorities."

How can we support women to eat well in pregnancy?

Useful interventions for pregnant women seem to be those that provide access to meaningful financial support, meaningful food assistance, culturally relevant and practical advice, individual counselling, and most importantly support around food skills and cooking for the whole family. As Professor Annie Anderson from the Public Health Nutrition Research Centre, University of Dundee, concluded in her presentation to the Caroline Walker Trust Eating Well Conference last year, "At the end of the day nutrition initiatives aimed at women of child bearing age are more likely to be better in environments where healthy food is available at an appropriate price and is widely available to the entire population, including the partners, family, colleagues and friends of these women."

Thank you to Dr Laura Wyness, senior nutrition scientist with the British Nutrition Foundation for her research contribution to this article.

Eden for high sugar breakfast cereals

Bucking the trend of corporate link-ups is a somewhat lonely business these days. There's gold in corporate coffers for those charities willing to allow their name to be used to add lustre to purveyors of high fat, salt and sugar products. But how sad to see **The Eden Project** on the back of high sugar Coco Pops breakfast cereal – promoting joint work on the Kellogg's Head Starters website – which promises to engage kids and parents in learning about food and the environment in fun and entertaining ways. The charity, and its famous biomes, is based in Cornwall, and promises, "to help us build a culture that knows how to sustain the things that sustain us and at the same time nurtures creativity, imagination and adaptability." It is unclear just how high sugar breakfast cereals are going to help us along that road.



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Book Review Special

Getting a grip on food politics

Food Policy: Integrating Health, Environment and Society. T Lang, D Barling and M Caraher. Oxford University Press 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-856788-2.

The Politics of Breastfeeding: When Breasts are Bad for Business, 3rd Edition. G Palmer. Pinter & Martin 2009. ISBN 978-1-905177-16-5. £8.99.

Like the number 19 bus, one can wait and wait for some intelligent discussion on food policy and then suddenly two good vehicles appear at once.

Tim Lang and his colleagues at City University’s Centre for Food Policy never stint on moving the discussion from the specific to the general, from the detail to the wider view. Their collaborative book on food policy goes about as wide as you can get as the authors strive to forge a unifying theory of food which encompasses agriculture and its impact on the environment, nutrition and its impact on health, global trading of commodities, inequalities in access and food poverty, the governance of food policies and the role of the state, and food as culture, symbol and ritual.

The unifying theme, they propose, is ‘ecological public health’ – seen as the merging of sustainable production (from an environmental view) with the sustenance of human health through good nutrition. Although the phrase is new, the ideas draw on familiar themes from the movements of the 1920s and 1930s which led to organic farming, the formation of the Soil Association, and the early notions of ‘permanent agriculture’ or permaculture.

However, what Lang and colleagues add is a far more radical analysis of the forces of global trade and the urgent need to control them. The are not explicit in their criticism of the organic movement, but their sense of urgency implies that now is not the time to be drinking tea in royal gardens while multinational corporations are seizing greater and greater chunks of food production, rural farmers migrate to the cities and their land turns to dust, forests are laid waste, and the sea loses its fish stocks.

Their conviction is attractive and the arguments strong. There are, though, a few corners left in need of attention. The analysis of the changing course of food production in the post-War years is rushed, and allows no consideration of the competitive markets being developed at the time. European agricultural policy was shaped by the assumption that science could fulfil human needs, the authors suggest, but this reviewer wonders if government investment wasn’t shaped more by the need to compete with the thriving production of Australia, Canada and the USA, largely undamaged by the War and making great strides in productivity. For the sake of its own security, to say nothing of the success of its food manufacturing base, Europe and the UK needed to develop their own forces of production, and the nutritional and social arguments were as likely to have been bolted on to the political and economic arguments as to have underpinned them.

A second concern is the absence of a gender analysis. Perhaps this asks too much, but as the authors do acknowledge, food is closely linked to nurturing and to servicing, and has less glamour than other sectors in the economy like engineering, architecture and, at least until this year, finance. Pay rates are lower, job security poor, opportunities for great achievement few – and even in popular culture the TV chefs are increasingly dominated by men while school meals staff are almost universally female. The gender

divide and the difficulty in making food policy a major force in world affairs, needs further thought.

Perhaps the biggest question, though, is one the authors themselves would surely acknowledge: what can we do about the situation? The ecological health paradigm sounds great, but how do we get there? What needs to be done to achieve the changes required?

In the very last pages of the book, where most authors add their ‘next steps’ thoughts, Lang et al write of the need for greater accountability and a commitment to improve food democracy. Change, they suggest, comes through public campaigns, which in turn push governments and corporations into changing their ways. But is this enough of an answer?

Surely the core of the problem lies in the power relationships which determine how food production and trade controls are framed and implemented. The heart of global food policy is found in the dealings between highly financed corporations on the one side and the governmental agencies such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization on the other. These latter agencies are weak but they need not be so if governments were prepared to grant them the resources and capacity to control corporations more effectively.

However, it is not just weak control but secrecy that undermines rational food policy. The dealings at high level occur mostly out of view, go unreported and occur among a very small number of people. To make significant change, they need to be transparent, routinely documented and opened to debate. To its credit, the UK government has opened up its workings to more critical view, providing diaries of ministerial meetings, records of decisions and even lists of expenses incurred by its legislators. These principles need applying at international level if food policies are to be democratised and rationalised.

Gabrielle Palmer has no illusions about the nature of corporate thinking or the need to expose their shortcomings in order to keep them under some form of control. A veteran campaigner for the defence of breastfeeding against the formula milk manufacturers, she is only too aware of the latter’s aggressive marketing strategies, media manipulation, government lobbying power and ability to infiltrate the very agencies that should control them.

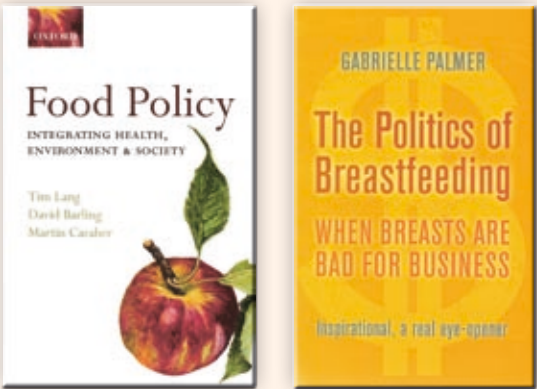
Palmer has decades of experience in the campaign to draft, agree and enforce the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*, which took place in the heart of food policy described above: the point where corporate power meets international government agency.

The Code represents a standard of protection which is expected of governments and, crucially, of companies, so that children are protected even when governments lack the capacity to implement and enforce *The Code* locally.

Holding companies to account is a game of naming and shaming. More than a game, in fact, as company staff who have divulged internal secrets on marketing practices have had their lives and their families threatened. The voluntary sector, and the members of the International Baby Food Action Network (www.ibfan.org) in particular, play the principle role in exposing the bad practices, deceit and violence of companies defending their sales.

Palmer documents the story with over 30 pages of references. It is a story that every food campaigner, indeed political activist in any field, should read carefully. Civil society owes Palmer and her colleagues in the campaign hugely for their work protecting children, and their exposure of the true nature of the corporate food industry at its most powerful.

Reviews by Tim Lobstein



Bee Wilson – What I’m reading...

I’ve been re-reading 100 000 000 Guinea Pigs by Arthur Kallett and F.J. Schlink (New York: The Vanguard Press 1933), and thinking: plus ça change.

When this electrifying little book was published in the States in 1933, Kallett and Schlink were engineers by training who both worked at Consumer’s Research, Inc., the main research body on consumer goods – an equivalent of *Which?* magazine. Their thesis was simple. Every day, a hundred million Americans trustingly consumed various foods, drinks and medicines assuming them to be safe. Every day, this trust was violated. ‘In the eyes of the law we are all guinea-pigs, and any scoundrel who takes it into his head to enter the drug or food business can experiment on us’.

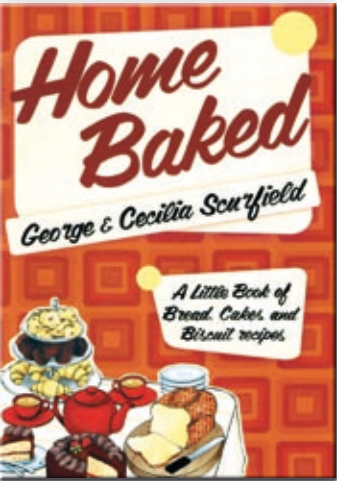
The food and drug laws which were supposed to protect consumers were entirely inadequate, in Kallett and Schlink’s view. ‘That big juicy apple you have at lunch – do you know that indifferent Government officials let it come to the table coated with arsenic, one of the deadliest of poisons?’ Kallett and Schlink give numerous other examples of everyday culinary poisons which have been allowed into the food system, from preservatives in meat to bleach in flour to the adulterated Jamaican ginger which, in 1930, caused disabilities (including muscle paralysis) in 15-20,000 victims.

Seventy six years on, this book has lost none of its freshness (though some of the authors’ obsessions, such as an irrational hatred of Kellogg’s All-Bran, do now seem a bit erratic) and it’s easy to see why it was such a hit at the time, going through 13 printings in its first six months. It’s partly that they have such a strong polemical voice. ‘The hamburger habit’, they write, ‘is about as safe as getting your meat out of a garbage can standing in the hot sun’. You can imagine being one of the thousands of Americans who ate this ‘national institution’ for lunch every day and abandoning your hamburger mid-bite as you read these words.

It was Kallett and Schlink’s intention to wake consumers up to the extent to which so much ‘food’ was barely food at all. A bit like Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, who has suggested that consumers would cease to buy broiler chickens if they were sold alongside information on how they were produced, Kallett and Schlink argued that labels should reveal the full truth about food, which would then force manufacturers to make better products.

‘Who but the starving would buy a pie labelled thus:
CORNSTARCH-FILLED, GLUCOSE-SWEETENED PIE, MADE WITH SUB-STANDARD CANNED PINEAPPLE, ARTIFICIAL (CITRIC ACID) LEMON FLAVOR AND ARTIFICIAL COAL TAR COLOR’.

After reading Kallet and Schlink, you feel desperate to get back in the kitchen and bake some real cakes and pies, so I was delighted to come across a Grub Street reissue of *Home Baked* by George and Cecilia Scurfield (Grub Street £12.99), first published in 1956. The Scurfields first taught themselves to bake when they ‘got fed up with shop bread. Even when quite fresh, it was unappetising; it was often poor in texture; sometimes it fell to bits on the board when we tried to slice it’. They discovered the joys of making their own simple wholemeal bread, as well as fancier things like challah, hazelnut macaroons (the recipe is worth the price of the book by itself) and apelkuchen, an honest German apple cake made from real apples. Kallett and Schlink would approve.



But even raw fruit is not always what it seems as a scintillating new book – *The Fruit Hunters* by journalist Adam Leith Gollner (Souvenir Press £18.99) – reveals. Kallett and Schlink were worried about poisonous pesticides on ‘apples, pears, cherries and berries’ giving American children ‘a steady diet of arsenic and lead’. Gollner writes of the countless ‘compromises’ that undermine the special qualities of fruit, from

“Who but the starving would buy a pie labelled thus: cornstarch-filled, glucose-sweetened pie, made with sub-standard canned pineapple, artificial (citric acid) lemon flavor and artificial coal tar color”

salmonella-ridden cantaloupes to GM strawberries. Gollner is not against tampering with fruit per se – after all, ‘Until the Renaissance, juicy pears were almost inconceivable’. But he is gently quizzical about some of the more extreme versions of hybridization he comes across, such as a citrus fruit which tastes exactly like chicken noodle soup. And then there’s the Grapple, a new American fruit made by ‘dunking Gala or Fuji apples in artificial grape flavor’. Gollner describes the Grapple’s ‘cloying aroma’, just like artificial grape candy. When Gollner asks the Grapple’s inventor, Gary Snyder, if it is safe to eat, Snyder reaches into his pocket and brings out a cell phone. ‘What’s a cell phone going to do to me? We don’t know’. Looks like we are still millions of unwitting guinea-pigs.

Bee Wilson writes the ‘Kitchen Thinker’ column in Stella magazine (The Sunday Telegraph); she is the author of *Swindled: From Poison Sweets to Counterfeit Coffee* (John Murray) Grub Street Publishing www.grubstreet.co.uk

Alan Davidson: The Pleasures of English Food

(Penguin; 2009; 112 pp. £4.99)
ISBN: 9780141191027

Penguin has had the doubtless brilliant idea of a series of little books under the rubric ‘English Journeys’. Drawing on their overflowing and nostalgic balance of Penguin Classics, they have put together a couple of dozen compilations from largely dead writers. *Life at Grasmere* from the Wordsworths, *A Wiltshire Farm Diary* from Francis Kilvert, *The Beauties of a Cottage Garden* from Gertrude Jekyll are three instances. More recent authors feature too: Ronald Blythe, James Lees-Milne and Simon Jenkins; as well as Alan Davidson whose great *Companion to Food* first appeared in hardback with Oxford University Press and then in softcover from Penguin. The Penguin version does not include the revisions incorporated by Oxford in a second edition. It was my privilege to superintend that recent slight updating and correction, so I had to assume a mask of ignorance and forgetfulness (not difficult) to assess this present volume.

The current (nameless) editor has had on occasion to mince and mangle an entry from a book that was notable for its inclusivity – of people, genders, nations and cultures – so that the new distillation should be an entirely English concentrate. He or she also had to draw once or twice upon articles that were not actually written by Davidson – who was the editor of everything and author of more than 80 per cent. The original authors, however, are not acknowledged. And in their narrow-focussed interest in things that are only English, Penguin have excluded much of the joy of the book as well as creating a strange pudding of a cuisine consisting largely of cakes, biscuits, steamed suet and stodge. However, some of the inimitable lightness of Davidson’s writing does come over, together with his nicely judged wit. He had the ability to explain things clearly, yet wear his learning as if weightless on his shoulders. This can sometimes mean an article is deceptively slight, but when closely studied it is found to contain everything of necessary value on the subject.

So we should welcome this revival for its display of proper writing, but not use it to illustrate what is meant by English cookery. For that, the reader should dive into the deep end of the *Companion* itself.

Tom Jaine, Prospect Books, www.prospectbooks.co.uk



Legal, decent, honest and true?

Misleading food and drink advertisements should be regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority. We report on recent adjudications.



Several companies are currently marketing pomegranate juice not as a fruity drink, but as a high performance method of delivering antioxidants into the body. Clever advertising and high prices enhance the impression that these products are special, but POM Wonderful recently overstepped the mark when claiming their product could ‘cheat death’.

POM Wonderful may have known that their poster campaign would be banned by the ASA, but they may also have considered that the ASA is slow to act, and that their campaign could happily run its course before any action would be taken. The posters showed a bottle of the product with a severed noose around its neck and stated: “Cheat death. The antioxidant power of pomegranate juice”.

Predictably, many people complained to the ASA that the ad was misleading. POM Wonderful responded with a token defence and argued their ad was never meant to be taken seriously. The ASA duly ruled that the ad was misleading and told the company not to repeat the ad in its current form – a decision which is unlikely to have had the POM executives and marketing boys quaking in their boots. www.asa.org.uk/asa/adjudications/Public/TF_ADJ_46101.htm

Gary Rhodes and his (misleading) mission

Recent TV ads for Flora Buttery showed celebrity chef Gary Rhodes approaching shoppers with buttered crumpets and asking: “Which one is your favourite?” After a woman makes her selection he asks her why and she responds: “It seems a bit more creamy.” Rhodes then reveals that she has chosen Flora Buttery and a voice-over continues: “More people prefer the taste of Flora Buttery and, since it’s made with seed oils, it has 40% less saturated fat so it’s better for your heart”.

However, sharp eyed viewers spotted the on-screen text which stated: “Out of 200 people tested 48% preferred Flora Buttery Taste, 45% Lurpak Lighter spreadable, 7% had no

preference”. Many wondered if these statistics could possibly justify the claim that: “More people prefer the taste”.

What the statistics actually tell us is that the number of those who selected Lurpak Lighter Spreadable or indicated no preference, was greater than the number who selected Flora Buttery. The ASA found that the claim ‘More people prefer the taste of Flora Buttery’, “had not been supported with sufficiently robust evidence and was therefore, likely to mislead.”



Müller Little Stars are not all natural

Müller have really gone to town when promoting their “Little Stars” range of children’s desserts and yoghurts. The ads have promoted the range as all natural, but rival Yoplait made a complaint to the ASA over a TV ad which stated: “New Müller Little Stars are made from as little as five ingredients, all of which are pure and natural, so it’s almost like getting a helping hand from Mother Nature.” The ad finished with a shot of the products above a caption which stated: “100% natural ingredients”.

Yoplait questioned if ingredients such as juices derived from concentrates, inulin, corn starch, gelatine and colour additives could be described as “100% natural ingredients” and whether claims like “it’s almost like getting a helping hand from Mother Nature” misleadingly implied all the ingredients were completely natural.

In a complex ruling, the ASA agreed with Yoplait and found that the ads were misleading, based on best practice guidance for the use of the term “natural” which considered that in the context of food, natural meant “produced by nature, not the work of man or interfered with by man.”

The gelatine in Müllers Little Stars jellies (derived from animal skins) had certainly been “interfered with by man” as it had been produced and refined by processes including acid and



Not so essential fruit juice

It is true that, on average, people in the UK do not eat enough fresh fruit. But, it this really because it is hugely inconvenient? Manufacturers of prepared fruit products, and juices certainly like to try to convince us this is so.

What they fail to tell us, along with their marketing promises of ease, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and so on – is that Government healthy eating guidelines say that fruit juice (a 150 ml glass) should count for just one portion a day. That’s because the health benefits of fruit juice are not the same as those from fruit – not to mention that juices are worse for your teeth.

We found a new entrant to the juice market in Waitrose - Compal’s Essential Apple Fruit Shots (pack of three 110ml containers). Each apple shaped plastic pot has 1 apple written on it, with the extra packaging claiming: “Our promise: equivalent to 1 apple. Get your fruit the Essential way. Easy to drink, no peeling, no hassle, no waste and tastes great too. One Essential Fruit Shot contributes to your 5 a day. (Health experts recommend that we eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day) Eat fruit the easy way, with Essential Fruit Shot and become a ‘fruitaholic’.

Available in 6 of your favourite fruits. Just eat more fruit and veg.” Skirting around health guidelines in what seems an attempt to confuse is irritating. Equating a juice product to an apple is even more irritating. But it is in fact the no waste claim that really takes the irritation biscuit for us – plastic cartons, cardboard packaging – no waste!

By the way – our local market has a full kilo of apples on sale at £1.39 – compare that to £1.89 for 330ml of the fruit shots. Of course, if you buy the apples, you will have all of that dreadful waste to dispose of. *The Food Magazine* has reported the product to trading standards on the grounds that we think the 1 apple statement is just plain wrong.

alkali treatment, sterilisation and ion-exchange filtration. The ASA also noted inulin, whilst derived from chicory roots, was a commercially refined substance that had had minerals and colour removed from its raw state by particular filtration processes, and that the blackcurrant, orange and beetroot juice used had been subject to concentration and pasteurisation.

The ASA also concluded that the statement “A helping hand from Mother Nature” was a misleading claim which implied that the ingredients were less processed and closer to nature than they were. Müller were told the ads must not be shown again in their current form. www.asa.org.uk/asa/adjudications/Public/TF_ADJ_45972.htm

We welcome letters from our readers but we do sometimes have to edit them so that we can include as many as possible (our apologies to the authors).

Write to: The Editor, *The Food Magazine*, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF or email to letters@foodmagazine.org.uk

Congratulations

I had to write to congratulate you on the January/March 2009 issue of *The Food Magazine*. This was a vintage issue, full of interest. I’m particularly glad that you drew attention to the non-vegetarian ingredients in products such as Müller Light Yoghurts. Keep up the good work.

J. Levy, Surrey

Famously poor role models?

I would like to comment on a couple of things in your current issue:

First, congratulations on the continual pressure you apply on many of the dubious and misleading advertisements and claims made by producers. Let’s hope some of your comments are read by relevant people. Particularly pertinent was your article on celebrity sports stars lending (selling would be a better word) their name to so-called healthy foods.

Keep up the good work!
M. Davies, Wiltshire

More on celebs

I found an excellent American site that gives a wonderful breakdown of the nutritional value of various foods in a much more comprehensive way than the frankly patronising and misleading FSA traffic light system. On their much saner system, Bran Flakes came out with flying colours (based on a sensible size portion) whilst Californian orange juice was remarked on as being relatively high in sugar. All because they take into account both the amount eaten and using the values in context.

Now you may consider it is acceptable to drag an eminent sportsperson’s reputation through the mud based with alarmist headlines about him pedalling junk food to kids, rather than his bicycle, but I do not. Hoy sets a great example to people over what it is to be a disciplined, good example of aspirations and the importance of fitness and health. If your publication worked rather more towards helping people to plan sensible diets rather than overblown, headline grabbing publicity then it would be to the better. Of course you aren’t alone – *Which? Magazine* is playing the same game.

S.J., by email

Our article **Famously poor role models** – on celebrities and food promotion – obviously hit a nerve. We have had more well known people getting in touch to join us – and we will be launching a celebrity charter – not sure yet exactly what we will call it – at the **Children’s Food Festival** in late June. We are hosting a debate on the topic, chaired by Sheila Dillon, presenter of BBC Radio 4’s **The Food Programme**. We hope to get more celebrities to refuse to promote high fat salt or sugar foods.

We use the Food Standards Agency’s own nutrient profiling model to define such foods – and we think this is a good one. Companies object about the standard 100g portion size used to judge foods – but we think that gives consumers something to go by, rather than the confusing, and often underestimated portion sizes that companies use. The model gives food ‘bad’ points for nutrients such as sugar, salt and saturated fat, and ‘good’ points for others such as vitamins, minerals and protein.

The Food Magazine’s ‘Celebrity Charter’ will give well known people who do not promote HFSS foods a chance to get some credit!



Not just chicken breast no matter how you slice it!

I am sending you a copy of a letter written to Sainsbury’s about a packet of their cooked ‘10 Chicken breast slices’, and would appreciate your comments.

In summary the letter said:

I am currently suffering a health problem and have been advised by my doctor to eat a very bland and totally dairy free diet. To this end I decided it would be helpful to have some cooked chicken, as well as an organic fresh chicken. I realised that it was unlikely that I would find organic cooked chicken and had decided that on this occasion I would compromise, but would certainly not wish to buy reformed chicken as I consider this to be an adulterated product.

I worked my way along the cooked chicken shelf, discarding at least 4 different packs of reformed chicken, clearly labelled as such so no problems with that. I was on the point of giving up when ‘ah – some straight chicken slices (or so it would appear from the labelling) which I bought and ate over two days. It was only when I finished the pack that I happened to turn it over and to my horror found amongst the nutritional information on the back the fact that this too was reformed chicken with added water, starch and milk protein, the very thing I am supposed to be avoiding.

My argument is that, if all Sainsbury’s other packets clearly say reformed chicken on the front, I should be able to assume that the pack that I find saying on the front 10 chicken breast slices’ will contain just that – chicken breast and not reformed chicken. Apart from the lack of standardisation on the packaging, I think it is very misleading to have a pack purporting to be chicken breast slices when in fact it is not.

Keep up the good work on *The Food Magazine*. I have grandchildren now so we have to be even more vigilant. My daughter now reads the magazine after me.

J. Reynolds, Hampshire

We have taken up this issue with **trading standards** – and they tell us that this labelling is in fact legal – which is basically what **Sainsbury’s** told you. The product ingredients are legally acceptable, it does tell you it is reformed – albeit in small type on the back of packet, and there is Allergy advice for the milk ingredient.

However, the whole situation shows just how difficult it can be for shoppers – we do a lot of product checking here at the magazine, and it takes a huge amount of time to shop when you commit to reading labels front and back. The small font size (not to mention difficult colour combinations), the variability in layout, and lack of easy to understand nutrition labelling on many products makes label reading a confusing and time consuming business. And you cannot help but feel that manufacturers and brands do their level best to emphasize product good points in bold, on front of pack, and to bury their less saleable points in small font on the back. Our regulators let them get away with this!

It is difficult to say – be vigilant – as you clearly are, and you avoid most processed foods. That puts the burden on the individual – and many parents who write to us remind us how difficult label reading can be with a couple of children in tow.