

HOW NATURAL
IS 'NATURAL'?
MISLEADING
MESSAGES

WHO'S
JUMPING ON
THE BRAN
WAGON? OUR
SPECIAL INSIDE
STORY

OFF THE SHELF
WE TAKE THE
LID OFF
CANNED MEATS

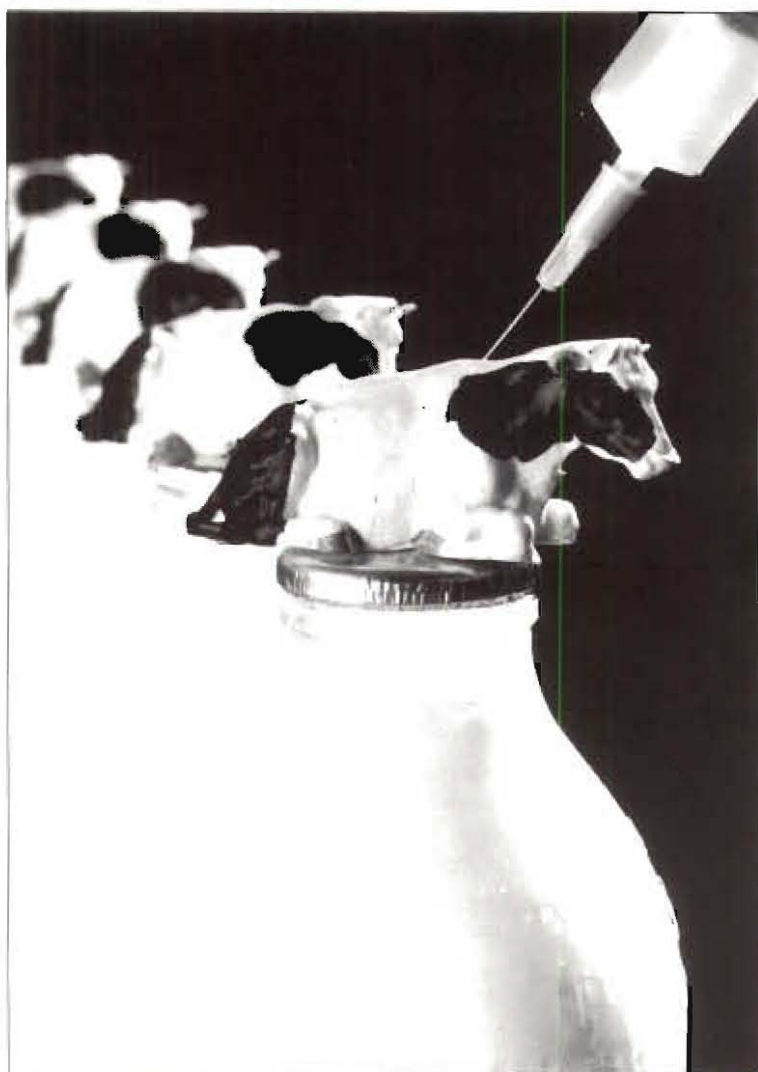
YOUR FAST
FOOD HABITS IN
OUR EXCLUSIVE
SURVEY,
GRAZING IN
PECKHAM.

GUEST
COLUMN -
DEREK
COOPER

SEVEN
OFFICIAL
SECRETS

THE FOOD MAGAZINE

Incorporating London Food News ♦ Issue 1 Volume 1 Spring 1988/£2.50



BST - WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO OUR MILK?

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- WHO IS
SETTING THE
STANDARDS?

BREAKFAST,
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YOUR
PROBLEMS
ANSWERED

THE FOOD MAGAZINE

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Its membership represents London's community and voluntary groups, food sector trade unions, statutory bodies and interested individuals and professionals.

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Heart Disease & Stroke Programme

Kentish Town Health Centre

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WELCOME to our new magazine! Last year we sent a questionnaire to our subscribers and readers, asking for your advice and comments. You told us you wanted plenty of punchy, factual information, more frequently and in a readable magazine style. You said you wanted more features and hard news. This is the result.

The Food Magazine has one aim – to mirror what really matters in the food scene today. And what we say can have a big effect. Take irradiated food. Without the London Food Commission campaign, the British public would now be eating it. Legally. Three years of London Food Commission work on the issue has brought home to the public what food irradiation is and why its safety is in doubt. The result is that the government has finally been forced to agree with us. We now have to ensure that the European Commission sees sense as well.

People are more aware about food issues. They are demanding more action. The canny traders will realise that it is in their interest to sell unadulterated food. Consumers now have to look out for the latest ploys from the trade which take advantage of the new consumer awareness. In this issue we expose the bogus claims about 'natural' food and the dubious benefits of 'added bran'. We describe how standards for residue-free or 'organic' foods are currently under discussion in the UK and the EEC. And we take a close look at the contents of canned meat in the first of our regular 'Off the Shelf' features.

The Food Magazine's lead exposé is the story of BST. Bovine Somatotropin (BST) has been called 'bad, stupid technology'. Inside we tell you what BST is and what it does to milk. We lift the veil on the secrecy imposed by manufacturers, with government complicity.

The Food Magazine believes that you have the

right to choose. You also have the right to be protected from potential dangers. Inside we reveal worrying information from the USA, gathered under the Freedom of Information Act, about another 'wonder' ingredient – sucrose polyester, the so-called 'non-fat fat'. We say non-fat fat is for fatheads. Is this really the best solution to health advice to cut down on fat intake or will it simply allow food manufacturers to persuade us to eat more fatty food, supposedly free from heart disease worries?

And just how effective is the government's attempt to get us all to cut down on fats? The LFC's researchers went to Peckham in the London Borough of Southwark and interviewed 350 people eating at fast food take-aways. Fast food companies and market researchers do this kind of research all the time, but they keep the results 'commercially confidential'. In this issue the LFC gives a pre-publication summary resume of the survey's key findings.

The fast food industry is famous for its quick turnover and commercial success. Less celebrated are the working lives and conditions of the people – often young and black – who work in Britain's fast food outlets. This issue includes a feature on the first piece of academic research into catering work. It demonstrates the poor conditions and the hardening labour relations behind the kitchen door. And things are little better in the public sector of Britain's service economy, as an interview with a hard-pressed catering manager in the NHS reveals.

Improvements to the public's food can only come about if consumers demand them. *The Food Magazine* offers you a new mirror to all that is good, bad and indifferent in the world of food. We hope you find it interesting and useful. Write with your comments, criticisms and suggestions.

"Improvements to the public's food can only come about if consumers demand this."

Government blunders on Chernobyl aftermath

Evidence presented to the House of Commons Select Committee on Agriculture is likely to show that the Government seriously underestimated the effects of Chernobyl on the UK and that their response was delayed, uncoordinated and inadequate.

The Committee of eleven back-bench MPs will be examining the advice given to farmers by the Ministry of Agriculture, and the action that it took in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Its recommendations should be published in the summer.

The enquiry comes after pressure from many quarters. David Clark, MP, Shadow Agriculture Spokesman who has been pressing for a full public enquiry into the response to Chernobyl, described monitoring procedures as a catalogue of incompetence and inadequacy. He also alleges that potentially contaminated food went to market for consumption. The Country Landowners' Association has accused the Government of incompetence, evasion and unnecessary secrecy.

Following the nuclear accident at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986, heavy rainfall affected parts of North Wales, the Pennines, Cumbria, the Isle of Man and South-West Scotland. On May 9 the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment said, 'The problem from radiation will diminish almost completely over the next few weeks.' However on June 20, nearly two months after the accident, restrictions were imposed on the movement and slaughter of livestock in parts of Cumbria and Wales. Four days later this was extended to Scotland.

Monitoring eighteen months after the accident still found high levels of caesium 137 in many upland areas – levels above the 1,000 becquerel per kilo (Bq/K)



Welsh farmers applying blue paint to the heads of their sheep that have been found to be contaminated with fallout from Chernobyl MAGNUM

action level recommended by government.

Radiation has been much slower in receding than was anticipated. One problem Ministry experts did not foresee, was that caesium 137 collects in surface vegetation, on the thin, peaty soils of upland areas, allowing greater uptake by grazing sheep.

There was also a failure of Government departments to share information. A Meteorological Office report pointing to a radiation hot-spot in Yorkshire, had been available for nine months when the *Yorkshire Post* published details, yet MAFF said it knew nothing of it.

Environmentalists are concerned that the action level of 1,000 Bq/K was designed for short-term exposure and advise that levels should be lowered. Recent studies of survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings indicate that previous estimates of the risk of fatal cancer from radiation should be increased between two and ten times. The National Radiological Protection Board advise that action levels for radioactivity in meat, vegetables and particularly milk – the levels at which restrictions are enforced – might have to be revised by up to a

factor of three in the light of new evidence.

Despite this, Junior Agriculture Minister, Donald Thompson recently argued in the House of Commons that the level at which action be taken should be raised from 1,000 Bq/K to 5,000 Bq/K, – a rise in 'acceptable' radiation levels of 500 per cent. The EEC has settled for 1,250 Bq/K, an increase of 25 per cent.

Food Irradiation – a temporary victory?

On February 4 1988 Junior Health Minister Edwina Currie announced that food irradiation would not be permitted in the UK – for the time being. This was the result of massive public pressure (including a LFC opinion poll showing 93 per cent opposed to removing the ban) and a rising tide of concern expressed by Port Health, Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers, consumers' organisations, food industry trade unions and sections of the food trade. Even the Food and Drink Federation, which had first supported irradiation, has come out against it.

The Minister was forced to accept that irradiation cannot be

detected and that it would therefore be impossible to prevent abuses. The LFC had highlighted cases where major food companies used irradiation to conceal bacterial contamination on unsaleable foods. The Ministry of Agriculture now has the task of developing effective controls that will prevent abuse and guarantee consumer choice. Even with grants of £150,000 a year for research into detection, this could be several years away.

In all other respects, however, Mrs Currie has accepted the opinion of her Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods (ACINF). Responding to public comments on the committee's earlier report, ACINF's second report published in February, finds no grounds for changing its earlier view that there are no special safety or wholesomeness grounds for the current UK ban on irradiation. This despite admissions in the report that:

- Irradiated food should not be consumed within 24 hours of irradiation – to allow time for radioactivity to decay.

- Additional use of anti-oxidants will be needed with irradiated food. Given the concern over BHA and BHT this is hardly reassuring.
- There may be problems for pregnant and lactating mothers from vitamin losses caused by irradiation.

- There is insufficient scientific evidence on some safety issues, especially the effect of irradiation on additives, contaminants, packaging and pesticide residues.

As with its first report the ACINF provides no scientific references to support its opinions. Requests by the LFC to be allowed to examine the 500 plus studies that the ACINF claims to have reviewed, were turned down by the DHSS.

In the meantime the European Commission is working on a draft directive that would force all EEC countries to accept irradiation under Commissioner Lord

Cockfield's 'harmonisation' proposals aimed at complete de-regulation of the internal market by 1992. This is despite rejection of general clearance for irradiation by the European Parliament in 1987, and objections from the Commission's Food Advisory Committee, which represents industry, trade, agriculture, consumer and trade union interests.

International collaboration will be necessary to counter the intense lobbying and marketing effort of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA marketing strategy involves the use of public relations and marketing experts to overcome consumer resistance and change national laws to permit irradiation. One tactic involves promoting irradiation as the only effective solution to food poisoning. Although food poisoning is a growing problem, irradiation is not the answer.

The cause of food poisoning is falling hygiene standards in food production, processing and catering. Offering a technical fix to avoid dealing with inadequacies in hygiene, will create more problems than it solves. It will lead to a false sense of security and may actually increase the incidence of poisoning. In the UK chicken processors are complaining that it won't help chicken sales to tell consumers that irradiation has killed 90 per cent of the bugs that could give them food poisoning. Irradiation also produces flavour, colour and texture changes, and will add significantly to the cost of each bird.

The IAEA also argues irradiation is needed to reduce post-harvest food losses in 'Third World' countries. This argument is equally false. The real needs are for far more basic and 'appropriate' technologies for storage, transportation, temperature and humidity controls. Third World delegates to an IAEA conference in 1987 were shocked to discover the concern over the safety of food

irradiation expressed by the British Medical Association – concerns which the IAEA organisers of the sessions on food irradiation had never mentioned.

Commenting on Mrs Currie's announcement for the LFC's Food Irradiation Campaign, Tony Webb expressed concern for the future: 'Mrs Currie's decision, welcome though it is, represents only a minor delay. The campaign for irradiation to be discussed in public and not in secret needs to continue – worldwide. People must exert pressure on the EEC and world bodies such as the WHO and FAO to see that the issues the LFC has raised are taken on board'.

Study Day

A Study Day on healthy eating and the black and ethnic minorities food business sector is being organised on May 6, by the London Food Commission and Greater London Enterprise. For further details write to Anita Green, Education and Training Dept, London Food Commission, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR (01-253 9513).

Baby milk code-busting continues

New evidence of continued violations of the World Health Organisation baby milk marketing code has led to renewed demands for government action.

A newly-published review of code-breaking around the world, investigation of six local health authorities, and a London Food Commission follow-up survey of twelve London hospitals have all revealed that manufacturers in Britain are still continuing to ignore the WHO code, adopted six years ago. They appear to be also contravening agreements they gave to their own joint government-industry watchdog, the UK Code Monitoring Committee.

In a world-wide review by IBFAN, the International Baby Food Action Network, evidence is

cited of violation of thirteen Articles of the WHO Code in Britain, and additional violations relating to products marketed overseas by British companies.

A detailed examination of the experiences of 134 women using local maternity services, undertaken by the North London Polytechnic, found that 45 per cent of mothers received free samples or company promotional material encouraging them to bottle-feed. This directly contravenes the meaning and spirit of the WHO Code. Furthermore, the study found evidence that 'industry representatives continue to "dump" unwarranted samples onto clinic and hospital staff...' – a practice strictly opposed by the UK Code Monitoring Committee.

Further evidence of this latter practice comes from a follow-up survey of senior midwifery staff, first contacted for the London Food Commission's report on Code violations last year (*Warding Off The Bottle*, 1987). Senior staff at twelve hospitals where samples were being given to mothers, were contacted and asked whether the staff had requested the samples; and if so whether this request was in writing, as the UK Code Monitoring Committee has stipulated.

In only two cases did the staff believe the samples had been asked for, and in one of these the request was assumed to have originated from an officer who had left four years previously. In no case had the senior staff requested the samples in writing.

This new evidence of code violations has led the Baby Milk Action Coalition and the London Food Commission to call for government action. Specifically the two organisations are asking for:

- a review of the 1983 DHSS circular which advised health workers to comply only with the weaker UK Code, permitting samples to be given to mothers, rather than the stronger WHO Code strictly limiting the use of samples

- a revision of the present UK Code to bring it more in line with the WHO Code

- a detailed report on the findings of the UK Code Monitoring Committee, which has met in secret for over three years but has as yet produced no public report.

Dame Alison Munroe, chairperson of the Code Monitoring Committee since its inception, has admitted that the Committee does not actively monitor or investigate health facilities. Instead it is 'very much dependent on complaints' of which she says she has received very few. The Committee may be contacted c/o The Food and Drink Federation, 6 Catherine Street, London WC2 5JJ.

Under-fives training pack

As part of Islington's Food and Health Policy a new *Under Fives Nutrition Training Pack* (\$5.00 + p&p) has recently been produced by Islington Health Education Department and the Nutrition and Dietetic Department. The pack consists of information and facts on aspects of children's diet, activity and work sheets and guidelines for the organising, setting up and running of workshops on healthy eating.

For further details contact Anita Ademoye, Islington Health Education Department (01-272 7777 ext 383/424) or Rekha Patel, Nutrition and Dietetic Department (01-272 3070 ext 4553).

No-fat fat – making light of the dangers?

Imagine indulging in your favourite snacks, cakes and biscuits safe in the knowledge that you wouldn't put on an ounce. This could be the promise of Procter and Gamble's new non-calorific fat substitute, Olestra, which they are planning to launch in the UK. The company claim that Olestra will be of real value to millions of people who want to reduce the fat and

cholesterol in their diets. The market value of the product could be around \$1 billion in the USA alone.

A dream, certainly, but a dream with a price. Studies obtained from the USA under their Freedom of Information Act show that Olestra caused cancer, liver damage and other serious problems in animal tests and that studies were inadequate.

Last May P&G petitioned the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve Olestra, a sucrose polyester, as a food additive to substitute for up to 35 per cent of the fat in many shortenings and cooking oils and for up to 75 per cent of the fat used for commercial deep fat frying and fried snacks. Sucrose polyester looks, tastes and feels like fat, but because it is not broken down by digestive enzymes it provides no calories.

More recently P&G have sought approval in the UK from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. P&G are anticipating UK approval of Olestra for a wider range of uses than in the US and plan to seek clearances in other European and Asian countries.

Although P&G claim to have spent twenty years developing Olestra, the Washington-based consumer watchdog Center for Science in the Public Interest has reviewed P&G's own test data and found that Olestra caused:

- premature death in male rats
- pituitary tumours in male and female rats
- leukaemia in male rats
- abnormal and possibly pre-cancerous liver changes in female rats
- deformed and stillborn offspring.

Furthermore, according to Dr Michael Jacobson, executive

director of CSPI, 'the FDA allowed P&G to do cancer studies on just one species of animal, instead of the customary two. That was totally irresponsible. The testing must be considered inadequate until additional species are studied'.

P&G argue that Olestra is not absorbed and hence its effects on the body are minimal. But Jacobson's analysis suggests Olestra can have an effect because it will be in direct and frequent contact with the digestive system.

The CSPI is urging the FDA not to approve any uses of Olestra until additional longterm feeding studies are conducted and the problems observed in the existing rat studies are explained.

In the UK the London Food Commission has written to MAFF expressing these concerns about Olestra and asking that P&G's case on the proposed uses of the additive should be made public.

Project on food and disabled people

The factors influencing the food needs of disabled people are many and complex. The London Food Commission and Action Research on Multiple Sclerosis are carrying out a small survey of disabled people in London to identify these needs.

We are looking for organisations working with disabled people willing to help with the distribution of the questionnaire to their members in London. Also, we need a volunteer to help us put the data on the computer, later in the year.

If you are interested to helping in this project please contact Sara E. Hill at the LFC (01-253 9513) or Hanan Yanny at ARMS (01-961 4911).

ADDITIVES UPDATE

◆ A new market research survey estimates that additives account for 2-5 per cent of the cost of the raw materials for food products. Sometimes they can cost as much as 10 per cent. The report from *Mintel Additives and the Consumer* (December 1987) estimates the cost of additives to manufacturers at \$300 million a year.

While sales of synthetic additives are down 5-50 per cent depending on the product, the use of so-called 'natural' additives has increased. The use of additives that do not have to be declared on food labels has risen dramatically. The market value of enzymes, for example, has grown from around \$200 million worldwide in 1984 to an estimated \$600 million in 1987.

Mintel also reports that four out of ten people admit they don't

know enough about additives but well over half are concerned enough either to check supermarket labels or avoid additive laden foods completely.



◆ Public scepticism about the safety of many additives is justified as a recent book shows. *Additives: a guide for everyone* by Dr Erik Millstone and John Abraham (Penguin Books, 1988) surveys the safety of 299 additives. It found that:

- in 186 cases there is a reasonable presumption of safety
- in 85 cases specific doubts and uncertainties about safety remain
- in 60 cases there is evidence that the additives cause problems of allergy and acute intolerance in a significant minority of consumers

- in 25 cases there is evidence that additives could pose a significant toxic hazard to the population as a whole

- in 97 cases additives have been permitted and used, since at least the 1960s, even though significant worries or doubts about their safety were, or still are, unresolved
- and in 23 cases quite exceptional secrecy covers the safety data.

Speaking at the launch Erik Millstone pointed out that much toxicity data remains secret at the industry's insistence and with the agreement of the Government. For example, the recent Food Advisory Committee report reviews 14 volumes of data on caramel colourings (E150) all of which remain unpublished. There are also severe limitations on MAFF's promise to place safety studies in the British Library. Millstone

requested a study on Amaranth (E123) and was told he must complete 35 forms and pay £89 for photocopying. So much for freedom of information!



◆ A recent survey of take-away foods by Environmental Health Officers in the West Midlands found that 100 per cent of their sample of Chinese and Indian meals contained the flavour enhancer, Monosodium Glutamate (E621). Artificial colours are also in widespread use. In fish and chip shops all fish batter contained artificial colour, and only three samples of chips out of eight did not contain colour. As a result of their survey, the EHOs are calling for the law to be changed, to require additives in take-away foods to be declared.

'Natural' is misleading

Claims of 'no artificial additives' or 'full of natural goodness' have blossomed on food packets. But are these claims meaningful or misleading? We investigate.

According to a recent report¹ by Trading Standards Officers, terms like 'natural' on food products are usually misleading. TSO's have examined over 671 products and adverts using 'natural', 'not artificial' and similar phrases. They judged 79 per cent of cases to be unacceptable, while a mere 9 per cent of product labels and 6 per cent of adverts were probably legitimate.

The kinds of things they took exception to were the use of nutritional claims such as 'natural goodness' or 'naturally better'; phrases like 'free from X' if all foods in the same category were already free from X; and 'preservative-free' claims, where broadly similar treatments such as antioxidants were present. They recommended that foods should not be described as 'natural' if they had been treated in any way other than harvesting, cleansing and packaging to make them fit for consumption.

As a result of the TSO's work the Government's Food Advisory Committee (FAC) has recommended that a voluntary code² be drawn up to control the use of 'natural' and similar words. The Committee was concerned about the nutritional implications and felt that consumers have been led to accept the idea that food described as 'natural' is somehow of greater worth.

Dictionary definitions of 'natural' include 'not affected by man', 'wild', or 'constituted by nature ... not artificial'. According to such definitions, there are very few foods which can carry the label 'natural'. Wild strawberries or wild mushrooms have a case perhaps - but any other food affected by human hands or technology doesn't comply. Fresh fruit and vegetables, though unprocessed, have usually



NATURAL SEA MALT
SALT & VINEGAR FLAVOUR



THE ADVERTISING

with these natural ingredients: wh

The examples shown illustrate some of the claims such as 'natural choice', 'natural snack', 'second nature', 'natural combination', 'natural harvest', 'just naturally' dreamed up by advertisers and that Trading Standards Officers say are misleading or meaningless.

been treated with fertilisers and pesticides. Even organic vegetables are likely to have been grown from highly selected strains that bear little resemblance to their wild ancestors. So if a strict dictionary definition of 'natural' were adopted, the term should be banned.

The FAC considered it unrealistic to interpret 'natural' in a purist sense. They thought this would lead to greater use of alternative phrases such as 'real' and 'traditional'. But the public understand the term 'natural' to imply healthiness or a relatively low degree of processing¹. So claims such as 'natural goodness' and 'naturally best' amount to health or nutritional claims - a usage the FAC justifiably found unacceptable.

The main FAC recommendation is that 'natural' should be restricted to single foods or ingredients to which nothing has been added and which have been subjected only to processing necessary to make food suitable for consumption. However in its submission to MAFF, the London Food Commission questions the interpretation of this important proposal. For example, would food

A natural rip-off

A recent market survey on additives reports that manufacturers are exploiting consumers' demands for healthier products by charging higher prices. Many packets now have flashes of 'no added colours' or 'no artificial ingredients'.

The market report comments: 'By using this, food manufacturers are able to realise enhanced selling prices, as consumers are prepared to pay the extra cost of not having additives in the product. Often these prices exceed the increased costs incurred as a result of making, packaging or distributing the products.'

Source: Mintel, 1987²

What the public understands by the term 'natural'

In 1986 over 1000 women were asked to sum up their view of a natural food. 41 per cent said it was one with no additives. The next most common phrase was 'no preservatives' (17 per cent), followed by 'no colouring' (13 per cent). Other comments included 'fresh vegetables', 'fresh food', 'not processed/manufactured', 'not tampered with', 'without chemicals', 'wholesome' and 'grown naturally/organically'.

When asked to give examples of foods they considered to be 'natural' two thirds of the women named vegetables/fresh vegetables and fruit/fresh fruit. After mentioning these, many had to struggle to name more. Some also mentioned bread, wholemeal/brown (35 per cent), free range eggs/eggs (20 per cent), milk, fresh/skimmed (21 per cent) yoghurt, natural/live (20 per cent) and fish, fresh (18 per cent). All these foods are perceived to be healthy or relatively un-processed.

Source: KMS/Presto 1986³

treated with pesticides be called 'natural'? Would full fat milk (subjected only to pasteurisation to make it fit for consumption) get the 'natural' label while skimmed milk (subjected to further processing to remove fat) would not? Given the link between sugar and dental caries, would it be acceptable for sugar to be called 'natural'?

Natural additives

The LFC's submission also challenges the FAC's proposal to allow non-artificial flavourings and additives to be called 'natural'. This practice is already widespread, and manufacturers have encouraged the public to think that so-called 'natural' additives are safer than artificial ones. Yet 'natural' colours

are not free from hazards. In a Scandinavian study of patients with urticaria (itchy weals on the skin) 26 per cent reacted to the 'natural' colour annatto (E160b) against 11 per cent for the artificial colour tartrazine (E102)⁴. Yet many manufacturers now use annatto in place of tartrazine.

The LFC feels that the term 'natural' applied to additives misleads the public. Many 'natural' additives are not extracted from foods but from substances that would not normally be eaten. Some are synthesised in factories, but are called 'natural' because an equivalent chemical exists in nature. Even additives extracted from food substances are often used in an unnatural context. For

example, a colouring, betanin (E162), extracted from beetroot is 'natural' - but to claim it is 'natural' in strawberry flavour yoghurt is clearly out of place. Betanin is natural to beetroot, not strawberries or yoghurt.

Whilst we welcome the proposal to control the use of terms like 'natural', we are unhappy that FAC's guidelines still allow the public to be misled. And enforceable statutory regulations would be far preferable to the proposed voluntary code. Another omission is that terms such as 'real', 'traditional' and 'fresh' were not considered. Research on these should be commissioned by MAFF from TSOs.

All such claims on packs should be minimised. Information, such as accurate names, descriptions, full ingredients lists and nutritional data should speak for themselves.

Notes

1. *The Use of the Word 'Natural' and its Derivatives in the Labelling, Advertising and Presentation of Food*, LACOTS/HMS January 1988.
2. *FAC report on the use of the word 'natural'*, December 1987. Available from MAFF Room 426, Great Westminster House, Horseferry Road, London SW1A 2AP (01-210 7881).
3. *Eating what comes naturally?*, a survey conducted by KMS in July 1986 among a nationally representative sample of 1013 British women, Presto, Argill Stores, Hayes, 1986.
4. Commission of European Communities *Reports of the Scientific Committee for Food*, 12th series, 1982, EUR 7823; J Egger et al *The Lancet* 9 March 1985, p 540 and 15 October 1983, p 865.
5. *Additives and the Consumer*, Mintel, December 1987.

**Delicious, crunchy biscuits
with the natural homebaked taste.**

The Mystery of the Mountains

In the first of our special reports from Brussels Debora MacKenzie explores the vagaries of the CAP – and explains, how February's EEC agreement is unlikely to resolve the food overproduction problem.

You weren't able to move in my neighbourhood for Belgian police with submachine guns during the week of the conference of European Heads of State. The occasion was yet another summit where Europe's leaders wrangled about how to control the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). You know the story: to make sure we had enough food and to keep people down on the farm, the EEC promised to buy all the crops European farmers could produce. The farmers accordingly went to work, supplies went up, world prices fell, and now 64 per cent of the EEC budget, a whopping £16 billion, is spent on surplus food. It costs too much to give it away, and we're going broke just storing it.

There are two answers to the problem. One is to grow less. The other is to grow things people want to buy. Since the EEC buys more or less everything on a weight basis, farmers have been motivated to produce increasing quantities of low-quality food. Now that all the carrots and sticks are in the hands of the EEC, they could be rewarded for moving into lower quantities of higher-quality foodstuffs. These wouldn't pile up in mountains, and people, not the EEC, would buy them for a decent price.

Alas, this is only wishfully suggested, off the

record, in the back rooms of DGVI, the agriculture directorate. What the DGVI has been asked to undertake instead is 'extensivisation', which means either growing fewer crops per hectare, or planting fewer hectares. The first option could be achieved by ploughing less nitrogen fertiliser into the land, or limiting pesticides, something the environment would obviously appreciate.

But, sigh the DGVI crew (who become noticeably more environmentalist as the futility of ever-increasing yields sink in), there are few ways to impose or enforce input limitations. Besides such a move would be political suicide in a situation where the chemical industry owns all the seed companies and pays for most agricultural research.

That leaves planting fewer hectares. There are two main options under discussion. One is to set land aside. This is easy to check up on, but unlikely to reduce surpluses much. One proposal is to take 20 per cent of land out of cultivation. Since that is likely to be the worst land, this will lead to about 10 per cent less crop – possibly slightly less if farmers are then given the technology to increase yields on remaining acres. The other ploy is to pay farmers less for any excess crop, after a certain specified tonnage has been reached. The reduced prices are called 'stabilisers'.

'Set-aside' will leave Europe full of empty fields, possibly washing away in the rain – or in the case of France, used as pasture to replace the grain mountain with one of beef. Stabilisers, and any other meaningful price cut, could, on

the other hand, induce farmers to grow different crops that are not subject to price penalties.

The trouble is, pressure from Germany and France – this being an election year – against cutting prices, among farmers who haven't had to compete on a real market for years, is intense. So we are likely to end up with a combination of land 'set-aside' and stabilisers. And if 'set-aside' starts cutting production, there will be less incentive to cut prices, and give farmers a reason to grow more useful things. Cynics in the DGVI say that is why Germany supports set-aside.

But if farmers are given reasons to switch to more useful crops, who gets to say what is useful? The people in the science directorate think they know. 'We are on the verge of a massive technological revolution in agriculture', says one. 'We shouldn't be paying farmers to do nothing. We should be getting them to intensify, and start growing some of Europe's industrial requirements.'

This is the infamous grain-into-plastics scenario. But growing even more mass crops for high-tech conversion with the emphasis on tonnage, not taste, is unlikely to change attitudes among farmers or crop breeders who are still fixated on quantity, not quality.

The threat is not imminent, however. The agricultural research programme on grains-to-plastic has asked for a mere £56 million from the EEC – and research requests have a way of being slashed in half. That would just about buy you part-share in a grain hillock – at least until the next European Summit.

WORLD NEWS

New plants for old

A Belgian company says it has made an important breakthrough by genetically altering plants so that they become poisonous to insects. Plant Genetic Systems (PGS) says its techniques could eventually result in a big reduction in the spraying of farm crops with insecticides.

Field trials on tobacco plants inserted with the naturally occurring, non-toxic insecticide, bacillus thuringiensis, have shown enough poison is produced to kill off caterpillars. PGS claim the technique could be transferred

successfully to a wide range of other food crops. (*Consumer Currents*, No. 102, December 1987)

Exporting radiation

Shipments of radioactive powdered milk, exported as cattle fodder from West Germany, have been turning up in Egypt en route for Angola. This particular attempt to export milk contaminated by the Chernobyl disaster backfired when checks revealed radioactive levels well above accepted levels.

Two companies are now being investigated by the West German

Authorities. Meanwhile the contaminated freight is temporarily stored at military bases until someone can decide on a safe method of disposal. (*Consumer Currents*, no.95, 1987)

Buzzing down under?

The Australian Consumers Association has encouraging news for people trying to kick the caffeine, sorry, coffee habit. Although Australians are presently consuming 250mg of caffeine a day,

well below intakes in Scandinavia (425mg) and Britain (444mg), the Association cites one study linking coffee consumption with an increased risk of heart disease as well as the more recognised side effects like anxiety, headaches and palpitations.

Urging moderation until further research is done the Association suggests switching to decaffeinated brands. And the switch needn't be at the expense of flavour, "overall the panellists rated the decaffeinated coffee higher than the full strength ones" (*Choice*, June 1987)

The

A report critical of the proposed use of Bovine Somatotropin was published this month by the London Food Commission. The report *Bovine Somatotropin: a product in search of a market* launches a campaign backed by a coalition of consumer, animal welfare and environmental groups, to halt the licensing of bovine somatotropin (BST) until more is known about its effects.

Bovine Somatotropin (BST), a genetically engineered hormone which boosts milk production, is being secretly tested on dairy farms in the UK. And the milk from the treated animals is being added to the general milk supply. The Ministry of Agriculture, which has licensed the trials, refuses to reveal the location of the trial farms but Wye College in Kent, MAFF's Shinfield Research Station in Berkshire and several farms in the West Country are understood to be involved.

No-one knows where BST milk is being sold, and there are no plans to label or separate it from conventionally produced milk. Leading retailers deny BST milk is being sold in their stores, but as yet there are no routine tests available for detecting the presence of the hormone.

In Holland sales of BST milk are not permitted, and West Germany is considering a similar ban while trials continue.

Biosynthetic versions of bovine growth hormone can boost milk yields by as much as 40 per cent if given regularly to dairy cows. BST also promotes the growth of calves and lambs. If granted a commercial licence campaigners fear BST will be used to beat the EEC hormone ban which came into force on January 1st 1988.

Considerable opposition to BST has come from the dairy industry itself. One large company complained: 'Despite repeated requests and meetings, MAFF refuses to disclose the experimental farms, since they state that they are not allowed to do this under the 1968 Medicines Act. The industry as a whole is pressurising MAFF to prevent the issuing of full Product Licences.'

Hard sell

BST is produced by four multinational companies: Elanco (a subsidiary of Eli Lilly), Monsanto, Cyanamid and Upjohn. The National Office of Animal Health (NOAH), the veterinary pharmaceuticals' industry lobby group, is pushing BST hard for the four drug companies involved.



CRISPIN HUGHES AND GINA GLOVER/PHOTO CO-OP

Early in 1988 NOAH sent literature to some 25,000 dairy farmers in the UK. Monsanto has also engaged the international public relations consultants Hill Knowlton to organise a series of 30 meetings around the country to promote acceptance of the new products. They will involve key figures in the farming and dairy industries, health workers, teachers, consumer and other groups.

Euro-MPs involved in Common Market deliberations over BST were flown by Eli Lilly to the United States to see BST farm trials, though Green MEPs were not invited on the trip.

NOAH's promotional material

emphasises BST's safety, and re-iterates that the milk itself remains unchanged by BST injections or implants. But recent studies have shown BST milk to have a higher fat content than ordinary milk. For example, analysis of the milk from Holstein cows given daily BST injections in a 28 day controlled trial reported in 1984 showed a fat content of BST milk 27 per cent higher than ordinary milk.

There is a huge surplus of butterfat in Britain and the EEC, which BST may swell. And while the Department of Health's dietary guidelines recommend a cut in dairy fat consumption to avoid heart disease, the Ministry of Agriculture

secrets in your milk

seems set to approve the use of a hormone which would produce more dietary fat.

Human Health

Assurances have been given that BST hormones pose no risk to human health, since they are 'biologically identical' to the natural hormone. But synthetic BSTs have several different chemical structures, depending on the drug company's production technique and none is identical to the natural hormone. So far details of the human and animal safety tests for these products are covered by official secrecy.

Many in the dairy industry are worried that the veil of secrecy surrounding BST will fuel consumer anxieties. If consumers are not given independent assessments of its safety and desirability before a product licence is granted, they argue, milk may lose its image as a wholesome and nutritious product. This could have damaging consequences for the dairy industry as a whole.

Survey results

A survey of dairy trades, consumer and animal welfare bodies carried out by the London Food Commission revealed that twenty one of the twenty-five organisations polled did not believe there was a need for BST. A similar number thought that further trials for human and animal safety, milk composition and residues, as well as economic and social impact were required.

One milk marketing organisation outlined its attitude in the following terms 'it should be sold only when and if ever the public accepts that BST is absolutely safe and has no effect on the young or old given prolonged usage.'

Milking Cows

Animal welfare groups are concerned the long-term use of BST will drive dairy cows over the limit of physiological endurance. A representative of one group said 'there is a great tendency for farmers to overdose their cows for greater production, as with the abuse of steroid hormones. The use of BST may mask declining output due to illness. The treatment of symptoms rather than the causes of animal disease is bad veterinary practice.'

MAFF's Farm Animal Welfare Council

RECOMMENDATIONS

The LFC working party includes representatives from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Consumers in the European Community Group, Compassion in World Farming, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the Vegetarian Society, the Farm and Food Society and Maternity Alliance. The LFC Working Party recommends:

1. Details of the BST trials should be made public to allay industry and consumer concerns.
2. The results of residues tests should be available for public scrutiny.
3. MAFF and the dairy trades should set up mechanisms for accurate labelling of dairy products.
4. The Ministry of Agriculture should consider the potential use of synthetic BST hormones as growth promoting agents, especially in the light of the EEC steroid hormone bans.
5. An independent review is needed into the impact of BST on employment, farming methods and land use.

(FAWC) report on BST was made public last December. It identified a number of areas still to be resolved: its administration, its variation in response, its effects on skeleton, fertility and calves, its suppression of natural growth hormone and multi-lactation effects. The report emphasised the need for further

multi-lactation and multi-generation trials to answer these uncertainties. Its chairman, Prof. Sir Richard Harrison wrote to the minister, John MacGregor, stating that the working party had not had sufficient time to 'carry out as searching and wide-ranging an investigation as we would have wished.'

Speaking to a meeting of the Parliamentary Food and Health Forum earlier this year, under-secretary Donald Thompson nevertheless gave support to the proposed use of BST. Dismissing the EEC hormone ban as an emotional reaction, he stated there was 'no scientific case against those hormones, and we have a similar situation with BST. It is being tested in the USA, France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain on similar animal test certificates.'

Managing quotas?

BST is being promoted to help farmers make up their full EEC quota. But some farmers are worried that if BST performs as promised, the pressures to reduce costs will have a knock-on effect throughout dairy farming, depressing prices and profits. In the US it has been estimated that half the dairy farms may be bankrupt within ten years. BST's potential impact on farming in Europe has not yet been fully assessed.

Eric Brunner, the LFC report's author, said at its launch 'BST is the first of a new wave of agricultural products, many manufactured using gene technology, which have the potential to change farming beyond recognition. Their proper regulation is vital for the future of food, health, environment and employment.'

□ *BST: a product in search of a market* is available from the London Food Commission, £7.50 (plus £1.13 p&p).

SUPPORT OUR BST CAMPAIGN

- ☐ I/We support the campaign to halt the licensing of BST until more is known about its effects.
- ☐ I/We enclose a donation of £5 ☐ £10 ☐ £25 ☐ other £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Please return to BST Campaign, London Food Commission, FREEPOST, London EC1B 1FX

OFF THE SHELF

In this country we produce some 200 million cans of meat each year. We also import large quantities of canned meat from countries as diverse as Denmark and Brazil, Yugoslavia and Botswana. In all, we buy from our shops over 300 million pounds weight of canned meat, ranging from luncheon meat to meatballs, chicken casserole to corned lamb. For people on low incomes, fresh meat may be viewed as a luxury and tinned meat a reliable stand-by. As lower income families tend to suffer more from dietary diseases, it is important to ask how well tinned meat serves their needs. Are people who rely on tinned meat getting a fair deal?

New Meat Regulations

Until 1986 the meat processing industry was required to conform to regulations which set legal standards for meat quality. Before that date, products such as 'sliced meat in gravy' had to be more than half meat, and no more than 40 per cent gravy – otherwise the manufacturer had to call it 'gravy with sliced meat'.

But now products containing very little meat can call themselves meat, and even put the 'meat' first in the product's name. And they can be given by the name of one meat, even though other meats may be present – so 'Minced Beef' may have pork or chicken in it. The only rule in these cases is that somewhere on the label there should be a declaration of what the meats are, and how much meat is in the can (the 'minimum meat content' as a percentage of the weight). Even this rule is not watertight. Some animal products – such as animal suet or lard – can be used without saying which animal it comes from. If you have scruples about eating certain creatures, this obscurity can be a nightmare. But, worse, if you have reservations about eating certain parts of an animal, then your search of the label will be hopeless. There is a

In this issue we launch a series of investigations into what is sold in our local food shops. We begin by asking what quality we can expect when we start...

Taking the lid off canned meat

requirement that a certain proportion of the meat must be *lean meat* but what the regulations call 'lean' may not be quite what we'd buy for lean Sunday roast. The regulations allow, as lean meat, not only the usual muscle flesh from the main carcass, but also, in the case of mammals, diaphragm, head muscles, tail, pancreas, thymus, rind, gristle, heart, kidney, liver, tongue, skin and sinew. In the case of poultry the gizzard, neck, skin, gristle, heart, liver and sinew are permitted.

Other parts of the animal, such as the feet, spinal cord, testicles, udder, lungs, rectum and intestines are supposed to be declared on the label but only if used in 'significant amounts'. Furthermore, many labels declare a meat 'stock' which is not so clearly regulated and may well be made by boiling these other items.

Gristle, bones and fat?

Gone are the days when lumps of gristle fell out of cans of stewing steak. New technologies allow gristle, skin, rind and fat to be turned into chunky pieces of quite believable 'lean' meat. With added texturisers, emulsifiers, flavourings, flavour enhancers and colourings, virtually any part of an animal can now be re-processed into hunks, chunks, 'fillet ribs' or 'steakettes'. Provided the meat has some 'lean' in it – from the list above – then there is no legal problem.

When it comes to fat – which for those worried about their health may be the most important concern – the label is little help. The label declares a minimum meat content – and there must be that much meat present – but only a proportion (usually just under two-

thirds) needs to be 'lean' meat from the list above. The rest of the declared meat content could be added fat and water. And there can be yet more added fat and water, which is supposed to be listed on the label. But there is no limit to how much extra fat and water can be added. In the case of fat there is no requirement to specify what the amount is. Only a minority of the tins we looked at gave any voluntary indication of the proportion of fat present.

What we expect

The changes in the regulations have freed manufacturers from responsibility for high product standards. They simply have to put enough on the can to cover themselves legally. If you complain, they will claim that they sold food 'of the quality, nature and type expected' according to the label. Under the Food Act you will have no case against them.

This approach is not in the consumers' best interests. The new regulations provided an opportunity to make manufacturers conform to higher standards, and to make labelling more explicit. But the opportunity was not taken, and the consumer is the loser.

Corny but True

Only in a few cases did the new regulations offer consumers a better deal. As can be seen from the table, a few products apparently stand out – the corned meats and luncheon meats. Corned meat involves boiling lean meat and adding preservative (saltpetre 'corns'). Legal standards require that 96 per cent of the meat must be lean meat.

Luncheon meats on the other hand are a mixture of finely chopped meats and fat. In practice they are often made in the factory as a means by which meat trimmings and some edible materials which have been rejected for other products (for instance,

Corned Beef and Luncheon Meat Compared

Top runners in the lean meat ratings are Pork Luncheon Meat and Corned Beef. But the two differ considerably in nutritional quality. The table shows the quantities of nutrients present in a 100g (3½ oz) portion of each product:

	Protein	Iron	Fat	Calories
Luncheon meat	13g	1mg	27g	313
Corned beef	27g	3mg	12g	217

Source: McCance and Widdowson 1985

Canned Meats Examined

<i>Make/Name (weight)</i>	<i>Price</i>	<i>Declared meat content</i>	<i>'Lean' meat price per lb.</i>	<i>Contents include (see notes)</i>
Abbey Farm				
Chunky Steak with Gravy (392g)	79p	65%	2.17p	w-2, s-3, Col.
Admiral				
Minced Steak and Kidneys (411g)	79p	25%	5.37p	w-3, Col, MSG
Campbells				
Beef Stew (425g)	60p	20%	4.93p	w-1, beef hearts, Col.
Chicken Stew (425g)	60p	18%	5.48p	w-1, Col.
Meat Balls (425g)	49p	22%	3.66p	w-1, chicken meat & beef hearts, Col.
Steak and Kidney Stew (425g)	62p	20%	5.09p	w-1, Col, MSG
Casserole				
Stewed Steak (212g)	79p	95%	2.74p	
Courtina				
Corned Beef (340g)	1.26p	100%	1.75p	(96% lean)
Fray Bentos				
Minced Beef with Onions (213g)	69p	50%	4.53p	w-2, Col.
Corned Beef (340g)	1.20p	100%	1.67p	(96% lean)
Goblin				
Chicken Casserole (425g)	55p	20%	4.52p	s-1
Libby's				
Corned Beef (340g)	1.26p	100%	1.75p	(96% lean)
Newforge				
Beef Stew (400g)	59p	15%	6.87p	w-1
Chicken Casserole (400g)	59p	15%	6.87p	w-1, s-5
SPAM ^(R) (340g)	1.05p	90%	2.40p	Ph.
Plumrose				
Bacon Grill (300g)	66p	80%	1.92p	w-2, Ph.
Pork Luncheon Meat (300g)	58p	80%	1.69p	w-2, Ph, Col.
Olde Oak				
Chunky Chicken (198g)	67p	50%	4.73p	w-2, s-3, MSG
Minced Chicken (411g)	52p	35%	2.53p	w2, MSG
Princes				
Chopped Ham & Pork (298g)	59p	90%	1.54p	w-2, Ph, MSG
Ham (454g)	1.10p	80%	2.12p	w-2, Ph.
Pork Luncheon Meat (298g)	49p	80%	1.44p	w-2, Ph, Col.
Tyne				
Beef & Onion (392g)	98p	43%	4.06p	s-1, w-2, chicken, MSG
Beef Casserole (392g)	68p	20%	6.06p	s-1, w-5, chicken, Col.
Beef Cnrry (392g)	65p	15%	7.72p	s-1, w-2, chicken, Col.
Chicken Curry (392g)	90p	15%	10.69p	s-1, w-2, turkey
Mince Bolognese (392g)	90p	35%	4.58p	s-3, chicken, w-6
John West				
Corned Lamb (340g)	1.10p	100%	1.53p	(96% lean)
Westlers				
Minced Beef (425g)	75p	35%	3.52p	w-1, MSG, Col.
Wilson's				
Minced Steak with Gravy (392g)	72p	75%	1.71p	w-2, s-4, Col.

Notes

Declared Meat Content = Minimum meat content declared on the label

'Lean' meat price per lb = cost for a pound of lean meat in each product assuming the minimum declared for all products.

Many products may have higher levels of 'lean' meat.

Price = cost in a medium sized grocers in North Islington, January-February 1988

Contents include: this shows the presence of unexpected meats, the positions of water (w) and meat stock (s) in the list of ingredients, added colouring agents (Col.), phosphates which help the meat retain water (Ph.), and flavour enhancer Monosodium Glutamate (MSG).

mis-shapen pies) may be incorporated into simple, easily made and saleable products' (Food Industries Manual 1984). Although cheaper, luncheon meat has more than twice the fat of corned meats, and only half the protein (see box).

Meat for your money

The products we found on the grocery shelves varied enormously, not only in the apparent quality of the meat – as declared on the labels – but also the amount you would have to pay to get a helping of 'lean' meat. Our table shows some of the leading brands (we have not included the supermarket chains' own-label brands).

We worked out a 'lean meat' rating. First we assumed that the declared meat content was the actual content, and that the 'lean' meat content was the minimum required by law. On this basis we calculated the minimum 'lean' meat the can was likely to contain, and how much it would cost per pound weight in each product.

The differences in 'lean meat' rating show that you could pay four or five times as much for an equal amount of lean meat, depending on the product. And, given the present labelling laws, the range could be even greater – some products could be less desirable than they appear, while others may be better.

Better labelling

An alternative to this confused situation would entail that manufacturers gave clear indications of

♦ *what parts of the animal* are in their cans ♦ *what animals these came from* and most important from the health view

♦ *how much lean and how much fat we can expect* when we open the can.

□ For further reading see: The London Food Commission's report on water in foods *Opening the Floodgates* and Jan Walsh's book *The Meat Machine*, Columbus Books, 1986.

In the 1930s, Peckham in South London was the home of a new and revolutionary type of health care – The Pioneer Health Centre – which aimed to provide its users with positive health care. It included a cafe serving food grown in the Centre's own organic garden in Kent and people were taught how to feed themselves and their children in the healthiest way. Fifty years on we returned to see how the people of Peckham fare in the age of fast food.

Modern Peckham shows all the signs of inner-city decay. Unemployment is high and most households live on less than £200 per week gross. Hand in hand with these problems go high rates of heart disease and other diet and poverty-related health problems.

In Peckham, as in many town centres, the fast food industry has arrived in force. In just two streets there is a Wimpy Bar, a McDonald's, two fish and chip shops, a Kentucky Fried Chicken and an Indian and a Chinese take away. Most surveys indicate that, on average, people eat fast foods about once a week, although for some – for example young and unemployed people – twice a week or more is not uncommon. Our survey of fast food eaters in Peckham established that nearly nine out of ten claimed to eat fast foods at least once a week. Nearly a third said they ate some form of fast food at least once a day.

Fast food and health

Two recent studies found that people who ate large amounts of fast food were getting low levels of nutrients – well below government recommendations. In pregnant women this was thought to have a detrimental effect on the birth weight of their babies. Yet one woman in our study commented: 'I eat at Wimpy every day for lunch and Chinese every night because I'm pregnant.'

Many of the foods from fast food take aways and restaurants are relatively high in fat (especially saturated fat) and salt and provide only minimal amounts of dietary fibre. A meal from one of these

Over one third of British adults visited McDonalds last year and nearly as many visited Wimpy. But *how often* is fast food relied on to provide a snack or meal.

We asked Peckham fast food eaters and found that 87 per cent went at least once a week and 31 per cent said they ate fast foods at least once a day.

places contains virtually no vegetables, salad or fruit, and if eaten frequently may displace the sort of healthy diet which helps prevent diet-related illness.



'I can't do without them. I come here three times a week'.



'The car's round the corner and it's convenient'.



'We come in every day for chips'.

Grazing

Why do people in Peckham eat fast food?

Reason	Number of people giving this reason first
Convenience	139
Like the taste	84
Hungry	43
Fast	32
For the children	9
Good quality	3
Cheap	3
Dislike cooking	2
Other	38

But we also found that housewives and children tended to put taste before convenience



'I'm in a hurry. It's clean and reliable but the food's not great'.



'It's handy when I'm hungry'.



'I like hamburgers. They're tasty'.



'They're fast and quick'.



'We can each have what we want'.

Our study

Sceptical of the claim that fast food is not nutritionally significant in the overall British diet, we went on to ask why respondents ate fast food, what they thought about it, and whether or not they believe information given to them by the manufacturers. We interviewed 354 people during October 1987, as they left five fast food restaurants in the centre of Peckham, either at lunchtime or mid-afternoon.

Over forty people had bought chicken and chips, fish and chips, or burger and chips, and said that this was going to be their main meal of the day. Other main meals included:-

pancake roll and chips	chips
pie	chicken, chips & cheesecake
chips & onion burger	burger & shake
pie & chips	fish & apple pie
roe & chips	fish, chips, applepie & icecream
chicken	corn-on-the-cob

Two people said that they were eating fast foods because they had very limited cooking facilities at home. Another said 'school dinners are too dear'.

People interviewed did not think that such food was good for their health. When asked how they would rate the food in health terms, 40 per cent rated it as poor. Only 20 per cent thought it was good. People with high incomes were more likely to rate the food as poor quality than people with low incomes.

Fast food eaters were not impressed by the information provided by manufacturers. When we asked them 'If the food manufacturer told you that the food you've just bought is good for you, would you believe them?' eighty per cent said 'No'. Four people commented 'I don't care what they tell me'.

□ The full report of *Grazing in Peckham* by Fiona Carruthers and Isobel Cole-Hamilton will be available from the London Food Commission in the summer.

The London Food Commission's fast food handbook for consumers will be published later this year.

in Peckham

Some fast foods are very high in fat

Food	Calories per portion	fat % of Calories
Chicken & chips (Kentucky)	619	50
Big Mac & fries (McDonalds)	840	47
Quarter pounder & chips (Wimpy)	830	47
Rock salmon & chips (Fish & chip shop)	880	53
Pie & chips (Fish & chip shop)	980	51
Chicken (Kentucky)	350	58
Fish, chips, apple pie (Wimpy)	780	41

Source: Company data and McCance and Widdowson, *The Composition of Foods*

The DHSS recommend that not more than 35 per cent of Calories in anyone's diet should come from fat. To follow this recommendation, people eating the types

of food listed above every day would have to ensure the rest of the daily diet contained relatively little fat.

We begin a new series of features looking at the food we are sold, what we are told, and what we really need. We begin with a dietitian's view of 'added fibre' products, and ask: who's been

Jumping on the bran wagon

Remember when breakfast was just a matter of 'sunshine' or 'snap crackle and pop'? When potatoes and pasta were fattening? Not so today. The coming of 'healthy eating' and 'high fibre' has been music to the ears of a food industry

BOX 1

What different types of dietary fibre do.

- Some kinds of fibre are broken down by bacteria in our gut, changing the nature and increasing the bulk of the stool.

- Others absorb water from the gut which also increases the bulk of the stool. But it can inhibit the absorption of important nutrients into the blood.

- Other types of fibre absorb organic molecules such as bile acids and cholesterol and may have the effect of reducing blood cholesterol levels.

- But some fibre actually attaches itself to certain nutrients, reducing their absorption.

looking for new markets and new products to sell. The bread, snack and breakfast cereal makers hyped the 'high fibre' message and starting cashing in on bran – and we are gobbling it up. But the effects on our guts, metabolism and nutrient balances remain largely unknown.

Why we need fibre

A lack of fibre in the diet has been linked to a range of health problems including heart disease, constipation, gallstones, varicose veins, diabetes and bowel and breast cancer. Whether and how fibre helps to prevent these diseases is still a matter of debate among scientists. Traditionally, people who eat a lot of fibre are also eating much less refined, processed foods, and therefore less sugar, salt, and fat, so that could be part of the answer.

Eating more fibre can have immediate effects. For people who have never eaten much, adding fibre will increase the bulk of the faeces, shorten the time between eating and excreting and relieve constipation. Piles and diverticular disease become less painful, and diabetes is better controlled. But the effect of simply adding bran to a diet of refined foods is not known.

Different types of dietary fibre

Dietary fibre is not one, but a number of different compounds which do different things (see Box 1). The fibre in wheat, for example, is more effective in increasing the bulk of the faeces, while that in beans and some fruit is more effective in lowering blood cholesterol. To get a healthy balance means eating fibre from a variety of foods.

Dietary fibre is provided by most foods of plant origin. Cereal foods, vegetables, fruits, nuts and pulses provide dietary fibre and each has its own mix of fibre types. But not all cereals are the same, nor are all fruits. Cabbage and carrots have different qualities and 'new' carrots may be different from 'old' carrots.

How much fibre?

No one really knows how much we need. It depends on the total amount of food we eat, our appetite, the state of our gut and maybe a host of other factors.

It has been suggested that the *average* intake for the UK population should be 30 grams of fibre per person per day, varying according to our needs. But rather than getting obsessive and asking 'Am I getting my 30 grams?', it is more important to ask 'Am I eating a variety of foods giving me plenty of fibre?' (see Box 2).

If we eat plenty of cereal foods (preferably from whole grains), starchy vegetables like potatoes, green bananas, yams, and other vegetables and fruit, along with some pulses and nuts, then we are likely to be getting all the dietary fibre we need.

BOX 3

Do you need added bran? Here are three daily diets, based on eating either 'white' refined foods, wholegrain foods, or added bran foods.

Food providing fibre	Daily amount	Grams of fibre		
		'White' refined	whole grain	bran-added
Breakfast cereal	1 large bowl	2.2	6.1	14.3
Bread	3–4 slices	4.2	13.2	17.2
Potatoes/rice/pasta	1 med-large serving	2.4	3.1	3.1
Biscuits	1–2	0.3	1.2	3.3
Snacks eg cake/ pudding/crisps/ nut/etc	1 portion	1.5	2.3	7.1
Salads	1 portion	11.3	11.3	11.3
Greens/root veg	1 portion			
Pulses/baked beans	3 serves/week			
Fruit	1–2 fruits			
TOTAL – Grams of fibre per day		21.9	37.2	56.3

N.B. A diet containing these amounts of starchy foods and following general healthy eating guidelines for eating other foods would provide about 2,250 calories.

A healthy diet providing about 2,250 calories would be expected to provide about 30 grams of dietary fibre.

Do we need added or high bran foods?

For most people, added bran is totally unnecessary. Although the bread and cereals industries would have us believe we are doing ourselves a great favour by stuffing ourselves full of added bran, it may be possible to have too much of a good thing. Fibre, particularly that found in wheat bran, is known to bind certain nutrients and inhibit their absorption into the blood stream. Eating refined, nutrient depleted foods and adding bran might lead to problems, particularly for people with small appetites. As we show in Box 3, it is perfectly possible to eat sufficient dietary fibre without reaching for the bran supplements or the added bran foods

□ A future issue of *The Food Magazine* will look at breakfast cereals in our 'Off The Shelf' review of branded goods and market trends.

BOX 2

Amounts of food which provide similar amounts of dietary fibre (about 5g)

Rice Krispies	4 bowls
Shredded Wheat	1 bowl (2 biscuits)
Bread	6 slices (white) or 2 slices (wholemeal)
Rice (uncooked)	7 oz (white) or 3 oz (wholegrain)
Pasta (uncooked)	4½ oz (white) or 1½ oz (wholewheat)
Flour	5½ oz (white) or 1½ oz (wholemeal)
Canned spaghetti	3 x 425g cans (white) or 1 x 425g can (wholewheat)
Baked beans	One third of a small (225g) can
Frozen peas	1 tablespoon
Canned sweet corn	2 tablespoons
Most vegetables	4-5 tablespoons
Boiled potatoes	2-3 large potatoes
Green banana	One four inch slice
Yam	4 oz
Raw dried beans	less than 1 oz
Dahl (cooked)	2 tablespoons
Most fruits	6-7 oz (e.g. two small apples)
Grapes and melon	1 lb
Summer berries	2-3 oz
Currants & sultanas	2-3 oz
Dried figs & prunes	1 oz
Nuts	1-2 oz

Source: McCance & Widdowson - *The Composition of Foods*, and industry data.

Alcohol ads and the under-age drinker

by Donald Macleod of the Greater London Alcohol Advisory Service

What have Carling Black Label, Fosters and Miller Lite in common? Yes, they're all lagers advertised on TV. But they have one more feature in common according to the Association of Market Survey Organisations: they are the favourite commercials of 13 to 14 year olds (*Guardian* Feb 3, 1988).

Yet alcohol and advertising industries claim that alcohol advertising is not aimed at under 18s. Research shows that by the age of 15, males have stepped up their average weekly consumption to 10 units of alcohol (ie 5 pints) and 1 in 5 are drinking 25 units or more per week - above the recommended safe guidelines for adult males. And their favourite drink is ... beer, including lager.

The industries also claim that alcohol advertising does not increase the total amount of alcohol consumed in society; they say advertising only causes shifts in brand consumption. However, the cumulative effect of the £200 million p.a. spent on alcohol advertising in the UK is to help prop up total alcohol consumption - at a level which sustains a number of alcohol-related problems in society.

Advertising says alcohol will make you sharp (Harp) and sexier (Carling Black Label); it will whisk you to paradise (Bacardi), become your good friend (Smirnoff), even welcome you home at night (Teachers). And if you don't want to go home, alcohol will make the night buzz with excitement (Pernod, Babydam).

Alcohol is synonymous with honesty: your hand on a pint of Toby is the equivalent of placing your hand on the Bible. It attracts members of the opposite sex like the proverbial magnet (Tennents, Red Stripe). Above all else, you must get hold of alcohol (Mountie) even if you have to slave for it (McEwans) because it will turn out to be the love of your life (John Smiths). In addition, sports sponsorship

(soccer, rugby league etc etc) ensures that alcohol and fitness are closely connected.

In November 1987, the Home Office-sponsored Working Party on Young People and Alcohol produced its report. Much to the consternation of the alcohol and advertising industries, the Masham Report recommended a ban on alcohol advertising on TV and in the cinema, and a tightening of the voluntary code covering advertisements in the print media. The government's Ministerial Group on Alcohol Misuse responded, in January, by inviting the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to review the current voluntary codes of practice which cover alcohol advertisements.

Neither the IBA or the ASA have enforced even the present weak voluntary codes. A recent complaint about Jonathan Ross's advertising of Harp met with the rebuff, from the IBA, that Ross, in the advertisements, was not portrayed as successful! Another complaint to the ASA about Red Stripe lager was eventually (four months after the first complaint) answered by the altogether mysterious comment that the advertisement 'could not be said unambiguously to contravene the Code'.

At the very least, the IBA and ASA ought to monitor advertisers' market research findings - and add to them where necessary - to assist them with their decision-making. Pertinent points from the findings should be published in response to complaints. And the ASA in particular, needs to quicken its complaint process. By the time four months have elapsed, a campaign is well established.

But more than anything, the Codes of Practice need to be strengthened, to eliminate the false promises and the damaging addictive messages which surround alcohol advertisements.

Catering Workers Speak Out

Yiannis Gabriel, author of the first systematic study of the catering industry, talked to 200 of Britain's catering workers about their jobs, their industry and their managers. His research questions the image of catering as the flagship of the new service economy Britain.*

'Working in catering you feel sometimes that your job lacks dignity. Kitchen ladies and catering staff generally are treated as inferior people by everyone.' Mary Price works in a modern cook-freeze kitchen. Her views express an age-old grievance of catering workers, systematically neglected by the public, the politicians and the media

Coming from some of the most vulnerable groups in society women, ethnic minorities and young school leavers – catering workers work in an industry of bewildering variety and complexity. I talked to staff and managers in eight different establishments, including a hospital mass catering unit, a cook-freeze operation, a gentlemen's club, three leading fast food outlets, a fish and chips restaurant and a kebab house. Yet, many of their experiences were very similar.

Ninety per cent of the workers and 68 per cent of the managers interviewed said that given half a chance they would move out of catering. 'You serve hundreds of people here each day. But most of them hardly seem to notice you – all they want is to get served as soon as possible and that's all that matters. Sometimes I think that this uniform makes me invisible.'

Sharon, an 18-year old student hoping to go to medical school, works weekends at a fast-food outlet in London's West End. She is one of few who has lasted in the job for a whole year. Between 40 per cent and 70 per cent of new recruits in fast food leave within a month.

Job dissatisfaction

Boring, physically and mentally demanding work with nothing to show at the end of it was cited by 32 per cent of respondents as the main problem with their work. 'I would like to settle down in a constructive job, a mentally stimulating job', said Diana, a fast food manager. She added 'this job makes me want to move out of catering; I wouldn't advise anyone to work here.'

Few workers could bring their own ideas to their work or exercise their skills. The only catering workers who generally enjoyed their jobs were the young trained cooks working in a hospital kitchen in Central London whose jobs allowed them freedom to develop their skills, and the women in a gentlemen's club who took pride in the product and service they offered.

By contrast, the most dissatisfied were those working in high-tech establishments – fast-food and cook-freeze. The problem was summed up by Mrs Norma Collier, a senior catering manager in a modern cook-freeze catering organisation in the North of England. According to her the object of new technologies is precisely 'to stop the cooks from messing about with the recipes'.

'This is not really catering, more like working in the factory. The product is irrelevant, it's not like cooking at home – you just have to do everything by the book, the same way, day in day out.' Views like those of Mrs Collins suggest that de-skilling and job dissatisfaction will intensify as production lines replace old-fashioned kitchens.

Macho management

Poor management was the catering workers' second most common grievance, mentioned by 26 per cent of respondents. While management styles differed across the eight establishments surveyed, there was evidence that in the 1980s, new macho

managers have moved into catering. 'We are very strict. The rules are very strict – the length of breaks, clocking in, smoking, litter and so on. But people now accept this. They realise that we manage and they work,' said Mr Sprake, a hospital catering manager, who himself had introduced extensive changes in rostering, overtime and work practices.

Many of the older workers felt embittered and demoralised. Manuel Carrillo, a kitchen porter of many years' service, expressed the 'back-against-the-wall' position in which many unions in the public sector find themselves. He said: 'It used to be 'one man one job' here; but the union is finished now. We now work 'one man one thousand jobs'. The money is also worse since the changes. Before you did a lot of overtime and took £100 home; now wages are very low. The job too is less interesting now. Before they cared about quality. You work harder now and conditions are worse.'

Much of the time, the workers felt that their managers were going behind their backs in introducing new technology, staffing cuts and new work practices. 'You are the last one to learn when they change something; and even then you learn from the grapevine; they do not consult us,' said Sheila Greenhalgh, an older cook in the cook-freeze kitchen. Her views were echoed by the overwhelming majority of workers, who said that there was no consultation between themselves and management.

One manager commented: 'In a field like catering you cannot involve them in decision making; they wouldn't know what we are talking about. They lack the skills and ability'

With attitudes like this, it is hardly surprising that half of all the respondents complained about management arrogance.

Equal Opportunities

What caused even greater bitterness, however, were accusations of favouritism and discrimination. These were rife in hospital catering, where older and younger workers, black and white, skilled and unskilled, worked side by side. Twenty of the 59 hospital workers were 'foreign' and they were distinctly more dissatisfied. Mr Rocha, a Spanish trolley-porter said:

'Discrimination and favouritism is the thing that annoys me most. Over time used to be allocated by the supervisors but this is now done by management, who don't know who is a good worker'.

Several of the women complained that they got a worse deal than male cooks and Diane, a young black cook, complained that she was never allowed to work in the same team as other blacks. Likewise, the older foreign dining-room assistants claimed that they were constantly assigned to refurbish the hated giro-sells (heated carousel serving platforms), while their younger British fellow-workers were assigned to the desirable nurses and doctors dining-rooms.

Over-time discrepancies and the preferential allocation of easy jobs (the so-called 'gravy jobs' rather than the 'stinkers') are regular complaints of catering workers in establishments where management has traditionally operated a dual labour structure of core and peripheral workers.

George, the catering department's star, an outstanding young cook who commanded general respect had this to say: 'Their attitude towards the staff is not too good. The 'chosen few' syndrome. It worries me that I could lose the standing of being one of the 'chosen few'.'

The study confirms that catering workers are at the bottom of the wage league. Only 14 per cent of the respondents, however, saw poor pay as the main problem at work. 'You get used to the poor pay, you even get used to the boring job. Bad manners of management, that's what you never get used to,' said one of the cook-freeze workers.

The Future

The lot of catering workers is unlikely to change overnight. But if we are ever to break out of the vicious circle of low prestige, low pay and low security, the industry should listen to the views of its workers and respond to them, rather than desperately trying to keep the lid on their discontent. Neither the flashy advertising of fast food chains, nor the star treatment of the country's outstanding chefs, is likely to solve the problems of absenteeism, poor service and labour turn-over.

As the London Food Commission has argued, the industry's leaders must take a long term view of catering. A national grading system of catering establishments for hygiene, quality, price and service would provide a much-needed incentive to catering management to invest in training. Such a system would benefit the employees, the customers and the long-term interests of the industry as a whole. If a small proportion of the vast sums spent on advertising, sites and deskillng technology were spent on training, improved pay and conditions a significant step would be made towards breaking the traditional association of catering with sweated labour and servitude.

* *Working Lives in Catering* by Yiannis Gabriel is published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, price £16.95.



Organically grown – food of the future?

What is Organic Farming? How are standards for organically grown produce set? These questions sound simple enough but providing acceptable answers is today an important issue. PATRICK HOLDEN has farmed organically for 15 years and is now Director of British Organic Farmers and the Organic Growers Association. He has been involved in the establishment of both UK and EEC organic standards. In this article he discusses the implications.

In a message of support to the First Organic Farming and Growing Conference at Cirencester in 1983, Prince Charles said 'For some years now modern farming has made tremendous demands on the finite sources of energy which exist on earth. Maximum production has been the slogan to which we have all adhered. In the last few years there has been increasing realisation that many modern production methods are not only very wasteful but probably also unnecessary.'

This message, sounding an early alarm bell, was unfortunately unheeded both by the Government and the British agricultural industry. In fact the 'maximum production ethic' had been in force since the end of the Second World War, since when farmers have been encouraged by successive Governments to maximise their output. The mechanism for achieving this was a combination of unlimited, cheap agricultural fertilisers and sprays and guaranteed prices to farmers and growers. The direct consequences of these policies have been massive over-production throughout Europe, progressive degradation of our countryside environment, an overall decline in food quality and taste; and, increasingly, a serious risk of contamination from pesticide residues.

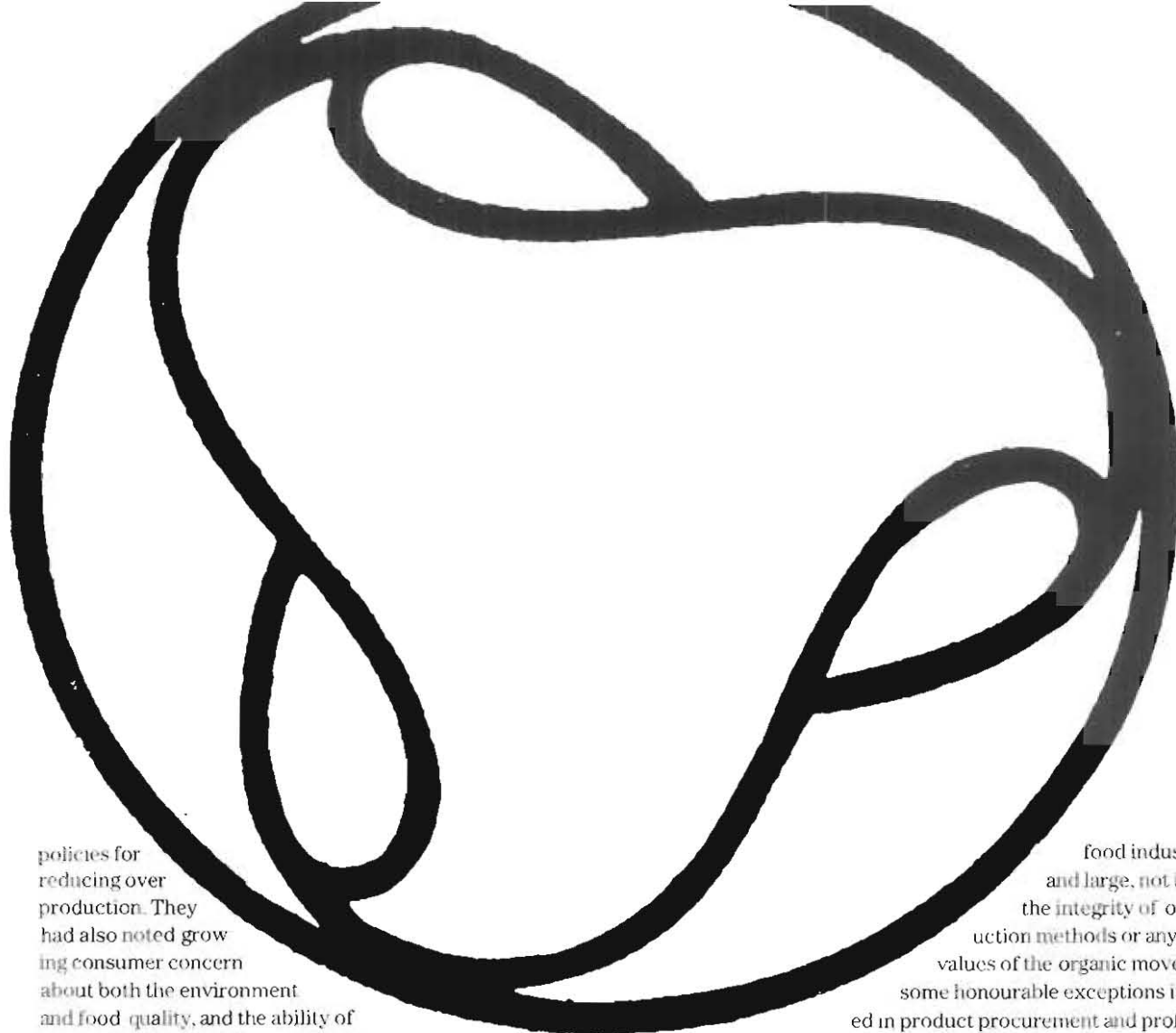
A small but influential group of farmers and scientists, who foresaw these dangers back in the 1940s, joined together and established the Soil Association. For over two decades their warnings went largely unheeded. In the late seventies the Soil Association's ranks were swelled by a significant number of younger producers, many of whom had grown up in the sixties and who wanted to develop Organic Standards and to make organically grown produce much more widely available.

In 1975, almost unnoticed, the Soil Association Symbol Scheme was launched. For the first time consumers could purchase organically grown produce in shops. For the Soil Association 'organically grown' means 'product of an organic farming system', which not only avoids the use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides but replaces them with a sustainable management system. This involves rotations, careful and sensitive management of both crops and livestock and a commitment to long-term soil fertility and the environment.

New Standards

After several drafts, the Soil Association produced, in June 1987, the definitive standards document – a comprehensive, 40 page text outlining exactly how farmers and growers can qualify for the Soil Association Symbol and cater for the new market – of concerned consumers. There are now over 500 Symbol holders. The Soil Association Symbol scheme has been expanded. Licensing schemes now exist for producers, processors and suppliers of fertilisers and other inputs. New schemes for wholesalers, retailers and importers of foreign organic produce are under development.

In the meantime, while this rather cosy sounding alliance was developing, the rest of agriculture was still deep in trouble. In the mid-1980s, the British Government, faced with the crippling costs of the Common Agricultural Policy, along with most other European member state governments, started considering



policies for reducing over production. They had also noted growing consumer concern about both the environment and food quality, and the ability of organic farming to deliver on all three counts has not entirely escaped the Government's notice. In 1985 John Selwyn Gummer, the Minister of State for Agriculture, realising that there was a potential political pay-off (not without some personal concern for the issues) established a Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) organic working party. Its task was to survey the field and report back to him with recommendations. This led to the establishment of UKROFS, the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards in July 1987, which heralded the government's entry into the organic arena. The UKROFS brief was to set organic production standards, establish a new UK organic logo, and approve existing standard setting bodies, such as the Soil Association.

Extraordinarily, while all this was going on, the food industry hardly noticed. They were too preoccupied with catering for the 'food revolution'. The NACNE report, the COMA report, and the 'revolt' against additives were all opportunities for the food industry to adjust processing operations and market 'lightly processed' food to a consumer market evidently concerned about dietary fibre, cholesterol, fatty meat and food additives. What they over-looked was the inevitable consequence of this new consumer interest in food quality - it would only be a matter of time before consumers realised that the method of agricultural production also affected what they ate.

Food manufacturers

Since the food industry have woken up to this reality, they have reacted quickly. Within the last year a food industry organic working party has been established. Along with all the major multiples, food manufacturers are keeping their ear close to the ground on organic market developments.

All this may sound like good news - but there are risks. The

food industry is, by and large, not interested in the integrity of organic production methods or any of the other values of the organic movement. With some honourable exceptions it is interested in product procurement and profit margins.

When the Government established the eleven-person UKROFS Board, three were nominated from the food industry, with the remainder representing producer and consumer interests. So already we have, the beginning of a gradual but inevitable process, whereby the influence of producers and consumers in setting and maintaining organic standards, has begun to be replaced or supplemented by political and commercial interests. This potential erosion of standards is a real threat and must be guarded against.

The EEC Directive

This Directive, at present only in blueprint form, will eventually lay down production standards throughout Europe. Member state governments will have the responsibility of implementing their own schemes which must be compatible with EEC standards. When the Directive becomes law it will be illegal for organically grown produce to be sold in any member state unless it complies.

The UK Government has kept its eye on EEC developments and hopes to design the UKROFS scheme to be compatible. All over Europe precisely the same scenario is being enacted: on one hand committed organic producer standards associations lobbying for high standards; on the other, member state governments are keen to set the lowest common denominator standards, to maximise exports.

It is hard to predict the outcome of this extraordinary play of forces involving producers, consumers, politicians and commercial companies, but I remain relatively optimistic. There is a growing tide of consumer concern, which cuts across both national and income boundaries. The power of the informed consumer to influence the development of genuine organic agriculture is, I believe, greater than that of either the food industry or short term political requirements of Government.

ON THE JOB

In the first of a series of personal accounts of working life in the food and catering industries,

VINCE MAFFEI talks about his work as a District Catering Manager in the NHS.



Vince Maffei, 51, is the District Catering Manager and Stores Controller for one of Britain's largest health districts, Barking, Havering and Brentwood. Born in Benevento, 100 miles south of Rome, he left the Italian Merchant Navy and came to Britain in 1958. He has worked in the Health Service for 20 years, and now heads a multi-million pound catering organisation serving up to 60,000 meals a week to patients and staff.

"When I was a young man in Italy I was told catering was a very important job and that's stayed with me. But here it's different. In England people will say a nurse is a more professional person than a caterer. This has a bad effect on the quality of recruits coming into the Service.

A catering manager in a hospital earns between £8,800 and £11,000. A district manager earns more but I've had to take on the responsibility of two jobs here to get a reasonable salary. Looking at other organisations with a similar turnover the salary isn't comparable. And you'd have much more status outside the Health Service. But I like the job and wouldn't leave just because of the money. It's very rewarding in other ways.

Part of the attraction of working in the Health Service was the environment, better social hours. Coming from the commercial sector where you could finish at 1.00am, in the Health Service you could start at 7.00am and be finished by 9.00pm at the very latest. But the job's changed 100 per cent since then. In those days cost wasn't the major priority – it was whether you could put good food on the plate. You could provide the service you wanted. Now, cost is the top priority.

The Health Service is on a loser to start with. We don't buy top

quality food. We buy at an acceptable standard. If you're starting with just acceptable standards of food and chefs who just meet the basic minimum requirements, then you're not going to get gold from dust. And that's the situation we're in. We run a very cheap service.

We won the first round of competitive tendering, and we're now coming up to the second round. It's made everyone aware that we're running a business. Generally the standard of the service has improved since then – we're about a quarter of a million pounds cheaper than we were three years ago. But it's more difficult to manage than it used to be.

Three years ago nobody told me I was spending £10,000 on uniforms. You ordered them and got what you wanted. Today you can order what you want but it comes with a bill. Everything costs money, and I have to live within the fixed tender price.

I'm not worried about a private contractor winning the tender. I don't see how a contractor could win because I don't have to make a profit. Anyone handling a four million pound turnover, wanting to make a minimum profit of 20 per cent is looking for a large sum of money. I'm not looking for that. I'm just looking to keep my head above water.

We prepare all our own

vegetables in-house. It works out cheaper. But you try telling that to any consultant. They'll say "no, no, it's cheaper to buy from outside", but it's not. It depends on your operation and purchasing power. I buy 500 bags of potatoes every week. But if I were to buy some peeled potatoes, a bit of potato powder and some frozen chips I'd lose my buying power – it'd be all over the place.

I shop around to get the best prices. The suppliers respect you if you're tough with them. Just recently I split two bags of potatoes and they were all wet inside and beginning to mould. The supplier offered me them at half price but I wasn't interested, and he had to take the whole lot back. He's learnt his lesson now. It cost him a lot of money to take them back and he lost a good client.

People don't understand our work because it happens behind closed doors. It's very stressful working in catering, you're always working against the clock. No matter what happens the meals have to be served at set times. Staffing is the biggest headache. It's difficult to recruit. We're never fully staffed – in fact we're about 20 per cent below establishment in this district. And up to 30-40 per cent of staff change every year. You can't get skilled staff, and when you do you can't keep them.

You'll never get a good service when you deliver food hot like we do. The food is good when it leaves the kitchen, but by the time you've transported it – one of my hospitals is spread over a 200 acre site – the quality's gone down. Generally patients don't complain about the food if it's a bit cold. They don't expect the same standards as at home.

What we're going for is minimal acceptable standards of service, at minimum cost. I don't aim for a five star service. I don't have the resources. At \$1.12 a day to feed each patient I can't work miracles".

Pupil pill power?

A study of 12 and 13 year olds at Darland Comprehensive School, S Wales featured on BBC2's & QED (January 20) examined the possibility that deficiency of dietary vitamins and minerals prevented optimal psychological performance. Sixty children took either a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement or placebo pill, on a double-blind basis, for eight months. The supplement group showed a significant rise in its average non-verbal intelligence score, from 111 to 120, whereas the placebo group did not.

But before we all start rushing to the pill bottle, four points need to be made. Firstly, the 'active' pill did not improve verbal intelligence scores at all. Secondly, the study must be repeated elsewhere to confirm the effect. Thirdly, does it indicate that the 'normal' diets of school children are deficient in valuable vitamins? And fourthly, and most importantly, if the implied dietary deficiencies are real what are the Departments of Health and Education going to do about nutrition education in schools, tuck shops, confectionary advertising and national nutritional guidelines for school meals?

◇ Benton D and Roberts G, 'Effect of vitamin and mineral supplementation on intelligence of a sample of schoolchildren', *Lancet* 1988, vol. 1, pp. 140-43.

Mineral water can be dangerous

Seventy per cent of still mineral waters were found contaminated with bacteria at levels above the EEC maximum after incubation at 22°C (72°F) for 72 hours. Fizzy water was less severely tainted, since carbon dioxide has some antibacterial properties. The authors of the study question the hygiene standards in bottling plants – human skin flakes and organisms originating from skin were found in some samples. They argue that bottled water is not a

safe drink for infants.

◇ Hunter PR and Burge SH. 'The bacteriological quality of bottled natural mineral waters', *Epidemiology and Infection* 1987, vol. 99, pp. 439-43.

Anorexia starts early

A study of 30 children with anorexia nervosa at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital found that the average starting age of symptoms was 11½, with a range from eight to 13 years. Half the children had not reached puberty. Doctors often miss the diagnosis, and so worsen the chances for successful treatment.

◇ *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 1988, vol. 63, pp. 5-9.

Cut salt, cut pills

A new leaflet from the 'Salt Data Centre', which acts on behalf of the British salt industry, suggests that salt restriction is not beneficial in the control of slightly raised blood pressure.

However, a detailed review of non-drug treatments for high blood pressure confirms that three measures – weight reduction and the restriction of salt and alcohol in the diet – effectively control slightly raised blood pressure. These measures have been shown to delay or limit the need for drugs, and in some cases make drug treatment unnecessary for the prevention of strokes.

◇ Reported in: Consumers Association, 'The treatment of mild hypertension', *Drug & Therapeutics Bulletin* 1988, vol. 26, no. 2.

Coping with Coffee

Norwegian researchers, in a survey of 143,000 men and women, compared the prevalence of depression, insomnia and 'coping problems' in those drinking more than eight cups of coffee with those drinking less. Coffee was not linked to these

mental problems in men – but Jacobsen and Hansen believe the eight cup dividing line may be too low. Statistically significant associations were shown for women for depression and 'coping problems'. Is this link cause or effect? When the results were adjusted for cigarette smoking the link became less striking. The authors conclude weakly, 'coffee consumption is probably part of a lifestyle associated with mental problems'.

◇ Jacobsen BK and Hansen V, 'Caffeine and Health' (letter), *British Medical Journal* 1988, vol. 296, p. 291.

Designer protein

The food research laboratory in Bristol has synthesised the world's first designer protein. The custom-built protein, tipped to enter the £200m European market for food emulsifiers, may herald a future of non man-made enzymes and other computer designed proteins.

◇ *Independent*, Jan 5 1988

No more pesticides?

Workers at Durham University have produced a pest-resistant tobacco crop which promises to cut the need for some pesticides in food production. A gene from the cowpea plant which disables insect digestion, starving the pest to death, was transferred to tobacco plants using gene technology.

◇ *Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 12 1987

Privatisation hits research

Agricultural research is widely considered to be in financial crisis, but virtually none of the £66m which Unilever paid for the Plant Breeding Institute was ploughed back into the Agricultural and Food Research Council. Aeting council secretary Prof. John Hearn remarked 'I feel we're running a science business, but every time we liquidise an asset, it is swiped.'

◇ *Independent*, Nov. 16 1987

Freak mini-cow

A two-foot high cow has been bred by a Mexican anthropologist. Mini-cows can graze on one tenth of the land required by an ordinary cow, producing 3 to 4 litres of milk a day.

◇ *Daily Telegraph*, Dec. 10 1987

Beans are good for the heart

Scientists at Shinfield Research Station report 'research has shown that legumes (peas and beans) differ in their ability to lower blood cholesterol levels and that baked beans were particularly effective in pigs made hypercholesterolaemic by dietary means'. Trials at Surrey University showed a similar effect. After two weeks of eating a large tin of baked beans daily, students found that 'flatulence was not a problem'.

◇ *Sunday Telegraph*, Feb. 7 1988

Food Safety: Hobson's Choice

A 'What affects food safety?' survey sent out recently by the Norwich Food Research Institute prompts the respondent to rank the following factors: nutritional imbalance, chemical residues, natural toxicants, food additives, environmental and microbiological contamination. How do you answer if you think they all are equally important?

Obesity risk

Children of overweight parents are more likely to become obese. A recent dietary intake study of 37 3 to 4-year-olds revealed that the energy intake of the children with obese parents was in fact 16 per cent less than those with normal weight parents. Physical activity and resting metabolic rate are the missing elements in the equation. ◇ Griffiths M et al, 'Energy intake in children at high and low risk of obesity', *Human Nutrition: Clinical Nutrition* 1987, vol 41C, pp 425-430.



Derek Cooper's Diary

When Radio 4's *The Food Programme* investigated the way in which pigs are reared in Britain they found that some 250,000 sows are tethered so closely that they can just about lie or stand. As soon as one litter is weaned the sow is covered and is expected to conceive within days. It is a cycle of hardship which the organisation Compassion in World Farming has described as being like something out of the Dark Ages.

Farmers are no less compassionate than other members of society, so why does factory farming continue in this intensive fashion, which undoubtedly causes stress and suffering to the pig? The Chairman of the NFU's pig committee, David Witherick, told reporter Sheila Dillon that it wasn't the farmers' fault. It's market demand, he said. Who leads us where we are? The consumers' demand for cheap meat. If the sow wasn't tied up and confined she might roll over and smother one of her little pigs. That would reduce profits and put up prices. 'If you ask the consumer', said farmer Witherick, 'would you be prepared to pay more for a product grown less intensively, then we have to say they don't show the tendency to do that'.

But are farmers really controlled by the consumer? Haven't they got enough clout to stand up and say that they don't want to cause unnecessary anguish to animals? And if it's really a question of profit and greed, that's a strong argument for more legislation not less. Perhaps the farmers should be protected from all these uncaring housewives who are forcing them to maltreat pigs.

Browsing but not grazing in the supermarket recently I saw a tin of 'fancy salmon' with a flash claiming that it was HIGH PROTEIN. As the ingredients were limited to salmon and salt should it not, in the interests of accuracy have also flashed its 'HIGH SALT' credentials?

When I go out shopping I get more and more confused. I was trying to buy some smoked haddock recently. In our wet fishmonger's shop they had two piles which looked not dissimilar. One lot was £2.20 a pound, the other £2.40. What's the difference?' I asked. 'Two-forty is frozen and smoked, two-twenty is

smoked and frozen'. I bought a couple of herrings instead.

I had a silly phone call from a supermarket press office recently. They were offering me an exclusive story about a new range of beef they were proposing to introduce. It would be properly hung, they said. Did that mean, I asked, that their ordinary beef wasn't properly hung? And did they really want me to publicise the fact that at last they were going to give their customers decent beef? At this stage the conversation petered out.

I have mixed feelings about salmon farming. By 1991 production in the sea lochs of the Highlands and Islands may well reach 45,000 tonnes. But what effect is this likely to have on some of the purest waters in Europe? Writing in the January 8

West Highland Free Press, Norman MacLennan points out that an average 25-tonne fish farm produces waste products equivalent to the sewage from 7000 people. In Norway they use vacuum equipment to Hoover the seabed clean; the Japanese rotate their sites and scour the seabed with chains. In Skye recently a fish farm manager told me they left it to the tides to clean the loch; he reckoned that if we ceased fish farming the seabed would be back to normal in three weeks.

*In the September/October issue of the campaigning Washington-based Common Cause magazine there was a fascinating account by staff writer Sheila Kaplan of the way in which the chemical companies, food growers and grocery manufacturers have been inhibiting Congress from outlawing potentially carcinogenic insecticides. According to Kaplan what she calls 'the food-chain gang' contributed \$6,533,937 to congressional candidates in 1985-6. Of this, over one million dollars went to members of the agricultural committees. Her thesis is that this dispersal of funds has prevented the major environmental groups from changing federal pesticides laws and making them tougher. There is perhaps research to be done in Britain on the creative lobbying of Westminster by our own food-chain gang. Anyone embarking on such research should first read Geoffrey Cannon's essential spadework in that area *The Politics of Food* (Century, £14.95).*

While lecturing at the Royal Society of Arts on dietary reform Professor Philip James was asked if there was any evidence that COMA had actually changed the eating habits of the nation. He had to admit there wasn't. Although people in certain areas appear to be eating more wholemeal bread old habits die hard. It is not without significance that 40 per cent of all fires in the home are still caused by chip pans catching alight!

We don't buy sickness it just comes:

Illness and health care in the lives of black people in London – Jenny Donovan, (Gower, 1986, pp284, £28.50)

This book examines the experiences of health, illness and health care of 30 black people of Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin now living in London. It describes their beliefs, daily experiences and socio-economic conditions, rating the latter as the more significant factor in black people's lives and health.

Based on research for a doctorate, the book starts with a theoretical review of immigration and race relations in Britain, the race and culture debate, and ethnicity and health research – essential to making sense of black people's experiences in the past and today. Most importantly it establishes the effects socio-economic status has on black people's health and how this is translated through racism in housing, education, employment, and health care.

A second section consists of recorded interviews with black people. These are informative, and fascinating, and provide a good insight into perceptions of health and illness – the cultural and personal inheritance (remedies, religion, food) and the experience of living in Britain (racism, work, the environment).

The role of religion in helping people cope with their situation is evident. Important too is the role of food – and people's views of it – in preventing and maintaining health, and curing ill-health.

The third part of the book looks at the differences and similarities experienced by Afro-Caribbean and Asian people and concludes that their lives are largely controlled by factors outside their own influence: 'Social, economic and political systems (act against black people), owing to the structural position imposed on them because of the



colour of their skin.' The understanding of people's perceptions and experiences of health, together with the context within which they are formed, is essential before attempting to resolve black people's health needs. (SEH)

**Commodities:
How the World was taken to market –**

Nick Rowling & Phil Evans (Free Association Books, 1987, pp192, £9.95 paperback)

This book draws on the experience and information accumulated while researching and producing the Channel Four series *Commodities*, adding in much information not included in the TV series. With very appropriate pictures and illustrations, the book gives the history of commodities since 1500, when products and materials started to be traded as commodities – to today when money itself has become a commodity. Although the book concentrates on sugar, tea, coffee and money, it cannot but include other commodities, notably slaves, rice,

oil, and drugs.

This book will help the reader understand the links between economic, political and technological changes in Europe and the detrimental changes in those countries which Europe came to control during 400 years of colonial expansion. The mechanisms of the mounting debt crisis are examined, alongside the Third World's increasing technological and economic dependence on the 'developed world'.

Looking at the more recent dominance by US and Japanese economies and the role of transnational companies, it forecasts a bleak future, in particular for Third World economies. But it finally reminds us that workers in both Third World and industrialised societies can take action to put human need before capital's profit. (SEH)

**Eating Habits:
Food, Physiology and
Learned Behaviour –**

edited by RA Boakes et al (Wiley & Sons, 1987, pp225, £20.00

hardback).

The book's title reflects the broad range of subjects examined in its well-packed pages. Chapters on eating disorders – bulimia, anorexia and obesity – are found adjacent to infantile eating patterns (one on breast and bottle feeding and one on children's food preferences), followed by studies of rats' hunger and satiety behaviour. A final chapter attempts to develop a quasi-algebraic model of the psychology of appetite.

Being so wide-ranging, readers may find the parts more interesting than the whole. Clinical attempts to treat obesity are reviewed, but are largely found wanting. Bulimia is examined in well-referenced detail, but in conclusion it merely presents 'a challenge for the researcher'. Anorexia is also considered in detail, and similarly its pathogenesis 'remains elusive'.

The reviews of infant feeding habits conclude that breast-feeding is protective against obesity in later life, and that, although fat babies may not inevitably become overweight children, fat adults are more likely to have been overweight in childhood. The suggestion that the number of fat cells is laid down at a critical time in childhood is examined – and dismissed.

Studies of children's eating habits are revealing. Bribing a child to eat its dinner in return for a reward does not make the child positively associate the dinner with the reward, but rather the opposite: dinner becomes a chore with conditions imposed on it, putting the child right off. Humans are, as the authors point out, the only species that require their young to eat all the food served to them.

Published in 1987, the book is based on a University of Sussex conference in 1984. But the reader is not short-changed – the topics have advanced little since then and the quality of several of the contributions makes the whole well worthwhile. (TJL)

PROBLEM PAGE

Keep sending us your queries. We're sorry we can't answer them all individually but we'll try to include them in this regular feature.

Q: My husband is a great meat lover and likes chops and roasts cooked in the oven in lard. He is in his mid-forties, is a businessman and spends much of his time either at his desk or driving. Can you advise me on a healthier way of eating the type of food we like?

A: From the way you describe it, your husband's diet looks as if it is probably higher in saturated fat than would be recommended. Use only the smallest amount of lard and choose lean meat with as much of the visible fat as possible cut off. It really depends on the balance of his diet. Does he eat vegetables with his meal or fruit?

If he is overweight he should really try and cut down the amount of fat in his diet and also take a bit more exercise. If you are both concerned about his state of health and particularly if other members of his family have had heart problems, it may be worthwhile having a check-up on his risk of heart disease. This might well put your mind at rest and you and he would be able to go on enjoying the meals you cook for him.

Q: I would be glad if you could give me some information on good nutrition for children. Do children get enough vitamins and minerals in their daily diet or should I supplement my child's diet with extra iron, vitamins and minerals?

A: If your child is eating a healthy, balanced diet including plenty of fruit and vegetables, starchy foods and some dairy foods, meat, fish, beans, egg, chicken or nuts, then there should be absolutely no need for her or his diet to be supplemented with extra iron, minerals and vitamins.

Some children though are very faddy eaters and only eat a very limited variety of foods. If your child is like this and seems generally unhealthy, then it may be worth discussing the matter with your health visitor or your doctor. Young children under the age of five and especially under the age of two, are encouraged to take vitamins A, C and D in drops every day (your health visitor has supplies).

In exceptional circumstances it could

be that an older child who is eating a very limited variety of foods may benefit from vitamin supplements. However, this is an expensive way of making sure a child is well nourished. If she or he can be encouraged to eat a better selection of foods, the diet can be perfectly adequate.

Q: I have heard that lemons are sprayed with a wax coating which includes a fungicide. Is this true? I use a lot of lemon peel in cooking.

A: Many fruits including lemons, oranges and apples are sprayed with a wax that includes fungicides. Labelling advice in Germany warns people not to use the zest or peel from sprayed citrus fruits. There is a clear need for labelling of fruit in this country.

In general the fungicides used are thought to have a low toxicity for consumers. You should be able to remove a good proportion by washing vigorously in water before using, but you will also lose the oils which give your cooking flavour.

Letters

Pots, pans and poverty in the UK

I work as a receptionist in an inner London Social Services area office dealing with a wide variety of issues. A large percentage of my time is spent dealing with DHSS queries, and I feel that the changes taking place in Social Security law from April 1988 will have a profound effect on the diet and the means of people on low income to prepare food.

From April 1988 the old system of single payments (one-off grants) will be replaced by the Social Fund. This new fund will be cash limited, which means that monies available at the beginning of the year to make a welfare payment for items like cookers, fridges, pots and pans may not be available at the end of the year to make a payment for a claim made under exactly the same circumstances. In 1986 £360 million was available for Single Payments; from April there will be only £60 million for grants.

Under the Social Fund some grants will be for a fixed amount. For example, a fixed grant of £75 will be paid to cover the cost of crockery, cutlery, pots and

pans, cooking equipment, floor covering, curtains etc, whereas under the old single payments system the cost of the separate items were calculated and added together. The old scheme may not have been ideal and the amount of the grant would not cover furnishing a house with essential items, but it was certainly more realistic than the £75 grant to be paid under the Social Fund. All loans will be recoverable out of a client's weekly benefit.

It will be harder for people to obtain payments for cookers and cooking equipment especially towards the end of the Social Funds financial year. Already DHSS offices are refusing grants for cookers on the grounds that they are not essential items! Clients will be very reluctant to take out a loan when they know they will have to make repayments out of their small weekly benefit. Even if a client gets a loan there will then be less money to live on. The old Supplementary Benefit was already considered the minimum a person can survive on. The new scheme means more and more families will be pushed below the poverty line.

If a household does not have the money or facilities, how can it cook properly?

Tim Mayn
London SW2

Traditional food vs ethnic food

When references are made to the food traditionally eaten by the black and ethnic minority groups the terminology used varies, immensely. Some people use the term 'ethnic food' in a racist or derogatory way. Others use the term to acknowledge that Britain is a multicultural and a multiethnic society.

The word ethnic means: 'Of race or relating to classification of humans into social, cultural, etc. groups' (*Collins Dictionary*) or 'Pertaining to race, ethnological: member of ethnic group' (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*). From these definitions one would understand that all individuals in Britain, including the English, Scottish and Welsh belong to an ethnic group. So, when the term 'ethnic food' is used, referring exclusively to the food which is traditionally eaten by black and ethnic minority communities, it shows a lack

of understanding and respect on the role that food plays in any culture.

It is as offensive to hear or read phrases like 'paki food', or 'chinky take-aways', as it is to see the term 'ethnic food' because they carry strong negative overtones about food which is unfamiliar to the ethnic majority population.

I do wonder how a Scottish person would feel about the haggis being referred to as 'ethnic food', a traditional food eaten in Scotland which is very much linked to their cultural heritage. Burns' supper would not be the same!

Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding are as traditional amongst some sections of the British population as rice and peas are to some people from the Caribbean.

It is essential that people when writing articles or giving presentations are sensitive to these points.

Rekha Patel
Community Dietitian
London N1

EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAMME

The London Food Commission's training days cover a wide range of food issues reflecting the extensive expertise that the LFC has established.

There are places available on the following study days:

Catering

- ★ Cook-chill: the Way Forward
27 July
- ★ Catering Education: Looking Ahead
11 May

School Meals

- ★ Marketing School Meals
18 May

Food & Education

- ★ Food in Nurseries and Playgroups
20 April & 15 June
- ★ Food and Nutrition in Schools: Theory into Practice
27 April

Health Education

- ★ Conveying the Healthy Eating Message in a Multicultural Society
25 May
- ★ Nutrition and the Elderly
29 June

Food and Public Health

- ★ Pesticides and Health
6 July
- ★ Additives as Workplace Hazards
20 July

Food Policy

- ★ EEC Food Policy Briefing
4 May
- ★ Food, Jobs and Local Authorities
1 June
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8 June
- ★ Rural Support: the Way Forward
22 June

**THE LONDON
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For further information phone
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Adriana Luba.

The Nutrition Consultancy Service.

London Food Commission.

88, Old Street, London EC1V 9AR

Tel: 01-253-9513 ext. 29

COMING UP IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

- ★ Food adulteration and the launch of our bumper campaign on food quality
- ★ what's happened to 'real' ice-cream? Off the Shelf investigates what you'll be eating this summer.
- ★ Loath shopping? We look at what some of the big retailers are doing to woo back the disgruntled customer.
- ★ What happened to food contaminated after Chernobyl? Read about this international scandal involving food aid and baby milks.
- ★ Will the UK follow the US in setting up food banks for those too poor to buy food? We investigate from both sides of the Atlantic.

The Secret Seven Exposed

In 1985 Jonathan Aitken MP (Conservative) complained that 'We know more about what goes into a pair of socks than about what goes into our food.' The London Food Commission has catalogued many examples of excessive official secrecy. Here we list our least favourite 'secret seven'.

1. The results of the government/Health Education Council/industry working party on nutrition, NACNE, were kept secret for two and a half years because its message for dietary improvements was opposed by powerful food industry interests.

2. The preliminary results of a 1983 DHSS survey of school children's diets, commissioned after standards for school meals were abolished, showed that many children ate a poor diet. It was only published after details were leaked to the press. Five years after the survey the full report has yet to be seen.

3. Much of the data examined by government committees on food is covered by the Official Secrets Act, regardless of whether members

have signed it. The government claims this is necessary to protect commercially sensitive data from competitors.

4. For over 20 years all evidence relating to pesticide safety was an official secret. After public outcry the Advisory Committee on Pesticides published its first report in 1986 but still keeps basic data on pesticide toxicity secret.

5. The DHSS has repeatedly refused to reveal the amount allocated for food in its welfare benefit payments.

6. With the exception of the 1979 report on colour additives, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF) has not published estimates of quantities of additives consumed. Yet such data is used by the government to interpret safety studies and to give clearance to additives. Our request for this data received the reply 'As for consumption figures, we do not have them.'

7. MAFF can mislead even the scientific experts who supervise its work. Its own evidence

suggests that at least 30 per cent of food has detectable pesticide residues. However the Chair of MAFF's Scientific sub-committee said on radio that only 1 per cent of foods sampled had detectable residues.

None of these 'secrets' would be damaging to national security. 'Food is a subject where maximum publicity is needed not maximum security,' Jonathan Aitken MP told the House of Commons in 1985. Greater access to information would enhance public safety and consumer confidence in government decision-making on food. The USA and many other countries operate freedom of information legislation. While not always perfect such laws aim to satisfy both the genuine areas of commercial confidentiality and the needs of consumers. It is time the UK followed suit.

The London Food Commission supports the Campaign for Freedom of Information's call for positive disclosure of information.

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