

FAST FOOD - THE
MISSING LABELS. WE
REVEAL ALL

EATING HEALTHILY
IS EASY FOR SOME
BUT NOT FOR OTHERS

GENETIC
ENGINEERING CAN
PROVIDE THE SPLICE
OF LIFE

SCHOOL DINNERS
CAN THRIVE. GIVEN
THE CHANCE, WE
LOOK AT THE
CAMPAIGNS

NEWS: NATIONAL
FOOD ALLIANCE,
EXPLODING
BOTTLES,
NUTRITIONAL
CLAIMS AND WORLD-
WIDE ROUNDUP.

1992 AND THE EEC -
BETTER FOOD OR
WORSE?

THE FOOD MAGAZINE

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FAST FOOD
SUPPLEMENT

TONY DE ANGELI'S
DIARY

SCIENTIFIC AND
MEDICAL ROUNDUP

PROBLEMS - THE
FLUORIDE QUESTION

LETTERS

WINTER JACKETS -
BAKED POTATO
RECIPES

BOOK REVIEWS



FAST FOOD FACTS

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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1992 and food

Why is it that jetsetting consumers can get a salad in one country's fast food outlet and not another? And why will that salad's nitrate levels be controlled in one EEC country but not another? Why do standards supposedly set by scientists vary between countries? Does it matter?

This issue of Food Magazine takes a hard look at two subjects which seem to be entirely unconnected: fast food and the European Economic Community's plan to remove barriers to trade by 1992. The issues are in fact closely linked – certainly harmonisation plans today could seriously affect what goes into your fast food tomorrow. And discussion of both raises serious concerns about food quality and informed decision-making.

That Ministry of Agriculture person must rue the day – just after our launch – when he said the LFC hadn't done any research. Thirty reports later, our latest looks into fast foods: what's in them; whether you know what's in them; and whether they are good value for money.

To many 'foodies' the term 'fast food' is one of abuse. But that's a mistake – there is nothing intrinsically wrong with placing an order and getting your food fast. Convenience and health are falsely polarised in the food purist's dictionary. For the London Food Commission fast food can and should be compatible with good health. The special feature reviews the often conflicting evidence about fast food and healthy eating. Analysis specially commissioned by the LFC from a public analyst tells you what you get for your money. The book is the UK's first independent review. Every fast food eater, parent, trader and educationalist should read it.

This July the European Court delivered a long-awaited decision on pasta. To the Italians, pasta can only be made from hard (durum) wheats. A German company had been blocked by the Italians from importing pasta made from a mixture of soft and hard wheats. The Italian defence was that this mix would mislead the consumer. Their argument was tantamount to saying that anything less than durum was adulteration.

The Court sided with the German company, thereby reasserting the principle of mutual recognition in trade. According to this, a product sold legally in one part of the European Community cannot be excluded from another part. Inadequate labelling and risk to public health are the only permitted defences. A clear cut decision in favour of trade.

So can we now expect to go to other European countries and find British soft ice creams and other dubious British processed food products? On the face of it, yes. And after the report on soft ice creams in the last issue of Food Magazine, readers ought to be concerned. This is what the Department of Trade and Industry's much advertised 'Europe – open for business' campaign will bring. So let's stand back for a moment and take a hard look at 1992.

Policy choices are upon us. Some are pushing for deregulation and asking us to trust manufacturers to provide high standards. Others (including the LFC) are more sceptical, and think we need some form of legal safety net. No matter which position you take, there must be a full and informed public debate about 1992 and its effects on food and health. So far, regrettably, too much emphasis has been placed on 'open for business' and not enough on 'good for the consumer'.

Some consumer organisations see 1992 as the opportunity for fine foods to come in to the UK. No more petty customs delays to inhibit small specialist producers of high quality, exotic foods. But this will suit only elite, bon viveur markets and mean nothing to the millions of low income consumers dependent on poor quality processed foods – or the recipients of the school meals we feature in this issue.

Time will tell. But public participation in the run-up to 1992 will be more telling still. That's why we publish here ten hints about how readers can influence European decisions. We cannot rely on powerful food multinationals to serve public health or consumer interests. That is why the alliances the LFC and others have set up – the new National Food Alliance, the Public Health Alliance, and the various food campaigns – are so important. The danger of 1992 is that the public health interest might win a battle or two (BST, irradiation?) in the UK but lose the war over food standards as a whole. 1992 is an opportunity to remind a wide audience that decisions made far off can and must be affected by us here at home, now. **Tim Lang**

With great sadness, the Food Magazine and the members of the London Food Commission record the death on Thursday September 22nd 1988 of Caroline Walker, campaigning nutritionist and founder member of the Council of the London Food Commission. She will be sorely missed.

Food quality campaign strikes a raw nerve

The July launch of the Food Quality Campaign has seen tremendous support and interest. The LFC's 10 point Charter calling for a Ministry of Food has now received formal support from 20 organisations, with interests covering consumers, trades unions, women's organisations, law enforcement and special interest groups. These latter include the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, the Maternity Alliance and the Health Visitors' Association.

The head of the Cooperative Wholesale Society, Sir Dennis Landau, also recently called for a Food Ministry. 'Ministers tend to

forget that they are not just ministers of agriculture', he said. The Food Quality Charter's call for a Ministry of Food has coincided with the free market Adam Smith Institute's call to abolish the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) altogether!

The FQC called for improved hygiene right down the food chain. On the FQC's launch day, MAFF and the Food and Drink Federation put responsibility for tackling food poisoning onto consumers. But blaming the victim is a poor public health policy. The FQC says that problems should be controlled at source.

Pro-irradiation lobby shapes up

The UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF), the European Commission (EC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) now appear intent on imposing 'free' trade in irradiated foods regardless of the concerns raised by consumers.

Despite health minister Mrs Edwina Currie's February statement that the UK irradiation ban would remain until there were methods for preventing abuse and protecting consumer choice, MAFF has formed an internal group to study the question of controls on irradiation. The group specifically excludes representatives of consumers or the many local authority food monitoring agencies.

With the chief scientist at MAFF dismissing irradiated food problems, it appears that MAFF doesn't want to wait for methods that can detect irradiation but would prefer to rely on something

very close to self regulation by the irradiation companies.

Meanwhile the European Commission seems set to ignore advice from the European Parliament and its own Advisory Committee for Food not to proceed with a draft directive forcing all EEC countries to accept irradiation. The EC looks likely to submit a directive on irradiation for approval by the Council of Ministers by the end of 1988.

Lastly, a conference for government representatives is being organised by the IAEA in conjunction with various other United Nations agencies in Geneva from 12-16 December 1988. This is expected to endorse a prepared statement approving irradiation as safe and effective. The conference will also recommend that irradiation has a significant role to play in reducing the incidence of food poisoning and reducing post harvest food losses, particularly in Third World countries.

Despite these moves many environmental health officers believe that irradiation, far from being the solution to food poisoning problems, has the potential to increase them. Rather than improving unhygienic processes and food handling, irradiation can be used to hide contamination, leading to hidden problems and a false sense of security.

Third World consumer bodies know that irradiation will do little

to solve the problems of world hunger and are disturbed at the way the argument about food losses is being used to promote irradiation.

Consumers in Britain appear equally unhappy. A Cleveland County Trading Standards survey of local shoppers found over 60 per cent preferred non-irradiated food and 85 per cent wanted clear labelling of irradiated foods and products containing irradiated ingredients.

BST debate hots up

John Gummer's recent ministerial move from Agriculture to Environment prompts speculation that his public position on BST was unpopular with everyone except the drug companies.

Gummer believes that the milk-boosting hormone BST 'is totally safe ... we have not to be Luddite. The idea that Britain should stand aside while allowing everybody else to produce milk in a modern way is barmy'. His outspoken statement was described by Prof Richard Lacey of Leeds University as 'intolerable'.

The Veterinary Products Committee (VPC), on which Lacey sits, is due to advise ministers on commercial licensing of BST. No decision will be made by the VPC until the European Commission has given its opinion, although there have been press reports that the VPC will oppose British licensing of the hormone.

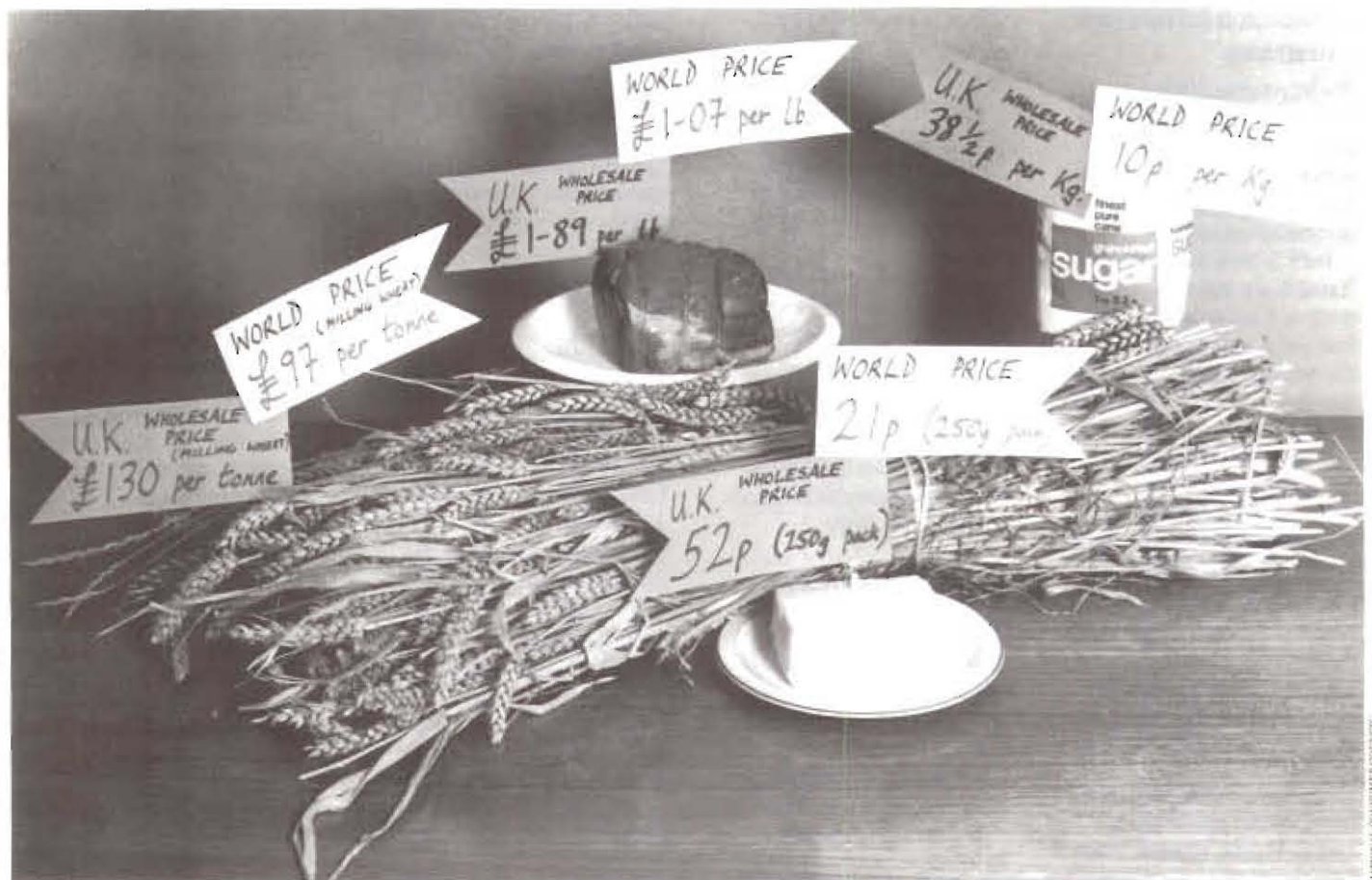
Euro MPs voted in the summer for a major study on the economic impact of BST for the dairy industry. A vote for a complete ban was defeated by a narrow margin of only nine votes. A final decision is not expected until early next year.

Consumers call for protection

The Government should address consumer food problems arising from harmonisation of the EEC by 1992. So voted the National Consumer Congress in July at its annual meeting in Newcastle. 'As a matter of urgency', the government should consider setting up a UK forum for 'dealing with all aspects of European food policy in anticipation of 1992', said the motion (carried overwhelmingly).

An all-day workshop on food heard detailed presentations by consumer delegates as well as senior local authority law enforcement officers. There was a keen debate about the need for food regulations, and the likely effect of future deregulation on quality and standards.

Views were divided about the impact of 1992 on food choice and quality. Taking note of the debate, Congress expressed concern about the following issues: threats to food standards; inadequate food information and labelling; insufficient consumer representation in decision-making; the food and health problems of low income consumers; and insufficient resources for enforcement agencies.



NATIONAL CONSUMER COUNCIL

High cost and reduced choice of EEC food

Every man, woman and child throughout the EEC pays an extra £195 a year for food as a result of EEC policies – either through higher prices in the shops or through higher tax bills – says the National Consumer Council in its new report 'Consumers and the Common Agricultural Policy'.

The photo above illustrates the dramatic differences between EEC and world prices for staple commodities such as beef, sugar, butter and cereals.

Commissioned by the government this report of the effects of the European Community's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on consumers found that the CAP has failed to achieve its own objectives, set out in the Treaty of Rome.

It concludes that high farm support prices have resulted in massive increases in agricultural output and productivity leading to long-term surpluses. Price and market support mechanisms have encouraged a marked shift towards high-input intensive farming methods at the expense of jobs, the environment and the quality of food. Not only has the CAP increased prices for the consumer but it has also restricted choice.

The report recommends a radical change in the way in which the CAP operates and the way in which decisions about policy are made. Stronger consumer representation at all levels of policy making, together with better resources for consumer interest bodies, would help redress the balance.

Consumers and the Common Agricultural Policy (HMSO) available from NCC, 20 Grosvenor Gardens, SW1, £2.50 inc p&p

★ ★ ★

Hot on the heels of the NCC report, September also saw the launch of a new parliamentary campaigning group, Consumer Watch, at the House of Commons.

Conservative MP, Sir Richard Body, speaking at the launch said the all-party campaign had the initial backing of over 30 MPs and Peers. The group aims to act as a parliamentary catalyst both in the UK and in the EEC to

campaign for the removal of all restrictions on the consumer's freedom of choice, and to support farmers who produce food with regard for conservation, health and animal welfare.

Eric Deakins, former Labour MP and government minister, announced that Consumer Watch would also be campaigning against the introduction of VAT on food which are part of Lord Cockfield's plans for EEC harmonisation by 1992.

For more information and details of affiliate membership contact Consumer Watch at 36 Murray Mews, London NW1 9RJ.

TUC support for food policy

This year's Trades Union Congress voted on a motion calling on the government 'to adopt a national food policy to promote good health, to reduce diet-related illness and to improve the quality of life for all.' Proposed by the Health Visitors' Association, the motion was passed unanimously.

Irradiation investment withdrawn

The International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank, based in Washington is refusing to finance food irradiation installations in developing countries.

Back in 1986 the Corporation stated that it was 'in principal ready to finance installations of food irradiation facilities in developing countries'. But since then they have examined several proposals and have concluded that 'the issues related to environment, consumer acceptance and operating safety of food irradiation projects are so complex that it is unlikely that such projects in developing countries will meet our stringent standards'.

For these reasons as well as business considerations, we are not actively promoting this type of project.'

(Correspondence from IFC to International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, 4 August 1988)

Denmark bans irradiation

The Danish Food Agency has withdrawn permission to irradiate potatoes in Denmark.

The decision comes after public concern about the safety of irradiation on potatoes which are an important part of the Danish diet. According to the environmental organisation NOAH, irradiated potatoes have never been sold in Denmark because retailers have feared public resistance.

Only spices can now be irradiated, but labelling laws mean that irradiated ingredients will have to be declared on the label. (NOAH press release, 21 June 1988)

Public Citizen wins additive appeal

For over 25 years, US laws banning food and cosmetic additives that cause cancer in animals or humans have served to

protect consumers in that country. However, in the past two years, the Reagan administration has overruled the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and allowed additives that cause a 'little' cancer to be used in the food supply, a policy known as 'de minimis'.

Now, a unanimous decision by the US Court of Appeal makes that policy illegal. The court ruled in favour of Public Citizen, a consumer organisation based in Washington DC, USA which sued the FDA.

(Nutrition Action Healthletter, USA, Dec 87 quoted in Consumer Currents, July 1988)

Mexican junk food problems

Changes in diet towards the consumption of junk foods and bottled soft drinks are causing health problems in Mexico. Increased sugar consumption is particularly evident in the increase of dental caries and mouth problems.

People in Mexico do not normally visit the dentist except when they are in pain. So in an effort to raise public awareness of the problem, the National University's Faculty of Dentistry is offering dental services to about 10,000 low-income patients a year at its twelve clinics around Mexico City.

However the problem of caries is growing rapidly and reflects the lack of health education, bad diet and the rising cost of dental services.

(Guia del Consumidor, March 1988; quoted in IOCU Newsletter, July 1988).

DDT for sale in Malaysia

The Consumer Association of Penang has stepped up its campaign against the misuse of pesticides in Malaysia. It says the country is far behind many poorer countries in protecting its consumers against the problem.

Nearly every country in the world has banned or restricted

DDT, but Malaysians can still buy it in the village shop. Indeed most of the pesticides on the IOCU/PAN 'Dirty Dozen' list are still available.

(Utusan Konsumer, June 1988; quoted in IOCU Newsletter, July 1988).

Cancer warning on booze?

A heated debate has erupted in California, USA over plans by the state to declare alcoholic beverages carcinogenic. Warning labels may appear next year on bottles and cans containing alcoholic drinks.

A scientific advisory panel, charged with overseeing California's tough new laws against toxic chemicals, found that there is sufficient evidence to label alcoholic beverages as carcinogenic. A drinker appears to be between 1.5 and 5 times more likely than a teetotaler to suffer from cancer of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, oesophagus, liver, breast or rectum.

According to one study, people who consume an ounce of ethanol a day - equal to two shots of whisky - run seven times the risk of developing cancer of the larynx. The recommendation is part of the state's clamp down on toxic compounds that may cause reproductive problems or cancer.

(New Scientist, UK, 28.4.88; quoted in Consumer Currents, July 1988).

WHO urged to review irradiation

The Australian government is considering asking the World Health Organisation to re-open investigations into the safety of irradiated food. This follows a resolution by the ruling party's committee on consumer affairs which believes that there is insufficient evidence to support WHO's claims that irradiation is completely safe and that it causes no dietary problems.

There are doubts about the scientific evidence used by the WHO, the IAEA and the FAO. The Australian government has been urged to ask the WHO to produce a new, well-referenced and factual scientific report which should cover possible toxic effects, including the long-term consequences of eating irradiated food; loss in nutritional value; ways of detecting whether food has been irradiated; and ways to control abused or irradiated food which could affect public health (such as the use of irradiation to disguise rotten food).

Canada and New Zealand may also press for a new WHO inquiry. (Sunday Telegraph, Australia, 1.5.88; quoted in Consumer Currents, July 1988).

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If you want us to send a message or card, let us have it before December 1st to ensure they get it, with out announcement of the gift subscription, in time for the Christmas holiday.

FAC looks at nutritional claims

How low is 'low salt'? What does 'no added sugar' really mean? These were the kinds of questions asked about food manufacturers' dubious food-labelling claims in a recent report by the government's Food Advisory Committee (FAC).

The FAC were concerned about the increasing use of claims such as 'low fat', 'low in saturated fat', 'low salt', 'low sugar', 'no added salt/sugar', 'high fibre', 'more' or 'less' nutrients or other ingredients and 'free from fat/saturates/sugar/salt'.

Their concern is that the messages are not consistent across all foods and that their prominence could detract from more important messages about achieving an overall balanced diet.

The FAC recommend that the situation should be controlled by legislation, probably by an addition to the Food Labelling Regulations. They made detailed recommendations for placing quantitative restrictions on the use of all the claims described above.

Some of these recommendations are:

1. Claims made for a food which

is naturally low or high in the particular nutrient should make it clear that all foods of that kind are similar, and that there is nothing special about that particular brand. For instance 'frozen peas - a low salt food'.

2. Numerical limits for all food labelled as 'low fat' should require a fat content of not more than 5 per cent, with the fat content of a normal serving not exceeding 5 grams.

3. 'Reduced fat/saturates/salt/sodium/sugar' will only be permissible if the food contains not more than 75 per cent of the amount present in a similar food for which no such claim is made.

4. Claims of 'no added sugar' will only be permissible if there are neither added sugars of any description nor any added food composed mainly of sugars.

5. If any of the above claims are made, all of the nutrients of the food must be numerically declared in a prescribed form.

The FAC report is available for comment now from the press office at 3 Whitehall Place, SW1 (01-270 8441)

Poll reveals public concern

Seventy per cent of us are concerned about the quality of our food and drink and believe that the government is not doing enough to protect our interests, according to a specially commissioned Gallup Poll for Channel 4's '4 What It's Worth'.

The survey shows that 81% of us are concerned about the colourings and chemical additives

in our food; 83% are concerned about pesticide residues; 73% are concerned about the use of BST, the artificial hormone used to promote milk production; and 71% believe the government did not act swiftly enough to warn us about possible radioactive contamination of meat and water after Chernobyl.

National Food Alliance formed

Janet Hunter of the NCVO reports on a new alliance of food interests

The idea of creating a vehicle to articulate voluntary sector views on food policy emerged in 1985, when the National Council of Voluntary Organisations convened a meeting of voluntary organisations to explore common areas of interest. Organisations present represented a broad cross-section of environmental, consumer, poverty and third world groups.

They were concerned about over-production, public health, environmental impacts, food prices and quality, and security of food supply in the third world.

After steady progress, the National Food Alliance was finally set up in April 1988. The Alliance is chaired by Professor Philip James and has a diverse membership. It includes such superficially disparate groups as the National Farmers' Union, the Children's Society, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and the London Food Commission.

The Alliance has set itself an ambitious goal - to campaign for good quality, nutritious, healthy food which is properly labelled and accessible to all at a fair price. In addition it shouldn't damage the environment, the rural economy, groups of workers or people in other countries.

In the short term, the NFA has set up four subgroups to investigate key areas of food policy - food and the EEC, food and low income, food and land use, and food and biotechnology.

While it is inevitable that at first the groups will have to spend much of their time researching the issues, making contacts, and establishing areas of common ground, the Alliance does not intend simply to be a talking shop. In the next few months, it hopes to start making representations on a number of key issues, including food labelling in this country and in the EEC, and bovine somatotropin (BST).

The Alliance is keenly aware of the huge gap left by the lack of a national food policy in this country, and by the serious deficiencies in the mechanisms for consumer representation both here and in Europe. As the Alliance becomes better known, we hope it will play a major role in these debates, and will ensure that on food issues the voice of voluntary organisations does not go unheard.

The National Food Alliance is open to national, international and local voluntary or other non-profit making organisations. Other organisations and individuals with a special interest or expertise in food policy may also apply for associate membership. Further details about the Alliance are available from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 26 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3HU, which provides the secretariat for the Alliance.

QUOTES CORNER

"Sausages have been attacked as being very fatty. They do contain fat, which adds flavour and succulence, but no sausage contains extra fat."

Press Information from the British Sausage Bureau.

BSI bottles out

Every year several hundred people need hospital treatment following explosive accidents in the home involving bottles of fizzy drinks. In the worst cases people have been blinded, have suffered severed arteries or have almost lost their fingers. Some recent cases have resulted in successful compensation claims ranging from \$1,000 to \$23,000 for the victims.

According to the soft drinks specialist Dr Ted Willhoft, the problem of exploding bottles arises in two ways. The first is associated with glass bottles exploding due to weakness from mechanical shock or from high residual stress left in the glass at the time of manufacture.

The second happens when the (usually) aluminium cap of either plastic or more commonly glass bottles explodes away from the neck of the bottle. The new wide neck 'jumbo' plastic bottles are particularly susceptible.

The problem could be reduced by decreasing the 'headspace' (the gap between the level of drink and the top of the bottle). The physics behind this is that if the headspace volume is reduced then, because the internal equilibrium pressure remains practically the same, the ballistic energy is reduced in direct proportion.

However there does seem to be resistance within the industry to

H.M. WARNING: WEAR
PROTECTIVE HELMET
WHEN OPENING



reducing the headspace. After eighteen months of secret deliberations by the Department of Trade and Industry and the British Standards Institute, the BSI now concedes that the 4-4.5 per cent headspace recommended by the Glass Manufacturers Federation is excessive.

But they propose only a small reduction to a maximum of 3.5 per cent – not the one per cent which Dr Willhoft says is entirely feasible and recommends for consumer safety.

The picture above illustrates a bottle recently purchased, showing a hairline crack in the neck, making the bottle particularly vulnerable to spontaneous explosive fragmentation. The location of the crack and absence of damage to the aluminium cap, established it to be present at the time of purchase.

Wakefield

In 1984 Stanley Royd hospital in Wakefield hit the headlines. In one of Britain's worst food poisoning outbreaks, 19 elderly patients died and many hundreds more were made ill. Now four years later the hospital is once again at the centre of a controversy – this time over the introduction of a cook-chill catering system. Professor Richard Lacey, once consultant to Wakefield Health Authority, gives an insider's view of this latest furore to hit West Yorkshire

The decision to introduce cook-chill catering was taken by Wakefield Health Authority in February 1986, one month after the public inquiry report on the food poisoning outbreak had been published. Their stated aim was 'to improve quality, variety and nutritional value of food', 'to reduce operational costs' and 'to create a viable unit of business as recommended by the latest guidance issued by the DHSS in respect of competitive tendering'.

Since that decision an extraordinary train of events has ensued. Industrial action, threatened sackings, resignations and special inquiries have dogged cook-chill's progress in Wakefield. The nub of the trouble centres around how much the proposals will cost, their safety and the principle of central regeneration

STAFF LOSSES

The central production unit was to cost about £700,000, with a further £300,000 needed to modify the existing kitchens. With projected savings at £300,000 annually, derived mainly from staff losses and bulk purchase of food, it is not surprising a financially strapped health authority accepted these management proposals.

Most clinical staff were unaware

of the cook-chill proposal until March 1987, following publicity over the catering staff refusing to operate the new system on grounds of 'hygiene'. During the ensuing debate it became clear that the initial proposal to reheat food centrally 'in the hospital kitchens' contravened the 1980 DHSS cook-chill guidelines on 'reheating immediately before consumption' and 'reheating of the food at the point of consumption'.

'UNSAFE'

In the case of Stanley Royd these phrases were clearly not compatible with a distribution time of between 40 and 90 minutes from kitchen to wards.

The likely quality of the resultant food for the patient was dubbed as 'microbiologically unsound and nutritionally unsafe' by the *Yorkshire Post*. Criticisms from others, including the London Food Commission, resulted in the Yorkshire Regional Health Authority setting up its Expert Group on Safety of the Cook-Chill System to look specifically at the proposed Wakefield system.

This group reported to the press in September 1987, and amongst a great deal of repetitive and unsubstantiated opinion, stated 'It is understood that the proposed system is to reheat at peripheral

MAFF gets the message?

Pesticide residues and their degradation products... could present a health hazard to man'. 'Consumers may be exposed to higher dosages' of certain pesticides 'than has hitherto been suspected'. For those who read the LFC report 'Pesticides and Food – the case for real control' such statements are not news. However these are the words of MAFF officials – even if they are only for private circulation.

Copies of three internal Research Consultative Committee reports on residue testing were leaked to Friends of the Earth in August and such extracts as those above were widely reported in the national press. One member of the residues sub-committee had publicly dismissed similar claims when the LFC report appeared in 1986.

Perhaps now a little more public honesty might be in order.

impasse



points before distribution in heated trolleys to all wards and departments'. The group saw no problems '... providing the time between reheating and serving should not exceed 15 minutes.' An extraordinary combination of statements since the group must have known Stanley Royd hospital could not possibly comply with this 15 minute rule.

But even before this report it became apparent that even with reheating in the existing kitchens financial savings would be much

more modest than had been originally anticipated. The saving in bulk purchasing of food was discounted completely by the district treasurer and the extra electricity required alone cost £40,000 per annum.

EXTRA COSTS

The servicing of equipment, maintenance of the distribution lorry, microbiological monitoring costs and extra staff were all additional items considered now for the first time!

During the autumn of 1987, after it became clear that the Wakefield proposal would have to be modified to provide ward regeneration, the costs began to mount. The cost of three phase wiring was estimated at £100,000-£200,000, and the purchase of 92 trolleys for transport/ regeneration between £250,000 and £400,000.

However, at the end of January 1988, the District Health Authority announced that it would nevertheless proceed expecting the additional capital outlay to be

provided by the Regional Health Authority. This humiliating position was already causing serious discord between the district general manager and the chairman of the Wakefield District Health Authority who, in a press statement at the end of February 1988, claimed - in my view correctly - the Authority had been 'duped' into cook-chill.

The allocation of money for any District Health Authority is controlled by strict formulae and there is no recognised procedure whereby this financial shortfall could be made up. Officers of the Regional Health Authority attempted to reroute general revenue money for patient care to the purchase of cook-chill equipment.

LEGAL OPINION

The Wakefield Health Authority sought legal advice as to whether this was in order. Legal opinion suggested it was not, with the result that these extra requirements can only be financed to the detriment of other aspects of patient care.

Even if such money was forthcoming substantial problems remain - notably the provision of food for the staff canteens, special diets and the production of custards and gravies. The net result of these factors is that for cook-chill to be implemented the total capital outlay could be about £1.2 million with an annual revenue deficit of £250,000-£400,000. Moreover, in the long term this equipment will need to be replaced.

Already bed closures have been enforced and more are in prospect as a result of these policies. As of June 1988, the new kitchen is standing empty, about £900,000 has been wasted and the senior management has disintegrated into bitter recrimination with argument over the terms of reference of the inevitable inquiry. **Professor R W Lacey**, University of Leeds Honorary Consultant to Wakefield Health Authority January 1985-March 1988

WAKEFIELD PHOTOGRAPHY

The splice of life

What will genetic engineering do to our food? Eric Brunner reports on the products emerging from food research laboratories around the world

The milk-boosting hormone bovine somatotropin (BST), produced by genetically modified bacteria, is the first of many commercial applications of molecular biology to food production. If it is licensed it will herald a switch from the factory to the pharmaceutical farm.

Further along the food chain, processors in the USA are already using enzyme cocktails produced by bacteria to accelerate cheese ripening. At the supermarket, an entirely new low fat, high fibre food called mycoprotein has appeared (see table) in a range of savoury pies. Mycoprotein has the Vegetarian Society's seal of approval.

Genetic engineers hope to provide modified seeds to produce plants resistant both to pests and viral disease. Further revenues would follow from the production of soil-resident microbes engineered to produce pesticides or increase the intake of nitrogen by a plant from the soil, or protect a plant against frost.

But environmentalists are concerned that biotechnology is being developed without much thought for its effects in the longer term. They fear biotechnology, in its various guises, will have a predominantly negative impact on farmers, consumers and the environment. For the consumer the disappearance of even more food crop varieties may mean eating flavourless foods, bred for yield, pest resistance, uniformity of size, ripening time and colour rather than for taste and nutritional value.

GLOBAL HARM

A meeting of the Seeds Action Network in Copenhagen, held in June 1988, produced a statement declaring concern for 'the global destruction of genetic diversity and the mounting pressure to make life forms patentable in Europe'. Participants believed these problems were closely linked to monopoly control of genetic resources and proposed publicly funded conservation and breeding initiatives to stop 'genetic erosion'.



What food do we get from plants, Mummy?

Biotechnology is used in the manufacture of medical and veterinary products, chemicals, waste treatment and pollution control as well as food production. Since the 1970's 600 biotechnology companies have been founded, mostly in America and Europe.

Very large sums of money have been invested in biotechnology by industry. Monsanto, the American chemicals and drugs company, has made agricultural biotechnology the centrepiece of its research – spending over \$1 billion, so far with little return.

Monsanto is struggling to win the regulatory fight to realise its investment in BST. Its corporate strategy hangs on the outcome. In 1991, for instance, Monsanto plans to launch a similar product for pigs

called PST (porcine somatotropin) which it claims will reduce back fat in pig meat by 70 per cent and may reduce feed costs by 25 per cent.

But should biotechnology products be more strictly controlled than conventional drugs and agrochemicals? In the US a new bacterium has been used to prevent frost damage to strawberries. The impact of such deliberate releases into the environment is still being debated. A recent conference revealed the criteria used for risk assessment are still unresolved, despite the haste with which such products are being developed.

In 1987 a secret and unauthorised experimental release of a recombinant DNA rabies vaccine in Argentina led to the

infection of 20 control cows and at least two human handlers. Scandal broke out when the Argentine government learnt of the virus trial, and the cows were slaughtered.

Another product undergoing transformation via genetic engineering is alfalfa – America's fourth largest crop. Mostly used as cattle fodder, Biotechnica International is using genetic engineering to boost the protein content of alfalfa seed and build in resistance to pests. The company reckons it can sell its alfalfa seed to the farmer at \$12.30 per pound (at current prices) a premium of \$10 over ordinary seed.

HERBICIDES

Scientists at Plant Genetic Systems (PGS), Belgium, claim to have launched the world's most ambitious programme of field trials of genetically engineered crop varieties. Herbicide resistance has been induced in new strains of potatoes, tomatoes and oilseed rape. This means that ground can be sprayed with herbicide while the food crop is growing.

PGS workers used genetic engineering techniques to transfer toxin genes from the 'natural' insecticide bacillus thuringiensis into tobacco plants. The plants then became resistant to feeding damage by larvae of the tobacco hookworm.

Monsanto also carried out research in this area and found that when resistance to tobacco mosaic virus was also inserted, yields improved by 20-30 per cent. Monsanto also incorporated resistance to one of its own herbicides, Roundup, which as the world's largest selling pesticide, accounts for 13 per cent of Monsanto's sales. In trials, the genetically engineered tomatoes survived a dose of Roundup, whilst surrounding weeds died. Monsanto thinks a Roundup-resistant tomato would significantly reduce a tomato-grower's weed-control costs.



New food products from biotechnology

PRODUCT	SPECIFICATION	IMPACT/PROBLEMS
FOOD PROTEINS		
Mycoprotein (ICI/New Era Foods/ Ranks Hovis McDougall)	First wholly new protein source to be cleared for human consumption by a Western government. Processed into a textured form resembling meat. Low fat/high fibre	
Pruteen (ICI)	Protein additive for animal feeds. Derived from fungus, launched in 1982	Competition with soya bean derived protein
Bipro (Bio-Isolates)	Additive in human foods, as a substitute for egg protein in baking and for people requiring high-protein diets, eg athletes, kidney patients	Consumer resistance to eating dried microbes
VITAMINS & ADDITIVES		
Beta-carotene (Hoffmann-LaRoche, BASF)	Naturally occurring pigment obtained from algae, used as food colouring. Most Beta-carotene used to colour foods such as margarine and orange drinks is made artificially	Demand for fewer artificial colours in food
Biotin (a B vitamin) (Institute of Food Research)	Production of this vitamin by E Coli bacteria is under development	
Nutrasweet (G D Searle)	Aspartame-based low-calorie artificial sweetener. Extensively adopted by major food and beverage manufacturers to create low calorie products. More expensive to use than sucrose	In April 1987 the patent on aspartame expired, allowing other manufacturers to develop their own sweeteners based on aspartame. It is not heat stable
Sunett (Hoechst)	An intense sweetener rated 200 times sweeter than sugar and also relatively cheaper to manufacture than aspartame	
ENZYMES		
Phospholipase A2 (Institute of Food Research)	A modified version of the enzyme can convert cheap palm oil to cocoa butter	
Cathepsin L (IFR)	Project to develop a meat tenderising enzyme for use 'in pre-slaughter mode'	
Proteuiase system	Rapid cheese ripening enzymes on sale in USA and Australia, but not the UK	

research by Theresa George

1992 – trading in food standards?

By December 1992, the European Economic Community will have cleared internal barriers to trade. Or that is the plan. When I asked a senior eurocrat how 1992 would help consumers, he said it would lead to less expensive delays at customs for food wagons. Costs would drop. Smaller, specialist, good quality food companies could enter the export market. And choice would thus be improved.

That sounds great. Yet, as this summer's UK Consumer Congress heard, there is growing disquiet that more emphasis is being put on the advantages to trade than to consumers or workers or public health. 1992 should be an opportunity for all sides to benefit. But will it be?

There are a number of crucial issues surrounding food on which we can all unite.

WHOSE STANDARDS?

Britain's food industry is very prosperous and powerful. Proportionately, it is the largest in Europe. There is a danger that the British food industry will exert this power and influence to force its often lower standards on the rest of Europe.

The European Court has ruled that food products acceptable in one member state must be accepted by any other member state – even if the product contravenes the laws of the latter. One effect of this ruling could be a downward spiral of standards.

For example, English sausages containing a red colouring additive (compensating for low levels of lean meat) are currently illegal under French and German law. But the European Commission's policy may mean that in future coloured, debased sausages could be legally sold anywhere in the EEC.

Does that matter? Those who believe in consumer sovereignty say that as long as the label is complete, then the consumer is free to discriminate between products. This is only true up to a point – people also need the means to buy the better ones.

On the dietary front, food quality standards across the board must be kept high, so that manufacturers are not allowed to create a two-tier market – one for the health conscious well-off and another for the unhealthy poor.

It's not just consumer and public health groups which fear worsening standards. As the Catering Equipment Manufacturers Association recently

The Department of Trade and Industry has spent £5 million on its 'Europe – open for business' advertising campaign. Tim Lang asks why a similar sum isn't being allocated to ensure consumers get a fair deal out of 1992

asked, 'The ability to make equipment to one standard acceptable throughout Europe is very attractive but the question is: whose standard?'

The European Commission's Directorate General (DGIII), which is the powerhouse in the drive towards 1992, is ambiguous on this issue. Its emphasis is on removing barriers, not raising standards. Yet the Single European Act (see box) clearly states in Article 100A that the Commission will 'take as its base a high level of protection' concerning 'health, safety, environmental protection and consumer protection'. But the reality has yet to be proven. If Britain's experience is anything to go by, this could mean that industry's interests and definitions will hold sway.

GOOD FOR BUSINESS

UK food exports to the EEC were around £2,500 million in 1987. Imports were greater, at around £5,500 million. Britain's food manufacturing and retailing sectors are highly concentrated. For 1992, the EEC conducted one of the largest economic studies ever. Paolo Cecchini and his team showed how food companies could gain.

By removing trade barriers on vegetable fats in chocolates, for instance, confectioners will achieve cost-savings of up to 30 per cent. Removing vegetable fat restrictions on ice cream will save around 12 per cent. Axing purity law restrictions on pasta will save just under 10 per cent. Sounds great. But it's doubtful whether these cost parings will be passed on to the consumer.

Moreover, manufacture of many products is already sewn up by large or multinational companies, with major multinational players based outside the EEC moving in fast. That's why the

Australian multinational GFW were after the bread and flour group RHM. That's why Nestlé bought Rowntree.

Global players like these smile cynically at 1992 and its promise of more 'free trade'. As Marketing magazine recently reported 'in ice cream, the existing multinational players are scornful about 1992. They already have most home markets sewn up'.

DEMOCRACY

At present 1992 is being driven by trade considerations. There are only a few cursory acknowledgements of its impact on social policy. Just as we in the UK are beginning to argue seriously for a national food policy and Ministry of Food, to coordinate action for the public good, the problem threatens to become Europe-wide.

Democracy will win, say the strong hearted. But regrettably, democratic participation is rare in the EEC. It's too huge an edifice. And just when we need to see it strengthened, the Consumer Consultative Committee (CCC) of the EEC is to be axed.

Once asked a eurocrat if the LFC could be put on the circulation list for documents about irradiation (a key 1992 issue yet to be decided). He laughed and said 'No' – he was too busy already having to consult with countless industry groups and the 100 people on the EEC's formal body, the CCC.

Well, at least someone is now happy. He soon won't have to bother even with that. And the industrialists will have a clear field.

THE FUTURE

1992 is, as the EEC recognises, a major

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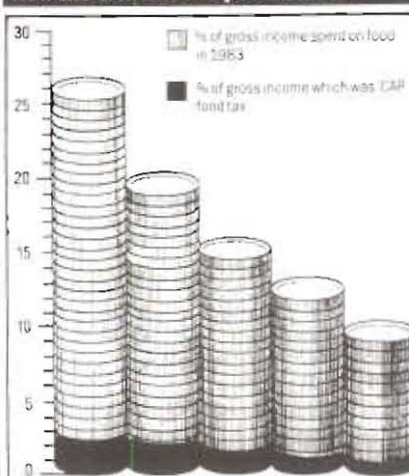
challenge. Harmonisation could be around the highest or lowest standards. Controls can be improved or worsened. On food hygiene, there is talk of the EEC adopting the best practices. Hygiene in cross border trade is essential, not just for consumers, but for processors also.

The Consumers in the European Community Group (CECG) have called for improved consultation at all stages and urgent action to integrate consumer policy in the EEC. But what else could we be arguing for?

Firstly, like the CECG, I'd like to see consumer watchdogs in each Directorate of the EEC. These people should represent consumer interests and liaise with consumer groups at early stages of policy making. Secondly, there should be consumer impact statements written into any European Commission proposal. Thirdly, the EEC should set up better formal relations with European consumer organisations. Fourthly, the imbalance of power between trade (DGIII), consumers (DGXI), social policy (DGV) and agriculture (DGVII) must be corrected. Fifthly, WHO Europe's Target for health for All by the Year 2000, to which the UK is a signatory, should be adopted as EEC policy. Sixthly, the consumers' directorate (DGXI) needs to be allocated more resources.

Finally, Britain's vociferous and increasingly influential food, health, environment and consumer movements should formalise their current national and international alliances and shift focus towards 1992 - before it's too late.

How the CAP hits the poor hardest



UK households according to income, from the lowest fifth (left) to the highest fifth (right)

Who pays for the CAP?

Each year every man, woman and child in the EEC pays £60 to the Common Agricultural Policy in tax and a further £136 per year through the artificial increase of food prices.

This total cost of £15.10 per four person household per week is however an average figure and masks the real burden.

In 1983 the 20 per cent of households earning the least spent 27 per cent of

their income on food, while the 20 per cent of households earning the most spent only 11 per cent of their income on food. This means that those least able to afford it paid a 'CAP food tax' of almost three per cent while those best able to afford it paid just over one per cent.

Current proposals to levy VAT on food would have a similar effect of placing an additional tax on the worse off. The EEC is clearly no friend of the poor.

THE SINGLE EUROPEAN ACT

The Single European Act (SEA) came into force on 1 July 1987. Under the 'cooperation procedure' set out in the SEA, the European Parliament has the right to give two readings to legislation coming forward under certain articles of the Treaty of Rome. The most crucial of these articles is the new Article 100a which is the basis for all proposals dealing with the establishment of the barrier-free internal market.

The SEA crucially affects the Council of Ministers. Before the SEA, Council had to be unanimous in its decisions. Now the Council may vote by qualified majority. Each country has a number of votes roughly proportionate to its population size. Thus the UK, France, Germany and Italy have 10 votes each. Spain has 8 votes. Holland, Belgium, Greece and Portugal have 5 votes each. Denmark and Ireland have 3 votes each. Luxembourg has 2 votes. A majority is 54 votes out of 76. It is not therefore possible for the larger Member States to call the tune by themselves.

The cooperation procedure set out in the SEA works as follows:

1. A proposal from the European Commission goes to the European Parliament for its formal Opinion.
2. The Council of Ministers, once it has obtained Parliament's Opinion, adopts a 'common position'. Voting works as outlined above.
3. The common position goes back to

Parliament for a second reading. The common position may go to a Committee.

4. The Committee submits a recommendation to Parliament. Any motion to reject or amend the common position (step 2 above) must win 260 votes, ie a majority of all MEPs, not just a majority of those present. Voting occurs at 5pm on the Wednesday of the Parliamentary Session.

5. If Parliament rejects Council's common position, the Council must be unanimous in its vote on the second reading.

6. Amendments adopted by Parliament but not accepted by the Commission have to go to Council. It can accept these amendments by unanimous vote only.

7. Council too must be unanimous if it wants to amend a proposal which has been re-examined by the Commission.

Some simple conclusions can be drawn from the SEA's complications! Firstly, there are more opportunities for lobbyists and pressure groups to get amendments tabled. Secondly, MEPs will need to be better briefed, as they now meet both Council and Commission face to face. Thirdly, although still the ultimate decision maker, the Council of Ministers will be increasingly obliged to give an account of itself to Parliament.

(Based on a talk by Dr Caroline Jackson, MEP, at the LFC's Food Irradiation - a Forum on the European Perspective, March 1988)

OPEN
FOR
NESS

Putting the influence on Europe

I've heard it said that consumer organisations are one of the strongest public interest groups on the EEC scene – environmental groups are the other notable ones. We don't have the clout or the money that the industry lobby has, but we have good contacts, a lot of expertise and some successes to our credit.

For example, there was the campaign to get lead out of petrol which was won in 1984. That was an excellent example of a successful alliance – consumers and environmentalists working together. Lead-free petrol wasn't brought in immediately (it's being phased in by the 1990s), but the point was won.

The ban on the use of hormones as growth promoters in meat production was another successful campaign. In 1985 the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly against the continued use of both natural and synthetic hormones for growth promotion.

It should be said that some UK consumer organisations (mine included) had taken a more cautious line than others. We were most concerned at the inadequate enforcement of the conditions of use for these substances, and wanted suspension until controls had been tightened up, rather than an all-out ban. Still, sometimes you just have to compromise at a higher level!

There is lots more work to do on ensuring that consumers living and working in the EEC, buying food and other goods and travelling round the Community, can do so confident in the knowledge that their health, safety and consumer rights are all protected. This is

British consumers need to learn how to lobby and exert influence with the EEC.

Judith Eversley of the Consumers in the European Community Group (CECG) says getting consumer issues onto the EEC political agenda needs perseverance. Here she gives ten tips for campaigners

becoming all the more important as we approach the magic date of 1992 – the year when (in theory at least) the EEC finally becomes the Common Market it was intended to be.

The current work of CECG includes financial services; opposing the imposition of VAT on zero-rated goods; food labelling; controlling the use of biotechnology in food production; water quality; and a concerted attempt to get the consumer interest taken into account in all EEC policies.

Whatever your pet subject, I'd like to set out some of the lessons we've learned, which can be employed when you lobby at home or in Brussels or Strasbourg:

Ten tactical tips

1. Learn your way round the EEC: know the difference between the

Commission, the Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the Economic and Social Committee. It's second nature to the people you're trying to influence, and they won't have the time to explain. Also they use shorthand all the time, so...

2. Learn the jargon! If your eyes glaze over when MEPs say they're willing to draft a motion for a resolution, you won't notice what a triumph you've just scored. And if they say that the Single European Act means it's all a question of comitology, you'd better believe it matters.

3. If you can, do your Strasbourg or Brussels lobbying with like-minded people from other EC countries – national delegations have limited appeal.

4. Accept that Euro-lobbying is also done in Westminster and Whitehall, and in your own Euro-constituency so –

5. Don't believe that only jet-setters and expense account holders get on. If you have a good case, well-argued, you may be the answer to an MEP's prayer. Far from being swayed in favour of a proposal by a lavish lunch, many would be repelled – so you are spared that dilemma.

6. Be prepared to provide background briefings for busy MEPs. They may help you, but you can and should help them too. Keep papers brief, interesting, up to date, and above all factually accurate.

7. Concentrate your time and effort on those MEPs you have a good chance of influencing and who are in a position to take up your cause.

8. Find out who does matter: who's on the relevant Parliamentary Committee, who has put down Parliamentary Questions on similar topics in the past, who is the rapporteur (don't know what a rapporteur is? Back to Hint No 2!).

9. Forget 'government' and 'opposition' labels – they're largely irrelevant in the European Parliament. One group (party) may have a numerical lead over another, but voting is rarely that clear cut. Equally, don't pin all your hopes on one group – alliances and working relationships are powerful and much more common than in the UK.

10. Don't give up because you feel powerless: even the powerless have influence!

□ For more details on their work, contact Consumers in the European Community Group, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RB.

The real cost of farm support

The Common Agricultural Policy takes the lion's share of EEC spending. In 1986-87 it cost the Commission US\$23 billion – about two thirds of a total budget which might have been spent on social, regional or industrial support. But even this figure is not the real total cost – that is far higher.

Member states are forced to pay part of the costs of storing mountains of unwanted food – at an estimated cost of US\$2-3 billion. And consumers pay an

effective tax of over US\$40 billion by paying well over world equilibrium prices. Thus 85 per cent of the EEC's costs are due to its agricultural policies.

This total subsidy of US\$66 billion compares badly with the United States' total of US\$30 billion – one reason why the USA is pushing for substantial reductions in the EEC figure, on the grounds of unfair competition, in the current round of GATT negotiations.

Never before have we eaten so much food so quickly. The world's largest burger chain – McDonald's – alone serves thirteen thousand customers world-wide every minute of the day.

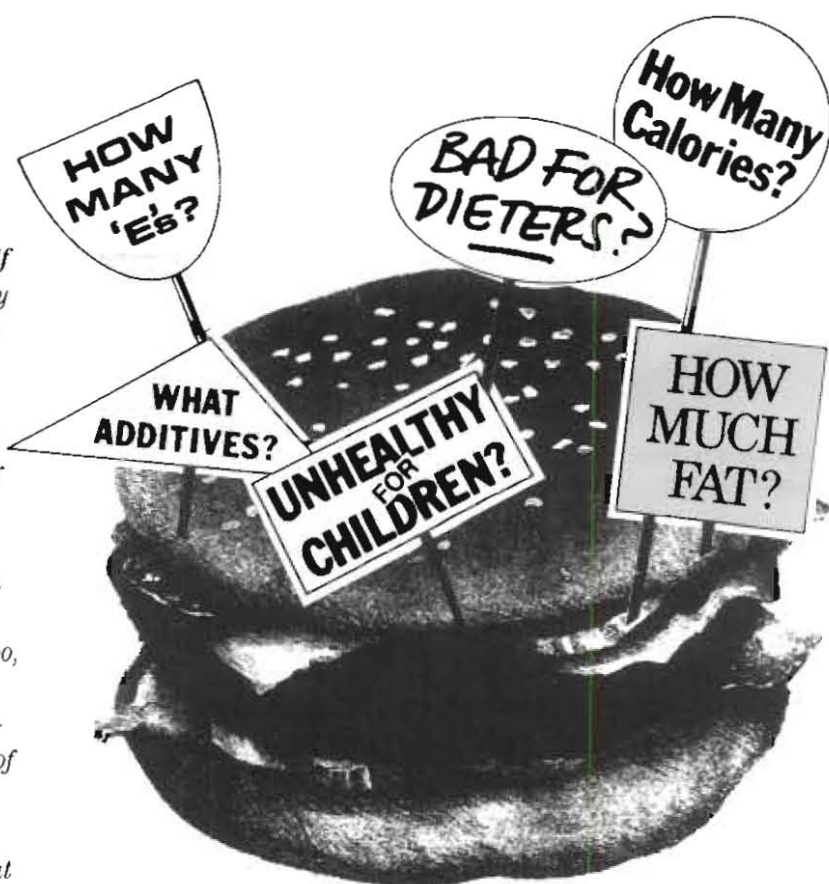
In Britain in particular the fast food phenomenon is big business. When Kentucky Fried Chicken opened their Marble Arch restaurant in London in late 1987, they found they were getting a massive 3,500 customers every day. McDonald's estimated they would get around a million and a half customers a year when they proposed opening a store in Hampstead, London. They are planning to open an average of three new outlets in Britain every month over the next 15 years.

That is a lot of fried chicken and a lot of burgers. And a lot of wrappers and cartons. And a lot of cash, too, with the big three – Wimpy, McDonald's and Kentucky – selling £500,000,000-worth of products in the UK.

It also represents a lot of artery-clogging saturated fat and a lot of obesity-enhancing calories.

Fast food is great for a quick and convenient meal at fairly low cost and little effort. But eaters have the right to expect the food to be good quality and to help with a balanced diet. Consumers have a right to know what is in the food and what it might do to health. This report reveals some of the secrets of fast food and shows that, far from helping with a balanced diet, some fast foods can

FAST FOOD SPECIAL



To coincide with the publication of The London Food Commission's Fast Food Facts (Camden Press) by Tim Lobstein, we publish a special six-page report.

never be balanced with healthy food. Others are loaded with colourings and preservatives that are never publicly revealed.

When the London Food Commission asked nearly four hundred fast food eaters whether they would believe a fast food manufacturer who said the food was good for them, an incredible 83 per cent said they would **not**. In this report we take a look at the promotional literature the big companies produce and look at what they **don't** tell you in their leaflets.

And vegetarians watch out! We asked the manufacturers about the fats and oils they use in their deep frying machines – and found that beef fat is the most popular in the bigger chains.

Fast food eaters have a right to know what is in their food. We have a right to know which foods are additive laden and which are additive-free. Even if you don't read the labels, the very fact that the information is displayed could serve to embarrass the companies into improving their product ranges.

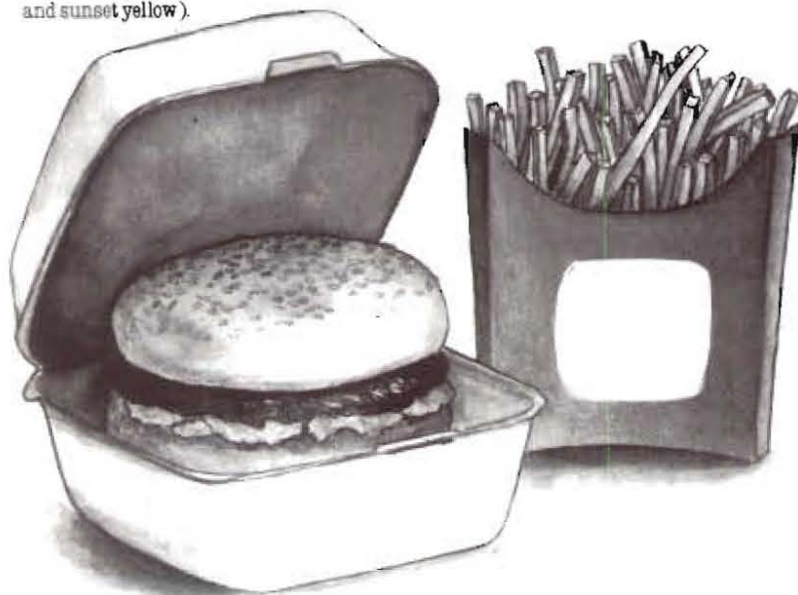
If fast food customers don't have a basic minimum of information on the nutrients and the ingredients in their food, then they cannot be expected to make informed choices. Manufacturers and caterers have been keeping their secrets for too long. This report exposes the secrets and calls on the manufacturers to start coming clean, so that we have the facts to make an informed choice about what we eat.

CASE OF THE M.



Fish: May be soaked in water-absorbing polyphosphates. Battered fish contains no egg but instead uses colouring (eg tartrazine or annatto) for yellow colour.

Chips: May be par-fried before cooking, increasing the amount of fat. May be soaked in a solution of colouring agents (eg tartrazine and sunset yellow).



Burger: A halfpounder can contain nearly two ounces of pure fat. Meat may include pork, lard, sugar, monosodium glutamate, coal tar dye colourings and sulphite and nitrite preservatives. Onion pieces may be preserved with sulphites.

Burger bun: May include animal fat, potassium bromate dough conditioner, plaster of paris and preservative calcium propionate.

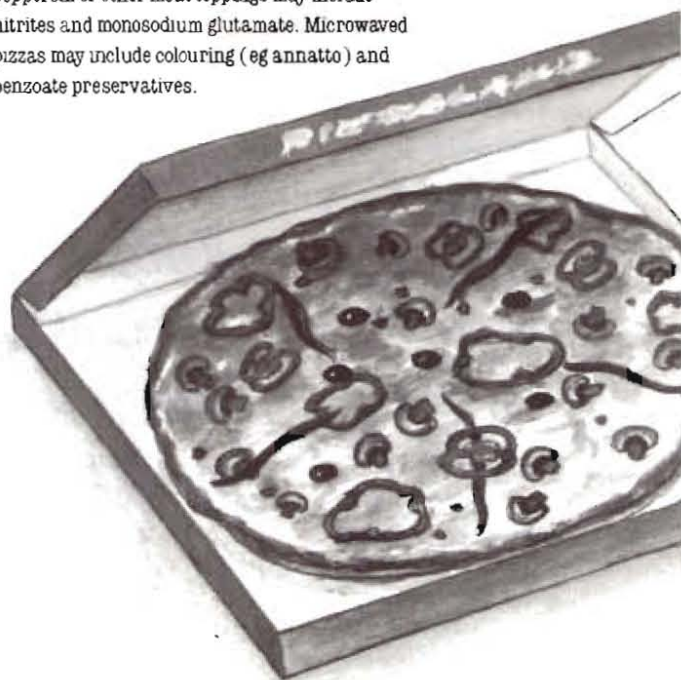
Fries: May be deep-fried in beef fat with antioxidants BHA and BHT and sprinkled with sugar (dextrose) and sodium pyrophosphate colour preserver.

There are no labels on fast foods. No nutritional details and no lists of ingredients. Some companies supply a few selected facts about their products' nutrients, but no company displays the ingredients.

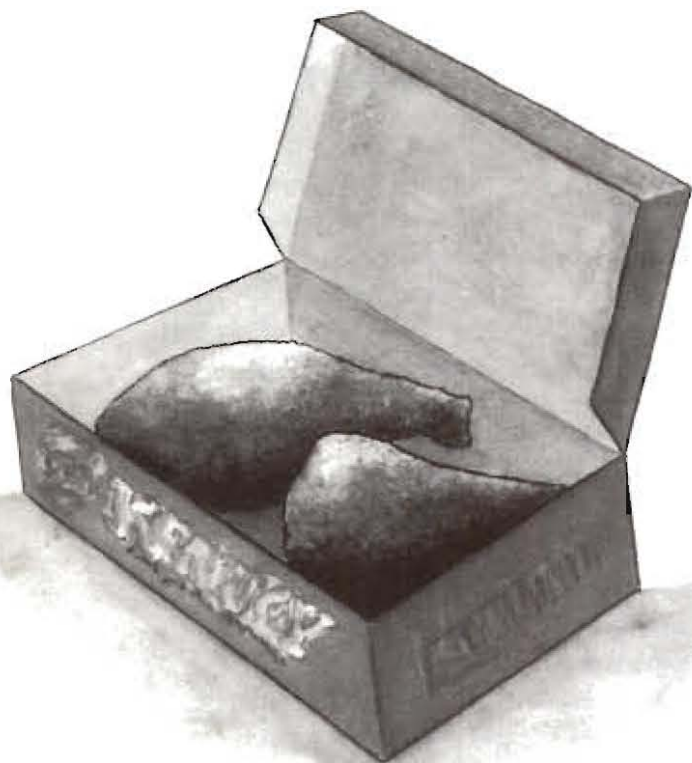
Walk into a Burger King or McDonald's in the USA and you can pick up fully-detailed ingredient listings for their products. But in the UK there are no such listings and we have no right in law to find out what the ingredients actually are.

Here in the interests of freedom of information are some of the details we could and should be given.

Cheese and Tomato Pizza: Dough base may include animal fat and anti-oxidants BHA and BHT. Ham, pepperoni or other meat toppings may include nitrites and monosodium glutamate. Microwaved pizzas may include colouring (eg annatto) and benzoate preservatives.

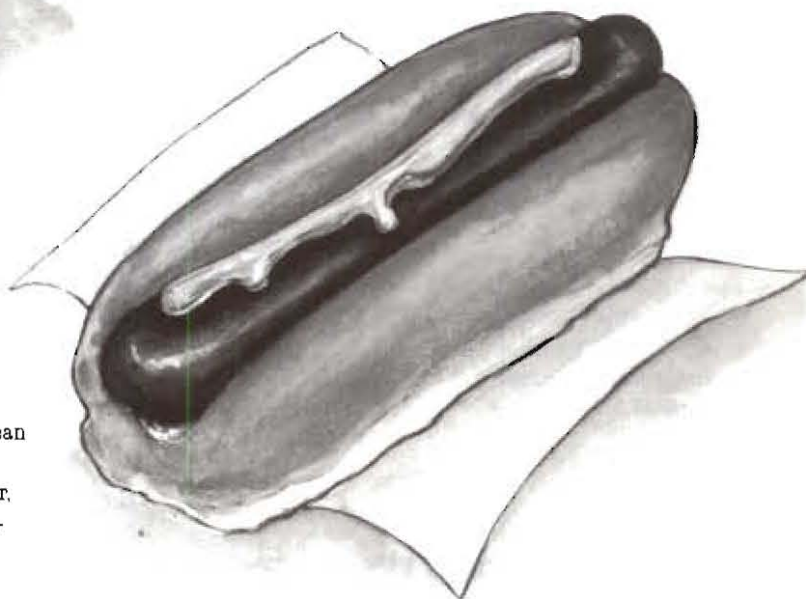


MISSING LABEL



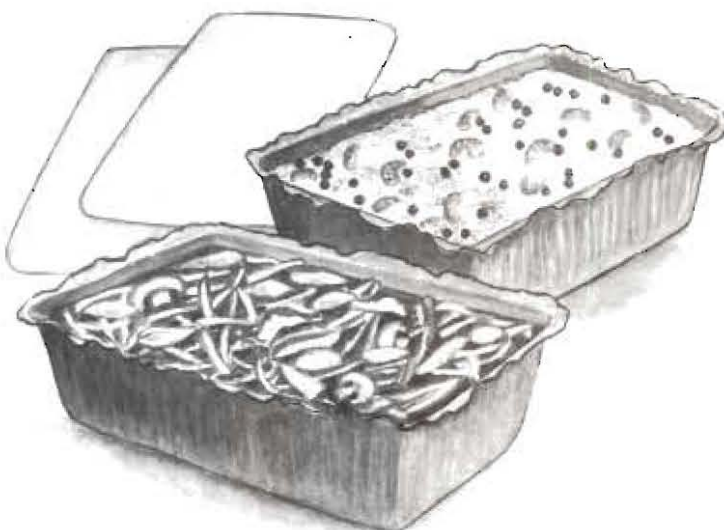
Deep-fried chicken pieces: High in fat and fried in partially-saturated vegetable fat. 'Special' seasoned coating includes monosodium glutamate.

Milk-Shake: Typically there are 5 oz of milk in a 10 oz shake, bulked out with water and air using thickeners, stabilisers and emulsifiers. Ingredients may include sugar (eg eight spoonfuls in a large-sized shake), seaweed, wood pulp derivatives and colourings like tartrazines or annatto.



Hot dog sausage: May be as little as 25 per cent lean meat. Can include pork and chicken and mechanically recovered meat slurry, milk powder, soya flour, water-retaining polyphosphates, antioxidants, colourings and nitrite preservative.

Roll: As with the burger bun, this may include bleaching agents and flour 'improver' potassium bromate



Beef Chow Mein: Usually includes monosodium glutamate and one or two teaspoons of salt, along with colouring agent tartrazine (in the noodles). Spare ribs are even saltier and may be coloured with sunset yellow.

Rice: Chinese fried rice may have monosodium glutamate and two or three teaspoons of salt. Pilau rice may include coal tar dyes sunset yellow and ponceau. Soy sauce may include colouring and benzoate preservative.

The hidden ingredients

As we show in the accompanying rundown of fast food ingredients, there is a lot more to fast food than meets the eye. Who at home would leave out the egg from a batter recipe and put in yellow colouring agents instead? Or soak their chips in tartrazine colouring? And what about the nutritional quality of the food on offer?

Chewing the fat

Take the fat that fast foods are fried in. We asked the major manufacturers what fats they used and were surprised by the results (Table 1). Despite widespread concern among health workers about over-consumption of saturated fats, and government encouragement to switch towards using polyunsaturated vegetable oils, some of the largest chains in Britain, including McDonald's and Burger King, are opting for beef fat in their deep-fat fryers.

Even the vegetable shortening used by Kentucky Fried Chicken has been partially hydrogenated – a process which chemically creates saturated fat out of previously unsaturated fat.

Adding a bit of colour

Or take colouring agents (Table 2). These are, of course, put into food to give it a more attractive appearance. For example batter or noodles made with no egg look off-white, not an appealing golden colour. Strawberry milk-shake, having no strawberries, might look decidedly pale without added colouring. And a jumbo sausage, a saveloy or hot dog might look far too pale and grey if they did not have a hefty dose of artificial colour.

For more details on the secret ingredients of fast food, see the London Food Commission's newly published *Fast Food Facts*, Camden Press, 1988, \$4.95.

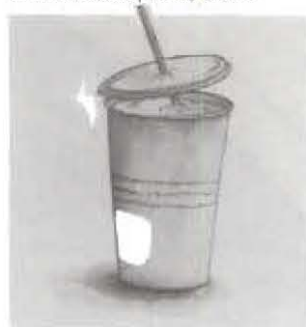


TABLE 2: COLOURINGS YOU MIGHT FIND IN FAST FOOD

Fish batter	tartrazine (E102) or annatto (E160b)
Mushy peas	tartrazine (E102), lissamine green (E142)
Chips	tartrazine (E102)
Noodles	tartrazine (E102)
Pilau rice	sunset yellow (E110), ponceau (E124)
Vinegar	caramel derivative (E150)
Soy sauce	caramel derivative (E150)
Onion bhajis	tartrazine (E102), sunset yellow (E110)
Tomato sauce	sunset yellow (E110), carmiosine (E122), indigo carmine (E132)
Saveloy sausage	red 2G (E128)
Hot dog sausage	brown HT (155)
Sausage roll	red 2G (E128)
Beef chow mein	tartrazine (E102)
Spare ribs in sauce	sunset yellow (E110)
Pickled onions	caramel derivative (E150)
Milk shakes	tartrazine (E102), sunset yellow (E110), amaranth (E123), caramel derivative (E150)
Orange drinks	sunset yellow (E110)
Cola drinks	caramel derivative (E150)
Microwave pizza	annatto (E160b), turmeric (E100)
Burger cheese	annatto (E160b), Beta-carotene (E160a)
Burger meat	red 2G (E128), caramel derivative (E150), tartrazine (E102)

TABLE 1: THE FATS IN THE FRYERS

	Fats used	Estimated % saturated fat
McDonald french fries	Mainly beef fat	45-55%
McDonald (some items)	Vegetable oil	25%
Wimpy – all items	Vegetable oil	15%
Burger King french fries	Mainly beef fat	45-55%
Burger King (some items)	Vegetable oil	20%
Kentucky F C – all items	Hardened soya fat	23%
Independents	Beef fat	45-55%
	Lard	40-45%
	Palm fat	45-55%
	Cotton-seed oil	26-32%
	Ground-nut oil	20%
	Corn oil	14-18%
	Soya oil	14%
	Sunflower oil	12-15%
	Rapeseed oil	7-10%

Source: Manufacturers' Information

TABLE 3: SOME OF THE HIGHEST-FAT FAST FOODS

Item	Total Fat	Saturated	Proportion of Calories from fat
Sweet & Sour Chicken & fried rice	106g	9g	46%
Spare Ribs in sauce	59g	21g	64%
Cod and Chips	56g	9g	48%
Wimpy Halfpounder	54g	27g	59%
Doner Kebab	49g	25g	59%
Kentucky Fried Chicken, 4 pieces	45g	12g	58%
Burger King Whopper	36g	12g	52%
Wimpy 1/4 pounder with cheese	33g	15g	51%
6oz Pasty	33g	10g	56%
Lamb Curry	33g	6g	58%
Jumbo 4oz Sausage	30g	11g	75%
McDonald Big Mac	28g	10g	45%
McDonald Filet-o-Fish	26g	7g	56%
McDonald 1/4 pounder with cheese	25g	12g	46%

Sources: company data where the company is named, otherwise Southwark Public Protection public analyst data

We surveyed a range of fast foods and analysed them for their best and worst features. Here we present the Food Magazine's very own

FAST GUIDE

We asked Southwark Public Protection's public analysts to look at a range of typical fast food items. Their report, along with additional material from standard food composition tables, identified exactly what was good, what was bad and what to watch out for.

*We awarded **one star** for foods that should not be eaten very often, **two stars** for foods that have some useful nutrients and may be eaten fairly occasionally and **three stars** for foods that provide a variety of useful nutrients and may be eaten quite regularly.*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Good nutritional points</i>	<i>Bad nutritional points</i>	<i>Balance nutritionally with</i>	<i>NOTE!</i>	<i>Star rating</i>
Fish and chips	Protein, calcium, vitamins B6, B12	High fat; many other vitamins low	Fresh veg and fruit, lean meat, wholegrains	Tartrazine in batter	**
Fried chicken and chips	Protein, vitamins B3, B6	High fat; many other vitamins low	Fruit and vegetables, fish, wholegrains	Monosodium glutamate in coating	**
Doner kebab with salad	Protein, zinc, some vitamins	High fat; a few vitamins low	More salad, fruit and wholegrains, pulses	Meat fatty	**
Shish kebab with salad	Protein, calcium, iron, zinc, some vitamins	A few vitamins low	Vegetables, pulses	Try with humus & extra salad	***
Sweet & sour chicken and egg fried rice	Protein, iron, calcium	High fat; a few vitamins low	Fruit and veg, lean meat, skimmed milk, nuts	Tartrazine	**
Cheese & tomato pizza	Protein, calcium, some vitamins	One or two vitamins low	Green vegetables, fish		***
Beefburger in bun	Protein, iron, vitamin B12	High fat; low in several vitamins	Fruit and veg, fish, potato, pulses, milk, wholegrains		**
Cheeseburger and fries	Protein, calcium some vitamins	High fat; low in several vitamins	Fruit and vegetables, fish, wholegrains, milk	May have azo dyes	**
Cod roe in batter	Protein, many vitamins	Low fibre	Potatoes, green vegetables	May have azo dyes	***
Sausage in batter	Protein, calcium vitamins B3, B12	High fat; low fibre; many vitamins low	Fruit and veg, fish, wholegrains, milk	May have azo dyes	*
Spare ribs in sauce	Protein, calcium, zinc, some vitamins	Low iron, some vitamins low	Fruit and veg, pulses, lean meat, wholegrains	May have azo dyes & monosodium glutamate	**
Spring roll	Protein	High fat; low calcium and many vitamins	Fruit and veg, milk, fish, lean meat, pulses, wholegrains		*
Chicken Madras	Protein, iron zinc	High fat; low fibre and some vitamins	Fruit and veg, pulses, wholegrains	Try with dahl, potato	**
Lamb curry	Protein, iron, zinc, some vits	High fat; low fibre and some vitamins	Potatoes, fruit, pulses, green veg, wholegrains	Try with dahl, potato	**
Cheese & onion pasty	Calcium	High fat; low in iron zinc & some vitamins	Fruit, veg, lean meat, fish, milk, wholegrains, pulses		*
Deep-fried apple pie		High fat; low in many other nutrients	Full range of nutritious foods		*
French fries	Vitamin C	High fat; low in many other nutrients	Full range of nutritious foods		*
Milk shake	Protein, calcium	High sugar, low fibre and several nutrients	Fruit and veg, potato, lean meat, pulses, fish, wholegrains		*

Source: The London Food Commission's *Fast Food Facts* by Tim Lobstein (Canden Press 1988)

* don't eat very often

** have some useful nutrients; can be eaten occasionally

*** have a variety of useful nutrients; can be eaten regularly

TO FAST FOOD

IS IT JUNK?

When The London Food Commission asked nearly 400 fast food eaters in Peckham, London, last year what they thought of their food most of them believed it was unhealthy, and an incredible 80 per cent of them said they would not believe a company that claimed the food *was* healthy!

But two of the companies in that very same Peckham street have published detailed leaflets explaining how very nutritious their products are. Wimpy 'Fact Sheet No 1' tells us about Fast Food and Healthy Eating – a natural combination, they say. McDonald's publishes 'McDonald's Nutrition Guide' indicating 'Our Role in a Well Balanced Diet'. They also publish 'Good Food and Nutrition at McDonald's' which gives some analyses of what they call typical meal combinations.

Before taking a closer look at these sorts of promotional pamphlets we need to ask: what sort of food do we want? And what do we need?

The first important point is that most of us don't need lots of protein. We get plenty in our diets already, so there is little significance in the figures they provide for protein levels in their food. The nutrients to check are the vitamins and minerals we, as a nation, may still go short of.

PUBLICITY

Surveys have found some younger, lower income groups to be getting too little *iron, calcium, folic acid* and *Vitamins B1, B2, B6, A, C and D*. Vitamin D can be boosted by sunshine, but the rest all need to come from our food, as do other essential nutrients which have not been surveyed so thoroughly.

The second point is that each of us needs different amounts of these essential nutrients. Any 'recommended' amount is for the average person, not necessarily for you. If you want to ensure the best for yourself you may want to aim for more than the average in these essential nutrients.

Ask the companies if their food is healthy and they'll tell you the valuable nutrients you can find in their wonderfood. But ask dietitians and they may express grave doubts. Who is right?



The third point is that all these essentials should preferably be found in food that is not too rich in other, less useful, ingredients: such as *fat, especially saturated fat, salt, or unnecessary calories*.

Lastly, we should not forget that non-nutrient, *dietary fibre*, which appears to help prevent a range of diseases.

When we look at any claims about the nutritional value of any food we should ask one crucial question: for the calories this food provides is it a rich or poor source of essential nutrients? If the food is providing half my daily calorie needs, is it also providing at least half my daily nutrient needs? If not, to stay fit I will have to find some other food later which gives me more nutrients with less than half

my calories. More of the same will just 'short-change' my body.

Let us take an example. The following is a list adapted from one

Meal: Double burger, fries and milkshake

	Proportion of average women's recommended daily needs
Calories	49%
Protein	66%
Vitamin B1	42%
Vitamin A	18%
Vitamin C	26%
Calcium	56%
Iron	31%
Dietary Fibre	42%
Fat	60%

of the manufacturers' pamphlets, but the same principle applies to any listing of the nutrient values of food. The pamphlet tells us how many nutrients are available in a fast food meal, as a proportion of what, for example, 'an average woman' is recommended to eat in a day.

This meal is providing almost exactly half the day's total calorie needs. But is it providing half the day's needs for a range of other nutrients? Protein and calcium are well-served here, but the fat levels are high and the vitamin A and C levels, and the iron level, are fairly low. To balance this meal we need to find some other foods during the day which can give us the following amounts of nutrients:

82% vitamin A
74% vitamin C
69% iron
plus unknown amounts of other essential nutrients

Yet all this has to be done eating only the remaining 51 per cent of calories and only 40 per cent of the daily fat intake. In other words, eating that fast food meal means having to find nutrient-rich low-fat food the rest of the day.

Similar figures can be shown for a range of fast foods. Many such foods – particularly if they are fried – will be loaded with fat and high in calories, while not offering anything like a full range of vitamins and minerals. How then can we balance our diets?

The problem is that fast food menus are short. That is how they can keep up the fast service. But short menus mean little choice, so when it comes to balancing out the meal with something healthier, you will probably have to find another shop to get what you need. And you might need a calculator and nutritional text book just to work out what you want.

Yet the leaflets say the fast food plays 'a very valuable part' in a healthy diet and is a 'valuable contribution to healthy eating'. In a sense *any* food can 'play a part' in a good diet, but perhaps in this case *the less you eat the better!*

Changing what you eat

The relationship between what we eat and the diseases we commonly suffer has recently made news. Our diets have been the subject of major television programmes, radio series and best-selling books. But has all this media interest actually affected people's everyday behaviour?

Results from a national survey of 1518 people carried out by Social and Community Planning Research in 1986* show that nearly nine out of every ten adults have made *some* change in what they eat. Many people are eating less meat, sugar and eggs, more fruit and vegetables and grilling rather than frying their food. They are drinking more semi-skimmed milk and eating more wholemeal bread.

The detailed findings show that:

- ◆ 86 per cent of adults have changed towards healthier eating
- ◆ 37 per cent are eating less processed meat
- ◆ 57 per cent are using less sugar
- ◆ 27 per cent are eating more fresh fruit and vegetables
- ◆ 56 per cent are eating more wholemeal bread
- ◆ 33 per cent are drinking more reduced fat milk
- ◆ 56 per cent are grilling instead of frying food
- ◆ 45 per cent thought that sugar in hot drinks was bad

The main reasons for changing our eating habits appear to be to improve or maintain health and to stay slim. People show positive attitudes to unprocessed foods like fruit and vegetables and negative attitudes to sugar and animal fats.

Value for money is also a consideration, particularly with items like meat and fish. One in four respondents said they ate less red meat or had cut it out altogether because it was poor value; a similar proportion were eating more fish because they thought it was good value for money.

A significant proportion of people were cutting down on potatoes, bread and sugar for weight control reasons. Decreasing potato and bread consumption goes against current dietary advice.

Most adults are trying to change to a healthier diet, but success is strongly related to social class, age and gender. Professor Aubrey Sheiham reviews the recent evidence

Diet and Social Class

Social class:	Healthy eaters	Intermediate	Unhealthy eaters
I/II	60%	26%	14%
III non manual	58%	25%	18%
III manual	37%	30%	32%
IV/V	39%	32%	30%
Total	48%	28%	24%

Cutting down on starchy rather than fatty foods reflects out of date dietary guidance which wrongly emphasised high carbohydrate foods as the main cause of weight gain.

Who are the healthy eaters?

Half the people surveyed were classified as healthy eaters and 24 per cent as unhealthy eaters. Social class, gender and age seemed to be important determinants of eating patterns. Whereas 60 per cent of social classes I and II were classified as healthy eaters, 37 per cent of social class III manual workers were in that category. Over twice as many respondents in manual occupations were classified as unhealthy eaters, compared with professional and managerial grades (see table).

Women in all age groups were much more likely than men to eat healthily; healthy eating also increases with age. Of women aged 55 and over some two thirds were healthy eaters. In contrast, less than a quarter of men aged 18-34 were healthy eaters.

Barriers to healthy eating

Half the respondents thought

that good food was more expensive and 42 per cent endorsed the view that pressure from other members of the family could stand in the way of healthier eating habits. This is important because men are less likely than women to change to a healthier diet. Yet men frequently determine what foods are served.

Although health promotion aims to make choosing healthier food easier, it is apparent that for many people free choice is illusory. Choosing what food to buy takes place in a specific social context where pressures may be exerted to make unhealthy selections. People in manual occupations were especially aware of barriers to healthy eating and were more inclined to think that healthier food costs more and takes longer to prepare. They also show a greater family resistance to healthy eating.

Women were more likely to be conscious of family resistance. Wives did not think it worthwhile cooking a 'proper meal' when their husbands were absent, and also tended to let their children decide what kind of meal should be served.

Confusion about what the 'experts' recommend is also a barrier to change. Three-quarters of the respondents believed that experts give conflicting advice. If

experts contradict each other it is hardly surprising that the average person has difficulty in knowing what to believe. Given that commercial interests are not averse to finding a tame expert and publicising adverse evidence for their competitors' products, the problem of contradictory advice will continue.

New healthy eaters

A sizeable number of people in the survey claimed to have made several changes towards a healthier diet. A startling 86 per cent said that they had made at least one change in the last two or three years. For the sample as a whole, the average number of changes was 2.4.

Recent converts to the new eating lifestyle tended to be women (averaging 2.6 changes) as opposed to men (averaging 2.3). People in the age range 35-54 of both sexes are particularly likely to have changed while older men (aged 65+) and younger men (18-24) are unlikely to have done so.

The picture which emerges from this study is of a large segment of the British population who have changed to a healthier diet. People are trying to change and come to terms with the apparently conflicting views of experts.

Some simple messages with uncomplicated truths are needed. Women are leading the trend and there is evidence of a social class divide. One third of manual and semi- and unskilled workers are unhealthy eaters with negative attitudes, compared with fewer than one in five in the professional and managerial jobs.

People in the lower income groups will more readily accept healthy dietary changes which also save money. The new orthodoxies about eating are accepted or rejected mainly according to economic imperatives, or according to whether they coincide with existing beliefs.

* 'Food Values: health and diet' by A. Sheiham, M. Marmot, D. Rawson and N. Buck. In *British Social Attitudes - 1987* report (edited by R. Jowell, S. Witherspoon and I. Brook). Gower Publication Company Limited 1987.

A healthy diet – who can afford it?

How easy is it to buy healthy food on a low income? Community dietitian Cathy Mooney went shopping in an inner city area

Hampstead Health District in inner London contains areas of extreme affluence alongside others of considerable deprivation. We were concerned that the availability and variety of 'healthy' food might be more restricted in areas with high rates of unemployment, one-parent families, ethnic minorities and council housing; and that the 'healthy' food choices promoted by the District Food Health Policy might be prohibitively more expensive than less 'healthy' alternatives.

Two shopping baskets were devised (see box) and costed in the large supermarkets. Shopping Basket A consisted of 500gm of foods being recommended by the Food Health Policy while Shopping Basket B contained 500gm each of less healthy alternatives.

We found that wherever people live it cost more to choose the healthy option, but the greatest difference was in the deprived areas where healthy food could cost 20 per cent more than less healthy food (Table 1).

The study found all the less healthy items in Basket B were available in all supermarkets. But the healthy Basket A items were not always on sale, particularly in the most deprived areas in the district. Seven healthy items weren't available in at least one supermarket in the deprived areas. Four items – wholemeal flour, low fat mince, semi-skimmed milk and wholemeal pasta – weren't available in at least one supermarket in both areas.

There was also less brand variety of healthy foods on sale, particularly in the deprived areas. If the healthy foods were available, there was only one option on sale while there was an average of three choices of the 'less healthy' food.

Besides looking at the shopping baskets we also costed two sorts of weekly diet. Diet A – the 'healthy' diet – was based on the foods eaten by a group of dietitians and their families in a study to test the feasibility of dietary

BASKET A

Cottage cheese
Edam cheese
Semi-skimmed milk
Polyunsaturated margarine
Polyunsaturated vegetable oil
Wholemeal bread
Weetabix
Brown rice
Wholemeal spaghetti
Wholemeal flour
Tinned beans – reduced sugar
Tinned peaches in fruit juice
Low fat burgers
Low fat mince
Low fat sausages

BASKET B

Cheese spread
Cheddar cheese
Whole milk
Soft margarine
Ordinary vegetable oil
White bread
Cornflakes
White rice
White spaghetti
White flour
Tinned beans – added sugar
Tinned peaches in syrup
Ordinary burgers
Ordinary mince
Ordinary sausages

recommendations. It reached all the nutritional criteria of the Hampstead Food Health Policy and the short term dietary guidelines of the National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education (NACNE).

Diet B – the 'less healthy' diet – was based on the foods eaten by a British family on low income, according to the National Food Survey 1985. Diet B is higher in fat and sugar and lower in fibre than the NACNE or Health Authority recommendations. We found that throughout the district Diet A is

more expensive than Diet B and the greatest price difference is in the deprived areas (see Table 2).

People on very low income – eg Income Support (£32.75 per week at 25 years or older) or Unemployment Benefit (£33.40 per week) – could hardly afford the healthier diet as it would cost over 40 per cent of their budget. The less healthy diet is more likely to be their choice, costing closer to 25 per cent of income.

Additionally, people who have to buy in small packet sizes will find their food budgets eroded. In this district we found that buying foods

in the smallest packets costs up to 17 per cent more per week. This particularly affects pensioners.

The affluent in Hampstead clearly have greater access to a healthy diet. In addition to having more cash in their purses, they are also offered more variety and choice of 'healthy' foods in their local supermarkets.

Having established this inequality between rich and poor, it is important for dietitians promoting better nutrition to work with the food and catering industries to increase the availability of cheap, healthy foods.



TABLE 1 SHOPPING COSTS

	'Healthy' Basket A	'Unhealthy' Basket B	Extra cost of Basket A
Deprived areas	£11.13	£9.23	20%
Affluent areas	£11.98	£10.32	16%

TABLE 2: WEEKLY FOOD COSTS

	'Healthy' Diet A	'Unhealthy' Diet B	Extra cost of Diet A
Deprived areas	£13.84	£8.02	73%
Affluent areas	£14.19	£8.71	63%

Low income spending survey

In August 1987 the London Food Commission asked 38 people with low incomes how they spent their money. Issy Cole-Hamilton reports on the disturbing results

If I didn't have to eat I'd be very well off! Food is fuel – so essential and everybody should be able to buy enough food and not worry about where the next meal's coming from'.

Sally is a single woman with a 12 year-old son. When we interviewed her she was working full-time and with her child benefit she had an income of about £90 a week. Her son Gary was getting free school meals. She spent nearly £30 a week on food and said she could only afford the basic essentials. She looked for 'special offers' on food and bought 'own brand' products. Sally was one of the better off people amongst those we spoke to.

Our survey ranged from single adults to families with two adults and eight children. Incomes ranged from less than £30 a week in five cases to over £150 a week in one case.

Expenditure on food varied widely. One household spent less than £4 per person per week on food, whilst another spent nearly £70 on food for two people. Twelve households were spending less than £10 per person per week and nineteen households – half of those we spoke to – spent less than £12. These amounts are lower than the cost of a healthy diet for most people.

In general people with low incomes tend to

spend a relatively high proportion of their income on food. Our survey bore this out. One in five of the people we spoke to spent more than 50 per cent of their weekly income on food. Nearly half spent more than 30 per cent.

'They don't give you enough for your children to eat on'.

One of the most disturbing findings in the survey was that 12 of the 18 households with children – two out of three – had gone without food in the last year for financial reasons. This compared with ten out of the 20 households – half – without children. One possible interpretation is that benefit levels for households with children are even less adequate than for those without.

'I can't buy all I need without worrying about how fuel bills and clothing will be paid for'.

Food is often said to be 'flexible budget' for households living on low incomes. This was found to be the case for one in eight people in our study. If money was needed for unusual expenses 18 people said they borrowed, mostly from friends or relations. However, 13 people said they had to find the money from their normal budget, five of whom would cut back on food. Another four said they would cut back on fuel.

The cost of food is not the only expense involved in eating. Fuel for cooking and fares for travelling to the shops also cost money. The majority of the people we spoke to went shopping at least twice a week. Only four households had the use of a car and most people walked to the shops. Ten people used public transport from time to time.

Corner shops were used mainly because they were convenient and no one used them for quality. People who travelled distances of more than half a mile to supermarkets did so mainly because the food was cheaper or of a better quality. One woman with young children felt forced to use the local shops because she was unable to travel with the children on public transport. The sums spent by people travelling to the shops varied from 40p to £5 a journey.

Even though our study was on a small scale some clear pointers emerged for areas of future research and action. Fifteen households in a sample of 38 had gone short of food for financial reasons in the previous two weeks – that must be a cause for concern. Like other studies, we found that people with low incomes are well-informed about the types of food they should be eating to improve their diets, and are extremely concerned that, because of lack of money, they are unable to do so.

Research: Eva Whittaker



Trends in healthy eating and recent government legislation have meant huge changes for school meals services round the country. The Food Magazine takes a look at some successful schemes that recognise the importance of school meals for our children's future.

School meals and the law

The 1944 Education Act made the provision of school meals mandatory, determined portion size, nutritional guidelines, price and even the staffing standards for kitchens. But since 1979 successive Conservative governments have undermined the policies enshrined in that Act.

In 1980 the Education Act deregulated school meals, leaving nutritional standards, portion size, staffing levels and price charged to the discretion of the Local Education Authority (LEA). Their only obligation was to provide free 'provision in the middle of the day as appears to the authority to be requisite' to pupils whose parents were receiving Supplementary Benefit or Family Income Supplement. They could legally scrap the rest altogether.

PRICES

Interpretations by LEAs of the term 'requisite' now range from a 'bun in a bag' to a full NACNE menu providing one third of the DHSS daily recommended allowance for many nutrients. There are similar variations in the prices charged, from 40p to over £1.00. And there are even wider variations in the choice of menu.

In April 1988 the Social Security Act 1986 came into force. This made it illegal for a LEA to provide

free meals to any pupil unless their parents were receiving Income Support (equivalent to the old Supplementary Benefit). Nearly half a million children lost their entitlement to free school meals overnight. Families in receipt of Family Credit were given some financial compensation.

SUBSIDIES

Another clause in the Social Security Act made it illegal to offer different subsidies to different groups of pupils. Many LEAs had traditionally provided cheaper meals to pupils in special schools.

In the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) the removal of this discretion resulted in an immediate doubling of the meal price in special schools. A further clause made it illegal to provide free milk to pupils unless their parents receive Income Support, thus ending the practice common to many LEAs of providing milk free to all primary school pupils.

The milk clause also limits LEAs to providing the free milk to Income Support pupils 'in the middle of the day'. When the Association of Metropolitan Authorities questioned the Department of Health & Social Security (DHSS) on the intended meaning of this clause the reply was that it meant what is said. It was therefore illegal to provide free milk in the middle of the morning when primary pupils most want it, and have always had it in the past.

TENDERING

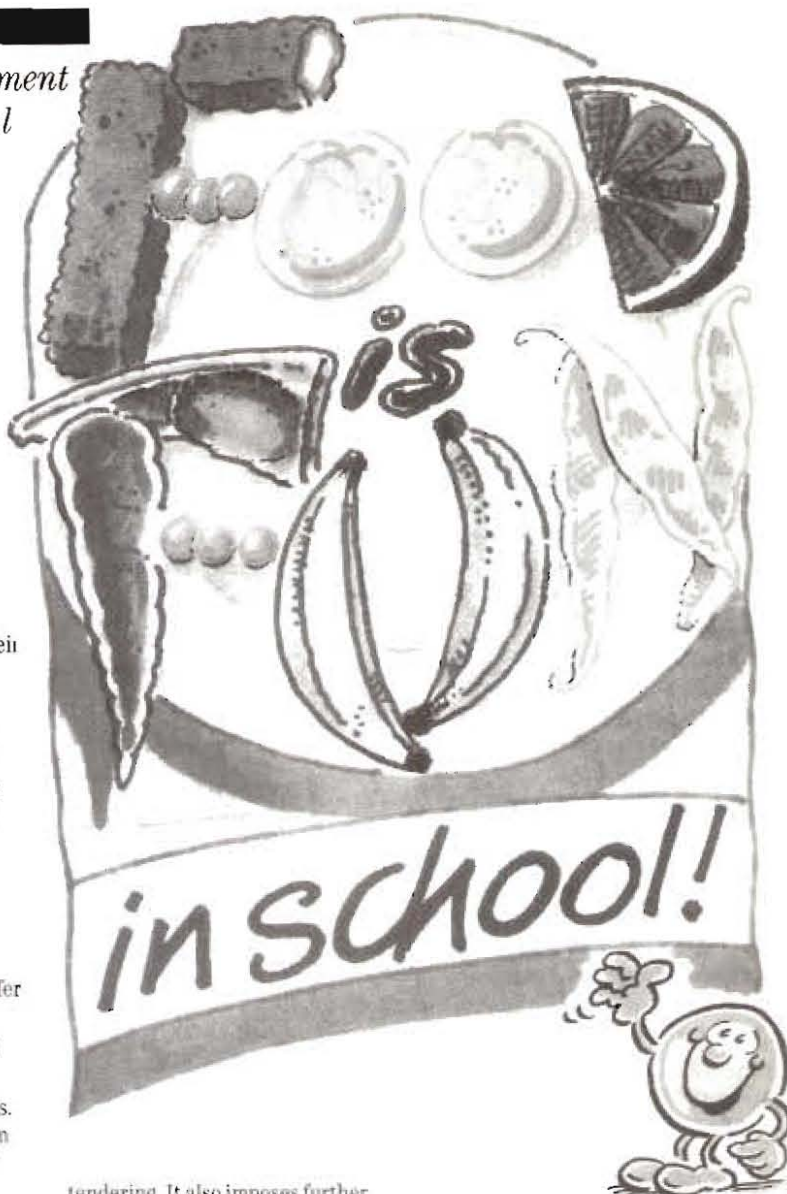
The latest attack on school meals is the Local Government Act 1988, which makes it compulsory for all LEAs to put the school meals service out to competitive

tendering. It also imposes further restraints on public sector provision of the service if the LEA wins the contract by demanding an unspecified percentage return on capital employed.

This could easily be used to force LEAs to reduce their subsidy to the service – up to 75 per cent in many authorities – and even to force up the price charged. Thus a welfare

service that was once nurtured, guided and advised by the Department of Education and Science and the DHSS has now been turned into a financial plaything for the Department of the Environment to throw to the private catering sector.

Robin Jenkins



PROMOTIONAL

At least two Local Education Authorities, Nottinghamshire and Cheshire, have introduced school meal vouchers which parents can buy when collecting their Family Credit from the Post Office.

Nottinghamshire's Ann Carter told the Food Magazine that their scheme aims to stop pupils losing or spending their dinner money on the way to school. It also guarantees a certain level of

income to the school meals department.

From May of this year parents of primary school children in two trial areas were able to buy vouchers to the value of £3.40, for five meals costing 68p each. Initial results have encouraged its continuation throughout the autumn term.

There are even plans for Postman Pat to help with promotion in the future.



Not so much a meal, more a feast

It's Fun Eating At School Today – that's the message behind the national marketing campaign for school meals FEAST.

For the past ten years or so many school caterers throughout the UK have been adopting healthy eating programmes within their school kitchens. Tremendous strides have been made, often without much encouragement and certainly on small budgets, to educate children's palates to enjoy healthier food and to learn its value.

Hours have been spent adapting favourite dishes to include whole food ingredients. Wholemeal flour in rolls, pizzas and pastry; unsaturated fats; fresh vegetables and fruit; fruit juices without additives; skimmed milk and yoghurt are all to be found in today's school dining rooms.

The challenge

Unlike the classroom, the school dining hall is not a compulsory venue, so students of any age have to be encouraged to try school food. And it's no good providing food they think is boring. Caterers have to meet the challenge head on. Simply doing a good job is no longer enough.

Customers must be attracted to the product if they are going to buy. If children want to eat hamburgers then provide them, but make sure they are home-made or made to the

caterer's specific order so that ingredients are carefully monitored.

In recent years some local authorities have been running their own publicity campaigns introducing cuddly characters or trendy themes in a bid to encourage children to eat school lunches. Numbers always increase for a term or two but then tend to fall again.

And greater publicity for the school meals service has never

been an option for most authorities, for ideological, political or financial reasons. Consequently it's become clear that if the message about healthy school meals is going to get across, it will have to be tackled nationally.

Thanks to the efforts of two enthusiastic catering officers, Arnold Fewell of North Yorkshire, and Wally Taylor from Surrey, the marketing strategy and the FEAST campaign began to take shape. It soon became clear that the vast

majority of school caterers throughout the British Isles were keen to support the campaign. Entirely funded by sponsorship from the food industry and the Milk Marketing Board in particular, the campaign is independent of local authority finances.

FEAST wants to bring the school meals message home by giving school catering a higher profile and developing promotional techniques in much the same way as commercial catering has learned to do. School caterers want to find a way of convincing the young and their parents that good eating habits can be a good healthy habit for life.

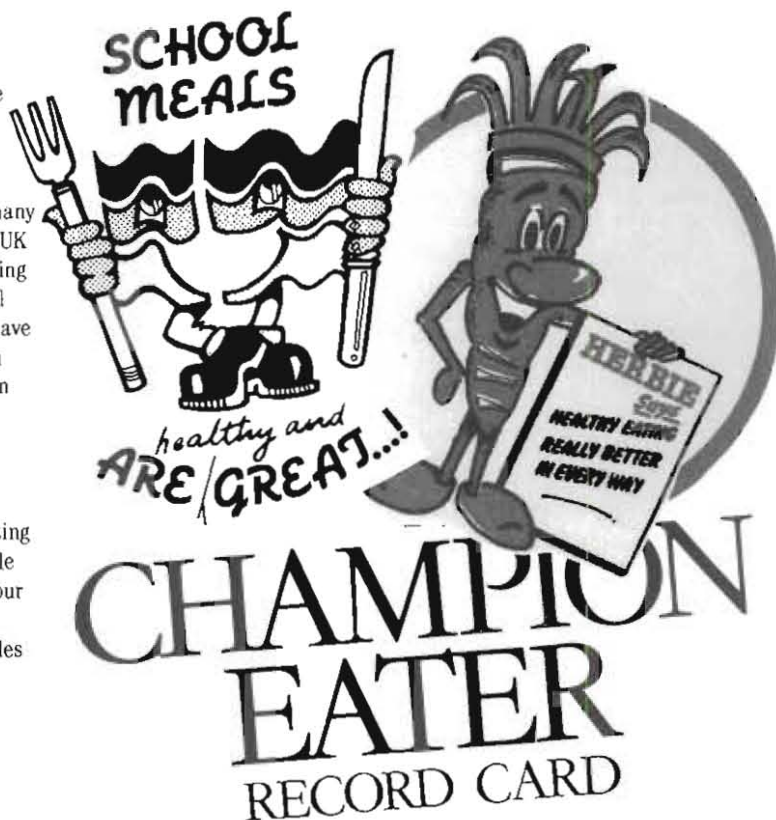
A first important step was taken by FEAST in spring 1988 when a special marketing conference attracted some 200 delegates from all over the British Isles, to learn about and discuss the best ways of encouraging their young customers to eat a midday meal.

Conference discussions ranged from the importance of the children as customers, the presentation of food and the atmosphere in which the meals are served. The production of successful publicity material and the improvement of information available to children and parents formed the main thrust of the two day conference. For years school caterers have worked in isolation, but now there really seems to be a chance to put across a united message.

The campaign is now preparing advertising and competition material for a national publicity drive early in 1989. All schools will be offered a chance to take part, with competitions geared to all age groups offering wonderful prizes, including a trip to Disneyland.

Happily there are some encouraging signs. More children are beginning to question the value of the food they eat as they learn about food values in the classroom. Educating the taste buds should be a natural progression, but may just take a little longer.

Ann Hay



SCHEMES ON TRIAL

Nottinghamshire have opened the scheme to all parents, not just those receiving Family Credit, but in Cheshire negotiations with the Post Office are continuing.

In April this year, Devon Schools Catering Department headed by Ian Wasson, mounted a radio advertising campaign reminding parents that school meals provided good quality and could be cheaper than healthy packed lunches. Of the

anticipated loss of 46,000 meals following the introduction of the Family Credit System, 30,000 have been retained.

Cheshire, under the guidance of Judith Hesp, County Catering Manager, has produced an information package for parents explaining how the Family Credit system works, and promoting school meals.

To help children from families where money for food is tight,

some LEAs have introduced individually priced items into primary school menus, such as Hampshire's 'Select a Snack'. Items such as pizza, filled wholemeal rolls, fruit juice and some sweets are individually priced. The scheme is now running in 40 of the 500 primary schools and will be expanded during the autumn term.

● Issy Cole-Hamilton

A BARGAIN IN BRADFORD

Where can you get a drink of milk, a two-course meal, and still have change from 50p? At that price, it must be north of Watford... the answer is in Bradford's schools. The city's Education Authority has been a pioneer in school meals since 1907 when the world's first purpose-built school meals kitchen was opened at Green Lane.

When the 1986 Social Security Act removed the entitlement of free school meals from over 9000 Bradford school children and practically stopped free milk, it was just another challenge for the resourceful school catering service.

The children who stood to lose free meals were those whose parents came under the Authority's discretionary scheme for low-income families. The Act outlaws discretionary schemes. Now, only children whose parents are on income support are eligible for either free meals or



CITY OF BRADFORD

milk.

The Authority decided attack was the best defence. Meals prices were slashed to 45p in primary schools and 55p in middle schools. Upper schools stayed at the old price of 60p. The price levels were chosen to match or undercut the allowance paid to

parents on Family Credit and to encourage them to send their children with the money rather than make sandwiches.

The strategy has proved a brilliant success. Although the summer term is traditionally bad for school meals services, between 6000 and 7000 children have made the switch from free to

paid.

In the coming winter terms, the school meals service is confident of seeing an increase in take up over last year, despite the 1986 Act. What's more, the scheme is self-financing, as well as nutritionally sound, because the lower prices are matched by higher sales.

First the meals, then the milk. Before the 1986 Act, Bradford, like many caring education authorities, gave all children aged seven or under a free one third of a pint of milk at the mid-morning break. But now, the Act only allows free milk for children of parents on income support and then, only at midday.

Rather than single out those children by giving them bottles of milk, Bradford's Catering and Welfare Benefits Manager, Mike Howat, seized his chance. Milk is now available mid-morning to all primary and nursery school children (ie up to 9 years old) for only 50p per half term – £3 a school year – or less than 5p a pint!

The money is collected at the beginning and middle of each term in little envelopes supplied by the dairies. And it doesn't cost the Authority a penny. The scheme breaks even through a combination of EC milk subsidies and hard bargaining with the dairies.

Francis Marslen-Wilson

Unions respond to compulsory tendering

Harry Barker, of the National Union of Public Employees, reports

The unions' response to compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) for the school meals service, as well as other public catering services, has been to campaign for them to continue as a public provision. Unions also want to ensure that the quarter of a million workers involved – mostly women – will still be employed directly by local authorities on reasonable terms and conditions.

The four unions concerned – GMB, NALGO, NUPE and TGWU – have worked together on this issue for some years, in response to the government's plans to put local authority services out to CCT. The

legislation is now in place and we are making every effort to ensure that our members know how the tendering process will affect them and how they can protect their jobs and the services they provide.

The TUC and the Public Administrative Research Centre have produced a trade union guide to CCT for local services. It endeavours to show what should be done before, during and after tendering and gives check lists of the legal processes involved. It is backed up by a number of other useful research and information documents.

We are also backing local campaigns aimed at improving and developing the school meals service as a provider of high quality, good value food. The recent changes in social security benefits

and the subsequent loss of many free school meals have forced many parents to recognise that school meals are a cheap and healthy alternative to sandwiches and other snacks.

Amongst the excellent initiatives we support are campaigns such as FEAST and the Haringey School Meals Project. They educate both parents and children in nutritional values, as well as providing food for children from ethnic minorities.

Although the unions are strongly opposed to CCT, they acknowledge that it could provide an opportunity for increasing choice and improving the quality of meal provision, at the same time as offering new training opportunities. Most importantly it gives people a chance to create the kind of public service they want.

DOCTORING THE MEDIA: THE REPORTING OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Anne Karpf
Routledge, pp 288, £7.95

The past ten years have seen an explosion in popular concern with health. Whether the media have created or only reflected this trend is difficult to say; there have been few attempts to look in depth at the way the media treat health and disease. And studies of media treatment of any issue are always in danger of falling into a trap of merely examining whether the media got it right.

It is to Anne Karpf's credit that this book avoids such a pitfall. Instead, she has produced a thoughtful account of the ways in which both doctors and journalists have an interest in a particular kind of popularisation – and how the interests of the medical profession intersect with the market pressure on, and day to day working practices of, the media. It also contains some fascinating material from the forgotten history of medical broadcasting. And although it is a serious sociological study, it's extremely readable.

As Anne Karpf points out, the media has usually been extremely sympathetic towards medicine. Health stories were about what doctors did, and about how clever and caring they were. At least until the 1970s, when what Karpf calls the consumer perspective ceased to be the preserve of a few radical critics of medicine and became much more a part of mainstream opinion.

Since then, it has been possible to produce another kind of account of health, best characterised as the 'look after yourself' approach. It's one of the strengths of this book that it also explores the limitation of this version – which starts out with self-health groups but shades uncomfortably into victim-blaming, à la Edwina.

Anne Karpf is a broadcaster, medical journalist, and sometime researcher on the sociology of medicine; the nice thing about this book is that it reflects the insights

of the insider and the outsider. If you want to see how a 'The Media and ...' book should be done, read it.

Jeremy Green

DROUGHT RELIEF IN ETHIOPIA: PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF FEEDING PROGRAMMES

compiled by Judith Appleton, Save the Children pp 186, £10

This book is a model of clarity. It is a practical manual for anyone providing famine relief. Although written specifically for Ethiopia, it has wider implications. It is a guide for crisis management at its most refined.

The book covers all the practical, administrative and policy issues likely to face those charged with relieving famine. In the UK famine isn't a problem, but I would still recommend community dietitians to read this and ponder. Judith Appleton and her colleagues take us through a series of highly relevant subjects: deciding what to do; public health; site feasibility; water supply; transport; fuel supplies; sanitation; buildings; labour; monitoring.

Issues familiar to any student of social policy are briskly dealt with. How are crisis needs to be met while not fostering dependency? Can agencies walk the tightrope

between controlling and managing a population, on the one hand, and encouraging them to look after themselves and their own folk on the other? One of the joys of this manual – as we would expect from Save the Children – is that public health and needs satisfaction are consistently put first.

The book has telling photos by Mike Wells and others. These are not the shock-horror photos of victims but the means for alleviating symptoms. As to alleviating causes, many other books have been written. This is a book dedicated to efficient, humane famine relief.

And why should a UK food audience read this book? Here is one reason. This summer, there was growing evidence that UK crisis management plans for disasters such as nuclear power plant failure are far from adequate (eg *The Independent*, 10 August 1988). Let us hope that improved plans for such crises at home emulate the SCF book and put public health and human need first.

Tim Lang

GENETIC ENGINEERING: CATASTROPHE OR UTOPIA?

Peter Wheale and Ruth McNally
Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1988, pp 332 with references and guide to

educational resources, £10.95 paperback

In 1980 after eight years' deliberation, the US Patents Office issued a patent on a genetically engineered form of *Pseudomonas*. This bacterium, designed to degrade and disperse oil spills, was the first living organism for which property rights were to be granted. By 1982 the number of US patents in mutation/genetic engineering had risen to 120 per year.

Along with designer micro-organisms containing modified gene sequences, 'biotechnology' has already produced new plant and animal strains and biochemicals such as enzymes (biological catalysts), hormones and novel foods. Many major investment projects are reaching maturity but popular awareness is still at rock bottom.

'Genetic Engineering: catastrophe or utopia?' is a book after my own heart. Detailed research has produced an independent and valuable account of the biotechnology story, from the birth of molecular biology to the billion dollar scams of the bio-industrial complex.

Perhaps there are too many technical details for those who aren't interested in such details as the plasmid called pSC101 which confers tetracycline resistance to *Escherichia coli*. But the science behind the 'new technology' of the 1990s is impressive, and gives great strength to the descriptions of its industrial applications, risk evaluation and regulatory politics.

Wheale and McNally lucidly describe developments in gene therapy and screening, agriculture and biological warfare. They are clear that there is potential risk to health, ecological balance and human values without some democratic control of the biotechnology industry. Their book will be useful for teachers, trade unionists and others who want to understand the significance that biotechnology holds for the future of agricultural production.

Eric Brunner



FLUORIDE QUESTION

Dear Food Magazine

Here in the North West we are under threat of having fluoride added to our water supply. Local health authorities are to request the North West Water Authority to fluoridate the water supply and they have already published formal notice to this effect.

There is considerable opposition to this scheme from consumers, MPs and certain local councils, yet the (unelected) health authorities ignore all protests. I object to fluoridated water as it amounts to compulsory medication.

It has been banned in other EC countries and fluoride is cheaply available in many other forms for those who desire it. I am particularly concerned that bottle-fed babies, such as my own, will be receiving a far higher dose of fluoride than exists in breast milk.

The standard of British drinking water is in general a

disgrace, and adding yet another chemical hardly improves matters. I know that the London Food Commission campaigns for purer food and genuine choice for the consumer; can you offer any assistance or advice on this important matter?

Josephine Ellis

We receive a steady flow of letters on fluoride which raise the issue of civil liberties versus public health. Diane Plamping, a community dental worker on the London Food Commission Council, has given us the following reply to Ms Ellis' letter:

I appreciate your concern for your own child and can reassure you there is no evidence that bottle-fed babies suffer any ill effects in fluoridated areas. This public health measure has been tested for more than 50 years in areas where fluoride levels are adjusted to one

part per million and of course supported by even longer-standing evidence in naturally fluoridated areas.

On the basis of fluoride's effectiveness in safely reducing decay by 50 per cent, water fluoridation is endorsed by many agencies including the World Health Organisation (WHO). EEC countries are WHO members and have accepted this endorsement.

Some countries have adopted a variety of methods of administration but only water fluoridation has the advantage of reaching those most in need – the children with the worst dental health whose parents do not provide them with fluoride supplements. For many low-income families supplements are costly and disadvantaged children may therefore not benefit from them.

In the UK 40 per cent of 16 year-olds have had a general anaesthetic ('gas') to have teeth extracted. Obviously water

fluoridation is only one part of the answer but I believe it must be included in public health efforts to reduce the avoidable pain and suffering from dental caries which remains such a problem in the UK. In this case I believe that a small reduction of personal choice is an acceptable loss in return for a huge gain in public health.

Although there is opposition there is also widespread support for this measure. 70 per cent of adults in Britain support fluoridation (Marplan, 1987) and in your own region 83 per cent of adults support the measure (Scantel, 1987).

While I continue to work for health-promoting dietary policies and practices – such as a 50 per cent reduction in sugar intake (NACNE, 1983) – this does not obviate the immediate need to take other actions to reduce the impact of this entirely preventable disease.

Letters

Irradiation controls

The statement in the spring issue of The Food Magazine that 'even the FDF has come out against food irradiation' is puzzling. FDF's view that food irradiation offers considerable benefits for specific food products has been frequently reiterated, most recently at the LFC Forum.

In view of the thorough evaluations for the safety and wholesomeness of irradiated foods, FDF believes that UK customers should have the opportunity to exercise informed choice, through appropriate labelling, as to whether or not they wish to purchase these products.

FDF supports the need for adequate control of the process and has repeatedly stressed the importance of establishing a detection method. It would, however, seem preferable to establish such a control procedure rather than try to maintain a ban which is not only difficult to enforce with regard to imports, but which – in view of the government's acceptance of the safety of irradiated foods – is of doubtful

legality in the context of the EC Internal Market. The Federation therefore welcomes the fact that a MAFF Working Party is examining the issue of controls.

John Wood
Food and Drink Federation
London WC2

First world hunger

As a visiting scientist here in connection with our World Hunger Programme, I am attempting to determine the prevalence of hunger among children in developed countries.

We acknowledge that this is a real problem among all too high a percentage of youngsters in our country, and we wonder whether the same holds for yours.

Are you cognizant of the existence of childhood hunger among any whom you serve or in outlying areas? And do you know of any surveys that have been conducted in recent months to determine the extent to which such hunger exists, especially among the less privileged members of the community?

Any information you may be willing to share with us will be deeply appreciated, and will help us materially in our work.

Yours sincerely
Dorothy Noyes MPH PhD
Brown University
Box 1831
Providence
Rhode Island
02912 USA

ALSO IN THE POST BAG

MacHospitals

Should McDonald's be promoted in NHS hospitals? The hamburger giant is approaching health authorities asking if Ronald McDonald, their child-appeal mascot, can come into the children's wards, entertain sick youngsters and award his special Mc-Certificates. McDonald's are also understood to be proposing that they cater for hospital visitors by opening burger bars on NHS premises.

Food Poisoning Resolutions

This year's Bakers Food and Allied

Workers Union (BFAWU) annual conference passed two resolutions urging greater concern over food handling and food poisoning. The first called for guidelines to be given to union members on public health and food handling. The second urged the union leadership to take a lead among other food-related unions on issues concerning food poisoning and the handling of food.

Vending Machine Contamination

MSF, the union formed by ASTMS and TASS, are concerned about the incidence of bacterial contamination in vending machines. Apparently plastic connection hoses have been found to be coated with bacterial slime and the water dispensed can have up to 4000 times the EEC maximum admissible level of contamination.

Keep sending us your letters!
We greatly welcome contributions, though we may have to trim them to fit them in.

TWO NEW BOOKS FROM THE LONDON FOOD COMMISSION

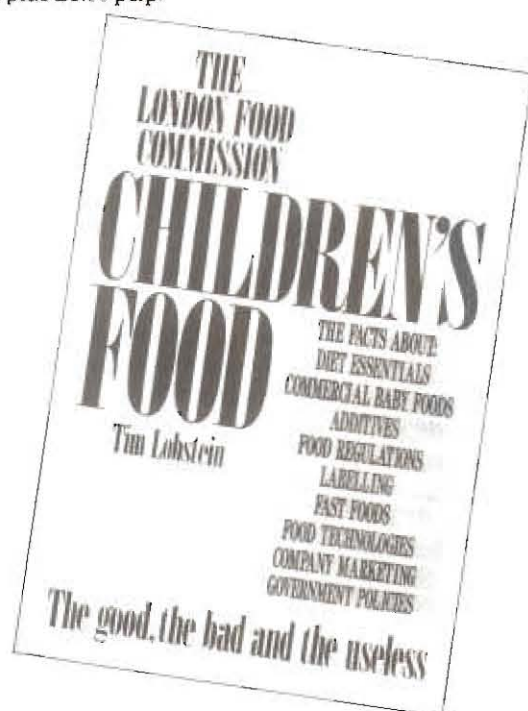
Fast Food Facts

Beef burgers can be 40 per cent pig fat. French fries may be coloured with azo dyes and fried in beef fat. Fish batter rarely has any egg in it, and milk shakes may have wood pulp and seaweed along with up to eight spoons of sugar in them.

With comprehensive tables of nutrients and additives this book is a unique and highly informative look into the secretive world of fast food catering. Showing the good points and the bad, it helps health-conscious readers find exactly what they want and don't want, and where to get it.

You don't have to avoid fast foods. But you do need to know what is in them. This book reveals the facts the companies want to keep to themselves.

The London Food Commission's *Fast Food Facts* by Tim Lobstein (Camden Press). Available now from the LFC. £4.95 plus £1.00 p&p.



Children's Food

Teething rusks twice as sweet as doughnuts? Baby foods made of thickened water? Sugar Puffs sweeter than some chocolate bars and fish fingers less than 50% fish? What should a parent be buying?

The book is a catalogue of shame for the food industry and the trouble that may be in store for our children. More than this, the book goes on to help readers look critically at the labels on food products, gives the details about healthy eating and the sources of good nourishment; and provides an extensive section on what can be done in playgroups, nurseries and school meals services.

The London Food Commission's *Children's Food*, by Tim Lobstein (Unw in Hyman). Available late November. Order now from the LFC. £3.95 plus 80p p&p

LONDON FOOD COMMISSION REPORTS

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Back issues

There are still a few copies of the celebrated first two issues of *The Food Magazine*

Issue 1 includes

- ★ BST – What are they doing to our milk?
- ★ Jumping on the bran wagon – the inside story on added bran in our diets
- ★ What's in canned meat – we take the lid off the canned meat industry
- ★ How natural is natural – are misleading labels a trading standards concern?
- ★ Catering for breakfast, lunch and dinner at £1.12 per day
- ★ Guest column – BBC's Derek Cooper

Issue 2 includes

- ★ 8-page Food Quality Supplement – the hidden hazards of eating healthy food
- ★ Soft-serve ice cream – the inside story
- ★ Homeless and hungry – preview report
- ★ Chernobyl after effects – the world trade in contaminated foods
- ★ Food aid to Britain's poor
- ★ Guest column – Lyn Faulds Wood

£2.50 inc. p & p per copy. Order from Subscriptions Dept, LFC, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR

COMING SOON

Issues 4, 5 and 6 of the Food Magazine will include:

- Cereal bars – we unwrap their claims to health and examine in detail their nutritional value
- A drop of the hard sell – we look at the alcohol content of products sold for newborn babies
- Training trade unionists – we examine a forthcoming union training pack on food
- Labelling and the EEC – will packets become unreadable as we enter the unified market?

- 100 years of MAFF – we join in the celebrations by assessing the pride and the shame of this enduring body
- Children's foods and nutrition – are babies getting what they need? Do children need vitamin pills?
- 3rd World rural co-operatives – the 'good-conscience' trading companies turn their attention to food imports
- Plus letters, your queries, science round-up, recipes and regular features and news.

When the unexpected can be expected – and that makes life exciting and enjoyable – you need routines. Without them deadlines and objectives could not be met.

So I wake up between 5.30 and 5.45 each morning, doze to 6.15, bolt into the shower, dress, take a cup of coffee which Susan has prepared downstairs, drink it, rush out of the door, rush back to kiss Susan goodbye, rush out again, get into the car and drive to the office. I park and open the office doors – if someone hasn't beaten me to it – by about 7.15. Then the day starts.

Clive Beddall, my close colleague, is also an early bird. We chat for ten to 15 minutes putting the world to rights. Last week we settled the Iranian problem but eventually decided it did not really merit our advice.

The work is varied. It takes in the mundane (sub-editing small pieces of badly written material) to writing features, deciding on news angles, making up pages, board and marketing conferences concerning other papers in the group, and meeting a variety of people sometimes as early as 7.30. These worm-catching appointments are a shock to their systems, but they feel so good afterwards I am sure it is worth the unique experience. A sort of purification. I have never understood the British 10 am office start. Industry has a much different idea of time and work.

An important part of the day is the half hour with Sheila Eggleston after the mail has been opened. She is much more of a personal assistant and editorial organiser than a secretary. Decisions are made about who does what to whom, when and how often. All members of the staff help to decide the diary dates (that is the theory anyway).

CONCERN

Sometimes I browse and a lot of worrying things go through my mind, some of which concern organisations such as the London Food Commission.

For example, one of the more deplorable changes, I believe, is the growth of lobbying groups who thrive on spreading anxiety neurosis. I consider the Commission to be amongst those who on occasion perform this task extremely well. I also accept that food manufacturers do not have much of a clue about how to respond or explain to



TONY DE ANGELI'S DIARY

For this issue we asked Tony de Angeli, editor of The Grocer, to contribute to our regular diary column. Here he gives us an insight into his daily life.

the trade or the public.

The absence of balance is what is worrying. The targets are so numerous, the language so uncontrolled, the charges so wide ... additives, sprayed produce that is grown on heavily fertilised soil, hormones in animals, battery methods ... all these matters are projected as one great conspiracy. And many more besides.

There is, of course, cause for disquiet on many particular issues but lobbies mix examples, arguments, opinions, and

even negative evidence – for example by suggesting scientific tests or scientific appraisals are not conclusive.

They will not appreciate the difference between risk and toxicity. Virtually all food is toxic if taken in sufficient quantity. Rhubarb will poison you but there is an amount which is acceptable to normal people without allergies or specific reaction. There are those who want to ban all sorts of things because there is a risk – however small. So the arguments about additives and manufactured foods are gyrating around what is acceptable. But different nations have different rules, different scientists have different views, and the lobbyists can always choose the ones which will throw suspicion on another finding – without having to produce objective and conclusive proof. Proving safety is much more difficult than disproving it.

SCARES

This constant barrage is, I believe, proving counter productive. Many organisations leading the fight to save the world, are producing so many scares that deaf ears are being used as a defence.

The recent controversy about what causes food poisoning is a case in point. Three press conferences took place on the same day, representing different points of view – one was probably engineered to take the wind out of the sails of the other two.

The generalised argument took in fat, fibre, colourings, nitrate residues, water in food ... sound argument was mixed with specious claims. There was no balance. I believe the bludgeon is being used instead of the rapier as PR techniques and loud hailer replace reason. One of the functions of The Grocer is to strike a balance between these warring factions which all have God and right on their sides.

Oh, if only they would occasionally admit they were wrong. If only they would step back (half a pace!) instead of marching on to war. At least editors apologise now and again, but this, cynics would say is probably due to solicitors' letters.

Tony de Angeli.

WINTER JACKETS

Choose large, even-shaped potatoes and scrub them. You can either prick them in several places with a knife point or fork to stop them from bursting, or slit the skin all round their circumference where you will halve them after cooking. Put them on a baking tray with coarse salt scattered over them if desired, and place in the oven.

An 8 oz potato will take at least an hour to cook through in a hot oven (425°F/220°C/Gas mark 7), 2 hours in a moderate one (350°F/180°C/Gas mark 4). They will not suffer from being left longer – the skin will thicken and become crunchier. But they are not pleasant if insufficiently cooked in the middle. Test by piercing with a skewer.

Cooking time can be speeded up, in fact, if they are baked either impaled on a special grid, with a nail for each potato, or pierced by nail or skewer. The metal acts as a conductor of heat to the centre of the potato.

All quantities of filling are for 6 potatoes.

Colourful mixed vegetable filling

4 oz onion, chopped
4 oz red pepper, diced
4 oz sweet corn, or the contents of a small tin
4 oz peas, fresh or frozen
3 tbs thick yoghurt
1 tbs oil
seasoning to taste

Soften the onion and diced pepper in the oil. Add the peas and sweet corn, cover the pan with a lid and leave to sweat over a low heat for five minutes or so. Season to taste and stir in the yoghurt after removing from the heat.

Baked potatoes can be embellished and served in many different ways to make an appetising, healthy and simply prepared snack, or with salad, a light meal. Here Amanda Goodfellow gives us some ideas.

Mushroom and bacon filling

4 oz lean bacon, diced
6 oz mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
4 oz onion or shallot, chopped
3 tbs oil
a little lemon juice
seasoning
1 tbs chopped parsley
3 tbs grated Cheddar cheese for topping

Fry the bacon in the oil until the fat runs, then add the chopped onion or shallot. Allow this to soften before tipping in the mushrooms. Toss together over moderate heat for a few minutes until the mushrooms are cooked. Season to taste with lemon juice, salt and pepper and stir in the parsley. Remove from the heat and leave to cool until ready to use.

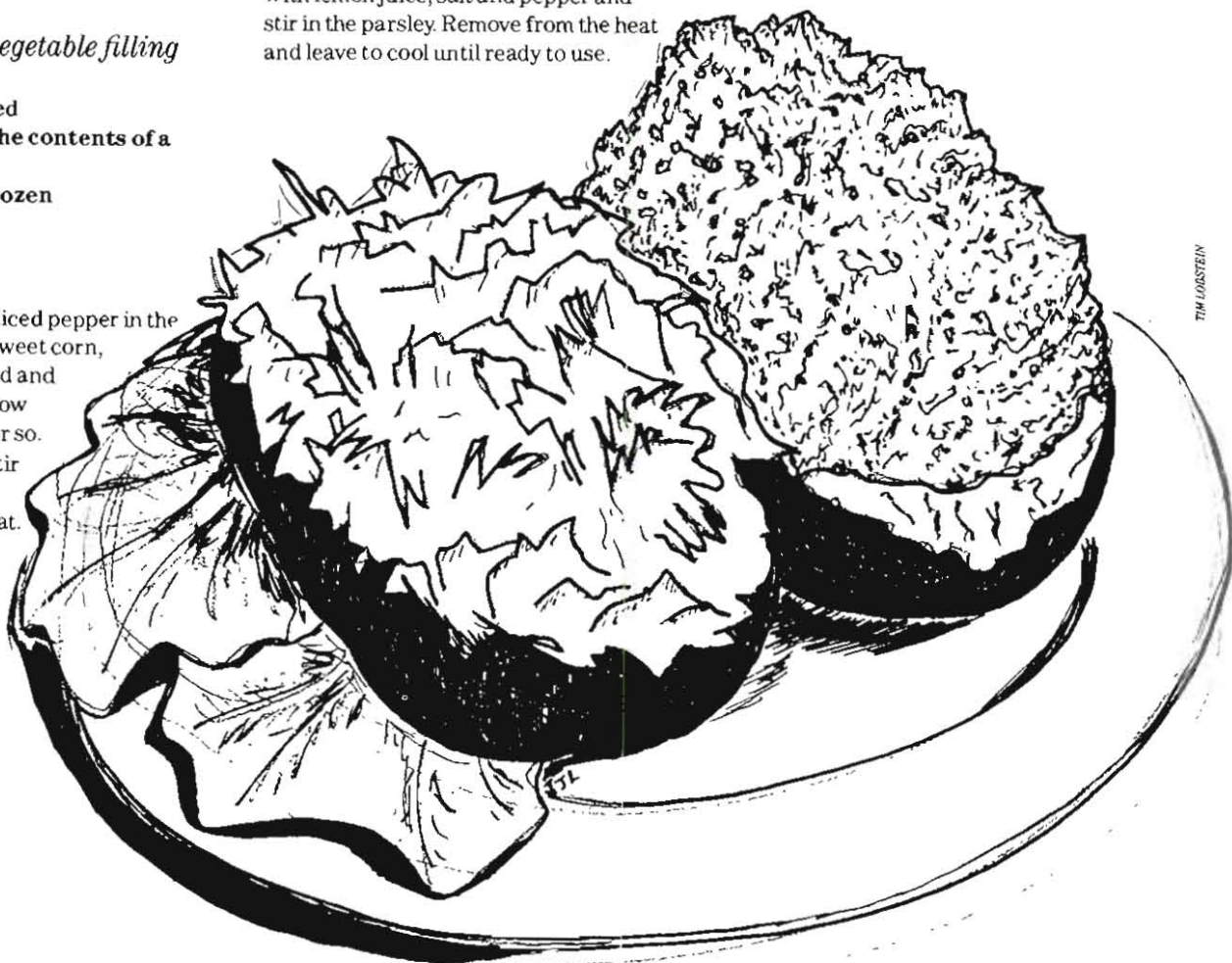
Cheese and onion filling

2 egg yolks
4 oz Lancashire cheese, grated
6 spring onions, finely sliced into rings
1 tsp paprika
seasoning to taste
4 tbs grated Cheddar cheese for topping

Mix together all the ingredients save the grated Cheddar.

To stuff the potatoes, slice them in half lengthwise when they are cooked. Scoop out the soft insides, leaving a thick shell, and mash with the filling of your choice. Check for seasoning. Spoon the mixture back into the potato shells, press down then roughen slightly with a fork. Scatter with cheese where appropriate and return the filled potatoes to the oven for 10-15 minutes.

These recipes will also be available in a forthcoming book, A Household Legacy by Amanda Goodfellow



TIM LOBSTEIN

Vitamin pills and IQ? Salt and blood pressure? Chlorine and cancer? ERIC BRUNNER reviews the journals

THE LANCET

Pupil pill power rubbished

The hyping of vitamin and mineral supplements to raise the IQ of schoolchildren followed, as sure as night follows day, the Benton and Roberts paper published in January. This claimed that supplementation raised non-verbal intelligence (see Food Magazine Issue 1, p 21). A repeat study, conducted by workers at Kings College, London on 154 children aged 11-12 did not confirm the results.

Pupils were given four tests of reasoning before and after taking either active or placebo pills for a month. The average scores on the re-tests were higher than the original scores in both groups (practice makes perfect!). But there were no differences in performance between supplement and placebo groups.

◊ Naismith DJ et al, 'Can children's intelligence be increased by vitamin and mineral supplements?', *The Lancet*, 1988, vol 2, p 335

Ghee mythology

'Analysis of conventional risk factors in (British) Asians suggests that hypertension, diet and stress may be important ... but current risk factors cannot explain the excess rate of heart disease', says a BMJ editorial dated 30 July 1988. Its authors refer to the idea that ghee (clarified butter) may be a culprit. In a 1987 study ghee was found to contain cholesterol oxides, which are known to damage blood vessels.

This hypothesis had been demolished four weeks before the BMJ editorial appeared. A letter to *The Lancet* reported a repeat study showing that ghee becomes totally unpalatable before any cholesterol oxides are produced. To put some figures to this, a rancid flavour develops at a 'peroxide value' of 0.5 but cholesterol oxides are only detectable at a peroxide value of 12, 'way beyond the degree of

autooxidation that would impart an unacceptable flavour to ghee'.

◊ Surendra Nath B & Rama Murthy MK, 'Cholesterol in Indian ghee', *The Lancet*, 1988, vol 2, p 39

BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

Major salt and blood pressure study

The massive Intersalt study confirms that high salt intake is linked to a rise in blood pressure with age. 10,000 men and women from 52 centres in 32 countries took part in Intersalt, designed to be the definitive study of the relations between salt and hypertension.

As is all too often the case with diet and health epidemiology, the results are not totally conclusive. Very low salt intake, measured as urinary sodium output, was again found to be linked with low blood pressure and little or no rise in blood pressure with age. These subjects all lived in non-industrialised cultures.

Across centres where salt intakes were higher, and more characteristic of the British diet, sodium was linked to rising blood pressure with age, but not to blood pressure itself, nor to the prevalence of high blood pressure.

The weakness of the relation shown may be due to the methods used in the study. Single 24-hour urinary sodium and blood pressure measurements were made on each person. Both of these have variability over time which tends to weaken the validity of the estimates used in the statistics.

The results show that a halving of salt intake, from 12 to 6 grams per day, would reduce systolic blood pressure by 2.2 mm Hg, assuming that the sodium-blood pressure link is causal. This is a small amount, given that systolic blood

pressure varied from 95 to 182 mm Hg across the study centres, but it may still bring important public health benefits.

Intersalt Cooperative Research Group, 'Intersalt: an international study of electrolyte excretion and blood pressure. Results for 24 hour urinary sodium and potassium excretion', *British Medical Journal*, 1988, vol 297, pp 319-328

Booze, the bigger culprit?

The Scottish heart health study provides data on health behaviour within rather than between communities. These show that age, weight, pulse rate and alcohol consumption came ahead of salt intake as predictors of blood pressure. Potassium output was found to be inversely related to blood pressure, implying that potassium rich foods are beneficial to the circulation.

◊ Smith WCS et al, 'Urinary electrolyte excretion, alcohol consumption, and blood pressure in the Scottish heart health study', *British Medical Journal*, 1988, vol 297, pp 329-330

CHEMISTRY & INDUSTRY

Chlorinated water and cancer

Water chemists have detected the potent mutagen MX, or 3-chloro, 4-(dichloromethyl), 5-hydroxy furanone, in chlorinated drinking water. The Water Research Centre in Marlow does not believe that MX poses a significant health risk, but points to the need to study the problem.

Chlorine reacts with natural constituents of ground and surface waters, producing chemicals of uncertain toxicology. It may be necessary to find an alternative disinfectant or to use chlorine more sparingly if the risk is confirmed.

◊ *Chemistry and Industry*, May 2 1988, p 281

Heart attacks preventable by diet change

The European Atherosclerosis Society has produced a policy statement on raised blood fat levels in adults. They estimate that 16 per cent of heart attacks in men aged 40 to 64 could be prevented by diet changes alone, and a further 7 per cent by diet and drug treatment.

◊ *European Heart Journal*, May 1988

North-South dietary divide

Differences in the diets of middle-aged people are thought by many, not to mention a well-known junior government minister, to contribute to the large geographical and social class differences in disease and death rates in Britain. The first large-scale analysis of this issue found dietary differences of a rather unexpected kind.

Consumption of fat and other main nutrients was measured in 2340 men and women in Ipswich, Stoke-on-Trent and Wakefield. Fat consumption was lowest in the northern industrial town, which had the highest death rates from heart disease.

The authors suggest that development and health, including diet, in childhood is more important than diet in middle-age. But they do not explain how it can be valid to compare death rates for 1968-78 with diets recorded in 1984-85. The time between was one of great dietary change.

◊ Cade JE et al, 'Diet and inequalities in health in three English towns', *British Medical Journal*, 1988, vol 296, pp 1359-1362

In January's Food Magazine No 4:

- ★ Cereal bars' health claims
- ★ Alcohol for young babies
- ★ Vitamins for children
- plus news, letters, recipes and features