

THE FOOD MAGAZINE

WITH
NATIONAL FOOD
ALLIANCE NEWS &
CONSUMER CHECKOUT

Issue 14 Volume 2 ♦ July/September 1991 ♦ £3.50

**THE SALT
SELLERS**

**FAMILIES
FACING
HUNGER**

**W.H.O.
TARGETS FOR
HEALTHY
EATING**



**THE LABELS
THAT MUST
CHANGE**

**DIET FOODS
CAN MAKE
YOU FAT**

**GOVERNMENT
SLAMS FOOD
SUPPLEMENTS**

Sweeter than sweet

THE SUGAR AND SACCHARIN IN CHILDREN'S SUMMER TREATS

THE FOOD COMMISSION

The Food Commission is your consumer watchdog on food. We are independent of the food industry and government and rely on subscriptions, donations and grants for our funding. We aim to provide independently researched information on the food we eat to ensure good quality food for all.

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Exercising free choice



Present food policies cannot supply healthy diets to those most at risk of dietary diseases. Not our assertion, but the conclusion reached by an expert committee of the World Health Organisation.

People in industrialised countries suffer more dietary disease than peasant farmers, largely, says the WHO, because of the support and subsidies given to the meat, dairy and sugar industries. Support for these industries may have made sense when priorities were to ensure sufficient food for growing urban populations. But it makes no sense when the main dietary problems are caused not by a deficiency but by an excessive intake of the products of these industries.

Concentrating on public education alone is not sufficient, the WHO report argues. We know enough, it says, 'to enable governments to protect their populations through policies that make healthy food choices the easy choices.' This may mean governments taking responsibility for 'availability, price and nutrient compositional standards of food.'

Making healthy choices requires more than cash. Cash is important, as the National Children's Home report on children, poverty and nutrition emphasised by showing that healthy food for a family on Income Support would cost an extra £6, some 20 per cent added to their shopping bill.

But just raising Income Support for a family by this amount will never suffice to ensure that healthy food baskets are bought instead of cheaper ones. We take the WHO's view: as long as healthy foods are priced above less healthy foods, as long as cheap food has poorer nutritional quality, many families on low income will still buy the cheaper, unhealthy foods. They have, after all, other bills to pay with the extra cash.

Last year we asked why manufacturers were not only adding seven lumps of sugar to children's orange squash, but also a large dose of saccharin. With one in six children aged two to five estimated to be consuming more saccharin than recommended (by both the EC and the WHO), we have been investigating why.

Now we have the answer. The main reason is simple – saccharin is cheaper than sugar. It also allows a manufacturer to make a product taste even sweeter without becoming syrupy. In Consumer Checkout we investigate the brands of soft drinks and ice lollies sweetened this way.

Manufacturers know that a sweeter taste gives more instant appeal to kids. Many parents will know how much more difficult it is to interest children in healthier, more nutritious food once they've developed a sweet tooth.

Artificial sweeteners are also used in many 'diet' and 'light' foods. So-called 'diet' drinks and table-top sweeteners can easily seem the answer in the desire to lose weight. But on page 17 we present disturbing evidence questioning the ability of artificial sweeteners to help people lose weight. They may even encourage people to eat more.

In this issue we welcome readers to our page News from the National Food Alliance (see page 8) which we include as a regular contribution to *The Food Magazine*. The NFA brings together a broad range of organisations concerned with food issues and we offer our support to it.

Sue Dibb
Tim Lobstein

Free with this issue

Subscribers to *The Food Magazine* will find enclosed with this issue a free copy of Genetic Engineering, a paper produced by the UK Genetics Forum and Parents for Safe Food.

And please – pass on our new green leaflet to a friend or colleague. We are happy to supply larger numbers to people who can help promote the magazine.

New moves on baby foods

Following the report in the last issue of *The Food Magazine* attacking the poor quality of commercial weaning foods, moves have been made to amend the proposed draft European directive controlling the composition of these foods.

The Food Commission, Baby Milk Action and Action and Information on Sugars are submitting criticisms of the draft directive to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food before the round of negotiations begins this summer.

The EC directive proposes to permit levels of sugars of over 20 per cent in savoury baby cereals and over 30 per cent in 'simple' baby cereals and baby rusks (18 per cent and 27 per cent of energy, respectively). Ready-to-eat baby desserts will be allowed the equivalent of sixteen sugar lumps in a typical Stage 2 jar.

Baby fruit drinks will be allowed up to 15 per cent sugar, which is nearly half again the levels found at present. Although sugar concentration makes little difference to the damage the sugar will do to teeth, Action and Information on Sugars is arguing that the calorie content—50 Calories in a

typical baby drink at present and over 70 Calories under the EC proposals—will constitute a significant part of a baby's daily needs, leaving the baby less hungry for more nutritious foods. Giving a baby five drinks a day, as the labels suggest, replaces as much as a third of their food, rising to half their food under the EC proposal.

Wot? No meat?

The EC proposes that the meat content of the savoury items can be as low as ten per cent in products such as Beef and Vegetable Dinner, and eight per cent in Vegetable and Beef Dinner. Although babies do not need meat, and should not be given large amounts of protein, the Food Commission's own surveys show that parents expect on average 25-30 per cent. The purpose of weaning foods is to help babies transfer from an all-milk diet to a family food diet, and the Food Commission believes parents are being misled when they buy foods that are very different to those they make at home.

The Food Commission is also asking the Ministry whether this small amount of meat, which will be highly processed by the time it gets into baby

food, can be relied on to provide the essential fatty acids a baby needs for brain and vascular development.

Wallpaper paste

No minimum calorie levels are being set by the EC directive. The Food Commission believes this will perpetuate the food companies' practice of diluting their products with water and thickeners, described by one researcher as 'wallpaper paste' in the case of ready-to-eat dinners, and 'polyfiller' for the powder mix dinners. Even though the Department of Health has reduced the recommended levels of calories needed by babies, an eight or nine month baby will still need some 400 Calories per day in addition to the calories the baby would get from drinking a pint of full-cream milk.

With cans and jars providing typically 70-90 Calories (and several we have looked at contained less than 60 Calories) this still means a baby would need five cans or jars a day if they rely on this sort of food. Assuming nothing is wasted, this amounts to thirty five cans a week, costing around £11.

When faced with these arguments, the baby food manufacturers say that they do not expect parents to rely on their foods. Trevor Bell, managing director of Milupa, said: 'Our food is not meant to be a complete diet, but should be supplemented with food made by the mother.'

This is dramatically at odds with Milupa's packets, which claim that Milupa dinners ensure 'your baby is given all the nourishment needed for healthy development' and 'There are no extras to add ...'

Catching them young

Baby Milk Action is objecting to the EC

proposal to permit weaning foods to be sold as suitable for infants 'over the age of three months'. They point out that the World Health Organisation has criticised commercial attempts to disrupt breastfeeding before complementary feeding is nutritionally required. At the 1990 World Health Assembly, member countries unanimously adopted a resolution to protect breastfeeding 'during the first four to



EC draft proposals allow up to sixteen sugar lumps in a larger jar of baby dessert

six months of life'

A previous draft of the EC proposals actually included a requirement on manufacturers to label their products as suitable from four months, and Baby Milk Action would like to see this limit reinstated.

No zapping

No mention is made in the EC proposals of whether baby food can be irradiated or can include irradiated ingredients.

The FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius, which recommends world standards for baby foods, has specifically prohibited the use of irradiation in connection with baby milks, baby cereals and baby weaning foods. The Food Commission is currently surveying baby food companies on their views concerning the use of irradiation, and in the meantime is urging that a similar prohibition be included in the EC Directive.

Tales of chicken and beef

In the last issue of *The Food Magazine* we reported finding chicken meat in a Boots Vegetable and Beef Dinner. Boots did not accept that the beef pellets used in dry baby foods could be contaminated with chicken and asked for the samples to be re-tested.

The manufacturers of the testing kit were unable to confirm the presence of chicken meat in the product—it scored just less than the cut-off level for positive identification. We are happy to report their findings.

While having the Vegetable and Beef Dinner re-tested, we also asked the laboratory to test Boots

Vegetable and Chicken Casserole. They found poultry meat present in this dinner, as we would expect. However, they also found a positive identification of beef.

No mention is made on the Chicken Casserole label that beef may be present. Careful reading shows that 'meat extract' is included, which is presumably the source of the beef found in the test.

Parents wanting to avoid beef, whether for religious reasons or because of anxiety over mad cow disease, should look carefully at ingredients lists and not assume that the meat in chicken dinner is all chicken.

Mothers and children go hungry

A report from the National Children's Home published in June calls for substantial increases in benefit levels in order to improve low-income family diets, following a survey of over 350 parents of young children using their family centres.

The survey found that at least one in ten of children under five had gone without food during the previous month for lack of money. A greater proportion of parents — one in five — had gone without food in the past month, and nearly half had gone without food at least once in the previous year.

In a follow-up interview of a small sample of parents, several had gone without food and all were eating unhealthy diets. Yet in every case they knew the sort of foods that would constitute a healthy diet, and would buy healthier foods if they had the cash.

Rejecting the call for extra money, social security minister Ann Widdecombe said the survey showed that it was perfectly possible to live on present benefit levels. 'If three quarters of those surveyed said they usually have enough money for food, what is the difference between those who are successfully feeding their children and those who are not? It doesn't seem to be the level of state support.'

The NCH chief executive, Tom White, said people living in outlying estates could not easily get to cheaper high street shops and supermarkets. 'Travel costs could be as high as £5 and for these families they can't afford that. They have to buy from the local shop.'

Speaking at the launch of the NCH report, Glenys Kinnock noted that one in three single parent families lives on an income of less

than £9 per day. 'The normalities of childhood are effectively prohibited to such families', she said. 'It is not just that there are no birthday cards, special treats, presents or trips. When income is so low that it permits only bare existence, there are children who get neither the quantity nor the quality of food needed to sustain a healthy, growing child.'

For more details of the NCH study, which was undertaken with assistance from The Food Commission, turn to pages 18-19.

■ *NCH Poverty and Nutrition Survey (1991), £5 from NCH, 85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD.*

Food benefit levels falling

Estimates of the food allowances given as part of Income Support (IS) show that they provide a smaller amount in relation to a family's actual needs than they did twelve years ago.

The food element of IS stands at £14.32 for an adult and £5.44 for a young child, according to estimates published by the shadow secretary of state for social security, Michael Meache, MP. These amounts represent 67 per cent of the amounts actually being spent by low-income families. Comparable figures for 1979 show that the food element of the then Supplementary Benefit supplied 77-79 per cent of the amounts actually spent.

■ Details from Michael Meache's office, telephone 071-219 6109.

WHO warns of hazards of poor diet

The World Health Organization has warned industrial countries that typical modern diets are worse than those of peasant farmers or traditional hunter-gatherers. Modest prosperity leads to a great increase in risk, says the WHO in a report on the links between diet and diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity and dental caries.

Unlike previous reports which focus on nutrients, this latest analysis makes recommendations that include actual foods such as vegetables and pulses. Its formula for healthy eating is shown in the table below.

The WHO also addresses the policy implications of changing to healthier diets. Its recommendations will, it admits, run counter to the 'entrenched farming and industrial interests', who will not welcome advice that people should reduce their consumption of meat, dairy foods and sugar. Policies developed at a time when the priority was simply to get enough nutrients are no longer appropriate at a time when the major dietary diseases are due to excess of certain nutrients, it says.

In an implied attack on the free-market approach to public health which offers little more than public education on what people should eat, the WHO report calls for national policies on the availability, price and nutrient compositional standards of foods. This, it says, is the major responsibility of governments, who should aim to ensure that 'the healthy food choices are the easy food choices.'

In the UK, the Government's Green Paper on Health admitted that the average person dies younger in Britain

than in Spain or Greece. Giving targets for reducing the incidence of major chronic diseases, the Department of Health said that obesity is currently increasing, with 37 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women overweight. Salt intake was deemed to be excessively high and 85 per cent of people are eating more fat than they should.

■ *Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Disease, Executive Summary, World Health Organization, Geneva, 1991*

■ *The Health of the Nation, HMSO, 1991*



Produced by the Guild of Food Writers and the Coronary Prevention Group, this 16-page glossy colour booklet forms part of a Healthy Eating Campaign launched in April. The Campaign is promoting issues highlighted by the WHO report (see above) and is also supported by the Consumers' Association and the National Federation of Women's Institutes. For copies of the booklet (price £1.95 including p&p) contact The Coronary Prevention Group, 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA. Telephone 071-935 2889

The WHO target diet for a healthy life

	Minimum amount	Maximum amount
Saturated fat	0	10% energy
Polyunsaturated fat	3% energy	7% energy
Starchy carbohydrates	50% energy	70% energy
Sugar	0	10% energy
Salt	(not stated)	6 grams/day
Fruits and vegetables	400 grams/day	(not stated)
of which nuts/seeds/pulses	30 grams/day	(not stated)

New controls on food supplements

The government is recommending tighter legislation covering dietary supplements and health foods. The recommendations follow concern over adverse health effects from some products and the misleading marketing of many dietary supplements.

The report, *Dietary Supplements and Health Foods*, produced by a joint Ministry of Agriculture and Department of Health working party, makes over twenty recommendations to control the use, composition and advertising of health foods and dietary supplements. It concludes that there is no justification for treating so-called 'health' foods separately from any other foods.

The report cites hazards to health from toxic substances such as germanium supplements; contamination of products, which may have occurred in the case of tryptophan supplements; supplements containing high levels of nutrients known to be toxic in excess, such as vitamin B6, niacin and vitamin A; and the presence of natural toxicants in supplements or foods such as comfrey.

Looking at misleading claims, the working party concluded that excessive claims were being made for some supplements and that in other cases the use of descriptive names implied benefits to health which may also mislead consumers. The report cites claims for evening primrose oil, royal jelly, garlic, ginseng and guarana as examples of statements that may be misleading and/or have implied medicinal claims. Claims, for instance, that a food is 'capable of preventing, treating or curing human disease', whether expressed or implied in labelling or advertising, are not

permissible without a medicinal product licence. The working party recommends that this legislation should be more vigorously enforced. Implied claims are, however, a matter of subjective judgement. Enforcement officers have been reluctant to prosecute in this grey area, leaving many claims unchecked, though the report notes the EC's intention to impose stringent controls which would effectively ban health claims.

The report does not consider dietary supplements sold as slimming aids. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) recently criticised spurious health claims such as those for Slimming Tea but recognises that its system of self-regulation leaves opportunities for unscrupulous companies to make misleading claims. The ASA says it will continue to expose companies making misleading, unsupported health claims but it cannot insist that a magazine or newspaper refuses to take such advertising.

As a nation we spend over £140m a year on dietary supplements. Ironically it is those people at greatest risk of poor diet who spend the least. Sophisticated marketing has changed the perception of vitamins and tonics from 'pick-me-ups' to being aids for a healthy lifestyle. The report's recommendations will be welcomed by those concerned about the worse excesses of this expanding industry.

■ *Dietary Supplements and Health Foods*, £4.95. Available from MAFF Publications, London SE9 7TP, quoting reference PB0439.

■ Comments on the report should be sent to Chemical Safety of Food Division, MAFF R 429e, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR.

Consumer checkout looks at two megavitamins and a diet spray — see page 16.

Ad challenge to Mars & Milky Way

'A Mars a day helps you work rest and play' and 'Milky Way, the sweet you can eat between meals without ruining your appetite' are two slogans being challenged under new advertising guidelines which ban generalised health claims.

The health watchdog, Action and Information on Sugars (AIS), says that Mars, Milky Way, Milky Bar and Ribena are all defying clauses in the new Independent Television Commission (ITC) advertising code, which came into effect this year. The Milky Way slogan directly violates the new rule forbidding commercials which encourage children to eat frequently throughout the day, say the campaigners.

The Milky Way slogan may be of long standing, but new health evidence, the new ITC code, and increasing public awareness of the health issues involved create a situation in which this slogan is no

longer tolerable,' says AIS campaigner Andrea Castell.

The complaint follows new recommendations from the government's Food Advisory Committee that there should be stringent controls on health claims for foods, which should only be permitted if supported by dietary recommendations from the



Department of Health.

AIS has challenged Mars to produce scientific evidence to justify its slogan. Meanwhile the ITC has confirmed that it is investigating the complaints.

Accreditation scheme for health education leaflets

A call to set up a national accreditation scheme for health education resources is proposed in a document published this summer. The proposals, drawn up by a working party which includes the Coronary Prevention Group, the Health Education Authority, the Food Commission and the National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention, seek to ensure high standards of health education in leaflets and other materials concerned with food and health. A wide range of organisations are being asked to endorse the recommendations.

The concern arises primarily from commercially sponsored material, available to clinics, schools and doctors' surgeries but which in a substantial number of cases has been found to be inaccurate, misleading or promotional. Existing controls on the content and distribution of health education materials are inadequate to maintain consistently high standards, the report argues.

■ Copies of the document, *Health Education Resources Concerning Food and Health: A Policy Statement*, available from the Coronary Prevention Group, 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA. Tel: 071-935 2889.

Nutrition claims can mislead

Nutrition claims such as 'low fat', 'high fibre' and 'low cholesterol' are often ambiguous, selective and irrelevant, says the Coronary Prevention Group (CPG) whose survey of 632 claims made on all products from five leading supermarket chains was published in June. Such claims often fail to help consumers choose a healthy diet.

Of foods making a 'low fat' claim, 44 per cent failed to meet the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food criteria for a low fat food, and 26 per cent were actually for foods which were high in fat. Seventy per cent of fat claims were for foods that were high in salt,

therefore potentially negating any health benefit.

Less than 20 per cent of foods with nutrition claims gave full nutrition information, and 70 per cent of cholesterol claims, 70 per cent of salt claims and 65 per cent of sugar claims did not even declare the nutrient referred to in the claim.

The CPG says claims can be misleading for at least three reasons. Firstly, they can be ambiguous — are 'low fat' spreads just lower in fat than other spreads such as butter and margarine, or relative to all other foods? 'Low fat' spreads are in fact still a high fat food.

Secondly, nutrition claims, by

emphasising the desirable characteristic, are selective and may obscure less desirable nutritional features. For example several breakfast cereals claimed to be 'high in fibre' but neglected to state that they were also high in salt and sugar.

Thirdly, such claims can be irrelevant. For example, foods that claim to contain 'no cholesterol' may offer little benefit to health, and confuse between dietary and blood cholesterol, of which the latter is the more important factor. To reduce blood cholesterol levels, people should primarily reduce their fat — particularly saturated fat —

intake, but foods making cholesterol claims are often high in fat and saturated fat.

The Coronary Prevention Group would like to see greater controls on the use of claims to ensure they do not mislead. UK legislation is inadequate and many claims would not meet proposed EC legislation despite the directive's own weakness, says the report. The CPG proposes its own criteria and wants to see nutrition labelling made mandatory for all foods.

Interestingly, the report found that foods making nutrition claims were no better labelled than other foods, indicating that manufacturers may be more interested in making a bold promotional claim than in providing the facts.

■ *The Regulating of Nutrition Claims Summary Paper*, price £7.95, and *Full Report*, price £250, are available from the Coronary Prevention Group, 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA

FAC call for sweeping label reforms

Food labels should be clearer, provide more useful information and not mislead, say new recommendations from the government-appointed Food Advisory Committee. The committee's comprehensive review of food labelling legislation and practices makes recommendations for improvements to all aspects of food labelling.

Food labelling should, the committee says 'provide sufficient information about all food available for purchase, not just pre-packed foods, in a clear manner so that the consumer can make informed choices and can store and prepare the food appropriately.'

The committee would like to see a standard box of information on food packets so that consumers can easily find the useful information and not be misled by claims made in larger print. Health and consumer groups are disappointed that the committee did not recommend compulsory nutrition labelling.

The committee's recommenda-

tions include the following:

- Quantitative ingredient labelling should show, for example, how much fish is in a fish finger or how much juice in a juice drink.
- The word 'flavour' (often confused with flavoured) should be replaced by the word 'taste'.
- All foods to carry full ingredient lists including alcoholic drinks, honey, chocolate, butter and cheese, all currently exempt.
- Labels should not state that a food is free from a particular ingredient or additive if it contains other ingredients or substances with the same characteristic. For example claims that a product containing the colour sunset yellow is 'tartrazine free', or that a product is 'saccharin free' when containing aspartame, or 'free from preservatives' when it contains vinegar, should not be permitted.
- Meaningless terms such as 'special', 'selected', 'healthy' and 'wholesome' should not be used without

further explanation.

- Claims about nutritional value — eg low fat, high fibre, low calorie etc — should meet agreed criteria. Claims such as 'light' or 'diet' should also explain their meaning.
- Medicinal claims (currently banned) and food endorsement schemes by health promotion agencies such as the Health Education Authority should not be permitted. Health claims such as 'this food may help reduce the risk of heart disease' do not in general have a place in food labelling and advertising and should only be permitted if they can be justified in relation to recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer.
- There should be labelling of post-harvest pesticide treatments on produce, but not for all pesticides used, or treatments given to farm animals.
- There should be more information on food sold in catering establishments.

■ Foods should carry clearer and more specific storage instructions; phrases such as 'keep cool/store in a refrigerator' are too vague.

In its response to the FAC proposals MAFF has generally welcomed the report, though its commitment to many of the proposals remains obscure. As many recommendations will require 'action at European Community level' or require 'the views of interested parties before reaching a decision', it is unlikely that these recommendations will be quickly introduced.

In the meantime the Food Commission would like to see responsible manufacturers and retailers adopting many of these recommendations on a voluntary basis.

■ *Food Advisory Committee Review of Food Labelling and Advertising 1990*, HMSO, 1991, £11.25

Consumer Checkout went shopping for misleading food labels — see the results in this issue's centre pages.

UK is losing in Euro-market

The UK is losing out in the European food marketing war according to new figures. The UK now imports twice as much food and drink as it exports, with official statistics showing last years trade deficit in food to be £5.1 billion, the worst on record. Food and drink now accounts for nearly a third of the total national trade deficit, far higher than any other sector of the economy.

While exports of food and drink rose slightly from £5.5 billion to £5.9 billion in the previous year, imports rose more steeply from £10.2 billion in 1989 to £11 billion in 1990, a rise of nearly eight per cent. Over 50 per cent of the deficit is accounted for by products which can be grown in the UK such as meat, dairy products, vegetables and indigenous fruits. Concern over BSE in Germany and France has been

blamed for reduced exports of meat.

Since 1983, Food From Britain (FFB), jointly funded by government and industry, has had the uphill task of trying to reduce this trade deficit. Critics say it has failed to convince either the British housewife or her overseas counterpart of the value of 'buying British'. Its 'Foodmark' quality assurance scheme failed to grab the attention of the home market and its attempts to concentrate on export markets in France, Germany, Benelux and the USA have not reaped good returns. In 1985/6 these four key markets represented 45 per cent of all UK exports, but by 1990 this was down to about 33 per cent.

In FFB's defence, chairman Paul Judge has complained that FFB's equivalent organisations in France and Germany have budgets of more than £50 million, seven times the

British level. He hit out at many British manufacturers' head-in-the-sand approach to European marketing. 'Despite some improvement, British manufacturers are still not deploying sufficient resources to capture a large share of what will become a huge home market after 1992.'

Whilst it may take more than a set of poor trade figures to persuade Britain's traditionally independent producers to follow the more successful marketing route of Europe's large farming co-operatives, others question whether the problem is purely one of marketing. As Sir James Goldsmith, former food company tycoon, confessed recently 'British manufacturers produce poor quality food and use too many additives'. Perhaps this open secret has been known all along by European housewives.

Food sampling rates 'too low'

Local authorities, responsible for monitoring food quality by taking routine food samples, have been accused of falling short of recommended food sampling rates. Some authorities appear to be doing virtually no food sampling at all.

According to the Association of Public Analysts (APA), an estimated 86,000 food samples were taken during 1990, of which 68,000 were routine 'planned' samples, an average of 1.25 planned samples per thousand population. Both the international Codex recommendations and draft European Commission proposals set 2.5 samples per thousand population as a standard for planned sampling rates, double the present average figure in Britain.

The figures for the UK show significant variations: Scotland showed an average of 3.2 per thousand, English counties an average of 1.06 and the average for London boroughs was a surprisingly low 0.5 per thousand.

GMB calls for food worker hygiene

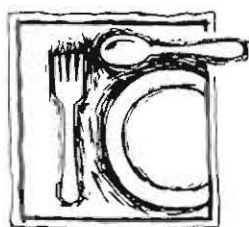
Workers in the food industry play an important role in ensuring high standards of consumer protection, says a new booklet on food safety and training from the GMB, the UK's largest trade union in the food industry.

Lack of training of both management and employees has been identified as a key contributor to poor hygiene practices in food businesses. While some companies already operate in-house training schemes, the majority of workers in the food industry receive little or no training. The GMB is calling for food hygiene

training to be part of an all-embracing training agreement for all workers.

The booklet summarises the provisions of the Food Safety Act and the Food Hygiene Regulations. It includes a checklist on training and good practice, both of which are essential to ensure not only good employment practice but high standards for consumer protection. These, the GMB argues, will lead to greater consumer confidence in the food industry.

■ GMB booklet available from: Communications Dept, GMB, 22-24 Worple Road, London SW19 4DD. Free to GMB members, £3.50 otherwise.



rights guide to
**THE FOOD AND
SAFETY ACT**

GMB
working together

First UK irradiation plant given go ahead

The government has given the go ahead to the first UK company to use food irradiation on a commercial basis. This follows the lifting of the UK ban on the controversial technology by the government from January this year.

The company, Isotron based in Swindon, has been granted a licence from June to irradiate spices and condiments. Isotron's Marketing Director was the technical and economic advisor to the government committee which first approved irradiation in the UK.

The company has confirmed it already has orders waiting to be processed, though declined to name its clients. It is anticipated that the main ingredient to be irradiated will be black pepper, likely to be used mainly by manufacturers and the catering trade. However the Food Irradiation Campaign is concerned that its use may not be made clear on the finished

food because of a labelling loophole. If an irradiated ingredient is part of a composite food such as peppered sausage on a pizza, its use does not need to be declared.

Food irradiation has not received widespread support throughout the spice trade. Companies including McCormick, British Pepper and Spice, Sharwoods and Lucas Ingredients have joined the Food Irradiation Campaign's positive list of companies who do not intend to use the process or purchase irradiated ingredients. Many of these companies are developing alternative processes using heat and steam treatments to clean spices. The Food Irradiation Campaign's positive list is available from Martine Drake, The Food Irradiation Campaign, c/o The Food Commission, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR (price £3.00 for full list or £1.00 for June 91 update only)

Patent Concern opposes EC directive on patenting of life

The campaigning coalition Patent Concern is encouraging people to write to their MEPs and MPs as part of a campaign to halt EC legislation intended to allow patents on genetically engineered life forms.

The coalition of leading animal welfare, consumer, environmental and third world organisations, brought together by the Genetics Forum, has written to UK prime minister John Major and the EC's president Jacques Delors urging them to reject the EC directive and support a moratorium on the patenting of life.

The coalition believes that the

directive raises serious ethical concerns and may damage animal welfare. Patents could increase the control by large companies of agriculture and genetic resources, particularly in the third world. 'Patenting of life has profound implications for society. It is imperative that we do not rush into it without a full public debate. Until this happens there should be a moratorium on the patenting of life', said Dr David King of the Genetics Forum.

■ Patent Concern has produced a briefing paper and details of what you can do, available from the Genetics Forum, 258 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JY. Send a large sae. Donations welcome.

P is for Pesticides

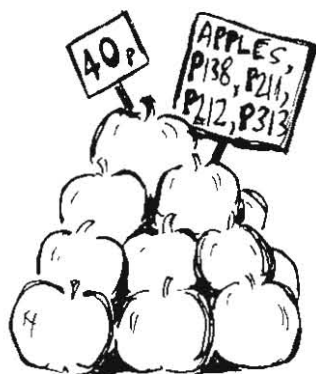
An international campaign to label all pesticides with a 'P' numbering scheme was launched in May with the support of eleven UK consumer, environmental and third world organisations. The scheme, which the World Health Organisation is being asked to set up, would simplify the current national and international confusion over chemical and trade names for the approximately one thousand pesticide ingredients used worldwide, say supporters.

The government's own consumer survey, published last year (see *The Food Magazine* issue 12), found that half of those questioned wanted more information on pesticides used on foods. The more recent Food Advisory Committee report on labelling (see page 5) proposes that post-harvest pesticide treatments should be indicated on the product label, a move which is thought likely to be in line with EC proposals to be published this year.

But Tim Lang of Parents for Safe Food says these moves do not go far enough. Eventually he would like to see 'P' numbers on each food label, indicating the pesticides used.

'People have the right to know if a pesticide has been used', he said. 'The "P" numbering scheme could be used to help farmers as well as retailers and consumers to have clear information.'

■ For further details contact Parents for Safe Food, c/o 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA (071-935 2099) or the Pesticides Trust, 23 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR (071-274 8895).



Farmers fight SAFE agriculture

Big farming interests have declared war on a new initiative set up to promote sustainable and more environmentally sound agriculture. The Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Environment (SAFE) Alliance has won the financial backing of former food company corporate raider, Sir James Goldsmith, whose conversion to green consciousness hit headlines last year.

Now Goldsmith is putting his money where his mouth is by promising £1 million to fund SAFE, an alliance of farming groups, environmentalists and consumer groups. SAFE is committed to agricultural intensification rather than further intensification, which has already led to environmental damage, surpluses of unhealthy foods, threats to public health and the destruction of rural communities.

One villain of the piece is the EC's Common Agricultural Policy, now facing reform under pressure from the GATT negotiations. But EC farm minister, Ray MacSharry's plans to slash subsidies to Europe's farmers while guaranteeing an income for small farmers so far have been thwarted by big farming interests led by the UK's agriculture minister John Gummer.

After a stormy meeting with Mr Gummer, Sir James Goldsmith was reported as saying, 'He represents the agro-chemical industry and the large farms, and his rejection of the MacSharry plan is wholly irresponsible.' Sir James said UK food policies favoured the big food companies, which produce poor-quality food and use too many additives. Gummer assured Goldsmith that the direction of British agriculture was safe in his hands.

Sir James gave up his UK food business interests last year, including selling out a large shareholding

in Ranks Hovis McDougall.

SAFE wants to see a radical restructuring of the CAP by phasing out price support. This would be replaced by support for environmentally sensitive agriculture which is beneficial to the environment and sensitive to consumer demand, and produces safe and healthy food in a manner that is supportive of rural life and culture. SAFE argues that the rural economy needs restructuring in order to keep people in the countryside.

Though not intending to court controversy, SAFE is already seen as a threat by some of Britain's big farming interests. Declaring war in an editorial headlined 'Yeoman of England: a call to arms!', *Farming News* in May concluded: 'There must be no unilateral abandonment of scientific agriculture. There must be no surrender.'

■ For more information on SAFE, send a large SAE to Nick Hildyard, SAFE Alliance, c/o The Ecologist, Station Road, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 1BB.

Goldsmith to give Caroline Walker lecture

Sir James Goldsmith will be giving the third Caroline Walker Lecture on Wednesday 16 October in London, on the theme of 'Food and Agriculture'. Tickets (£15) for the Caroline Walker Trust's Evening of Celebration include a reception, and the proceeds will go to the Trust's bursaries for young research workers committed to the improvement of public health by means of good food. Applications for tickets to the Caroline Walker Trust at 61 Redchurch Street, London E2 7DU.

Goldsmith backs National Food Alliance

When the UK government finally decides to take the issue of food and public health seriously, where will it go for guidance? The National Food Alliance is now set to be the UK think-tank on national food and agriculture policy, with funding from an extraordinary source: former food company magnate Sir James Goldsmith.

'This government seems unable to realise just what an appalling effect the average UK diet has on public health. What we need in this country is a think-tank to draw up a new, rational and progressive food and agriculture policy. I see that as the role of the National Food Alliance,' says Alliance chairman Geoffrey Cannon, author of *The Politics of Food*.

The National Food Alliance was founded as a result of an initiative taken by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in 1984. The original inspiration came from Jeanette Longfield, then of NCVO, now of the Coronary Prevention Group and the Alliance secretary. At an early meeting attended by representatives of over 20 organisations, Tom Burke, director of The Green Alliance, pointed out that economic, agriculture and health policies are all in a state of flux — and food policy is the point where they intersect.

The aims of the Alliance were then identified as:

- To reduce the rates of suffering and death from diseases caused at least in

part by an unhealthy diet.

- To encourage people to make informed choices about food, and to improve the quality of food in the shops.

- To increase awareness of the impact of food and agriculture practices on employment and the environment.

With administrative backing from NCVO, the Alliance became a valuable forum for discussion. In 1987 it was reconstituted following a Food Policy Seminar organised by NCVO, attended by representatives of consumer, health, farming, environment and development organisations. A paper written for this seminar recommended key areas for action:

- The links between food and health, and the government's failure to act on the medical advice it is receiving.

- The uncertain future of the Common Agricultural Policy, with its impact on agriculture, the countryside and the environment.

'The Alliance should set itself objectives that are firmly grounded on the political and practical realities of present-day Britain,' said the paper. The first chairman was appointed: Professor Philip James, well-known as the chief author of the NACNE report on UK dietary guidelines. Reports were prepared, notably on food and low income and food and land use. But a practical reality for the Alliance was lack of funding, no home of its own, and a low profile.

In 1991 the fortunes of the Alliance have been transformed. First, it has an office with the new headquarters of the Coronary Prevention Group in central London. Second, the governing council, consisting of all full Alliance members, has adopted a constitution and agreed a committee of management (listed below).

This new energy has been fuelled with funds from the Goldsmith Foundation, the charity controlled by Sir James Goldsmith, who last October announced his decision to 'go green'. For many years Sir James has been concerned about the deterioration of agriculture and the environment. He is a long-standing opponent of nuclear energy and has quietly supported Friends of the Earth for years. It is said that he sold his food interests in Britain because he was disgusted with the processes used to make British food, and his estates in France and Mexico use sustainable, organic methods.

Typically, Sir James has given money to the National Food Alliance and other British organisations without conditions. 'Of course if we do nothing,' says Geoffrey Cannon 'we won't expect more funds in future. But you can expect some action. We are a broad grouping: with organisations such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes, Food Commission, Maternity Alliance, the National Farmers Union and the Vegetarian Society. And we have valuable advice from organisations whose constitutions do not allow them to be Alliance members but who attend as observers, such as the National Consumer Council and the Health Education Authority. We are on our way.'

■ The address of the Alliance is 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA. Telephone: 071-935 2889. Fax: 071-487 5692.

Organisations wishing to apply for membership of the Alliance should please write to the secretary, Jeanette Longfield, at the above address.

This page has been contributed by the National Food Alliance

Aims and membership of the NFA

The National Food Alliance is an association of voluntary, professional, health, consumer and other organisations. Its purpose is to develop food and agriculture policy in order to benefit public health, the environment, trade, employment, the economy, and the common good, nationally and internationally.

Members of the NFA include:

Action and Information on Sugars
Baby Milk Action
Caroline Walker Trust
Children's Society
Christian Aid
Coronary Prevention Group
Council for the Protection of Rural England
Elm Farm Research
Food Additives Campaign Team
Food Commission
GMB
Green Alliance
Guild of Food Writers
McCarrison Society
Maternity Alliance
National Community Health Resource
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Farmers' Union
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Federation of Women's Institutes
National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention
National Federation of City Farms
OXFAM
Parents for Safe Food
Pesticides Trust
Soil Association
UK Federation of Home Economists
Vegetarian Society
Women's Farming Union

Observers of the NFA include:

Common Ground
Consumers' Association
Consumers in the European Community Group
Health Education Authority
National Consumer Council

Officers:

Professor Philip James (President)
Geoffrey Cannon (Chairman)
Jeanette Longfield (Secretary)
Suzanne May (Treasurer)

The National Food Alliance research projects

Part of the purpose of the National Food Alliance is to prepare papers on aspects of food and agriculture policy. Papers have already been prepared on *Food and Land Use*, *Food and Low Income*, *Food Labelling*, and *Food and Europe*. Alliance papers are drafted by working parties convened from among member organisations.

Current Alliance working parties, with their convenors, are:

- Food Quality
Convenor: Lawrence Woodward (Soil Association)

- GATT and the Consumer
Convenor: Tim Lang (Parents for Safe Food)
- Food Advertising (with special reference to children)
Convenor: Sue Dibb (The Food Commission)

Alliance working parties will be pleased to receive relevant information, submissions and queries from interested individuals and organisations. Please write to the Alliance at 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA, identifying on the envelope the working party in which you have an interest.

CONSUMER CHECKOUT

The Food Magazine's special supplement and guide to brand name products

SWEETER THAN SWEET TREATS

We check out the added saccharin sweetness in children's soft drinks and ice lollies

This summer children will be cooling off with soft drinks and ice lollies. But many of these sweet treats not only come with mega-doses of tooth-rotting sugar but contain an extra sweet boost of saccharin. We check out the brands and find out why manufacturers are adding artificial sweetener to sugar.

It's not just 'diet', 'lite' or 'reduced calorie' drinks and foods which may contain artificial sweeteners. Many shoppers may be surprised to find there is a whole range of popular products in which manufacturers add the artificial sweetener saccharin to a product *already* sweetened with sugar. Consumer Checkout found that the majority of conventional soft drinks on supermarket shelves were sweetened in this way.



A lot of these are marketed specifically for children — even though a government survey found one in six children had higher than recommended saccharin levels in their diet. In supermarkets and corner shops Consumer Checkout found many soft drinks and ice lollies sweetened not only with sugar but also a generous serving of the artificial sweetener saccharin. A government study found that these

soft drinks were the major source of saccharin in the diet for children aged between two and nine. Just two standard sized cartons of soft drink would provide enough saccharin for a four-year-old to meet the maximum daily intake of saccharin recommended by the World Health Organization and the EC.

These cartons, cans and bottles of children's drinks and squashes contain about seven lumps of sugar in a glassful. So why the added saccharin? The main reason is simple — to cut costs. As one ice lolly manufacturer claimed 'you just can't make a 10p lolly without using saccharin'. Saccharin is at least a third cheaper than sugar, so by replacing some of the sugar with saccharin manufacturers can make a cheaper product while maintaining — and even increasing — the sweet taste. Each year manufacturers can save tens of millions of pounds by replacing some of the sugar with saccharin.

In this issue of Consumer Checkout we look at:

- Sugar and saccharin sold to children
- Food label claims condemned
- How they sell excess salt
- Honest wine labels
- Baby drink companies sued
- Sussing the suspect food supplements

Sales of soft drinks and ice lollies, particularly to children are booming. As all still contain high levels of sugar, these products provide no protection to teeth, and can taste even sweeter than those sweetened purely with sugar.

Other countries do not allow a mixture of sugar and artificial sweeteners in soft drinks. They say it is adulteration. Now the EC is set to decide who is right.

Double sweet lollies and drinks

It's not just 'diet' products that are sweetened with artificial sweeteners. Consumer Checkout found conventional soft drinks and ice lollies sweetened not just with sugar but with saccharin too. With one in six children consuming more saccharin than may be advisable, we take a look behind the label.

Manufacturers know that the sweeter the product the more it will have instant appeal to kids. But they can't just keep adding the sugar — manufacturers say that around about the 10 per cent level some drink flavours become unpalatably cloying. So by replacing some of the sugar with saccharin they not only save money but also maintain high levels of sweetness.

Typically, manufacturers say, a quarter of the sugar is replaced with saccharin, which then provides about half the sweet taste in the final

product. This means drinks can taste about 50 per cent sweeter than if they contained only sugar. Many dietitians and parents are concerned that this intense sweetness becomes a learned habit, making it harder to interest children in less sweet, healthier foods.

Last year the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) told the Food Commission that one in six (17 per cent) of children aged two to five were consuming more than the 2.5 mg per kilogram bodyweight (mg/kg) which was then the maximum acceptable daily intake (ADI) for saccharin. The government's Food Advisory Committee was known to be concerned. However, MAFF announced a doubling of the ADI of saccharin to 5mg/kg, despite confirming their earlier opinion that saccharin caused tumours in laboratory animals (see *The Food Magazine* issue 11). The EC is proposing to stick to a maximum ADI of 2.5 mg/kg bodyweight, the same maximum that the World Health Organisation recommends.

During the 1980s the UK consumed more saccharin than the rest of the EC combined.

Some European countries have not permitted artificial sweeteners to be used alongside sugar in non-diet products. They have traditionally considered it a form of adulteration. In 1959 the UK's then Food Standards Committee proposed to ban the use of saccharin used in soft drinks in this way. However, the soft drinks manufacturers persuaded MAFF not to go ahead with the proposal. Now, according to industry sources there are at least 175 soft drink products on the market sweetened with both sugar and saccharin.

Double limit

Maximum levels of saccharin are limited to 80mg/l in ready-to-drink products and 400mg/l in squash concentrates. Many drinks are formulated with the maximum amount of saccharin allowed. Now the soft drinks industry is asking for this 80mg/l limit to be almost doubled to 150mg/l — a proposal which, if it were ever accepted, would undoubtedly lead to even greater use of saccharin.

The EC is currently debating whether to permit these products as they are currently



Just two cartons could take a four-year old to the maximum recommended daily sugar levels and the WHO's and the EC's recommended daily intakes for saccharin.

formulated. The EC's Directive on Sweeteners proposes that artificial sweeteners be permitted in a range of 'energy reduced' or 'calorie free' products including ice lollies and soft drinks. Clearly these are not 'calorie free' products, but do they qualify as 'energy reduced'? Yes, say the soft drink manufacturers. No, says the European Parliament, unless their calorific level has been reduced by at least 33 per cent. Confusion reigns. An EC official confirmed that they were working to the Parliament's proposal but MAFF officials say the UK position would demand only a 25 per cent reduction. As the Directive still has to leap several hurdles before final agreement, it remains to be seen whose standards finally become law.

Warning

The European Parliament has recommended that all products using artificial sweeteners should carry the following warning: 'not to be taken by pregnant women or children under the age of three years'.

Artificial sweeteners continue to be banned in foods made for babies and young children, but because soft drinks and ice lollies are also eaten by older children and adults they are not covered by this law. So, if you wish to limit the amounts of saccharin your child may be consuming you'll need to take a close look at the label.

Jelly and trifle, too

Another summer treat for children is a bowl of jelly for dessert. But here, too, manufacturers have turned to saccharin to boost the sweetness levels at low cost.

Not all jelly has added saccharin: own-label brands such as Sainsbury's are still free of artificial sweeteners. But Rowntree, the UK's top jelly manufacturers, now adds saccharin to its entire flavour range of jelly packs.

We also looked at Bird's Eye packet trifles. There, again, we found sugar and saccharin together.

And as for trying a milk-shake as a way of avoiding the saccharin-loaded squashes and drinks, look carefully. We found products such as Crusha Milk-shake Syrup, made by Rayner Burgess, to include both sugar and saccharin in their ingredients.

■ *Written and researched by Sue Dibb*
Product Research: Shirley Posner

Below, we check out some of the brands on sale this summer appealing to children:

<i>Manufacturer</i>	<i>Product</i>	<i>Sweetener used</i>
ICE LOLLIES		
Lyons Maid	Feb	sugar & saccharin
Lyons Maid	Fruit lollies	sugar & saccharin
Lyons Maid	Zoom lollies	sugar & saccharin
Safeways	Freeze pops	sugar & saccharin
Safeways	Orange flavour lollies	sugar & saccharin
Safeways	Ice lollies with real orange juice	sugar & saccharin
Tesco	Assorted ice lollies	sugar & saccharin
Tops	Fruit lollies	sugar & saccharin
Treats	Juicy lollies	sugar & saccharin
Treats	Jazza orange/raspberry	sugar & saccharin
Walls	Orange fruitie lollies	sugar & saccharin
Walls	Strawberry split	sugar & saccharin
CONES & WAFERS		
Askeys	Wafers	saccharin (no sugar)
Walls	Sundae shop cones	sugar & saccharin
Walls	Wafers	sugar & saccharin
SOFT DRINKS		
Britvic	Quosh Lemon & Lime	sugar & saccharin
Britvic	Quosh Orange & Pineapple	sugar & saccharin
Crusha	Milk shake mix: banana/strawberry	sugar & saccharin
Fanta	Fanta orange crush	sugar & saccharin
Fanta	Calypso orange flavour drink	sugar & saccharin
Kia-Ora	Pear & blackcurrant	sugar & saccharin
Kia-Ora	Orange & pineapple	sugar & saccharin
Kia-Ora	Whole orange	sugar & saccharin
Robinsons	Apple & strawberry drink box	sugar & saccharin
Robinsons	Whole orange drink	sugar & saccharin
Robinsons	Orange barley water	sugar & saccharin
Sainsbury's	Limeade/cherryade	sugar & saccharin
Sainsbury's	Ginger beer	sugar & saccharin
Sainsbury's	Orange squash	sugar & saccharin
Safeways	Orange/pineapple	sugar & saccharin
Safeways	Apple/blackcurrant	sugar & saccharin
Soda Stream	Cariba & orangeade mix	sugar & saccharin
Tango	Tango orange drink	sugar & saccharin
Tesco	Whole orange drink	sugar & saccharin
Tesco	Apple & blackcurrant drink	sugar & saccharin
Treetop	Orange drink	sugar & saccharin
Unigate	Hi! Orange flavour drink	sugar & saccharin
Vimto	Mixed juice cordial	sugar & saccharin
Vimto	Mixed fruit juice drink	sugar & saccharin

Research supported by FACT, The Food Additives Campaign Team

Sticky labels

Strawberry flavour
The picture of a strawberry might imply real fruit was used, but the word 'taste' instead of 'flavour' unless real fruit is present.

Many food labels should be condemned, say two new reports. Consumer Checkout looks at the writing they found wrong.

Food labels should inform, not mislead. But today's labels are, according to reports from the Coronary Prevention Group and the government-appointed Food Advisory Committee, frequently failing to give consumers what they need.

The Coronary Prevention Group (CPG) surveyed nutrition claims such as 'low fat' and 'high fibre' looking at all the products in five supermarkets, and found they were frequently 'ambiguous, selective and irrelevant'. It found 44 per cent of low fat claims were failing to meet Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) criteria. Of foods claiming to be low in cholesterol, the CPG rated over half to be high in saturated fat.

Nutrition details were generally poor, says the CPG. Two thirds of labels making cholesterol, salt or sugar claims failed to indicate the actual level of the nutrient referred to in the claim, and less than one in five of all nutritional claims gave full nutritional labelling.

The government's Food Advisory Committee (FAC) were critical of many current practices and recommended nearly forty areas that needed better regulation. In his response, food minister David Maclean indicated the government's willingness to accept many of the points and to urge the EC to incorporate them into future directives.

The FAC's report calls for quantitative ingredient declarations and the listing of ingredients in foods currently exempt, such as alcoholic drinks and chocolate products. It also recommends listing processing aids which may leave residues in the final product, and a declaration on products such as fruit and vegetables of the use of post-harvest pesticide treatments, where these have been used.

Instructions for use and storage after purchase were also examined and found wanting. Wrapping, microwave cooking and cold-storage temperature levels all needed greater clarification, the FAC said.

Like the CPG, the FAC found that claims for certain nutrients were often ambiguous and potentially misleading. The FAC called for phrases such as 'light' and 'diet' to be backed up with nutritional information.

In many other respects the FAC found labels to

be falling short of the standards it feels consumers deserve. So with their report and the CPG's survey in our hands, Consumer Checkout took a walk down the supermarket aisles to see if there was cause for concern.

There was, indeed, as the labels we found — reproduced on this page — clearly show.

Low fat

At 39 per cent fat, this product comes way above the MAFF criterion for low fat claims of 5 per cent.

No sugar added

Maybe not, but there is no sugar declaration (or any other nutritional information). In fact this juice is 12-15 per cent fruit sugars, and would be regarded by dietitians and dentists as a high-sugar drink.

Over 50 per cent of the flavour from strawberries

Virtually meaningless phrases like this should not be allowed, says the FAC. We thought this one might imply that 50 per cent of the product is fruit, which it isn't.

No tartrazine

This had two other colouring agents, sister chemicals to tartrazine. The FAC does not want 'x-free' claims where similar additives have been used.



Can help reduce cholesterol

Health claims should not be permitted, says the FAC, unless specifically recommended by the Department of Health.

the word 'flavour'
FAC recommends the
and no fruit images



Cow & Gate Babymeals are carefully made from specially selected wholesome ingredients, and can help to provide a nutritionally balanced diet for a baby. The texture and flavour of this Stage Two Savoury have been specially prepared to be suitable for babies from about seven months.

Before opening check outer seal and safety button.

To serve: Cow & Gate Babym either be served cold or warm (the required amount into a cup of water or sugar). Arr

Specially selected, wholesome ingredients

Words such as 'special', 'selected', 'healthy' and 'wholesome' are meaningless without further explanation and should not be used, according to the FAC.

100% natural

With ingredients such as 'vegetable mono-diglycerides' and added colouring, this is neither a single ingredient traditional food nor are the ingredients unprocessed; so it fails the FAC's recommendations twice over.

Lower fat, reduced salt

Claims such as lower and reduced should be at least 50 per cent below the regular version of the product, says the CPG. The FAC suggests a mere 25 per cent reduction. This product would fail the CPG though not the FAC criteria.

High fibre

The FAC recommends that a product should be at least 6 per cent fibre, or have at least 6g fibre per serving to qualify as 'high fibre'. This bar just passes the 6 per cent level, but one serving — a bar — has only 1.6g fibre.

The salt sellers

Two new reports confirm the need to limit our taste for salt. But our special Consumer Checkout feature shows just how easy it is to exceed the recommended levels.

According to researchers at St Bartholomew's Hospital, the saltiness of British diets is costing the country 75,000 lives each year.

This is the number of deaths from heart disease and stroke that could be prevented, say the research team, if our current salt intake of around nine to twelve grams of salt per day were cut by half. 'There would also be a major reduction in disability caused by stroke,' they add.

The findings, published in the *British Medical Journal* in April, demonstrated a strong link between salt intake and blood pressure in both first and third world countries, and also found that the link between salt and blood pressure rose with age: increasing salt intake by three grams a day was twice as effective at raising blood pressure for people in their sixties as it was for people in their twenties.

Within weeks of this report, the World Health Organization published a report which found that a daily salt intake above six grams is linked to an increase in problems of high blood pressure (hypertension). Populations with an average daily intake below three grams of salt showed no increase in blood pressure with age. The WHO also found that diets containing large amounts of smoked and salt-preserved foods were associated with an increased risk of stomach cancer.

The WHO report recommends a maximum daily intake of six grams of salt, less than a heaped teaspoon. Recognising that much of the salt in our diet comes from processed foods, the WHO calls for discussions between governments, the food industry and consumers to ensure the development of foods low in salt.

The researchers at St Bartholomew's also suggested that, although advising people to cut their salt intake was important, 'the widespread use of salt in food processing limits what individual people can readily achieve.' Labelling of the salt content of foods and, 'above all, reduction in the amount of salt added by manufacturers to processed food is a vital public health objective.'

Such action by food manufacturers would allow

people to reduce their salt intake by as much as six grams per day, which would, say the researchers, reduce the incidence of stroke by 39 per cent and that of ischaemic heart disease by 30 per cent, preventing 11,000 deaths a year of people under the age of 65, and 75,000 deaths in all.

These figures, they say, are three to four times the number of deaths that can be prevented by using drugs for the treatment of high blood pressure. 'Few measures in preventive medicine are as simple and economical and yet can achieve so much.'

The shake-down

Consumer Checkout went shopping to see where the salt in our diet comes from. We looked at foods which most of us expect to be high in salt such as bacon, crisps, olives, Marmite and soya sauce, and at foods that the health educators encourage us to eat, like wholemeal bread, breakfast cereals, fish, beans and low-fat cheeses.

We also went to the take-away and checked the salt in fast foods — before any gets added by the customer.

Time and time again we were surprised by the amount of salt that finds its way into the food we buy. Even if you take great care to avoid adding any salt of your own, either in your cooking or at the dinner table, it is all too easy to exceed the six grams per day maximum recommended by the WHO.

One source of consolation is that the highest levels of salt were often found in foods which were also high in fat — especially saturated fat. Salt is used to make fatty food less greasy-tasting. In the search for good health we can happily reject the salt and the fat together.

Watch the label

Salt is sodium chloride and is the main source of sodium in our diet. The sodium part — the bit that matters when it comes to raising blood pressure — is about 40 per cent the weight of the whole salt molecule, and this can lead to confusion when interpreting the small print on food labels.

Some products, whether salty or not, fail to give any information. Among those that do give information there are differences: companies such as Heinz and Marks and Spencer declare the amount of *total sodium in grams*, which has to be multiplied by 2.5 if you want to compare it with the WHO-recommended six grams of salt per day. Other companies declare the *total sodium in milligrams*, which must first be converted to grams by dividing by a thousand.

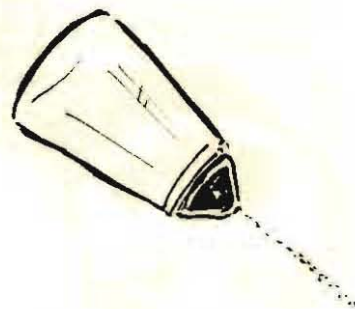
Yet other companies, such as Sainsbury's, declare

the amount of *added salt in grams*. Giving the figure for added salt alone means it is hard to tell how much you are getting in foods naturally high in sodium, like shellfish, and it may ignore other forms of added sodium, such as monosodium glutamate.

A uniform labelling method would be far more useful, expressing *total sodium as grams of salt* with an easy-to-see symbol showing low, medium or high salt relative to our daily needs.

Label-readers should also take care to check whether the salt content is declared for a serving of the product or for 100g. A portion of canned soup, say, would be several times the 100g figure, whereas a spreading of Marmite would be less than a twentieth the 100g figure.

Food labels can also contradict healthy eating advice. Consumer Checkout found many examples of cooking instructions which recommended adding salt to the dish. Guidance given on how to boil rice often suggests adding salt to the water. The same goes for pasta. And 'recipe suggestions' on a wide range of products recommended the addition of salt.



SEA SALT

Sea salt contains traces of other minerals — notably magnesium and calcium — besides the sodium found in regular table salt. These other minerals dilute the sodium a little, to around 70 per cent of the sodium found in regular salt. Many people also find sea salt tastes more strongly, so they use less of it.

For these reasons it is worth considering sea salt as a means of cutting back on sodium intake — but make sure you still use it very sparingly.

Some seasoned tips

■ Watch out for high-salt processed foods: check the labels for a salt or sodium declaration (400mg sodium is equal to 1g salt) and check the list of ingredients for added salt.

■ Sodium means more than salt: other food ingredients come as sodium molecules, so check the ingredients list for additives like monosodium glutamate and sodium bicarbonate (or baking powder).

■ Take care when eating out: most savoury foods will be salted before they are served, so you should avoid adding more yourself. Even the French Fries may get a sprinkle before they reach you.

■ Cut the salt you add during cooking: try experimenting with herbs and spices in your dishes, and don't add salt to the boiling water for vegetables, rice or pasta.

■ Throw away the salt cellar: help stop yourself reaching out thoughtlessly for that habitual sprinkle of salt

■ Try other taste enhancers to sprinkle on your food:

a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese

a shake or two of vinegar

a couple of squeezes of lemon juice or lime juice

■ Low sodium salt can help boost the flavour of your meal without adding so much sodium. The sodium has been partly replaced by potassium and some people find the taste a little bitter. People with kidney problems are recommended to check with their doctors before using these products. And don't be tempted to increase the amount you sprinkle on to the food or you may end up with as much sodium as you get with regular salt.

The secret salt in our daily diet

How much salt are you eating without knowing it? We checked a range of products for their sodium levels, expressed in the table as grams of salt in a typical serving.

Product and portion	Grams of salt
FOOD USUALLY THOUGHT TO BE SALTY	
Bacon	2 rashers back bacon, 2oz 2.5
Kipper	1 medium, 4oz 2.8
Ham	2 thin slices, 2oz 1.6
Crisps	one bag, 1oz up to 1.0
Salted peanuts	one bag, 50g 0.5
Salted butter	average for two slices, 20g 0.4
Olives	10 olives, 1oz 1.7
Marmite and Bovril	1 teaspoon, 5g 0.5
Oxo	half a cube 0.9

CONVENIENT AND TAKE-AWAY FOODS

Sainsbury tomato cup-soup	1 sachet, 1 cup 2.0
Mushroom soup, canned	one bowl, 8oz 2.6
Marks & Spencer ham and cheese sandwich	1 round 3.5
Kentucky Fried Chicken	3 pieces chicken 3.7
Wimpy burger	Quarterpounder with cheese 3.7
Sausages in batter	one portion, 6oz 4.5
Take-away spare ribs in sauce	12oz portion 9.3
Take-away spring roll	one, 7oz 3.3
Burger King Chicken Royale	as served 5.1
McDonalds Big Mac and large French fries	as served 3.0
Marks & Spencer Egg Fried Rice	7oz portion 3.5
Marks & Spencer Potato/Bacon Gratin	8oz portion 4.5
Fish cakes	two, 5.5oz 2.5
Ravioli	half a tin, 7.5oz 2.6
Spaghetti hoops	third of tin, 5oz 1.5
Pork sausages	two, 4oz 3.4
Spam	half smallest tin, 3oz 2.2
Pork pie	individual, 5oz 2.6
Tomato ketchup	one sachet, 1oz 0.8
Barbeque sauce (McDonalds)	one portion 0.8
Toasted crumpets (no butter)	two, 3oz 1.6
Butter (salted)	for two crumpets, 1oz 0.6

FOOD USUALLY THOUGHT TO BE HEALTHY

All-Bran breakfast cereal	1 bowl, 50g 1.9
Special K breakfast cereal	1 bowl, 40g 1.2
Wholemeal bread, sliced	two thick slices 1.2
Cottage cheese	small tub, 4oz 1.3
Edam cheese	two slices, 2oz 1.4
Cheese salad roll	one, 6oz 2.5
Wholemeal scone	one, 2oz 1.0
Tomato juice	1 glass, 8oz 1.4
Cheese & tomato pizza	large slice, 8oz 5.3
Wimpy Spicy Beanburger	one as served 2.8
Burger King Beanburger	one as served 6.7
Heinz baked beans	smallest tin, 5oz 2.0
Prawns, shelled	two dozen, 2oz 2.0
Smoked salmon	2-3 slices, 2oz 2.6

SALT AT HOME

Salt	one level teaspoon 5.0
Sea salt	one level teaspoon 3.5
Soya sauce	one level tablespoon 3.6
Baking powder	one level teaspoon 1.3



Honest wines

The small print on a bottle of wine usually tells you very little about additives or hazards. Unless, that is, you have a locally labelled wine from New Zealand or California.

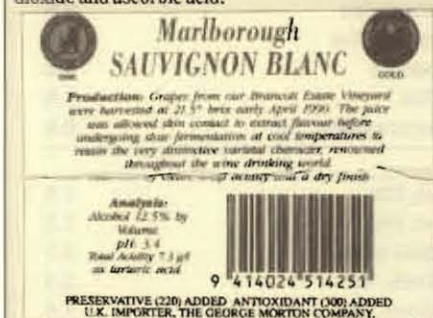
Flowery bouquets are all very well. Smooth characters and full bodies sound more like elderly lawyers, while refreshing hints of gooseberry with a crisp nose must be a rip-off from the Food and Drink Programme.

But on either side of the Pacific ocean the rules are different. California has for some time had to declare the presence of sulphur-based preservatives (see *The Food Magazine*, issue 4). More recently all alcoholic drinks (and, in several states, drinking places such as bars and restaurants) have to display hazard warnings about the dangers that alcohol can cause:

GOVERNMENT WARNING:

- (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects.
- (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.

There is no such warning on a bottle of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, but instead a techno-manual on harvesting, a laboratory report on alcohol and acid, and the admission of two additives, sulphur dioxide and ascorbic acid.



The sulphur dioxide — a common ingredient in wines — stops further fermentation in the bottle but is a known hazard for some asthmatics. The ascorbic acid (vitamin C) isn't there for your health but to ensure the colour doesn't fade. In this case, it is a 'straw colour with green tints'.

And, yes, there is a 'distinctive gooseberry fruit on the nose'!

In Britain, the government-appointed Food Advisory Committee recommended in its 1990 labelling review that all alcoholic drinks should contain an ingredients list. The European Commission is expected to introduce such labelling legislation in 1992.

Slimming aids do a fat lot of good!

'Miracle' slimming aids prey on dieters' desperation. But for most products there is little evidence that they work.

Latest slimming hope is 'The Diet Spray' which the manufacturer, Crystal Health, claims will 'defeat fattening snack attacks'. Its 'carefully balanced blend of vitamins and amino acids' promises to suppress appetite. But their claims have never been medically substantiated.



With over 99.98 per cent of the product water, its price of nearly £20 for two small pocket-sized sprays is also hard to swallow.

The Advertising Standards Authority watchdog says magazines and newspapers should not accept adverts for this product, nor for other products whose claims cannot be substantiated. But the fact that the ASA's advice can be legally ignored means that adverts for miracle diet products still appear every week.

Health hype

Another expensive hype comes from Californian manufacturers Designer Foods with their Fast Blast and Gourmet Choline Cooler mega-vitamin supplements, sold to night-clubbers seeking an alternative high.

But according to nutritionists there is no evidence that taking vitamins and amino acids in such quantities will produce the results purchasers seek.

With a warning that some people using choline may



develop a fishy smell, it hardly sounds like the kind of product to go down well on the dance floor.

Ribena pays out for tooth damage

Beechams, manufacturers of Ribena, has agreed to compensate ten families whose babies developed tooth decay.

Although denying liability, Beechams settled out of court following the parents' complaints that the labelling on Ribena drinks gave inadequate directions on maximum dosages.

A similar case went to trial in Frankfurt, Germany, involving Milupa baby teas. The court found that

Milupa had omitted to give clear warnings on its packaging to warn parents of the 'baby bottle syndrome' caused by the constant sucking of sweet drinks. Milupa should have warned the public and the authorities of the potential danger of its products.

Giving judgement in December 1990, the court ordered Milupa to pay compensation to consumers for misleading advertising and incorrect labelling information.

Can diet products help you slim?

'Diet' food and drinks hold out the promise of weight reduction or prevention of obesity. But what is the evidence? Sue Dibb investigates disturbing research which shows that artificial sweeteners may actually encourage us to eat more.

Fuelled by a late twentieth century obsession that equates thinness with beauty and happiness, so-called 'diet' foods and drinks have taken the market by storm. The 1980s have seen a phenomenal growth in the market for a host of soft drinks, table top sweeteners and desserts sweetened not with sugar but with artificial sweeteners such as aspartame (NutraSweet), saccharin and acesulfame-K. These

sweeteners provide the taste of sugar, or an approximation of it, but none of the calories, thus offering highly sweetened foods and drinks without adding inches to your waistline.

But this success story hides two disturbing findings. Firstly, the growth in the use of artificial sweeteners has not led to an overall decline in our sugar consumption. While people have cut back on the amount of sugar they themselves add to food, this has been compensated for by their consuming more sugar in processed foods and drinks. The truth is that over the last ten years, despite our best endeavours and increasing use of artificial sweeteners, our sugar consumption, as a nation, has not declined at all (see fig 1).

Secondly, and equally disturbing, is the lack of any scientifically adequate evidence that the way many people substitute intense sweeteners for sugar helps in the reduction of weight or the prevention of obesity. Indeed research indicates that the effect of a sweet taste on the human palate, whether in the form of sugar or artificial sweeteners, is to stimulate the appetite, not suppress it. The mechanisms that control hunger and appetite are complex. However, the consumption of calories in one form or another plays a key role in the satiation of hunger. Food

without those calories, as in the case of artificial sweeteners, is unlikely to suppress hunger.

In carefully designed studies, Rogers and Blundell¹ have demonstrated this effect. They compared feelings of hunger and actual food intakes over a period of thirteen hours following the consumption of four different samples of yoghurt by twenty-four volunteers.

An unsweetened fruit yogurt was eaten either plain, sweetened with saccharin, sweetened with glucose or bulked with starch. Half an hour after consuming the yoghurt volunteers were asked to rate their hunger, desire to eat, feelings of fullness and estimate of how much they could eat. They were then given a test meal and asked to record everything that they subsequently ate or drank that day.

The results were surprising. Raising the level of sweetness, whether with sugar or with saccharin, increased appetite. But saccharin had a particularly pronounced effect, leading to more food intake both in the test meal and during the rest of the day. Not only did the saccharin group make up for the calories they would have consumed if the yogurt contained added sugar or starch, but they also ate significantly more calories as well — on average a further 200 calories that day (see fig 2).

So why should our appetite respond so strongly to sweetness? The look, smell and taste of food will trigger gastric juices in anticipation of digestion. But a sweet taste also seems to have an effect on stimulating insulin, produced in response to anticipated raised blood glucose levels that would normally follow digestion and absorption. The Rogers and Blundell study found there is evidence that the sweet taste of saccharin might promote increases in hunger and food intake by stimulating this preabsorptive insulin secretion. Their re-analysis of a previous study by Jorgensen² found a significant decrease (6 per cent) in blood glucose levels due to release of insulin, following the drinking of a solution of saccharin. The same result was found when the saccharin solution was tasted but not swallowed. So it seems that just the sweet taste of saccharin is enough to stimulate physiological changes leading the body to expect calories from food; and if not forthcoming, hunger will not be satisfied. The calories from sugar,

Fig 1. We buy less sugar, but we eat just as much: declining sales of packet sugar have been replaced by increasing amounts of sugar 'hidden' in processed foods.

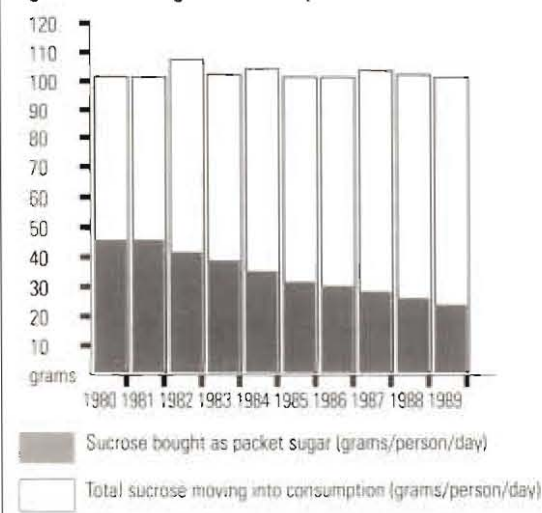
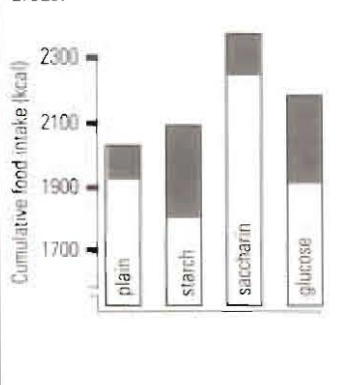


Fig 2. Food intake following the consumption of four types of yogurt. Subjects consuming yogurt sweetened with saccharin ate significantly more during the day. These cumulative intakes include the yogurt, indicated by the tinted areas.



Continued on page 20

When parents go hungry so children can eat

In a survey of families using National Children's Home centres around the country, nearly half the parents said they had gone short of food to ensure their children had enough to eat. Tim Lobstein reports.

'I tend to run out of money. Sometimes there's nothing else to cut back on but food — before Christmas I went short of food myself to save up a bit to give the bairns something for Christmas.'

Mother, with two children under five, Newcastle.

In a survey of over 350 families with young children using National Children's Home (NCH) family centres during January 1991, over 150 (44 per cent) of the parents said they had gone short of food. A third of parents had gone hungry during the month prior to the survey, and of these over half said the main reason was lack of money.

Most parents using the NCH centres were receiving welfare benefits or had low earned incomes. Average income for the families surveyed was £106 per week, of which average expenditure on food was £37 (£9.68 per person). A third of those questioned were in single-parent families, and the majority — over 200 families — were receiving Income Support. Average food expenditure per person for those on Income Support was £8.71.

The parents reported that they were making substantial sacrifices to try to make sure their children were fed properly. Yet, despite the sacrifices a mother makes, children's diets and health are in jeopardy. One in ten of the children had gone without food in the previous month because there was not enough money for food. Nearly a quarter of the children had gone without because they did not like what the parent had to offer — when money is tight, if a child does not like what is offered it may not be possible to offer an alternative.

Less than half the children and nearly two-thirds of the mothers did not eat fruit or green vegetables every day, and nearly three-quarters of the families did not eat brown or wholemeal bread. Fatty meat and meat products were eaten more often than lean meat and fish. Half the children were eating sweets and savoury snack foods each day. In the NCH survey, both healthy and unhealthy eating habits were related to the amount the family spent on food. Those families with a higher expenditure on food ate brown or wholemeal bread, lean meat and fish, vegetables and fruit more frequently than those with

a lower expenditure. Those families with a lower expenditure ate fatty meat and meat products more frequently (see table 1).

People with low incomes are often criticised for wasting money on sweets and snacks for children which could be spent on fruit and vegetables, especially as the cost of a bag of sweets or crisps may be more than the cost of an apple or orange. But, as the NCH report points out, in terms of getting enough energy in the diet, fruit is considerably more expensive. Children need dietary energy (calories) and if they do not get enough they will be hungry and demand more food. Crisps and sweets are very cheap sources of calories compared with fruit and vegetables:

Table 2. Cost of 100 Calories of various snack foods

	Amount	Cost
Custard cream biscuits	2 biscuits	3p
Sweets	1 small bag	9p
Chocolate bars	1/2 bar	10p
Crisps	2/3 bag	12p
Carrots	1 lb	20p
Banana	1 medium	20p
Apple	3 small	29p
Orange	4 small	35p
Celery	2.5 heads	£1.44

The survey found no evidence to suggest that parents are ignorant about what constitutes a healthy diet.

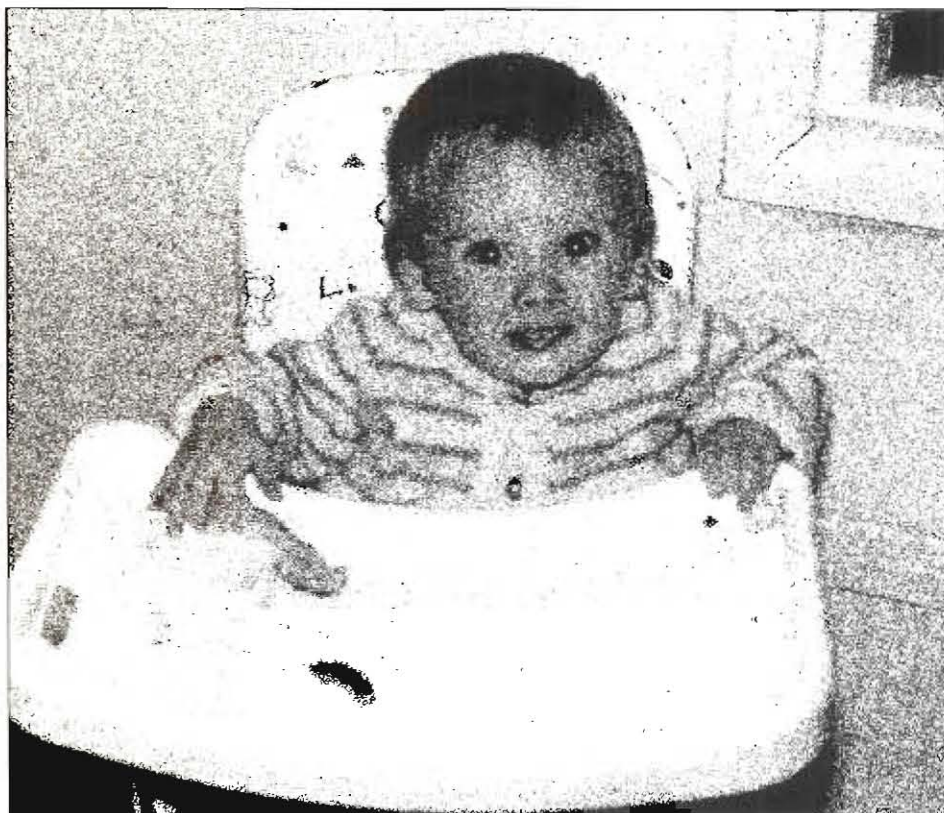
Parents were asked 'If you had an extra £10 to spend on food for your child, what foods would you like to buy?' This open-ended question found that less than one in ten mothers would use the money to buy unhealthy luxuries (such as cakes and biscuits, ice

Table 1. Food expenditure related to child's eating patterns
Food expenditure/person/week (£)

	Yes	No
Brown or wholemeal bread most days	10.38	9.33
Fish, lean meat or chicken 4 times/week	10.82	9.12
Green vegetables or salads most days	10.07	9.41
Fresh fruit most days	10.22	9.05
Burgers, meat pies, sausages etc 4 times/week	8.77	10.33

Table 3. Proportion of unprompted answers to 'What would you buy if you had an extra £10 for food for your child' (Some respondents gave several replies)

	%
Fresh meat, poultry, steak, mince etc	60
Fruit	54
Vegetables, salad, potatoes (but not chips)	38
Fish, shellfish, fish fingers	24
Milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, milkshakes	9
Cakes, biscuits, sweets, ices, puddings	8
Meat products, sausages, ham, bacon, pies	3
Fruit juices	2



cream and snack foods) while over half the mothers would buy more fruit and fresh lean meats, and over a quarter would buy more vegetables and fish (see table 3).

In a second survey, undertaken at NCH centres across the country, the cost of buying a 'healthy' basket of foods recommended to meet the needs of a three-person family for a week was contrasted with the cost of buying an 'unhealthy' basket, based on typical purchases for low-income families. The difference was greatest in rural areas where a healthy basket would cost a family an extra £6.20 per week:

Table 4 The cost of a week's shopping: healthy and unhealthy food baskets compared (43 centres)

basket	Healthy basket £	Unhealthy £
Average	33.49	28.57
Scotland	36.54	30.07
North East	32.41	27.84
North West	31.61	26.77
Midlands	33.57	28.25
Wales	35.01	29.47
South East	35.38	30.22

Overall, shopping for a healthy basket would cost an extra 17 per cent, and as much as 21 per cent in rural areas. The increased cost of the healthy basket comes primarily from buying leaner, lower fat meat and dairy products and from the greater amounts of bread, cereals, fruit and vegetables recommended. Savings are made by buying less sugary foods, fats and oils, but this does not compensate for the extra cost of other items (see table 5).

Claims that healthy eating need cost no more

Table 5. The contribution of different types of food to the cost of healthy and unhealthy shopping baskets

	Unhealthy £	Healthy £
Bread and cereals	3.83	4.23
Meat & alternatives	9.73	11.22
Fruit & vegetables	4.21	6.92
Sugary foods	2.92	1.87
Fats & oils	.70	.49
Dairy foods	4.22	6.11
Other foods	2.91	2.00

cannot be substantiated for low income families, the report maintains. People with adequate incomes spend considerably more on food than those with low incomes and can almost certainly make savings if they wish too. But households with low incomes tend to spend much less on food and do so by minimising on what they consider to be the luxuries of lean meat, vegetables and fruits, and wholemeal bread. They buy cheap, calorie-dense foods which help satisfy hunger and are readily acceptable to most children. These foods are generally high in fat and/or sugar. To replace them with more 'healthy' foods inevitably results in an increase in expenditure (see table 4). If you spend a lot on food eating healthily can be cheaper. If you don't, then it is more expensive.

The report calls for substantial increases in Income Support, Family Credit and the Social Fund to ensure families have access to the shops, the food and the cooking facilities they need. It also urges local authorities to promote good quality food for children in nurseries and schools.

■ NCH Poverty and Nutrition Survey (1991), price £5, is available from NCH, 85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD. Summary results are published in The NCH Factfile 1991, price £2.50.

'I'd buy more fish if I had the money. We've never gone hungry but there have been plenty of times when I've had to go and borrow money for food off my family.'

Mother of three children, Newcastle.

'If I buy a pack of meat — two chops — instead of us having one each I'll give him one in the week and one on Sunday. Then I will tell him that I was so hungry I couldn't wait and have already had mine — It isn't that I'm not grateful for what they give me but it just isn't enough.'

Woman with a school-age child, Nottingham.

on the other hand, will lead to suppression of hunger, offsetting the appetite stimulation due to sugar's sweet taste.

However, not only does saccharin appear to have a short-term pre-ingestion effect on hunger due to its sweet taste, it also appears to stimulate appetite further during its passage through the body. The possible mechanisms are not clearly understood, but the fact that saccharin stimulated increases in food intake beyond the test meal, many hours after the consumption of the yogurt, strongly suggests, the researchers say, a post-ingestive action of saccharin.

It has also been shown that other artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame and acesulfame-K, also exhibit an appetite-boosting effect due to their sweet taste. But aspartame and saccharin are chemically unrelated and would therefore be expected to differ in their later post-ingestive actions. Blundell and Hill³ have demonstrated that the sweet taste of aspartame stimulates appetite, at least in the short term — it increased motivation to eat and decreased ratings of fullness. For an hour after consuming aspartame appetite was not suppressed and on certain occasions actually increased compared with controls. However, Rogers *et al.*⁴ also discovered an unusual physiological effect of aspartame to suppress appetite once it reaches the gut. This mechanism is not understood but is possibly due to the physiological effect of phenylalanine, a constituent of aspartame, on hormones in the gut. In this study aspartame was consumed by capsule, but, say the researchers, there is no evidence that this apparent suppression of appetite would hold true for aspartame consumed in food or drink.

But what about the longer term effect of artificial sweetener consumption on weight control? Booth⁵, in his review of the value of artificial sweeteners in weight control, concludes: 'There is no encouragement in the existing data to think that an indiscriminating advocacy of the substitution of intense sweeteners for sugar and other caloric bulk sweeteners has the justification it is generally assumed to have, both by health professionals and by the food industry.' In 1986 Stellman and Garfinkel⁶ compared long-term users and non-users of intense sweeteners (largely saccharin). They concluded that casual long-term use of intense sweeteners in the absence of other major changes in lifestyle does not by itself lead to weight loss. As Rolls⁷ points out, data from long-term studies are very limited. But she suggests intense sweeteners can only be expected to help with weight loss through significant dietary changes to restrict intake. The substitution of only a few foods may not result in a reduction in daily energy intake.

So, are claims of 'diet' on the label misleading by implying special properties for weight reduction? Any claims that a product may help in weight reduction are legally required in the UK to add the proviso that it be used as part of a calorie-controlled diet. But this is meaningless. Any food, even a Mars bar, 'if eaten as part of a calorie-controlled diet', could make this claim. However, most people reading such a claim will be led to believe that the product has certain advantages for weight reduction. And this is where the danger may lie. If dieters think that these product will automatically help them control their calorie intakes, then they are more likely to relax controls and eat more. Using no-cal sweeteners and then treating yourself to a creamcake (as one advertisement for a sweetener implied you could do) will be counterproductive.

So what is the best way to control your weight? You need calories to suppress appetite, and evidence suggests that complex carbohydrates and dietary fibre provide the best appetite-regulating effect. This confirms the view of nutritionists that the best way to lose weight is to reduce overall energy intake by increasing complex carbohydrate bulk and maintaining a varied, relatively low-fat diet.

And the best way to use artificial sweeteners? Peter Rogers, research psychologist at the Institute of Food Research concludes: 'Don't assume food will do the work for you. Artificial sweeteners can be useful but only if you use them wisely.'

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Books

P IS FOR PESTICIDES

Dr Tim Lang & Dr Charlie Clutterbuck, in association with The Pesticides Trust, Ebury Press, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA. ISBN 0 85223 968 8. £6.99



THE PESTICIDES HANDBOOK

Peter Hurst, Dr Alastair Hay & Nigel Dudley, Journeyman Press, 345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA. ISBN 1 8517204 13. £22.50

With over a billion gallons of pesticides being sprayed annually on UK agricultural land, these two books have been published at a time of growing public concern about the effects of pesticides, and their impact on food and the environment.

Tim Lang and Charlie Clutterbuck argue that too little is known about the long-term health effects of constant exposure to low levels of pesticides. Exposure to high levels of these chemicals is well documented and proven to have caused cases of mass poisoning and death. According to the World Health Organisation, three million people worldwide will suffer from acute pesticide poisoning and 20,000 will die this year.

But the effects of consuming low levels of pesticides are poorly documented. Lang and Clutterbuck quote government figures showing a quarter of fruit and vegetables contain detectable residues, with 6 per cent over the maximum residue limit.

Produced in association with The Pesticides Trust, their book

challenges official complacency and secrecy surrounding the use of pesticides, pinpoints the most hazardous, and outlines where you can expect to find them.

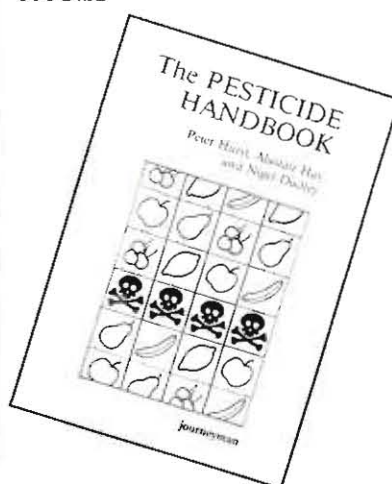
The Pesticides Handbook, written by seasoned pesticide campaigners, Hurst, Hay and Dudley, is a comprehensive guide for farmers, agricultural workers, campaigners and concerned consumers to the use of pesticides both chemical and organic.

Taking the cultivation of cocoa as a case history, the authors also look at the problems of pesticide use in developing countries: injury and ill-health suffered by agricultural workers; lack of information for farmers, and the way in which dangerous chemicals — banned in the countries that produce them — are exported to the third world. It is now well known that the use of chemical pesticides in agriculture can be harmful to wildlife, but how many people know that there are pesticide residues in a bar of chocolate?

In their examination of how necessary pesticides are and how they can be avoided, the authors look at what information needs to be made available to the public, and what manufacturers, governments and farmers should be doing to protect our health and future.

They call for a coherent pesticides policy based on the overall strategy of reducing the use of pesticides and developing alternatives such as integrated pest management and low-input farming systems wherever possible, in the interests of human health and the environment.

Sue Dibb



FROM FEAST TO FAMINE

Official cures and grassroots remedies to Africa's food crisis

Bill Rau, Zed Books, 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU, 1991. ISBN 0 86232 927 2. £8.95

THE ENERGY DIMENSION

A practical guide to energy in rural development programmes

Christopher Hurst and Andrew Barnett, Intermediate Technology, 103-5 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HH. ISBN 1 85339 074 7. £9.95

AID AND POWER

The World Bank & policy-based lending, Volume 1

Paul Mosley, Jane Harrison and John Toye, Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE. ISBN 0 415 01548 0. £12.99

EUROPE: 1992 AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Michael Davenport with Sheila Page, Overseas Development Institute, Regent's College, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS. ISBN 0 85003 151 6. £9.95

BIOTECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF WORLD AGRICULTURE

Henk Hobbelaar, Zed Books (address above). ISBN 0 86232 837 3. £8.95

Despite millions of pounds' worth of aid to Ethiopia during the 1974 famine and tens of millions during the Band Aid era of 1984/5, famine is stalking the country. Indeed it did during 1986/7 and again in 1989/90. Why does it happen? Why is aid so ineffective at preventing famine's return? Why are so many of Africa's countries plagued by famine, riddled with poverty, burdened by debt?

Bill Rau's book brings up to date the now-classic Walter Rodney text *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, which itself followed Marx's 1853

analysis in *The British Rule in India* showing how colonial powers not only extract and exploit a country's resources but actively destroy local industry. Post-independence aid packages and development strategies, guided by such bodies as the World Bank and USAID, do not offer effective solutions, says Rau, but continue forms of development more suited to Western than to local needs.

It is not all doom, though. The 'grassroots remedies' of the title reflects Rau's belief that solutions are being found in the informal economy, the urban slums and rural backwaters that have been largely untouched by official development. Small-scale, co-operative enterprises providing goods and services for local sale or barter, and using production methods rediscovered from their ancestors — this is the development that is needed, says Rau.

It is a heartening theme, if a little rose-tinted. One project Rau describes I have had contact with, and there are two points he could have raised but didn't. Firstly, that project grew thanks to funds from War on Want and Oxfam. Secondly, perhaps because of this support, some skilled members of the project outgrew their roles and left for salaried jobs. The project has now virtually failed.

Rural self-sufficiency is fine in theory. The practicalities from the point of view of sustainable energy are pointed out in Hurst and Barnett's book, an excellent source of check-lists and reminders for anyone trying to administer or advise development projects.

Meanwhile, official assistance — in this case from the World Bank — is given a careful appraisal by Mosley et al. I suspect they wanted to give the Bank a kick in the teeth by exposing how the Bank undertakes secret bargaining with recipient governments, a hidden version of the IMF's 'conditional' loans. By the end of their research, though, the Bank had itself become more open about its negotiations and priorities. Nevertheless the authors are



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sceptical of the Bank's new, liberal style and the accompanying liberal view of economics, which ignores, they say, some of the world's significant economic forces.

Certainly there are forces well beyond the World Bank's control. The opening of borders with East Europe and the harmonisation of EC economies are two examples. In Davenport and Page's book the impact of EC harmonisation on third world countries is examined, looking at manufacturing, capital investment and trade. In brief, they conclude that it is bad news for countries trying to export products to Europe which can be produced in Europe, and good news for countries export-

ing products which can't.

Another force beyond the World Bank's control is new technology, including genetic engineering or biotechnology. There are several books on biotechnology and third world issues, and this latest one, from the founder of GRAIN — the Spanish-based campaigning group Genetic Resources Action International — ranks among the most readable of introductions, with plenty of tables and graphs backing up the narrative. But I do wish Zed had invested in better type-setting: far too many lines finished with hyphenated part words, disrupting an otherwise lucid flow.

Tim Lobstein

Just ask us

Tricks of the trade? The meaning of the small print? How to tell the good from the bad ... just ask **The Food Magazine's** panel of experts, including public analyst Bob Stevens and specialist lawyer Craig Baylis.

Puree purist

You ask us: I buy my tomato puree in metal tubes. Is the metal made of lead or aluminium, and will this contaminate the puree inside?

It appears that the modern tomato puree tube is made of an aluminium alloy. But don't get worried about Alzheimer's disease or aluminium poisoning, because the manufacturers don't let the tomato sit next to the metal. The major manufacturers, such as Napolina, coat the inside of the tube with a protective lacquer.

The only contact between puree and metal is likely to occur at the nozzle. If you want to be ultra-cautious, then use the whole tube when you first open it, or discard the first half-inch after it's been open a while.

Freshly frozen

You ask us: Are frozen vegetables as good nutritionally as fresh vegetables?

Vegetables are a good source of dietary fibre and complex carbohydrate, and these are not lost during processing by freezing (nor during canning or dehydrating). They are also good sources of some vitamins and minerals. The minerals are hardly affected by processing though small amounts may leach into the cooking water during canning.

Only the vitamin levels are likely to be significantly affected by processing vegetables. And of the vitamins, the most easily lost is vitamin C, which is sensitive to heat and soluble in water. Vitamin B1 (thiamine), vitamin B3 (niacin) and vitamin A may also suffer.

Whether they are going to be frozen or canned, the freshly picked vegetables will first be blanched — steamed or dipped into hot water — to help clean and preserve them. Freezing does little further damage, although some plants suffer cell wall

damage more easily than others.

The Australian Consumer's Association looked at vitamin losses from frozen peas, beans, carrots and corn compared with freshly cooked equivalents. They found

■ Frozen peas: little effect on vitamins A, B1, B3. Loss of nearly half the vitamin C

■ Frozen beans: loss of two-thirds of vitamin C, loss of half the small amount of vitamin A, loss of all the tiny amounts of vitamins B1 and B3

■ Frozen carrots: No loss of vitamin A, complete loss of the tiny amounts of vitamin B3 and C

■ Frozen corn: Vitamins B1 and B3 were maintained, and vitamin C levels were twice as high in frozen corn compared with fresh.

The findings on the corn testing showed up one salient feature of all these tests: the quality of the fresh product can vary significantly. Poor handling and over-long storage times can do at least as much damage to fresh vegetables as blanching and freezing does to frozen vegetables.

Heinz doppelganger

You ask us: I run a small delicatessen and want to start selling my own specialised cooked foods. My surname is Heinz, and I wondered if there would be a problem selling my food with my name on it — Heinz Pasta Sauce, for example — or would I be in trouble with a well-known international company?

You would be in trouble. If it came to the attention of the well-known H J Heinz they may well prosecute you for attempting to 'pass off' your goods as theirs by trading under their name. It would be no defence to say that your name was Heinz.

You might, like Bernard Matthews, try using your full name if this would clearly distinguish your product. Arthur Heinz Pasta Sauce would be much less likely to attract prosecution

Letters

Potato slip

Dear Food Magazine

I think the link between green potatoes and spina bifida (Throwing Light on Potatoes, The Food Magazine issue 13) has been totally discredited, but you carry on with the myth. Are you sure of your facts?

R M Forrester, MD FRCP
Ambleside, Cumbria

Editors' reply: A suggestion that solanine in potatoes eaten by mothers in early pregnancy might be responsible for spina bifida received much publicity but, as you rightly point out, has not been confirmed by the evidence. The link was suggested when potato blight had reduced crops to such a level that green potatoes were eaten in large quantities, and at the same time a rise in the number of spina bifida babies was noted — but in the end no epidemiological link could be established between the two.

Solanine can, though, at high levels give rise to headaches, nausea and stomach upset and in extreme cases serious neurological disturbances, stupor and hallucinations.

Company pay-off

Dear Food Magazine

In your news item in the April/June issue of The Food Magazine (issue 13) you mention the Tory party being the main beneficiary of food company political donations. To my mind the contrast to this is the meagre donation of these companies for nutrition research. Perhaps it would be possible to find out how much they give for research to academia and elsewhere and make a comparison. There are some notable exceptions, but I would imagine the total does not exceed five figures.

Dr M Eastwood
University of Edinburgh

Fountain of youth

Dear Food Magazine

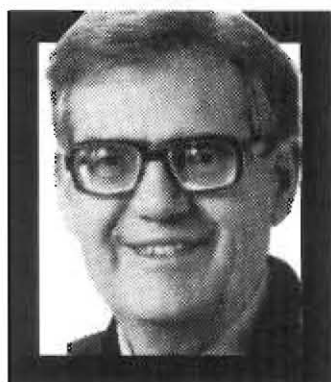
From what I can make out, many infants' schools no longer have mid-morning or mid-afternoon breaks for drinks, only for play. At lunchtime children seem to make do with one drink, and for all I know may not even have that. It takes a lot of cajoling to get my daughter to finish the juice in her lunchbox flask, she is in such a rush to get to the playground.

What should children's liquid intake be? Do they drink enough? Bearing in mind that the children spend the best part of an hour rushing around playing, and probably having had a salty bag of crisps, does this pose a health risk? A friend's child suffered convulsions in the school playground last summer, and it was found that she had become dehydrated and was suffering from sunstroke.

My daughter's school would, I am sure, defend itself by saying that there are water fountains where the children can always get a drink. In fact the playground fountains are beyond a red line and they have to get a dinner lady's permission to cross it — new children or shy children do not go and ask for this permission. There is admittedly a fountain in their toilets.

I would like to see some discussion of this. Do I worry unnecessarily about getting drinks down my children? Is the importance of drink mentioned anywhere in the briefs to Local Authority School Dinner Services? Are school children storing up future kidney problems?

R Southern
Ilford, Essex



The Long View

Unnatural practices

Guest writer Alan Long takes a sideways look at the cattle trade.

Hypernatural is a word the food industry toys with to euphemise products pasteurised, irradiated and otherwise 'improved'. Now food science spreads its techno-tentacles down on the farm, to the meat and milk on legs pushed to the limits of production by growth-boosters (sorry, 'performance enhancers') peddled by the so-called animal health industry.

Take hormones. However safe the experts declare 'the hormones' to be, the word is death in the meat and dairy market-place. In the EC, hormone-sation will not clear the fourth hurdle, even when new names such as BST and PST have been coined. Of course, there are already hormones in meat and milk and even so-called phyto-oestrogens in plant foods (which may have beneficial effects). But the public doesn't like the idea of hidden doses of such powerful artefacts in their dinner.

Then there is the technique of immunising animals against their own growth-controlling hormones. This removes a natural check to excessive growth. Some meat

traders advocate such hypernatural interferences, immunisation being a 'healthy' word — doctors urge it for children, don't they? But then, doctors urge antibiotics, too.

These devices may appeal to human body-builders, but even then they are rightly dismissed in competitive events. Should we turn a blind eye when the same techniques are used by farmers hoping to improve the weight and conformation of show animals, to gain prizes worth thousands of pounds?

Therapy is not the purpose behind these farmerceuticals masquerading as animal health products. Their wizardry consists of supplementing bizarre diets and performing various tricks all for one purpose: to finish animals for slaughter as young as possible, at minimum food cost and before robust sex-taints develop.

And it isn't just the weight of the carcass that matters. Fatstock prices are quoted no more; in these lean times the traders talk of finishing, not fattening, for market.

Felling animals with a pole-axe was abandoned in the 1930s. Slaughterhouses — the shambles of old — became abattoirs, to disguise the frankness of the honest English word (although a knowledge of French preserves the element of assault and battery). Qualms were put at rest by the introduction of the humane killer, with which a half-ton beast would collapse equably into a

selection of prime cuts ready for delivery from what should be regarded as commercialised mortuaries.

The term 'humane killer' describes contraptions intended to stun the animals before they are killed by cutting their throats and bleeding them to death. Such niceties before the cut may not always be observed: for instance, concessions have always been made in the case of halal meat from the days when ships were crewed by Lascars.

In fact, the Koran contains texts on animal welfare that belittle the Farm Animal Welfare Council's own list of Freedoms. Strict observance would dismiss nearly all British livestock as non-halal even before they are slaughtered.

Vets pledge themselves to do their utmost for the well-being of the animals in their care. Their importunity in securing jobs in the slaughterhouse, where they collect their fees at the massacre of their charges, contrasts sadly with their vows. Veterinarians should be no more than a misprint away from being vegetarians.

It seems that dope testing of the champions may be required at the Royal Smithfield Show, and the vets will then be reduced to taking the piss out of their hapless hypernatural patients...

■ Alan Long is a veteran vegetarian and writes in a personal capacity.

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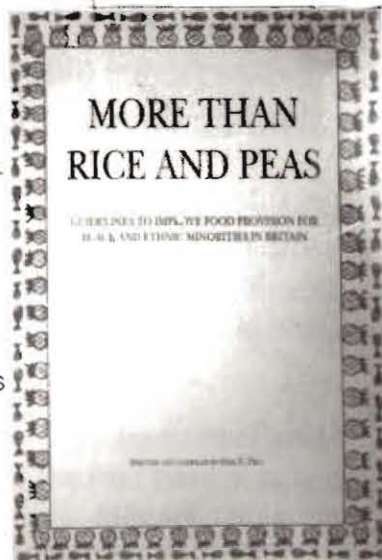
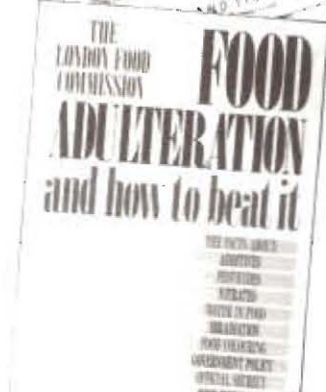
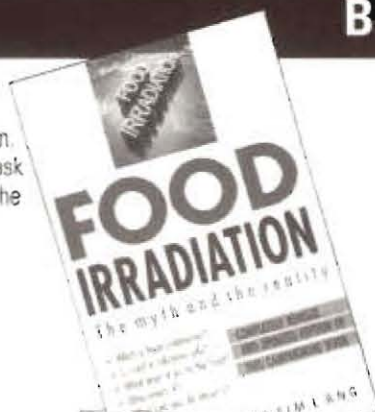
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Children's Food

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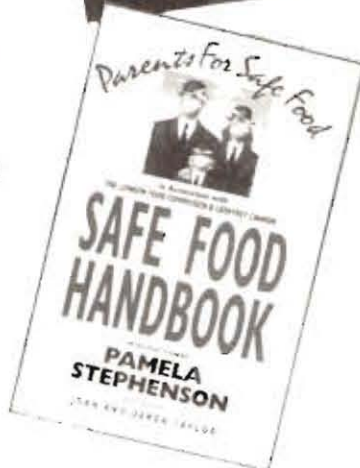
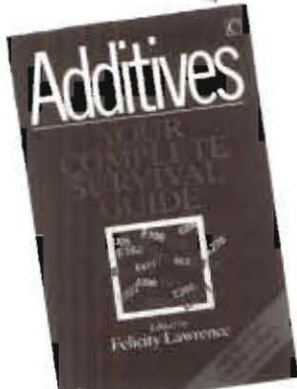
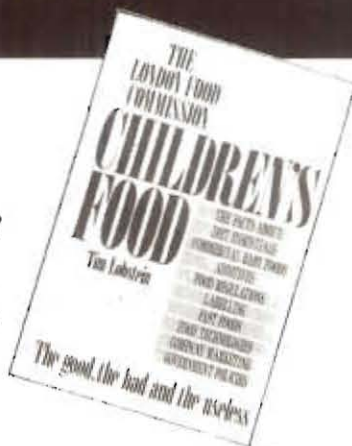
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The nation's health

Eleven years after the Black Report and five years after the abolition of the Health Education Council, the Conservative Government has spoken about the public health. *The Health of the Nation* sets out the Government's proposals for the development of a health strategy for the UK.

William Waldegrave seeks to regain the initiative after the years of NHS attrition, and in conceptual terms, if not in plans for action, the Green Paper is remarkable for accepting what was for so long repudiated by Thatcher — that poverty is linked to ill-health. The document's summary recognises that health is determined 'by a whole range of influences — from genetic inheritance, through personal behaviour, family and social circumstances to the physical and social environment'.

Responsibility for the nation's health is acknowledged to lie with the government and all its institutions, as well as with individuals. Here is a distinct change of tone from the 'Look After Your Heart' message, perhaps even a recognition of the existence of 'society' above groups of individuals and families which seemed to be the limit of

understanding in the previous decade.

The action that the Green Paper proposes is sadly not so spectacular. Food and diet feature in several sections but little material change is promised. Food safety is identified as an area with 'great potential for harm' but no target for improvement of hygiene is considered possible since 'more needs to be known about incidence of food poisoning'. Environmental health officers might disagree, arguing, no doubt, about the need for resources to offset the conflicting demands of their work.

The Paper reiterates the 1984 COMA advice to reduce intake of fat, sugar and salt and proposes a target for reduction of obesity to the 1980 level. Sadly, there is no discussion of food labelling, the restoration of school meals or the alleviation of food poverty.

The Health of the Nation HMSO, 1991. £11.80

Magnesium may help ME sufferers

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), or myalgic encephalomyelitis, has no known cause and is not recognised by many doctors. Viral infection is suspected in the disease, with symptoms of

Public health, missing magnesium, excess salt and plenty of greens — Eric Brunner reviews the medical press

appetite loss, nausea, tiredness and muscle weakness. These symptoms are similar to those associated with magnesium deficiency and doctors at Southampton have now shown that magnesium treatment can benefit CFS patients. Patients given magnesium injections claimed to have improved energy levels, better emotional state and less pain.

Cox, I M, Campbell, M J, Dowson, D, *Red blood cell magnesium and chronic fatigue syndrome*, *The Lancet*, 1991 337:757-760

Reducing salt intake

Cutting salt by about a quarter lowers risks of heart attack and stroke according to researchers at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Analysis of 78 trials of dietary salt reduction shows that moderate salt restriction lowers blood pressure by 5-7 mmHg. Using this as a basis, the authors have estimated that such a reduction in salt intake by those in the West would reduce the incidence of stroke by 26 per cent and heart disease by 15 per cent. In the UK 70,000 deaths per year, as well as much disability, would be prevented if less salt was added to processed foods, say the authors. This compares with 40,000 potential lives saved if table salt, but not that added in processing, were avoided.

This paper is the last of three which examine the relationship between salt consumption, blood pressure and disease. The first examines the relation between salt intake and blood pressure in different countries. The second looks at the same question but within populations.

Law, M R, Frost C D and Wald N J, Analysis of data from trials of salt reduction, *British Medical Journal* 1991, 302:819-824

Eat your greens

For some time the belief has been growing that the antioxidants, vitamin A, C and E and B-carotene play a protective role in the development of cancer. This new study confirms a finding of low carotene levels in the blood of cancer patients.

The study also showed the cancer itself was not responsible for the change in B-carotene level either through an effect on diet, or a change in metabolism. The researchers found serum B-carotene levels to be low in close family members as well as the patients themselves. Low carotene levels, relative to control individuals, were seen in patients with cancers for which smoking is a risk factor ie lung, stomach, small intestine, cervix and uterus, but patients with cancers of the breast, colon, prostate and skin did not have low carotene levels.

Smith, A W & Walker, K D, *Serum B-carotene in persons with cancer and their immediate families*, *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 1991, 133:661-671

■ Late extra

Editors' note: Eric Brunner modestly excluded a paper of his own from this review. A study of over 10,000 Whitehall civil servants found an increased risk of heart disease among lower grade workers compared with higher grade workers. A previous study, undertaken some 20 years earlier found similar class-related differences in morbidity, and there had been no reduction in the social class differences during the intervening decades.

Employment grade differences were also found in health-related behaviours such as smoking, diet and exercise, and in the social circumstances at work and social support networks.

Marmot, M G et al, *Health inequalities among British civil servants: the Whitehall II study*, *The Lancet*, 1991 337:1387-1393.

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