

THE
FOOD
MAGAZINE

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WITH
NATIONAL FOOD
ALLIANCE NEWS &
CONSUMER CHECKOUT

**WE EXPOSE
HERBAL BABY
DRINKS**

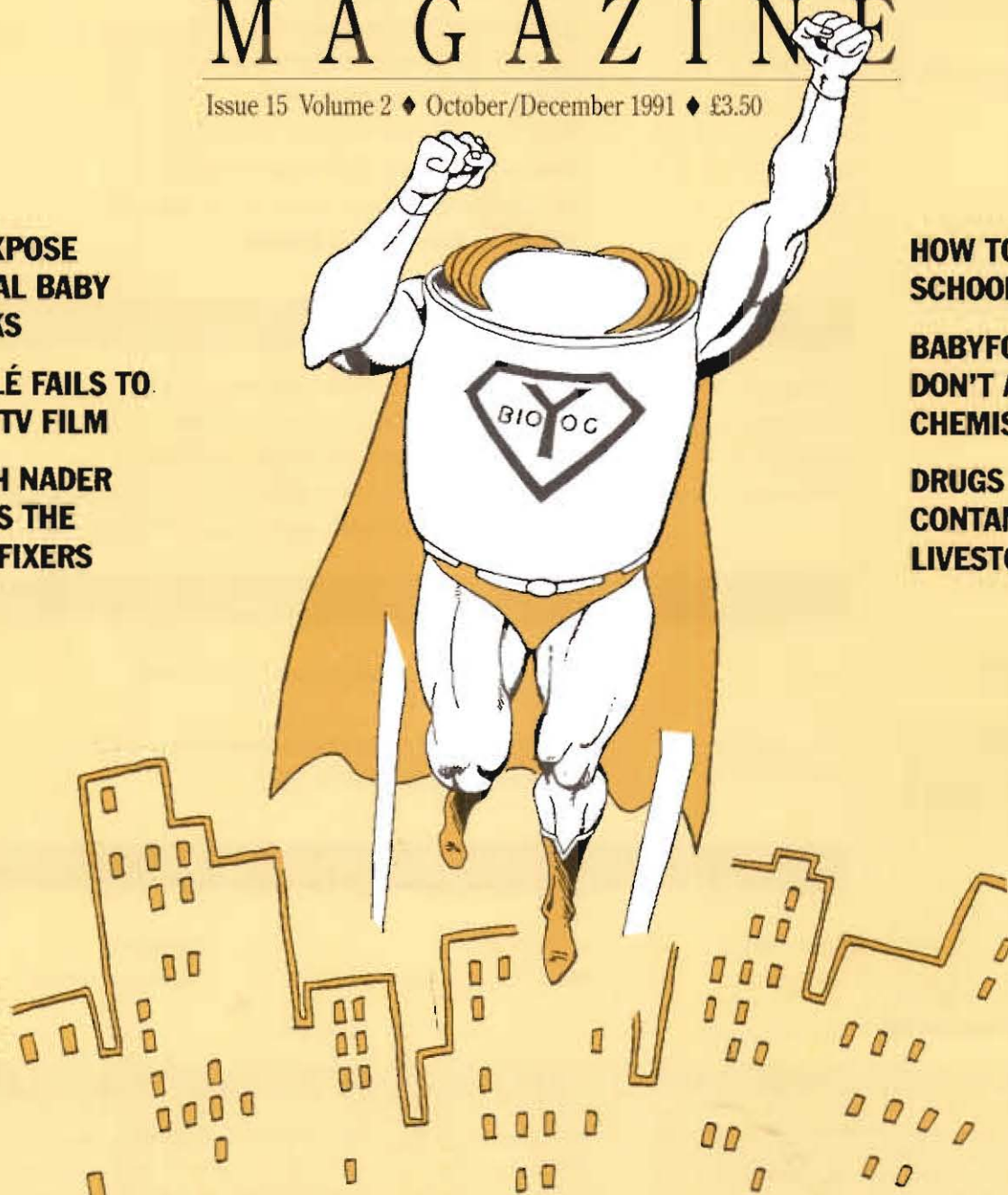
**NESTLÉ FAILS TO
STOP TV FILM**

**RALPH NADER
SLAMS THE
GATT FIXERS**

**HOW TO IMPROVE
SCHOOL DINNERS**

**BABYFOOD –
DON'T ASK YOUR
CHEMIST**

**DRUGS
CONTAMINATE
LIVESTOCK**



Super-yogurt?

JUST HOW HEALTHY ARE BIO-YOGURTS?

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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Putting people first



In the world of food, agriculture and public health new distinctions are emerging between the needs of human beings and the needs of a free-market economy.

Ralph Nader, with his powerful reputation for defending consumer interests for nearly thirty years, has turned his attention to the current GATT negotiations. As we report (page 5), he finds big business too influential in running the show while consumer representation is small and divided. And while he is raising eyebrows among the quiet negotiators, another group of consumers has overturned a powerful agribusiness grouping at the CODEX negotiations over whether growth hormones should be allowed in beef production (page 5).

But while the thunder echoes around the political arenas, the everyday problems of eating healthily and happily remain. *The Food Commission* has analysed the changing diets of rich and poor families in the UK (page 2), and found widening gaps between those who can afford to improve their diets and those who can't. Two decades of increasing relative poverty are having their toll and a two-diet society is emerging.

This analysis is strengthened by research also conducted for *The Food Magazine* showing that many women living on low incomes are significantly deficient in their intakes of several essential nutrients (page 3), when compared with the newly announced officially recommended nutrient levels. Over a quarter of such women were falling below the level that would 'fail to meet the physiological needs of over 97 per cent of the population' for eight different vitamins and minerals.

Meanwhile, the diets of many school children are under threat as they return to school to find school authorities facing the prospect of cutting back or even closing down their meals services (pages 18-20). Children from low-income families benefit most from the nutrients offered by a good school meal, and so it is they who will suffer most if the service is not defended and

improved. In this issue we report on the campaigns to improve the quality and availability of school meals and to encourage children to enjoy healthy eating.

Going Japanese?

The links between diet and health have been the basis for a range of new products in Japan, known as functional foods, which promise physiological benefits for the consumer. Bio-yogurts are one product where Japanese research has been adapted for European tastes. Made with special bacterial cultures known as bifidus and acidophilus, these designer yogurts claim to aid digestion and protect against harmful bacteria.

But can they live up to their claims? In a specially-commissioned survey we found less than half of the products tested were likely to contain sufficiently high levels of both cultures to be of biological value (pages 9-11). Keeping cultures alive and kicking is a known problem, but many manufacturers appear to have rushed products onto supermarket shelves to cash in on the health hype.

The law does little to help. Clever copywriters skirt around the vague legislation to flaunt their product's promises. Earlier this year the government's Food Advisory Committee said health claims should not be permitted unless on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer. Now it is time for the legislators to ensure health claims for foods do not overstate their case.

Whoever wins the forthcoming election, there will be much work needed to promote and sustain food and health policies. As Sir Donald Acheson said on his retirement as the government's Chief Medical Officer in September, there is only so much that health promotion can achieve. Policies that attack the underlying inequalities in our society are needed to deal with the real causes of diet-related ill health — a challenge no government should ignore.

Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein

FREE BOOKS!

Yes, help yourself to one free book from our selection on page 24. All you have to do is to subscribe to the Food Magazine (or give a subscription to a friend) and name the book of your choice (sorry, not *More Than Rice and Peas*).

Class differences in diets are widening

It is now well-accepted that the gap in incomes between rich and poor has widened considerably, especially in the last twelve years. With these widening inequalities in income have come widening differences in diets.

The National Food Survey – an annual survey which looks at household purchases of food but not food eaten outside the home, such as confectionery, soft drinks, meals and alcohol – shows a general improvement in healthy eating over the 1980s. Purchases of full-fat milk, cooking and spreading fats, and table sugar have all been falling, while purchases of wholemeal bread, skimmed milk and fruit have been rising.

But closer inspection shows that these apparently healthy trends are more marked for those on high incomes than for those on lower incomes, as a result the latest figures (for 1989) show

'There is a link, has been a link, and I suspect will continue to be a link between deprivation and ill health'

Sir Donald Acheson, a respected epidemiologist who is leaving his post as Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health.

a widening gap between the diets of rich and poor.

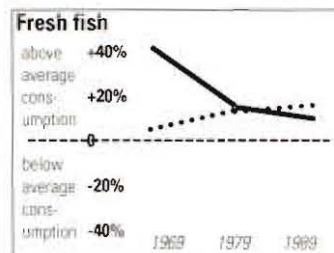
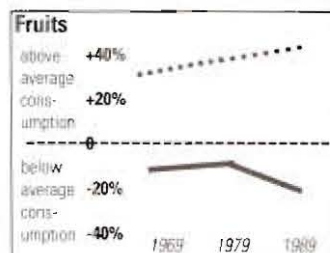
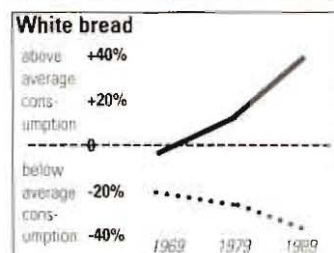
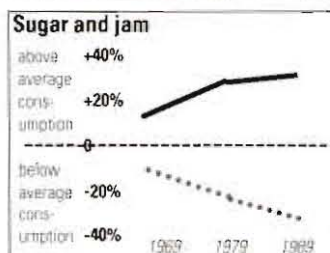
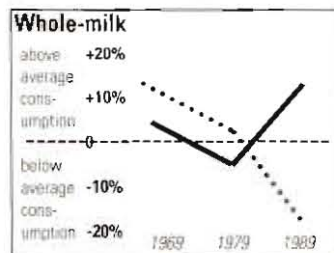
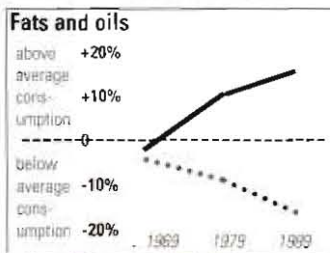
The graphs compare high and low income groups with the national average, at the end of each of the last three decades.

The figures should not be read as showing an absolute worsening of the diets of low income groups. But their position compared with the average for the nation has deteriorated, and in absolute terms their improvement in diet has been small compared with higher income groups. The effect has been an increasing discrepancy between income groups, and the emergence of a two-diet society: those making large and significant dietary improvements and those showing little or no improvement.

Low income groups have traditionally faced greater risks of ill-health, including diet-related disease such as heart disease and cancers. These inequalities in health can only get worse as dietary inequalities increase.

Key
..... higher income households (A1 & A2)
— lower income households (D & E2)

Household food consumption figures 1969-1989 show the changes in healthy eating patterns between high and low income groups.



Source: National Food Survey, HMSO 1971; 1981; 1991.

Slow moves on menu labelling

Despite promises from food minister David Maclean earlier this year that food eaten in cafes, restaurants, pubs and take-aways would soon have to carry details of ingredients, nutrients and possibly preparation methods, announcements made during Parliament's summer recess has meant there will be little movement before mid-1992 at the earliest.

The government-appointed Food Advisory Committee (FAC) has been asked to re-review its position on menu labelling, and the government-appointed National Consumers' Council has been asked to undertake 'an in-depth survey into what customers want from food labelling in restaurants and take-aways.' Both

these moves could delay progress for some time.

The FAC recommended last April that 'there was no reason in principle why consumers should not be given as much information with non-prepacked foods as with packaged foods'. Mr Maclean expressed agreement but rejected any immediate action, suggesting 'consumers may have different information needs than they have when shopping.' And he added 'I am not in the business of imposing unnecessary burdens on the catering industry'.

In Italy restaurateurs have to show on the menu whether food is fresh or frozen; and in Germany certain additives have to be declared

Free food will do little to help poor

Controversial plans by the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) to give away unsold food to the poor will do little to help the real problems of people on low incomes say critics. 'Using the poor as a dustbin doesn't work if it keeps them in that role' said Parents for Safe Food Director, Tim Lang in a letter to IGD Chief Executive, John Beaumont.

Based on the Second Harvest schemes in the US, the IGD proposal would hand out surplus or imperfectly packaged food to charity centres across the country. Marks & Spencer already distributes perishable and non-perishable food that has passed its 'display by' date to

local charities.

Companies may receive tax benefits and conscience-salving publicity through such schemes, but must face up to their role in perpetuating food problems for people on low incomes, say voluntary sector critics. Retaining local stores and introducing pricing policies to make healthy food cheaper would do far more than free handouts to help people in the long-term, they argue.

Meanwhile the EC continues its annual handout of surplus butter and beef, which even the UK government has criticised as 'an inefficient method both of dealing with surpluses and of assisting those whom it should help'.

Government sets our nutrient needs

The long-awaited review of recommended nutrient intake levels was published by the Department of Health in July. Adopting the term 'Dietary Reference Values', the report sets out average requirements for nine vitamins and eleven minerals, an extension of the previous Recommended Daily Amounts (RDAs). The report also repeats dietary targets for fats and fibre, gives new, lower figures for energy (Calorie) levels, and for the first time in any government

document gives recommended levels for sugar consumption.

The figures need to be read with care. The new recommended amounts are set at levels which are expected to satisfy the needs of 97 per cent of the population, and are termed Reference Nutrient Intakes (RNIs). Estimated average requirements (EARs) which would satisfy 50 per cent of people and lower amounts (LRNIs), which would fail to satisfy 97 per cent of people, are also given.

Deemed the most comprehensive set of figures in Europe, the scientific panel's chairman, Dr Roger Whitehead of the MRC Dunn Nutrition Unit in Cambridge, anticipated that they would be used for the current revision of EC food labelling recommendations. But in spelling out the implications for industry Dr Whitehead created some confusion when he suggested that for labelling purposes the EAR levels might be acceptable, rather than the higher RNIs.

Dr Whitehead also admitted that the levels for nearly all the RNIs were lower than the Recommended Dietary Allowances in the USA, which manufacturers used on US food labels. This, he said, was because the RNIs were based on the physiological requirements of 97 per cent of the population, rather than the US approach which set levels for the entire population.

Commenting on the new figures, the British Dietetic Association welcomed the new targets but added that they would remain meaningless unless translated into action in a form people can understand.

New figures reveal deficient diets for low income women

The Department of Health's new Dietary Reference Values include a set of figures termed Lower Reference Nutrient Intakes (LRNIs). These are levels which would fail to meet the needs of at least 97 per cent of the population, people habitually eating less than these levels would almost certainly suffer nutritional deficiencies.

The Food Commission has re-analysed the results of the government's 1990 Adult Nutrition Survey and found extensive evidence of nutritionally deficient diets among women in social classes IV and V, women claiming welfare benefits and unemployed women.

In each category there was a significant shortfall in not just one but several vitamins and minerals. Over a quarter of women claiming welfare benefits were falling below LRNI levels for iron, potassium, magnesium and vitamins A, B1, B2, B6 and C.

■ For further details, send £3 for the factsheet *Analysis of diets of women on low income*, to the Food Commission, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR.

The Food Commission has also re-analysed data published in the government's survey of children's diets: for details see our feature article on school meals, pages 18-19.

The new Reference Nutrient Intakes which should meet the physiological needs of 97 per cent of adults (given as daily amounts)

	Old RDAs		New RNIs	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Vitamins				
Thiamin/B1 (mg)	1.2 ^a	0.9	1.0	0.8
Riboflavin/B2 (mg)	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.1
Niacin/B3 (mg)	18	15	17	13
Vitamin C (mg)	30	30	40	40
Vitamin A (µg)	750	750	700	600
Vitamin D (µg)	b	b	—	—
Vitamin B6 (mg)	—	—	1.4	1.2
Vitamin B12 (µg)	—	—	1.5	1.5
Folate (µg)	—	—	200	200
Minerals				
Calcium (mg)	500	500	700	700
Iron (mg)	10	12	8.7	14.8
Phosphorus (mg)	—	—	550	550
Magnesium (mg)	—	—	300	270
Sodium (mg)	—	—	1600	1600
Potassium (mg)	—	—	3500	3500
Chloride (mg)	—	—	2500	2500
Zinc (mg)	—	—	9.7	7.0
Copper (mg)	—	—	1.2	1.2
Selenium (µg)	—	—	75	60
Iodine (µg)	—	—	140	140
Protein (g)	72 ^a	54	56	45
Energy (Calories)	2900 ^a	2150	2550 ^c	1940 ^c
Fat (g)	—	—	70-80 ^c	
of which saturated (g)	—	—	20-25 ^c	
monounsaturated (g)	—	—	25-30 ^c	
polyunsaturated (g)	—	—	12-15 ^c	
Non-milk extrinsic sugars (g)	—	—	0-60 ^c	
Intrinsic & milk sugars & complex starches (g)	—	—	200-300 ^c	
Dietary fibre (g)	—	—	18 ^c	

— no RDA was made for these nutrients

^a These are the old figures for 'moderately active' younger men

^b 10µg/day is recommended for adults not exposed to sunlight

^c This is the estimated average requirement (EAR). RNIs are not available

Sugar's sigmoid factor

Despite reported opposition from the sugar industry, the Whitehead committee recommended that only an average of 10 per cent of total dietary energy should come from sugars — ie around 60g sugar per day for an adult or 30-40g per day for a young child.

The committee endorsed previous COMA advice that sugar was directly linked to tooth decay (caries). According to Professor Aubrey Sheiham the link shows a sigmoid or S-shaped curve: up to a certain level of sugar consumption — around 30-40g/day — there is little increase in dental decay, but above this level the amount of decay rapidly increases,

until at levels above 100g/day the maximum effect is found. Average sugar consumption in the UK is currently 100g/day, and Professor Sheiham recommends an average 'safe' level to be around 40g/day if there is fluoride in the diet, or 30g/day if there is no fluoride.

■ A. Sheiham, *British Dental Journal*, July 20 1991, pp 63-65

MAFF admits irradiation loophole

Agriculture minister, John Gummer, has admitted that not all irradiated food ingredients will have to be declared on food labels. This is despite repeated assurances during the passage of the Food Safety Bill last year that there would be full and comprehensive labelling of irradiated products.

In a written reply to Labour's Dr David Clark in July, Mr Gummer admitted 'if a particular ingredient does not need to appear on the label, then the fact that it may have been irradiated need not appear either'.

Foods currently exempt are those containing compound ingredients – an ingredient itself composed of two or more ingredients – if the compound ingredient constitutes less than 25 per cent of the final product, or if the compound ingredient has a generic name such as herbs and spices.

The government's own Food Advisory Committee's review of food labelling earlier this year

recommended that these exemptions should be removed. The government's initial response to the recommendations was to argue that difficulties might be posed for manufacturers, and a decision would have to be taken at EC level.

The Food Irradiation Campaign has called for the suspension of Isotron's existing licence to irradiate spices and herbs until changes in the UK labelling regulations are made to ensure that all irradiated products will be clearly labelled as originally promised by ministers. Consumers are being urged to write to their MP to ask Mr Gummer to stick to his commitment.

The US Food and Drug Administration has ruled that irradiated food cannot be labelled as 'fresh'. Bryan Silbermann of the Produce Marketing Association, the largest industry trade group in the US, said it was inevitable that the

inability to call food 'fresh' would help steer many food producers away from the technology.

The Fisheries Department in Thailand has been test marketing irradiated seafood, both in Thailand and in several export markets including the Netherlands, Austria, Japan and Australia. But it has kept the irradiation secret so as not to spark off protests.

A spokeswoman for The Thai Fisheries Department was reported as saying that products were not labelled as irradiated as consumers 'might protest against it and that would make news. I don't want all our efforts on food irradiation over the past ten years to be destroyed'.

■ The Food Irradiation Campaign's list of UK companies that do not intend to use or handle irradiated food is available from Martine Drake, The Food Irradiation Campaign, c/o The Food Commission, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR – price £3 for full list or £1 for June 91 update.

UK pesticide review 'shambolic' says Labour

The UK uses more pesticides than most other countries yet delays in government reviews mean that 30-year-old pesticides are still in use despite the availability of safer alternatives, says Dr David Clark, MP, Shadow Minister for Food and Agriculture.

In August he revealed that the rate of review of pesticides is so slow that only three pesticides have had their review completed since the work began at the beginning of 1990, although the legislation was enacted in 1985.

Pesticide manufacturers are also facing increasing delays in getting new pesticides approved, with many agrochemical companies facing up to five years delay in bringing possibly safer chemicals onto the market. They complain that the UK's approval procedure is possibly the slowest in Europe.

By comparison Sweden's successful strategy for pesticides achieved a 47 per cent reduction in pesticide use between 1986 and 1990. All pesticides are reviewed on a five-year basis and since 1986 Sweden has completed their review of 700 pesticides. Subsequently 350 active ingredients have been withdrawn from use.

Under increasing pressure MAFF has promised to increase resources for this work. But additional funding is likely to come from resources previously allocated to other important environmental work.

'The situation is clearly shambolic' says David Clark. 'It is important that we have a good system of approving, monitoring and reviewing pesticides.'

Farmed salmon

Friends of the Earth Scotland say that the pesticide Ivermectin, which has not been granted a licence for use on fish, is being used to combat sea lice infestations on salmon farms.

Resistance to the toxic pesticide dichlorvos (sold under the trade name Aquaguard) has led some producers to switch to Ivermectin. Last year the industry faced criticism when residues of dichlorvos were found in salmon, along with traces of antibiotics.

Poor hygiene escapes the law

Over 15,000 food premises nationally do not meet food hygiene standards, yet local authorities are reluctant to prosecute, says a report from the local authority watchdog, the Audit Commission. Only 3,000 cases were brought to court last year with many local authorities bringing no food prosecutions at all.

The report found many environmental health departments lacked the resources to meet their duties under the 1990 Food Safety Act and were suffering a 14 per cent

shortage of staff to carry out inspections. One-third of authorities surveyed had no emergency plans for tackling serious problems such as a food poisoning outbreak.

The Audit Commission recommends that clear policies, new managerial attitudes, and more precise targeting of activities are required to ensure authorities make the optimal use of scarce resources.

■ Towards a Healthier Environment: Managing Environmental Health Services, The Audit Commission, HMSO, July 1991

Secrets out

Much pesticide safety information held by the British government is still kept an official secret. But, says the Campaign for Freedom of Information, you can walk into the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) public reading room in Washington and read all submissions, including

company data submitted to US authorities, plus correspondence between the EPA and the companies, farmers, food retailers, environmental groups, the UK government and the European Commission.

The Campaign also revealed that British cruise liners crossing the Atlantic are regularly checked by US health inspectors and their reports – which include data on food poisoning

outbreaks and kitchen hygiene – are widely distributed to the US travel industry and the press. The QE2, for example, was found to be infested with cockroaches in several locations in 1989 and again in 1991. British health inspectors also check the same liners but their reports remain secret.

■ Secrets, July 1991, Campaign for Freedom of Information, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR (Tel 071-253 2445)

Farmers continue to misuse drugs

'The British agricultural industry has a fine reputation for the safe use of veterinary medicines' declared Agriculture Minister, John Gummer, in July.

A few days later the director of the newly-privatised Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), Dr Michael Rutter, announced what he called 'reasonably low' figures for the numbers of animals and carcasses

which exceeded maximum residue levels during 1990. Of 48,500 samples, randomly selected at farms and slaughterhouses, under 300 were found to be contaminated with hormones, antibiotics or heavy metals.

But the implication that this overall rate – less than 0.4 per cent – is reassuringly low maybe wrong. If all sampled animals had been tested for all likely drugs then the overall figure would be valid. But in fact the tests for each of the 66 substances were made on different sample sizes, some of them very small. The VMD found two cases of lead contamination in cattle in a sample of only 13 such animals.

The table shows the numbers found by the VMD to exceed Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), with Food Commission estimates of the total numbers of contaminated carcasses in the UK, based on MAFF annual slaughtering statistics and assuming the VMD figures are representative.

On this basis it appears that nearly three-quarters of a million pigs in the UK are contaminated with sulphadiazine and sulphadiazine at the time of slaughter. The drug is commonly added to pig feed to combat infections, and is to be banned in the USA as tests have shown links to cancer.

Heavy metal contamination also appears widespread, with an estimated million pigs and half a million cattle contaminated with excessive lead or cadmium. When confronted with these figures, a MAFF spokeswoman suggested it would be inadvisable to extrapolate from such a small sample size, but she admitted that she knew of no other, more representative sample on which to base estimates for national contamination figures.

Exceeding the MRL carries no penalty at present, and is only defined as the level at which 'immediate official action' is triggered, including a visit to the

Substances exceeding Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) in random tests

Substance	Animal (site)	Sample	Over MRL	Estimated total over MRL for UK*
Hormones				
Zeranol	Young cattle (bile)	243	3	21,500
Zeranol	Cows (bile)	287	5	11,000
Trenbolone	Young cattle (bile)	311	1	8,000
Progesterone	Young male cattle (serum)	294	12	60,000
Testosterone	Young female cattle (serum)	357	6	17,000
Testosterone	Cows (serum)	442	2	5,000
Antibiotics				
Sulphanomides	Pigs (kidney)	1,318	69	727,000
Penicillin G	Sheep (kidney)	19,442	3	3,000
assorted types	Cattle (kidney)	4,463	4	3,000
assorted types	Pigs (kidney)	16,414	71	60,000
Heavy metals				
Cadmium	Cattle (kidney)	13	1	254,000
Cadmium	Pigs (kidney)	12	1	1,157,000
Lead	Cattle (kidney)	13	2	508,000

Note: Only positive results are tabulated here. In 53 other tests, no levels above the MRL were reported.

* These figures are based on MAFF annual slaughtering statistics, and show Food Commission estimates of the number of carcasses estimated to have residues above MRL for the year 1990. Extrapolations from small samples may be prone to statistical error.

Source: Annual Report of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate 1990-91, MAFF, July 1991. Data collected Jan-Dec 1990.

BSE threat over?

The government's Chief Veterinary Officer, Keith Meldrum, announced in July that the incidence of mad cow disease, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, would 'rapidly decline' next year.

This optimism is hardly supported by current figures. Around 300-400 cases of BSE are still being confirmed each week, virtually unchanged from the same period a year ago. By the end of August a total of 35,334 cases had been reported in the UK, affecting 13,393 farms, over half of them in the South West of England.

The transmission of the disease to humans has still not been ruled out, following the case of a patient who developed Cruetzfeld Jacob disease – the human equivalent to BSE – six years after receiving a transplant of bovine tissue in a brain operation in 1983. Mr Meldrum acknowledged that nineteen cats have been diagnosed as suffering the feline version of BSE in the last year. He also acknowledged that there had been one case of the disease being passed from a cow to her calf, with three other possible cases being investigated. But he denied that this implied the disease would be with us for generations to come.

Meanwhile, the use of bovine offal for fertiliser was banned in June. Offal such as spleen, thymus and spinal cord can no longer be sprayed onto crops or soil, although the new restrictions do not affect bone meal.

farmer to investigate the cause. However, as the table shows, the estimated numbers of animals affected is enormous. This, combined with the decline in the number of Ministry vets now employed – down 27 per cent in the last decade to less than 450 – makes investigation of irresponsible farmers virtually impossible.

Concern over the illegal use of Angel Dust (Clenbuterol) in cattle has led MAFF to review their legal and investigative powers. Draft regulations which would make it an offence to send animals with residues above MRLs to slaughter, and to sell meat with residues above MRLs, have been sent to farmers and meat traders for consultation.

Regulations that cannot be enforced will be of little value, however. And, of course, the legislation would be unnecessary if Gummer were right about farmers' fine reputations.

Research budgets slashed

The research budget for the Agriculture and Food Research Council has been cut from a peak of £53m in 1984-85 to under £46m in 1990-91, according to Hansard. This represents a cut of over 40 per cent in real terms.

Scientific staff at AFRC institutes have fallen from 3100 to 1900 during the same period. Non-scientific staff fell from 2400 to 1300 (plus 200 in a privatised unit).

In a move described as 'myopic madness' by staff representatives, the Ministry of Agriculture has also started to close seven of the country's 19 Veterinary Investigation Centres. The centres undertake surveillance work including post mortems on carcasses. It was the early work done at the Truro centre – closed this September – which identified the first cases of BSE.

Cost is important determinant of food choice

Despite the growth of the health-conscious food shopper, prices and incomes still remain a major determinant of food consumption, according to Professor Bruce Traill, Dalgety Professor of Food Management and Marketing at Reading University.

Red meat sales have fallen while white meat has increased in popularity. Are we just concerned about our fat consumption or are there other factors at play? According to Professor Traill, between 1975 and 1985 the real price of beef fell by 5 per cent. However the real price of chicken and pork fell by 25 per cent, making it significantly cheaper than beef. Traill argues that this could be a major non-health related

explanation for the change in relative consumption of white and red meats.

Now pressure is building for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. GATT, budgetary reasons and concerns over intensive agriculture are all fuelling calls for a reduction in farm support policies. If successful these changes are likely to lead to an overall fall in prices, particularly for those commodities most highly subsidised. Ironically, this change in relative prices is likely to lead to an increase in consumption of red meats and dairy products – the kinds of foods we are being advised to cut back on for health reasons.

Price support policies of CAP

costs every household in Britain an estimated £800 annually. Professor Traill argues that if this money was returned to consumers through lower overall prices, the amount of money spent on food at the checkout might rise by around 5 per cent. While this sounds like good news for consumers as well as food manufacturers, it may not be so good for our waistlines and health. His analysis of European income and expenditure trends shows that as incomes rise, particularly those of low income consumers, more money is spent on eating out and on high value-added products.

Professor Traill predicts that incomes throughout the EC will continue to rise fastest in the

poorer countries. Latest figures show that the Portuguese spent on average 778 ECU per head on food, virtually a third of the Danes 2069 ECU. If all EC citizens reached the Danish level, food expenditure would increase by around 33 per cent, though he acknowledges this would not happen during the 1990s.

However the trend is set. Poorer countries of the EC will become more like the richer ones and their populations will eat more meat, more convenience and more value-added foods. This may be good news for food companies' 1992 European expansion plans but is likely to have devastating effects on health as southern European countries adopt northern European food practices.

Food multinationals look towards Eastern Europe for new markets

To many eastern European consumers freedom has meant the opportunity to indulge in western chocolates, biscuits, confectionery, soft drinks and salty snacks. To exploit this potentially huge market, food multinationals are competing to buy into eastern Europe's food businesses. Fledgling market economies in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, struggling to cope with lack of investment are welcoming western food multinationals, including BSN, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Sara Lee, Tate & Lyle and United Biscuits. The food giants have already recognised the potential for growth.

After years of living with restricted choice, chronic shortages and poor quality products eastern European shoppers are eager to sample the variety and novelty of

western goods. It is estimated that Polish consumers eat only an eighth as many chocolates on average as west Germans, while soft drink consumption in eastern Europe is a sixth of US levels.

It's an advertising executive's dream – the opportunity to build brand loyalty among consumers largely untouched by western mass-marketing. 'People actually remember advertisements' said one marketing consultant. But will the dream turn sour for eastern Europeans? Western investment may help the health of the economy in the short-term but there are concerns over the health of the people in the longer term. Levels of coronary heart disease are already high in many countries and greater consumption of sweet or fatty foods will do little to help.

Civil service catering to go

The Civil Service Catering Organisation (CISCO) is to be privatised by spring 1992, with a government-proposed employment package that has caused alarm among the two main trade unions.

CISCO management staff are expecting to enjoy continuous employment and retain most of their present terms and conditions, said CISCO chief executive Reg Wheeler following concern expressed by the management union IPMS. But non-management workers, mostly members of TGWU, are likely to be made redundant from the civil service and then offered re-employment without the same conditions. Employees could see hourly rates drop from £4.60 to £3.35 in some parts of the country, said a CISCO source.

GATT slammed over tuna ban

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has criticised GATT for overruling a 1990 US ban on tuna imports from Mexico and other nations which use fishing methods that kill large numbers of dolphins. The WWF says GATT is allowing international trade to contribute to the death of dolphins caught in tuna fishing nets.

The Mexican complaint against the US ban was supported by the EC and seven other GATT nations. Their argument, that health and environmental measures should only apply within the legal jurisdiction of the country applying the trade measure, could clearly set a precedent for overruling many other environmental protection measures.

■ The WWF has produced a discussion paper *The GATT, Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development*. It is available free of charge from Charles Arden-Clarke, World Conservation Centre, Avenue du Mont-Blanc, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland.

Nader attacks companies' hold on GATT

In his message to the World Congress of the International Organization of Consumer Unions in Hong Kong this summer, Ralph Nader, the US's best-known consumer advocate, warned that multinational corporations were using the Uruguay Round of GATT to try to free themselves from the shackles of national and local regulations on consumer protection, environmental standards, worker safety and wage levels.

'They want world commerce even without a commensurately democratic world law. The consequences, for both democratic procedures and substantive justice, of a failure to head off their power grab will be immense and very difficult to reverse once entrenched,' he said in his written message to the worldwide consumer movement.

He criticised the IOCU Secretariat for supporting GATT's view that liberalised trade would increase competition and lower prices, and that increased exports will benefit

the third world. He implied their view was naive and did not represent the views of most IOCU affiliates.

Many of the benefits of trade competition were rarely passed on to consumers and whatever dubious benefits GATT offers to third world economies in the way of improved access to northern markets are far outweighed by what those countries will be forced to give up in the areas of services, investments and intellectual property, he argued.

Nader highlighted the high costs extracted from third world agricultural, export-oriented economies in the form of environmental degradation and land concentration, and how cash crops lead to the loss of production for domestic consumption.

'Negotiations are taking place behind closed doors in Geneva, Switzerland, between admittedly unelected and largely unaccountable government agents who are representing largely business interests. Corporate lobbyists,

swarming in the halls outside the negotiating rooms, have been able to exert tremendous influence on the negotiations. Citizens' groups have not been able to play a parallel role.'

He described the harmonization process designed to cut out restrictions on trade — the so-called 'non-tariff trade barriers' — as having devastating consequences for progressive health and safety and environmental regulations.

Using food safety as an example of the way harmonization will work, he described how under GATT, the Rome-based Codex Alimentarius Commission will set international food safety standards. It doesn't have standards for many foods and possible food contaminants, but those it does have are relatively low. For example, Codex allows DDT residues in fruits and vegetables although most GATT member countries have banned DDT entirely. In setting its rules, Codex is highly influenced by multinational food and chemical company 'private advisors'

to national negotiators. At a recent Codex meeting Nestlé was reported to have had a larger delegation than several participating countries.

Not only will harmonization override countries' more stringent standards but it will preclude decentralised regulation-making, crucial to the evolution of health and safety standards.

In his strongly worded statement, Ralph Nader called on IOCU to adopt unequivocal opposition to a GATT agreement as it currently stands and to encourage citizens to pressure their national governments to oppose any trade agreement which threatens consumer and environmental protection.

■ The IOCU Congress passed a resolution expressing concern over GATT's impact on the environment, health standards and the third world

■ A worldwide independent Consumer Network on Trade was set up at the Consumer Congress to provide a forum for discussion and an exchange for information and research on GATT for NGOs. For more details: Tim Lang, PSF, 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA. Tel: 071-935 2099.

NGOs press for GATT reform

Representatives of over 30 non-government organisations (NGOs) worldwide are lobbying Arthur Dunkel, Director General of GATT, calling for a radical change in the direction of the Uruguay Round and a democratisation of the negotiating process.

To ensure food security in the developing world the group are calling on GATT to recognise a fundamental distinction between subsidies used in the North to perpetuate overproduction and export dumping, and subsidies use in the South to raise self-sufficiency, protect rural employment and promote environmental sustainability.

GATT is also called upon to recognise that environmentally sound farming may not be competitive in world market terms, and that governments should be allowed to retain the right to provide price support, trade restrictions and policies that support less intensive forms of production.

Thirdly they call for a full review of Codex Alimentarius Commission standards and reform of its structures to allow for the fuller representation of consumer, environmental and trade union organisations.

■ For more details contact: Dr Kevin Watkins, OHR, Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ.

Hormones: a test case for Codex

The Fourth of July proved cruelly ironic for the USA as Codex, the international food safety standards body, faced a major split over growth-promoting hormones. At stake was the right of countries, including those in the EC, to uphold their ban on the use of these hormones in meat production, which countries such as the US see as a barrier to trade.

In one corner stood the USA, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Japan, New Zealand, Canada and Israel all pressing for the acceptance of growth-promoting hormones in meat production. Against these world heavyweights stood the assorted powers of the EC, including the UK, together with China, Indonesia and

several African, Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries.

The Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs has slowly been developing evaluations and limits for various residues. The debate was tense and the Netherlands suggested deferring a decision for two years. The pro-hormone lobby pushed it to a vote, unusual for a body that in the past worked by consensus. But they badly miscalculated and lost the vote two to one (12 for, 27 against).

EC consumers will continue to eat meat produced without growth promoters — that is until the next challenge from world pharmaceutical and farming interests.

Gummer pledged to healthy UK diet

"Food and nutrition has been identified as a key policy area by Government, and the goal of a healthy diet for all is one to which we have repeatedly made clear our commitment." So says Agriculture and Food Minister John Gummer, in a recent letter written to National Food Alliance Chairman Geoffrey Cannon.

Mr Gummer continues: "I certainly believe that organisations such as the National Food Alliance can play an extremely useful role alongside Government in helping to secure the changes in the national diet vital to public health, and I welcome your offer of the expertise of Alliance members as part of the ongoing policy making process on nutrition."

This letter followed a meeting held in July between Mr Gummer and his officials, and Geoffrey Cannon, Jack Winkler (of Action and Information on Sugars), Janette Marshall (of the Guild of Food Writers) and Sue Dibb (of the Food Commission) representing the Alliance.

At this meeting, Alliance members called for up-to-date nutritional standards for institutional catering, especially for school children; uniform, explicit, comprehensive food labelling, protection of the quality of staple foods on which low-income people depend; reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, to give support for high-quality food; and a new open-door national food and nutrition policy-making process, designed to give health and consumer groups a full voice.

At the meeting Mr Gummer said that he is almost the only Agriculture Minister within the EC that cares about food and public health, and he asked the Alliance to put pressure on his fellow Euro-Ministers. This has now been done: the International Heart Network, partly set up by the UK Coronary Prevention Group, has now made formal representations to European Ministers of Agriculture and Health, calling for nutrition to be

given a top priority in Common Agriculture Policy reforms.

After the meeting with Mr Gummer, Geoffrey Cannon and Suzanne May of the Alliance wrote to all members of the government advisory Food Advisory Committee, and also of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy. In part their letter reads:

"With publication of the Government's Green Paper 'The Health of the Nation' and the new COMA report, agriculture, food and nutrition policy now has a new national importance. Government should now open up the national policy-making process, and make full use of the expertise represented within organisations such as the National Food Alliance, the Coronary Prevention Group and the Healthy Eating Campaign organised by the Consumers' Association. We invite your response, and your support."

A number of Government advisors have now responded, some in writing, some privately. The Alliance has now been invited to give evidence to the COMA Cardiovascular Review Group chaired by Professor Michael Marmot, and also to the new COMA expert advisory group on Folic Acid and Neural Tube Defects.

Commenting, Geoffrey Cannon says: "There really is a new mood in Government. John Gummer has now invited us to discuss reform of the UK food and agriculture policy with his top officials."

Vegetables boosted

The National Farmers' Union is full of praise for 'Eat Well...Live Well!', the booklet produced by Alliance members the Guild of Food Writers and the Coronary Prevention Group, to accompany the new World Health Organisation report on food, nutrition and public health, worldwide.

NFU Head of Horticulture Department John Roach has written to the Alliance saying "I must

express the British horticulture industry's recognition and gratitude. Could I also volunteer our willingness to be involved in discussions on the subject of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. I repeat "Very well done" for showing in a very appealing manner the many benefits that accrue from having vegetables, salads and fruit in the diet in generous proportions".

The NFU is also an Alliance member, and Geoffrey Cannon together with Janette Marshall of the Guild of Food Writers will join a special meeting of the NFU Horticulture Committee, to discuss plans to develop UK horticulture with public health in mind. More details later.

World Cancer Research Fund

The World Cancer Research Fund is now a member of the National Food Alliance.

The WCRF is an offshoot of the American Institute for Cancer Research, set up in the USA following publication in 1982 of the landmark expert report 'Diet, Nutrition and Cancer', published by the National Academy of Sciences. Thanks to these initiatives, people in America are well aware that the risk of common cancers, notably those of the breast and colon, can be reduced by eating lots of vegetables, fruit and wholegrain cereals, and cutting fat and sugar out of the diet.

■ More details about WCRF and its services from 11-12 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB

■ 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
Eim 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)

CONSUMER CHECKOUT

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

ALIVE OR DEAD? Bio-yogurt exposed...

The latest designer yogurts to hit supermarket shelves are BA or bio-yogurts. But does bio-yogurt really live up to its claim as an aid to healthy digestion? Consumer Checkout investigates.

In the last couple of years a whole new range of 'super-yogurts' have been appearing on supermarket shelves. Already popular in Germany and France, where they have taken over ten per cent of the market, many of these bio-yogurts claim to provide health benefits by 'aiding healthy digestion' and 'guarding against harmful bacteria'.

Consumer Checkout asked shoppers what they knew about these products and discovered that few people understood how bio-yogurts differed from ordinary yogurts. Yet half of those questioned said they were influenced to buy bio-yogurt products by the health claims on the pots, although far fewer were convinced that the products really did them any good.

Bio-yogurts are simply ordinary yogurts but with special bacterial cultures added which the manufacturers claim to be beneficial to



health. These cultures go by the name of Bifidus and (Lactobacillus) acidophilus — sometimes abbreviated to BA for the less microbiologically minded.

Human strains of both these bacteria exist naturally in the digestive tract of healthy people — bifidus in the large intestine and acidophilus in the small intestine. They make up part of the complex balance of microflora that maintains a healthy digestive and immune system.

But is there any evidence that eating these products will do you any good?

Consumer Checkout asked medical experts whether the health claims could be justified, and in specially commissioned tests, we analysed nine different bio-yogurt products to find out if the BA cultures were indeed alive and kicking or were dead on arrival.

All of the nine yogurts we tested contained significant levels of viable bifidus cultures. However, for Lactobacillus (including acidophilus cultures) half failed to register significant life, one was below par, and only three were really alive and kicking.

The \$64 million question' according to Dr Valerie Marshall, head of Oxford Polytechnic's Centre for Sciences of Food and Nutrition, 'is whether the bacteria can survive the hazards of the digestive tract before finding a safe haven to colonise and multiply.' Strains would need to be of human origin and must be viable at sufficient levels to have any chance of survival, she argues.

According to Dr Anita Rampling, Head of the Public Health Laboratories in West Dorset 'There is no real

In this issue of Consumer Checkout we look at:

- Baby herbal drinks – a waste of money?
- What does your pharmacist know about baby feeding?
- Selling sugar in schools
- Fizzy drinks price fixing?
- How much saccharin in your cider?

claims. They should be taken with a pinch of salt'

Consumer Checkout remains sceptical that bio-yogurts will do very much to enhance digestion if you are already healthy. If illness or antibiotics have upset digestion it may be possible that bio-yogurts with high enough levels of viable cultures could help in restoring balance to the gut flora, but there is very little hard evidence to support manufacturer's over-the-top claims.

Bio-yogurts. Dead on arrival?

Can manufacturers' claims be supported by the medical evidence on bio-yogurts? Consumer Checkout reports the results of specially commissioned tests to discover if cultures are alive and kicking or are dead on arrival.

Our digestive tract provides a cosy home for between three and five pounds of a rich variety and complex balance of up to 400 different types of bacteria. It has proved exceedingly difficult for doctors to understand exactly what role different bacteria play, although stable gut flora appear to help the body resist infections. But factors such as diet, antibiotics and stress can alter this complex balance and lead to upset stomachs and diarrhoea.

Human strains of both bifidus and acidophilus are known to play an important role in the human gut. But there is very little hard evidence to show that eating these yogurts will offer any benefits to healthy people. Firstly, to have any effect bacterial strains would need to be of human origin. Secondly they would have to be alive at sufficiently high levels — 10^6 (1,000,000) per gram for each strain is usually considered to be a minimum acceptable level, 10^7 is better. Then there is the question as to whether they can survive the treacherous journey through the stomach acids. Any live bacteria that make it that far down the intestinal tract will find a tough competitive environment where it may be difficult to attach themselves to the gut wall to colonise and multiply.

Most research indicating positive effects of such probiotic cultures has been carried out on rats and farm animals. The relevance of these studies is open to question as there are fundamental differences in gut microflora between species. Add to this the difficulty of testing for many different strains of bacteria and knowledge is still limited.

In 1990 the US National Dairy Council published a report on the nutritional and health benefits of yogurt. 'Although some strains of lactic acid bacteria may offer immunological benefits, scientific evidence fails to support claims that specific lactobacilli or

culture and culture-containing dairy foods enhance the immune response in humans,' it concluded.

Dr Anita Rampling, a medically qualified microbiologist and Head of the Public Health Laboratories in West Dorset agrees the evidence is just not there to support some of the claims being made. 'I doubt whether cultures would colonise the gut and stay there', she argues. In her opinion they would be much more likely to pass through the system and are unlikely to survive both the large and small intestine.

The Claims

Chambourcy's Le Yoghurt Actif actually claims 'It does you good'. Loseley BA Live tells eaters to 'be alive with beneficial bifidus and acidophilus', while Greek Original says it is 'delicious and healthy'.

Five out of the nine products *Consumer Checkout* looked at implied that their product would help maintain a healthy digestive system and made specific claims for bifidus and/or acidophilus (see table). These include 'Medical evidence suggests that these cultures actively promote a healthy digestive system (Sainsbury Natural Bio Yogurt), 'Medical evidence shows that bifidus also helps to maintain the balance of your digestive system' (Danone Bio), 'BA cultures aid digestion, guard against harmful bacteria and improve efficiency of immune system (Greek Original Natural Bio Yogurt) and BA cultures 'have long been associated with good health... survive well in the digestive tract to promote natural healthy digestion' (Loseley BA Live). Chambourcy says their yogurt 'does you good!'

Others such as Onken Bioghurt and Little Swallow Biogarde just say they are made from the bifidus and acidophilus without making any specific health claims on the pot. However Onken's promotional literature says their Bioghurt is 'good for you as they are live. Bioghurt Pot is made using the Acidophilus and Bifidus cultures, which are believed to aid digestion.'

What we found

Consumer Checkout tested nine different bio-yogurts on sale in the UK. We looked at claims manufacturers were making and then measured the levels of live bifidus and Lactobacillus (including acidophilus) cultures each contained. The results are shown in the table.

All the products that we tested contained more than 10^6 viable bifidus cultures per gram, the minimum level considered acceptable for 'live' cultures. All contained a better level of over 10^7 except three, Onken, Sainsbury's and Chambourcy.

But the results for acidophilus were far less satisfactory. Our tests looked generically for Lactobacillus cultures. This would pick up not only *Lactobacillus acidophilus* cultures but also other Lactobacillus strains such as *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* commonly used in yogurt-making.

Therefore we were disappointed to find that of the eight products (Danone Bio does not claim to contain acidophilus) four (Onken, Busses Farm, Sainsbury and Chambourcy) fell below the lowest levels our tests could detect (less than 5,000/g). Viable levels of Lactobacillus in Little Swallow Biogarde were fairly thin on the ground and only three products, Loseley, Holland & Barrett and Greek Original, contained levels above 10^7 .

Sainsbury's told *Consumer Checkout* they would be concerned if levels of acidophilus dropped below 10^7 though they were 'confident our specifications were being adhered to'. Nestlé's press office for Chambourcy said 'We have independent research which indicates that these particular bacteria are alive and well for the full shelf-life of the product.' When we asked for more details on specific levels we were told 'This is commercially sensitive information which the company is not prepared to give.'

Analyses of bio-yogurts by the Belgian consumer organisation, Test Achats, also found low levels of cultures in many products. In the UK, the Milk Marketing Board, whose remit is to promote milk and dairy products, confirmed that their own tests had revealed some products with low levels of viable cultures but refused to give *Consumer Checkout* their figures.

Our conclusion

Don't be misled by manufacturers' over-the-top claims for bio-yogurts. Buy them if you like the milder taste and can afford the higher prices, but don't expect too much of bio-yogurts if you are already healthy. If illness or antibiotics have upset digestion it may be possible that bio-yogurts with high enough levels of viable cultures could help in restoring balance to the gut flora, but the scientific evidence is inconclusive.

■ Written and researched by Sue Dibb.

■ Product research by Rowena Hunter and Karen Mann.

HOW LIVE ARE BIO-YOGURTS?

Consumer Checkout analysed nine different bio-yogurts for their culture counts

BRAND	NAME	CLAIMS/INFORMATION	LACTOBACILLUS INCLUDING ACIDOPHILUS	BIFIDUS
Little Swallow or Schwalbchen	Smooth and Mild Biogarde	Live natural yogurt Mildly soured with original Biogarde special cultures. Lb acidophilus, Lb bifidus forming L(+) lactic acid	x	✓
Onken	Bioghurt Pot	Yogurt made from milk with natural fat content. Produced with mild Biogard cultures L (Lactobacillus) Acidophilus Bifidus	⊗	✓
Busses Farm	Live organic set wholemilk yoghurt	This yoghurt is cultured with Lactobacillus acidophilus, Bifidobacterium bifidum, Streptococcus thermophilus A naturally balanced food	⊗	✓
Loseley	BA Live Low fat set yoghurt	Be alive with beneficial bifidus and acidophilus. . . have long been associated with good health as they survive in the digestive tract to promote natural healthy digestion and metabolism by maintaining the proper balance of microflora. New production techniques and protective packaging ensure BA Live remain live to the consume by date	✓	✓
Danone	Bio au bifidus actif	Danone's bio contains natural bifidus that gives it a milder, creamier taste. Medical evidence shows that bifidus also helps to maintain the balance of your digestive system	0*	✓
Sainsbury	Natural bio yogurt	No artificial additives. Medical evidence suggests that these cultures actively promote a healthy digestive system. Exceptionally mild, fresh, clean flavour	⊗	✓
Chambourcy	Le yoghurt actif	Delicious fresh yogurt. Important part of a healthy diet because it is made with active, special cultures - bifidus and acidophilus. Medical evidence suggests that these cultures have a beneficial effect on the digestive system where they are present naturally. It does you good.	⊗	✓
Holland & Barrett	AB live natural yogurt	This yogurt is made from reconstituted skim milk solids and cream, using Lactobacillus acidophilus and Bifidobacterium bifidus cultures to produce a luxuriously creamy yogurt	✓	✓
Greek Original	Natural Bio Yoghurt The real yoghurt	Delicious and healthy. 100% pure with active BA cultures. BA cultures aid digestion, guard against harmful bacteria and improve efficiency of immune system	✓	✓

Key: Number of bacteria found per gram

- ✓ More than 10^7
- ✓ More than 10^6
- o $10^6 - 10^5$
- x $10^5 - 10^3$
- ⊗ Less than 10^3

* does not claim to be made with acidophilus

It's in the pot

Loseley claim that its bio-yogurt products are superior because the company has developed special packaging that prevents oxygen entering the pot and keeps the cultures alive for longer. With prices ranging from 42p for a small 140g pot in a supermarket to 55p in a health food shop, Loseley's product was the most expensive. While their product came out with higher culture levels than most products we tested, culture counts were no higher than those found in Holland & Barretts AB Live or Greek Original's Natural Bioghurt.

Alive, aliveo

Yogurt is made from pasteurised whole milk, or skimmed milk for low-fat versions. First the milk is treated with enzymes to destroy any antibiotic residues and then typically cultures of *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* are added. These raise the acidity level coagulating the milk proteins to form yogurt. Some yogurt products are then pasteurised to extend their shelf life but most will remain 'live', although how live is open to question as our tests show.

Yogurt has long been considered a 'healthy' food. Fermentation of the milk produces lactic acid which is easier to digest, particularly for people who are lactose intolerant. However neither of the strains of bacteria used in ordinary yogurt fermentation live in the human gut and are unable to colonise and multiply.

Yogurt, like milk, is a good source of many nutrients including protein, calcium and some B vitamins. But you may need to watch out for added sugar in flavoured yogurts — eight sugar lumps in a small pot is not unusual — and higher fat contents, particularly in Greek-style yogurts which at 10 per cent fat are half way to pure cream.

Health claims

As our survey showed, consumers are influenced by health claims, even though they doubt their credibility. In law, foods are not permitted to make 'medicinal claims' ie that they are capable of 'preventing, curing or treating human disease', although most people could be forgiven for thinking many bio-yogurt manufacturers' quasi-medical assertions fall into this category.

The Food Labelling Regulations state that a product 'must be capable of fulfilling claims'. The catch, however, is that the burden of proof is not on the manufacturer to prove their claims are true, but on a complainant (usually a local authority trading standards officer) to disprove any claim. Cases rarely come to court.

There is increasing concern that cleverly worded claims can get round a loosely worded law and mislead consumers. The Government's appointed Food Advisory Committee earlier this year said that health claims do not, in general, have a place in food labelling and advertising, and unless justified by recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer. As the CMO has made no pronouncements on the value of bio-yogurts, such claims would not be permitted.

Baby herbal drinks

With faster-growing sales than any other baby product, herbal drinks are set to extract over £25m from parents' purses this year. But, asks *Consumer Checkout*, are these drinks any good for a baby?

'Healthy' and 'herbal' are the latest key words being used by baby food manufacturers in their attempts to woo the conscientious parent. Using the 'natural' image of herbs and the association between herbs and healthy living, products that are considered unnecessary, ineffective and potentially damaging to teeth are being sold as a healthy and valuable part of the diet, for babies as young as four weeks.

Traditional sweet drinks for babies, such as Delrosa's syrup, suffered a drop in sales following the exposure - for example on Esther Rantzen's *That's Life* TV show - of the damage that can be caused to teeth by the use of these drinks, particularly when given to a baby in a bottle or dinky feeder. In response, manufacturers searched around for new products with a healthier image, and discovered that the German company, Milupa, was doing well with sachets of granulated fennel drink.

The last three years has seen the launch of over a dozen herbal-based products and the UK market has grown by 15-20 per cent each year, to an estimated value of £25-27m this year. Yet the manufacturers admit that there is little in these drinks except flavoured, sweetened water and are unable to justify why young babies should need them.

The herbal tease

'A convenient soothing way of providing your baby with an additional drink' ... 'Refreshing and soothing' ... 'a light soothing drink' ... 'natural herb extracts specially selected for babies'.

These are the tempting phrases used by companies to encourage anxious parents with fractious babies to buy a sugary, herb-flavoured product to keep their baby sweet. But official health advice is against giving young breastfed babies extra

drinks, and against the need for giving babies of any age drinks with added sugar. So can the added herbs justify contradicting health advice? *Consumer Checkout* challenged the manufacturers to justify their claims that the drink has a soothing effect on babies:

Cow & Gate: 'We do not make these claims on a medical basis. We sell solely on appeal. We cannot guarantee the drink is soothing, because any drink will soothe.'

Milupa: 'Many drinks, whether herbal or fruit, are found to be soothing. The soothing effect is not attributed to either the herbal extracts or the sugar content - it is not a medical claim. The purpose of the herbal extracts is solely to add natural flavours and colour to the drinks; it is not claimed that these products have any pharmacological properties.'

Boots: *The British Pharmaceutical Codex* lists fennel and aniseed oil as having a carminative effect. (Carminative means it relieves flatulence and can be used to treat colic and gastric upset.) But Boots then added 'We do not claim on the pack that the product has a carminative effect... We do not claim that our herbal drinks can prevent, treat or cure disease.' But Boots insisted that the fennel, chamomile and aniseed used in their product 'have long been recognised as soothing agents.'

Consumer Checkout asked the companies: Does your product provide any nutritional benefit? What good does it do?

Boots: 'It is not designed to be of nutritional value but a soothing alternative to cooled, boiled water recommended by midwives for thirsty babies.'

Milupa: 'Babies and children require adequate fluids to ensure healthy growth and development especially in hot conditions and from when solids are introduced at around three months of age. Milupa herbal baby drinks offer different and appealing tastes for babies who are not happy to drink plain, previously boiled water and as an alternative to baby fruit juices.'

Manufacturers are keen to promote their products through the health services, and one company claims it has increased its range of herbal baby drinks because of the recommendations of health visitors. Sample products are sent unsolicited to new mothers, and samples are also given away in Treasure Trove bags - given to new mothers as they leave hospital. Promotional leaflets are distributed

through baby clinics and displayed in pharmacies. Despite this apparent endorsement by the health service, babies have no physiological need for herbal drinks of this sort, and parents should not feel any sense of inadequacy if they leave the products on the supermarket shelf.

■ Written by Tim Lobstein, researched by Karen Mann and Rowena Hunter.

WHAT DO BABIES NEED?

There is a range of products designed to add flavouring to water: the flavouring may be herbal, such as fennel or vanilla or based on fruit juices. There is some doubt about the need for breastfed babies to receive additional water. Thirsty infants will take water without flavouring. (Department of Health *Present Day Practice in Infant Feeding*)

Several articles in *The Lancet* have confirmed the suggestion that water supplementation for breastfed babies is unnecessary, even for babies in tropical climates. Offering drinks in a bottle with a teat can undermine breastfeeding as a baby adapts to the teat shape and will feed less often at the breast.

For bottle-fed babies the position is less clear, as a baby who has been fed an over-concentrated formula feed will become thirsty and need additional water. But sweetened and flavoured water will be unnecessary as a thirsty baby will take plain (cooled, previously boiled) water.

As developing teeth emerge they will be vulnerable to any sugar put in the mouth. The body produces all the sugar it needs from other carbohydrate foods so there is no need to eat any at all. If sugar is to be eaten keep it to meal times to reduce tooth decay. Don't dip a dummy into sugary substances. And don't let a baby suck at a bottle with a sugary or fruit juice drink.

Health educators recommend that babies be offered drinks on a clean teaspoon rather than in a bottle or dinky feeder, and weaned on a lidded feeding cup. After six months, babies can be offered regular cow's milk or 'diluted natural fruit juice or water, as a drink with meals', the Health Education Authority recommends.

HOW CONSUMER CHECKOUT RATES THE HERBAL DRINKS

- ☒ thumbs down
☒ thumbs up



Boots ready-to-feed bottles e.g. Fennel and Orange Drink

- ☒ Encourages bottle-drinking: 'simply attach teat and locking ring to this bottle'
- ☒ 5.2 per cent sugars
- ☒ no mention of 'sugar' or 'sweet' or danger to teeth
- ☒ nutritional information does not conform with Food Regulations

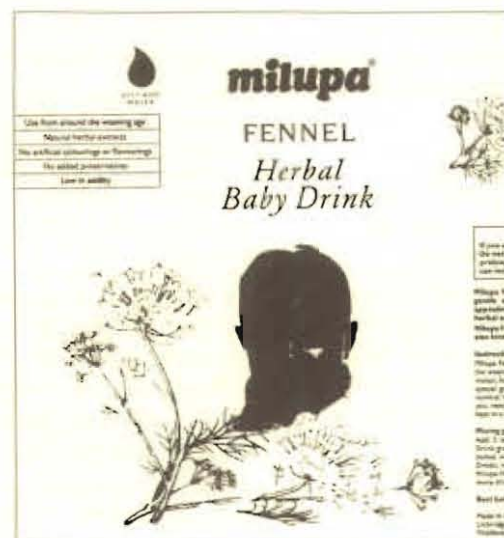
Boots powder 'virtually sugar-free' Herbal Drink

- ☒ less than 0.1 per cent sugars
- ☒ recommended from just 4 weeks
- ☒ not suitable for vegetarians (main ingredient gelatin, see page 22 of this issue)



Cow & Gate ready-to-feed bottles e.g. Fennel with Orchard Fruits

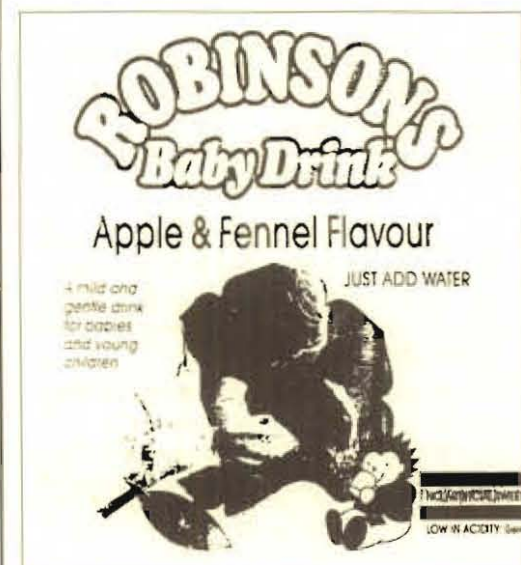
- ☒ designed to fit teat directly to bottle (though instructions do not mention bottle feeding)
- ☒ 2.4 per cent sugars despite 'No Added Sugar' claim
- ☒ no mention of danger to teeth



- ☒ from 3-4 months (previously from around 3 months)

Milupa granules e.g. Fennel Baby Drink

- ☒ 4.4 per cent sugars (granules are 96 per cent sugar)
- ☒ include instructions for giving in a bottle
- ☒ mentions 'sugar', 'sweet' and implies danger to teeth



Robinsons granules e.g. Apple and Fennel Flavour Baby Drink

- ☒ 5.2 per cent sugars (granules are 91 per cent sugar)
- ☒ un-named added flavourings
- ☒ leaflet says 'safe and soothing from a very early age'
- ☒ mentions 'sugar', 'sweet' and implies danger to teeth

What your pharmacist may not know!

Consumer Checkout asked a number of chemists some leading questions on baby diets

A straw poll of high street pharmacists has found a worrying lack of knowledge about recommended infant feeding practices. Yet the European Commission is proposing to make baby food manufacturers state on their products that pharmacists can give advice on baby feeding.

In a survey for *Consumer Checkout*, parents visited their local pharmacists and asked questions about weaning and feeding babies. Sometimes the pharmacist answered according to current health guidelines. But several times the pharmacist offered inappropriate advice – and on one occasion the pharmacist did not know, so asked the store supervisor to give advice instead! Pharmacists tended to make mistakes that would encourage a parent to

buy a product on sale in the shop, even though this was unsuitable or unnecessary.

Pharmacists are also retailers, and much of their daily business comes from selling products such as baby foods and formula milks. They have little or no training in children's nutrition, and few of them will have read the Department of Health infant feeding recommendations or even the Health Education Authority's weaning leaflets. Much of their knowledge will have come from the baby food companies.

Recognising the close links between pharmacists and the food industry, the World Health Organisation explicitly excluded pharmacists from its definition of health workers in its Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes, and considered a pharmacy to be

akin to a sales outlet.

Yet the EC regards pharmacists as equivalent to doctors and health visitors in their ability to give advice on baby foods. The EC draft directive on baby foods proposes that all baby food products must state on the pack that the product can be used for babies over 3-4 months '...according to the advice of independent persons having qualifications in medicine, nutrition, pharmacy, or other professionals responsible for maternal and child care'.

The Food Commission is complaining to the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food about the inclusion of pharmacists in the draft directive.

■ Written by Tim Lobstein

■ Researched by Adriana Luba

QUESTION TIME AT THE CHEMISTS

We asked

My baby is weaned but I only give her Milupa baby meals. Is it all right to rely on these products for her diet?

What the pharmacist should have said

Commercial foods can be useful, but don't let them replace fresh foods altogether. Using your own family food is cheaper, you know what is in it, and your baby will get used to eating like the rest of the family more quickly. (Health Education Authority)

Our food is not meant to be a complete diet, but should be supplemented with food made by the mother. (Trevor Bell, Milupa General Manager, responding to press enquiries)

What the pharmacist actually said

It's fine, don't worry. They are very well balanced. (Pharmacist 1, Caterham)

Yes, it's fine, they've got everything in them. (Pharmacist 2, Caterham)

Is it OK to give bread rusks to my five month old?

Wheat products sometimes cause allergic reactions. Wait until your baby is six months old before you start giving them. (Health Education Authority)

Yes. There's nothing harmful in bread so I should think that would be fine. (Pharmacist 5, Caterham)

My baby is now six months and I want to stop breast feeding. Do I need to give her formula feeds or can I give her cow's milk, or no milk at all?

Milk continues to be an important source of energy and nutrients for most infants throughout the weaning period ... suitable milks from the sixth month are human milk, infant formulas, follow-up milks and whole cow's milk. (Department of Health)

After six months you can begin to give drinks of ordinary cow's milk. (Health Education Authority)

Better to use formula milk. (Pharmacist 3, Caterham)

She's too young for cow's milk. Use a formula milk. (Pharmacist 2, Caterham)

What drinks should I give my baby now she's on solids and only has an occasional breast feed?

Thirsty infants will take water without flavouring. (Dept. of Health)

You can also (besides cow's milk) move on to the odd drink of diluted natural fruit juice or water, as a drink with meals. (Health Education Authority)

The practice of providing drinks on demand from a feeding bottle is to be avoided ... Most destructive are fruit juices. (Textbook of Paediatric Nutrition, 1982)

Use a baby juice with apple in it, mixed fruit drinks and those with berry fruits tend to be more acidic. The ready to drink are better than the concentrates which you dilute yourself. (Pharmacist 4, Caterham)

Give her one of the baby juices. They've less sugar than normal juices and do not have any colouring or preservatives in them. Stick with them until she's at least eight months old. (Pharmacist, High Street chain, Redhill)

My 4 week old baby is fully breast fed. Do I need to give her extra fluids, and if so what

There is some doubt about the need for breastfed babies to receive additional water. (Department of Health – and subsequent research published in *The Lancet* supports the view that breastfed babies do not need any other drinks, even in hot, dry climates.)

Babies can get very thirsty on milk especially in the summer. Either give her cooled boiled water or something like the Milupa herbal drinks. My daughter used the camomile variety very successfully. (Store supervisor, High Street chain, Oxted)

Fizz giants flying high despite monopolies probe

Sales of fizzy drinks have risen steeply since the mid-1980s due to heavy advertising and a series of good summers, with the largest growth among the 10-15 age group. In 1989 we guzzled our way through about 4,000 million litres of carbonated drinks worth over £1,300 million.

Now the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has reported that soft drink giants Coca-Cola & Schweppes Beverages and Britvic indulge in anti-competitive practices which limit customer choice and lead to higher prices. But the 16-month investigation has fallen short of the anticipated shake up, leaving companies relatively unscathed.

In 1987 Coca-Cola and Cadbury Schweppes formed a joint venture, Coca-Cola & Schweppes Beverages Ltd, to become the largest suppliers of carbonated soft drinks in the UK, now with 43 per cent of the market. Coca-Cola's rivals, Pepsi, are one of the owners of the second largest supplier, Britvic Soft Drinks Ltd, along with three national brewers, Bass, Allied-Lyons and Whitbread. Britvic has about 22 per cent of the

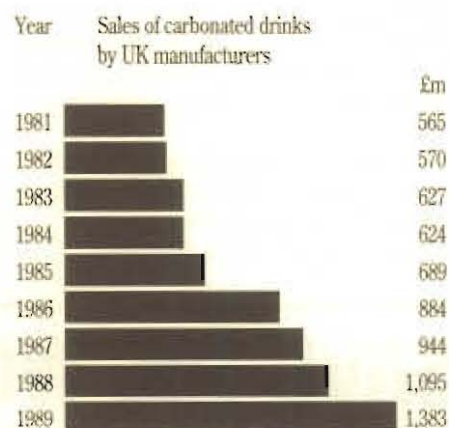
market.

While monopoly situations were discovered, sales of soft drinks through supermarkets and other retailers, which account for 80 per cent of the market, were generally thought to provide a wide range of products.

The MMC's major criticisms centred on the leisure market where at least 90 per cent of sales are supplied by CCSB and Britvic. Smaller manufacturers had complained that exclusive agreements operated by the larger companies prevented pubs, clubs and fast food restaurants from buying from other suppliers.

No evidence was found that the benefits of the more favourable terms offered by manufacturers for exclusivity were being passed on to consumers. Prices varied considerably with a glass of Coke or Pepsi bought in a pub costing anywhere between 40p to over £1.

However the two companies continue to battle it out over vending machines, numbers of which are set to rise substantially.



■ Carbonated drinks. A report on the supply by manufacturers of carbonated drinks in the United Kingdom, Monopolies and Mergers Commission, HMSO, 1991.

SUGAR BUREAU'S SWEET TALK TO SCHOOLS

The sugar industry is misleading primary school children and their teachers with a glossy, but scientifically inaccurate 'teaching pack' which hides the health risks of sugars, says the health campaign group, Action and Information on Sugars (AIS). The Sugar Bureau's teaching pack, Science and Technology for Seasonal Celebrations, was sent free to all 24,000 primary schools throughout the country and is an example of a marketing promotion presented as 'educational material' say dietitians and health promotion workers who analysed the pack for AIS.

AIS's detailed critique, *Exposing the Sweet Talk*, highlights specific areas of nutritional and dental concern in the Sugar Bureau's pack. The main criticisms are:

- The pack does not meet the National Curriculum guidance on health education for primary school children.

- The nutritional information presented is misleading and inaccurate and differs widely from official nutritional recommendations.

- The portrayal of sugar as a necessary food for energy is inaccurate.

- While a significant reduction of average sugar intake will be necessary to meet official dietary recommendations, the pack actively encourages sugar consumption. At least one activity in each of the four sections involves eating sugar between meals.

Action and Information on Sugars is seeking to discourage teachers from using the pack, urging them to complain to the Sugar Bureau and encouraging them to develop school policies on commercially sponsored teaching materials.

Much 'educational' material from the food industry has come under fire for carrying commercial messages, being misleading or

inaccurate in the information it conveys (see *Food Magazine* issue 12). A consortium of public health, consumer and professional bodies are backing plans* for a National Accreditation Scheme for health education materials to ensure that all material meets high standards (see *Food Magazine* issue 14).

■ *Exposing the Sweet Talk* is available from AIS, PO Box 459, London SE5 7QA.

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

MAFF grant British Nutrition Foundation criticised

The granting of £250,000 by the Ministry of Agriculture to the food industry-funded British Nutrition Foundation to produce educational materials for schools on food and nutrition has caused consternation among consumer groups.

Critics have asked why such money was not made available to a more independent organisation, given the poor record of educational material produced by industry interests.

Saccharin in cider

It is impossible to tell what additives are in your regular pint because alcoholic drinks do not have to declare their ingredients.

It's an outdated law which the Food Commission has long campaigned to see changed. The good news is that EC regulations are expected to insist that alcoholic drinks will be labelled just like other foods and drinks. The bad news is that it will be several years before we can see what colours, preservatives or even artificial sweeteners there are in our pint or bottle of wine.

However, *Consumer Checklist* can reveal that the artificial sweetener, saccharin, is regularly added to ciders – even some dry ciders come with a dose of added sweetener. Here we name the brands.

	Levels of saccharin (mg/l)
Woodpecker	19.22
Olde English	16.13
Strongbow Dry	11.48
Biddendum Medium	8.82
Westons Medium Dry	6.66
Diamond White	4.89
Westons LA	4.27
Westons Medium Sweet	0.70
Diamond Blush	Negligible
Westons Dry	Not present

■ Source: Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Trading Standards Department.

FRUIT FACTS AT LAST?

Fruit drinks and soft drinks with fruit flavouring will have to declare their fruit content, according to legislation being drafted by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. Proposed revised Soft Drink Regulations state that if the name of a drink indicates that its flavour comes wholly or mainly from fruit, then the quantity of fruit or fruit juice present in the drink must be declared on the label.

In 1989 the *Food Magazine* reported on the low levels of fruit in many fruit drinks and called for quantitative labelling to be made compulsory. Although the draft legislation states it will come into effect during 1991, this is now unlikely.

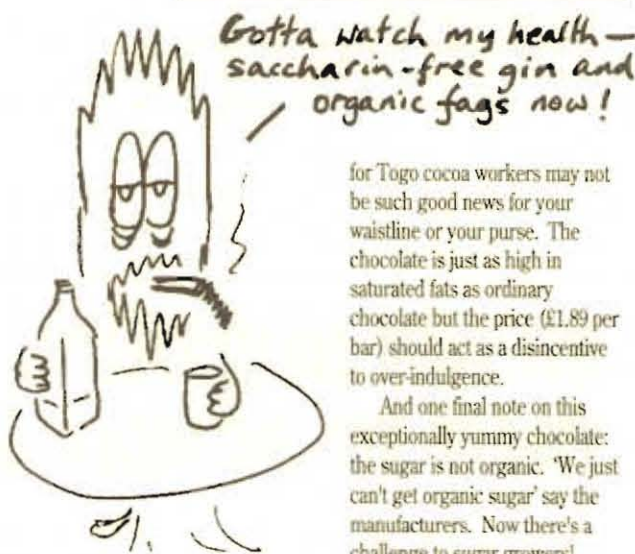
A loophole in the regulations will allow drinks containing no fruit to use the name of a fruit on the label (for example as Orange Flavour Drink and Orangeade). Furthermore, such drinks will not have to admit their lack of fruit (ie they will be exempt from making a fruit content declaration).

SAVE THE WORLD WITH CHOCOLATE

Pesticide use in third world cocoa plantations is a continuing cause for concern. 'Not only may workers' health be affected by the indiscriminate use of highly toxic pesticides but there is growing concern that residues of these chemicals remain in the cocoa',

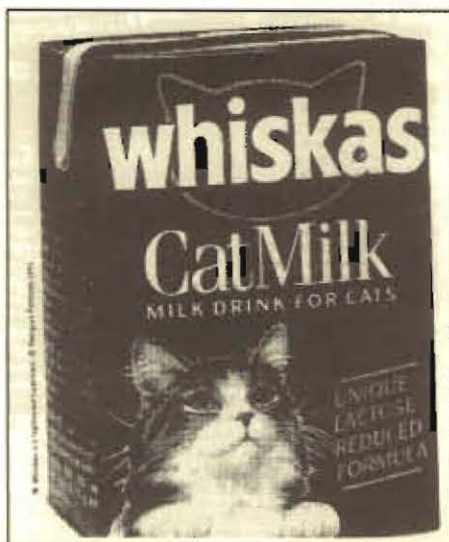
reported the *Food Magazine* two years ago.

Now a new chocolate made from organically grown cocoa is available in the UK. The high quality dark chocolate is made under the name Green and Black's and contains 70 per cent cocoa solids. The cocoa is cultivated by traditional methods in Togo, West Africa, without the use of pesticides. The good news



for Togo cocoa workers may not be such good news for your waistline or your purse. The chocolate is just as high in saturated fats as ordinary chocolate but the price (£1.89 per bar) should act as a disincentive to over-indulgence.

And one final note on this exceptionally yummy chocolate: the sugar is not organic. 'We just can't get organic sugar' say the manufacturers. Now there's a challenge to sugar growers!



In a small carton looking at first glance like a blackcurrant drink or a milkshake: CatMilk is a lactose-reduced snack drink for particular pussies, sold in individual-sized, purple-coloured tetrapacks without a straw!

Standards abolished

Regulations controlling the ingredients of tomato ketchup, curry powder, mustard, salad cream and suet, have all been revoked in legislation effective from last July.

Henceforth manufacturers need not ensure that their curry powder contains at least 85 per cent spices and herbs, and shredded suet at least 83 per cent beef fat. Mustard need no longer have a limit of 20 per cent starchy filler, salad cream can now be less than 25 per cent oil and less than 1.35 per cent egg, and ketchup need not be at least six per cent tomato solids.

Concerned consumers can no longer rely on a food standard to ensure minimum quality but are told to read the product labels with care. But even very careful label reading will be of little help until compositional labels show the quantities of each ingredient.

Previous removals of standards have led to a deterioration in the already low quality of some food products. The moves were announced as part of 'the Government's policy to reduce the burdens on business'.

Breast beating

Jill Turton reports how the world's biggest food company tried to stop a British television documentary.

Nestlé is the biggest food company in the world. Its products include Nesquik and Smarties, Shredded Wheat and Lean Cuisine, Kit Kat and Milky Bars, Quality Street, Polos, Black Magic and Branston Pickle. Its Gold Blend coffee advertisements have become soap opera. Its reputation is for quality and reliability.

Nestlé is also the world's largest manufacturer of baby milk and for almost 20 years now Nestlé and the other big milk manufacturers have faced criticisms for their aggressive marketing of infant formula, particularly in the Third World. Earlier this year Swiss Television transmitted two documentaries about the subject – films which Nestlé tried to stop.

Nestlé has been at odds with executives of Swiss Television over British and Australian documentaries both of which investigated the baby milk issue and which Nestlé claimed were biased and untrue. Although these films had already been transmitted unchallenged in their country of origin, Nestlé reacted swiftly to the announcement of transmission in its home country, Switzerland, threatening to go to court to stop them.

Court action is no empty threat from Nestlé. In 1974 it sued for libel when an article entitled 'The Baby Killer' was translated in Switzerland as 'Nestlé Totet Babies' (Nestlé Kills Babies). It won, but the trial judge advised 'If the complainant in future wants to be spared the accusation of immoral and unethical conduct, he will have to change his advertising practices'.

One of the films under attack was 'Vicious Circles', shown in Yorkshire Television's 'First Tuesday' series, which looked at the marketing and sale of infant formula in Pakistan. The Australian film 'Formula Fix' investigates the situation in the Philippines. Swiss Television planned to show both films followed by a debate with Nestlé.

Nestlé's response was astonishing. In a five hour meeting with Swiss Television executives it sought to undermine the research, the accuracy and authenticity of much of the material in 'Vicious Circle'. It even invited Swiss Television to make their own film in Pakistan – funded by Nestlé – 'to give an objective view of the situation'. It told Swiss Television the two films were 'propaganda films for activists, with the lowest journalistic standards'. 'Vicious Circles' won this year's prize for 'Best Investigation' at the Santander International Film Festival.

When Otto Honegger, Executive Producer of Documentaries at Swiss Television refused to withdraw the programme, Nestlé went to the General Manger in Berne. After two further meetings, Nestlé still failed to convince him that the contents of the films were inaccurate and Swiss Television maintained its commitment to transmit.

It might appear from all this hostility that 'Vicious Circles' had made an attack on Nestlé. In fact the film reported on the marketing of baby milk in Pakistan in the ten years since 'The Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes' was drafted by The World Health Organisation and UNICEF. The code was intended to restrict the selling and marketing of infant formula and was developed partly in response to a huge campaign against the multi-nationals in the 1970s. 'First Tuesday' reported code violations by British, American and Japanese companies. The only reference to Nestlé was archive film referring to the 1977 Nestlé boycott. However, Nestlé claims that any reference to infant formula in Switzerland will be associated with them.

The Australian film 'Formula Fix' did refer to Nestlé by name. Nestlé responded by making its own video, presented by the late Bernard Falk, which it calls 'Formula Facts'. Nestlé refused to allow Swiss Television to use material from this video in its programme.

Two days before the Swiss programme was due to be screened Nestlé held what they called a 'press briefing'. Chosen journalists were invited to watch selected clips from the two films 'Vicious Circles' and 'Formula Fix'. Nestlé showed the clips without permission in breach of copyright, while refusing to allow anyone from Swiss TV's documentary department to attend. According to Pierre Novello of *Journal de Geneva*, 'They told us it was only for certain journalists. They did not want to invite people who they thought would be hostile. We were very surprised at how they tried to discredit the films.'

Nestlé's press briefing backfired. Instead of controlling the press it created huge publicity for the programme and almost every newspaper in Switzerland picked up the story. Swiss TV translated the two films into French, German and Italian and Swiss German TV moved transmission from 10.00 pm to peak viewing of 8.00 pm.

After the films were transmitted Nestlé took part in the ensuing studio discussion while simultaneously maintaining its threats of legal action. Its stance backfired at home and abroad.

The World Council of Churches praised Swiss Television for raising the issue and Dr Jim Tulloch, of the World Health Organisation, wrote to congratulate Swiss Television on the quality of the programme. Nestlé promptly fired off a letter to WHO expressing its dismay at his comments and requesting an explanation.



Photo: UNICEF/Mushaq Khan

What is surprising is that despite insisting that Yorkshire Television had got its facts wrong, Nestlé never raised any objections when 'Vicious Circles' was transmitted in the UK.

Annelies Allain of the International Organisation of Consumer Unions made the point: 'Here was the largest and holiest of Swiss companies being challenged on home turf'. For a country with a unique, not to say paranoid, 'protection of personality' law which prohibits criticism of Swiss companies the films amounted to heresy.

One Swiss editorial even dared to ask whether such a manufacturer should be boycotted. According to Annelies Allain, 'In Switzerland such a question is or was sacrilege until 1991'.

Last month Nestlé delivered something like three kilos of paper to the Independent Complaints Institution, the media watchdog in Switzerland. If they win they can take the case to the Supreme Court; if they lose they may face more bad publicity.

Nestlé has always insisted that the profits from its baby milk operation are almost insignificant in the global share of its food empire. Yet 20 years of campaigning against baby milk marketing in the Third World have not damaged Nestlé's appetite for controversy.

■ Jill Turton was producer of the documentary 'Vicious Circles' shown in the 'First Tuesday' series for Yorkshire Television.

Back to school dinners

With school meals budgets cut drastically in the last ten years, less than half of today's children eat a school lunch. Sue Dibb investigates the continuing threat to school meals and reports on campaigns to improve the availability and quality of this vital service.

For well over a hundred years, school meals have played an important role in the nutrition of children, especially children from poor families. They were introduced as a universal right in the 1940s and remained so until 1980. In 1979 nearly two-thirds of English school-children were eating school meals. Now less than half are. Some local authorities have axed school meals and only provide sandwiches for those entitled by law to a free meal. Others have raised prices or cut back on choice, encouraging more children to bring sandwiches or go out to the local cafe or take-away, neither of which may provide a nutritionally adequate choice.

Now a coalition of voluntary, public sector and trade union organisations are campaigning for the recognition of the important role school meals play in children's diet. At the start of the autumn term the Child Poverty Action Group and the Food Commission published a joint fact sheet, *School Meals* which highlighted the growing threat to the service from current policies on education and benefits. Also in September the National Union of Public Employees launched their campaign for school meals and in January a broad coalition of voluntary and public sector organisations will publish an action pack to put increasing pressure on government ministers. Their charter, fact sheets and checklists for parents and governors have been put together by a team which includes the Coronary Prevention Group, the Food Commission, the National Forum for the Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease and Parents for Safe Food with input from teachers, trades unions and education and health professionals.

The first priority in all these campaigns is the reintroduction of national nutritional guidelines for school meals based on latest healthy eating advice, and for enough money to be made available to ensure schools can provide a good service. The government's own figures reveal that spending per child on school meals and milk has been cut by 27 per

cent in real terms from 1979 to 1990.

Community charge capping and cuts in local authority spending have left many councillors and schools facing difficult choices between books, teachers, buildings or school meals. Additionally, changes in benefit laws during the 1980s removed the right to free school meals for about 400,000 children and new changes to be introduced next April will cut entitlement even further.

The 1980 Education Act abolished nutritional standards and price controls for school meals. Prices in a substantial number of authorities rose, reducing the uptake. Other authorities began to consider cutting their meals service completely except for children entitled to free school meals. Prior to 1980 government guidelines for school meals laid down standards that school meals should provide one-third of a child's daily nutrient needs. With free school milk, a primary school child could expect to get around 40 per cent of their nutrient needs met at school. Today it has been estimated that the figure has dropped to nearer 25 per cent according to NUPE.

Yet studies have shown that the kind of school meals provided in the early 1980s were more nutritionally valuable than meals bought outside the schools or packed lunches (seeoverleaf). School meals were also shown to be particularly important in the diets of those children from poor families for whom a school meal might be the main meal of the day.

The diets of significant numbers of school children are likely to have deteriorated since the early 1980s. The government's COMA report on Dietary Reference Values published this year, sets targets for dietary goals, but these goals will only be achieved by a broad range of policies, including those to ensure high standards for school meals.

School meals and poverty

In October 1987 over 1.3 million children in England, 21 per cent of those at school, were eligible for free school meals. However, benefit rule changes introduced in April 1988 meant that some 400,000 children lost that right. Families receiving family credit were entitled to a cash sum which theoretically compensated for the loss of free school meals. For many families this provided problems: take-up of family credit is notoriously low and the cash compensation was based on a national average price of 65p. In 1988 the price of a primary school lunch varied widely throughout the country from 45p to over £1 and over fifty local education authorities had prices above the average leaving children with inadequate cash to buy a school lunch.

■ For more information

School Meals Fact Sheet (13 pages) by the Food Commission and Child Poverty Action Group, is available from Publications Dept, Food Commission, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR. Price £3.50 (inc p & p).

For details of NUPE's Campaign for School Meals and Fact Sheets, contact Virginia Branney, NUPE, Civic House, 20 Grand Depot Road, London SE18 6SF.

■ How you can support the School Meals Campaign

The School Meals Campaign will be launching in the new year, a charter and action pack to help promote the availability and quality of school catering.

If you would like to be involved in the School Meals Campaign, particularly if you are a parent, governor, teacher, school meals worker or health worker please contact Caroline Mulvihill, of The School Meals Campaign, c/o 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 3DA. Tel 071-935 2099.

Organisations are also invited to support the *Charter for School Meals*. For a copy contact Caroline Mulvihill as above.

AROUND THE COUNTRY

■ Dorset axed its full school meals service in primary and junior schools in 1981.

■ Hereford and Worcester ended its full meals service in primary schools in 1982 and in middle and secondary schools in 1984.

■ Buckinghamshire ended its full meals service in 1986, providing only sandwich packs for children entitled to free school meals. Some schools have their own arrangements using contractors.

■ Cumbria's plans to cut the service to a soup and sandwiches menu were ditched after a major public campaign. However savings of £500,000 will be made, with cuts in staff holidays and hours and the abolition of a holiday period retaining fee.

■ London Borough of Haringey has cut its schools meals budget from £4 million to £1.2

million. Now menus offer no choice, 180 staff have been made redundant and additional staff have had hours and staffing levels cut.

■ Hillingdon has ended its full school meals service in all of its 17 secondary schools.

■ Kingston-upon-Thames is scrapping hot meals and charging £1.60 for sandwiches. 190 jobs are to go. The cuts package was voted through on the casting vote of the Conservative mayor.

■ Northamptonshire has abolished its school meals service with the loss of 1,200 jobs. Children eligible for free school meals will get sandwiches.

■ Rotherham will operate a fast food system instead of traditional school meals with a 30 per cent reduction in kitchen staff hours.

■ (Source: NUPE, 1991)

Improving school meals

Despite threats to the school meals service many LEAs have worked hard to try and improve choice and nutritional quality while keeping prices reasonable. When the Local Government Act of 1986 forced authorities to put their school meals service out to competitive tendering, many took the opportunity to try and improve their meals service by including nutritional standards in contract specifications. This opportunity to improve food quality and encourage children to eat healthier diets is now being undermined by cuts in central government grants to LEAs and community charge 'capping'. Many authorities have been forced to cut back on the service to reduce costs even further (see above, Around the country).

The Fun Eating At School Today (FEAST) campaign of the late 1980s, led by school meals organisers to promote healthy school meals, and joined by over 70 LEAs in the UK, provided an important spring board for those wishing to improve their services and boost sales. Where there is an underlying commitment to school meals, imaginative projects together with policies that keep prices reasonable have encouraged children not only to enjoy their school meal, but to appreciate a wider choice of tastes and learn about healthier eating in an environment that is fun.

For example East Berkshire Health Authority's project shows just how a school meals project can not only encourage healthier eating in school, but also re-educate young palates away from less nutritious food.

Schools star healthy eating

Many primary schools in East Berkshire are starting term with The Eating Habit, an innovative project linking classroom learning to encouraging healthier lunch-time choices.

'Pressures on children to buy junk are high. If we are to teach children to be discerning then we must help them by providing an adequate range of options from which to make those choices' says health promotion worker Lynda Jones who with her colleagues has helped bring together education managers, teachers, catering staff, parents, governors as well as private contractors BET plc, who were recently awarded the catering contract for Berkshire school meals, and, of course, the children themselves.

The result is a pack for schools including a step by step guide and a suggested timescale

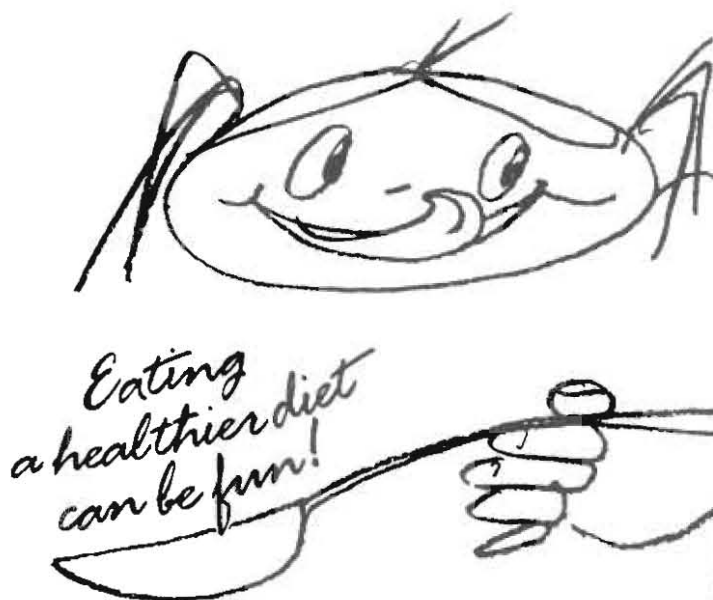
■ Menus are being adapted to include healthy choices.

■ A star-rating menu system makes healthy eating easy and fun.

■ Classroom projects, relevant to the National Curriculum, are provided for teachers to use with the children. And nutritional workshops are run for parents, teachers, and catering staff.

■ Promotional ideas, such as leaflets, counter cards, stickers and badges are available for children and parents.

The whole idea of The Eating Habit is to ensure that learning about food is fun so eating a healthy



diet becomes a positive experience, not one of denial,' says Lynda Jones.

■ For further information contact: East Berkshire Health Promotion Unit, Old Windsor Hospital, Crimp Hill Lane, Old Windsor, Berkshire. Tel 0753-832808

School meals best source of nutrients

A re-analysis of the diets eaten by schoolchildren has found considerable deficiencies. School meals of the sort provided in the early 1980s were better at providing the necessary nutrients than were packed lunches or eating out at cafes and take-aways.

Using the new Dietary Reference Values issued by the Department of Health in July this year, *Food Commission* has re-analysed data on schoolchildren's diets and found substantial numbers of children falling below minimum nutrient levels for several essential vitamins and minerals.

Minimum levels, known as Lower Reference Nutrient Values (LRNIs), are defined by the government as the levels which would fail to satisfy the needs of over 97 per cent of people. Anyone regularly eating less than the LRNI 'will almost certainly be deficient' their criteria state.

Both primary and secondary school girls are especially at risk, with over a third of girls aged 10-11, and nearly a third aged 13-14 showing deficiency in iron intake (see Table 1). This amounts to nearly half a million children in Britain in those age groups alone.

Children from families with low incomes — those eligible for free school meals in the early 1980s — were consistently eating overall diets with the lowest nutrient density (the fewest nutrients for the calories). For these children, a school meal was significantly more nutritionally valuable to them, as it provided a substantial proportion of their daily needs (see Table 2).

For older girls a free school meal provided on

Table 1 Estimated percentage of children below minimum recommended nutrient levels

	Boys		Girls	
	10-11	13-14	10-11	13-14
	%	%	%	%
Iron	5	3	38	3
Calcium	7	6	15	17
Vitamin A	10	25	35	26
Vitamin B1	2	3	2	2
Vitamin B2	6	7	10	15
Vitamin B3	1	1	1	1
Vitamin B6	4	5	4	5
Vitamin C	10	9	14	8

■ Source: Figures are based on means and standard deviations given in *The Diets of British School children*, HMSO, 1989, using data collected in 1983, and LRNIs from *Dietary Reference Values*, DoH, 1991.

average over 35 per cent of protein, calcium, iron, vitamin B6 and vitamin C, and over 30 per cent of vitamin B1 and vitamin B3.

In all age groups school meals provided on the whole higher levels of vitamins and minerals than either packed lunches or meals eaten from a cafe or take-away.

■ Researched by David Anderton

Table 2 Nutrients provided by different lunches, for girls aged 13-14

	School meal		Packed lunch	Cafe/Take-away	RNI
	Free	Paid			
Protein (g)	21	18	17	12	41.2
Iron (mg)	3.8	3.3	2.9	2.4	14.8
Calcium (mg)	250	200	220	140	800
Vitamin A (µg)	93	95	250	58	600
Vitamin B1 (mg)	0.34	0.30	0.31	0.23	0.70
Vitamin B2 (mg)	0.32	0.25	0.28	0.17	1.10
Vitamin B3 (mg)	8.1	7.0	6.9	5.2	12
Vitamin B6 (mg)	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	1.0
Vitamin C (mg)	18	17	13	14	35

■ Source: as for table 1

■ RNI figures are the daily amounts sufficient for the needs of 97% of the population

food for wealth or

HEALTH

ROBIN JENKINS

TOWARDS
EQUALITY
IN HEALTH

FOOD FOR WEALTH OR HEALTH

Robin Jenkins, Socialist Health Association, 195 Walworth Road, London SE17 1. ISBN 0 900687 16 9. £3.50

This splendid little book sets out to analyse how the food sector operates in order to understand why there are so many problems with food supply. Its main value is that whereas the problems are widely recognised, not least because of the work of *Food Magazine* and The Food Commission, the processes underlying them receive much less attention.

This is important, as the most effective action will come from attention to the roots of the problem rather than the symptoms. As Jenkins says, 'There is a political debate about food these days, but too much of it meddles with details rather than dealing with the basic problems.'

The book's focus is on the UK, but the larger European and global perspectives are given full weight. An especially good chapter is devoted to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and I recommend getting hold of the book even if only for the clarity of this exposition, in which Jenkins shows just what needs to be changed. Another section analyses the operation of multinationals and giant retail companies. The free-market is then dissected, as an inadequate and illusory response to existing problems.

As to recommendations for future policy directions, Jenkins is well worth reading as his suggestions are bound to provoke thought and debate. One is a return to labour-intensive agriculture, implying some re-population of rural areas.

Another is a planned move towards organic agriculture, although I fear this neglects the danger of segmenting the market into those who can and will pay

extra for organic produce, and those who can't or won't - a problem which is mentioned but given insufficient weight. However, the important contribution is to deepen the level of discussion.

If I have one criticism of the book it is that good, wholesome food is unwittingly portrayed too much as a necessity, even a duty, rather than as a cause for celebration.

Mike Joffe

PESTICIDES AND YOUR FOOD

Andrew Watterson, The Merlin Press, 10 Malden Road, London NW5 3HR. ISBN 1 85425 047 7. £7.99.

THE SOIL ASSOCIATION HANDBOOK

Nigel Dudley, MacDonald Optima, 1 New Fetter Road, London EC4A 1AR. ISBN 0 356 20041 8. £5.99

Consumer guides to pesticides all face the same problem - what practical advice can they give about avoiding such ubiquitous contaminants? Watterson addresses the problem by listing common foods, the hazardous chemicals used on them and the residue levels which result. While this certainly demonstrates the scale of the problem, it does leave consumers doubting whether any food is safe to eat.

The common association of residues with fruit and vegetables has even led some people to question current nutritional advice to eat more of these foods. While there is a wider range of residues in freshly harvested fruit and vegetables, the most persistent pesticides tend to be concentrated in animal fat. By reducing consumption of animal fat and eating more fresh fruit and vegetables, consumers should reduce dangers both from contaminants and from an unbalanced diet.

Watterson brings to the study a unique depth of experience in the issues of health, safety and pesticide use. His fully referenced introductory sections give an accessible and balanced summary of the arguments.

Ever since it was founded in the mid-1940s, the Soil Association has sought to minimise food adulteration and environmental destruction while maintaining agricultural profitability. It therefore offers a model to those who would seek to reform agricultural policy to reward sustainability rather than output.

Dudley summarises Soil Association policy, then gives practical advice on where to find organic food and how to become an organic gardener. His breadth of experience allows him to give a full account of the issues facing organic agriculture and the policies which seek to address them. The book offers fresh insights into current knowledge for both the general and specialist reader. It is therefore unfortunate that its value is reduced by a lack of references - the suggested list of further reading is an inadequate substitute.

The book does not duck controversial issues such as the possibly conflicting demands of animal welfare, the need to minimise residues of veterinary drugs and the benefits of animals within a balanced rotational system. These are questions which the government will have to address, if agricultural support is to be redirected towards the concerns of those who pay for it.

There is now an EC standard for organic food production. The Soil Association standard is even more rigorous and places additional conservation standards on symbol holders. In so doing it continues to lead public concern rather than lagging behind European governments. This book shows policy makers what could be done.

Pete Snell

FOOD HYGIENE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

A Stretch and H Southgate, Pitman Publishing, 128 Long Acre, London WC2E 9AN. ISBN 0 273 03386 7. £10.99

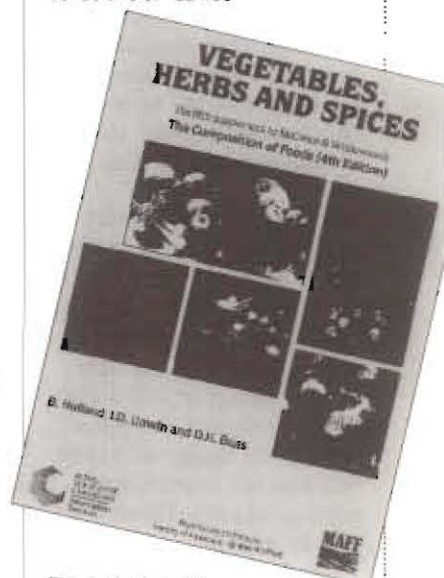
This is a basic text for training in practical food preparation, emphasising accident prevention in the kitchen and safe and hygienic food handling. Chapters on knife handling and small equipment use are alternated with chapters on food

poisoning and food borne diseases. Self-assessment exercises and repeated summaries of points being covered make the book ideal for revision for students attempting certificates in food hygiene, though the result is occasionally rather simplistic and repetitive.

Diane McCrea

VEGETABLES, HERBS AND SPICES

Fifth supplement to McCance & Widdowson's *The Composition of Foods*, Royal Society of Chemistry/MAFF, Turpin Transactions, Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Herts SG6 1HN. ISBN 0 85186 376 0. £24.50



This is the latest in the excellent series of tables showing the main nutrients to be gained from - in this case - over 450 variations on the theme of pulses, vegetables, herbs and spices. A subsequent table shows fatty acids for a smaller range, in an 'as-cooked' form (e.g. mushrooms fried in butter). Another table shows some of the vegetables' alternative names along with their Latin taxonomic names.

The main tables are set out in the usual four-page format, and it is encouraging to see that only rarely do figures rely on manufacturer's data. On the minus side, though, there are still far too many 'N's in the tables, indicating that a significant quantity of a mineral or vitamin is present but the amount is unknown.

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.*

Gelatin risks?

You ask: Are there any risks of contracting BSE from gelatin, which I believe is made from skin, bones, tendons etc? On a packet of Davis brand gelatin it says product of more than one country. What controls are there on imported meat by-products to ensure they are not contaminated?

Commercial gelatin is derived from pig and cattle skin, gristle and bone, which contain large amounts of a protein called collagen. The collagen is extracted and broken down into gelatin by keeping the bones in a strong acid solution and then boiling them, along with the skin etc and skimming the rich liquid off the top of the vat. As the liquid cools it hardens into a gel and can be rolled into sheets or grated into a powder.

We consume over 10 million kilograms of edible gelatin annually in the UK, much of it imported from the rest of Europe. The Food Standards (Edible Gelatin) Order defines its purity, and food inspectors (local authority trading standards and port authority inspectors) are supposed to enforce the regulations. As from 1992 there will be very little port authority inspection of foods from other EC countries.

The threat of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy contamination is assumed to be very small. The risk to humans from BSE-infected meat is said to be 'remote' and the most infectious parts of the animal are no longer permitted for human consumption. Gelatin (or collagen) has not been banned as it is presumed to be safe. But any neural or lymph tissue in bones, gristle or skin could carry the disease and boiling will not destroy it. So we cannot say gelatin is 100 per cent safe. As collagen is not an essential part of the diet you may want to limit your consumption of gelatin. Check the ingredients lists of sweets, packet puddings, yogurts, thickened drinks, cream, ice cream, cheese spreads and the capsules used for drugs, vitamins, etc.

Fat facts

You ask: Most healthy eating guidelines tell us to eat chicken and fish rather than red meat, because there is less fat. Is there really such a difference?

Yes and no! Lean raw beef and lean chicken are both very similar, at under five per cent fat. And the proportion of saturated fat is similar (over a third of the total fat) though the chicken is higher in polyunsaturates.

Roast chicken is a bit fattier, with the dark meat around seven per cent fat, and the lighter meat under five per cent. Roast chicken with the skin left on is much fattier – around 15 per cent fat. Roast lean cuts of beef, pork and lamb will top 10-15 per cent, with fattier cuts ranging 20-30 per cent fat.

Fish are quite another kettle, so to speak. White fish (cod, haddock, plaice etc) are around one per cent fat, and oily fish (herring, mackerel, tuna etc) are around 15 per cent oil, with much of this oil comprising mono- and polyunsaturated fats.

So if your worry is about fat in your diet then fish and lean, skinless chicken come out best of the animal meats. Cheeses such as cheddar are over 30 per cent fat (more than half of this is saturated fat). A boiled egg is about ten per cent fat (and about a third of this is saturated fat).

Remember: processed and take away chicken and fish products may not be so healthy. At McDonalds, six Chicken McNuggets provide nearly twice the fat of a regular burger, and the Fillet-o-Fish has nearly as much fat as a Quarter Pounder with Cheese. With both the chicken and fish, the deep-fried batter is the culprit.

Find out more

The Ryedale Food Education Group in North Yorkshire is running another popular term of lectures with invited speakers to debate issues from food irradiation, the role of meat in our diet, chemicals in food and why so many people in the world are starving. Contact Verity Steele on (0653) 694084.

Letters

A place for pills

I am very concerned at the growing paranoia displayed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Health over the control of food supplements.

As a nutritionist I am aware that there are many food supplements on the market which are rubbish. Junk, yes, but surely not a hazard to health in the way we are being led to believe? Irresponsible manufacturers need to be cracked down on – but not all products should be tarred with the same brush. While several thousand people have died from mis-prescribed drugs, none have died from mis-used food supplements.

My husband fell ill with cancer of the stomach and was not expected to survive. He has survived thanks to a range of vitamin, mineral, amino acid, enzyme and probiotic supplements, without which he suffers relapses.

At one time I would have believed that one could get all the necessary nutrients one needs from a properly balanced food intake. However, with the increase in the number of unidentified viruses, the mounting pollution problem, the excessive use of pesticides and the generally poor quality of processed food, I no longer believe that this is possible.

In the quest to save us from ourselves, MAFF and the DoH may do more harm than good. Legislation will force many of the honest brokers out of business, companies who have carefully prepared, properly labelled products have helped thousands of sick people beat 'unbeatable' ill health.

Better labelling? More product information? Definitely! But legislation to force the restriction of proven therapeutic dosages? Definitely not! Kathryn Marsden Malmesbury, Wilts

Facts for chefs

For the last two years I have been providing nutrition advice to caterers wishing to implement a healthier eating programme.

I have found difficulty in obtaining information on the composition of some foods prepared for the catering industry. There seems to be a lack of nutritional labels on products and in some cases a very long delay in providing compositional information.

I do not know if other nutritionists and dietitians have experienced similar problems, but I wondered if you have considered investigating this area.

Gillian Lockie
Aberdeen

Good point. When we researched our book Fast Food Facts we found several examples of catering products being inferior in composition to equivalent retail products. We hope to do a feature article on this topic in the near future. (Eds)

Obesity help

We are making an inventory of self-help groups, research units, commercial centres and professionals concerned with obesity problems in Europe.

Please let us know of any organisations we can add to our list. We are co-sponsored by the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health in Flanders, Belgium. We would like to know names, addresses and all relevant details, so we can issue invitations to our First International Obesitas/WHO Congress on obesity management.

Miep Bekkers-van den Hoven
Obesitas, Bunderbeeklaan 19, B-2950 Kapellen, Belgium (Tel.32 3 664 17 12)



The Long View

Eggs-ploitation

Guest writer Alan Long looks at the life of a chicken

Total Free Range. Ministry-inspected. Salmonella-free. Empty claims and bogus symbols abound, to egg on consumers into free-ranging delusions, innocently paying green premiums otherwise known as VAT – Virtue-Added Tricks – for products lovingly nurtured in Saint Tesco's hallowed pastures (and adoringly slaughtered in United Meat Packers' sacred halls).

Chickens descend from jungle birds feeding mainly off the ground. Their beaks are the organs of their most enduring pleasure. They escape into trees from predators. And they congregate as harems for a cockerel, with upwards of half-a-dozen wives. Egg-laying declines in winter, when food is scarcer and chicks may not survive.

In the days of scratching poultry in the farmyard the eggs had to be collected from wherever they were laid. They might be mucky with feathers stuck on – duck eggs were notoriously contaminated with nasty bacteria. Production was low by modern standards: a bird wasn't 'ready for the table' in less than two

years and hens went off laying in winter, so our grannies preserved 'pan eggs' in buckets of waterglass to tide them over.

Today's consumers may savour fresh red meat, but they jib at signs of an embryo in a fertile egg, so the hens are kept in unisex flocks. Some welfarists have considered running neutered or vasectomised cockerels with the hens, but this seems an odd concession to some sort of natural order.

Chicken feed is no longer an innocent mixture of grains. In the artificial conditions in which they live (including free range) both fishmeal and 'feather and bone' may be added to the rations, as well as dyestuffs to colour the yolks to the purchasers' likes, assessed against special charts of yellowness. Artificial illumination keeps the day length to 17 hours to counteract the autumn decline in production.

High-tech breeding and rearing, vaccines, drugs and growth-boosters ('performance enhancers' in the parlance of the funny farm industry) administered in the feed, the water and even as sprays, have been applied to all systems, even so-called free range. Flocks of 50,000 or more hens, squawking in an environmentally controlled unit have

taken the chicken a long way from the scratching birds in the farmyard. A free range unit may comprise flocks of several thousand, with the care of up to 5000 birds now reckoned to be within the capabilities of a single person.

The broiler has been developed for breast meat while the laying hen is a scrawny bird. Putting broilers in batteries would cause so much bruising that the carcasses would look repulsive.

A single page of this magazine measures 0.062m². A modern fully-grown broiler gets 0.034m² – giving two birds a space barely the size of this page. High densities of birds are needed, says the industry, 'to stop birds moving around too fast and damaging themselves and each other'.

The EC has at last reached agreement on free range definitions for table fowl by compromising on three categories, appeasing producers rather than customers. Simple *free range* will apply to all birds slaughtered after 56 days (intensively-reared broilers are 'harvested' at 49 days), and which each have a minimum of 0.077m² (just over the size of this page). These birds should also have continuous day-time access to open air runs with a minimum of 1m² per bird.

Traditional free range will be kept at densities allowing at least 0.083m² per bird, they must live at least 81 days after hatching and must be allowed 2m² each in an open air run.

Total free range will apply to birds kept in similar conditions to traditional free range, but with access to open air runs of 'unlimited area'.

Most free-range birds, especially in large colonies, will rarely venture through the pop holes into the great outside, which is often a barren yard merely complying with the definition. It lacks food, water, shelter or interest, and the birds are bred for intensive indoor production. Some egg farmers secure contracts with supermarkets only if they include

some free range eggs, which they produce unenthusiastically in hastily converted buildings with uncongenial outside runs surrounded by wire fencing to deter dogs and foxes.

Free range units may have some of the highest mortality rates, with fighting, disease and predators taking the lives of one in three birds. Yet the unit remains profitable because of the high premiums paid for the 'free range' label.

Finally comes the time to 'depopulate' the broiler houses, batteries and free range units. The birds are grabbed by the legs and stuffed like cabbages into crates, to be transported to 'packing stations' for the final massacre. There, the pathetic corpses whizz past the inspectors who have a second or two to assess each carcass. A third of the birds may arrive with broken bones – and as a concession to welfare, catchers are asked to grab no more than three birds in each hand, and to yank them up by two legs not one. Spent layers, hens no longer producing eggs, are good for nothing more than 'manufacturing' – soups, baby food, vichyssoise...

And lastly there is the mystery of the cockerels who never crow. For every female chick there is a male chick, and in the days of scratching flocks a rooster could be allowed to adolescence and eaten as coq-au-vin. But today's business has no place for males and won't waste feed on them until they can be differentiated by the usual signs.

Enter the chicken-sexer, adept at sexing the tiny chicks by minute differences in the baby organs. Conveyor belts take the unwanted males away to be gassed, and turned back into animal feed.

In many respects free range systems are no better, and can be even worse, than batteries. If you must eat eggs then read the labels intently and with a lot of scepticism. Virtue-Added Trickery abounds. This is an industry where there is seldom a cock to be seen, but a lot of bull to be heard.

BOOKS

Food Irradiation

Good food doesn't need irradiation. If food had to be irradiated then ask 'what was wrong with it?' With the UK government permitting food irradiation in 1991 this book is essential reading.

224pp ISBN 0-7225-2224-X £6.50 including post and packing.

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Children's Food

■ Teething rusks sweeter than a doughnut?

■ Fish fingers less than half fish?

■ Beefburgers can be up to 40% pig fat?

The book offers ways of judging what is good or bad on the shelves of our shops and gives sound advice on how to ensure our children eat healthily.

210pp ISBN 0-04-440300-3 £4.75 including post and packing

Additives - Your Complete Survival Guide

What can you do about additives? Which are dangerous and which are safe?

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Safe Food Handbook

The key facts to help you understand current issues such as the use and misuse of pesticides. Plus an A-Z shopper's guide to the most commonly bought foods, pinpointing risks and recommending alternatives.

Edited by Joan and Derek Taylor, with an Introduction by Pamela Stephenson.

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Fast Food Facts

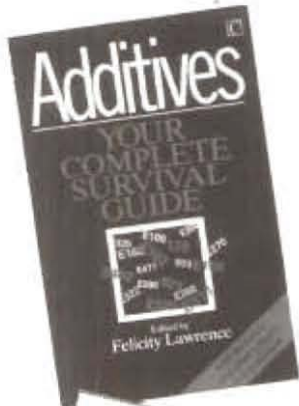
■ Chips coloured with textile dyes

■ French fries cooked in beef fat

■ Batter made without eggs or milk

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- Do we need added bran?
- Taking the lid off canned meat

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- A hard look at ice cream
- Homeless and hungry

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Microwave protein peril?

Suggestions have been made that microwave cooking may alter the chemical structure of proteins, reducing the nutritional value of protein-rich foods. A search on the 'Medline' medical and scientific research database turned up two papers which shed light on this question. Neither examined the point directly, but their findings suggest that use of a microwave oven has minimal effects on the biological activity of protein, and is unlikely to reduce its nutritional value.

Scientists at Marburg University in Germany compared conventional water bath thawing of frozen blood plasma with thawing using a microwave oven. Clotting activity, which relies on a complex cascade of biochemical reactions between more than 12 proteins, was the same immediately after thawing, and after two hours was significantly better if the microwave oven was used. This test suggests that these proteins are not affected by microwaves, since any change in the chemical or 3-D structure of the proteins would interfere with the clotting process.

In another study, using microwaves to thaw protein-rich cow colostrum, small effects on protein were seen. Colostrum, the milk produced immediately after birth which contains a high concentration of protein antibodies, was thawed

either using a water bath (25 min, 45 deg C) or using a 650W oven at full or half power (10 or 17 mins respectively). Compared with water bath thawing, thawing in the microwave caused some coagulation and produced milk with a lower total protein content and a smaller amount of some of the antibodies. The researchers, from the University of Illinois, conclude that microwaving 'provides a reasonable source of colostrum when fresh high quality colostrum is not available'.

On the basis of these reports it seems that microwave ovens are unlikely to cause any nutritional problems, since antibody activity is destroyed by conventional cooking and coagulation of soluble proteins, such as egg-white, is commonplace. Unanswered questions remain about the potential for microwaves to produce small amounts of toxic protein derivatives - and last but not least, its effects on taste and texture. **Sohnen D, Kretschmer V, Franke K et al, Thawing of fresh frozen plasma with a new microwave oven, *Transfusion* 1988, 28: 576-580** **Jones LR, Taylor AW, Hines HC, Characteristics of frozen colostrum thawed in a microwave oven, *Journal of Dairy Science* 1987, 70:1941-1945**

Pesticide effects on farm workers
Estimates suggest that around the

Microwave cooking hazards, vitamins for pregnancy and reactions to the new Dietary Reference Values - Eric Brunner reviews the medical press

world there are 3 million severe cases of pesticide poisoning and 230,000 deaths annually. Cases are mainly found in developing countries. Although a lot is known about the acute effects of poisoning, little research had been done on its long-term consequences.

A new study examined 36 farm workers in Nicaragua who had been admitted to hospital for pesticide intoxication, and compared them, about two years after the accident, with matched 'control' men. The poisoned men did much worse on several neuropsychological tests. Poor performance was seen for the following functions: verbal and visual attention, visual memory, dexterity, co-ordination and problem solving. A single episode of organophosphate poisoning alone seemed to be responsible for a decline in neuropsychological functioning, for two years at least. The report raises concern over this massive problem in the developing world, when economic and social pressures encourage the ever-growing use of such chemicals, while ignoring their hazards. **Rosenstock L, Keifer M, Daniell WE, McConnell R, Claypoole K and the Pesticide Health Effects Study Group, Chronic central nervous system effects of acute organophosphate pesticide intoxication, *The Lancet* 1991, 338:223-227**

demonstrable adverse effect of the folic acid, but the study was not designed to detect rare effects. The research group suggest that, apart perhaps from epileptics taking drugs, all pregnant women who have previously had a child with a neural tube defect should consider taking folic acid supplements.

MRC vitamin study research group, Prevention of neural tube defects: results of the MRC vitamin study, *The Lancet* 1991, 338:131-137

Reactions to DRVs

Prof John Garrow, in a BMJ editorial on the COMA Dietary Reference Values (see page 2 in this issue) points to the increasing size and thoroughness of reports from the Department of Health's Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy. Earlier documents on recommended daily allowances were less weighty in both the literal and metaphorical senses. In 1969 the equivalent document had 43 pages; in 1979, 27 pages; the new one has 210, and provides reference values for 35 rather than 10 nutrients.

Literature reviews are now fully referenced. The chapter on fat has 92, and that on fibre 53 references. Surely public concern about food, diet and health, as much as academic endeavour, has brought about these changes?

Garrow J, New dietary reference values, *British Medical Journal* 1991, 303:148

Folic acid can prevent spina bifida

Folic acid vitamin supplements taken before conception reduce the risk of embryonic tube defects in women who have had a previous affected pregnancy, according to a Medical Research Council study. A randomised double blind trial carried out at 33 centres involving 1817 'high risk' women shows that folic acid, a B vitamin, had a 72 per cent protective effect (relative risk 0.28; 95 percent confidence interval 0.12-0.71) relative to non-supplementers. Other vitamin pills did not show a protective effect. There was no

The COMA report on dietary reference values recommends a 50 per cent reduction in average sugar consumption. Malcolm Dessorges, deputy chairman of the Sugar Bureau, responds by saying 'it is nonsense to single out refined sugar as a cause of dental caries. Tooth decay is caused by acids, and the worst offenders are fresh and dried fruits - the very things the COMA panel say we should eat more of. On obesity he said: 'there is published evidence that slimmer people eat more sugar than fat ones, who tend instead to eat more fatty foods'.

Bonn D, UK: Food for thought - the COMA report, *The Lancet* 1991, 338:109

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