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# THE FOOD MAGAZINE

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## Problems with pills

**Vitamin pills that don't dissolve, tablets with mis-labelled ingredients – the Food Magazine exposes poor quality control in the £250m food supplements industry.**

They may be no substitute for nutritious food, yet food supplements such as vitamin and mineral pills are promoted by manufacturers as an insurance against an inadequate diet. If you read the labels, their pills 'safeguard against deficiencies' (Boots), 'help maintain good health' (Superdrug) and 'give the whole family added protection' (Haliborange).

But The Food Commission has looked inside the packaging and found the quality of some products leave a lot to be desired. In an exclusive test of 18 popular vitamin pills carried out for the *Food Magazine*, nine products failed to dissolve satisfactorily in half an hour, and three of the nine – from leading companies Holland and Barrett, Superdrug and Health Aid – failed to dissolve after a whole hour.

In the opinion of the testing laboratories – at the Universities of Northumbria and Sunderland – all nine slow-dissolving products would fail to release their full dose in the human gut and would remain in large pieces until excreted.

Similar problems have been shown with mineral supplements by the BBC 'Watchdog' programme and in trials of vitamin pills run in the United States by the campaigning group, Centre for Science in the Public Interest.

On top of these damning reports come a series of tests by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. The first results,

focusing on iodine, found amounts of iodine in the pill that differed enormously from the amount stated on the label. One product contained less than one tenth the amount, another contained over nine times the amount.

High standards of quality control are required by law for medicines but not for food supplements. There is no equivalent to the Medicines Inspectorate to monitor production, and no equivalent to the Committee on the Safety of Medicines to ensure products are safe and effective.

Two years ago the European Commission proposed that most food supplements should be classified as medicines, available only through pharmacies and under a doctors' prescription. This already applies through much of Europe, but UK manufacturers were alarmed at the cost of having to test their products for safety and purity, and pay £15,000 registration fees.

Fierce lobbying has stalled the EC proposals, and they have also been criticised for putting food supplements under the control of doctors, many of whom by their own admission are poorly trained in nutrition and dietetics. But if supplements continue to be poorly manufactured they will find no-one to defend them and the call for putting them under medical control will be all the stronger.

**See report on pages 8 and 9**



## Stress of the long distance pig

At a recent discussion on transport of animals a vet mentioned the effects of stress during transport and handling of animals on meat quality. In cattle the effects are evident in dark, tough meat. In pigs the phenomenon of PSS (porcine stress syndrome) results in pork that is pink, soft, with exudating tissues.

Now I read in the *Financial Times* (28.10.92) that pig breeders are to use genetic engineering to remove the gene responsible for causing PSS. It would be very interesting to find out if the elimination of this gene has any effects on other genes, or if this is a purely therapeutic operation with no side effects. Incidentally, when we tried last year to get someone from the Pig Improvement Company to speak at our AGM on 'Biotechnology and Animal Welfare' we drew a complete blank, so it seems they may be sensitive on this subject.

Joanne Bower, Hon Sec,  
The Farm and Food Society,  
4 Willifield Way,  
London NW11 7XT

## Cruel world

I was in the corner shop yesterday and overheard the following:

A: ...and I made her a nice salad but she wouldn't eat the salmon. She wants special cheese.

B: That'll be that vegetarian cheese.

A: Is there vegetarian butter as well as cheese?

B: No, I've never seen it. I suppose they don't eat butter...

Which goes to show that there's plenty of confusion and scope for misinformation when it comes to vegetarian products. Let's be as clear as we can: terms such as vegetarian cheese are deceptive. The 'vegetarian' cheese products now on sale may not have been made using traditional rennet, derived from calves' stomachs, but they have been tested on animals.

Customers who buy only 'cruelty-free' products would, if they knew the facts, reject cheese made with genetically engineered chymosins because these processing aids, like a number of additives in food and

drink, have been tested on laboratory animals. The Body Shop would not sell 'vegetarian' cheese if it were promoted for toiletry.

Alan Long  
VEGA – Vegetarian Economy and Green Agriculture,  
Greenford,  
Middlesex.

## Colour concern

My daughter has taken anti-epileptic Epilim coated tablets, two a day, every day for a number of years. The leaflet says the pills contain 'colour and other inactive ingredients including E123'.

My daughter is twenty and in the next few years may want to start a family. I would be most grateful if you could look into this 'E123' most carefully.

Mrs L Parsons  
Alcester Road,  
Birmingham.

*Editors' reply: Medicines don't have to list their ingredients and it is unusual that this company admitted to using E123. The additive is a colouring known as Amaranth, widely used in Britain but banned in the USA, the former Soviet Union and Scandinavia, because of links to cancer and to damaged fetuses in experimental animals.*

*There is also some evidence that azo dyes, of which Amaranth is one, can provoke hyperactivity and allergic reactions such as asthma, eczema and skin rashes. As the drug Epilim is designed to prevent epileptic attacks then it seems absurd that the manufacturers should be adding an unnecessary colouring which may affect the nervous system.*

*If your daughter does want to become pregnant she must talk to her doctor: Epilim is not advised during pregnancy even without the E123 coating.*

**Please note, we love getting letters and try to print all we can. But long letters may have to be cut – if so, we will try to keep their flavour.**

# Well, we finally did it!

After being runners-up in the Caroline Walker Awards for three years running, your very own *Food Magazine* won the 1992 Special Award for 'distinguished work over many years'.

Promising to follow Caroline's lead and continue our campaigning, we accepted the award fully conscious that the magazine is a team effort. It needs our dedicated administrator, Martine Drake, and our subscription manager, Ian Tokelove, to keep it afloat. And it needs supporters: you our readers and subscribers who ensure we are unsinkable!

This issue is the twentieth, the end of the second volume, and five years since the first issue. We don't want to rest on our laurels and let the cobwebs grow, so we have a surprise in store. For our next issue we are currently negotiating a joint publication with ... well let's just say with a sympathetic organisation.

It'll be a bumper issue with many extra pages, lots of news and feature articles, exclusive investigations, backbiting gossip and loads of stuff we haven't even thought about yet! Everything you expect from the *Food Magazine*, and a whole lot more besides!

Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein



We collect the Caroline Walker glass dinner plate at the 1992 awards ceremony

**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.**

**The Food Magazine is published quarterly by The Food Commission.**

**Co-editors:** Sue Dibb & Tim Lobstein

**Information Officer:** Martine Drake

**Subscriptions:** Ian Tokelove

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# Belgians break irradiation laws

Irradiated Belgian egg products have been illegally imported into Germany, German Federal Health Office, the Bundesgesundheitsamt (BGA) has told the *Food Magazine*.

German food regulations prohibit the sale of irradiated food. The BGA examined pasteurised egg products from German, Belgian and Italian producers using electron spin resonance spectroscopy (EPR) to screen packaging material and gas chromatographic methods to detect volatile hydrocarbons and cyclobutanones.

The BGA told the *Food Magazine* that the 'products of two Belgian suppliers (product names DION and CocoVite) could be identified as irradiated by analysis of hydrocarbons and dodecylcyclobutane. EPR on the package

material showed very clearly that this had been irradiated. Obviously the whole product had been irradiated as part of the production process.'

Food irradiated in the EC and not labelled as such would face an easy passage onto UK supermarket shelves. Since the start of 1993 there has been no inspection of foods at the port of entry into the UK from other EC countries, and no accepted methods for irradiation testing by food inspectors.

'This discovery by German health officials raises serious doubts about the ability of European governments to control food irradiation,' said Martine Drake for the Food Irradiation Campaign. 'Here we see companies clearly behaving illegally, and there is no guarantee that unla-

belled irradiated food is not being imported into the UK.'

The Food Irradiation Campaign is currently asking supermarkets to specify the methods they are using to monitor for irradiated foods. Current UK food regulations require all irradiated food to be labelled 'irradiated' or 'treated with ionising radiation'. But if a food contains a compound ingredient which amounts to less than 25 per cent of the product then the fact that a component of the compound ingredient had been irradiated need not be declared. In Holland only compound ingredients at less than 2 per cent are exempt.

■ For details of the Food Irradiation Campaign, send an 18p-stamped, self-addressed large envelope to Food Irradiation Campaign, 3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH.

# Elderly people face 'institutional starvation'

A new report from the Department of Health warns that many elderly people face 'institutional starvation'. The report on nutrition and the elderly found that low body weight is extremely common in chronically ill or disabled old people particularly among those being cared for in institutions.

The report advises that in general people over 65 should adopt the same healthy eating patterns and lifestyle that are recommended for younger people. They should be encouraged to increase intakes of fibre, fruit, vegetables and vitamins A, D and C, and decrease intakes of fat and salt. But 'meals on wheels' may lose up to 90 per cent of their vitamin C content by the time of delivery and those dependent on institutional catering may also be at particular risk of low intake.

While pointing out that a good diet can help the elderly to withstand ill health, the Department of Health acknowledges that far too little is known about the diets of elderly people. Of particular concern is the effect illness and disability can have on nutritional status within this age group.

■ *The Nutrition of Elderly People, Report of the Working Group on the Nutrition of Elderly People of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, Report on Health and Social Subjects 43, HMSO.*

# Boycott hits Nescafé sales

According to figures released to the Baby Milk Action campaign by market researchers AC Nielsen, Nescafé instant coffee sales showed a significant fall in the year following the Church of England Synod decision to boycott Nestlé for its baby milk marketing practices in July 1991.

Despite being the only company to increase its advertising (by 27 per cent to £19m during 1992), Nescafé sales dropped over three per cent – equivalent to over two million 8oz jars – while the rest of the instant coffee market fell less than one per cent.

The boycott may have suffered from product confusion. As one church-goer put it: 'I'm doing my bit – I'm boycotting Nescafé and buying Gold Blend.'

■ For a full list of Nestlé products (including Gold Blend!) contact Campaign Against Nestlé, Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrews Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX (tel 0223-464420).

# Gene food could affect antibiotics

The widespread use of a marker gene in genetically altered food could reduce the effectiveness of certain antibiotics, according to the US Pure Food Campaign.

One genetically altered food which contains the controversial kanamycin marker gene is the FlavrSavr tomato, developed by Calgene, the genetic engineering company, and Campbell Soup Inc and originally planned to be launched early this year in the US (see FM19). The FlavrSavr tomato, developed to stay firm longer, includes two novel genes in every cell: an 'anti-sense' gene that is designed to retard rotting and the kanamycin resistant gene used as a 'marker' to indicate when genetic modifications have been successful.

Following public pressure in the US, particularly from the Pure Food

Campaign, Calgene has reversed a two year policy and decided that the kanamycin gene will undergo Food and Drug Administration (FDA) review as a food additive. The announcement comes in spite of a ruling last May by the FDA that genetically engineered foods do not require special approval or labelling. Concerns about genetically altered foods include possible allergic reactions, potential long-term toxicity and unforeseen effects of releasing novel organisms into the environment, as

well as the concerns that the marker gene may reduce the effectiveness of two antibiotic drugs, kanamycin and neomycin.

Many genetically engineered foods, including fruits, vegetables and fish are in the pipeline both in the US and the UK. The Pure Food Campaign has launched an international boycott of genetically engi-



neered foods and has warned Campbell Soup that if it continues to support the research, development and marketing of the FlavrSavr tomato, it too would be boycotted.

Pure Food campaigner Jeremy Rifkin said, 'We have put the biotech companies on notice that we will make safety of genetically engineered foods among the most important consumer issues of the 1990s.'



## ITC slams Kellogg's advert

Kellogg's has been forced to withdraw misleading TV adverts for Corn Flakes following an apparent failure of the new self-regulatory TV advertising system which leaves interpretation of the code of practice to television companies.

The Corn Flakes' ads claimed that 'in a single bite of brown toast with a low-fat spread there's more fat than you'd find in an entire bowl of Kellogg's Corn Flakes with skimmed milk.' In December the TV advertising watchdog, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) ruled that it was impossible to determine the size of a bite so consequently the claim could be considered to be true or false for different people. The ITC asked for the advertisement to be withdrawn and advised the television companies that close-run comparisons such as this were not suitable for presentation of absolute nutritional claims.

Complainants also argued that Kellogg's were being economical with the truth. Craig Sams of Whole Earth Foods complained that the adverts failed to point out that there is less



dietary fibre in a bowl of Corn Flakes than in one bite of wholemeal toast and there is more sugar in a table-spoonful of Corn Flakes than in an entire loaf of wholemeal bread. The Code of Advertising Practice says that advertisements should not mislead consumers by omission.

David Roberts of the Federation of Bakers whose complaint brought swift action from the ITC, told the *Grocer* magazine, 'We are surprised that a company of Kellogg's standing should not only be responsible for such a misleading advertisement but should also undermine expert advice and Government guidelines recommending increased consumption of

all cereal-based foods, of which bread provides more nutrients per penny than any other.'

But the ads have also raised questions about the self-regulation of advertising. Under the Broadcasting Act the ITC no longer pre-vets such adverts. It is now the responsibility of the television companies, which have a commercial interest in maximising advertising revenue, to decide if ads are acceptable.

Even though the ITC moved uncharacteristically fast following the complaints, the Kellogg's advertising campaign had already run its course. Under current regulations there are no fines for companies broadcasting misleading adverts, nor any form of broadcast apology or correction.

Similar complaints were made to the Advertising Standards Authority, the body responsible for print advertising, although to date no decision has been reached. Even when the ASA does make a ruling, the advertising campaign will be long over and Kellogg's full-page advertising message swallowed.

## Kids Get Cooking!

**The Department of Health is backing a project to encourage children to learn basic cooking skills, with a £60,000 grant over the next two years. The Get Cooking! project which will be launched in the spring is being co-ordinated by the National Food Alliance.**

**Aimed at 12-13 year olds the project aims to raise awareness and appreciation of basic cooking skills.**

**A pack for Home Economics classes is being devised, and high-profile media events are being organised.**

**The Get Cooking co-ordinator, Lara Baker says, 'A healthy diet for life starts in childhood. We'd like to see all children given the opportunity to learn basic skills so they can eat healthily, choose sensibly and have the confidence to cook and choose foods' – and not feel they have to buy packet foods to make themselves a meal.'**

■ For more information contact Lara Baker, Get Cooking! Project, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH. Tel: 071-628 2442.

## Retailers' 'crumbs for the poor' scheme faces criticism

The voluntary sector has called the Institute of Grocery Distribution's 'free food for the poor' scheme a publicity stunt and criticised the retailers' organisation for lack of consultation. The scheme, entitled Provision, which invited Prince Charles to its launch in October last year, is to be piloted early this year in Manchester.

The IGD intends to set up a national system for supplying charities with dry or canned foods that cannot be sold in shops either because they are wrongly labelled, packets that are over or under-filled or which may have out-of-date special offers. It is planned to extend

the scheme to fresh, chilled and frozen foods.

However many organisations in the UK voluntary sector have reservations about such schemes. In the past charities have rejected attempts to dispose of EC surplus foods, such as butter, through their channels. Their main criticisms are that it does nothing to resolve the causes of food poverty and by giving food in kind reduces the control the poor have over their daily lives still further. The attendant publicity given to such schemes also focuses attention away from the fact that retailers are part of the problem. Giant supermarkets have squeezed out smaller shops

which traditionally provided locally accessible food.

One campaigner concerned about the growing interest in food industry free-food schemes for the poor is Tim Lang of Parents for Safe Food. After hearing about the Institute of Grocery Distribution's plan in August 1991 he held a long discussion with Dr John Beaumont of the IGD and followed it up with a 9 page letter outlining the voluntary sector's concerns to which 16 months later he has still received no reply.

Other groups who already receive surplus food from retailers on an ad hoc or local basis also feel that the IGD scheme represents the 'thin

edge of the wedge' and an institutionalisation of 'crumbs for the poor', and are calling for more acceptable alternatives.

In Strathclyde there are already at least 30 food co-operatives under local people's control. Each co-operative which supplies basic foods at reasonable prices has typically between 250 and 500 local members. Similarly Glasgow is piloting community food stores. Tim Lang argues that the encouragement and extension of such schemes nationally would be far preferable. However the root causes of lack of money cannot be ignored and he is calling for a national enquiry into the causes of food poverty.

■ For more information contact Tim Lang, Parents for Safe Food, Third floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH. (071-628 2442)



# Gummer lets EC legislation lapse

Despite promises to make progress on at least a dozen major initiatives on food through the EC machine during the six month UK presidency, John Gummer, the minister responsible, has left a supposedly harmonized market in unregulated chaos.

Proposals to regulate the nutritional claims that foods can make were abandoned at the Edinburgh Conference, and there is no prospect of agreement during 1993.

Several pieces of legislation on foods for special purposes (PARNUTS) were left at the consultative stage, including draft directives on infant weaning foods, slimming foods and low sodium foods. Promised draft directives on vitamin and mineral supplements, diabetic foods, sports foods and gluten-free foods have also been left 'on the back burner'.

Harmonization on irradiated food leg-

islation also failed to materialise, despite being first on Gummer's list. Denmark, Belgium, France, Italy, Holland, Spain and the UK currently allow irradiation of specific categories of foods (not the same categories in each country), while Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Germany and Luxembourg do not.

Asked whether this meant that irradiated foods not permitted in the UK might nonetheless be imported, MAFF said that this would be illegal, but then agreed that such a barrier to trade might be challenged in the European Court.

Last summer Mr Gummer promised that 1992 would see '...the emphasis move to the Single Market measures, the enforcement of food law and advice on diet and nutrition'. Yet a review\* in December 1992 by the Consumers in the European Community Group (CECG)

evaluating progress towards a single market found :-

- no agreement on mandatory nutritional labelling of food
- no agreement on controlling misleading food claims
- no progress on the labelling of organic meat
- no agreement on quantitative ingredient labelling
- no agreement on the training of food inspectors
- no agreement on standards for laboratory food testing
- no agreement on the final list of colourings and other additives to be permitted in foods
- no agreement on the testing or release of genetically modified organisms, or the labelling of novel foods
- no agreement on improved food

hygiene principles and codes of practice despite a draft directive published January 1992.

The CECG also noted that the protection of consumers still differed across the EC: if you are electrocuted by a defective UK-made food processor, for example, make sure it happens in Belgium where your rights are better than in the UK. Similarly, disputes over the purchase of faulty goods will follow a different course according to the laws and procedures of each country.

The absence of fully-harmonised regulations could allow unscrupulous traders to exploit the legal loopholes. 'Consumers beware,' said Tim Lang of Parents for Safe Food. 'I hope this isn't a sign that the promises of 1992 were just hype. The lesson of history is that improvements in quality only come from tough controls and monitoring. What we see in this case is chaos.'

\* 1992 A Consumer Audit, from CECG, 24 Tufton St, London SW1P 3RB. (tel 071-222 2662).

## Supermarkets face prosecution over beefed-up joints

Supermarkets are facing prosecution for beefing up profits by adding large quantities of fat to their joints. In the worst cases beef joints were found to contain over 25 per cent compared to a natural fat content of five to eight per cent for silverside or topside of beef.

North Yorkshire Trading Standards officers checked out 133 joints of beef costing between £1.98 and £3.24 a pound from supermarkets and traditional high street butchers.

Of the 115 bought from supermarkets, 77 had added fat, whereas only one of the 18 bought at butchers' shops had extra fat. The added fat in supermarket joints gave the false impression that many supermarkets were cheaper than the butchers.

'It is not fair and it is not healthy,' said Mr Cresty, chief trading standards officer for North Yorkshire. 'In some cases supermarket suppliers roll the fat from huge vats around joints just as if they were adding pastry.'

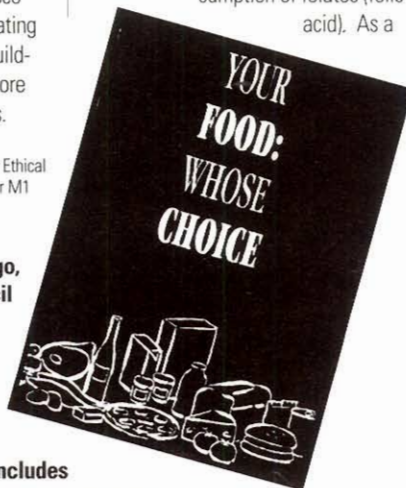
## Bigger isn't always better

A report from the Ethical Consumer Research Association says the growth of supermarkets on the edges of towns is encouraging greater car use and contributing to global warming as well as contributing to the loss of local shopping facilities.

Tesco and Sainsbury supermarkets have both been targeted by local campaigns against superstore development proposals. In October over 50 Tesco stores faced protesters demonstrating against the boom in superstore building which currently sees a new store opened every four and a half days.

■ *Report on Supermarkets* is published by Ethical Consumer, 16 Nicholas Street, Manchester M1 4EJ (Tel/Fax: 061-237 1630).

**Unbelievable just five years ago, the National Consumer Council has taken a giant stride forwards with the publication of its report on food choice. Far from being a dull diatribe on the need for more healthy eating pamphlets, this report includes excellent chapters by Jeanette Longfield on the influence of advertising and Suzi Leather on poverty and choice.**



## Mums must take folic acid pills

The Department of Health (DoH) has advised all women planning to become pregnant to take folic acid food supplements.

Results of Medical Research Council studies published last year show that the incidence of babies born with spina bifida and other neural tube problems can be reduced by over two thirds if the mother increases her consumption of folates (folic acid). As a

result the DoH is urging all women to eat more folate-rich foods, eat foods fortified with extra folate and take a daily supplement of 0.4mg (400mcg) folic acid while trying to conceive and until the twelfth week of pregnancy.

Foods naturally rich in folate include green vegetables, wholegrain foods, liver, milk and yeast extract. Low income women are most at risk of folate deficiency, with over half consuming less than the normal recommended amount (200mcg daily) and one in ten consuming less than the minimum acceptable (100mcg).

The amount of folate necessary to reduce the risk of disease has not been established. The Expert Advisory Group selected a figure 'likely to be protective' and admitted the dose-response relationship was unknown. There was no indication of the possible cost women must bear in order to improve their diet and take supplements, nor the side effects of taking high doses for months or even years while trying to conceive.

'It is an ill-considered approach to improving women's nutrition,' one GP told the *Food Magazine*. 'Instead of eating a better diet women are told to buy pills, or ask us to prescribe them. What a lost opportunity.'



# Grey future for EC's fields

**EC farm policies have promoted an industrialised system of farming that is destroying soil, water resources, the ozone layer and threatening even the ability of future generations to grow food, says a new report from Greenpeace.**

A new report from Greenpeace, *Green Fields, Grey Future*, which has the backing of over 85 consumer, farming, rural, third world and environmental organisations throughout the EC, says that even if farmers want to protect the environment, financial incentives and pressures created by the EC's Common Agricultural Policy mean that they are often compelled to exploit their land to the maximum.

Contrary to popular belief that all farmers are featherbedded, the Greenpeace report highlights the inequalities of modern industrial farming. Eighty percent of farmers in 1990 received less than 10% of the CAP budget, with large numbers

being forced out of farming, which in turn threatened the viability of many rural communities throughout Europe (see box).

The CAP's main beneficiaries are a small number of large, industrial farms — the ones which cause most pollution. These get about 37 per cent of the CAP budget and the rest of the money — about 50 per cent of the budget — is wasted on storing and disposing of surplus farm products.

Companies that benefit from EC policies are the pesticide producers whose sales reached \$8.5 billion in western Europe in 1990; fertiliser producers with sales of \$6.6 billion in the EC in 1989 and the companies who profit from disposing of EC surpluses.

Greenpeace says numerous ministerial statements and European Commission documents making 'green' promises are little more than window-dressing. The recent CAP reform was an opportunity to put EC agriculture on a new ecological path. Instead, Greenpeace argues, set-aside policies and price reductions are unlikely even to reduce surpluses and will encourage farmers to intensify production further.

'We need a sensible farming system which benefits people and protects the environment' says Hugh Raven of the UK's Sustainable Agriculture and Food Alliance (SAFE), one of the three major European consumer and agriculture alliances backing the report.

Organic farming, the report demonstrates, is a viable alternative, which is more efficient, and would provide Europe with sufficient food at a reasonable price. It would prevent food contamination, conserve soil and wildlife habitats and greatly reduce energy consumption. In addition it would create more jobs in rural areas and provide a fair livelihood for farmers in the EC and the third world.

To achieve these objectives the report calls on Agriculture Ministers to restructure EC agriculture by the year 2000 by shifting support to organic and other ecological farming systems, to phase out subsidies for intensive farming, to end the subsidies on EC exports and impose taxes on pesticides and synthetic fertilisers.

■ *Green Fields Grey Future - EC Agriculture Policy at the Crossroads* is available from Greenpeace Communications, 5 Bakers Row, London EC1R 3DB. Price £3.00.

## How EC destroys rural life in Spain

Family farms in northern Spain have traditionally produced dairy products and extensively reared, quality meats. EC farm policies now mean that they find themselves unable to compete in their own domestic market with the produce from intensive dairy farms in the Netherlands, France and Denmark.

Spain produces eight million tonnes of milk a year, but was given an EC quota of only 4.8 million tonnes, although Spain is not self-sufficient in dairy products. EC milk quotas will probably force more than 58,000 Spanish farmers out of business. Rural communities and cultures that have been economically stable are beginning to break down as a result of the competition from subsidised 'efficient' industrial farms in northern EC member states.

It is likely that the abandoned Spanish grasslands will be planted with monocultures of eucalyptus plantations for pulp. Over 34,000 Galicians have signed a petition against a plan to set up pulp factories with EC funds.

■ *Coordinadora Extremena de Protección Ambiental, 1992* quoted in *Green Fields, Grey Future*, Greenpeace, 1992.

## Global opposition to GATT

France is not alone in its opposition to GATT proclaims the full-

page ads in the French daily newspaper, *Liberation*, on December 10th.

The ads, signed by over 300 consumer, green, small farmers, third world and citizen groups worldwide aimed to step up pressure against the GATT agreement. Adverts also appeared in the US.



Photo: Greenpeace/De Abreu



# Pesticide residues found in 29% of food

New government figures show detectable pesticide residues in a wide range of foods, including 29 per cent of fruit and vegetables, 32 per cent of all cereals, 55 per cent of milk and 48 per cent of potatoes.

According to MAFF the figures are 'reassuring' with only one per cent of the 2,500 samples analysed in 1990 and 1991 exceeding Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs). But the Pesticides Trust says there is no room for complacency: one per cent of potatoes exceeding the MRL is equivalent to 63,000 tons of contaminated potatoes reaching the consumer in 1991. For a staple food 'this should be an extremely worrying statistic', says Peter Beaumont of the Trust. And MAFF's figures continue to show high residue levels of triazophos in car-

rots and parsnips.

Farmed salmon also scored highly for residues with 54 of the 67 samples (ie 81 per cent) containing residues of the organochlorine pesticides DDT or dieldrin. Both are banned for agricultural use so the figures highlight long term environmental contamination or the illegal use of banned chemicals.

Pesticide residues were also found in some organic foods including organic potatoes, bread, flour and bran. This may be due to environmental contamination or post harvest treatments which are not permitted.

■ *Annual Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues: 1991*, HMSO, 1992  
*Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues: 1988-90*, Food Surveillance Paper No 34, HMSO, 1992.

## WWF calls for new UK pesticide policy

Reduced pesticide residues in food would be just one major benefit of a comprehensive UK pesticides reduction policy, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Its report, *Pesticides: Missing the Target*, produced by the Pesticides Trust for the WWF calls for a reduction in pesticide use of 50 per cent over 5 years.

Rather than regulating pesticides solely on a chemical-by-chemical basis, the report argues for a comprehensive policy which compares the costs, risks and benefits of chemical and non-chemical control and looks at appropriate pest control for sustainable agriculture, and which incorporates pesticide reduction as a principal aim.

The report highlights the problems of intensive and excessive use of pesticides in modern agriculture which have contributed to impoverishment of biodiversity, pollution of surface, ground and sea waters, risks to human health, atmospheric pollution and damage to

the ozone layer and accelerating development of pesticide resistance by pests.

The principal of reduction has already been accepted by many governments. Several countries, including Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands are already experimenting with reduction programmes. However the report describes the UK policy as 'minimal' with the burden of deciding how pesticides should be used falling largely on the user. The WWF and Pesticides Trust propose a UK policy that is a 'positive approach to pest control, with emphasis on developing alternative means of pest control and helping towards the ultimate aim of sustainable agricultural production'.

■ *Pesticides: Missing the Target, A pesticide reduction policy for the UK*. A report by the Pesticides Trust for the World Wide Fund for Nature. Available from: WWF UK, Panda House Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR

## Toxic pesticide gas destroying ozone layer

The toxic gas, methyl bromide, widely used as a fumigant for soil and on food before transport, is a major contributor to ozone depletion, acting five times faster than CFCs. Friends of the Earth are calling for its use to be phased out

by 1995 but the Montreal Protocol, the international agreement to control ozone-depleting substances, at its meeting in November 1992 agreed only to freeze the production of methyl bromide at 1991 levels.

Doug Parr of Friends of the Earth says 'A ban on its use could have significantly reduced the risk of substantial ozone loss over the next few decades. The Netherlands has already banned methyl bromide on health and environmental grounds and there are many safer chemicals or alternative procedures which could substantially reduce or eliminate methyl bromide emissions to the atmosphere.'

The use of methyl bromide as a pre-plant soil fumigant accounts for 81 per cent of global sales for fumigation purposes. It is used to kill pesticides and weeds prior to growing a wide variety of crops including tomatoes, strawberries, cucumbers, peppers, aubergines and vines. A further 14 per cent of the chemical's use is in the fumigation of

commodities such as fruit, vegetables, cocoa and coffee beans, grains and dried fruit.

According to Friends of the Earth methyl bromide is acutely toxic and has caused many deaths - 34 in California alone since 1974. Low-level chronic exposure can result in a variety of problems including tremors, poor coordination, headaches and dizziness. Friends of the Earth say they will be looking to the EC to set tougher standards.

## Alar risks confirmed

The US Environmental Protection Agency has confirmed that daminozide (the chemical name of the pesticide Alar) does pose unacceptable risks and has announced a continued ban of the chemical on food.

Alar hit the headlines in 1989 over fears that it caused cancer. Critics attacked anti-Alar campaigners as hysterical and unscientific. Now after reviewing new toxicity data and recalculating the dietary risk of daminozide the EPA has confirmed its earlier proposal to cancel Alar's food uses because of the risk to public health.

## German pesticides dumped in Albania

Albania has become the latest dumping ground for companies removing chemical waste from environmentally-strict Germany, the world's largest waste exporter. Authorities in Albania say they are stuck with hundreds of tonnes of questionable pesticides they don't want, shipped in by a dealer who refuses to take them back.

'We have blocked more than 400 tonnes of pesticides because they are not on the list approved by our government and because they are forbidden by regulations of the European Community,' Lirim Selfo, head of the Albanian government's Committee for Environmental Protection said. Selfo says the pesticides began arriving a year ago, described as 'humanitarian aid'.

■ *Consumer Currents*, Number 151, IOCU, December 1992.





# Mind the quacks!

**Making excessive claims for their products has long been a feature of the food supplements industry. But it will be poor quality control that will bring about its undoing. The *Food Magazine* reveals the details of two new surveys.**

With Food and Drug Administration (FDA) investigators in the US considering a ban on a wide range of supplements that have not been submitted for safety testing — and the European Commission proposing to make all but a few basic vitamin and mineral preparations available only on prescription — the pills and potions manufacturers are facing a crisis of confidence.

Companies are already well aware that claims to cure arthritis or improve children's IQ have brought the industry into disrepute. A report leaked to the Food Commission of a meeting between leading trade representatives and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food shows clearly that they fear a huge market loss if they don't clean up their act. The document suggests that some food supplement manufacturers are even prepared to support local trading standards officers in prosecuting companies that make unsubstantiated claims for their products. A figure of £50,000 from the manufacturers was suggested to help underwrite prosecutions of fellow traders — and that this money should 'make an example of a shark rather than a minnow'.

But attempting to improve the image of the sup-

plements industry by reigning in the maverick manufacturers may not be enough. In both Europe and the US deeper questions are being asked about the quality of products on the market. Even if it can be shown that a certain nutrient or food supplement can have the effect it claims to have, that is no guarantee that the product on the shelf contains an effective dose. Quality control over food supplements is far less exacting than it is over medicines.

Two surveys, one conducted by the Universities of Northumbria and Sunderland exclusively for the Food Commission, and the other an unpublished survey by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, cast doubt on the manufacturers' ability to deliver the nutrients stated on the pack.

In the first study, 18 popular vitamin products were tested for disintegration in simulated stomach acids (procedure described in *British Pharmacopoeia* 1988, Vol II, HMSO). Nine of the products failed to dissolve in 20 minutes and three of those nine took over an hour (see *Getting Your Vitamins?*). Those taking over 20 minutes remained in large granules, and although this does not prove that the contents remain largely unavailable, in the opinion of the test-

ing laboratory the vitamins and minerals would not be released into the gut but would remain within the granules until excreted.

In the second study, 57 products claiming to contain the essential mineral iodine were analysed for the actual amount of iodine present. Only three products came within ten per cent of the quantity stated on the packet (see *All You Expect?*), while one product was so high that a single tablet could exceed the maximum safe recommended daily amount.

Other studies have shown similar problems with the formulations and bio-availability of food supplements. Six out of 14 vitamin and mineral pills tested by the Washington-based Centre for Science in the Public Interest failed to disintegrate within an hour; and in a study last December BBC 'Watchdog' found similar poor disintegration for calcium supplements.

Pharmaceuticals have to be tested for consistent dosage levels, for full disintegration and for adequate bio-availability. Food supplements do not — they only have to contain what is stated on the package, and few trading standards departments are sufficiently resourced to check products routinely.

Pharmaceuticals also have to show laboratory testing and clinical evidence that they are both safe to use and effective in fulfilling the treatment claims they make. Food supplements need only be fit for consumption under the Food Safety Act. If they make a claim that their product would have a specific medical effect the product would need to be registered as a medicine, so manufacturers say something like 'this supplement is chosen by women during pregnancy' or 'those on weight loss diets may choose to take this supplement' to avoid a direct claim.

The Food Commission is calling on MAFF to insist that food supplements — even if available over the counter without prescription — should be manufactured to standards equivalent to those used for medicines. It also urges MAFF and the Department of Health to restrict both direct and implied health claims for food supplements as well as food products.

The Commission would also like to see manufacturers following the lead taken by Vitalia in printing on the box: 'Good natural sources of vitamins and minerals are fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy products, wholegrain cereals, seafood and meat'.

**Written and researched by Tim Lobstein.  
Additional research by Sabena Sayed, Ian Brown and Annette Lauridsen**





## Getting your vitamins?

**Half the products we tested failed to disintegrate in 20 minutes and the contents may remain in the gut until excreted. Tip: buy chewable varieties, and chew them!**

The laboratory tested 12 tablets of each product. Batch variations may give different results to those shown.

Product	Cost/day	Disintegration time
Boots Multivitamin	6p	7 mins
Boots Multivitamins & Iron	6p	8 mins
Boots Vitamins & Iron	2p	13 mins
Boots Vitamins & Yeast	1p	30 mins
Haliborange Vitamins ACD	4p	5 mins
Haliborange Multivitamins, Ca & Iron	6p	17 mins
Health Aid Multivitamins & minerals	10p	77 mins
Healthcrafts Multivitamins, Iron & Ca	7p	4 mins
Healthcrafts Vitamin B complex	7p	3 mins
Holland & Barrett Multivitamins & minerals	5p	62 mins
Sainsbury Chewable Vitamin C	3p	15 mins
Sainsbury Multivitamins	5p	53 mins
Sainsbury Multivitamins & Iron	6p	58 mins
Sanatogen Multivitamins	7p	51 mins
Sanatogen Multivitamins & Iron	7p	34 mins
Superdrug Multivitamins	4p	78 mins
Superdrug Multivitamins & Iron	3p	34 mins
Vitalia Multivitamins and minerals	5p	10 mins

**Unexpected added ingredients: among the products examined in this test we found colouring agents (eg cochineal, annatto), flavourings (eg vanillin), insect products (shellac, beeswax, cochineal) and artificial sweeteners (aspartame, saccharin).**

## US maintains ban on Evening Primrose Oil

The United States Food and Drug Administration is continuing its ban on the sale and promotion of Evening Primrose Oil (EPO), following its 1985 statement that it had received no evidence that the oil 'was safe and effective for any medical condition' and hence no product containing EPO had been approved for marketing.

In the UK only two EPO products have medical licences: Epogam and Efamast have medical product licences to treat eczema and breast tenderness respectively. Both made by manufacturers Scotia Pharmaceuticals (owned by Efamol Holdings) and distributed by Searle.

Other claims for EPO have not been substantiated sufficiently to qualify for a product licence. The claims made include the relief of premenstrual tension, gastrointestinal disorders, viral infections, diabetic symptoms, schizophrenia symptoms, cardiovascular disease, and more besides!

The claims are based on the assumption that the person taking EPO cannot easily metabolise linoleic acid — a common ingredient of vegetable oils — into a substance called gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), which is found in small amounts in some fats and oils but especially in EPO where it makes up 10 per cent of the oil. GLA appears to play an essential role in a variety of neural and hormonal functions, as part of the structure of the brain and nerve cells and in the formation of prostaglandins.

Most trials showing a benefit of taking EPO have compared EPO with olive oil or liquid paraffin. A better test would be to compare EPO with an oil rich in linoleic acid such as sunflower oil or safflower oil. Better still might be a handful of sunflower seeds, as the seeds also contain useful nutrients, such as zinc, that could help metabolise the natural sunflower oil into GLA.

The prestigious journal *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* (3/9/90) concluded that the anti-eczema claims made for Epogam appeared exaggerated, with only the effects on roughness of the skin reliably demonstrated. 'Since the effects appear to be rather

## All you expect?

Government tests of the content of food supplement pills have not been published, but the *Food Magazine* has obtained a copy of their report on the iodine content of 57 food supplement products. Only four products were within ten per cent of the dose stated on the pack — listed below — and a further ten products were within 20 per cent. Several were more than double or less than half the amount stated on the package, and the worst of these are also listed below.

The figures given below show the percentage of iodine found compared with that stated on the pack: 50% means only half the stated quantity was actually found, 300% means three times the stated quantity was found.

Product	Amount found
<b>The most accurate:</b>	
Lifeplan Kelp with Calcium	96%
Holland & Barrett Kelp with Calcium	104%
Boots Multivitamins, Minerals and Ginseng	95%
Solgar Formula VM-75	103%
<b>The least accurate:</b>	
Seven Seas Femin-9	7%
Vitabiotics Multiron	36%
Cantassium Ocean Kelp Naturtabs	45%
Larkhill Truefree Multivitamins and Minerals	50%
Lifeplan Amino Chelated Multiminerals	52%
Vitabiotics Premence-28	160%
Vitalia Childrens Vitamins & Minerals	167%
Power Health Products Musselkelp	191%
Nature's Plus Chewable Mini-Mins	195%
FSC Sea Kelp & Potassium	526%
Nature's Own Kelp Plus	914%*

\* at 1280mcg this product exceeded the government's recommended maximum safe intake of 1000mcg.

■ Source: *Survey of the Iodine Content of Vitamin and Mineral Supplements*. Laboratory of the Government Chemist, December 1990 (unpublished).

marginal, Epogam is, for the present, best regarded as an optional addition to existing treatment, and as a dietary supplement rather than a medication for eczema.' The journal warned of the expense and of the possible unreliability of other EPO products which were not medically licensed and whose quality control was not monitored.

When we asked the manufacturers of Epogam why they had not applied for FDA approval they indicated that they did not want to register as a food supplement if they could hold out for registration as a pharmaceutical — considered by many a more profitable alternative. In the UK Evening Primrose oil sells for around 10p per day as a food supplement, but the NHS pays over £1 per day for the same quantity on prescription.



## New global food and nutrition alliance formed

### NFA Chairman and member of the UK delegation, Geoffrey Cannon, describes the outcome of the International Conference on Nutrition held in Rome last December.

Who calls the shots when world food and nutrition policy is decided? In Europe more and more power is in the hands of officials working for the European community. World-wide 'free trade' increasingly means freedom for multinational corporations to trade, with the result that the rich countries become richer, and the poor countries not only become poorer but fall more and more prey to cash-cropping, destruction of traditional agriculture, and its replacement by unsustainable agribusiness and unhealthy mass-produced food.

That's the way it looked to delegates at the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) held in Rome last December: or, to be more exact, to those delegates who represented non-governmental organisations working in the public interest.

*Do conferences like the ICN make any difference? Yes, if their rhetoric is turned into action by national governments, and supported by international organisations*

Devised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the ICN was designed to sign up 160 member nations to the 'Declaration and Plan of Action' for world food and nutrition policy. Prominent in Rome as in the preparatory meeting held in Geneva the previous August were delegates from so-called 'non-governmental organisations' who in fact represented the interests of the food manufacturing industries (see FM19).

Delegates from many UN member states were angered by their tactics at the ICN, and in particular by their

determination that the Plan of Action should contain no reference to sugar as the cause of tooth decay and a contributory cause to obesity and thus to diabetes and obesity.

The UK delegation, backed by the USA and many other countries, proposed that sugar, together with fat, saturated fat, salt and alcohol, be identified as public health problems not only in developed countries, but now increasingly in developing countries as their food supplies become industrialised. But after a dramatic debate on the last evening of the ICN, during which delegates from sugar-producing countries like Brazil and Mauritius insisted that sugar is always harmless, the 'S word' was eliminated from the Plan of Action and replaced by 'refined carbohydrates.'

However, non-governmental organisations working in the public interest were able to persuade member states to pay more attention to breast-feeding as vital to the health of baby and mother. Other victories included strengthening references in the Plan of Action to the need for sustainable agriculture systems and food security, and to the need for debt relief.

Do vast and costly conferences like the ICN make any difference? Yes, if their rhetoric is turned into action in the public interest by national governments, and supported by international organisations.

With this in mind, delegates from non-governmental organisations round the world formed a new Global Food and Nutrition Alliance in Rome. The initiative for such an elected body first came from Asian delegates; and in Rome an 18-person Council was elected — three each from Asia, Africa, South America, North America (plus Japan and Australasia) and Europe, and another three from international NGOs.

President of the Global Alliance is Jonas Mva Mva from Cameroon, Vice-Presidents are Max Cardenas Dias from Peru and Marie-Cecile Thirion from France. Council members include Geoffrey Cannon from the National Food Alliance who, with Jeanette Longfield, has special responsibility for networking among NGOs of the world.

#### Action in the UK

In Rome, the UK government was praised by NGOs for two reasons; first, for its inclusion of NGO representatives from the Consumers' Association, the National Food Alliance and the UK Food Group, as members of the official delegation. Second, for its support of some NGO initiatives, notably concerned with the ill-effects of an industrialised diet.

Back in Britain, the Department of Health has now set up an official Nutrition Task Force, with the job of achieving goals set out in the Government White Paper, *The Health of the Nation*. The first Task Force meeting was held on December 16.

At this meeting four working groups were proposed, focusing on education and the media; catering; food production, manufacture and retailing; and the NHS and health professionals.

All the signs so far, are that Government will now include public interest organisations as partners in determining national food policy. The NFA and therefore its member organisations are represented on the Task Force and individual Alliance members are being considered as members of working groups.

■ The address of the Alliance is  
3rd Floor, 5-11 Worship Lane  
London EC2A 2BH  
Telephone: 071-628 7261

Organisations wishing to apply for membership of the Alliance should please write to the NFA secretary, 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  
Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union  
British Organic Farmers and the Organic Growers' Association  
Caroline Walker Trust  
Children's Society  
Christian Aid  
Common Ground  
Coronary Prevention Group  
Council for the Protection of Rural England  
Elm Farm Research  
Food Additives Campaign Team  
Food Commission  
Friends of the Earth  
GMB  
Green Alliance  
Henry Doubleday Research Assoc.  
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  
Parents for Safe Food  
Pesticides Trust  
Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union (TGWU)  
SAFE Alliance  
Soil Association  
Vegetarian Society  
Women's Farming Union  
World Cancer Research Fund

#### Observers of the NFA include:

Brighton University  
British Dietetic Association  
Campaign for real ale  
Consumers' Association  
Consumers in the European Community Group  
Guild of Food Writers  
Health Education Authority  
Institute of Trading Standards Administration  
National Consumer Council  
Royal Society of Medicine Food and Health Forum  
Scottish Consumer Council

#### Officers:

Professor Philip James (President)  
Geoffrey Cannon (Chairman)  
Jack Winkler (Treasurer)  
Jeanette Longfield (Co-ordinator)



# Freedom of information

**This month the House of Commons will debate whether the UK should have a Freedom of Information Act. Sue Dibb looks at how official secrecy affects decision-making on food.**

February 19 is the date set for the second reading of MP Mark Fisher's Right to Know Bill. This would give the public the enforceable right to any information held by government or other public authorities unless it is explicitly exempt from disclosure.

Following criticism of secrecy surrounding government decision-making on food in recent years, the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, has made some welcome attempts at openness. However there are still a number of areas where access to information is unnecessarily denied, and where the UK lags behind other countries such as the US.

For example, one area that Freedom of Information legislation would open up to closer scrutiny is the government advisory committee structure. The main committee on food matters is MAFF's Food Advisory Committee. After pressure from consumers the Committee now publishes a Summary Record of its meetings, although these are a model of Whitehall non-information. Requests for observers from MAFF's Consumer Panel to attend committee meetings have so far been denied and meetings are considered confidential. Members of

the FAC are not permitted to pass on information from the meetings to anyone outside. Thus policy decisions of the FAC are never made public unless and until the Minister sees fit. We do not know what reports and recommendations made by the FAC in the public interest, are kept secret by the Minister for political or even commercial reasons.

To give just one example, in 1990 the FAC recommended that a colouring additive, canthaxanthin, used in salmon and chicken feed should be banned on safety grounds. However the Ministry decided that it would not implement the FAC's advice. Only because a copy of the report was leaked were consumer bodies and the public aware that it had even been discussed.

In the case of pesticides MAFF has recently made more safety data available to the public after years of campaigning by consumer and environmental organisations. Yet the UK system still lags far behind the US. MAFF argues that there should be no access to 'unevaluated studies' so information on a product whose safety is being reviewed remains confidential until the review is over. But some reviews can last for up to 18 months and as many as 10 per cent of approved pesticides have been under review at the same time. Policy in Washington is very different. New information on pesticides under review is placed in a public reading room within 10 days of receipt.

Similarly no safety data on additives is made public until the approval procedure is complete, and this only applies to data submitted after 1986 which

is a tiny proportion of the data held by MAFF on permitted additives. This means it is impossible for independent bodies to make any input into the regulatory procedure. Again in the US things are different. For example, the Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) in Washington was able to have access to and consider the toxicity data presented to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the fat substitute Olestra in 1987. The CSPI's independent analysis of the toxicity tests found serious flaws and it successfully ensured that the FDA asked for more safety tests on Olestra before further consideration of its approval. Here in the UK Olestra was also submitted for approval, but UK public health organisations had to go the USA to get access to any data.

These are just a few examples where current UK policies restrict public interest to the decision-making procedure on our food. The Right to Know Bill is backed by the Campaign for Freedom of Information and supported by a wide range of organisations including the Food Commission, the Consumers' Association and the Pesticides Trust.

The Bill would allow people to find out about the real effects of government policies, making it impossible for ministers to suppress the truth merely because the facts are embarrassing. It would improve the quality of decisions, by subjecting proposals to greater scrutiny, allowing the input of a wider range of expertise; it would also ensure that unreliable information, including that submitted by vested interests keen to influence government decisions in their favour, could be seen and challenged.

■ If you would like to support the Bill, write to your MP asking him or her to support the Right to Know Bill on 19 February 1993.

■ For more information contact The Campaign for Freedom of Information, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9AR. Tel: 071-253 2445.

# Experts target healthier school meals

Healthier school meals could be on the menu if nutritional guidelines are formally adopted by government as part of its Health of the Nation strategy, says the School Meals Campaign. The announcement follows the publication of guidelines by an expert working group convened by the Caroline Walker Trust.

'A healthy diet is one of the best ways of maintaining and protecting children's health, both now and in later life', said Maggie Sanderson, Chair of the Expert Working Group.

The report highlights research which shows that children's diets are high in fat and sugar, low in fibre and several vitamins and minerals essential for health, growth and development. Ninety per cent of girls are not getting enough iron and 80 per cent of boys are not getting enough calcium. And for some children, the

school meal is the only meal of the day.

The guidelines aim to provide recommended amounts of nutrients for school meals and are based on the Government's most recent dietary recommendations, set out in 1991. The expert working group that drew up the guidelines included observers from the three government departments, Health, Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Since nutritional standards for school meals were abolished in 1980 there have been many calls for guidelines to be reintroduced. However 1992 was the year the School Meals Campaign, supported by over 50 national organisations put the issue firmly back on the political agenda. Now the vast majority of local authorities, despite the financial cutbacks many are facing, say that government support for national

guidelines would help their efforts to improve the nutritional quality of school meals.

The task now facing the School Meals Campaign is how to ensure the guidelines are implemented. All agree that in order to be successful, school meals need to be a positive and enjoyable experiences. The guidelines have been welcomed by government departments but so far without any commitment to turn them into practical advice for school meals caterers.

In 1993 The School Meals Campaign will be seeking to persuade government departments that their support for school meals guidelines would be a positive and practical step towards achieving the goals of the government's *Health of the Nation* report.

■ *Nutrition Guidelines for School Meals, report of an Expert Working Group* is published by the Caroline Walker Trust and available from School Meals, PO Box 7, London W3 6XJ price £8.50 (inc p&p). Cheques and postal orders to be made payable to BSS.



# Diversity in your dinner

**As agribusiness wipes out the variations among farmers crops, Robin Jenkins argues that biodiversity is not just about rainforests but about our daily diet.**

While the ingredients of a cheese and tomato sandwich appear nutritionally diverse they are in fact produced by the elimination of biological diversity in the field. Wheat is grown as a monoculture; so is the soya, maize, sunflower and rape that went into the margarine; so are the tomatoes. The cheese will have come from a genetically uniform herd of cows, which may spend some of their time grazing biologically diverse pastures, but depend increasingly on concentrated feeds and grains grown as monocultures.

So while there might be more variety in the supermarkets today, the very way they draw up their specifications ensures that the biodiversity of our agricultural landscape is reduced.

To most people biodiversity is about rainforests. The only well-known connection with food is the catastrophe of the 'jungleburger' — beefburgers pro-

duced from cattle ranches on the burned-out rainforests of the Amazon. But the Earth Summit in Rio last year was about much more than rainforests. A 'Biodiversity Convention' was signed by every participating nation except the USA, and 'Agenda 21' was also agreed as the basis for detailed action.

The Convention defined biodiversity as 'the variability among living organisms ... including diversity within species, between species and ecosystems'. Ecologists measure biodiversity by staking out areas of a square metre, 100 square metres, a square kilometre, or more, counting the number of species found plus the number of examples of each species, and then using both figures to calculate an index of biodiversity.

A simpler device, which gives a quicker but cruder picture is to take the top ten plant species within an area and measure what percentage of the total number of plants are accounted for in each case. The dominant plant species on an ungrazed prairie is unlikely to account for more than 25% of the total number, and in a rainforest the figure will be much lower still. By comparison, most agribusiness enterprises would be horrified if weeds accounted for more than 5% of the plants in a field. In fact farmers spend a great deal of time, effort and money minimising biodiversity by using herbicides and, in the near future, specially genetically engineered herbicide-resistant crops.

No single food can meet all our nutritional needs. An agricultural landscape worked by peasants is a reflection of their diet. If they are self-sufficient in food, their fields will contain all the species they eat — and in more or less the same proportions. The land mirrors the plate from which the food is eaten.

Our own agricultural landscape bears no relation to our diet, which nowadays depends on food from the farthest corners of the planet. Throughout this century there has been an increasing division of labour in our agriculture. Farmers have been encouraged to specialise in milk, beef, wheat or potatoes, and the list of varieties they use has become much shorter. Although the situation has improved slightly since the 1960's, our main field crops are still dominated by no more than three varieties.

Agricultural monocultures are not just aesthetically boring and lacking in wildlife. They are also an

inefficient, environmentally polluting, soil degrading, high risk means of producing food.

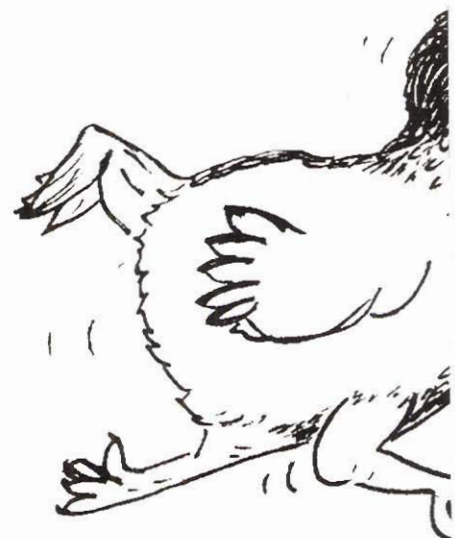
The very lack of biodiversity on our farms leads to increased problems with pests, and the constant need to develop new poisons and breed new resistant species at an ever-increasing rate. Genetically homogeneous monocultures — and they are getting more homogeneous all the time, some even being cloned — provide the perfect meal for traditional pests. Monocultures inevitably maximise the vectors for the spread of diseases and pests.

By comparison, a biologically diverse field growing several crops — either mixed or in blocks or lines — is quite difficult for pests and diseases to spread through. A further benefit is the ability of one crop to complement another. For instance, maize provides stalks for beans to grow up whilst beans provide fixed nitrogen for the maize.

There are several alternatives to monocultures and an increasing amount of research is underway on forms of integrated crop management which deliberately increase biodiversity in the field. However, the food industry and the supermarkets find it easier to insist on tight specifications which force farmers to grow only a few varieties across whole landscapes. This is done in the name of quality control and consumer demand — but consumers are not made aware of the dire implications.

The SAFE Alliance (Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Environment) held a one day conference and published a report on these issues in December. The Alliance is now launching a project Biodiversity in our Food and Agriculture (BIFA) to put the subject on the environment and consumer agendas.

■ Copies of the report *Bringing Rio Home - Biodiversity in our Food and Farming*, £3.50 inc p&p from BIFA, 5-11 Worship St, London EC2A 2BH (tel 071-628 4975, fax 071-628 0817). If you are interested in the work of the BIFA Project and want to know more about it, please get in touch.



## HOPPING MAD?

Hops are a minor crop but they are a necessary ingredient for the brewing industry. All the needs of the UK brewers can be provided by 2,500 hectares — just five square kilometres. In effect there is no profit in breeding new hop varieties nor in developing chemicals for protecting hops.

The lack of both breeding and crop protection places hops in a dangerously exposed position. Unless chemicals produced for the protection of other, more economically important crops, also happens to be effective on hops, a disaster is waiting to happen. This problem worries few people beyond a small band of hop farmers, because the brewers know that if there is a failure in the UK hop harvest they have the economic clout to buy hops elsewhere.



## CHILLI BEANS AND MAIZE TACO

This is a well known nutritionally balanced meal made entirely from vegetable sources which can be bought, ready to heat, in many European supermarkets. It is also a typical mainstay of Mexican peasants. Although the organoleptic experience of eating the peasant and the supermarket versions of this meal might be very similar, everything about the way the two meals are produced is different.

The Mexican peasant grows the maize and the beans together and the tomatoes and chillies to one side. Several varieties of each species are used — each with differing resistance to climatic variation so that whatever the conditions, some of the crop will provide a good yield. The ingredients are grown together in a biologically diverse pattern that maximises the different nutrient needs of the four species and minimises the vectors for the spread of pests and disease. The plot actually mirrors the plate on which the meal is eventually served.

Industrial agribusiness grows maize, beans, tomatoes and chillies as single variety monocultures, provides nutrients by applying fertiliser, and controls pests and disease by spraying. The food manufacturer buys in the four genetically uniform ingredients on the world market so it is quite possible that each of the ingredients will come from a different continent.

Although the supermarket version of the meal is geographically far more diverse than the peasant version, it contains less biodiversity because the crops from which it is made lack internal variety.

## EXTINCTION OF BIODIVERSITY

### TRADITIONAL VEGETABLE VARIETIES LOST IN THE USA 1903-1983

Vegetable	No. varieties in 1903	No. of these in 1983 collection	% loss	Vegetable	No. varieties in 1903	No. of these in 1983 collection	% loss
artichoke	34	2	94.1%	martynia	4	0	100%
asparagus	46	1	97.8%	muskmelon	338	27	92%
aubergine	97	9	90.7%	mustard	44	5	88.6%
beetroot	288	17	84.1%	NZ spinach	1	1	
broccoli	34	0	100%	okra	38	4	89.5%
brussels sprouts	35	4	88.6%	onion	357	21	84.1%
burnet	1	0	100%	orach	5	1	80%
cabbage	544	28	94.9%	parsley	82	12	85.45
cardoon	6	1	83.3%	pea	408	25	93.9%
carrot	287	21	92.7%	peanut	31	2	93.5%
cauliflower	158	9	94.3%	pepper	126	13	89.7%
celeriac	25	3	88%	popcorn	48	0	100%
celery	164	3	98.2%	radish	463	27	94.2%
chervil	8	0	100%	rampion	1	0	100%
chicory	17	3	82.4%	rhubarb	35	1	97.1%
chives	1	1		rocket	1	0	100%
chufas	2	0	100%	runner bean	14	1	92.9%
collards	28	5	82.1%	rutabaga	168	5	97%
corn salad	21	1	95.2%	salsify	29	2	93.1%
cress	39	2	94.9%	scolymus	1	0	100%
cucumber	285	16	94.4%	skirret	1	0	100%
dandelion	25	0	100%	sorrel	10	0	100%
endive	64	4	93.7%	spinach	109	7	93.6%
garden bean	578	32	94.5%	squash	341	40	88.3%
gherkin	10	2	80%	sunflower	14	1	92.9%
horseradish	1	0	100%	sweetcorn	307	12	96.1%
husk tomato	17	2	88.2%	swiss chard	23	1	95.7%
kale	124	9	92.7%	tomato	408	79	80.6%
kohlrabi	55	3	94.5%	turnip	237	24	89.9%
leek	39	5	87.2%	watercress	2	2	
lettuce	497	36	92.8%	watermelon	223	20	91%
lima bean	96	8	91.7%				
mangel beet	178	3	98.3%				
maize	434	40	90.8%				

■ Source: Fowler, C & Mooney, R. *The Threatened Gene, Food Politics and the Loss of Genetic Diversity*. Lutterworth Press, 1990 pp65-67.

## POTATOES, CRISPS AND CHEMICALS

Some varieties of potato are excellent for making crisps whilst others are no use at all.

Crisp manufacturers specify the varieties that work best with their machinery, and farmers are contracted to grow a single potato variety over a large area. Most varieties of potato lose resistance to blight over time, but this happens more rapidly with cloned monocultures because their lack of genetic variability presents the optimum conditions for blight to overcome the resistance of the potato.

Once an adapted blight attacks the crop, the farmer has two possible strategies — he can spray poisons to control the blight, or resort to the seed merchant to

breed renewed resistance into the variety. The problem with the latter strategy is that the transfer of blight resistance to a new variety may be accompanied by the transfer of other characteristics, some of which may make the new variety unusable for crisps. As a result, the crisp industry pushes the potato farmer in the direction of chemical crop protection, rather than the use of resistant varieties. In theory, there are two solutions to this problem. The first one is biotechnology, which is more accurate than plant breeding and should be able to insert genes for blight resistance into a new variety without also inserting genes that alter the physical characteristics of the potato. The second is to alter the crisp-making machinery so that it can use a wider variety of potatoes.





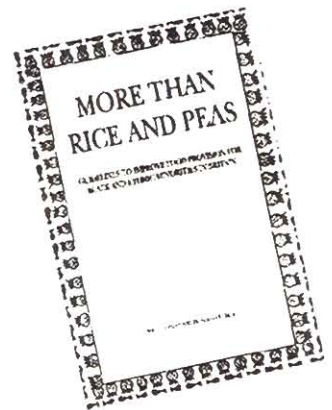
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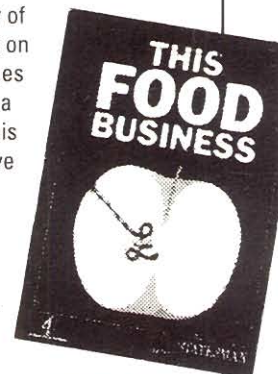


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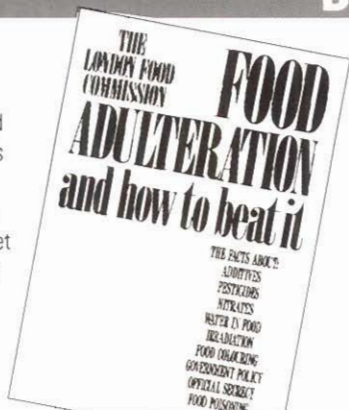


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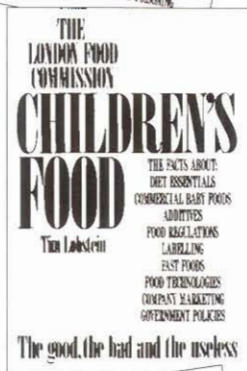


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The book offers ways of judging what is good or bad on the shelves of our shops and gives sound advice on how to ensure our children eat healthily.

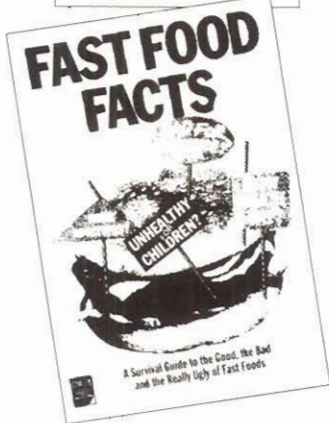
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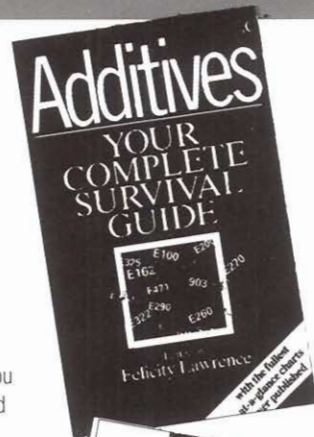


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What can you do about additives? Which are dangerous and which are safe?

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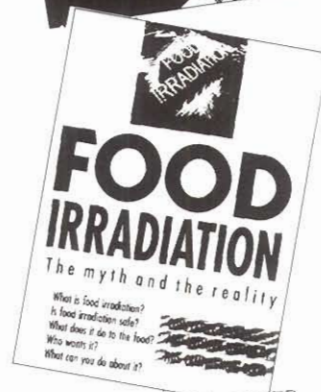
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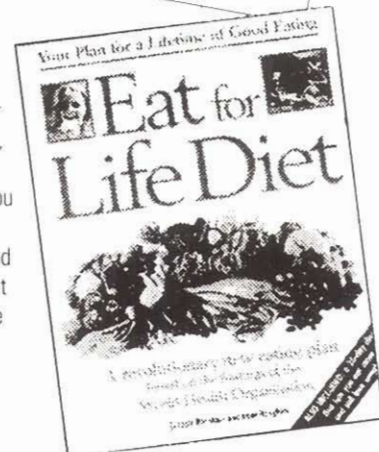
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## Two words

Proudly announcing their *Food Research Strategy and Requirements Document 1993-95*, MAFF declared that their research objective is 'to ensure that UK-produced food is of the highest quality, achieved through the application of scientific and technical advances in safety, nutrition and production efficiency'.

Those last two words say it all. The report lists three out of four key programme managers brought in by MAFF as:

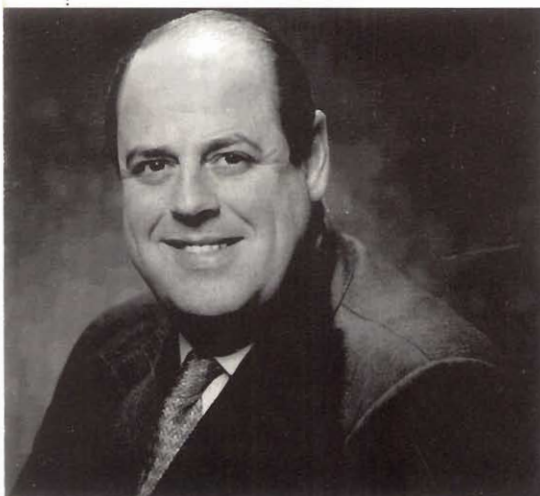
- Professor M Conning, British Nutrition Foundation (an industry-financed body)
- Dr D Richardson, Nestlé Company Plc
- Dr M Easter, Grand Metropolitan Foods (Europe) Ltd

MAFF currently spends over £17m of public money on what it calls 'external research and development'.

## Bottle pushers

Cow & Gate are seeking a 'professional, highly motivated commercial team. A team capable of capitalising on changes in the NHS and delivering a dedicated service covering both Infant Milk and Clinical Nutrition products. ... Handling your own territory, your role will be to identify and exploit all business opportunities in hospitals and the community.'

For 'changes in the NHS' read 'opted-out Trusts strapped for cash and looking for commercial help'.



**This is our Minister for Food, Nicholas Soames, who knows a balanced diet when he sees one. In an attack on regulations ensuring good food hygiene, Soames' boss Mr Gummer quipped to the press 'I wouldn't like to be the Environmental Health Officer who tried to get between Mr Soames and his lunch!'**

## Nice work 1

Last year we reported on a new job for MAFF's former Chief Scientist, Dr Mike Knowles, who went to work for Coca Cola Europe. Now 1993 offers new pastures to Dr John Steadman formerly Head of Health Aspects of Food and Environment in the Department of Health and a UK representative on the EC's Scientific Committee for Food and the World Health Organisation's Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA).

His new paymasters?... Unilever — one of the world's largest food companies — better known for Walls sausages, Flora margarine, Bird's Eye fish fingers and PG Tips. Steadman will be Unilever's Head of Safety and Environmental Assurance.

## Nice work 2

And campaigner Des Wilson is also on the move. A veteran of many skirmishes with industry and government over such issues as homelessness, lead in petrol, the environment, freedom of information and under-age smoking, he is now offering his talents to one of the country's leading public relations consultants, Burston Marsteller. His new boss, Martin Langford, Chief Executive of their London office says that Des's campaigning and coalition building skills will be valuable to a wide range of clients. Burston Marsteller's food industry clients include Sainsbury's, Quaker, Danone and Unilever's subsidiary, Van den Berghs, makers of Flora.

But Des has not always felt so close to industry interests. In 1984 he wrote in *Pressure: The A to Z of Campaigning in Britain*: 'My objection to them (vested interests), apart from the fact that they are so often acting against the public interest, is that they seek to achieve their objectives in non-democratic ways in what have become known as the "corridors of power" without proper public debate, and that their resources are not the resources of community support but rather of sheer money and on occasions corruptive power.'

## Swim little fishy swim

For increasing numbers of fish the end comes with a bang not with a whimper. Fishermen who find traditional means of fishing too laborious are resorting to dynamite.

According to the Earth Resources Institute in Thailand, illegal dynamite fishing in Cambodia has led to drastic reductions in fish catches downstream, particularly in Laos, and is threatening the whole ecosystem of the Mekong Basin.

Dynamite fishing is also illegal in the Philippines but sources report its widespread use is destroying the coral reefs which protect coastal environments.



This self-styled 'health education resource' has 'been designed to show that tasty low-fat food does not have to be expensive'. It goes on: 'a diet rich in carbohydrates is better for our health. Both starches and sugars are sources of carbohydrate ... Sugar is a pure carbohydrate and in moderate amounts it helps to top up the overall carbohydrate level, and makes food tasty.'

Yes. It's from the industry-run Sugar Bureau.

## No flies on us

**That glossy wax on your oranges and lemons is not, we are assured by the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Information Bureau, a generous helping of mineral hydrocarbons — a group of oils and waxes which MAFF promised to ban four years ago.**

**In a letter to the Food Commission, the Bureau chairman tells us that waxes currently used on citrus fruit may include beeswax, shellac (made from an Indian beetle), spermacetti and sperm oil (both derived from whales). I'll have my gin and tonic without, in future.**

## Only human

Herman has permission from the Dutch parliament to be a father — but only his daughters will be allowed to survive. Any sons or grandchildren must be slaughtered.

Herman is a bull. Most of him, that is, but a bit is human — he is the world's first transgenic bull and boasts a modified human gene for lactoferrin. His owners, Gene Pharming of Leiden, hoped he would be a cow and the lactoferrin he produced improve protection against mastitis. Now they must wait another generation to find out how their experiment worked.

The affair has caused quite a stir, with the Dutch equivalent of our RSPCA strongly opposed to the whole process, arguing that 'animals are not small chemical factories but individuals with a sense of their own dignity'.