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Special joint issue

of the Journals of the Soil Association
and the Food Commission



LA BIOTECA

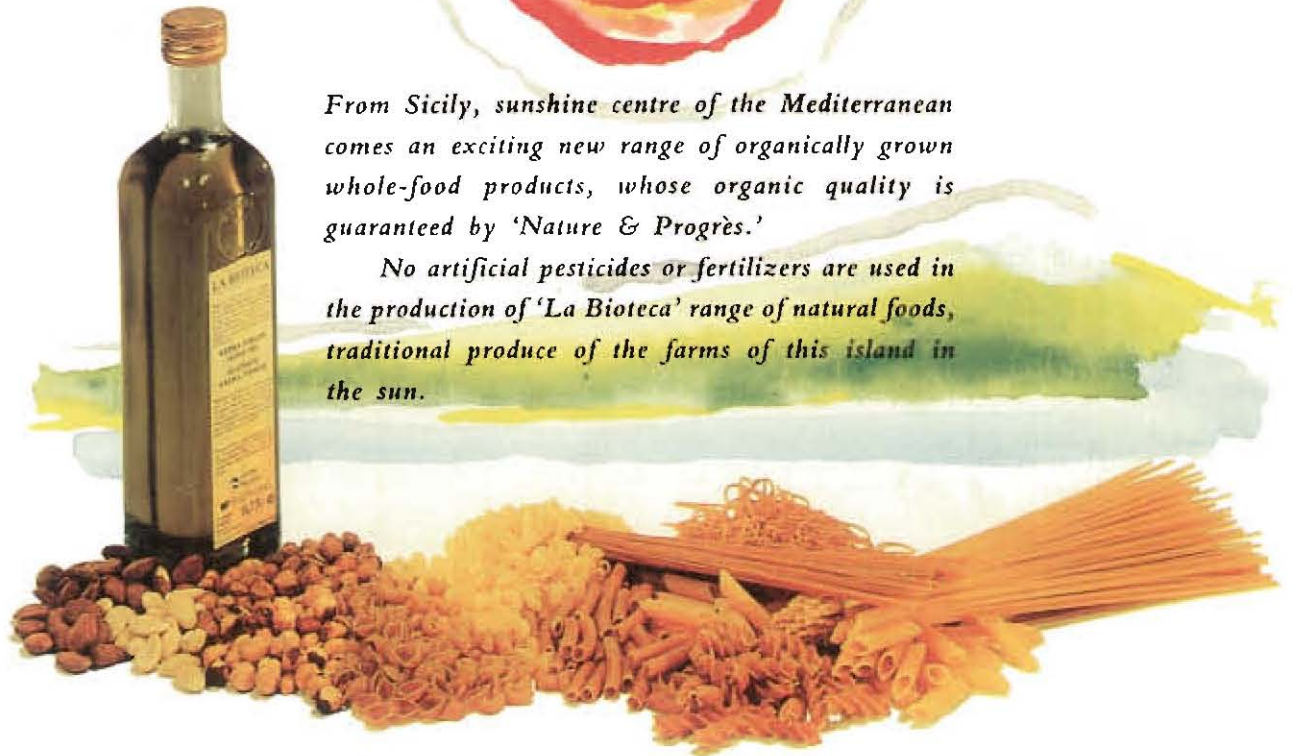
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The Soil Association exists 'to research, develop and promote sustainable relationships between the soil, plants, animals, people and the biosphere, in order to produce healthy food and other products while protecting and enhancing the environment'.

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THE FOOD COMMISSION

The Food Commission is Britain's leading consumer watchdog on food. We are independent of 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 Commission Research Charity aims to relieve ill health and advance public education through research, education and the promotion of better quality food.

Co-directors: Sue Dibb, Tim Lobstein
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editorial

Welcome to an experimental joint issue of the two magazines of the Soil Association and the Food Commission. For the *Food Magazine* it's a special bumper 21st birthday issue marking the completion of five years of publication. For *Living Earth* it is just one issue short of the 50th year.

A cause to celebrate. Two organisations both recognising one truth: that common causes are best promoted by combining forces.

However, the success or failure of this joint venture depends on you. Stapled into the centre of this issue is a short questionnaire for you to mail back to us. Tell us, please, if we should repeat the formula, change it, or abandon it.

Regular readers of the *Food Magazine* will notice one particular difference: the presence of advertisements. These are a normal feature of *Living Earth* but as a matter of principle adverts have never been published in the *Food Magazine*. On this occasion the Food Commission will receive no income from the adverts. Let us know what you think about them.

Regular readers of *Living Earth* will notice more articles on food products, nutrition, additives, food irradiation and matters beyond the normal realm of organic issues. Do you like this broader approach?

The common interests of the two organisations have created the magazine you are now reading – but it is much more than just the mechanical mixture of two publications. The combination has created scope for more investigative reporting of the sort the *Food Magazine* has a reputation for, and it has created more opportunity to put the positive alternatives to mass produced food that *Living Earth* has reflected so well over the years. But have we got the mixture right?

No need for a stamp. Just pop your thoughts in the post!

Living Earth (formerly **Mother Earth**, the **Journal of the Soil Association**, and the **Soil Association Quarterly Review**) is published every six months by the Soil Association Ltd, 86-88 Colston Street, Bristol, Avon BS1 5BB, tel: 0272-290661, fax: 0272-252504. This edition April 1993, the 49th year of publication, issue no. 179.

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■ Cover picture: 'Produce' from Highgrove - Portrait of an Estate. © A. G. Carrick Ltd, 1993. Photo: Andrew Lawson

Retailers fail to check for irradiated food

Retailers, the last line of defence against illegally-irradiated food, are carrying out no checks on the products they sell, even though they may be liable for any mislabelled food.

Irradiated food can now enter the UK more freely than ever yet the illegal irradiation of food continues, (as seen by the irradiated Belgian egg products illegally exported to Germany – see *Food Magazine* no 20). Meanwhile MAFF is not carrying out tests on food and has not issued the necessary guidelines to local authority food inspectors.

Without government or local authority monitoring, the food industry is first in line to ensure that illegally irradiated food products stay off shop shelves. The Food Irradiation Campaign has asked leading retailers what procedures they follow to check their products, now the barriers to European food are relaxed.

Whilst almost all retailers that replied said they had no plans to sell irradiated food, none indicated that they would be using any tests such as those used by the German Federal Health Office. Instead they said they rely on their suppliers to provide products to their specifications.

There is no EC Directive on testing food for irradiation and the onus is on Member States to come forward with sampling plans. The Food Irradiation Campaign will now be pressing MAFF to recommend testing procedures for retailers and what they themselves are doing to ensure consumers are protected from illegal practices.

■ More details from Food Irradiation Campaign, 3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH. Tel: 071-628 7774

Supermarkets admit they rely on suppliers' word

ASDA

No plans to use irradiated food

Monitoring of suppliers: By due diligence, would take advice from the Government and the British retail consortium if alerted to irradiated food being within the chain.

Co-op

No plans to use irradiated food

Monitoring of suppliers: Product specifications stipulate policy. Approval and checking of production facilities occurs regularly throughout the world.

Gateway

Do not believe there is demand for irradiated food

Monitoring of suppliers: Spoken to all suppliers to make them aware of their feelings. Trade with reputable suppliers. Given the quantities of foods sold, the control of the irradiation of food has to work on the basis

of trust. Testing to show food has been irradiated is far from precise, so direct discussions are seen as the best way forward.

Marks & Spencer

No plans to use irradiated food

Monitoring of suppliers: Policy is to sell fresh foods of good eating quality. Products are made in hygienic factories to detailed specifications. These practices are linked to a well established cold chain.

J Sainsbury

At present do not intend to use or handle irradiated food

All suppliers' premises are visited and approved as technically competent. All suppliers receive the Codes of Practice, product specification standards and are visited at least annually. Suppliers maintain appropriate records of their technical controls for inspection, and each is aware that

they are responsible for ensuring they receive their raw materials from appropriate sources.

Safeway

Do not sell irradiated food in response to a perceived lack of consumer demand

The single market does not alter standards of supplier selection and inspection, product specification, level of quality, or ability to demonstrate due diligence. Therefore they fail to see how trade in illegally irradiated products may arise.

Tesco

No plans to use irradiated food

Monitoring of suppliers: Deal with reputable suppliers, all of whom conform to their Codes of Practice for good manufacturing standards.

Waitrose

No plans to use irradiated food

Monitoring of suppliers: Did not say.

No policies on irradiated food for school meals

Unlike the food served in prison, where the Home Office has guaranteed that irradiated products will be banned, school meals are not exempt from the inclusion of irradiated food. The Food Irradiation Campaign (FIC) has just completed a survey for Cleveland's Trading Standards Department of Local Education Authorities (LEAs), to see which ones have policies on the use of irradiated food. FIC found that over half had policies seeking to prevent irradiated food from being used. However a third did not and did not intend to.

If your LEA has not adopted a policy regarding irradiated food for schools you should contact your local councillor and ask them to raise the

matter in the Education Committee and with the Director of Education and the Director of School Catering Services.

■ Copies of the survey results with LEA contact details can be obtained from FIC, Third floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH, price: £10 (£1 to campaign supporters).

LEAs intending to develop a policy:

Havering ■ Kingston upon Thames ■ Berkshire ■ Cheshire ■ Cleveland ■ Devon ■ Dorset ■ Kent ■ Lancashire ■ Northamptonshire ■ Oxfordshire ■ Northumberland ■ Nottinghamshire ■ Somerset ■ Stockport ■ Sunderland ■ Highland ■ Strathclyde ■ Tayside ■ Orkney ■ Shetland

LEAs not intending to develop a policy:

Barnet ■ Bexley ■ Bromley ■ Camden ■ City of London ■ Croydon ■ Ealing ■ Harrow ■ Islington ■ Kensington & Chelsea ■ Newham ■ Redbridge ■ Wandsworth ■ Westminster ■ Bedfordshire ■ Buckinghamshire ■ Cambridgeshire ■ Cornwall ■ Derbyshire ■ Essex ■ Gloucestershire ■ Hereford & Worcester ■ Lincolnshire ■ West Sussex ■ Shropshire ■ Staffordshire ■ Trafford ■ Wakefield ■ Wigan ■ Wirral ■ Wolverhampton ■ Borders ■ Central ■ Grampian ■ Western Isles

Brussels approves genetic engineering for organic food

European Commission regulations defining organic food standards will permit genetically engineered food to be sold with organic certification.

EC standards for organic fruit, vegetables and grains have been circulating in draft form for many months. But when the Regulation was finally published with all its technical appendices, it turned out that the Commission had inserted some small print specifically allowing genetically engineered food to be labelled and sold as organic.

Genetic engineering is a technique for combining genes from species that do not normally mix to create new plants and animals. Fish genes inserted into tomatoes have produced a tomato able to resist frost damage and be more easily transported. Rat genes inserted into oil-producing plants reduce the saturated fat content of the oil.

Few organic organisations have a formal position on genetic engineering and there is no inherent reason why a genetically engineered plant should not be grown organically.

The European Parliament, which

voted unanimously on March 12 to reprimand the Commission, claims that the Commission has fundamentally altered the wording of the Regulation passed earlier by the Parliament. The Commission has included high-tech genetically engineered foods 'without consultation or justification'.

According to the Vice-President of the European Parliamentary Agriculture Committee: 'The purpose of the organic food law was to increase confidence in the bio-label but the new Commission Regulation does just the opposite.'

Unless the Commission is forced to back down, consumers may find that although genetically engineered food does not require labelling it can still be labelled as organic.

Concerned readers are encouraged to write to their MEP demanding the labelling of genetically engineered food and the removal of genetically engineered food from the organic food Regulation.

■ More details from Robin Jenkins, Committee on Biotechnology and Food, Third floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH, 071-628 4975.

Sex, fish and biotech

Changing the sex of a trout may not be most people's everyday fantasy, but for the Department of the Environment (DoE) it is proving a nightmare while for fish farmers it is a dream come true.

In January the DoE reported alarming signs that fish downstream of sewage outfalls were changing sex. The cause appeared to be dilute traces of oestrogen from human contraceptives, but the concern was that the fish were being affected at distances where the levels of oestrogen were almost below those that analysts could detect. Nonetheless the hormones were causing males to show female characteristics and lose their fertility, threatening a rapid decline in the population.

Meanwhile research laboratories are reporting a similar trick which

can be played on the females. A small amount of male hormone washed around young trout can induce females to produce sperm. They remain genetically female, with two X chromosomes.

The exciting thing from the scientists' viewpoint is that the 'female' sperm can be used to breed all-female trout. The sperm are chromosomally female and all offspring from breeding with normal females will be female too. Female fish are good news for trout farmers since they grow to a large size before maturity and are more docile in intensive fish farms.

■ For more fishy facts on biotechnology in food, contact Dave King, Genetics Forum, Third floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH, 071-638 0606.

MEPs vote No to the oncomouse

The European Parliament voted overwhelmingly against the patenting of a genetically-engineered animal, a species of mouse developed by the multinational drug company Du Pont to be particularly susceptible to cancer.

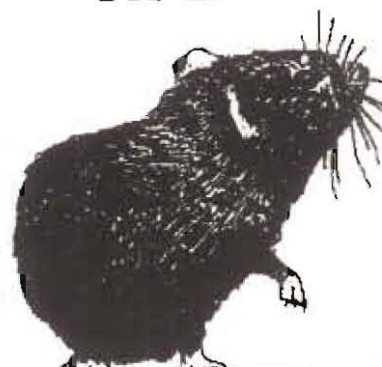
In an Urgent Resolution passed by 178 to 19 against on 11 February, MEPs claimed the oncomouse patent is unethical because 'transgenic animals engineered to suffer shall be deemed incompatible with public order and consequently be unpatentable'. Another patent being considered by the European Patent Office is no. 0424044, 'a transgenic fowl expressing bovine growth hormone' produced by inserting bovine genes in fertile eggs, along with viral genes that can switch the hormone genes on or off according to whether the animal is given certain metals such as zinc in their diet.

The vote gives strong support to various European campaigns being co-ordinated in Switzerland against the patenting (and hence private ownership) of life forms.

"The Earth does not belong to human beings; human beings belong to the Earth".

Chief Seattle's Message, 1854.

NO PATENTS ON LIFE!



Working Group on Genetic Engineering Policy of the GREENS IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

■ Details from Florianne Koechlin, No Patents on Life European Coordination, Blauenstrasse 15, CH-4142 Munchenstein, tel: 010-31-61 411 2634, fax: 010-31-61 411 2688.

Gummer backs BST

The milk-boosting hormone Bovine Somatotropin (BST) has been approved by the Medicines Commission, the final approval-giving body under the Medicines Act 1968. In January, John Gummer announced that BST now met the criteria for licensing, and if the EC moratorium lapses at the end of this year, BST could be marketed in the UK.

The European Commission is due to prepare its report on safety and the socio-economic impact of BST in June, so that the Council of Ministers can decide whether to end the moratorium. The Commission's last report showed that consumers would buy less milk and that farmers did not want BST. It also noted that BST would encourage over-production of milk and lead to a reduction in the number of dairy farms, which is con-

trary to CAP reform policy. These wider issues (sometimes referred to as the Fourth Hurdle) may yet determine whether BST is accepted.

The campaign BST Concern, which includes major animal welfare, consumer and farming organisations has recently written to Mr. Gummer, arguing that the scientific evidence shows that BST is not safe for cows and demanding that the Medicines Commission give its reasons for the decision. It is also discussing BST with the major supermarkets. The Co-op and one other supermarket are indicating that they oppose BST, while the response from others has so far been less encouraging.

■ For more information, contact The Genetics Forum, which co-ordinates BST Concern at Third floor, 5-11, Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH, 071-638 0606.

MAFF tests miss pesticide contamination

Government documents obtained by the Food Commission reveal a disturbing lack of consistency between different laboratories testing food for pesticide residues. Tim Lobstein reports.

National figures on the levels of pesticide residues found in food may need to be revised upwards following some surprise results obtained during routine testing. Two documents¹ reporting the routine monitoring of laboratory testing procedures show remarkable variations among the participating laboratories.

In the first report, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) prepared samples of pesticide-free wheat spiked with three organophosphorus pesticides of the sort likely to be used on grain crops — chlorpyrifos-methyl, methacrifos

and malathion — at levels between four and 10 mg/kg and had the wheat milled, baked into bread, freeze dried and ground. The samples were sent to 66 laboratories across the world requesting the organophosphorus (OP) pesticide residues be analysed.

58 results were returned by 53 participants before the closing date, with the agreement that only levels above 50 µg/kg (0.05 mg/kg) need be reported. The results showed a wide variation between laboratories: 44 laboratories correctly identified the three OP-pesticides, 10 identified two of the OP-pesticides, two identified only one of them, while seven identified OP-pesticides other than those added.

In the second report, MAFF prepared samples of beef fat deliberately spiked with four organochlorine (OC) pesticides — beta-HCH, pp'DDE, dieldrin and pp'TDE — and sent them to 75 laboratories asking for residues to be reported above 10 µg/kg.

Fifty-eight laboratories submitted results: only 18 correctly identified all

four OC-pesticides. Thirty-eight failed to identify the beta-HCH, seven failed to identify dieldrin, two failed to identify pp'TDE and one failed to identify pp'DDE. Ten laboratories identified other OC-pesticides.

Some of the differences in the bread test results can be explained by simple procedural differences where by some laboratories added water to the test sample and others did not. According to the head of MAFF's Food Analysis Performance Assessment Scheme, Alan Patey, procedures using only non-aqueous solvents were not likely to be sufficient with freeze-dried bread, and that mixing the sample with water, and using an aqueous-miscible (water-based) solvent could add 50-100 per cent to the pesticide residue levels found.

The need to use aqueous-miscible solvents to improve the extraction of OP-pesticides from grain has been known for years², but many laboratories appeared unaware of this. 'We are recommending in our next round of tests that all laboratories use aqueous-miscible solvents,' said Mr Patey.

Other variations between laboratories remain unexplained. Using procedures designed to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of results, the proportion of laboratories falling outside acceptable limits ranged from 24 per cent to 80 per cent for the different pesticides tested.

In the case of the spiked wheat, the levels of pesticide deliberately added were chosen 'so that the resulting breads would have levels of pesticides near to the appropriate Codex Maximum Residue Levels'. These levels are considered the highest acceptable under good agricultural practice. The Codex MRL for chlorpyrifos-methyl is 2 mg/kg, yet only two laboratories reported a level above 1 mg/kg.

The high number of unsatisfactory results is of more than academic interest. MAFF has been increasing the number of laboratories to which it 'contracts out' its work, even though it has not yet agreed the analytical

methods needed for testing residues in food. Yet this doesn't stop MAFF from publishing the results as hard facts: indeed when the food surveillance results for pesticide residues in our daily diet were published³, MAFF made much of the low levels of organochlorine and organophosphorus residues reported. 'Residues on food are at low levels,' the press release of last November announced. 'No residues were detected in 71 per cent of samples and only in one per cent of cases were residues detected in excess of Maximum Residue Levels.'

Yet the small print reveals two further disturbing features. Firstly, where different laboratories using different analytical methods can achieve different levels of sensitivity, the reporting threshold is taken as that achieved by the *least sensitive method*. Levels of residue below that detectable by the least sensitive method are discounted, and treated as zero.

Secondly, food residue results are double checked by another laboratory *only if an unusual result is found*. As a zero result is common, this translates from MAFF-speak as 'we double check only the high figures'. Presumably the result is discounted if it is not confirmed by a second laboratory.

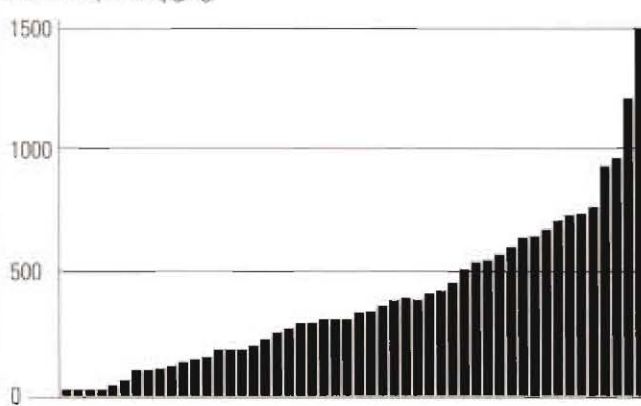
These two factors both act to minimise the detection of significant levels of pesticide. When routine food sampling results are reported by MAFF they make no mention of the laboratory procedures being used, nor is there any random double-checking of results to ensure reliability.

MAFF claims, for example, that 35 samples of wholemeal bread bought and analysed across the UK revealed 'only' nine to have detectable levels of OP-Pesticides, and that 32 samples of beef fat resulted in 'only' five showing pp'DDE. But, in the light of the variability between laboratories, these figures must be minimum estimates of the real frequency.

'There appear to be no agreed methods for the analysis of many pes-

Laboratories fail the acid test

amount reported (µg/kg)



ANY RESULT YOU WANT: One of the disturbing sets of figures reported in the MAFF tests. A sample of wheat was spiked to ensure levels of chlorpyrifos-methyl would be present 'at levels near to the Codex Maximum Residue Level' which is 2000 µg/kg. Only two laboratories reported levels above 1000 µg/kg. (Others reported finding pesticides which were not present.)

Source: MAFF, 1992

MAFF gives 'token' support to organics

A scheme for supporting farmers converting to organic agriculture was announced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on March 26, but was immediately condemned as little more than token support.

The document *Agriculture and the Environment* announced the first ever government cash support for organic farming, but did not put a precise figure on the amount to be made available. Nor was there a clear indication that farmers already practising organic agriculture would receive any benefit. Without similar levels of support, existing organic farmers would not be able to match the prices of those newly converted using government subsidies.

Organic farming is expected to be given some £1m, a tiny sum compared to the cost of set-aside schemes, estimated to be around £150m this year to be paid to farmers not to farm parts of their land.

Support for organic farming in some other European Community states runs at around £150-£200 per hectare, according to a response to the MAFF document prepared jointly by the Soil Association and other groups, and the amount being given by MAFF would barely support 10,000 hectares.

'We have waited fifty years for this support to be introduced and it would be wrong to let the occasion pass without recognising the achievements of John Gummer in introducing the scheme,' said Patrick Holden, Soil Association Policy Advisor. 'However it is clear that the allocation of Treasury funding is totally inadequate.'

■ For details of the response to MAFF's consultation documents write to the Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.

■ For the documents themselves contact MAFF, room 349, Nobel House 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR. Tel: 071-238 5916.

Chocolate unwrapped by WEN

Chocolate bars from leading confectionery manufacturers Cadburys, Mars, Nestlé and Suchards, have been found to contain traces of a highly toxic pesticide, according to the Women's Environmental Network (WEN). While there is no evidence that residues at the levels found pose any threat to consumers' health, it is indicative of unacceptable practices in cocoa production, says the campaigning group. WEN are calling for a reduction in the use of pesticides to ensure pesticide free chocolate.

The bars tested were Cadbury's Bournville plain chocolate, which was found to contain 5 parts per billion (ppb) of Lindane, Nestlé Yorkie (7ppb), Mars Galaxy (10ppb) milk chocolate and Suchards Milk Lila Pause Praline-

Crisp (6ppb). Lindane residues were found at an average of 7 parts per billion. The UK government sets no maximum residue limit for lindane in chocolate but WHO standards set a maximum guideline limit of 1,000 parts per billion in cocoa.

Lindane is a highly toxic insecticide which has been classified as a probable carcinogen in the US, where its use is restricted. It is banned in a further eight countries, though it is still approved in the UK. The main hazards, WEN warn, are to plantation workers, mainly women in countries like Malaysia, Brazil and increasingly in Ghana, and to the environment.

■ See Chocolate's Guilty Pleasure on page 25

FoE says set-aside scheme is little better than a car park

Friends of the Earth has added its name to the growing list of environmental groups opposed to the set-aside scheme which compensates farmers for keeping part of their land out of production.

'Set-aside is about as attractive to wildlife as a car park,' said FoE's agricultural campaigner Robin Maynard. 'It makes more sense to avoid this kind of rural dereliction and farm all the land, but in a more environmentally friendly way.'

Lower-input farming would lead to lower levels of nitrogen in ground water and watercourses, fewer harmful nitrogen and pesticide residues in food and reduced use of fossil fuels whereas set-aside schemes only encourage farmers to intensify production on their remaining land. FoE would like to see the extension of the environmentally-sensitive areas scheme, which compensates farmers for conserving selected sites.

Symptoms of pesticide poisoning

Organophosphorus compounds were developed as nerve gases, and after the war they soon found a use as an insecticide for grain crops, fruits, vegetables and grassland. They are often used on grain in storage. The chemicals affect the nerve junctions.

Symptoms of mild OP poisoning include frequent headaches, general fatigue, dizziness and mild indigestion. More serious poisoning can induce vomiting, lung failure, convulsions and death.

Organochlorine compounds also affect the nervous system, and are widely used on cereals, grassland, fruit and timber. They accumulate in fat, so animals grazing on grass sprayed with OC-pesticides may show high levels in their fatty tissue and in the fat in their milk.

Symptoms of low-level poisoning include restlessness and aggressiveness, sensitivity to noise, headaches and twitching eyelids.

► Continued

ticide residues,' said Peter Beaumont of the watchdog Pesticides Trust. 'We have grave doubts about the reliability of the testing procedures being used by the government in its food surveillance programme. This latest revelation shows we cannot be complacent about apparently low levels of residues if the real figures could be very much higher.'

The Pesticides Trust is linking with the Food Commission to raise the matter as a Parliamentary Question.

1 Food Analysis Performance Assessment Scheme Report 0903 (OP-Pesticides) and Report 0504 (OC-Pesticides), MAFF Food Science Laboratory, September 1992 and December 1992 respectively.

2 See Desmarchelier et al, *Pesticide Science* 8, 1977, and Sharp et al, *Analyst* 113, 1988.

3 For example the *Annual Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues 1991*, MAFF/HSE, HMSO 1992.

■ For details of the work of the Pesticides Trust, contact them at 23 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR, 071-274 8895.

GET THE MOST OUT OF EVERY REMAINING SQUARE INCH OF LAND.

Extran being short for extra nitrogen fertiliser, of course.

The farming press has been running adverts such as this one, for a nitrogen fertiliser which boldly states: 'When you've taken away 15% for set aside, it's vital you make maximum returns on the other 85% of land. Look to maximise yields. Look to Extran...' Extran being short for extra nitrogen fertiliser, of course.

To regulate or not to regulate?

MAFF has announced new proposals to remove 'unnecessary' regulation controlling the food industry. Jeanette Longfield, NFA secretary, reports.

The Minister of Agriculture's lot is not a happy one. The Government's policy is to 'lighten the burdens' on British industry and MAFF, like all the other departments, must begin to undo whatever red tape can be found tying the hands of the British industry. At the same time though, MAFF is faced with implementing a mass of legislation emanating from the EC. 'Deregulation and food law' is MAFF's brave attempt to square this circle.

Unfortunately, from the perspective of health and consumer groups, this initiative has not had the most promising start. Last December MAFF sent a list of all current food legislation to the food industry (but not consumers) inviting them to identify the laws they found most burdensome. In February, food industry representatives (but not consumers) were invited to a seminar addressed by the Prime Minister, where the principles guiding the deregulation of food law were spelt out. These principles did not, it seems, include protecting consumers against unsafe, debased and deceptively marketed food.

In a recent letter to the food industry (and, at last, consumers) the importance of consumer health and safety has now been acknowledged and public interest groups are being given a chance to have their say. Whether the public voice will be heeded, is another matter. The concluding part of the 13 page consultation document does not bode well, noting that consumer concerns will be 'recognised'. Is it only paranoia that notices the absence of a commitment to act on consumer concerns?

The first clue in the consultation document comes early on. The Government considers it a 'drawback' that other EC states have a tougher approach to the use of additives than in the UK. But if European food indus-

tries can prosper using fewer additives in their food products, then why can't the British food industry? The paper also 'regards as questionable' (civil service-speak for 'considers utterly unnecessary') a number of other EC measures and proposals on, for example, the protection of local speciality foods and the control of slimming foods.

The paper notes that some of these measures have already been introduced at EC level and, since they have been championed by France in particular, there is very little prospect for sweeping away these regulations. In other areas, however, MAFF sees greater potential for deregulation.

One early casualty has been an EC proposal to make nutrition labelling compulsory. Health campaigners predict, on the basis of years of bitter experience, that the EC's voluntary system will not provide consumers with the information they need to choose a healthy diet. Only those food producers with a good nutrition story to tell will offer information on saturated fat, sugar, salt and fibre. Others will remain unhelpfully – and legally – silent.

Another food labelling measure also looks set to disappear. The Food Advisory Committee's recommendation to label foods that have been treated with post-harvest pesticide treatments will be 'examined closely' as part of the deregulatory initiative.

Perhaps the whole area of food labelling epitomises the problem facing MAFF. On the one hand, few will mourn the passing of the EC's infamous 'recipe laws' which, for example, took several years to reach agreement on a common compositional standard for jam (and even that required redefining carrots as fruit!). On the other hand, if compositional rules have to go, then labelling rules are essential to allow consumers to distinguish product A from product B, which looks the same but is not.

More positively, the Government is supporting a proposal for an EC inspectorate to check that food laws are being properly implemented in

every Member State. This is to be warmly welcomed, as many consumers and producers have long suspected that British enforcement officers operate to a much higher standard than their continental colleagues.

We have until 31 May to persuade MAFF that this latter approach – creating parity at the highest levels of consumer protection – might prove a more fruitful way to improve the quality, and hence the competitiveness, of the British food supply. Contact Tom Norton, in MAFF's Consumer Protection Division (071-238-6550) with your comments.

New Members

Genetics Forum was formed in 1989 and aims to inform the public about the whole gamut of ethical, social and environmental issues raised by genetic engineering and biotechnology. Thus, as well as covering food and agriculture related issues such as Bovine Somatotrophin (BST) and herbicide resistant plants, Genetics Forum also produces information materials on human genetics. Partly supported by the Worldwide Fund for Nature, the Forum works closely with a wide range of public interest organisations to encourage public debate on genetic engineering and biotechnology.

The NFAs newest member is also its youngest. The Committee on Biotechnology and Food (CoBAF) was formed in the summer of 1992 to monitor the work of relevant EC and UK Government committees, such as the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, as well as patenting and food labelling issues.

Recently both CoBAF and Genetics Forum gave written and verbal evidence to the Government committee, chaired by the Reverend Polkinghorne, which is examining the ethical implications of biotechnology.

**■ National Food Alliance,
3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street,
London EC2A 2BH.
Tel: 071-628 7261**

*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
British Organic Farmers and the
Organic Growers' Association
Caroline Walker Trust
Children's Society
Christian Aid
Committee on Biotechnology and Food
Common Ground
Coronary Prevention Group
Council for the Prevention of
Rural England
Elm Farm Research
Food Additives Campaign Team
Food Commission
Friends of the Earth
Genetics Forum
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 Consumers 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 – Department of
Service Sector Management
British Dietetic Association
Campaign for Real Ale
Consumers' Association
Guild of Food Writers
Health Education Authority
Institute of Training Standards
Association
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)

MEPs demand better additive controls

A series of amendments passed by the European Parliament will put pressure on the European Commission to re-draft its proposals on colouring agents to be permitted in food.

The amendments agreed on March 10 include:

- All food with added colouring should have labels showing the Acceptable Daily Intake and the quantity of colouring in the food.

- Colours should be banned from flavoured milk drinks, yogurts, smoked fish (except kippers), prepared meat and game, cheese spreads, preserved fruit and vegetable products, wholemeal and brown bread, breakfast cereals unless puffed, extruded or fruit-flavoured jams, jellies and marmalade.
- Erythrosine (E127) and Red 2G (E128), both suspected carcinogens, should be removed from the list of Permitted Colourings.

The Parliament left intact the Commission's proposals to permit the use of nearly 50 other colouring agents, and to permit some colourings in beer, butter, cheeses (including the 'blue' in blue cheeses), sausages and salami, meat pies, luncheon meat and burgers and vegetable oils (except olive oil).

Tories stick firm

Tory MEP contributions to the additives debate in the European Parliament appeared to do little to improve food quality.

MEP Caroline Jackson called on Brussels to approve all those colours already declared as safe, saying 'People in other countries are banning colours on the basis of their own prejudices and ignorance. We want to send a signal that we are prepared

to be tolerant of the use of colours.'

And MEP Michael Welsh waved a stick of Blackpool rock at the assembled members, declaring he had eaten it for years with, he claimed, no ill effects.

Meanwhile the press in the UK scorned the attempts to limit colourings. 'Whole areas of Britain's culinary heritage are under threat,' stormed the *London Evening Standard*. 'Mushy peas would never be green without E102 (tartrazine), Red Leicester is only red because of E160b (annatto) and without E127 cocktail cherries would be brown.'

In fact the MEPs voted to extend the varieties of canned peas that could be coloured to include 'garden' along with 'mushy' and 'processed' versions. A victory for Britain?

MAFF's secret

Amongst other items, the MEPs voted to amend the draft directive on additives to ensure that their Parliament was supplied with full figures on the market for colourings and their levels of consumption. They may find this harder than they think.

MAFF's Food Advisory Committee asked in 1989 to be given annual estimates for the UK sales of all artificial sweeteners. Dr Eric Millstone, a specialist in food additives at Sussex University, wrote to MAFF asking to see the annual figures. No way, said the Ministry. These figures are provided by industry on a 'Commercial-in-Confidence' basis and will be kept secret.

'I am sorry I cannot be more helpful,' said the official.

► In 1990 MAFF were so alarmed at the high levels of saccharin being consumed that they doubled the acceptable daily intake level — then they could honestly say fewer people were exceeding the limit!

EC blocks helpful food labels

EC food law, due to come into force next October, will prevent manufacturers and retailers from telling shoppers in plain English how much fat, sugar, salt and fibre there is in products, according to the Coronary Prevention Group (CPG). Their banding scheme, which is being used by the Co-op on its own-brand foods, tells consumers whether the amounts of fat, sugar, fibre etc are 'high', 'medium' or 'low'. From October the CPG/Co-op label will be illegal.

The EC Nutrition Labelling Directive, which was designed to prevent consumer confusion by presenting information in a standard format on labels, will require nutrient levels to be declared in g per 100g or g per serving but in no alternative way. Research by the CPG and MAFF has found that consumers find these numbers virtually incomprehensible.

Mike Rayner, CPG's Senior Research Officer, says 'The recent Health of the Nation white paper commits the government to "seek ways of improving information on the nutritional content of foods". This is an empty promise if the law cannot be changed. If MAFF are serious about this commitment then they should persuade the EC to additionally allow helpful information like the CPG/Co-op label.'

The Co-op will be seeking to persuade the government that their labelling scheme is in the best interests of consumers.

Labelling US style

Meanwhile the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is setting tough standards for nutrition labelling and health claims. Manufacturers will be obliged to declare nutrition information on their products, not just the amount but also the percentage of the recommended daily amount that it makes up.

The FDA has also approved health claims such as the connection between saturated fat and cholesterol with heart disease and cancer and also that fibre-containing grain products, fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of cancer. Not only must these foods be a good source of fibre (defined as 0.6g soluble fibre per serving) without fortification, but they must also meet requirements for 'low saturated fat', 'low cholesterol' and 'low fat' claims.

The regulations were delayed because of disputes between the FDA and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA argued that giving the percentage amounts of a nutrient would confuse shoppers.

In announcing its proposals the FDA said 'the benefits to public health measured in monetary terms are estimated to well exceed the costs. Potential benefits include decreased rates of coronary heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, obesity and allergic reactions to food.'



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Dutch government supports organics

'To be unknown is to be unloved' say the Dutch, and according to Dutchwoman Alice Boverhof, if nobody knows about organic food they are not going to buy it.

Now, thanks to the assistance of a DfI 6.2m (£2.3m) grant from the Dutch government, a new Information Centre for Organic Products, BIOLOGICA, has been formed to promote the market for organic produce.

The group's management consists of representatives from the four organic and bio-dynamic (Rudolf Steiner-inspired) farming and trade organisations in Holland. In turn, BIOLOGICA is split into four secretariats, one each for agriculture, marketing,

retailers and consumers.

It is Europe's first national trade association devoted to organic and bio-dynamic trade promotion, serving the common interests of the main organic trading bodies. Whether such orthodox marketing methods would suit the sometimes less orthodox organic farmers of the UK remains to be seen. But the wait is likely to be a long one unless the UK government is prepared to back such ideas with the same degree of support that the Dutch government has given.

■ For more details contact Alice Boverhof, BIOLOGICA, Postbus 253, 8000 AG Zwolle, Netherlands. Tel: 038-219855. Fax: 038-222639.

Royal Show time

Following the enormous success of the Organic Food & Farming Centre at the Royal Show over the last six years, the Soil Association is organising a comprehensive organic display and information centre. This will be situated in an organic food and farming centre.

Along with the Soil Association, the display will include British Organic Farmers giving information and advice to producers, the Henry Doubleday Research Association supplying information on organic gardening and Elm Farm Research Centre who provide technical information and research and development services.

There will be tastings of organic food and a few specially selected companies will prepare food for the general public.

■ For more details of the organic stand at the Royal Show, contact Events Organiser, Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB, 0272-290661.

Community Supported Agriculture

The Soil Association is organising a conference this autumn to share experiences and ideas on developing the links between consumers and growers.

There are still few true Community Supported Agriculture schemes, where consumers and producers work together to support each other. However many other kinds of links are being formed, such as the boom in farm shops, home deliveries and consumer buying groups.

The conference is planned for 29th/30th October 1993.

■ For details, contact Eric Booth, Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB, 0272-290661.

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SA launches animal welfare project

A new project co-ordinating the Soil Association's animal welfare standards is due to be launched later this year, including a nation-wide campaign to increase awareness of the welfare benefits of organic farming.

The campaign aims to draw attention to the animal welfare components of organic standards including the production and marketing of organically produced livestock, and to link with other animal welfare groups to research and develop Soil Association, UKROFS and EC standards for farm animals.

The Soil Association is seeking funding towards the costs of this project, which include a full time Animal Welfare Projects Officer, expected to amount to £41,000 pa.

■ Contact Patrick Holden, Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB, 0272-290661.

Give A Gift Voucher

The Charities Aid Foundation has launched a new kind of gift voucher to benefit charities. Charity Gift Vouchers are designed to 'share the pleasure of giving' and are available in three denominations (£10, £25 and £50), with a gift card for adding messages to suit the occasion.

You can give a Gift Voucher to the Soil Association (Charity No 206862) and to the Food Commission Research Charity (Charity No 1000358).

■ Contact the Charity Aid Foundation's Gift Voucher Department on 0732-771 333.

Conference

The Quality of Food: New Technologies in the Food Sector

4 - 6 June 1993 at Evangelische Akademie Mulheim/Ruhr, Germany. Hosted by Katalyse. Telephone Arno Podt for details: 010-49 221 235965 (fax 242320)

Organic food awards

The Soil Association is joining forces with the Henry Doubleday Research Association to stage the 1993 Organic Food Awards at the Organic Food And Wine Fair at Ryton Gardens, on 9-10th July 1993.

The event has been designed to promote standards of excellence in the organic food and wine sector. The event will also include, for the first time, a seminar on food quality.

In line with other developments, the three original awards categories are being greatly expanded this year to include awards for specific product areas. The awards will include cate-

gories for dairy products, meat and poultry, fresh produce, baked goods, flours, ready meals and beverages.

The number of entries has increased every year, starting with 45 in 1987 and rising to over 100 in 1991. Products entered must be certified to Soil Association or other approved standards.

Each year four celebrities from the food industry are invited to judge the food award entries. The judges will be announced shortly.

■ Details from Organic Awards organiser, Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB. 0272-290661.

Education pack ready in June

Work is nearing completion on the long-awaited organic food education pack for primary schools, compiled by the Soil Association and due to be launched in June.

The pack consists of a series of information sheets for use by teachers together with a set of example activity sheets showing ways that the ideas can be delivered. The Soil Association is interested in hearing

from teachers who would be prepared to use the pack and offer comments for future editions.

The Soil Association will be inviting parents and supporters to sponsor packs for local schools and educational resource centres when they are published.

■ For details, contact Eric Booth, Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB. 0272-290661.

Responsible forestry scheme

Revised standards for the responsible management and use of forests are being prepared by the Soil Association.

The Soil Association's Responsible Forestry project is developing a certification and labelling scheme for 'sustainable' timber. The aim is to encourage worldwide forest management to protect the environment and benefit local communities.

Draft standards are currently being circulated for comment, covering environmental, social and economic criteria for forest management, along with oper-

ational standards for timber traders to enable tracing of timber through the manufacturing chain.

A revised version of the standards, incorporating comments received and the results of the field trials is scheduled for late summer. Additional specific standards for British forestry are being compiled and a draft is available.

■ Copies of the draft Responsible Forestry Standards from Ian Rowland, Forestry Officer at the Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB. 0272-290661. Price £2.50 to cover production and postage costs.



'We treat the piglets with homoeopathic remedies, and we don't dock their tails because a pig's tail can tell you a lot about its health.' Helen Browning shows off her free-range pigs reared to Soil Association standards during a Soil Association-organised farm walk. For details of future farm walks, contact the Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB. 0272-290661.

Photo: Compassion in World Farming

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Mad cows and Englishmen

The European Parliament has not accepted UK government reassurances that Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) is now under control.

Joanna Blythman reports.

Remember Mad Cow disease and the sight of John Gummer feeding a beefburger to his reluctant daughter? Remember Professor Richard Lacey and Dr Helen Grant warning of the possible links between BSE and the human Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease?

Nearly five years have passed since TV viewers were watched images of cows staggering and collapsing on British farms, along with rare views of the inside of meat rendering plants where the carcasses of sheep and cows were being turned into 'protein' to add back into the cattle feed.

BSE had, of course, been discovered long before

this, with the first case confirmed in 1985. Yet it took nearly three years for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to declare the disease notifiable and to ban the use of animal proteins in cattle food, and a further year before some beef offal including brains, stomach and spleen, was banned from human food.

Consumer confidence fell sharply, with a dramatic drop in beef sales and some local education authorities withdrawing beef from school menus.

But now beef sales have bounced back and anxiety has receded. The government insists that matters are rapidly improving, the trend of BSE is on the decline and it's business as usual.

Such comfort coming from the UK Government is, however, at odds with the European view. Earlier this year the European Parliament in Strasbourg examined, and supported, a highly respected report on BSE from a Portuguese MEP, Vasco Garcia. As a result the Parliament demanded a series of new measures — more research, better controls on animal feed, stricter checks at abattoirs — as part of a Community-wide campaign to combat the disease.

Garcia's report identified the problem as being very much a 'British' disease, with over 60,000 cases reported to date, but that other countries had started to show significant numbers of cases too: Northern Ireland (337 cases), Ireland (46), Switzerland (10), France (5) plus several cases outside Europe.

There are several theories about the cause of the disease. In organic farming circles some credence has been given to the idea that chronic exposure to organophosphate pesticides has weakened the normal defence system of Britain's herds. While those of us who fully support organic farming methods have

no difficulty believing that pesticide exposure must generally weaken both animal and human resistance, the European Parliament backs the view that the abrupt outbreak of BSE can be traced back to a more specific matter. It believes that the disease was catalysed by changes in the manufacturing of cattlefeed.

In the late 1970s the main rendering plant in the south of England which processes abattoir 'waste' into food to be fed back to cattle changed its system from a solvent-based, high temperature method to the less costly continuous-sterilisation method. This change may have mattered little were it not for a second potential hazard. It is thought that many of the sheep carcasses being rendered were infected with a disease, Scrapie, which is similar to BSE. To make matters worse, before the government's 1988 ban came into effect, the remains of cows which had died from BSE were being recycled back into cattlefeed.

This must go down in history as an exemplary moral tale on the dangers of intensive farming. Cattle are natural herbivores and would not eat animal protein, let alone the remains of other cattle, in normal circumstances. But according to Garcia, 'recycled animal proteins were used intensively to increase milk production in the UK from 1981 onwards ... the aim being to obtain the highest possible levels of production, with a view to the arrival of milk quotas in 1984'.

Whether we blame cost-cutting renderers, profit-maximising dairy farmers or inadequate government controls (or all three) is now irrelevant. The question now is what happens to the mess? How will the disease evolve?

The British government, too, believes that the cause of BSE was contaminated feed, and because all such feed was banned in 1988 the disease can be expected to tail off by the year 2000, once the maximum 8-9 year incubation period is passed.

But, as Garcia points out, the ban did not apply to exports. 'Between 1987 and 1989 the UK had already disposed of between 30,000 and 40,000 tonnes of possibly contaminated feed in France,' he reveals. So France (given the incubation period) may now face the prospect of more cases of BSE from now until at least the end of next year.

While Garcia accepts the British government's belief that BSE will peter out by 2000 and not affect humans, he stresses it is far too early to be complacent. 'There is still a possibility of the transmissibility of BSE to other animal species, from which humans cannot be totally excluded.' Transmission between species has already been shown and zoo animals, cats and mink have been infected.

Garcia also considers two more possibilities. The first is that there could be vertical transmission from cow to calf. This would prolong the disease for a few years and it may have to be controlled through slaughtering. The second is that BSE could be transmitted horizontally by contact. In this case the disease could become endemic.

Despite the UK government's repeated assur-

Dairyman's brain disease 'just chance'

The death of a Lancashire dairy farmer from Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (CJD) was most likely just a chance finding, and a causal link with BSE was at most conjectural, said Dr Robert Will, head of the government's CJD surveillance unit, in a letter to the *Lancet* in March.

The brain disease is the nearest form of human encephalopathy to BSE, the so-called Mad Cow disease. The farmer, aged 61, had worked with BSE-infected cattle, but had not been in contact with their internal organs, said Dr Will.

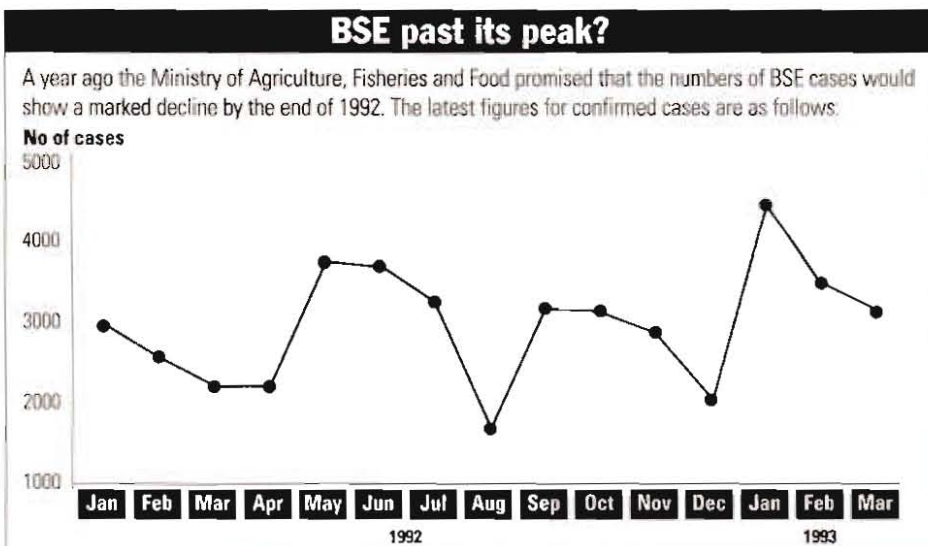
It is the first reported case of CJD among the 120,000-strong dairy farming workforce. The national average is one case per 2 million people per year.

ances that it has BSE under control, the responses of other European governments is far from confident. Several appear to have no faith in the UK's ability to control BSE: Germany, for example, continues its ban on certain UK beef imports and demands BSE-free certification for others. World-wide, British beef continues to be banned in nearly 30 countries.

British farmers themselves have not helped the situation. The government's figures for BSE now show over 400 cattle developing the disease even though they were born after the ban on infectious cattle feed was in place. The ministry believes this is due to farmers continuing to use old stocks of cattle feed, a suggestion that does not inspire confidence.

The whole BSE debacle has taught us three lessons. The first is that farmers and feed manufacturers, just like food manufacturers, need to be kept under careful public scrutiny. What measures did MAFF take to ensure that contaminated feed was no longer available after the ban in production was put in place in 1988? And why were farmers continuing to use old stock after widespread publicity about its ban?

The second is that you cannot rely on MAFF to put public health above commercial interests: it needs an extremely vigilant and independent public agency,



charged with ensuring high quality food production based on a sane agricultural policy. And it means maximum accountability and openness about all food production methods.

And the third – which is just common sense to organic farmers – is that you muck about with the nat-

ural order of things at your peril. Cows eat grass, preferably unadulterated with chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

■ Joanna Blythman is a freelance journalist based in Strasbourg

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GATT means more additives

European harmonisation is already leading to more additives in our food. But the new global trade agreement – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – will only make matters worse. Melanie Miller reports.

At first sight the idea of harmonising international standards can look attractive: if all countries had the same food safety rules then products could travel round the globe much more easily, giving more consumer choice at reduced cost. And theoretically, harmonisation provides an opportunity to raise standards to the highest level.

But EC harmonisation is expected to allow more than 100 extra additives on top of the current UK list of over 300 (these figures exclude flavourings). It will

erode standards much more in other countries: the list of permitted additives in Germany, for example, will more than double from its current level of 150. And the range of foods permitted to contain additives will increase substantially in Germany, Denmark and France. Countries with high standards lose out, because harmonised rules cater for the wide range of manufacturing processes and food cultures of different countries. If an additive is legal in one country it is often made legal in all, giving trade interests precedence over consumer protection.

The GATT proposals currently being negotiated will make matters worse. The Sanitary Agreement of GATT will oblige governments to harmonise additive laws at a global level. A country will only be able to keep (or adopt) higher national standards for imports if these can be proven to meet a strict set of criteria in the GATT rules. It will be expensive and difficult for countries to defend high levels of consumer protection, so most will harmonise with the international standards.

International food standards are set by Codex, a body run by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Health Organisation (WHO). Codex was set up in 1963 to facilitate world trade in food products, and to protect the health of consumers. It has set standards for over 230 food products (eg. ham, margarine, processed vegetables), recommending which additives should be used in them.

Codex standards for additives are lower than several EC countries and much lower than Scandinavian standards. Codex allows propylene glycol (E1520) in cottage cheese, benzoate (E210) in margarine, and polyphosphate (E452) in milk powder. The UK does not permit these uses. Codex and the UK both permit dyes like Ponceau 4R (E124) and Erythrosine (E127) in fruit preserves and frozen shrimps, but they are not permitted in these foods in Germany and France.

The bad news does not stop there, however. Codex standards are likely to become significantly weaker in future. For years, Codex has been required to limit specific additives to specific foods when setting standards. Codex has therefore assessed the 'need' for additives in many food products for which it has set composition/quality standards. Many countries have also traditionally made 'need' assessments before permitting additives (some more strictly than

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Cracking the Codex

Who makes the decisions in the Codex committees? Why are consumer interests so often put second to trade interests? Natalie Avery summarises a new report revealing the cracks in Codex.

The facts are simple: of the 2578 people who participated on Codex committees in the last two years, 660 represented industry interests. And only 26 representatives of public interest groups participated.

On national delegations industry representatives outnumbered those from public interest groups by a ratio of 56 to 1. Representatives of 139 corporations

participated in establishing international food standards — more than the 105 countries participating on Codex committees.

On some delegations and committees the situation is even more worrying. Nearly half the participants on US delegations sent to Codex committees represented industry interests. Even worse was the Swiss delegation where 61 per cent of participants represented industry. On the pesticide residue levels committee 33 per cent of the participants came from the agrochemical industry, while on the food additives and contaminants committees, 41 per cent of participants represented the food industry.

Codex standards are supposed to protect consumers and at the same time facilitate trade. But in the light of huge industry participation on Codex committees, many fear that the drive to facilitate trade will overshadow the need for better food stan-

dards. Nutritionist, Professor Philip James believes that if Codex gains the prominence planned for it, 'Nutrition development would literally be stopped in its tracks.' US consumer activist, Ralph Nader has commented that the GATT trade agenda will 'degrade existing health and safety standards to the lowest common denominator' and 'drive (US) standards down to the levels of less fortunate countries'.

The international consumers' organisation (IOCU) has called for clear criteria for selecting experts for the committees which advise Codex. This needs to apply to any experts involved in advising on international standards.

■ The report *Cracking the Codex* is available from Natalie Avery, National Food Alliance, Third floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2H 3DA. Phone 071-628 7261 for price.

others). Partly this has been to protect quality and prevent consumer fraud. But there has also been a strong safety element: it is not possible to predict accurately the health effects of additives, so it makes sense to restrict the range of foods that they are allowed in.

In future, 'need' assessments will not be justifiable under the GATT Sanitary Agreement. Already, Codex has plans for 'simplifying' its procedures by dropping most need assessments, and recommending free use of many additives in a wide range of foods. Governments backing this approach include the UK, USA and Australia. For the last few years the US government has been trying to eliminate need assessments because it says they are not 'scientific'.

But if the aim is to protect consumers, there are very sound reasons for assessing 'need', because it builds a greater safety margin into standards. Many additives once considered safe have later been found hazardous (often after years of exposure).

If GATT is signed, the EC will eventually be obliged to accept additives approved by Codex, but not currently permitted in the EC, such as Fast Green FCF (a controversial dye linked to cancer in laboratory animals). Or instead, GATT rules would require the EC to give some kind of compensation to the USA or other countries which cannot export products containing such a dye. But the cost of maintaining a whole range of standards (eg. the ban on growth-promoting hormones in beef) would become enormous. Alternatively, the EC could continue to prohibit EC manufacturers from using Fast Green FCF, but allow imports to contain it — creating a dual standard. EC manufacturers would complain of unfair competition and there would be pressure for the EC standard to be lowered.

According to a new study published this month (see box *Cracking the Code*), Codex meetings in the

last two years had more companies participating than governments — even though Codex is supposed to be a government body. Sometimes a few consumer groups participate, but they have no hope of matching the technical resources and lobbying efforts of food and chemical companies. And Codex's structure and procedures make it difficult for consumer protection to be adequately addressed.

When a national or EC standard is challenged by another country, the case will be judged by a panel of three people selected by the GATT secretariat and

meeting in secret. Most rulings made by these panels have interpreted existing GATT rules to put trade interests above the environment or public health. At present, the decisions of GATT panels cannot be enforced, but when the new GATT agreement is signed, they can be. So in future three people meeting in secret will have a major role in deciding whether your food laws meet the GATT free trade rules or not.

■ *Melanie Miller runs the SAFE Alliance Trade Project.*

GATT's narrow rules

Two parts of GATT that will affect food standards are the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement (SPS) and the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement (TBT).

The aim of both is to remove 'unnecessary' differences in legislation between countries. They set criteria which national laws must meet in order to comply with GATT rules.

The SPS rules apply to laws and standards controlling the safety aspects of food, drink and agricultural products:

- Governments are obliged to harmonise with international food safety standards as far as possible.
- National standards are only allowed to be stricter than international ones if a country can prove its standards are necessary to protect health. The SPS does not allow protection of animal welfare or the environment as a justifiable reason.
- Higher national standards must be based on risk assessments (taking into account those developed by Codex) and a consistent approach to risk. What

this means in practice is that safety is defined in very narrow terms, and the precautionary principle is not acceptable.

■ A new Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures will monitor the process of international harmonisation, and draw up guidelines on the appropriate level of risk.

■ The TBT rules apply to laws and standards for all kinds of consumer goods, and will cover all aspects of food other than safety, such as labelling and quality:

- Countries must not have national standards which are unnecessary barriers to trade.
- A new code of conducts is set up for non-governmental standards-setting bodies.

The EC ban on growth-promoting hormones will be one of the first casualties when GATT is signed. The law cannot be justified under the SPS rules — because the ban cannot be proven as necessary to protect health. And it can't be justified under the TBT because the ban is regarded as an unnecessary barrier to trade. Other food laws, especially those relating to quality, will suffer a similar fate.

Throw off our supermarket chains

The big retailers will destroy our movement, argues organic farmer Julian Rose. He wants to stop them turning organic food into a 'niche market' for minority tastes.

It may look wonderful on paper to see that millions of pounds worth of organic food was sold through UK multiples last year.

But it means little in terms of raised public awareness, environmental impact or the financial return to the farmer. And it may do nothing for the philosophy once vital to the organic approach: the long-term relationship between whole, living, unprocessed foods, the marketing structure that sells them and the ultimate buyer.

It is now common for organic farmers to apply all their skills to producing exceptional, unadulterated, fresh food only to see it sold 200 miles away, eight days old, over-processed, over-packaged and over-priced. After all, supermarkets are designed to handle standardised, mass-produced foods, transported to centralised warehouses and out again to depots across the country.

The development of more appropriate regional and local outlets is now an urgent task if we are to display to our advantage the qualities missing from mass-produced, non-organic food. Organic food, fresh and unprocessed, should retain its links to an identifiable region, and tell us something about the farm or holding where it came from.

Of course we don't want to be labelled as a 'backwater' alternative. But nor do we want to be perpetually pleading for sponsorship from the dominant multiple chains. Do we?

It seems to me illogical that organic conferences, Royal Show participation, food awards etc are held under the auspices of Safeway, Sainsbury et al, while these very institutions coolly manipulate organic food into their well-defined, over-priced 'niche markets'.

But in moving away from the supermarkets we must remain professional, responsible and credible.

We must hold on to the original drive for a people-based, human-scale approach to agriculture and marketing. And we probably need a good deal more passion, discomfort and indignation even amongst our own kind.

Organic food and farming is not about 'safe' living, and any attempt to market it free of any radical taint is an aberration.

The same can be said for the steady bureaucratisation of the administration of organic standards. The farmer is buried under a pile of tedious paperwork, and the organic inspector, who once tramped the land on the look-out for tell-tale signs of violations, now rarely gets further than the farm office, relying entirely on the multifarious 'records' the farmer has to keep in superfluous detail. Even the farm's book-keeping and accounts have to be available for inspection — an intrusion surely designed to alienate newcomers and create animosity between those who regulate and those who have farmed for generations.

The new connection between farmer and consumer which I hope we can help to initiate must reverse this situation. We must resist the attempts to standardise that which by its nature is unique and diverse, for there is more at stake than just food.

We also need to sever, at least emotionally, any lingering adherence to the agrochemically aggravated, genetically manipulated hypermarket called 'The Food Industry'.

At stake is an organic movement able to retain some sort of cutting edge, which means the survival of all those who still have enough red blood corpuscles left to trigger an instant government health warning!

■ *Sir Julian Rose is an organic farmer in Oxfordshire.*



CHECKOUT

In a special report by the Food Commission we take a close look at popular crisps and savory snacks

When it comes to snacking we're a nation of monster munchers grazing our way through £1.6 billion worth of crisps, snacks and nuts last year despite the recession. That's the equivalent of 150 packets of crisps for every man, woman and child in the country, three times as much as the French, twice as much as the Germans, but still behind the world's megamunchers, the USA.

Eating between meals, has never been more popular and when we get the munchies savoury snacks are a popular choice. According to market researchers, Mintel, children prefer a bag of crisps to an apple, banana or a yogurt, and it seems no lunch box is complete without a bag of crisps or starch-based savoury snack. However the most popular place for snacking is in front of the television – is it those adverts or just the boredom which brings on a snack attack?

While sales of crisps have grown by about 40% in the last five years, the biggest growth has been in the market for starch-based savoury snacks primarily targeted at children. This market really took off during the 1980s when new manufacturing technology and flavours made possible the production of the hundreds of different bagged snacks seen on supermarket shelves today. Sales have virtually doubled from £280 million in 1987 to £550 million in 1991, with children eating about two-thirds of all products. Attractive packaging and cartoon characters have helped persuade more and more children to gobble their way into this fiercely competitive market.

Snack attack

The Top Ten Snack Brands, 1991

Just three companies dominate the UK snack market. PepsiCo and United Biscuits battle it out with around 40% share of the market each with Dalgety in third place with around 8.5% share. Recently the successful Derwent Valley Foods whose Phileas Fogg range pioneered the adult snack market in the 1980s was taken over by United Biscuits.

Brand	Owner	Sales (£m)	Adspend (£m)
1 Walkers Crisps	PepsiCo Foods	Over 160	4.8
2 Golden Wonder Crisps	Dalgety Spillers	55-60	3.1
3 Hula Hoops	United Biscuits	50-55	1.0
4 Quavers	PepsiCo Foods	30-35	0.3
5 KP Nuts	United Biscuits	25-30	0.5
6 Skips	United Biscuits	20-25	0.8
7 Wotsits	Dalgety Spillers	20-25	0.08
8 McCoys	United Biscuits	20-25	0.7
9 Monster Munch	PepsiCo Foods	20-25	0.1
10 Discos	United Biscuits	20-25	0.5

Source: Neilson/Register-MEAL

At the same time crisps have been moving more upmarket. Crisps are no longer plain or salt and vinegar, they are now crinkled, pan-

style, kettle chips, jacket fried or thick and crunchy with a whole range of flavours designed to suit a more sophisticated adult taste and

pocket. And the health conscious too. Lower fat, lightly salted and no artificial additives are now commonly claimed. But just how healthy are crisps and savoury snacks?

In this special survey Checkout took a close look at the contents of some top selling crisps and snacks and found a few unsavoury facts. Its not just that crisps and snacks are generally high in fat and salt (you don't need us to tell you that!) but we also found a long and sometimes worrying list of additives in children's snacks, manufacturers using unhealthy 'hydrogenated' vegetable oils, 'lightly salted' crisps with more salt than regular ones and snacks which can be just as damaging to children's teeth as biscuits.

For the details, read on...

■ Written and researched by Sue Dibb
Additional research: Ezra Burnett

Children's snacks

With a booming market in savoury alternatives to crisps at pocket-money prices, Checkout asks: what exactly are children being sold?

Crisps and savoury snacks are among children's most favourite foods. Nine out of ten children say they eat crisps and other savoury bag snacks and on average children eat about 4 bags a week. Some children eat a lot more, sometimes several times a day.

Packaging is all important. Companies know that children will be influenced more by colourful exciting packaging than by the product inside.

Character merchandising has become increasingly popular with favourite characters such as the Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles, the Simpsons, Yogi Bear and the Flintstones, as well as a whole host of specially created characters appealing to children.

Savoury snacks come in all shapes and flavours and are the end product of a technology known as extrusion. Virtually any form of starch can be used, whether from potatoes, wheat or maize and commonly referred to as

snack pellets. These are soaked and forced under high pressure through shaping nozzles in a technique known as extrusion. This puffs up the starch ready to be baked or fried and flavoured. Hey-presto, highly processed junk.

So how suitable are these snacks for children?

We looked at how much fat and sodium is in these savoury snack products and also took a close look at the additives used (see box Extruded Snacks)

Fat: All the products we looked at were high in fat – all got around half their calories from fat. This is slightly lower than for crisps but is still relatively high. However not all manufacturers declared how much fat was in their product.

Salt: Compared to crisps, savoury snacks tended to be much higher in salt. KP Discos scored the highest at a very high 1.8g sodium per 100g. One 30g bag would provide 0.54g of sodium – that's more than the daily recommended needs for a toddler (aged between one and three). And for adults one bag would provide nearly a quarter of the World Health Organizations recommended maximum of 2.4g a day for an adult.

Many manufacturers did not declare how much sodium was in their product (Smiths, Golden Wonder, Quentins and Bensons). Others declared how much salt was in the product. If the product also contains monosodium glutamate this may be an underestimate of the full amount of sodium in the product.

Sugar: Added sugar can be harmful to teeth and unexpected in savoury products. Found in: KP Skips,

Sainsbury's Flintstones and Wolf Pom Bears

Additives: Many responsible food manufacturers have cut back on the additives that they use in children's foods in response to parents' concerns. But we found a long and sometimes worrying list of additives that are used in children's savoury snack products.

Many of the additives, like flavour enhancers, colours, artificial sweeteners and antioxidants, are not permitted by law in foods for babies and young children. Yet the products we looked at are made to appeal to young children. How do the manufacturers get away with it? Simple – the products are also eaten by older children and adults so they are not classified as food for babies and young children.

We found a number of additives over which there are safety concerns:

Antioxidants: BHA (E320) and BHT (E321). Used to prevent oils and fats from becoming rancid. Have been found to cause cancer in laboratory animals. Can provoke intolerant reactions. Found in: Smiths Quavers and Squares.

Artificial Sweetener: Saccharin. Causes cancer in laboratory animals. Concern in UK that young children may be nearing maximum acceptable daily intake levels. The European Parliament has recommended that all products using artificial sweeteners should carry the warning: 'not to be taken by pregnant women or children under the age of three years'. Found in: KP Skips, Quintins snack pack, Bensons lunchbox snacks

Colours: Sunset yellow E110. One of the artificial azo dyes belonging to the same family as tartrazine.

Snacks and teeth

Before you give your child a savoury snack instead of sweets think twice!

Many dentists advise giving children savoury snacks rather than sweets but research at Guys Hospital Dental School has found that some crisps and savoury snacks can also be surprisingly harmful to teeth. Such products, as our survey found, may contain added sugar. But the main problem the researchers identified was the extrusion processing of refined starch which makes the snacks more liable to damage teeth than unprocessed starchy foods.

As the table below shows some crisps were nearly as damaging to teeth as semi-sweet biscuits and only just under half the cariogenicity (ability to damage teeth) of ordinary sugar (sucrose). By comparison salted peanuts had negligible effect on teeth.

Relative cariogenicity of snacks compared to sucrose (=100)

Sucrose	100
Ready salted crisps	19
Salt & vinegar crisps	16
Cheese & onion crisps	45
Square crisps	45
Flavoured prefabricated snack	21
Cheese flavour curly potato snack	22
Cheese filled puff	22
Potato rings	35
Semi-sweet biscuits	51
Salted peanuts	3
Wheat starch	7

Sources: Grenby TH (1990) Snack foods and dental caries. British Dental Journal: 168, 353-361.

Extruded Snacks

	Fat % Cals	Sodium g/100g	Additives
KP Hoola Hoops	54%	2.75g	MSG (621)
Smiths Quavers (cheese flavour)	57%	0.5* **	MSG (621), flavourings, antioxidants: E320, E321, colour: annatto
KP Skips (prawn cocktail flavour)	50%	1.3	MSG (621), flavourings, artificial sweetener: saccharin, colours: E110, E160b, sugar, acidity regulator: E262
Golden Wonder Wotsits (cheesy flavour)	56%	1.0* **	flavourings, colours: paprika, annatto
Smiths Monster Munch	53%	0.7* **	MSG (621), acidity regulator: E262
KP Discos (cheese & onion flavour)	50%	1.8	MSG (621), 635, flavourings, emulsifier: E471
Smiths Squares (salt & vinegar)	39%	1.0* **	MSG (621), acidity regulator: E262, antioxidants: E320, E321, Emulsifiers: E322, E471, calcium hydroxide, calcium phosphate dibasic
Smiths Frazzles (bacon flavour)	43%	0.6* **	MSG (621), 635, flavourings, sugar, magnesium carbonate, trisodium phosphate, colour: beetroot red
Smiths Chipsticks (salt & vinegar)	46%	0.9* **	MSG (621), acidity regulator E262, seasoning
Sainsbury's Flintstones (tangy tomato)	54%	0.96g*	Acidity regulator: sodium diacetate, flavourings, lactose, sugar
Tesco Scooby snacks (barbecue spiders)	47%	1.4g	MSG (621), flavourings, colour: Caramel
Tesco Scooby snacks (tangy tomato fangs)	48%	1.1g	MSG (621), acidity regulator: sodium diacetate, flavourings, colour: carmine, vitamin mixture
Quintins snack pack (Beaky's prawn wrigglers)	?	0.92**	MSG (621), acidity regulator: sodium diacetate, flavourings, saccharin
Wolf Pom Bears (lightly salted)	53%	0.96g*	Emulsifier: lecithin, sugar
Bensons lunchbox snacks (Loony Lucy spicy loops)	?	?	MSG (621), flavouring, sweetener, saccharin

* calculated from salt figures on packet. Sodium figure may be an underestimate if product also contains MSG. ** figures from manufacturers, no figures provided on packet

Suspected carcinogen. Can provoke hypersensitive reactions. *Found in: KP Skips*

Caramel E150. Some forms are considered a health risk. Used in large quantities in food and drinks – maximum acceptable daily intakes often exceeded. *Found in: Tesco Scooby snacks*

Annatto E160(b). So-called 'natural' colour sometimes used instead of the infamous tartrazine. Can cause allergic reactions. *Found in: KP Skips, Smiths Quavers.*

Flavour enhancers: Typically used to enhance artificial rather than real flavours. *Monosodium glutamate (MSG) (621).* Subject of controversy for many years. Has gained a bad reputation for causing headaches, chest pains, nausea and dizziness in some individuals (known as 'Chinese Restaurant Syndrome'). However this has proved hard to confirm experimentally and regulatory bodies have permitted its general widespread use.

MSG has been found to cause damage to brain cells in young laboratory animals and is banned from foods for babies and young children. *Found in: virtually all the products we looked at except Golden Wonder Wotsits.*

Sainsbury's Flintstones and Wolf Pom Bears.

Flavourings: Unlike other additives, flavourings don't need official approval before they can be used, so it is hard to say that all flavourings are safe for long-term human consumption – even in the small quantities in which they are used in individual foods and the small amounts any one person eats (below). *Found in: all products apart from Wolf Pom Bears.*

Flavourings

The hundreds of types of crisps and savoury snacks on the market rely on flavourings to give them their distinctive taste. There are thousands of different flavourings used in foods, more than any other type of additive. But unlike other additives, flavourings don't have to have official approval before they can be used. This means that manufacturers don't have to show safety testing to get approval. The actual flavouring agents used in a product do not have to be declared and no E numbers are required.

Back in 1976 a UK Government

Too full of flavour!

Last October Mrs Deborah Fox, from Oxfordshire wrote to the Food Commission after she had bought a packet of salt and vinegar flavour Discos for her two year old daughter. She was angry that the snacks had been prominently displayed at child level which had encouraged her daughter to pester her and make her life difficult if she refused to buy them.

But more worryingly, before her daughter had eaten half the packet, the insides of her lips had become white and puffy and she was crying as her mouth was stinging so much. Mrs Fox was extremely concerned that the strong flavourings could have such an effect on a child.

So she wrote to the manufacturers, KP, who apologised, claiming that the Discos had accidentally been excessively flavoured. They explained that flavours are automatically added by machine and 'the product is continually tested to ensure that it is at a correct flavour level'. They could only assume that there had been a 'temporary malfunction of this machine'. Mrs Fox says she won't be buying any more Discos for her daughter. 'If the flavourings they use can have that effect on children, I don't like the idea of my daughter eating them even at normal levels.'

committee recommended that there should be a limited list of flavourings permitted but only now, nearly twenty years later, is the European Commission beginning to find out what manufacturers use, let alone decide on what is safe to be permitted.

In the meantime no-one can say for sure that all the flavourings in use are safe for long-term human con-

sumption – even in the small quantities in which they are used in individual foods and the small amounts any one person eats.

Beware of claims such as 'no artificial flavours'. Non-artificial can mean natural or nature-identical – which means manufactured in laboratories to mimic ones found in nature – and these aren't necessarily safer or better for you.

Crisps

How much salt is in a bag of crisps?

Not all manufacturers declared just how much salt was in their product (Walkers & McCoys), including some which claimed their products were 'lightly salted' (Ellerts, Bensons and Golden Wonder), so consumers have no way of checking how true their claims are. We think all manufacturers should give full nutritional information, but particularly those that make a claim.

Beware when you making comparisons between brands. Some manufacturers declare added salt, others declare sodium. One gram of sodium is equal to 2.5 grams of salt.

The World Health Organization recommends a maximum of 2.4g of sodium (equivalent to 6g of salt) a day, less than a heaped teaspoon and about half the amount we eat now. Cutting back on salt could help cut deaths from heart disease and stroke.

Lightly salted claims

Beware of 'lightly salted' claims. This has no meaning in law and we found products claiming to be 'lightly salted' that contained more salt than regular brands. For example Marks and Spencers' lightly salted crinkle crisps were the second saltiest crisp in our survey, while the crisps with the least sodium were Marks and Spencers ready salted and Sainsbury's Gourmet chips, which didn't even claim to be lightly salted.

We also found manufacturers making 'lightly salted' claims but not declaring the amount of salt or sodium on the packet. After next October this will be illegal. Ellert lower fat crinkle crisps, Benson Jacket Potato crisps and Golden Wonder lower fat crisps all claimed to be lightly salted but provided no information on the nutrition labelling.

How much salt is in crisps

	Amount of sodium in a typical 30g bag	per/100g
M&S ready salted	0.24g	0.8g
M&S lower fat crinkles	0.12g	0.4g
M&S handcooked ready salted	0.09g	0.3g
M&S lightly salted crinkle crisps	0.21g	0.7g
Sainsbury's ready salted*	0.18g	0.6g
Sainsbury's Gourmet chips*	0.10g	0.36g
Sainsbury's lower fat lightly salted	0.12g	0.4g
Golden Wonder ready salted**	0.19g	0.66g
Golden Wonder lower fat lightly salted*	0.12g	0.4g
Tesco ready salted*	0.18g	0.6g
Tesco lower fat lightly salted crisps	0.12g	0.4g
Brannigan's pan style crisps	0.12g	0.4g

* calculated from salt figures on packet ** no figures given on packet

How much fat is there in crisps?

It will come as no surprise to learn that crisps are a high fat food. Nearly two-thirds of their calories come from fat. On average the UK population is advised to eat no more than about 35% of calories from fat. The regular crisps in our survey ranged between 57 and 64% of their calories from fat.

One 30g bag of crisps would provide up to 11g of fat, that's one-sixth of the recommended maximum daily fat intake for a seven-year old child. Eleven grams of fat is equivalent to the fat in a chocolate product like a KitKat.

What type of oil?

All the crisp brands that we looked at were fried in vegetable oil but four of the brands, Walkers, Sainsbury's, Tesco's and McCoys also used the less healthy hydrogenated vegetable oils.

Hydrogenation is an industrial process which hardens vegetables oils so they are no longer liquid at room temperature. From the food manufacturers point of view they get an oil which is harder with a longer shelf life but its not such good news for health.

Hydrogenation converts healthier unsaturated fats into trans-saturates which are considered just as much a health hazard as the artery-clogging saturated fats which we are advised to cut back on.

Lower fat crisps

Health concerns over crisps have now led to a thriving market in 'lower fat' crisps. That's good news, but watch

out! These products may be lower in fat but they are not a low fat food. At 43-49% calories from fat, they are still fairly high in fat.

To qualify as low in fat, foods have to contain less than 5g of fat per 100g grams. Lower fat crisps have about 25g/100g. To qualify for a 'reduced' or 'lower fat' claim foods have to have 25% less fat than regular products. All the products we looked at claimed to contain between 30-40% less fat.

Fibre

A 30g packet of crisps contains about 1.5 g of dietary fibre which is about 10% of a child's dietary requirement. Few manufacturers declared how much fibre was in their product. There are different ways of measuring fibre and when figures were given it was not always clear which method was used. This made comparisons difficult.

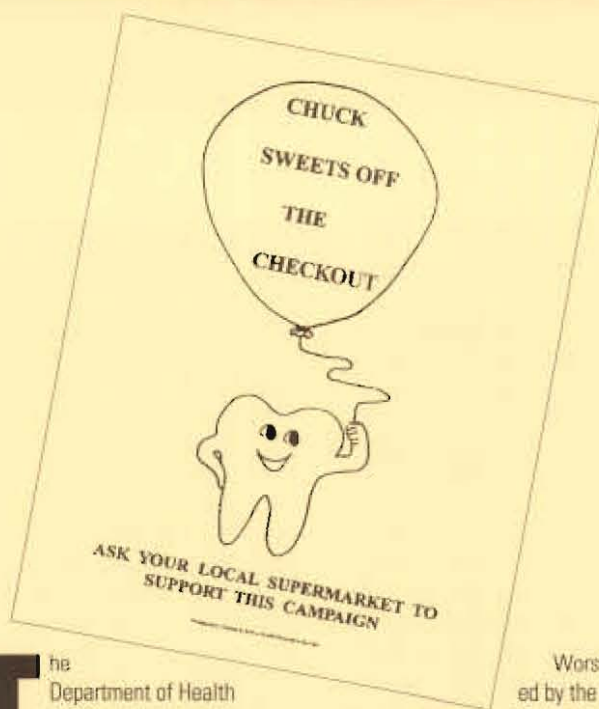
While crisps do contain a useful amount of fibre it is not a very healthy way to boost your fibre intake, as you'll also be boosting your fat and salt intakes!

Vitamins

Crisp manufacturers have made much of the fact that there is more vitamin C in a bag of crisps than in an apple. On average a medium sized apple contains about 6mg of vitamin C while a 30g bag of crisps contains 8mg. What they don't say is that there is also over 100 times more fat and sodium in a bag of crisps compared with an apple, or that apples are not a particularly good source of vitamin C. For example there is ten times more vitamin C in an orange than in a bag of crisps.

Lower fat crisps

Product	% calories from fat	manufacturer's claim
Golden Wonder, Golden Lights	43%	40% less fat than standard crisps
M & S lower fat crinkle crisps	44%	30% less fat than standards crisp
Ellert Lower Fat Crinkle Crisps	44%	35% lower fat than in standard crisps
Sainsburys Lower fat Crisps	46%	30% lower fat than Sainsburys standard crisps
Tesco Lower Fat Crisps	49%	30% less fat than Tesco standard crisps



The Department of Health has welcomed the campaign to 'Chuck sweets off the checkout', which was launched in January with the backing of dietitians, health visitors, dental health educators and parents.

Campaigners are urging supermarkets to put healthier alternatives and non-food items at their checkouts rather than sweets which tempt children.

Supermarkets which rate best are Sainsbury's and Waitrose, neither of which displays confectionery at their checkouts.

Worst rated by the campaign are

Marks and Spencer, the Co-op and Safeways all of which have sweets at the majority of checkouts. Marks and Spencer say they will now provide two sweet-free aisles in every store.

The campaign has produced an action pack, posters and ideas on healthy snacks for young children.

■ For more details write to: Iona Smeaton, Chief Community Dietitian, c/o the Wilson Hospital, Cranmer Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 4TP.

Heinz removes the starch — in the USA

Food giant Heinz has taken a step in removing the thickeners and starches that feature in many cheap baby foods and are selling some products with the slogan 'no modified starch'. But you will have to fly to America to get them.

In the UK you will be hard put to find any Heinz baby meals without thickening agents, the starches, pastes and gelling agents that absorb extra water. Heinz's spokesperson, Dr Nigel Dickie, has defended the use of thickeners as valuable to 'ensure the correct consistency'. At the same time he admitted that water also had to be added 'to

ensure the correct consistency'.

Some products include two, three and even four different types of thickening agent. Critics say they are used to mask the lack of real food in a watery product. Thickening agents include starch, modified starch, cornflour, modified cornflour, wheat starch, rice flour, soya flour, gelatin, pectin and vegetable gums.

And in another move, Heinz, who boasted last year 'none of our savoury varieties have added sugar' are sneaking the sweetness back into the savoury dishes in the form of fruit syrups.



Heinz USA boast 'no thickeners' while Heinz UK defend their necessity.



Cow & Gate thicken Olvarit

The ready-to-eat baby food manufacturer, Cow & Gate launched a new range of products under the Olvarit label three years ago. The image of the Olvarit range was one of superior quality ingredients and recipes like the ones you make at home.

The jars of Olvarit typically cost 20p-25p more than regular brands, which could encourage some shoppers to feel that 'it must be worth it or they wouldn't charge so much'.

But bad habits die hard. A close look at the Olvarit label shows that cheap thickeners such as refined wheat starch, rice flour, cornflour and pectin have crept into the range. We found cornflour and wheat starch, as well as puréed pasta, in the Spaghetti Bolognese. And we found wheat starch, cornflour and pectin thickening the puréed Summer Fruit Salad.

TEA-CUP IN A STORM: Premier Teas are promoting their Typhoo brand with a new symbol 'caring for tea and our tea pickers'. It marks 'our commitment and care for our product and those involved in its production,' say the company.

However the press launch in February was cancelled at short notice amid reports that the parent company Hillsdown Holdings had sacked virtually all of Premier's directors.

The symbol is based on independent assessment of the suppliers' plantations, using criteria that include workers' welfare and sustainable agriculture. Unlike some big tea companies, Premier doesn't own any estates or plantations, but buys on contract from approved growers. It has spent six years weeding out less suitable growers and guaranteeing contracts with the better ones. It is now in a position to market its progressive strategy by selling the symbol. 'It puts the ethics of fair trading onto the supermarket shelf,' said one commentator. 'Let's hope it turns the spotlight on what the other companies are doing.'

Meanwhile Hillsdown Holdings has reported a 20 per cent slump in profits and is making drastic cuts to its portfolio of activities. If they sell off Premier there is no guarantee that the 'caring' will continue.



Thirst aid for brewers

Drink a pint of Stone's bitter and you could feel nearly twice as thirsty as you would after a pint of Carling Black Label.

Concerned trading standards officers have been eager to identify a secret ingredient in beers and lagers that appears to encourage greater consumption of fluids. Sandwell's Environmental and Consumer Protection Department joined with researchers Keith Thomas from Sunderland University and Eric Millstone from Sussex University to track down the possible cause.

Willing volunteers were asked to join a tasting session, and were given a pint of one of the brews shown in the table. Half-an-hour later they were given a glass of water and encouraged to drink

whatever they needed to 'refresh themselves' before being given a second pint to taste. The actual purpose was to see how much water the volunteers drank, and results showed significant differences between the products tested.

However, the obvious causes, such as salt or alcoholic strength, either of which might be thought to encourage greater thirst, did not seem to be a sufficient explanation. 'No single factor seems to be leading to the effect,' said Dr Millstone. 'There may be an interaction of factors, but it wasn't obvious in the results. Or there may be some ingredient we didn't detect - and we strongly support the call for alcoholic drinks to have to list their ingredients as other foods do.'

Bass, who own the Stone's brewery at Sheffield, said they were unaware of any secret ingredient. 'If we knew what the ingredient was in Stone's Bitter, we would be putting it into our Carling Black Label which came bottom of the list,' said a spokeswoman.

Thirst effect remains a mystery

The water needed to 'refresh' volunteers after drinking a pint of beer or lager differed significantly between products. But the salt (sodium), alcoholic strength, and preservative (sulphur dioxide) levels were not able to explain the effect.

	Water needed (ml)	Alcohol	Sodium (mg/l)	Sulphur Dioxide (mg/l)
Stone's keg bitter	315	3.8%	132	0.8
Holstein keg lager	285	5.1%	148	7.4
Arkell's Best draught bitter	269	3.8%	86	89.0
Mitchell's & Butler's keg mild	252	3.6%	172	0.4
Fosters Export keg lager	236	5.0%	116	6.8
Carlsberg Pils keg lager	213	3.4%	110	1.1
Carling Black Label keg lager	189	3.6%	52	2.0

Source: British Food Journal, February 1993.

Sulphur in vegeburgers

Changes to the Food Regulations are being recommended by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to allow what they call 'vegetable and cereal protein products' to contain the preservative sulphur dioxide.

Sulphur dioxide is not currently permitted in such products and most vegeburger manufacturers use chilling as a means of preventing bacterial growth. But following 'a submission from industry' MAFF has accepted that levels of up to 200mg/kg can be allowed in uncooked products. They will be recommending this to

the European Commission where new legislation is currently being prepared.

Sulphur dioxide and the sulphites are widely used in other foods, such as sausages, regular burgers, dried fruit, and wines and beers. The preservatives are linked to headaches and nausea, and can provoke asthmatic attacks in susceptible people. They also destroy vitamin B1, a nutrient which is not stored in the body and which is consumed at barely sufficient levels in some groups of the population (eg women on low incomes).

The fat is down but the sugar is up — by over ten per cent! Britain's hugely-popular digestive is hoping to appeal to slimmers, but there are still nearly 70 Calories in each biscuit (down less than seven per cent on regular digestives).

Comfrey tablets to go

Following warnings from the government's Committee on Toxicity (COT), the Food Minister, Nicholas Soames, has asked all manufacturers of comfrey tablets and capsules to withdraw their products from the shops.

'Comfrey contains toxic substances known as pyrrolizidine alkaloids, part of a family of alkaloids of which some are known to cause liver damage and cause tumours in laboratory animals,' said Mr Soames.

'Although the toxicity data were limited, the COT considered there was evidence they could cause liver damage in animals and man.'

Comfrey teas and herbal infusions are not affected, as the levels of alkaloid are considered too low. Comfrey preparations used externally were not considered a cause for concern, although products such as comfrey roots used for poultices will carry a warning against their ingestion.

market place

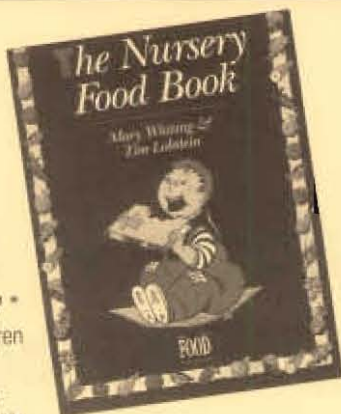
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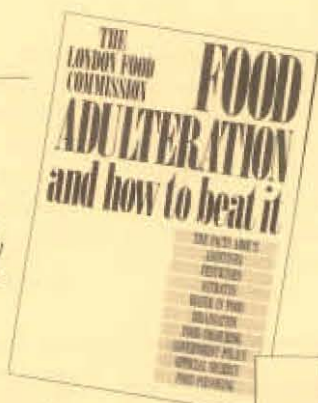


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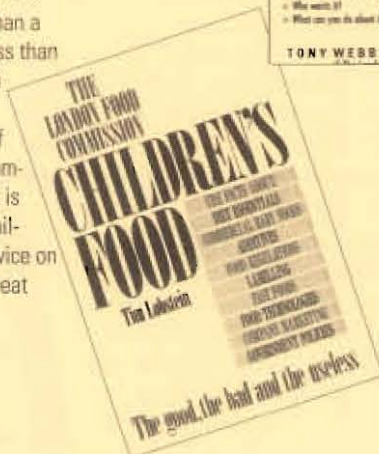
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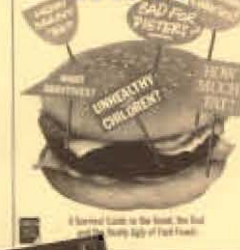
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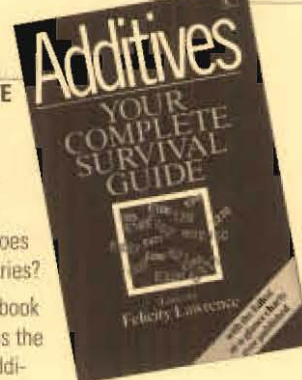


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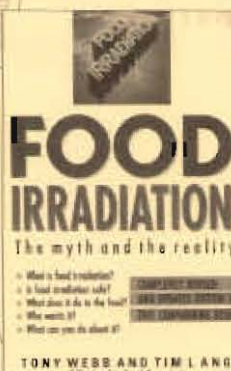


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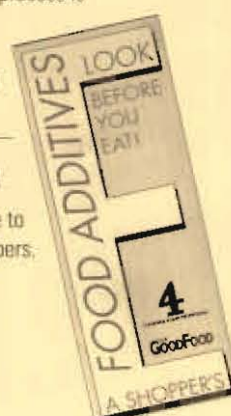
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Chocolate's

Guilty

Pleasure

Chocolate's advertising image is a far cry from the realities of cocoa production, writes Sue Dibb.

The adverts may portray the beautiful, leggy model secretly indulging herself with a chocolate bar in a soft porn fantasy but the reality for women both in the developed and developing countries is a far cry from adland's dream factory.

The sensual indulgence of chocolate's promotion to women in the west is just one of the contradictions highlighted in a new book, *Chocolate Unwrapped: The Politics of Pleasure*, by the Women's Environmental Network (WEN), and in *The Pesticide Hazard*, Barbara Dinham highlights the health threat of pesticides to workers in the third world.

Few chocolate consumers realise how their pleasure may affect the lives of women in developing countries such as Malaysia where, according to WEN, it is women who work predominately on the cocoa plantations as pesticide sprayers. The women rarely wear protective clothing and leaking spray equipment leads to constant contact with sprayer's skin while the spray mist is inhaled. Women have been found mixing pesticides by hand and removing blockages from spray nozzles by mouth, unaware of the toxic hazards pesticides can pose.

Vasanthi Arumugam of the Pesticides Action Network (PAN) has documented the shocking effects pesticide spraying has had on the health of sprayers. Skin irritation and rashes are common, as are breathing difficulties and irregular menstrual cycles. It's a price women workers have to pay to support their families when there is no alternative employment.

Many of the Malaysian women she interviewed were unaware that their headaches, tiredness or dizziness were initial symptoms of pesticide poisoning. Women using the weedkiller Paraquat complained of

skin rashes, sore red eyes and discoloured nails; half the women spraying a toxic insecticide, lindane, complained of skin rashes with one in five suffering nausea, difficulties in breathing, stomach pain and dizziness.

In Brazil, one of the other main cocoa producing countries, WEN report that women are increasingly required to become sterilized in order to get work on Brazil's plantations. Then they earn so little for their work that many are unlikely to have ever tasted chocolate.

Much of the cocoa used in the UK has traditionally been imported from West Africa, particularly Ghana where there has been a better record of good agricultural practices and controlled and moderate use of pesticides. However this has been changing. Ten years ago in return for loans from the World Bank Ghana has been pushed towards privatisation and mass production of cocoa using more pesticides. At the World Bank's insistence over 20,000 sprayers have lost their jobs leaving it to the farmers to spray their own crops, without guidance or assistance.

Cocoa is just one cash crop that has become dependent on pesticides. Whether it is bananas from Costa Rica, cotton in Egypt or rice in India the issues are remarkably similar. The World Health Organization estimates that each year pesticides cause over three million acute severe cases of pesticide poisoning and 20,000 unintentional deaths, mostly in third world countries. Other WHO estimates put the figures as high as 25 million workers acutely poisoned every year. While minor food scares in the west make front page headlines, global poisoning on such a massive scale goes almost unreported.

In her book, *The Pesticide Hazard* published earli-

er this year, Barbara Dinham of the Pesticides Trust points out that the primary human victims of the global pesticide trade are poor people, whose suffering tends to be invisible to those in positions of economic and political power. A trade union organiser in Brazil, talking of a cocoa plantation worker mixing pesticides with his bare hands, says 'in a few years time, this worker will be trembling, perhaps go blind, and will certainly die young without even realising why. Plantation owners spend a lot on pesticides, but if workers become ill, they sack them and hire others.'

In spite of health and environmental risks, pesticide sales to third world markets are expanding. Trade liberalisation and monetary policies which encourage cash crops for exports will tend to increase pesticide sales to agricultural-producer countries. Barbara Dinham reports that while there is a move away from some highly toxic pesticides like DDT which have long been banned in the West, numerous other pesticides are in common use which though less environmentally persistent, are more hazardous to the health of applicators. Education and training for safe use of pesticides can play a useful role — though, as she points out, its value is limited in areas of illiteracy or where plantation owners show little interest in providing protective clothing and safe equipment.

The Pesticides Action Network would prefer to see less hazardous production methods, such as integrated pest management, techniques to reduce pesticide use, or non-chemical, sustainable alternatives. This would not only provide safer conditions for plantation workers, protect the environment but also limit the levels of pesticide residues in the crops themselves. That would be good news not only for the third world workers but also consumers in the west.

Perhaps it is also time that western consumers cared more about the way in which their food is produced. If angry parents can get additives taken out of their own children's food shouldn't they also demand that companies buying agricultural commodities from the third world ensure that plantation practices meet standards for worker health and safety? Surely large chocolate producing multinationals like Nestlé, Mars, Jacobs Suchard (owned by Philip Morris), Cadbury's and Hershey could use their buying power to improve conditions on cocoa plantations; they could also invest a little more of their profits in more sustainable cocoa production. Then perhaps we could all feel a little less guilty indulging ourselves with chocolate.

Chocolate Unwrapped; the Politics of Pleasure by Cat Cox is published by the Women's Environmental Network, price £8.99 available from WEN, Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Avenue, London N5 2EA (071-354 8823) and selected bookshops.

The Pesticide Hazard — A Global Health and Environmental Audit is compiled by Barbara Dinham of the Pesticides Trust and published by Zed Books price £12.95

■ Sue Dibb is Co-director of the Food Commission

Overkill at the abattoir?

In the name of better hygiene MAFF has closed over 200 slaughterhouses. Is this good news for consumers or, asks Tim Lobstein, are some vested interests making a killing?

‘We are being strangled to death by our own government,’ complained Graham Spellman, a director of Reading Abattoir in Berkshire. ‘They have seen fit to translate a small number of simple EC directives into a bureaucratic tourniquet.’

‘Workers, animals, farmers, abattoir owners, butchers, haulage contractors and the public will face higher prices and reduced quality due to increased costs and more stressed animals.’ No one would gain and everyone would suffer, he fumed in a well-publicised letter to John Major in January.

This is nonsense, of course. There are several interested parties who will gain. The main beneficiaries are, according to MAFF, consumers who want better hygiene for their meat and poultry. With food poisoning cases running at record levels anything that reduces the risk of infected meat must, say MAFF, be a good thing. Tight regulations and the introduction of veterinary inspection of animals pre-slaughter are a means of combatting poor hygiene.

Unfortunately, the regulations being imposed by MAFF are not all concerned with better hygiene — and many take no account of local circumstances. Abattoir owners are complaining of having to build rest rooms and showers for truck drivers, even when the drivers are local farmers less than half an hour’s drive away. Abattoirs must have two access routes, one for trucks carrying animals in and one for car-

casses leaving, even though the vehicles may share the roads outside.

The costs of making the necessary changes has proved to be too high for the smaller independent abattoirs, and an estimated 200 out of nearly 800 in the UK have closed in the last two years. With local, usually small businesses forced to stop trading, this means that the larger abattoirs have taken over the trade.

These larger firms — such as Hillsdown (currently trying to sell off its abattoir interests), United Meat Packers (largely halal meat production) and the Fatstock Marketing Corporation — already dominate the market. By the end of the decade it is expected that only 100 abattoirs will remain, each one processing an average of 1000 head of livestock every day of the year (excluding poultry).

Larger abattoirs can afford to make changes to meet the regulations, and may already have many of the extra facilities that the smaller abattoirs are being required to install. Nonetheless it is expected that the remaining abattoirs will put up their charges, particularly to specialist trades such as organic/free-range farmers and the butchers they supply.

The larger plants may already have the capacity to cope with the increase in trade, but they will have lit-

tle interest in the farm shop or independent butcher who sells specialist meats bought in small quantities from known smallholdings. The premium for organic and free-range meat over mass-produced meat will almost certainly rise (see box: Organic hit hardest).

Animal transportation firms are also set to increase their business, as farmers will no longer be able to bring their own animals to a local plant but will have to find ways of sending them across the county.

The implications for animal welfare are considerable. Already several areas of the UK are without facilities, including the Isle of Wight, the Scilly Isles and parts of the west coast of Scotland. Of 16 slaughterhouses in East Anglia, only three remain, making journeys of 60 miles not uncommon. New Forest farmers have lost their local facility and must now take their animals up to 80 miles.

‘There has been a lot of publicity about the appalling conditions suffered by animals being exported live to the continent,’ said Peter Stevenson for the animal welfare group Compassion in World Farming. ‘It is ironic that public concern about the transport of farm animals is on the increase and yet EC laws are forcing ever longer journeys on these animals.’

Other groups back these views. ‘We believe ani-



Facing a long journey. Up to fifty miles to the nearest abattoir will increase suffering for livestock

Photo: Compassion in World Farming

imals should be slaughtered as close as possible to the farm they come from,' says the Humane Slaughter Association, a group dedicated to the welfare of food animals from farm to slaughter. Their solution is to turn the whole business on its head: instead of sending animals off to the slaughterhouse they have developed the idea of bringing the slaughterhouse to the farm (see box: Bringing it home).

A third interested party which stands to benefit from the new regulations on abattoirs is the veterinary profession. Under earlier EC legislation, vets were supposed to inspect all animals before they were killed, a common procedure in some European countries, but rare in the UK where a specialist — the meat inspector — looked after all aspects of meat hygiene and animal infection. As a compromise, the UK accepted vet inspections for those premises which exported meat to other EC countries. Remaining abattoirs were 'derogated' from the EC regulations and could continue with meat inspectors alone.

But 1993 has changed this. Vets have taken over the meat inspectors' roles. According to Richard North, a consultant food safety advisor and organiser of the newly-formed Quality Meat and Livestock Alliance which is fighting the abattoir closures, the move from meat inspector to vet is politically inspired, and reflects the government's determination to weaken the role of local authorities who employ inspectors.

'The regulations are being used as an excuse to create a centralised monster bureaucracy run by vets, the National Meat Hygiene Agency (NMHA), employing 1800 staff, to take over local authority functions,' he argues. And he points out that in France the vets are paid from the state purse, while in the UK the vets must be paid for by the abattoirs — the NMHA itself is expected to be a self-funding agency.

As evidence that MAFF is definitely targeting local authorities, North quotes Nicholas Soames, Food Minister, who claimed in February '...we have to accept that lack of supervision and enforcement by some local authorities over the years has contributed to the number of non-exporting abattoirs falling below the standards required...'

North calls for the veterinary monopoly to be bro-

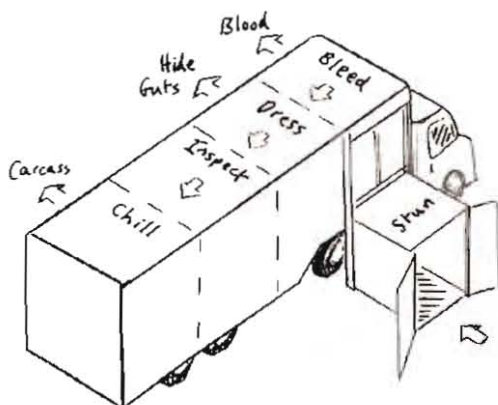
Bringing it home

With the rapid decline of small abattoirs, farmers will be forced to send their animals long distances. But there is an alternative.

In a bid to retain the advantages of small, local abattoirs, while also meeting EC hygiene regulations and reducing the need for transporting animals long distances, the Humane Slaughter Association have developed the idea of a 'mobile slaughterhall' on an articulated trailer.

The unit would be equipped to kill, dress and chill cattle, sheep and pigs, and would visit suitable farms equipped with holding pens, staff amenities, water and power supplies. It is designed to cope with up to ten head of cattle or 70 sheep in a day.

'The only alternative is to keep open a network of local slaughterhouses, and staff them on a part-



time basis, but this would still entail considerable capital costs on many sites to bring them up to EC standards,' said Miriam Parker, deputy director of the HSA. 'Mobile units are a feasible alternative, provided we can ensure that the farms we visit have the right facilities already built.'

The mobile units are expected to cost around £120,000 each, and the facilities on the receiving farms would cost 'up to several thousand' at each site.

■ Details from the Humane Slaughter Association, 34 Blanche Lane, South Mimms, Potters Bar, Herts. EN6 3PA. 0707-659040.

ken up. 'The European Commission should be informed that the UK, medical-based system of public health control is fully equivalent to veterinary-dominated systems and conforms with the spirit of the Directive.'

After years of demoralisation, knowing MAFF had intended to reduce the role of meat inspectors, it may prove hard to reverse their ultimate demise.

Yet the need for vets may rest on an error translating the EC directive. According to Hull's Public Health Director, Dr James Dunlop, the directive refers to 'veterinary officers' which is not necessarily the same as veterinary surgeons. The latter are trained for five years, whereas 'meat inspection on the continent is frequently carried out by retired policemen who have done a six month training course'.

Changing the name of meat inspector to veterinary officer was all that was needed. Who interprets the regulations at MAFF? And in whose interests?

■ Tim Lobstein is Co-director of the Food Commission.

Organic hit hardest

No assessment has been made of the effect of abattoir closures on organic livestock rearers. One farmer, Richard Young, told this magazine that he has already seen costs rise by over £50 per animal and expects further increases.

'Our local abattoir in the Vale of Evesham has closed and we now have to transport our animals 17 miles instead of five. But this abattoir, too, may be forced to close and the next is over 30 miles away. Because of its vast size it is not prepared to kill our animals in a definable separate batch - which is essential to maintain their organic status.'

'Unless MAFF take a more realistic attitude many small and specialist producers will go out of business.'

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French lessons

What makes French farmers take to the streets with burning tyres, manure spreaders and their *operations escargots*, asks Hugh Raven. Could threatened British smallholders learn from their tactics?

The French have a word for it. In the 14th century the word *jacquerie* — meaning agricultural insurgency — entered the lexicon, and French farmers have been accustomed to show their anger in public ever since.

Though France is by no means the most rural of EC countries, the French body politic seems uniquely susceptible to agricultural pressure. Put crudely, manifestations get results.

But why? Firstly, in comparison with Britain, France has a great many farmers — or, as some still proudly call themselves, peasants. In common with other industrialised countries, France's farmers are less numerous than they used to be — the total has halved since 1970. But they still account for over 6 per cent of the workforce, three times the level in Britain. And though the average age of a French farmer is getting on towards retirement, they have families. Add a spouse and some children, plus a similar number of people working in agriculture-related indus-

tries, and you have arguably one-sixth of the population with a strong economic link with farming. If farming suffers, so do they.

Secondly, even where a family has no immediate connection with agriculture, most have rural roots. France was late to industrialise: while Britain underwent the enclosures, which swept millions of rural workers into the cities as cheap labour for manufacturing, the French stayed put on their farms 'like potatoes in a sack', according to Marx. And there they remained — until quite recently. Even after the war, France still had well over two million farmers, with an active agricultural population of nearly six million. Like Britain, France's farming has since, in Gummer-speak, been 're-structured'. But that has taken place within living memory, so even families with no current farming connections may well have a recent farming past. They sympathise.

Farmers in France engage public support. When they blockaded Disneyland last summer, hardly a

(French) voice was raised against them (Brits in traffic jams were another matter). Unlike the British, the French overwhelmingly take their holidays in their own country. They want their countryside to look nice. When we want to see pretty countryside, we go abroad. The French just leave town. And though it is a sector in relative decline, French farming is also economically important. France is far bigger than the UK, and although a lower proportion of its surface area is farmed (just over half in France; three-quarters here), it still has a lot of agricultural land. Some of that is amongst the best in Europe — wheat growers in the Paris basin can out-produce almost any competition worldwide. This has resulted in France's food trade balance — in the red in the early 1960s — to have a healthy surplus second only to the USA.

So French farmers are a political force to be reckoned with. Most of them support the political right (although there is a Communist tradition amongst the *paysans* of the South) and they are capable of swaying the voting intentions of others, to considerable effect. They get what they want: witness France's leading role in stalling the GATT negotiations. And witness also the extra Government aid worth £130 million announced in 1991 after a massive demonstration in Paris, and a further £250 million to soften the blow of last summer's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms.

The CAP reforms themselves will mean cuts in the support prices for agricultural output. Since its inception, the CAP aimed to keep EC farmers in business through offering open-ended price support. It was because all units of output are rewarded equally, no matter how much a farmer produced, that Europe was engulfed in surplus products. Now, to cut output and control the ballooning agricultural budget, farmers are facing price cuts and an obligation, if they want to be compen-

sated, to set land aside.

Price cuts make French farmers angry. They are deeply in debt — because, at the behest of their political masters, they invested heavily in modernising their operations. Their incomes were already low, because though they get artificially-supported prices, the amounts actually reaching the farmer (as distinct from paying for storage and export or destruction of unwanted produce) have reduced steadily for several years. This reduction in support has affected all EC farmers, but France has felt it more than the UK because its farms are smaller (half the size, on average) at a time when more and more land is required to make a living.

The CAP reforms were unpopular in France: big farmers were against them because, being the most heavily indebted, they faced more difficulty paying off loans on reduced incomes; small farmers opposed them because the element of bias towards the smaller farmer in the original reform package was removed (at the behest of the UK, with our larger average farm size).

But if CAP reform made French farmers angry, a GATT agreement will doubly enrage them. They had just about got over last summer's bad news, when it became clear that a GATT deal between the US and EC would very likely re-open the CAP reform negotiations, to impose still further burdens. Its still not clear how real the threat of re-negotiation is: under Ray MacSharry, the EC produced a paper claiming that the deal with the Americans could be honoured within the farm cuts already agreed. The French Agriculture Ministry pre-empted that message by leaking another set of figures which said further deep cuts would be required. The truth is probably somewhere in between — depending on future planting decisions of individual farmers and the size of their harvests.

The perception is that this is an American plot to undermine French farming. Objections vary according to whom you ask: the peasant farm sector objects to the sacrifice of the traditional, environment-friendly smallholder for the sake of international free trade. The large cereal producers see it as a ploy to frustrate what they call their *vocation exportatrice*: their right to a fair share of the world food trade. US food facilities have felt the heat: both Coca-Cola and McDonald's installations have been ransacked.

What of the British farmer? Facing the same price pressure, the larger farmers, particularly in the climatically and topographically favoured eastern counties, will probably survive — possibly even prosper — by cutting costs and inputs. Smaller farmers are going under in unprecedented numbers. Twelve thousand people left farming last year alone, and in the last decade at least 600 have taken their own lives in the ultimate statement of dejection.

But British farmers are not rioting.

In the main, British farmers don't riot. They're an independent-minded lot, who have never been good at joint (or direct) action. But perhaps more importantly, they are cowed by the overwhelming impression in the UK that a GATT agreement would be a good thing. Fourteen years of Conservative Government has instilled into the national psyche the belief that more trade has got to be beneficial — and GATT is the mechanism to deliver it. So while farmers might believe GATT presents a threat to their livelihood, they think the opprobrium which would be heaped upon them if they scuppered the deal would outweigh any damage such a deal would do to their businesses. Tyres remain unburnt, manure unsquirted.

In France they have got more to save and more determination to save it.

■ *Hugh Raven is Director of the SAFE (Sustainable Agriculture, Food and the Environment) Alliance.*

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Food for the Future

Highgrove – Portrait of an estate

by HRH The Prince of Wales and Charles Clover. Chapmans, Orion House, 5 Upper St Martins Lane, London WC2H 9EA. ISBN 185592-6105. £20.

Charles Clover said in a recent radio interview that the decision by The Prince of Wales to convert Highgrove to organic farming "posed a challenge to the heart of the agricultural establishment". He was right. The publication of 'Highgrove - Portrait of an Estate' will probably come to be seen as denoting a major landmark in the development of organic farming.

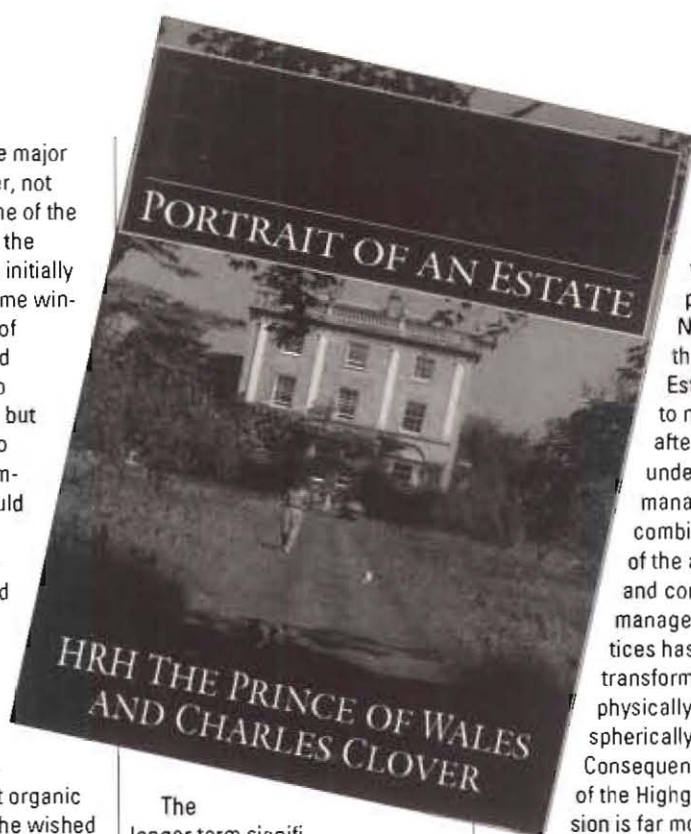
In this detailed and beautifully illustrated book, the Prince of Wales sets out his concerns for the environment, his vision for the future and the steps he has taken to develop Highgrove as a practical example of ecologically sustainable farming. Co-author Charles Clover, now a firm organic advocate but initially selected as a sceptical agnostic towards organic farming, has pulled off a truly remarkable feat. He has managed to combine the various strands of the history of the acquisition of Highgrove, the development of the gardens and the conversion of the farm, into a compelling account of the evolution of what is not only the best known but is also rapidly becoming one of the best farmed organic holdings in the country.

Clover also retraces the Prince's steps in the years that led to his decision to farm organically. The story that unfolds is one not many people will know or could guess. The Prince, who was searching for a more environmentally sustainable way of farming, decided to try organic methods after a private visit to Barry Wooley's farm and Elm Farm Research Centre in 1984. Then in 1989, after his visit to Kite's Nest Farm, he announced his intention to convert the entire

Highgrove estate. These major decisions were, however, not without difficulties. Some of the Prince's advisers within the Duchy of Cornwall were initially incredulous and took some winning round. The Prince of Wales told them in broad terms what he wished to achieve with the estate, but was prepared to defer to those with practical farming experience who would have to run the farm. Initially, the Prince himself felt sure there would be some less intensive option which satisfied his concern for the environment which was not as demanding as full organic farming. The realisation that organic farming was the option he wished to pursue developed only slowly.

The book provides a fascinating background to the Highgrove conversion and all the principal players in the story. It also sets out very graphically, in the form of a detailed diary written by farm manager David Wilson, the farming year at Highgrove. The Prince's considerable knowledge and deep concern for the environment manifests itself in almost every aspect of the book, whether it be the careful restoration and development of the gardens or the care for wildlife. The farm, for example has been the site of a barn owl re-establishment programme which has been monitored by the British Trust for Ornithology.

The book is not only a 'good read' but also contains what is undoubtedly the best collection of colour photographs of Highgrove and the organic farms which influenced the Prince ever published. There are also some endearing and surprisingly perceptive references to well known and much loved members of the organic movement. These will be much enjoyed by those who have been fortunate enough to meet the characters involved, such as Mary Young of Kite's Nest Farm.



The longer term significance impact of 'Highgrove - Portrait of an Estate' is that it is likely to bring about a significant change to public attitudes towards organic farming. At a political level, it will help establish organic farming as a serious contender in the debate on future agricultural policy. This would not have been possible were it not for the fact that the farm manager David Wilson has not only succeeded brilliantly in demonstrating the environmental potential of organic farming but is also beginning to make economic headway with the commercial enterprises on the estate.

Important though this undoubtedly is, for me the outstanding contribution of the book is in the introduction, where the Prince speaks of the importance of attachment to place, where "every tree, every hedgerow, every wet place, every mountain and river had a special, almost sacred, character of its own." Within this simple observation is an understanding which is fundamental to the organic approach, but its significance is often misunderstood or ignored.

Both the text and the pictures in the book bear witness to the fact that at Highgrove, the Prince

has been determined to practice what he preaches. No visitor to the Highgrove Estate can fail to notice that after eight years under organic management the combined impact of the agriculture and conservation management practices has been a transformation, both physically and atmospherically.

Consequently, the story of the Highgrove conversion is far more than a sermon on what should be done, it is a testament of what has already been achieved. It goes without saying that its influence will be far reaching.

Patrick Holden

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Biosphere Politics

Jeremy Rifkin, Harper Collins, 77-85 Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8JB, 1992, ISBN 000-509316-4, £7.95. (Also *Entropy*, Jeremy Rifkin, Paludin, 1990.)

Nature's Web

Peter Marshall, Simon & Shuster, West Garden Place, Kendall Street, London W2 2AD, 1992, ISBN 0-671-71065-6, £9.99.

The Voice of the Earth

Theodore Roszak, Bantam Books, 61 Uxbridge Road, London W5, 1993, ISBN 0593-0281-63, £17.99.

One of the strengths of theoretical ecology is the fact that it still has not been socially organised and institutionalised in universities. Every self-respecting university in the world now engages in practical ecological studies of food chains, eco-systems and species habitats but there is no equivalent commitment to the theoretical development of ecology. We have to rely, instead, on odd, resolute individuals scattered around the globe, most of them either voluntarily outside, or actually excluded from academic institutions.

Jeremy Rifkin is best known as a political activist second only to Ralph Nader in what he has cost US corporations over the years; Peter Marshall writes from a remote hill farm in Snowdonia; Theodore Roszak is a freelance writer and lecturer.

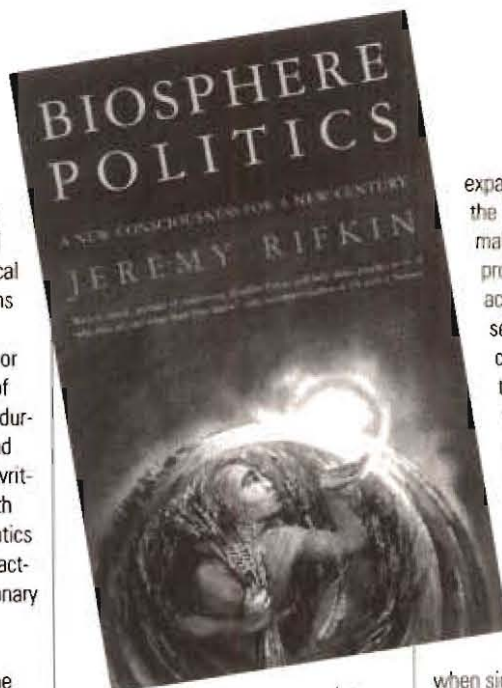
One of the main weaknesses of theoretical ecology stems from the geographical and social isolation of its theorists. There are no funds for them to get together and argue, and few grants to finance them through laborious studies of the literature. The result is a lack of real intellectual engagement in an area that desperately needs it.

If people like Rifkin, Marshall, Roszak and other like minds could be brought together for a month each year, their minds would be that much sharper, and our understanding of the constraints and possibilities of the biosphere would be that much better

as a result.

Peter Marshall has produced a very thorough review of ecological thinking, starting with the ecological content of the major world religions — easier to find in Taoism and Buddhism than it is in Christianity or Islam — the mechanistic theories of Europe's first scientific revolution during the 16th and 17th centuries and the potential green shoots in the writings of the philosophers of the 18th century Enlightenment. The romantics of the 19th century are seen as reacting to the collapse of the revolutionary hopes of the 1790's by turning to nature. Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge are seen as providing the basis for the writings of utopian socialists such as Morris and Proudhon, and utopian anarchists such as Godwin and Kropotkin. Marshall then turns his attention to Marx, and to the contradictions between some of his earlier pro-ecological writings and his later belief in the need to dominate nature — a secularised version of the Judao-Christian imperative. This is followed by a rapid survey of the ideas of Darwin, Haeckel (who coined the word ecology), Whitehead, Bergson and Heidegger. As one might expect, there is a discussion of the wider implications of quantum mechanics and the currently fashionable chaos theory. Strangely, these precede any mention of thermodynamics or entropy theory, which Marshall challenges by appealing to a version of the Gaia hypothesis, whilst rejecting any religious interpretation or use of it. The final section of the book seeks a synthesis between liberal democracy and ecological sustainability, but as a matter of faith rather than as a political possibility.

This book is written in the style of an objective survey of ideas rather than that of a documented argument and thesis. The ideas are examined in a vacuum, unrelated to the era in which they were formulated. If there is any single truth that Marx bequeathed us it is historical materialism — the theory that our ideas about the world we live in are a function of the way we produce our food, clothing, warmth and shelter. In a sense it is an extension of the old saying that necessity is the mother of invention. In other words, our ecological thinking is



determined by ecological changes and crises. Perhaps it is no more than a personal preference but I would have learned more from a blow by blow account of the major paradigms in ecological thought, the way new paradigms developed in response to new circumstances and then challenged existing ones, the struggles between competing paradigms and the reasons one eventually supplanted another. Only the chapter on Darwin gives a hint of what happens when ruling paradigms are challenged, and the lengths to which the existing establishment will go to defend their indefensible old paradigms. Somehow Marshall has taken all the excitement out of the issues and we are presented instead with a wealth of discrete, disconnected theories from which we can pick and choose, invoking exactly the same whimsy we are encouraged to exercise when pushing a trolley up and down the aisles of a supermarket.

Theodore Roszak is best known for coining the term 'counter-culture' to encapsulate the anti-Vietnam, anti-authority, flower-power politics of the 1960's. In his latest book, Roszak seeks to launch what he calls 'eco-psychology'. He draws on the much-heralded convergence of quantum physics and eastern religion in which space-time can be waves or particles, and no clear line can be drawn between physics and metaphysics. Just as Freud gave us access to our personal subconscious, and Jung to our collective subconscious, so Roszak seeks to give us access to the subconscious of the whole cosmos. He

expands the Gaia hypothesis to the universe, and in so doing makes us humans a purposeful product of it all rather than an accidental outcome of natural selection. This might give us a cosy feeling, compared with the bleakness of Darwin's vision — if we can accept it. Along with many others, I take an aesthetic approach to philosophy in which the simplest explanation is the most elegant and the most acceptable, where there is no reason to believe in complexities

when simpler solutions are on offer, and this makes it difficult to accept this particular eco-psychology, though there are other dimensions of the same theme that might be more fruitful to explore. Roszak also presents us with a strangely anthropocentric universe with pre-Copernican echoes. He confuses ancient rites and practices with conscious understanding. People from less 'developed' cultures have survived for millennia because their actions are the distillation of the trial and error of their forbears, and their technology is not sufficiently developed to be able to destroy their environment. There is no real evidence that they are more self-conscious ecologists than the animals that also manage to live within the limits of their environment. I find it quite reasonable to doubt whether there are any self-conscious ancient wisdoms we can learn from, though there is an enormous wealth of wise practice in every society that has not yet been wrenched from the land. We have a lot to learn from the 'unconscious ecologists' of the past.

Jeremy Rifkin's latest book consists of 42 essays, each capable of standing alone. They could be profitably read in any order so it is a good book to dip into for twenty minutes at a time. Had the book been advertised as a collection of occasional polemical essays I would not have been disappointed. However, seeing a book entitled *Biosphere Politics — a new consciousness for a new age* I thought I was in for another treat like Rifkin's *Entropy — into the greenhouse world*. Three quarters of the essays provide excellent condemnations of the way

we run our world today. They range from his well-known attack on genetic engineering, and the environmental and political immorality of eating beef, to a diatribe against the automobile. All good stimulating stuff. The last quarter of the book purports to look forward to what Rifkin calls 'the biospheric age'. It is disappointingly vague in its prescriptions and philosophically unfocused in its approach. I find it odd that a theorist who managed to construct a coherent scientific approach to ecology using entropy theory should subsequently write another book on the same basic subject without even mentioning the term. It is doubly odd when entropy theory provides the only known defining principle between sustainable and unsustainable agriculture, industry and everything else. To a physicist, entropy theory makes the bleakest possible statement about the universe and everything within it. Order shall become disorder and energy shall be dissipated. Every moment of our lives our bodies create disorder out of order. We eat concentrated energy and dissipate it as low grade heat, sweat and urine. We accelerate the entropy process every time we drive a car or switch on a domestic appliance because these too consume concentrated energy and dissipate it as low grade heat. Our agriculture has dissipated energy at an ever-increasing rate and become less efficient year by year throughout this century.

It might seem a mystery how our species — or any other — can survive under such adverse circumstances. The reason we survive is because human beings living the most primitive existence can usually produce at least 10 calories and often 50 or even 100 calories of food with only 1 calorie of work or effort. In fact, given that we need to eat about 5 calories of food to produce 1 calorie of muscular effort, anything less than a beneficial ratio of 1:5 would mean starvation.

These are the necessary facts of our physiology. We can dream of worlds where we are free from entropy but we cannot realise them on this planet. Now all this would be a fairly bleak prospect, guaranteed to make us seek the shelter of some millennialist religion if we were not also

self-conscious social animals with an ability to organise our environment. The problem for Rifkin is that he does not develop the social side of his argument. The result is that he traps himself — and the whole of humanity — in an unnecessarily fatalist fix.

In *Entropy* he writes: 'We are so used to looking at biological evolution as progress. Now we find that each higher species in the evolutionary chain transforms greater amounts of energy from a usable (concentrated) to an unusable (dissipated) state. In the process of evolution, each succeeding species is more complex and thus better equipped as a transformer of energy. What is really difficult to accept, however, is the realisation that the higher the species in the chain, the greater the energy flow-through and the greater the disorder created in the overall environment... Explanations and rationalisations aside, there is no way to get around it. Evolution means the creation of larger and larger islands of order at the expense of ever greater seas of disorder in the world.' (p71)

At a cosmic level all this seems to be true, but at the planetary level of the biosphere it is not the case. Green plants have been creating order by converting the energy of the sun's rays into the chemical energy of plant tissues. Human intervention can increase the energy efficiency of this process, thus adding to the concentrated energy in the world and reducing the amount of solar energy that is simply lost back into space. We are not helpless victims but partially-free agents with a job to do.

If one were to define sustainable agriculture in energy terms, it would be the maximisation of the energy input-output ratio whilst also maximising the fixation of solar energy per unit of land. It would be a labour-intensive permaculture without resort to fossil fuels. It could attain an input-output energy ratio of 1:100 and provide the million calories that we each need per year from about 500 square metres of land — but only on a vegan diet. Vegetarians are less efficient and create more entropy, carnivores even more so; it takes more work to produce such diets and requires much more land.

Thus it is possible to begin to con-

struct an ecological ethic out of an entropy analysis. And the psychology? Well we might start into eco-psychology by asking why the maximisation of entropy is currently so fundamental to the self-identity, rites of passage, social standing and prestige of the male of our species. (I write this on the day that male motorcyclists lobbied parliament against the imposition of an EC ban on high-powered motorbikes!) What should we do to inculcate feminine values in men so that they will happily engage in the minimisation of entropy, retain their self-respect, and perhaps save the planet?

Robin Jenkins

Fair Trade

Reform and Realities in the International Trading System

Michael Barratt-Brown, Zed Press, 57 Cledonian Road, London N1 9BU, 1993, ISBN 1-85649-074-2, £10.95.

A debate about the impact of international trade is hitting headlines at the end of the 20th century as it did at the start. Newspapers and pundits who disagree on social or political affairs all apparently agree that more trade is needed.

Mantras are chanted to hasten the completion of the GATT Uruguay Round. Competition, via trade, is the gospel of the times. Our collusion in this definition of the future is ensured by the frequent iteration of the awful prospect of simmering trade wars between the worlds economic superblocks — US, EC and Japan — breaking out into overt hostilities.

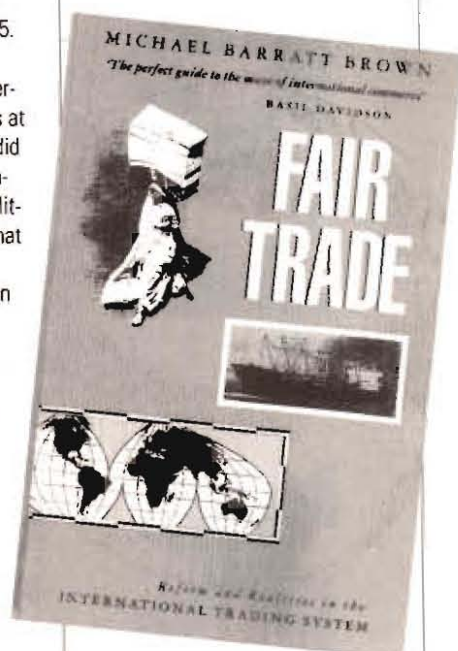
Should we buy this vision?

The answer has to be a resounding no, but don't take my word for it. If you ever wanted to know more about trade, its history, its implications, its theories, its potential and its injustices, this is the book to read. Michael Barratt-Brown has put a lifetime's experience as an economist and leading advocate of a different sort of trade into this book. It contains a stunning array of facts, figures and stories, all covered with equal ease. I have been working on the GATT's implications for food policy, and espe-

cially food standards, for three or more years, and long ago wanted a book such as this to explain the history of trade, who gained, who lost out, in a clear, coherent, but sophisticated way. At last there is a book to stand by Susan George's *How the Other Half Dies*, written in the mid 1970s.

Trade rules penalise the poor, both in North and South, but Michael Barratt-Brown's primary concern as Chair of Twin Trading, an Alternative Trade Organisation (ATO), is to help build practical alternatives to mainstream trade which bring more benefit to the South. The need for a new positive alternative vision is one of the great challenges critics of free trade face. There are now 40 or so ATOs linked in an international federation in Amsterdam, bringing in a wide range of food commodities, including coffee, tea, rum, nuts.

Coffee is the big seller, and the Café



Direct brand is now the official coffee at the European Parliament.

Barratt-Brown tells stories of how groups of peasants in Latin America had to fight for the right to trade, how women got organised to retain more money, how trade cannot be separated from wider social justice. It is a book of great hope, set against the context of terrible, indeed growing, world inequity. Read it and start questioning the free trade package.

Tim Lang

Organic Junk Foods – Good for Life on Earth?

**Starting a
regular feature
where key
issues in food
production and
the philosophy
we hold dear
are debated
in open forum.
Craig Sams
opens by
arguing the
case for
organic
junk food.**

From: **Craig Sams**

It is my belief that organic certifying bodies should not attempt to regulate the quality of processed food made with organic ingredients. They can only legitimately aspire to control agriculture and horticulture to ensure that they conform to established organic standards.

The argument of the Soil Association's founders was that if we could make the earth whole again, then the health of its inhabitants would automatically follow. Soil, plant, animal, man supposes a connection; if the soil were healthy it would produce healthy plants and animals, and a food production system would evolve that would underpin human health.

I believe that putting nutritional prohibitions into the organic food regulations, for example banning the use of hydrogenated fat in organic bread as the European Commission has done, will lead to less of the earth's surface being farmed organically, to the detriment of soil quality, biodiversity, and the environment.

A glance along the supermarket shelves reveals products made with hydrogenated fats, sugar, preservatives, artificial colourings, and other ingredients which are the processor's stock in trade. Health alternatives don't always succeed, because they are too expensive or they don't look or taste like their artificially enhanced counterparts. There is no conspiracy to force people to eat cheap junk food; junk is what most price-conscious consumers demand. Nonetheless, many of those same consumers are deeply alarmed about the deterioration in the global environment. They would rather have junk made with some organic ingredients than junk without any, yet Brussels has dictated that the product cannot use the word organic anywhere prominent on the label — even saying 'made with organic ingredients' — unless at least 95 per cent of the product is organic. And the remaining five per cent can only be necessary ingredients taken from a restricted list (which excludes, for example, hydrogenated vegetable fat).

Why should consumers be denied the ethical satisfaction of eating products that includes food from organically grown sources? Many of them drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, eat too much meat and dairy produce, have bad sex, and get deeply stressed by the multiplicity of worrying events of the late 20th Century. Unless we intend to regulate all this other behaviour, it is tinkering at the edges of individuals' preventive health activity to make rules about what additives or processes can be used with raw materials from bona fide organic farmers and growers. I have said before that when Mars bars go organic, we'll know we've won the battle. Under the current regulations, Mars couldn't go organic if they wanted to.

From: **Lawrence Woodward**

The profound misunderstanding of the current Soil Association's treasurer and no doubt others on its Council about the founding ideas of that organisation is depressing. However, the environmental, social, economic and nutritional consequence of Craig Sams' simplistic analysis is horrific. Moreover, it is something that any organisation purporting to base itself on a holistic concept of soil, plant, animal and man should not only reject but also fight against.

There is scope here for much debate, but little space. So I will make only two points in answer to Craig.

Firstly, the Soil Association was created to promote an investigation into a con-

cept of health. This was most eloquently expressed by Lady Eve Balfour: the health of soil, plant, animal and man is one and indivisible.

This concept originated in the studies of a number of other people, key amongst them was Sir Robert McCarrison, a pioneer of the study of human nutrition. His studies led him to the conclusion that the diets of the healthiest peoples had the same things in common: the food they ate was simple, whole, fresh and came from a local agriculture based on recycling all wastes from that society, or came to them direct from the sea. There was no intervention with chemicals or synthetic materials at any point from production to consumption.

It is notable that these observations and the efforts of the Soil Association's founders occurred before the widespread uptake of 'chemical agriculture' and certainly before synthetic pesticides and food additives. Avoiding agro-chemicals and simply farming 'organically' is only part of the story.

Secondly, even Craig's basic premise that the way to 'save the planet' is to ensure that more land is 'farmed' organically, is seriously flawed. Energy consumption in agriculture (even including agrochemical production) is a fraction of that used by the manufacturing, processing, packaging, distribution and retailing of food. Overall pollution from agriculture, however you measure it, is less than pollution caused by the treatment of food after it has left the farm gate. Destruction of farmland and habitat also occurs because of the facilities needed for modern processing, distribution and retailing of food. I could go on...

The fact is that the unique contribution the 'organic movement' can make is its holistic concept of the indivisible nature of food from production to consumption and back. It is sad the Soil Association seems to be in danger of losing this understanding.

From: **Tim Lobstein**

Organic Mars Bars would be a sign that we have won the battle, argues Craig. And presumably cigarettes made with organic tobacco would be equally good news.

Craig defends his position on the basis of the freedom of the individual — a person's right to poison themselves. If they want to eat junk, that's their problem, but at least let it be organic junk, he says.

I can't agree with this. It assumes individuals are freely choosing in a free market, and they are not being 'sold' anything. In fact I believe a lot of purchases are based on individuals being sold the product — by which I mean they are sold the image, the packaging, the concept, the message.

This isn't a new thought. Helena Rubenstein, founder of a cosmetics empire, put it clearly: 'It is not cosmetics we are selling to women. It is hope.'

In the case of the Soil Association symbol, people are being sold an assurance of organic origin, of course, but I also believe they are being sold much more.

The SA's image is of a caring, concerned, charitable group of people making sure that farmers, growers and retailers are bringing the shopper a product reflecting the group's care and concern. The passion of Lady Eve, the feeling that human health lies in the health of the soil, the air, the water — these are the images the Soil Association strives to promote, not to betray.

The SA's own mission statement calls for '...a sustainable relationship between the soil, plants, animals, people and the biosphere in order to produce healthy food...'

Putting a Soil Association symbol on confectionery, on flavoured sugar and fat, no matter how 'pesticide-free' the product is, seems to me to negate the real meaning of this mission statement. Sugar and fat do not constitute healthy food.

The sustainable relationship between people and the biosphere cannot be left to what Craig calls the individual's freedom to buy what he or she wants, but which I call a commercial freedom for companies to sell what they can. We cannot leave such matters to the market-place.

From: **Craig Sams, having seen Lawrence's reply**

Before I respond to Lawrence I should make clear that I personally have campaigned against junk food for 25 years and have never used hydrogenated fats, refined grains, animal products, sugar or artificial additives in any Whole Earth product.

And I believe in justice — if you take more than your share of the Earth's resources you will pay the price in disease and unhappiness. So I personally eat low on the food chain with little in the way of animal products or refined foods. If other people eat a greater quantity of meat, dairy products, alcohol, artificial additives and sugar — that's their choice. Organic or not, they are wasting more food, energy and land than I am.

No one has ever advanced a cause by imposing it on other people by force or legislation. To establish regulations to define organic agriculture and stop fraudulent claims of organic origin is legitimate and non-coercive and I am proud of the leading role that the Soil Association has played in bringing about the new EC Regulation controlling organic claims.

However, to dictate what organic consumers can or cannot eat, by regulating the permitted ingredient detail of the foods they choose to buy, falls into the same category to my mind as compulsory vaccination.

The concept of healthy soil, plant, animal and man implies not only an indivisible relationship but also a direct flow. The flow is from soil to man. Human life comes from the soil. If the soil is healthy then plants, animals and people who eat the foods from the land will be healthy. The sickness that permeates the entire food processing industry is rooted in the sickness of agriculture. Curing the root cause of the food quality problem, by farming organically, will inevitably and without the need for picaresque regulatory lists, cure the rest of the disease. Regulating every ingredient that can be used in organic foods means putting up obstacles to conversion to organic farming that will set our movement back at a time when more people than ever are beginning to get the organic message.

An example: Britain's major bakers are actually switching away from organic flour because the European Commission does not permit hydrogenated fat as an ingredient in organic bread. Some are switching to 'conservation grade' flour or some other half-way house that allows the use of hydrogenated fat. The organic wheat growers are the losers.

However, if I buy a loaf of organic bread from my local health food shop, I can legally spread the bread with margarine that is 40 per cent hydrogenated fat. If we don't stop people putting hydrogenated fat on organic bread, why should we stop bakers putting it in organic bread?

How can anyone support organic farming and at the same time support food quality controls that reduce demand for organic raw materials?

It is indisputable that alcohol, hydrogenated fat, preservatives, saturated animal fats and sugar are all bad for health.

Under organic regulations I cannot have a salad sandwich of organic whole wheat bread made with hydrogenated fat, while Lawrence can chomp down on an organic steak, wash it down with organic wine, and follow up with an organic creme brûlée and an organic coffee.

Lawrence's meal, organic or not, represents a much higher toll on the Earth's resources (and his health) than my sandwich which Brussels bureaucrats have made illegal. I resent that.

I enthusiastically defend Lawrence's (or anyone else's) right to poison himself, organically or in any other way he chooses. Why can't he allow others the same freedom of choice?

■ Craig Sams is Chairman of Whole Earth Foods and a Soil Association Council member. Lawrence Woodward is Director of Elm Farm Research Centre. Tim Lobstein is Co-director of the Food Commission. All contributors write as individuals.

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Watch out for bugs in low-fat spreads

High fat foods, such as butter and margarine, are poor media for the growth of bacteria and other causes of toxicity and spoilage, being low in water and nutrients conducive to the proliferation of micro-organisms.

Low fat products are a different matter. They are being promoted with health aspects much in mind, but the potential for contamination is higher than regular products.

The technology in the manufacture of low fat spreads raises the aqueous content using various proteins (eg gelatin, whey and casein), salts and other additives, making the product more congenial than butter or margarine to the growth of micro-organisms (note that cheese and butter were developed as stable derivatives in which to preserve milk, which turns sour much more quickly). Technologists can tackle this problem by adding acidulants or preservatives but the public's distrust of additives, chemicals and E numbers imposes constraints, on top of the limitations on flavour and taste.

Low fat products are generally made in factories cleaner than dairying premises (although pasteurisation overcomes lack of hygiene in milk production). However, low fat products aren't usually suitable for cooking, so undesirable organisms are unlikely to be killed by heating.

I have therefore been concerned that customers be advised to redouble their precautions against contamination in storage, bearing in mind that their experience with butter and margarine may not be relevant to the alternatives.

I'm pleased to report that the MAFF has now commissioned preliminary tests. They have some way to go before defining the optimum conditions for familiar pathogens (eg salmonella, staphylococci, listeria, yersinia, clostridia, campylobacter and Bacillus cereus), as well as for novel opportunists, benign or malignant, that may thrive in the new

environments.

Prolonged storage of butter in wartime gave the British a taste for a certain off-flavour, different from rancidity. The cause was identified and the chemical is added to 'butter up' some margarines. The same trick could be applied to low fat spreads.

We shall continue to monitor the low-fat market.

Alan Long
VEGA Research
Middlesex

Doctors not dictators

I was disturbed to find an insert in my copy of the *Food Magazine* for a publication called 'What the Doctors Don't Tell You.' I disliked the tone of the advertising which seemed to be sensationalist and unnecessarily alarmist, eg the column headed 'why not to give your child the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine'. There were many such examples.

I am a doctor and like many of my colleagues do not have a 'conspiracy of silence' or 'dictatorship' relationship with my patients. I will always talk through known side effects of treatments and try to balance benefits with risks. I hate to think what this publication will do to the health of the nation (or at least its readership) if it is arguing against screening, vaccination and various treatments in such a strong journalistic style. Medicine is not an exact science.

No one yet knows the exact relationship between breast cancer and hormone replacement for example, or the 'real cause' of many forms of arthritis. If they do (as they appear to) then they cannot be presenting a full or balanced view on these and the many other subjects they mention.

I hope you will think carefully before promoting a magazine such as this one again.

Dr Deborah Hagan
Royston
Herts

EC's recommended amounts

The European Scientific Committee for Food adopted its report on 'Nutrient and Energy Intakes for the European Community' on 11 December 1992, with a view to setting European Recommended Daily Amounts. The full report is not yet available but we have received a summary of its contents and recommendations.

Following a course similar to that of the 1991 Department of Health Dietary Reference Values report, the committee's equivalent values are the Population Reference Intake (approx RNI), Average Requirement (approx EAR), and Lowest Threshold Intake (approx LRNI).

The SCF has decided to abolish the use of the highest reference value (that corresponding to the needs of almost 100 percent of the population) for nutrition labelling purposes. 'For reasons described in the report, the Committee considered that a more serviceable reference value would be the Average Requirement for adult men'.

'Serviceable' for whom? Certainly not for the consumer, who doesn't know whether his or her requirements are average or not. And a product claiming to meet '30% of your average daily requirement for riboflavin' might look misleadingly impressive.

This recommendation represents a drop in nutrition standards which can only benefit the food industry. It is vital that we demand the right to know the vested interests of SCF members. Now that eurosceptic MP's increasing opposition to the Maastricht Treaty ratification is causing much neurosis at the EC Commission, this is an ideal time to write to your MP, MEP and the the SCF itself.

The address is: Mr J D Howlett, Secretary Scientific Committee for Food, DGIII/C1, 200 Rue de la Roi, B - 1049 Brussels, Belgium.

Linda Lazarides
Society for the Promotion of
Nutritional Therapy
Sussex

TWO BEDROOM Somerset cottage to let with possible land for organic cultivation. Partly furnished. Rent etc by agreement. References required. Tel: 0460-63229

FRUIT CROPS, NUT CROPS, tree crops, forest gardening, ground cover Read Agroforestry News £16 (£12 unwaged) for 4 issues. From the Agroforestry Research Trust, 17 Arden Drive, Chelston, Torquay, Devon, TQ2 6DZ.

PEMBROKESHIRE holiday cottage Cleddau Estuary, Pembrokeshire: comfortable cottage, sleeping 2-4, available for Short Breaks/longer. Lovely garden, islands/beaches/woodlands nearby. Pets welcome. Free Soil Association membership offer! Tel: 03376-672.

VOLUNTEER (organic/biodynamic) horticulturalist needed for Ashram Acres, an Inner City land use project growing Asian, Caribbean and other vegetables organically and keeping animals. Opportunity to gain experience in a multi-cultural context, work with a variety of people and also to live in a radical Christian community. Contact: Ashram Volunteers Project, 23-25 Grantham Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham, B11 1LU. Tel: 021-773 7061.

LARGE STONE HOUSE in Wales, spacious but cosy, with outbuildings, in 2 1/2 acres: trees, shrubs, grass, organic veg garden; conifer plantation; quiet location near village in south-west Clwyd. £120,000. For more details phone 049 082 472 or fax 049 082 321.

ORGANIC WHEATEN BRAN Best quality, stoneground by waterpower, available for human or animal consumption. Soil Association Symbol. Delivery anywhere in the country. Any quantity from 500gms to 1 ton! Write or ring for details: Little Salkeld Watermill, Penrith, Cumbria CA10 1NN, phone 0768-881523.

FOR SALE in rural Herefordshire: 4/5 bedroom self-contained homes in established omnivorous community with co-operatively run 40 acre organic mixed farm. Prices £75,000 Tel 0531-670530.



We thought it was illegal to publish leaflets such as this which gives no indication of who published it or printed it. It turns out to be the Meat and Livestock Commission, of course, asserting that eating meat does not deprive the third world of grain, and if the rain forests were not destroyed for cattle ranching they would be destroyed for something else.

Sweetness and Bright

A future issue of this magazine ought to carry a listing of MP's food interests, if only for their peculiarity. John Major's Parliamentary Private Secretary, Graham Bright (Luton South) has been seen by colleagues popping sachets of Sweet and Low into the sugar bowls in the Members' Tearoom.

'His pockets are stuffed with them,' said a fellow MP. But Mr Bright protests: 'People often ask me for some to put in their tea. I keep both packets and tablets because I believe in free choice.' Sweet and Low is made by Dietary Foods Ltd. Besides being an MP and the PM's PPS, Mr Bright is the company's Chairman.

Furthermore he is Chairman of Cumberland Foods Ltd and Mother Nature Ltd, sits on the Board of International Sweeteners and is parliamentary adviser for Safeways!

MAFF's New Man

Such a disappointment. MAFF has appointed a new man as permanent secretary, the top post and of course far more powerful than any passing minister.

He's one Richard Packer, aged 48, a one-time tax inspector who has spent the last 26 years climbing relentlessly up the MAFF ladder. He will now earn £87,620 a year.

In January we were promised an interview with him, exclusive to this magazine, and we received all the encouragement that the new, open, 'we have no secrets' Ministry could give – and many thanks to the press officer at MAFF, Sharon Atkinson. The interview is printed on page 41 of this magazine...

Yes, it isn't there. They cancelled. 'Mr Packer will not be giving interviews,' we were told bluntly. So much for their open door policy.

Food from where?

While farmers, especially sheep exporters, have been clamouring for an end to the Meat and Livestock Commission ('superfluous, costly and ineffective' said one farmer), it looks like the end of the tracks for the gravy train at Food From Britain. John Major, no less, has refused to appoint a new head to the feeble marketing organisation, and has called in the National Farmers Union to see if there is anything worth salvaging.

Holiday treat

Like some virgin olive oil, cheap? Want a bottle of Moët & Chandon, no questions?

Well, darlings, this summer you simply must motor down through Italy to Salerno. Why? Because Salerno has opened its Museo del Falso, dedicated to displaying fake products from around the world. There you can find the sunflower oil tinted green and passed off as first-pressed olive oil. There's lemonade passed off as bubbly, and Parma ham that's a sham.

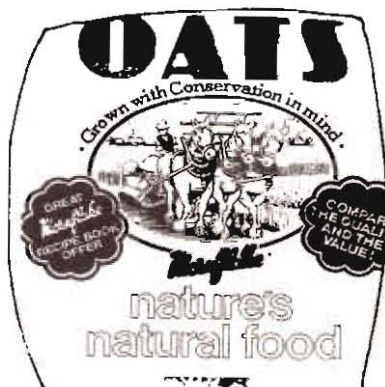
And would you believe, only 30 miles away, police found a warehouse in Naples stacked with new labels ready to stick on cans and jars that were past their sell-by dates.

Conservation trade

Morning Foods, the family firm making Mornflake Oats, have a reputation for their organic products. Great.

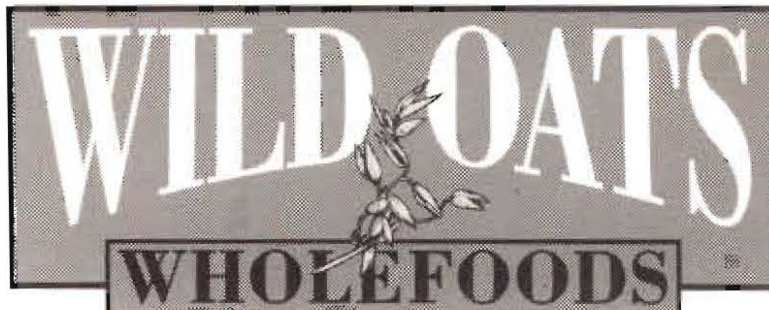
But they also produce regular oats for the KwikSave market, with the word 'Conservation' splashed across the front of the pack, and a quaint picture of shire horses on a farm. Of course, you unwisely assume, this is conservation-grade oats, half way to organic, so to speak, and good to see in a supermarket chain.

No such thing. Read the small print on the back and you realise that the word conservation is interpreted by Mornflake as meaning that because they are selling you oats they are paying farmers to grow the oats, and by paying farmers to grow oats they are 'conserving' this corner of British agriculture.



The grand estate of Chatsworth in Derbyshire, home of the Duchess of Devonshire, boasts a listed building for a hen house. 'It's a game larder, built to hang 4000 pheasants,' said the Duchess, pictured above.

Given the lack of windows she could be well-advised to put in a light bulb or two, but clearly has not heard of such objects. 'I am thinking of installing a chandelier to encourage better laying.'



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Dear Fellow Supporter,

The Best Foods in Life are Organic

At Wild Oats we welcome members of the Soil Association and subscribers to The Food Magazine as we share your concerns about the quality of food and your commitment to the organic movement. Whether you are a new customer or a well-known regular, we would like to offer you a discount on your next visit to our shop.

Our long standing commitment to the organic movement is reflected on our shelves. As Wild Oats is Britain's largest wholefood shop you can fill your entire shopping basket with organics - everything from tea, coffee, cheese, bread and butter, to delicious farm fresh organic fruit and vegetables, plus special items such as organic kamut cous-cous and organic babyfoods. We also stock a wide range of carefully selected organic wines and beers to suit even the most discerning tippler.

For those of you with wheat allergies, there's a fantastic selection of gluten-free goodies, and for everyone concerned about keeping sugar consumption to a minimum there's a vast choice of delicious no-sugar-added products. Every week, you'll find brand new products on the shelves, so there's no need to get stuck in a lentil rut.

Wild Oats is open until 7pm weekdays, 6pm Saturdays, and on Sundays from 10am - 4pm, making healthy shopping more convenient.

Yours Organically,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jan & Stephen". The script is cursive and fluid.

Jan and Stephen Mosbacher

P.S. Send us your name and address for mail order details and a copy of our free newsletter with the latest news on healthy living.

**Bring this coupon into Wild Oats Wholefoods
for a 10% DISCOUNT on your next visit.**

**If you spend £10 or more you will also receive
a free bar of GREEN & BLACK'S ORGANIC CHOCOLATE.**

Offer ends June 30th, 1993

GUILT-FREE CHOCOLATE (WELL, ALMOST...)



✓ **ORGANIC COCOA BEANS** Cocoa beans are one of the most heavily sprayed crops in the world, with lindane insecticide regularly applied despite being banned in Europe and North America. Small growers cannot compete and are forced to abandon their plantations and work as labourers on large-scale plantations. Organic cocoa growers plant under existing forest cover. Non-organic plantations clear the forest completely: then plant rows of single-variety shade trees and cocoa trees. Biodiversity is the first victim of this monoculture practice, and pesticides reduce whatever life forms are left.

✓ **FAIR TRADE** Green & Black's organic cocoa beans come from 600 small independent growers in the jungle highlands of Togo, in West Africa. We contract to pay them a premium above the world price for cocoa beans. With this security they can plant, cultivate and harvest in confidence. As a result of Green & Black's success, more and more growers are signing up.

✓ **QUALITY** Green & Black's is a 70% cocoa solids dark chocolate. With our traditional process we take a lot of time to develop the texture and flavour we want, using only whole cocoa beans. Most high cocoa solids chocolate is made by mixing cocoa mass with cocoa butter and cocoa powder. We just add the minimum of sugar to balance the bitter taste of chocolate.

**SO ENJOY GREEN & BLACK'S - THE CHOCOLATE WHICH GIVES YOU LESS SUGAR, MORE FLAVOUR
AND IS MADE WITH ORGANIC COCOA BEANS.**

Available from all good health food shops, Holland & Barrett, Health & Diet Centres, Sainsbury's and Safeway.