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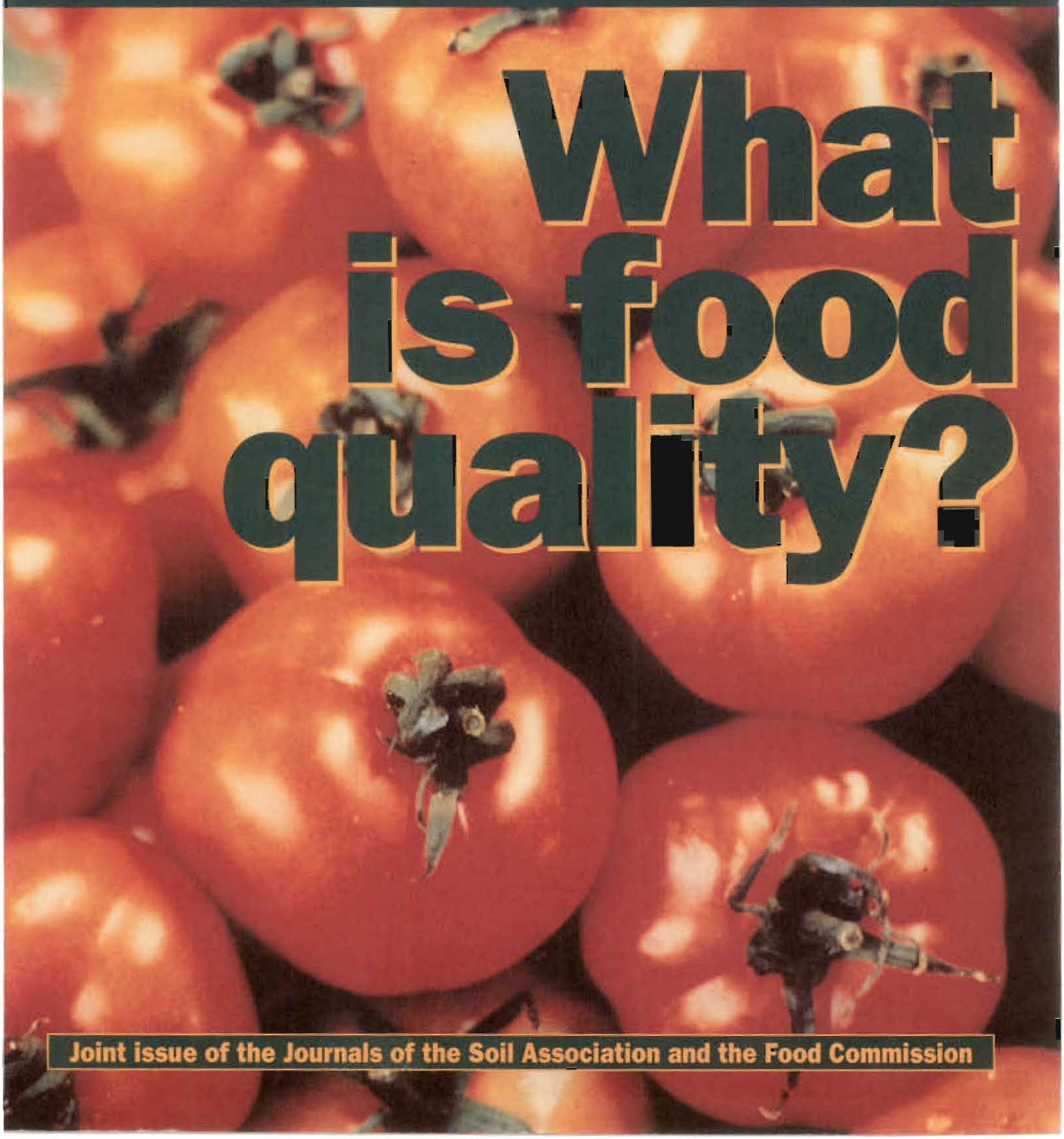

What is food quality?

Joint issue of the Journals of the Soil Association and the Food Commission

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 and Tim Lobstein
Administarion & Subscriptions Manager: Ian Tokelove.
Information Officer Mary Whiting
Food Irradiation Campaign officer and EECC network co-ordinator: Martine Drake

editorial

What is food quality? Unblemished tomatoes, just turning red the day they are put on display? Apples all of one size? Patrick Holden of the Soil Association (page 6) argues that the modern food industry perpetuates the myth that quality is about uniformity and conformity. We must, he says, rediscover the connections between the way that our food is produced and its environmental and health impact.

The earliest food adulteration legislation in England was in 1203 when laws governing the purity of bread were introduced, writes Craig Sams (page 8). And looking further back, the people of ancient China saw food quality as the essence of preventive and curative medicine. Only when food quality is identified with the quality of life can it take priority over materialistic, short term attitudes, he argues.

While northern Europeans are being encouraged to adopt a 'Mediterranean' diet with its emphasis on fresh fruit and vegetables, olive oil and only small amounts of animal derived products, many southern Europeans are under pressure to adopt the unhealthier northern European diet. As Alan Long reports from Cyprus (page 23), subsidies are being used to encourage dairy production while traditional foods eaten by local people are being replaced by foods grown for export. Orange groves may beautify the island, yet he found it impossible to find anything other than imported orange drink, full of added sugar.

The amount of juice in a fruit juice drink can be very small indeed. A Food Commission survey reveals that, although these drinks are often sold to look like juices, full of pictures of healthful fruit, some products contain as little as 5 per cent juice. On page 11 we name the brands.

And in an exclusive preview of a forthcoming report on supermarkets, we see how they have left many town centres dying while adding to local road traffic (page 19). With decisions in the hands of just a few executives, supermarkets may have to be forced by legislation to be more socially responsible in terms of access, transport, pricing and, of course, food quality.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The promotion of commercial products in this magazine is done only by the Soil Association, not the Food Commission. For details on how to advertise, or comments on the advertisements, please contact Stephanie Jones 0272-290661.

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■ Cover picture 'Tomatoes (1984)' by courtesy of the late Greater London Council

Transfats face firing line again

Margarine manufacturers have been badly shaken by further evidence that implicates transfats in coronary heart disease deaths. Harvard Professor, Walter Willett, writing in the *American Journal of Public Health* in May claims that transfats cause at least 30,000 deaths a year in the US.

Transfats are a type of fat which are created when fats and oils are artificially hardened (hydrogenated) and were first developed for margarine. They are now known to act in a similar way to many saturated fats by raising 'bad' cholesterol levels in the blood. One estimate suggests that about 70 per cent of vegetable oils used in wide range of processed or fried foods are hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated and are found in many processed foods including margarines and spreads, biscuits, pasties, fast food, breakfast cereals, sliced bread and even baby foods (see *Living Earth/Food Magazine* February 1994).

The article has re-opened the battle between butter and margarine manufacturers. The Butter Council used the opportunity to criticise margarine manufacturers for selling margarine on a health platform. Meanwhile Van den Berghs, the makers of Flora, the UK's most popular spread, had been quietly reformulating its product.

The new version of Flora now contains only 1.5 per cent transfats, a reduction from around 7 per cent. But in order to reduce the amount of transfat, they have increased the level of saturated fat. As most nutritionists now agree, it is the total amount of 'cholesterol-raising' fats – saturates plus trans – which are important. So the total reduction achieved by Flora is very small – from 21 per cent 'bad' fats to 18.5 per cent.

Although reformulating their product, Van den Berghs have sought to play down the significance of transfats on dietary health. In June the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) upheld a complaint by Van den Berghs against Whole Earth Foods over an advertisement for its Superspread which appeared in the Autumn 1993 issue of *Living Earth/Food Magazine*. The advert for Superspread, which contains no transfats, was headlined 'These facts could save your life' and made a number of other claims concerning the health risks attatched to the consumption of hydrogenated fats used in margarines and spreads. The complainants objected that the claims were misleading and inaccurate, that the advertisement was denigratory to products which contained transfats and that the advert unduly appealed to fear.

In upholding the complaint the ASA acknowledged that there was evidence to suggest that the consumption of transfats may have negative health effects, but considered that the extent and nature of these effects were still unclear. The ASA considered that the advertisement overstated the health risks associated with transfats and that it was therefore misleading and an unwarranted appeal to fear.

In repudiating the ASA's decision Craig Sams for Whole Earth Foods said: 'It is a sad reflection on industry moral standards that Flora can spend £5 million annually advertising the health benefits of their product and never mention hydrogenated fats, while the ASA bars publications from accepting advertising from Whole Earth that simply disseminates information about hydrogenated fats that has been published in learned medical and scientific journals.'

■ *Am J Public Health ,84,* May 1994, pp722-4

Nestlé money embarrasses baby doctors

The multinational food giant Nestlé, target of a continuing consumer boycott for its violations of baby milk marketing codes, has embarrassed senior members of the British Paediatric Association (BPA) by making a series of anonymous donations to the BPA's research programme.

Staff at the BPA were forced to admit to their governing Council meeting at the end of June that £140,000 was being donated by Nestlé over a four-year period starting in 1991. A spokesperson said the BPA had been assured that Nestlé was abiding by the WHO Code of Marketing for Babymilk Substitutes and that there was therefore nothing improper about accepting the donation.

Ironically, for a baby milk company to give an anonymous donation to a health-related bodies is itself a violation of the WHO Code.

■ Further details:
Baby Milk Action, tel 0223-464420

EC offers 10m ecu to reverse healthy eating trend

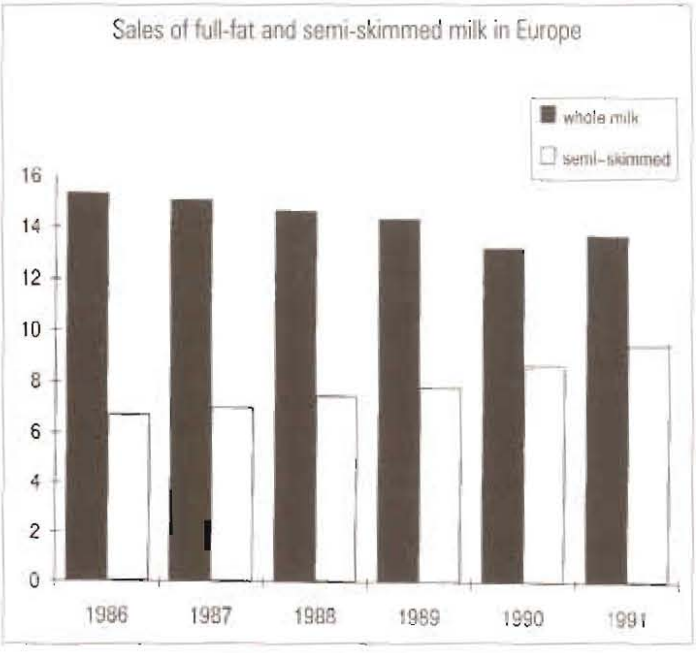
The European Commission is offering 10m ecu (about £7m) to distributors, producers or retailers wanting to promote full-fat milk consumption.

While MAFF and the Department of Health congratulate themselves on trends towards consuming lower fat milks, their work is being undermined by the Commission's belief that it should 'improve market equilibrium' for 'the benefit of the dairy industry'.

Having already subsidised the advertising of butter (last year) and meat (this year) they now want to boost milk consumption, and are explicitly excluding skimmed and semi-skimmed milk. The Commission points to an advertising campaign in the Aberdeen area in Scotland which boosted milk consumption by nearly 10 per cent. They would like similar results elsewhere in Europe, not only in northern latitudes, but 'especially where there are good prospects for milk as a drink, such as Portugal, Spain and Greece.'

Sales of full-fat milk fall, semi-skimmed rise, upsetting the European dairy industry (scale is in billions of litres)

■ source: *Agri-industry Europe, 2,* 4/94



Battery hens suffer 'unequivocal' stress

A review of more than 80 scientific studies of hens kept in battery cages has concluded that the evidence overwhelmingly indicts battery egg production as causing intense suffering.

The review, compiled by Dr Michael Baxter of Brunel University, identifies the constraints on natural behaviours such as wing flapping and the increased incidence of signs of frustrations such as cage pecking as indicating behavioural stresses. Social stress through enforced close proximity with other hens and the frustration of instincts such as nest construction are also identified. Restricted exercise leading to bone weakness and damage is 'probably the greatest single indictment of the battery cage.'

'The evidence is now compelling and inescapable,' said Dr Baxter. 'Battery hens clearly suffer distress in several different ways because of the cramped and barren conditions inside an average battery cage. Scientific proof has at long last caught up with common sense – you cannot keep a hen in a tiny cage with absolutely nothing to do all day and expect it to lead a contented life.'

Dr Baxter is a member of the Farm Animal Welfare Council, a government-appointed committee advising MAFF minister Gillian Shephard. 'The time has come for the government to accept the cruelty of battery cage systems and make a full-scale commitment to phasing them out as soon as possible,' he added.

A spokesperson for the British Egg Industry Council said that battery hens enjoyed better environmental conditions, less disease and fewer attacks from parasites and predators. 'Every form of production has advantages and disadvantages,' he said.

Earlier this year the RSPCA called for clearer labelling of battery eggs, criticising terms such as farm fresh and country fresh as being inadequate indications of battery farming.

■ The welfare problems of laying hens in battery cages, M R Baxter, *Veterinary Record*, 11.6.94.

MAFF U-turns on animal transport

Animal rights activists were celebrating a remarkable change of policy by Gillian Shephard over European regulations on livestock transport. It was believed she would side with southern European states by supporting a lax regulation allowing animals to be transported 22 hours without rest or food, but at the last minute switched her vote at the Council of Ministers meeting on June 20 to support German, Dutch, Danish and Belgian demands for better treatment of live animals.

Only a week earlier Nicholas Soames, MAFF minister for food, had told animal rights campaigners that the UK would accept a 22 hour journey time (and up to 15 hours without water), saying it was at least an improvement on the present 24 hour journeys, with no watering requirement. Blocking the 22 hour proposal would only leave the present lax rules, he suggested.

Ms Shepherd did not indicate if she would support German proposals for a maximum 8 hour journey time. The Germans take over the EU presidency this summer and have said they will push for an improved directive. She denied suggestions from the RSPCA that she had been influenced by public opinion and possible government unpopularity.

Bosnia baby milk adverts withdrawn

Feed the Children, a charity delivering aid to Bosnia, is withdrawing a television advertisement following complaints that the adverts misleadingly portrayed negative images of breast feeding. The advert also showed boxes being unloaded, claiming that these contained 'over 30 essential items to keep a baby alive and healthy' when in fact the boxes contained bottles, teats, baby milk and branded baby foods, many of them highly sweetened.

A baby was also shown with a bottle hanging from its mouth, yet no mention was made of the risks of bottle feeding in such situations. Research shows bottle-fed babies are 14 times more likely to die than breasted babies where clean water and sanitation are a problem.

The directors of the charity admitted receiving a generous donation from Nutricia, makers of Cow and Gate products, although Nutricia have denied that their support was directly linked to the contents of the advertisement.

'Well-meaning but inexperienced relief agencies, willing to transport and distribute these products as food aid, are a natural target for companies eager to open up new markets,' said a spokeswoman for the campaigning group, Baby Milk Action. 'Such advertisements encourage the misconception that lactation failure is common.' Evidence from Ethiopian refugee camps shows that lactation can continue under difficult circumstances. Strict guidelines on the use of substitutes have been drawn up by the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and UNHCR, though they have no legal standing, and are ignored by companies 'who take every opportunity to donate inappropriate products, with complete disregard for their ill effects' said the Baby Milk Action spokesperson.

■ Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrews Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX (0223 464420).

School food news

◆ The National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology (NATHE) is spearheading a campaign to keep food as a compulsory element of the technology curriculum at key stage 3. If food becomes optional, cookers and other essential equipment could disappear from schools, making it impossible for pupils to choose food technology at a later stage. The deadline for consultation is 29 July.

■ For further information contact June Scarborough, NATHE 071-387 1441.

◆ A new report from school caterers, Gardner Merchant has found that more than one million British school children have virtually no guidance in the classroom on healthy eating. The survey of 836 11-16 year olds found that children are snacking throughout the day on crisps, sweets, chocolate and fizzy drinks yet believe that they maintain a healthy diet. The survey found that families eat together less often, fresh fruit and yoghurt are becoming less popular, but jacket potatoes are becoming more popular.

■ *Gardner Merchant School Meals Survey (1994) 'What are our children eating?'* For more information, Marc Cornelius/Gail Whitfield on 071-831 6262.

◆ Setting up a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) is one way of improving the link between what is taught in schools and the food that is provided. A new booklet shows how schools, by adopting a whole-day, whole-school approach to nutrition, can build a school-based healthy alliance between pupils, staff and caterers. Seminars are being organised to promote SNAGs.

■ For further details contact Joe Harvey, Martineau Education Centre, 74 Balden Road, Birmingham B32 2EH. Tel: 0210428 2262. Fax. 021-428 2353.

◆ A report *Healthy School Food* calls on governors to use school meal contracts to achieve a healthy school food service. The report features schools which have successfully tackled the 'healthy food is boring' problem.

■ *Healthy School Food: A Guide for School Governors and School Boards* is available from the School Meals Campaign, PO Box 402, London WC1H 9TZ Price £2.50 (inc p&p). For further information: Imogen Sharp 071-383 7638.

Soil Association launches new vision for reforming the CAP

The Soil Association has unveiled an innovative blueprint for future reform of the CAP, *Subsidies Without Set Aside*, which proposes that all agricultural support should become conditional upon entry into clearly defined Farm Management Agreements available to all farmers nationwide.

Patrick Holden, Policy Director of the Soil Association said, 'Our new policy statement explores just how the CAP can be harnessed to start protecting, not continue pillaging, the fabric of the countryside. We believe it is a milestone document which could lead to the adoption of much higher standards of environmental practice on most UK farms by the end of the century.'

The proposals would provide a minimum level of environmental protection across the whole of the countryside and could be supplemented by a range of additional 'bolt-on' measures that farmers select from a menu of optional 'green' schemes with very specific environmental objectives, such as the need to recreate habitats in some areas or reduce nitrate leaching in others.

Mark Redman, Soil Association Policy Researcher, added, 'It is widely agreed that if farmers expect to continue benefitting from taxpayers' money they must be prepared to deliver a high quality countryside in return. What is unique about our proposals is that they provide the first detailed and truly practicable prescription for achieving this.'

This summer should see the introduction of the UK's first Organic Aid Scheme offering incentives to encourage farmers to convert to organic production methods. Although underfunded at present, this is one of several schemes examined in *Subsidies Without Set Aside* that has the potential to benefit the whole of the countryside by providing a 'green' baseline to plug the gaps between the existing, largely ad hoc, environmental protection schemes.

The Soil Association is optimistic that its proposals will receive widespread support amongst farmers and the public, and urges MAFF to give them utmost consideration as they start preparing for the next round of CAP reform.

'In 1993/94 almost £1.8 bn of tax payers' money was channelled into the pockets of UK farmers with little consideration for the environment. It really is time that the public and countryside alike got a much better deal from the CAP!' said Mr Holden.

■ Details: Soil Association, tel: 0272 290661

Fast food

The case of the McLibel 2 opened at the High Court in London at the end of June as we went to press. Dave Morris and Helen Steel of London Greenpeace, two unemployed environmentalists, are defending themselves against the multinational corporation's claims that London Greenpeace were distributing defamatory information about the hamburger chain.

In May, Jeremy Corbyn MP submitted two early day motions to Parliament condemning the business practices of the McDonald's Corporation, its advertising claims and its use of libel writs to gag criticism. He further called for multinational corporations to be barred from suing their critics for libel, as are Governmental bodies.

Slow food

In 1989 Carlo Petrini was so horrified by the proposed opening of a McDonalds at the bottom of the Spanish Steps in Rome that he decided to set up the Slow Food Movement. The movement is now established in over 26 countries. It aims to combat the world dominance of fast food which threatens the rich and varied national and regional cuisines.

Now plans are being made to develop a separate chapter for the Slow Food Movement in Britain.

■ For further information contact: Morwenna Given, Nahanni Gate, Dipley, Harley Wintney, Hampshire RG27 8JP (Tel: 0252 843265 Fax: 0252 844092)

SAFE Alliance starts biodiversity count on organic farms

The SAFE Alliance is running a pilot 'comparative biodiversity' study this summer investigating the number and variety of wild plant and butterfly species on organic farms. Building on the excellent work of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the work is part-funded by WWF UK and is being conducted in collaboration with two environmental charities – Plantlife and Butterfly Conservation – together with researchers from Oxford University.

According to SAFE Co-ordinator, Hugh Raven, 'Little research has been undertaken upon the environmental impact of organic farming. This project has been developed in close consultation with the BTO, MAFF and the Soil Association and will make a significant contribution to discussions over the significance of organic farming as a strategic component of future agricultural policy.'

Monitoring of farmland birds by the BTO has shown that many common species including the linnet, reed bunting, skylark and tree sparrow have declined in number since the mid-1970s. These changes coincide with the increased intensification of lowland agriculture under the CAP. Since April 1992, the BTO has been conducting a specific study on the numbers, diversity and breeding of birds on pairs of organic and conventional farms across the UK. Results reveal that organic farming methods can halt the decline in bird numbers and significantly increase the abundance of breeding and overwintering birds.

■ Contact: SAFE Alliance: tel: 071-823 5660

More news on page 10

Re-discovering our food

In this 4-page special feature we focus on the quality of our food: the Soil Association's Patrick Holden argues for a renewed look at the meaning of 'quality'; the work of Soil Association pioneer Mary Langman in celebrated; and Craig Sams of Whole Earth Foods looks at the chequered history of food quality from its earliest days.

'Whatever else the organic movement may or may not have accomplished so far, it has certainly aroused interest in the nutritional properties of food; that is their inherent quality as conveyors of vitality as distinct from their quantitative chemical analysis.'

So began an editorial on Food Properties in 1947 in the 6th issue of *Mother Earth* (the SA's journal 1946-1961). Are we in a position to reiterate this statement nearly 50 years later?

There is no doubt that the Soil Association can take much credit for the tremendous growth of interest in organic farming especially over the last decade. The development of organic standards and their adoption by the UK government and the EU, our increasing influence in matters of agricultural policy, our work in developing the market for organic foods, the growing recognition of organic farming among the conservation and environmental organisations and, more recently, our animal welfare, community supported agriculture and education initiatives are all solid achievements we lay claim to. But there is one challenge still facing us: restoring our rightful place in the food quality debate.

In 1946 Lady Eve Balfour wrote that one of the aims of the newly formed Soil Association should be *'to educate public opinion not only regarding the need for healthy soil – the source of our food – but also concerning the way in which that food should or should not be treated once it is grown; so if people continue to abuse Nature's laws to their own detriment, or allow governments to do it for them, such behaviour shall at least be the outcome of an informed choice, and not a blindfolded and Gaderene descent into the abyss.'*

This aim seems just as valid today as when first written, but the need is now more urgent than ever because the modern agri-food industry has hijacked society's perception of good quality food. Producers, processors and retailers perpetuate the modern myth of uniformity and conformity in food. Short term marketing considerations demand a rigidly-defined, technological approach to food quality whereby size and appearance, packaging, storage and processing criteria now reign over the more abstract and complex concept of a wholesome, multi-faceted biological quality originally identified by the founding members of the Soil Association.

While the original objectives of the Soil Association are clearly still pertinent, I feel that we must recognise that we have made relatively little progress in our understanding of the true nature of food quality. We may be in a better position to articulate our opinions on the full range of food quality issues, but huge gaps in our knowledge still exist.

Is society so divorced from the realities of food production that people have lost even the most basic instincts for distinguishing good quality from bad, let alone recognise that there is a plethora of related quality issues beyond high profile ones such as food safety or adulteration during processing?

I hope not! The recent media attention given to the Danish research linking male fertility to diet is one encouraging example of public interest in the broader questions concerning diet and human health. But if the Soil Association is to reclaim its position in the food quality debate it must not stop here.

We must strive for a fuller understanding of the processes involved in the link between soil management, plant and animal nutrition, and food quality. We need more studies on the nutritional composition of organically-grown foods. We also need to develop an improved definition of food quality and encourage more linkage between organisations and government ministries whose interests are linked to food quality – notably the Department of Health.

■ Patrick Holden is Policy Director of the Soil Association

Mary Langman, a founding member of the Soil Association, was awarded an MBE this summer. Katherine Holden interviewed her about her life's work.

Founding member of the Soil Association, Mary Langman has achieved the recognition that she deserves for her services to the organic farming movement. Mary was recently awarded an MBE in this year's Queen's birthday honours list. Her interest and practical experience in organic farming and in nutritional and environmental research stretch back over half a century. Yet Mary has seldom been willing to take sufficient credit for her achievements and has generally under-valued the part she has played in promoting organic issues to a wider public.

Mary was born in 1908 and grew up in the country. Her involvement with the Soil Association came about through her work in an allied field. In 1934 she had been taken on as assistant to doctors George Scott Williamson and Innes Pierce, founders of the Pioneer Health Centre in south-east London. During the war years, when the centre temporarily closed down, she helped them work on their influential report *The Peckham Experiment: A study of the living structure of society.* The book contains a tribute to Mary which indicates her depth of commitment and dedication to the project. 'For her unflagging interest and work in this connection, we wish to express our deep sense of gratitude to Miss Mary Langman, who nominally acting as amanuensis has actually contributed to every page of this book.'

Mary Langman
Organic Pioneer

The Peckham Experiment was published in 1943 within a few months of Lady Eve Balfour's equally widely-read book *The Living Soil*, an account of recent scientific work in the fields of nutrition and agriculture and of her own research project based on her farm at Haughley in Suffolk. The two books brought their authors together, for as Mary indicates there was a close affinity. 'The concepts that informed both research projects had much in common: both directed to the study of health and of nutrition: in the one case Haughley, through the relationship between soil, plant, animal and man; in the other, Peckham, through observation of action and relationships of families of all ages engaged in their leisure in the enriched environment of a social setting.' The health of families using the Peckham Centre for social and leisure activities was closely monitored by the doctors through periodic medical check-ups.

By 1950 Mary was running a small farm at Bromley Common, set up to produce organically grown food of known quality and freshness for use in nutritional research at the Pioneer Health Centre. She kept the farm going for 25 years after the centre close, building up a Jersey herd and growing vegetables in an old walled garden demonstrating her strong commitment to exploring methods of organic food production at a time when such ideas were dismissed by most farmers and members of the public as 'muck and magic'. Through this period she maintained close links with the Soil Association and Lady Eve who became a lifelong friend, read the journal *Mother Earth*, participated in conferences and in latter years attended courses on organic husbandry run by the Association. With her farm a mere 14 miles from Piccadilly Circus, she became one of the earliest suppliers of organically grown vegetables for the shop Wholefood, set up in the 1960s by some of her friends from the Soil Association to provide outlets for organic produce. Mary soon became a director of the enterprise, a position she still holds.

This marketing experience led to an invitation to join the Soil Association Standards Committee in its earliest days when the first tentative efforts were made to hammer out appropriate standards. She was the one constant member of that committee, through all the developments that ultimately led to the present position, where common standards for all produce with an organic label have been officially agreed by the European Commission and by all the countries of the European Union. Of special interest to Mary was the harmonisation of the standards worked out in this country with those originating independently in Switzerland and France. Speaking French fluently, she was already a member of the French sister to the Soil Association, Nature et Progres, whose lively annual three-day conferences of organic farmers – who described themselves proudly as peasants – she much enjoyed. She also toured French organic farms in search of produce for Wholefood.

These contacts in turn led to Mary's association with IFOAM – the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements – founded at a Nature et Progres Congress with the Soil Association as one of the five original founding members. In the early days Mary acted as Soil Association representative in the Coordinating Committee for managing the affairs of the infant federation with its global aims and meagre resources. Over the years Mary attended conferences held in Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, the United States and Germany, taking part in the associated tours of local organic farms. It is with much regret that she has decided that she is now too old to undertake the journey to this year's IFOAM conference in New Zealand.

Equally important on the home front, Mary was one of the older members who welcomed new young members with active farming experience onto the Soil Association Council, recognising the importance of 'new blood' for the movement's continuing development. Members who were part of the difficult transition period during the 1980s have acknowledged how important Mary was to them as a confidante and point of reference. At a time when the movement might have fallen apart, she played a crucial bridging role, enabling it to move forward into a new era without losing touch with its roots.

Now in her late 80s, Mary remains vigorous in the movement and an inspiration to those of us who worry about losing momentum on retirement. Though no longer farming she is still a Director of the Wholefoods Trust, a registered charity which promotes research and information on health and organic agriculture. She plays an active part in the book department of the Wholefoods shop, which stocks a wide range of books on nutrition and nutritional therapies, alternative medicine, organic farming and gardening and related subjects.

She has never lost touch with her roots. Convinced of the relevance of the Peckham findings and concepts to the problems of today, she is a member of a small group wishing to make these known to new generations. She recently took part in a video about the project entitled *A Pool of Information: a Search for Positive Health*, that unites archive material with contemporary commentary. The video ended with her quotation of an observation by Scott Williamson's that 'Health is as infectious as disease given the right conditions for its spread'. Her pleasure was great at hearing that phrase picked up from the video in the course of a debate in the House of Lords following a question addressed to the Department of Health.

It is time she feels for a parallel renewal of interest in the findings of the Haughley Experiment, so cogently described by Lady Eve in the later edition of *The Living Soil*. Having written a brief history of the early days of the Soil Association, published in *The Living Earth*, Mary is now engaged in conjunction with Lady Kathleen Oldfield (Lady Eve's much younger sister) in collecting material from which they hope to be able to put together a life of Lady Eve. If any reader has kept or chances to come upon a batch of old letters or recollections of Lady Eve, she would be delighted to hear from them via the Soil Association.

Interviewing Mary as part of a larger project on the lives of single women between the two world wars, I found the experience invigorating. We talked for six hours during which I felt that I too was being interviewed. I wasn't allowed to get away with any sloppy thinking and was particularly impressed by her razor-sharp intellect, her mental stamina, and her deep commitment to and enjoyment of her life's work. Although Mary believes marriage and family to be the most fulfilling life-path for women, her career illustrates the importance of unmarried women's service in our society. She has dedicated her life to the organic movement which, without her inspiration, loyalty and sheer hard work, would have been very much the poorer.

The Soil Association was formed to bring together all those working for a fuller understanding of the vital relationship between soil, plant, animal and man. Mary Langman's recognition and life-long interest in nutrition as the most vital link in this chain has enabled the Association to hold onto its deeper meaning and goals.

Food quality through the ages

The search for a healthful, unadulterated food supply is far from new, writes Craig Sams.

Food is the foundation of physical life and health, so it is natural that throughout history it has been at the centre of our cultural, social, spiritual and philosophical lives as well. The growing awareness in recent times of the interconnectedness of food quality and the quality of life is not a new phenomenon. The earliest cave paintings showed the degree to which our ancestors vested magical significance in the process of obtaining food. Dietary laws are part of most religious traditions, and serve to define a community and distinguish it from outsiders. The hygienic and nutritional roots of dietary laws may be forgotten with the result that the rediscovery of the relevance of diet to health and consciousness can excite hostility if it goes against established norms. The line between food quality and social conformity can make a concern with food quality appear revolutionary. The hostility that vegetarians excite among meat-eaters, or that organic food proponents can excite, is an indication of the degree to which any criticism of society's eating habits is seen as not only a challenge but also a rejection of society's dinner table.

Key issues of food quality focus on which foods to eat, the adulteration of food, the refining of staple foods, and the nutritional quality of food as a reflection of soil quality.

In the beginning, the earth was fertile, food was abundant and food technology relied on nothing more than stone tools and fire. The earliest debate about food was concerned with the religious and tribal significance of foods, and about competing nomadic and sedentary food-producing systems. Vegetarianism was also an issue from the earliest times. The Bible opens with dietary counsel from God: 'Behold, I give you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed: to you it shall be for meat.' Vegetarianism didn't last long in Eden and by the time of Noah a wide range of beasts were eaten. God was more specific in Leviticus, by prohibiting the consumption of fat and blood, whether from oxen, sheep or goats. Shakespeare's reference in the Merchant of Venice to Shylock's problem in taking a pound of flesh that is completely blood-free refers obliquely to this dilemma of keeping a cow and eating it too.

The theme of observing a dietary precept while not practising it is common. In Thailand, Buddhists strictly observe the Buddha's sanction against the taking of any life by allowing Muslims to run the slaughterhouses. The importance of observance of the ritual becomes more important than the underlying reasons for the ritual.

In Leviticus, God allowed, in addition to the Bovids such as sheep, goats, cows, and antelope, that some fish and fowl may be eaten, but in general specified that they should only be vegetarian animals. The same perception of meat quality applies, according to anthropologists, in cannibal societies, where a captive would be kept on a strict vegetarian diet for 3 months before his meat was considered fit for consumption.

Dairy products and the cow play a special role in the English diet. The original home of the Angles and their allies, the Frisians, Jutes and Saxons was on the coastal land of the North Sea. The names of the most common breeds of cattle – Holstein, Friesian – reflect the small geographical area of the North Sea coast where dairying evolved. The English and other North sea peoples enjoy a genetic abnormality that has been the key to their survival and biological success: they keep producing an enzyme that digests milk throughout their lifetime, instead of it atrophying at weaning age. This enables them to obtain calcium and vitamin D from the liquid milk in their diet and survive in a climate where sunshine is almost non-existent for large parts of the year. Without milk, rickets and osteoporosis would have substantially reduced the chances of survival.

The early trade in sea salt owed much to the need to restore minerals lost from the land, in particular iodine. In the United States, the 'Goiter Belt' stretches from Ohio to Kansas, encompassing most of the American Midwest (across much of the same area as the Bible Belt). The high incidence of goitre and hypothyroidism in the late 19th century as the Plains were opened up to arable agriculture reflected the very low levels of iodine in the soil. Discovery of this led to laws requiring the iodisation of America's table salt, an example of national mass medication to rectify a national nutritional deficiency that continues to this day.

Iodine is the key regulator of the metabolism as it is the main component of the thyroid hormone thyroxine. Without it, lethargy, decline and genetic degeneration take place. The inhabitants of Alpine communities grew arable crops on steep mountain slopes. By the Middle Ages, the inevitable leaching of iodine from the soil and the lack of any other iodine source from the sea, led to an increase in births of mentally retarded babies. The common practice of putting such babies to death was justified on the grounds that they were not human. The Church, appalled at this practice, made it a moral crime to do so by declaring that the victims of this nutritional deficiency had souls in the eyes of God and were therefore 'Chretiens' or Christians, and therefore entitled to live. The word 'cretin' reminds us of this nutritionally induced condition and of the importance of diet to foetal health.

In third century China the same problem arose as agriculture expanded. A trade in dried seaweed soon developed with coastal areas to rectify iodine deficiencies in the inland regions. The intrinsic iodine deficiency of arable land means that there is a greater reliance on alternative sources such as fish, seaweed

A 12th Century dishonest baker is dragged through the streets with an underweight loaf tied round his neck

and pasture-derived foods. One significant dietary source of iodine nowadays is the iodine-based sterilising fluid using in cleaning stainless steel dairy machinery.

To the Chinese, food quality was the essence of preventive and curative medicine. *The Yellow Emperor's Book of Medicine* eschewed political or ethical considerations of diet – the key to health was to choose whichever foods prevented illness and encouraged longevity. The Yin Yang relationship of toxic heat and damp heat leads to a constant search for balance, or harmony. The most effective way to maintain this is through foods which have various properties that affect the natural balance. The core medicinal foods were either kidney yin tonics or kidney yang tonics and were used to correct deficiencies and restore balance.

Yan Zhi-Tui wrote in the 6th century classic, *My Teaching to Posterity*: 'I have been in the habit of eating kidney tonics throughout my life, which is why I could still read fine print when I was 70 years old with no grey hair on my head.' Kidney yang tonics included clove and clove oil, dill, fennel, fenugreek, mandarin orange seeds, green onion seeds, prickly ash root, pork testicles, raspberries, strawberries and shrimp. The division between food and drugs that exists in the west had no counterpart in China. The Chinese practised what Hippocrates preached: 'Let thy food be thy medicine'.

In 500BC the followers of Pythagoras, of the eponymous theorem, readily espoused his recommended vegetarian diet. Unless they ate a diet free of animal products and beans, Pythagoras believed they would not be able to comprehend his teachings. His lasting influence was such that, until the last century, when the word 'vegetarian' came into usage, the word 'Pythagorean' described anyone who observed meat-free dietary principles. To Pythagoras, peace on earth was not possible until vegetarianism prevailed. He asserted that if people developed the compassion that would restrain them from killing and eating animals, they would find it even more difficult to wage war on one another. In particular he enjoined political leaders to abstain as he believed that if they refrained from hurting lower animals, they could also be trusted to refrain from hurting their human subjects. He also believed that disputes over territory would disappear if the pressure on land from animal husbandry were reduced. The vegetarian Hitler's contempt for human rights and his territorial aggression indicate that theory does not always translate successfully into practice.

Erasmus, who suffered from kidney stones, wrote in 1511 of food adulterators, probably after a bout of food poisoning: 'We have men that steal money. These wretches steal our money and our lives too, and get off scot-free.' Much adulteration of food is merely fraudulent, but it can often be injurious and sometimes fatal.

In 1903 *The Times* thundered that adulteration has 'nowadays risen to the dignity of an exact science... certain large companies trade almost entirely in 'faked' products, are able to employ the highest legal talent to drive the proverbial coach and horses through the Food and Drugs Act, and can even influence Parliament itself. There are only three important forms of adulteration now practised by the retailers, namely the substitution of margarine for butter, of chicory for coffee, and of cottonseed or other cheap oil for olive oil; the manufacturer does the rest.'

Even at the turn of the century the retailer was the first candidate for prosecution and had the duty of 'due diligence' as is still the case today. In June of 1994 *The Times* carried tales of olive oil adulterated with rapeseed soil, instant coffee laced with chicory and grain extracts, and new twists to the margarine-butter debate. *Plus ça change...*

The earliest legislation in England that dealt with food adulteration was in 1203, during the reign of King John, when laws governing the purity of bread were introduced. Fifty years later the Statute of Pillory and Tumbril extended the controls to cover the practices of vintners, brewers and butchers. For the first offence a trader was drawn on a hurdle from the Guildhall to his own house, 'where most persons do congregate' with the offending article hung around his neck. For a second offence the same punishment was enhanced with an hour in the pillory. In the event of a third offence, the offender was banned from his trade forever. The power to enforce these laws was vested in the trade guilds governing that trade, with the perhaps inevitable result that enforcement was rarely carried out to any great effect. It was not until 1869 that the public authorities took over responsibility for enforcing the laws on adulteration. However, bakers, vintners, brewers and butchers still enjoy special exemptions in not having to declare the full ingredient content of their products.

Bakers in London in the 13th century had formed guilds based on whether they baked brown bread or white. The health debate had started. 'Adulterants' such as sawdust and chalk (calcium carbonate) were used in white bread. Nowadays the addition of calcium in some form to white bread is compulsory in many countries, to replace that lost from refining wheat. The addition of sawdust made a comeback in the 1980s when a New York bakery launched 'Golden Fields' a high-fibre white bread that contained '20% fibre from natural forest sources'. The addition of finely ground sawdust in this way provided high quality fibre, including lignins, nowadays considered anti-fungal and a possible preventive of colon and breast cancer. The white colour and light texture of the bread is retained. Perhaps those medieval bakers weren't such conmen after all.

7500 additives are currently used in producing food, an area the size of Italy is lost every year to soil erosion and cruelty to animals to convert cheap nutritious protein into expensive unhealthful fatty protein increases apace, often at the expense of the world's remaining rain forests and wildlife reserves. Degenerative and congenital diseases follow economic growth around the world. Only when food quality is identified with the quality of life is it likely to take priority over materialistic and short term attitudes that are risking the future of all life on Earth.

■ Craig Sams is Chairman of Whole Earth Foods and honorary treasurer of the Soil Association.

FDA faces corruption charge

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) decision to permit the milk-boosting hormone BST to be used in the USA may face a Congressional enquiry following charges that senior FDA staff had close links with BST's main manufacturer, Monsanto.

According to the UK campaign group Genetics Forum, the FDA's Deputy Commissioner Michael Taylor was previously Monsanto's lawyer and is now representing Monsanto in anti-labelling legal action. The FDA's Deputy Director of New Animal Drugs Margaret Miller collaborated with Monsanto staff on joint publications. And the FDA Data Reviewer Susan Sechen previously worked at Cornell University on a Monsanto-funded contract.

■ Details from Genetics Forum, 3rd Floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH (071-638 0606).

Parents back curbs on kids food adverts

Two out of three parents want to see tougher restrictions on children's food adverts. Only 15 per cent of parents think that current food advertising encourages children to eat a healthy and balanced diet according to a MORI poll published by the National Food Alliance (NFA) in July.

The poll of a representative sample of 633 parents also found that half of parents with children aged between five and ten agreed that they often bought advertised foods or drinks which they wouldn't otherwise buy because of their children's 'pester power'. And the same number of parents said that advertising encouraged their children to spend their pocket money on foods which the parents prefered them not to eat.

The NFA is calling for advertising codes of practice to be amended to ensure that advertising, particularly to children does more to support healthier eating. In submissions, to the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) published in July the NFA makes detailed proposals for amendments to the codes of advertising practice which would ensure that advertisements presents a more balanced picture of nutrition, rather than it's present dominance by adverts for fatty and sugary foods.

The NFA intends that its proposals will assist the Nutrition Task Force which has called on the regulatory bodies to reveiw their codes of practice in the light of the Health of the Nation.

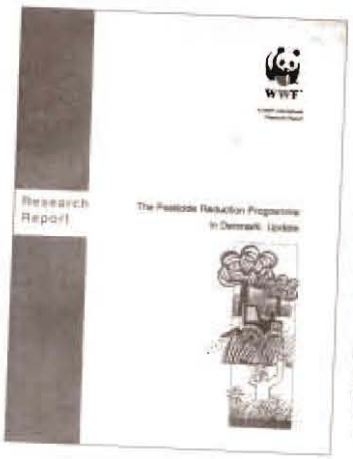
■ *Responsible Food Advertising, Proposals for the Review of Advertising Codes of Practice* is available from the National Food Alliance, 3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH Tel: 071-628 2442. Price £25 (£7.50 to non profit organisations).

GM tomato hits the shelf

On 18 May the Food and Drug Administration approved Calgene's genetically modified tomato for sale in the US. The 'Flavr Savr' tomato has one gene reversed to prevent softening and one gene inserted which gives resistance to the antibiotic kanamycin. The UK government's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes has already recommended that antibiotic resistance genes should be removed or deactivated if the antibiotic is currently in medical use. Public consultation on this issue will be reviewed by ACNFP in July.

■ Details:Genetics Forum 071-638 0606

Denmark fails pesticide targets



A pesticide reduction programme aimed at cutting use by 25 per cent by 1990 was not achieveed, and a 50 per cent reduction by 1997 will fail if more stringent measures are not implemented, says the World Wide Fund for Nature. The promotion of organic farming, pesticide taxation and CAP renegotiation are urged upon the Danish Government.

■ *WWF Research Report: The Pesticide Reduction Programme in Denmark - Update*, WWF International, Switzerland (UK office 0483-426444), 1994.

NAO nudges NHS

Inspectors of the National Audit Office (NAO) have called on hospital catering managers to ensure nutritional standards are written into all catering contract specifications. Their report on hospital meals found continuing rumbles of discontent among patients in a minority of institutions. It also found that costs ranged from £2 per patient per day to over £10, and that costs were not linked to patient satisfaction.

■ *NHS: Hospital Catering in England, National Audit Office*, April 1994, London:HMSO, £7.40.

Hoechst faces pesticide outcry

The German-based multinational chemical company Hoechst AG faces an international campaign against two of its products, Endosulfan and Triphenyltin, co-ordinated by the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN-AP). 'In the South, with poverty, illiteracy, lack of resources to monitor pesticide use and restrictions on workers organising themselves, these pesticides become extremely hazardous and are potentially deadly,' said PAN-AP director Sarojeni Rengam, launching their campaign to have the pesticides withdrawn.

■ *Citizens, Pesticides, Hoechst*, by R Mafarlane, PAN-AP, 1994. Details from PAN-AP, P O Box 1170, 10850 Penang, Malasia (tel 60-4-6570271).

The Food Commission's special supplement on food products

CHECKOUT

In a special report by The Food Commission we look at the soft drinks that would like you to think they are fruit juice

Fruit juice drinks – or legalised fraud?

Only five percent fruit (orange pulp) plus sugar and a dose of artificial sweetener saccharin in Kia Ora

They may look like juice and have fruity pictures on the pack, but don't be fooled. Many 'fruit juice drinks' are barely 10 per cent real juice. We took a look inside the cartons.

While manufacturers of pure fruit juices are being sent to prison in America and have been threatened with prosecution in the UK for adulterating their product with added sugar and water, manufacturers of 'fruit juice drinks' can do exactly the same thing and escape with impunity.

The phrase 'fruit juice drink' is poorly defined but it does mean one thing. The product is not pure juice, nor even a reconstituted juice made with water and concentrate. Fruit juice drinks may be stacked on the shelves alongside the real juices, and they may have pictures of fruit all over the carton. But in the most popular products being sold this summer we found none that had even 50 per cent real fruit juice and some that had as little as five per cent fruit.

Popular brands like Ribena, Apple 'C' and Rowntree Fruit Juice Drink all scored less than 10 per cent real fruit juice. Several products had more added sugar than juice. Many of these low-juice drinks had added colouring agents. Virtually all had added flavourings.

This year the US Food and Drug Administration has made it compulsory for American manufacturers to declare the amount of juice in products such as these. In 1989 the *Food Magazine* reported on the low levels of fruit in many fruit drinks and called on MAFF to make juice declarations compulsory. They told us that regulations were being drafted to come into effect in 1991. In 1991 the revised Soft Drinks Regulations were due to state that if a drink indicates its flavour comes mainly from fruit then the amount of fruit has to be declared. When they were published the expected regulation was missing. We asked MAFF what they now planned to do about it, and they told us that they were awaiting the EC's draft directive on quantitative ingredient declarations. When will that be?

As readers may remember, the

Continued on next page

Fruit juice drinks

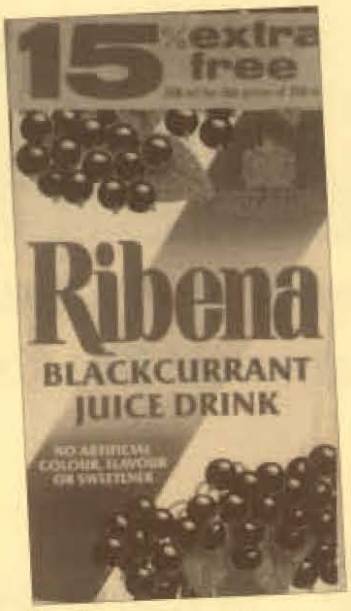
Continued form previous page

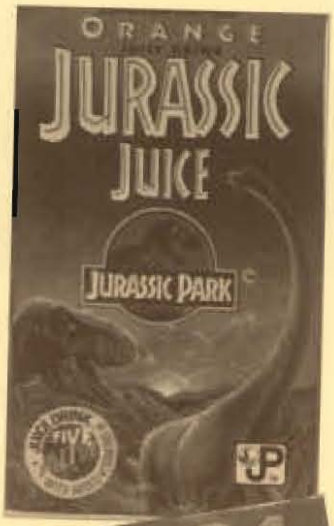
directive on quantitative ingredient declarations (QUIDs) has been stalled for several years, and is not likely to surface until 1995. Then it will be discussed for a year or two and become a directive, with luck, by 1997. That will require member states to draft legislation within, say another 18 months. That legislation in turn will be tossed about and finally be enacted in, say, 1999. It, too, will not require actual change for another year or two after that...

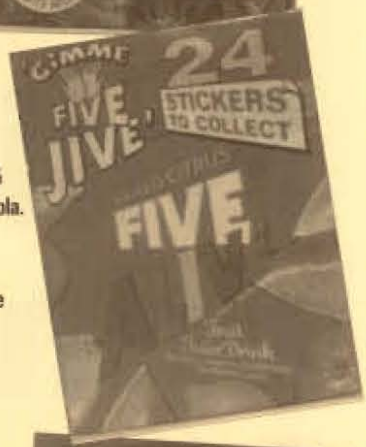
The Food Commission is concerned that these products can feature their 'real fruit juice' image even when they are as much as 95 per cent sugar-water. As health experts call on us all to increase our fruit and vegetable consumption, these products masquerade as real fruit, but apart from some added vitamin C they will have little or none of the other valuable ingredients – the other vitamins, enzymes, bioflavinoids, minerals and other trace nutrients that real fruit has. We believe the pictures of fruit should be removed and the amount of juice clearly declared – if only to embarrass the manufacturers into improving their products.

In the meantime, if the product doesn't declare the quantity of fruit then be suspicious. Have a look at the list of ingredients. Real juice doesn't have to have a list because there is only the one ingredient. If there is a list, and it includes colouring and flavouring, and especially if water and sugar are the first two ingredients, then you can be sure there is very little fruit in the pack.

■ Researched by Tim Lobstein







▲ Popular in lunch boxes, but Ribena had only 5 per cent juice and a lot more sugar than Coca Cola.

Two cheers to Robinsons for removing the saccharin from their drink, and declaring the juice content (12 per cent juice plus 2 per cent orange pulp) ➤

Fruit juice drinks - less than you might expect

Product	Fruit content	Added flavouring	Added colouring
Capri-Sun orange	10%	yes	no
Capri-Sun tropical orange	10%	yes	no
Capri-Sun mountain cooler	10%	yes	no
Del Monte Orange Burst	secret	no	no
Del Monte Lemonade Burst	secret	yes	no
Five Alive mixed citrus	45%	yes	no
Five Alive mediterranean	44%	yes	no
Five Alive tropical	32%	yes	no
Jurassic Juice, orange	11% *	yes	no
Kia-Ora whole orange	5% *	yes	no
Libby's Apple 'C'	6% *	yes	yes
Libby's Orange 'C'	24%	yes	yes
Libby's Um Bongo	20%	yes	no
Bulmers Orangina	15%	yes	no
Ribena blackcurrant	5% *	no	no
Ribena strawberry	5% *	yes	yes
Ribena raspberry	6% *	yes	no
Ribena orange & apricot	7% *	yes	no
Robinson's Orange	14%	yes	no
Rowntree Fruit Juice	9% *	yes	no

* the quantity of added sugar in these products exceeds the quantity of fruit

[source: manufacturers data collected 10/93-5/94]

Loopy labels

We feature another batch of barmy brands sent in by our sharp-eyed shoppers.

Tesco juice and salad box labels

High in vitamin C declares the Tesco orange juice label. Rich in vitamin C, iron and protein declares the Distafruit salad box label (from Budgens).

But how high? Claims like these are illegal unless they are backed up by figures declaring how much of the vitamin or mineral there is in the product, usually in terms of the amount in a serving as a proportion of your recommended daily intake. Neither Tesco nor Distafruit make such a declaration. We phoned and faxed Tesco's press office and they promised to answer our charges. No reply came. Their knuckles are hereby rapped.

Boots Shapers crisps

Trying to lose weight but fancy a little snack? Boots would like you to think they have just the product in the form of some crisps in their 'Shapers' range, sold with the usual warning that the product can aid slimming 'only as part of a Calorie controlled diet'.

But just a moment. Boots also sell some low fat crisps, so which should you choose? It turns out that weight for weight the Shapers crisps have **more** calories and **more** fat – and **three times** the salt – as the low fat crisps. In fact the only good thing about the Shapers pack is that it is smaller. You get 20 grams of Shapers (for 27p) compared with 40 grams of regular low fat crisps (for 32p). In the name of slimming, we think Boots are taking you for a ride.

We noticed a similar trick being used by Batchelors in their instant soup range. The Slim-a-Soup products were very similar to the regular Cup-a-Soups, except that you got about half the quantity in a pack. Selling a smaller portion accounted for much of the reduced calories, yet slimmers think they are getting a special formulation and are induced to pay a premium price. We think this is misleading.

Cadbury's drinking chocolate

Two varieties of the one product it would seem. Both claim to be the 'original' drinking chocolate so of course there is no difference. Or is there?

Well, we couldn't resist reading the ingredient lists and had a moment of shocked horror as we found that the newer version of Cadbury's Original Drinking Chocolate (on the right, a purple pack) contained added salt and flavouring, whereas the previous Cadbury's Original Drinking Chocolate (on the left, a red pack) had just the sugar and cocoa that we have all learned to love.

We asked Cadbury's what on earth they were doing to their sugary brew, and how it could still call itself original if it contained these added ingredients.

The flavouring, they told us, was methyl vanillin (which we found out is a nature-identical vanilla flavour, but not the real thing) added at 'minute levels' plus a pinch of salt. Synthetic vanilla flavour and salt had actually been used from the 1950s through to 1987 but were dropped that year as part of 'a drive to remove artificial additives' from their products.

Cadbury's were sure consumers could barely tell the difference when that change was made. Now, though, they feel that 'a small discerning minority might prefer the product containing these ingredients' and the flavouring and salt have come back in.

We thought that 'Original' meant that the food was going to have the same composition as it did when first made, but we were mistaken. According to the Cadbury's spokesperson, 'the term "Original" as applied to the current product is intended to imply that the beverage was the first of it type on the market place.'

Sweetness and

Are artificial sweeteners replacing sugar or are we just eating more sweet food? The Food Commission investigates the changing market for sweetness.

As sugar has increasingly fallen out of nutritional favour, the market for artificial sweeteners has taken off in a big way. Initially offered as an alternative to sugar for dieters and diabetics, artificial sweeteners are now found in a whole range of foods commonly consumed by the general population including children.

With so many products now containing artificial sweeteners you'd think we'd be eating less sugar. So it's something of a surprise to discover that the amount of sugar going into food has remained remarkably stable over the last ten years (see table 1). It's true we buy less packet sugar in the supermarket and therefore think we eat less sugar, but we easily make up the difference with sugars hidden in processed foods and soft drinks.

Meanwhile our consumption of low calorie artificial sweeteners has grown and is predicted to carry on increasing. It was always assumed that artificial sweeteners would substitute for sugar but the figures that are now emerging show that, far from being a significant replacement for sugar, artificial sweeteners are adding to the total market for 'sweetness' and have encouraged our consumption of highly sweetened foods.

In 1990 the Food Commission revealed that many regular squashes and soft drinks which appeal to children actually provide a double-dose of sweetness – from sugar and intense sweeteners – encouraging an even sweeter tooth. The food industry's own research confirms that children under ten prefer the up-front sweetness provided by artificial sweeteners. Once they acquire the taste it's much harder to interest children in less sweetened and more nutritious foods, say health campaigners.

Intense sweeteners were originally marketed as an aid to dieters sold as table top sweeteners and used in 'diet' drinks. 'Diet' low calorie soft drinks, are the major source of intense sweeteners in many, particularly young, people's diets. In the ten years between 1981 and 91 sales of these drinks increased by over ten times (see table 2) and are predicted to rise even further by the end of the century.

However there is little evidence that such 'diet' drinks have helped keep us slim. In fact, the numbers of overweight and obese people are increasing and the government is concerned enough to have set targets for reducing obesity as part of its Health of the Nation strategy. Reseach has even suggested that intense sweeteners may boost appetite. Other researchers argued, that as carbohydrate is a regulator of appetite, substituting artificial sweeteners may impair the appetite control mechanisms of the body and thus encourage greater food consumption.

Then there is the behavioural theory which suggest that we compensate for eating low calorie foods by 'treating' ourselves to high calorie foods. Who hasn't at sometime thought, 'I've had a diet cola so I can afford to give myself a cream bun as a treat'? Thus we manage to fool ourselves that we're cutting back on the calories but may end up eating even more.

However the artificial sweetener market is now repositioning itself. Manufacturers are realising the limits of the 'diet' market which is fast being seen as old fashioned and unhealthy. The smart move is now to associate your product with 'health'. Artificial sweetener manufacturers have been quick to use government recommendations for a reduction in our sugar consumption as a new marketing opportunity.

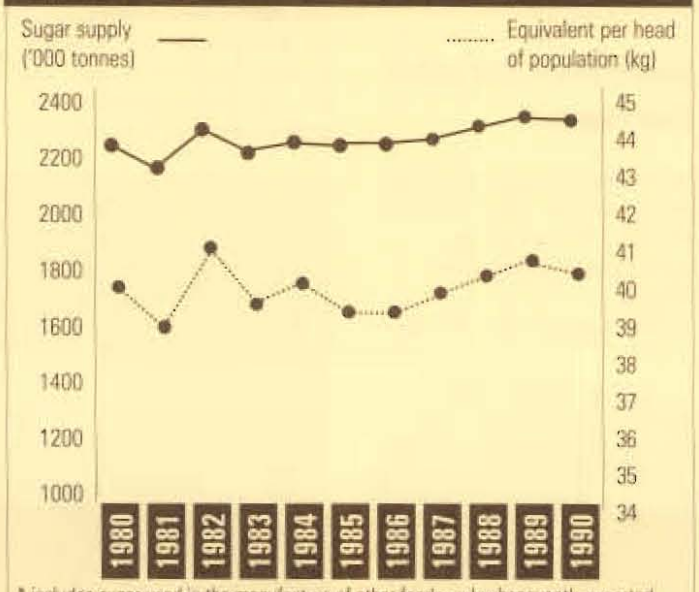
Now artificial sweeteners are to be found in products claiming to be 'lite', 'low in sugar' or containing 'no added sugar' aimed at health conscious parents. Children are a particularly important market as 45 per cent of all soft drinks are consumed by children and teenagers. But while these individual products may contain less sugar, it remains to be seen whether they help to reduce the total amount of sugar in our diets.

How much are we eating?

In the UK we consume more low-calorie sweeteners than any other European country. While total UK sugar consumption is roughly the same as in France (just over 2 million tonnes a year), our consumption of these sweeteners is nearly five times higher. According to 1992 figures we consumed more aspartame in the UK than the rest of the EU added together, and our saccharin consumption accounted for a third of the European total.

Perhaps one reason our consumption of artificial sweeteners is high has been the lack of restrictions on

Table 1: Sugar* for food in the UK, 1980-1990



* includes sugar used in the manufacture of other foods and subsequently exported. Excludes sugar in imported manufactured foods.
■ Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics, CSO, 1992

lite

their use (the only restriction is the amount of saccharin that can be used in soft drinks). For example, unlike the UK, France has not permitted sweeteners to be used alongside sugar in soft drinks and squashes – they considered it adulteration. But now everything is about to change.

An EU directive on sweeteners is due to come into force within the next eighteen months and for the UK it will set much stricter criteria for their use – limiting the foods which can contain sweeteners and setting maximum levels of use. For some UK manufacturers this will mean reformulating products and using more blends of sweeteners. But as we are eating and drinking more of the foods that contain artificial sweeteners, it is unlikely that this will reduce our total consumption. It would appear that while aspartame has replaced saccharin in a number of foods and drinks our saccharin consumption has remained about the same, rather than falling as perhaps expected. Meanwhile the market for aspartame continues to grow.

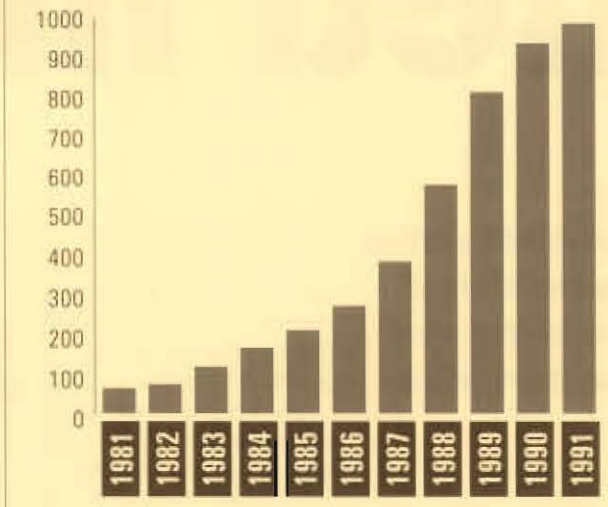
The most recent official survey that examined our consumption of artificial sweeteners dates back to 1987/8 and was published by MAFF in 1990. This survey showed that more saccharin than recommended was being consumed by some young children (from drinks and squashes) and diabetics (from table top sweeteners). MAFF asked manufacturers to warn diabetics not to consume excessive amounts of saccharin and to vary to the types of products they used. But earlier this year, MAFF's Food Advisory Committee expressed its disappointment that some manufacturers were failing to implement MAFF's advice. A new survey of artificial sweetener use among diabetic people is due to be published by MAFF before the end of the year.

The market for sweeteners has changed rapidly since the MAFF's surveys were carried out in the mid 1980s. But detailed figures are a closely guarded trade secret. Over the last three years MAFF has requested and received market information from the sweetener companies which it has presented to its Food Advisory Committee. Even though that committee includes consumer representatives they are forbidden to pass this information outside the committee. When the Food Commission asked MAFF for the data, we were refused, first on grounds of 'commercial confidentiality' and then we were told because MAFF was submitting an article for publication and the figures could not be released in advance.

■ MAFF, Intakes of Intense and Bulk Sweeteners in the UK 1987-88, Food Surveillance Paper No 29, HMSO, 1990.

■ Written and researched by Sue Dibb
Additional research Dee McColgan

Table 2: UK sales of low-calorie carbonates



■ Source: The British Soft Drinks Association (1993)

Artificial sweeteners and children

MAFFs survey showed that children under five had particularly high intakes of saccharin for their body weight – up to 6.28 mg/kg/day. The Food Commission calculated that one in six (17%) children aged between two and five were consuming more than the accepted daily intake (ADI) level of 2.5mg/kg/day. MAFF subsequently accepted evidence from its toxicity advisors that it was safe to raise the ADI to 5mg/kg/day and thus solve the problem, but the EC has so far continued to use the lower figure.

The major source of saccharin for these young children was regular soft drinks, which many parents are unlikely to realise contain artificial sweeteners alongside the sugar. All artificial sweeteners are banned in foods 'specially prepared for babies and young children'. But as the Food Commission has pointed out in the past there is no clear definition of a young child. Most common sense understanding of the phrase would include children up to the age of three. But young children don't just eat food 'specially prepared for babies and young children' (ie baby food). From an early age they eat a range of foods many of them specifically targeted and popular with youngsters but which are permitted to contain artificial sweeteners.

Sweet alternatives

Up until 1983 saccharin was the only low calorie sweetener permitted for use in the UK, but then aspartame (trade name Nutrasweet), acesulfame-K and thaumatin were given approval. Now European legislation means that two other intense sweeteners, neohesperidine and cyclamate (banned in the UK since the late 1967) are also likely to be allowed.

The intense sweetness of these additives mean that they are used in very small quanitites and are therefore virtually calorie free. Originally their main market was in 'diet' and 'low calorie' products but now they are widely found in a whole range of products often in combination with each other to provide a greater intensity of flavour. Aspartame is considered to the sweetener with a taste profile most like sugar.

There are currently two new low-calorie sweeteners which are being evaluated by most food regulatory authorities, sucralose, made by Tate & Lyle, and alitame. Both claim the advantage over aspartame of being heat stable while possessing a similar quality of sweetness. If approved these new sweeteners may develop new markets for reduced calorie versions of baked goods, confectionery and canned foods.

Another kind of sweetener are the 'polyols', such as sorbitol, mannitol, isomalt, lactitol and xylitol. Known as bulk sweeteners these are used mainly in 'tooth-friendly' sweets and diabetic foods. Unlike the intense sweeteners they are not low-calorie and they can cause diarrhoea in some people if eaten in quantity.

In the future we may see foods with added sweetness brought about through genetic modification. Research is already underway into how genes for, sweetness could be inserted into fruit, for example.

Banned in the

New US labelling regulations will limit nutrition and health claims made by manufacturers of processed foods. The Food Commission went shopping to see which British claims would be banned in America.

In the name of giving consumers greater knowledge about the products they buy, and as an incentive to manufacturers to improve their products, America's two leading food regulating bodies have laid down rules on food labelling which come into effect this summer.

Under the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (1990), the US Food and Drug Administration and the Food Safety and Inspection Service are requiring changes which they estimate will cost the industry up to $2.3 billion over the next two decades, but believe that the benefits to public health will 'well exceed' this figure.

The new regulations define terms such as 'low' (as in 'low fat', 'low calorie'), 'reduced', and 'light' and there are restrictions on the use of specific health claims linking nutrients to diseases such as heart disease and cancer. In a departure from previous practice which disallowed any linking of products to specific diseases, the regulations will allow seven forms of health claim:

- high calcium products can be linked to osteoporosis claims for certain target groups (eg young women)
- low fat foods and reduction of cancer risk
- low saturated fat and low cholesterol foods and coronary heart disease prevention
- fibre-containing grain products, fruits and vegetables can be linked to preventing cancer and also to coronary heart disease
- fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins A and C can be linked to preventing cancer
- salt (sodium) can be linked to high blood pressure
- folic acid-rich foods and birth defects such as spina bifida.

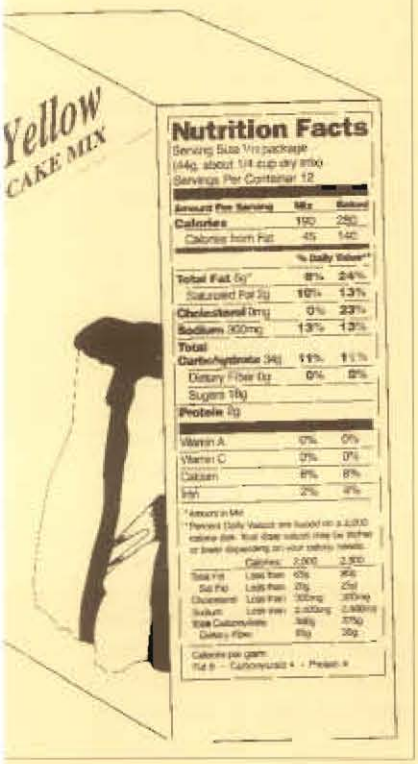
No food can make a health claim if it is high in fat or salt and it is expected there will be restrictions on the use of health claims in other 'junk' foods like sweets and soft drinks.

The definitions for what can be called low and high are linked to the FDA's new format nutrition panel which will be required on virtually all packaged foods, and even on wrapped fruit and vegetables. Mandatory declarations include figures for saturated fat and sugars, expressed in amounts per serving and percentage of the daily value recommended for a 2000 Calorie diet.

Other measures are also being introduced. Ingredient labelling will be required on virtually all foods that contain more than one ingredient. Fruit drinks are to be required to declare the total percentage of fruit juice in the product. And ingredient lists are to be amended to require the declaration of caseinates as being a milk derivative in foods claiming to be non-dairy, such as coffee whiteners, and to require the naming of the source of hydrolysed proteins used as flavour boosters. In both these cases the FDA believes the declarations will help allergy sufferers avoid the relevant products.

The US regulations say a low saturated fat claim can only be made where there is less than 1 gram saturated fat per serving. A 10-gram portion pack of Flora contains nearly 2 gram saturated fat, Sainsburys about 1.5 grams.

How the FDA likes it



The lower fat claim on these Boots crisps would pass the US regulations, but the term 'lightly salted' would probably fail. Far from being lightly salted, these crisps contain twice as much salt as their Cheese and Onion cousins - and would fail the US requirement that 'light' should mean at least 50 per cent less than the regular salt level.

USA

This drink is not sugar free as it contains fruit syrups, and the level of sugars takes it well above the US maximum of 0.5 grams per serving allowed for a sugar-free claim.

Under US law this Rowntree fruit juice drink would have to state the amount of juice in the pack. With water and sugar as the first two ingredients, we believe this product to be approximately 9% blended fruit juices.

Claims in the UK

Many nutrition claims (ie that a food is high or low in a particular nutrient) were found to be misleading and false in a major survey by the Coronary Prevention Group in 1991. Many foods claiming to be low in a nutrient were found, in fact, to be high in that nutrient. But unlike the US, there is no specific legislation to stop manufacturers making these kinds of claims in the UK.

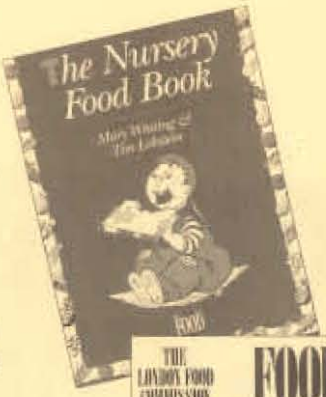
Attempts to regulate these claims throughout the European Union could take many years to be agreed and come into effect. MAFF announced that it would introduce its own 'voluntary guidelines', but even they are now wavering over this.

Health claims are much harder to define and regulate. These are the kinds of claims that suggest or imply that particular foods may have a beneficial effect on health, such as 'helps lower cholesterol' or 'builds healthy teeth and bones'. The government's Food Advisory Committee has repeatedly expressed concern about the potentially misleading nature of some health claims and has called for tougher controls. Claims, they said, should only be allowed if they refer to 'measurable and objective characteristics' which would rule out meaningless descriptions such as 'healthy' or 'wholesome'. But an EC Directive, first proposed 14 years ago is still no nearer agreement and there are fears that the European Commission may drop its plans altogether for regulating these kinds of claims.

While the Food Advisory Committee recommended that health claims should only be permitted if supported by the Chief Medical Officer, it looks unlikely that the UK will adopt a similar 'approved list' strategy for health claims as in the US. And some health campaigners argue that's not a bad thing. They don't want to see any health claims. If, as the industry asserts, there are no 'good' or 'bad' foods, then manufacturers shouldn't be permitted to claim particular foods are beneficial to health.

A health claim like this one promising to reduce cholesterol can only be made on a low fat food (which this is) but it must be accompanied by a statement giving the general relationship between diet and cholesterol, stating also that other factors play a role in heart disease.

market place



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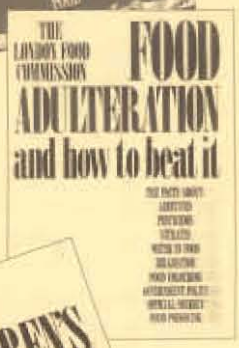

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A penetrating expose of the shocking state of food quality in Britain, revealing the facts on additives, pesticides, food poisoning and irradiation. £5.95 inc p&p.

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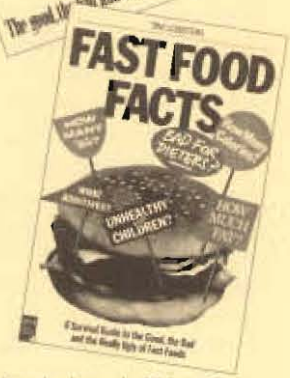

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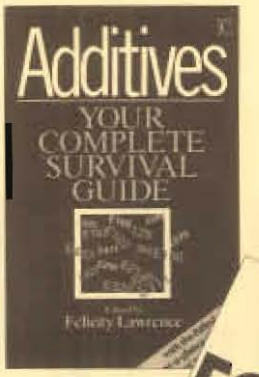
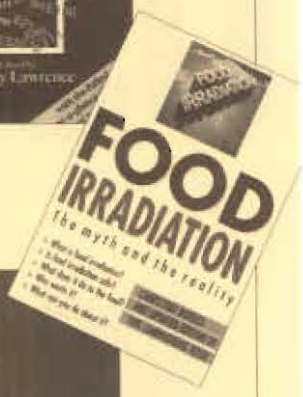


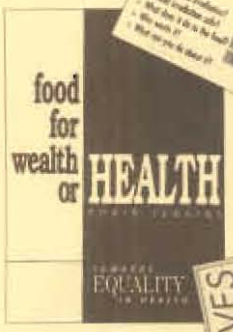
Additives - Your Complete Survival Guide

Still the best reference book with comprehensive tables and summaries of the evidence on the safety of each additive. Special price only £3.50 inc p&p.



Food Irradiation

Good food doesn't need irradiating yet the UK has now legalised the process. £6.50 inc p&p.



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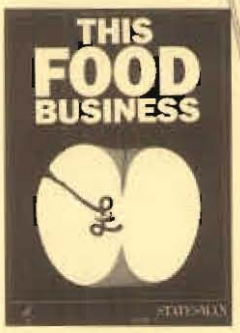

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The shops we love to hate

Supermarkets dominate Britain's food industry, dictating their terms to farmers and manufacturers alike. We love them and hate them and, according to a forthcoming report by Hugh Raven and Tim Lang, we urgently need to bring them under greater public control.

Today the number of food shops is a third of what it was in the 1960s. Britain is in fact a nation of supermarkets and hypermarkets, and declining street or open markets.

Whereas only decades ago people went to the shops, now they go to a self serve warehouse. This has music and smartly dressed attendants filling clean shelves, with the occasional service counter, and hovering aides to reassure. Essentially the customer is helped to do the service sector work others used to do in former times.

The real warehousing now occurs on the motorways, as the giant wagons with their chilled and frozen wares thunder to meet the retailers' rigorous deadlines. The entire food system, from farm to factory to distribution centre to warehouse, operates on a miracle of planning known as 'just in time'.

No image is more closely associated with the triumph of consumerism than the supermarket. The supermarket is deemed the triumph of efficiency, choice, value for money, cleanliness, and good management.

The daily miracle of bringing food from all over the world, whether wrapped or loose, lurid or wholesome, to urban centres is an awesome feat of modern management. No wonder retail captains in recent years have often been asked to review state bodies. In the early 1980s Rayner (Marks and Spencer) reviewed Civil Service Catering. In the mid 1980s Griffiths (J.Sainsburys) reviewed Community Care. And in 1994 Lord Sainsbury, deregulation adviser to the President of the Board of Trade, himself introduced the government-wide assault on red tape. We are not a nation of shopkeepers but a nation governed by shopkeepers.

Giant continental European low cost retailers like Aldi and Netto are moving in to the UK. Questions have been asked about UK food retailers' high mark-ups and profit compared to other European giants. All over the country, groups have sprung up against the opening of new superstores. There were 50 at one count against Tesco. After seeming recession-proof, the big companies have begun to announce falls in sales. Their share value fell. Lay-offs have occurred.

Supermarkets, in short, have for decades been happily presented as prime examples of how market forces benefit consumers and shareholders, to the mutual benefit of all. Now, with a Parliamentary Select Committee investigating out-of-town shopping, there is a healthily growing debate about whether this wasn't a false perception.

Choice

The modern supermarket provides a range of choice that is awesome.

In June 1981, a mid-sized Tesco store stocked 1,799 items kept at ambient temperatures. In October 1993, it would stock 3,818 items. Tesco's larger stores now stock over 13,500 different food items. Compare that to a Netto store, one of the new arrival discount stores, which by January 1993 had 45 stores in the UK. Netto stocks just 600 lines including both well known brands and its own label.

According to the Chairman of J Sainsbury, 'the range of food and other goods we sell is four times as great as 20 years ago and now we are able to have fish and delicatessen counters and in-store bakeries.'

Price

Part of the triumph of the supermarket has been its association as the vehicle which brought unimagined foods down to the price that ordinary British people could afford. Meanwhile, the proportion of household food expenditure on the main food groups (beverages; bread/cereals; fruit and vegetables; sugar and preserves; fats; meat; fish and eggs; and milk, cream and cheese) has remained remarkably stable. In other words, the people have paid less for broadly the same diet.

Convenience

Modern supermarkets have transformed the life of the shopper. Instead of having to trail around a variety of shops, today there is one trip (often by private car) to one shop at which almost everything – and more – that the routine shopper requires. The stores are warm, clean and familiarly consistent.

Instead of queuing for the attention of attendants behind counters, almost all of the modern shopping experience is under the control of the customer. S/he can amble or whip around the aisles; can spend as long or as little time perusing the labels as is desired; and can choose between a number of well-known brands or the 'own label' supermarket brand.

On average the British spend 2.6 hours per week on essential shopping such as for food, with women doing vastly more than men, retired people more than workers and the unemployed less than the average.

Convenience meals were developed, utilising a modification of cook-chill techniques of mass catering pioneered for state hospitals. Marks and Spencers plc pioneered cook-chilled convenience meals, introducing Chicken Kiev, then Chicken Cordon Bleu in 1981. By 1987 chilled meals accounted for 75% of its food sales, and it had 75%

cartoon: Leeds Postcards

of the national chilled food market. The market rocketed from zero to £300 million in five years and is now worth over £600 million a year! The other supermarkets quickly followed M&S's lead.

Efficiency

Supermarkets represent the triumph of culture over nature. By pushing management, contracts and close study of markets to the limit, they have been able to bring to the consumer foods across the seasons. Foods, indeed, barely seem to be connected to the seasons. Green beans can come to the shelves almost throughout the year, flown in from across the globe, when the Northern climate won't yield. They may cost more, but they are there. Even if consumers still don't eat vegetables evenly throughout the year – which they don't – the supermarket means they have the option.

Providing this choice can only be achieved by remarkable planning, communications, transport and new technologies such as atmospheric control to reduce waste and rotting. Living in the heart of one of the worlds great cities – as both authors do – it is easy to forget or under-rate the extraordinary feat of moving all that food, mostly perishable, to consumers many of whom have only idealised notions of what it is to grow food, let alone where it has come from and what its impact is.

Market failure

Many of the advantages which are commonly held to accrue from our highly concentrated food retailing sector depend upon the free play of market forces. Above all, supermarkets are justified on the grounds that they are highly competitive, vying to outdo each other on both cheapness and convenience.

The reality, we believe, is different. In the real world, markets do not operate as described in economic textbooks. In the UK food retailing sector, several conditions of the free market do not – or do not always – apply.

One such is the requirement that all the economic implications of a transaction should be reflected in the price. As we show, this does not apply to many aspects of food retailing – 'loss leaders' and 'externalities' (costs not reflected in the product's price) abound. For example the real cost of transport associated with centralised distribution and out-of-town locations are not reflected in supermarket prices. Neither are the resource costs of excessive packaging, or intensive farming and horticulture. And nor do consumers have a 'perfect knowledge' of the comparable prices in other stores in order to make a properly informed choice.

Planning

The financial muscle and expertise of supermarkets make them formidable operators of the planning system. A combination of aggressive supermarket expansion and Government policy during the 1980s transformed patterns of food retailing throughout the country. Town centre shopping declined at the hands of out-of-town and edge-of-town development. New retail outlets on greenfield sites increased both traffic levels and urban sprawl – at very considerable environmental cost.

Typical of the public statements of supermarkets on their site development policies is Sainsbury's claim that even on greenfield sites, development will be considered 'normally only when as a result of the development the overall public benefit in terms of open space or environmental terms is undiminished or preferably enhanced.' Tesco reassures that 'concern that store development is having any material impact on greenfield locations is unfounded,' and 'Tesco developments have secured important gains in facilities and amenities wherever they have taken place.'

Supermarkets' claimed commitment to, in Tesco's words, 'supporting the well-being of the community' is disputed by some of the communities whose interests are being 'supported'. In Bristol, 16,664 local people objected in writing to a proposed Tesco store, backed by Bristol City Council, Avon County Council, the local MP and MEP, all the local political parties, the city's Bishop and numerous local amenity groups. Tesco ignored the views of the community, built their supermarket and resorted to litigation to prevent demonstrations by local residents.

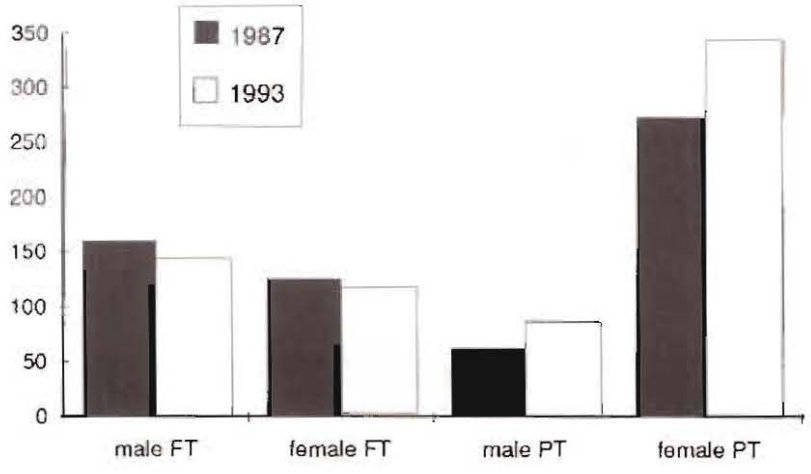
Supermarkets led the way in the run-down of the High Street. According to the Automobile Association 'out-of-town shopping centres ... for a mainly car-borne consumer market (are a) trend pioneered by food retailers such as Sainsbury.' In 1988, for example, 65 per cent of new superstores opened were edge- or out-of-town, with only ten per cent in town centres. In the year to spring 1992, 72 per cent of Sainsbury's sales were from edge- or out-of-town sites; for Safeway the figure was 84 per cent and for Tesco 87 per cent – reflecting the fact that edge- or out-of-town stores, though limited in accessibility and environmentally damaging, tend to be more profitable than town centre equivalents. They also divert business away from – and thus undermine the viability and vitality of – existing shopping centres.

Somewhat surprisingly, food retailers frequently deny that their developments have this effect. According to Tesco 'concern is sometimes expressed about the impact that out of town shopping facilities have on the traditional high street. All the evidence in recent years has shown that in fact the effect is beneficial.'

A common practice of supermarkets when moving out of town is to prevent their former sites remaining in the grocery sector, by refusing to sub-

More jobs for part-time women

Part-time staff, especially women, have gained opportunities at the expense of full-time women and men. Job numbers in 000s



Hourly rates kept low

Company	Wage rates check-out assistant
Sainsbury	£3.57
Tesco	£3.57
Kwik Save	£3.35
Safeway	£3.19
Retail Co-op Societies	£3.18
Gateway	£3.08

■ Source: USDAW, cited by Raven and Lang, 1994 in press.

Price advantages for out-of-town stores

Even within the same supermarket chain the larger branches can be substantially cheaper. The figures are for identical shopping baskets (31 items)

	Ministore	Superstore	difference
Tesco	£23.13	£21.55	£1.58
Sainsbury	£23.69	£23.56	£0.13
Co-op	£25.97	£23.57	£2.40

■ Source: Food Retailing in London, London Food Commission, 1985

let to potential competitors. Unless other retail space is available, this will often leave shopping centres with no significant grocery outlet – reducing the number of shoppers and threatening the viability of other local shops.

Health

On three counts, supermarkets must take their share of responsibility for the nation's health.

Firstly, their own rates of pay, and pay differentials, contribute to poverty and inequality and the attendant increased risk of ill health.

Secondly, Government policy is to encourage consumers to shop, cook and eat healthily. The standard market defence of the status quo is that supermarkets cannot be blamed if consumers eat what they choose to buy. Yet supermarkets do have an influence: through their marketing strategies, their advertising and product promotions, their labelling practices and their pricing strategies.

And thirdly, their policies have added a distinct and extra burden for people on low incomes.

Poor consumers are caught in a nasty cleft stick. Shortage of income means more pressure to make money go further, yet to be able to take advantage of cheaper foods costs more money. Transport to and from the supermarket, and bulk purchases, takes money – and taking advantage by buying a lot at once may mean access to credit facilities, which is also more readily available to higher income earners.

Several studies have shown that supermarkets in more affluent areas 'offered more choice, carried more information on nutrition, had a greater variety of vegetables and fruit, had more choice in pulses and herbs and more healthy products (eg low in fat, sugar or salt or high in fibre) than supermarkets in other areas.

In Hampstead in the late 1980s a study by the community dietitian suggested it would be better to be poor and live in a rich area than poor in a poor area. Availability of healthier alternatives to foods such as white bread and full fat milk were less easy to find in deprived areas and they were priced at a higher premium.

A study published by the London Food Commission in 1985 found that some supermarket chains also operated price differentials according to the location of the supermarket, with the larger out-of-town stores having lower prices on a range of goods than the same chain's smaller, in-town branches. Again, it is those who can least afford the transport costs to the further store who must pay more.

Democracy

We are concerned about many other aspects of food retail behaviour: their policies affecting transport, packaging, employers and so on. We note the rising concern about the impact of modern food retailing with great interest. That so many are beginning to voice concerns is a matter of profound hope. We have little doubt that the revolution in food retailing – and retailing as a whole – is a major historical shift in how people live their lives.

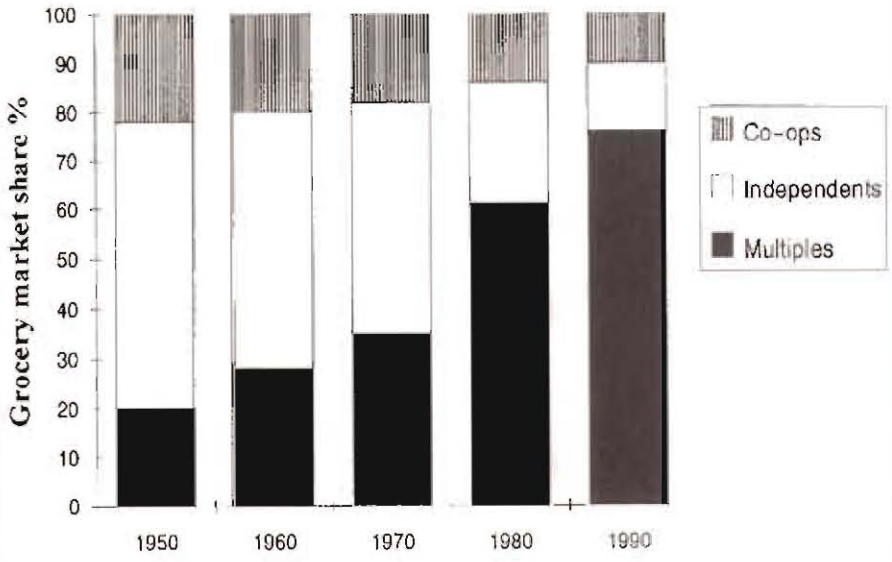
We are not romantic, harking back to some mythic era when local shops were plentiful, clean and customer-oriented. Nor are we without admiration for some aspects of modern food retail management. The point of our review is to encourage more people to stand back and look at the shape of the whole.

In our full report we make a series of recommendations, including:

- The Office of Fair Trading should look at monopoly practices in regional and local markets
- Planning policies need to include commitments to protect the diversity of local shopping facilities and outlets
- Transport subsidies should be reviewed to ensure that true transport costs are reflected in the prices of products
- Wholesale fresh food markets should be opened to the public and made more customer-friendly
- The Trades Description Act should be amended to define the meaning of environmentally friendly packaging
- National targets for the reduction in the use of packaging materials should be set
- Experiments with alternative schemes such as direct marketing, LETS and box schemes should be supported

■ The full report, by Hugh Raven and Tim Lang is to be published later this year. Contact: SAFE Alliance 071-823 5660

Increasing domination by the supermarket chains



■ Source: Institute of Grocery Distribution

Cyprus: an odyssey in bromatology*

Alan Long, campaigner and founder of Vegetarian Economy and Green Agriculture (VEGA), reveals the secrets of feeding the tourists in Cyprus.

Mediterranean agriculture and diet hold strong clues to healthy living. In particular they throw light on the so-called French paradox in which the populations of Toulouse and Crete have long and healthy lives and low rates of coronary heart disease despite high levels of blood cholesterol and a high consumption of fat in their diet. Something in the traditional diets of southern Europe is clearly beneficial to health.

And so a tourist to Cyprus might look forward with pleasure to joining in the traditional fare. Cyprus is the second largest island in the Mediterranean (after Sardinia) and although partly occupied by Turkey, it is the seasonal occupation with tourists that now has the most impact on the lives of local people.

Small fishing villages such as Ayia Napa, have become tourist 'slums' and the catering is dominated by north European tastes. Imported packaged, branded foods are stocked in profusion in shops serving the self-catering apartment blocks – with a range of foods hardly different to ones that would be found in a similar corner shop in Blackpool.

I booked into a 1-star hotel (with a party of British farmers, as it happened, though few showed much interest in their profession). For breakfast we were served 'fresh fruit juice' but this turned out to be an orange drink from a carton, made with sugar and a fruit concentrate imported from Israel.

I found this amazing. Groves of oranges and other citrus fruits beautify the island. We visited one orange grove with a local ministry official who was trying to build up exports. The owner had been encouraged to install equipment to produce and bottle freshly squeezed juice. I took a bottle back in a vain attempt to influence the hotel's supply. 'Sorry,' said the manager. 'We have a fixed contract with a catering supplier. You know how it is...'

The owner of the groves, where a few chicken scratched among the rows, was a stocky 70-year old, still spry, who disdained the government's recommended regimen of sprays. His table was set for lunch: tomatoes, bread, olive oil, feta cheese, oranges and red wine.

Cyprus: oranges grown for export

Neither the hotel nor the shops could find me any wholemeal bread or even pitta bread. I can eat Greek food more easily in my London suburb than I could in this resort, while the Cypriots in Cyprus are increasingly obliged and induced to buy costly imports, expensively packaged and shipped.

Eating in a taverna, I ordered fasolia, a traditional meal of beans, olive oil, lemon juice and vegetables. It was happily provided, although it was not on the menu and was no longer a staple meal for the staff. The Coca-Cola culture had arrived,and even the bouzouki music had given way to hard rock.

The government official expressed no interest in organic farming. Set aside in Cyprus means switching to a crop other than grapes. Terraces lay abandoned. I was spared any sightings of tobacco, which enjoys hefty subsidies in southern countries of the EU.

Irrigation schemes are being developed, distributing dammed water from the melting snows of the Troodos mountains. The contryside is dotted with windmills, watertanks, solar energy units and trees planted under the British administration.

Cypriot farmers can take two crops of potatoes each year from the rich red soil. Harvesting, sorting and packing entails much manual labour, mainly women bussed in daily from the Turkish zone. Rotation is observed and we saw piles of compost ready for spreading on the fields. But UK potato growers may want to focus on the terrible health and safety practices we saw in the Cypriot packing plants.

We were shown avocados, broccoli, lettuce, onions, garlic, cabbage, watermelon, carob, kiwi, pomegranite and pistachios – all grown with exports in mind. Polythene tunnels were being rigged up for tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and courgettes. But many labour-intensive tradional crops were dwindling: chickpeas, lentils, walnuts, almonds and hazel nuts could be found for sale but were all imported, as were dates and sesame seeds.

We saw herds of sheep and goats, kept mainly for their milk to make yogurt and cheese, clearing up after the potato pickers. The British farmers cheered from the coach at every sighting of livestock, from miserable Friesians kept on dairy feedlots to a consignment of pigs in transit to the slaughterhouse. Efforts were being made, as they are in the southern areas of the EU, to raise the output of cows milk. The traditional Mediterranean diet is low in animal derived foods and the milks are generally consumed in fermented forms, so the adult human population is likely to have a limited tolerance for lactose.

The hotel served UHT milk and butter in plastic containers imported – to the British farmers' disgust – from Holland and Germany.

Too much hygiene could weaken our immune systems, it is said, but British EHOs would have fits over conditions in Cyprus. Butchers and fishmongers in Limasol market smoked cigarettes over the raw flesh exposed on their slabs. The meat was dark and the skinned rabbits put off even the British farmers, though the flies seemed well nourished. Strawberries were picked by foreign workers, mainly women from Romania and Bulgaria, who had to use filthy latrines with no washing facilities.

Already the traditional foods eaten by local people have been substantially submerged by foods grown for export to northern Europe and feed its tourists. Northern 'rich' foods and the cult of the cow are destroying the original diets, and with them goes the evidence of the superiority of those diets in bestowing long and healthy lives.

*Bromatology? The study of food! (Gr *brome* food)

letters

Cow concern

I am an organic farmer with all my 93 acres registered with the Soil Association and the Symbol on the beef and sheep I produce. For nearly 30 years, however, I was a 'conventional' dairy farmer and I am still involved in the dairy industry as a whole.

I am especially concerned, therefore, that you printed Colin Spencer's article 'Cows in Clover?' in the last issue (May 1994).

At best he presented a very narrow view of modern dairy farming, at worst I feel he is guilty of bias, scaremongering and gross ignorance.

We all agree that farmers must re-align themselves to match a changing world, but must not forget that agriculture remains of fundamental importance for feeding the worlds increasing population by 'working with the natural and living things to provide more food than would normally be produced'. Milk, furthermore, remains one of the best and most natural foods for any mammal, including humans, and over the centuries we have developed the domestic cow to supplement and sustain this important part of our diet. It is therefore inevitable and desirable that any farmed cow will be encouraged to produce more than her natural limit of 7 litres per day.

We may have selected and bred cows because of their superior milk producing qualities and increased our understanding of their management to the point that better feeding, better housing and better milking methods have all contributed to increased yields, but in my opinion none of these factors has compromised the welfare of cows.

It is totally untrue to suggest that a cow yielding 40 litres/day does not get enough time to sleep, rest or chew her cud, or to claim that 35% of cows suffer mastitis and 25% lameness. Any herdsman will tell you that milk simply could not be produced under such circumstances!

Mark Redman's article which follows in the same magazine is, of course, factually correct, but in the context of your feature simply serves to reinforce Colin Spencer's prejudices against the dairy industry by appearing to imply that 'non-organic' cows are all permanently housed, cannot stand naturally and lie down easily, do not benefit from good stockmanship etc.

I'm not suggesting that all farmers are without fail, generous and kind to animals, but I would dispute that things are as bad on our dairy farms as you have portrayed.

Yours sincerely,
Mr B Garratt,
Burscombe Cliff Farm,
Ashford, Kent

Colin Spencer replies:

Mr Garratt should know that the National Dairy Council itself quoted the figure of 35 per cent mastitis and 25 per cent lameness in the dairy cow. So how can it be 'totally untrue'? And who is it that is suffering from 'gross ignorance'?

He has misunderstood my point. I am not saying that farmers are unkind to their livestock. I am repeating Professor Webster's views (an acknowledged expert on this subject) that the dairy cow is the most hard working and exploited of all the farm animals.

Lastly, if milk is such an important food, how does the two-thirds of the world which finds it indigestible survive? The dairy cow is the main source of the large amounts of saturated fat in our diet. What I ask is that we should rethink her role in our society and the prominence of milk products in our food.

We welcome letters from readers

Please send your comments or thoughts to:
The editors
Living Earth/Food Magazine
3rd floor
5-11 Worship Street
London EC2A 2BH
or you can fax us on 071-628 0817

Help needed

I am undertaking postgraduate research into the future prospects for Organic Farming in Europe. One area in which empirical data is particularly scarce, concerns the reason why people buy organic produce. At the moment, I am in the process of carrying out a survey – amongst likely groups – into the reasons why people buy these products.

In this context I would be grateful if readers would take the time to answer the following questions:

1) How often do you buy organic produce?
2) What organic produce do you buy?
3) Why do you buy organic produce?
4) What do you feel are the main benefits – to health – of eating organic produce?
5) What do you feel are the main benefits – for the environment – of organic farming methods?
6) Is price a factor in your purchase of organic products?

Please sent your replies, to reach me by the 31 of August, to:
Phil Churchward,
MSc European Environmental Policy,
Department of Geography,
Lancaster University,
Lancaster, LA1 4YB

Assistance in this research will be greatly appreciated and I will be happy to provide a summary of the results – to anyone who encloses an SAE with their answers to the above questions.

The Caroline Walker Trust

£2,500
The Caroline Walker Bursary for Studies on Healthier Eating

The Caroline Walker Trust is offering £2,500 to support innovative research or developmental work which will contribute to an improvement in people's eating habits. The bursary is offered to students in full or part-time postgraduate education or to people working in the field (eg dietitians, home economics) who wish to carry out a specific, food related project within the voluntary or statutory sector.

£500
The Caroline Walker Prize for Food and Health

Students are invited to submit an essay of no longer than 5,000 words based upon work they have done as part of their post or undergraduate degree or diploma course, in the area of food and health. The judges are looking for essays which demonstrate a broad understanding of the cultural and social factors affecting food choice with a particular emphasis on health.

For further information please send a SAE to Mrs Sarah Ivetts, The Caroline Walker Trust, 12 Thistle Grove, London SW10 9RZ.

The closing date for applications is 30 September 1994

To boldly go...

This year's AGM was addressed by a new Professor, saw new Trustees elected, added another new member, and looked forward to a new and progressive food policy.

The NFA's AGM returned to last year's pretty, canalside venue; the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' conference suite. Although the early June weather was unseasonably dismal, the atmosphere inside was warm and vibrant. The morning session had the usual lively exchange of information between members and then proceeded to elect four new Trustees to the NFA's Management Committee. Now ten-strong, the Committee can be much more representative of the NFA's growing and diverse membership.

There was even good news on the fundraising front. Jack Winkler, so often the self-proclaimed Cassandra of members' meetings, was able to give a cautiously optimistic Treasurer's report, thanks to recent grants from the Health Education Authority, the Department of Health and the Baring Foundation.

In similarly upbeat mode, Geoffrey Cannon kicked off the afternoon with a Chair's overview of the NFA's past and future role in developing a rational and progressive food, health and agriculture policy, and introduced three speakers who each play a vital part in developing particular aspects of that policy.

Sarah Jane Evans, chair of the Get Cooking! committee was able to report on the remarkable success of a project which was barely a year old. Since the June 1993 launch some 1,500 copies of the Get Cooking! pack have been sold, and a sell-out conference led to the development of a directory (listing some 100 food clubs up and down the country) and a newsletter. If fundraising is successful, future plans include organising regional conferences, inviting local food club representatives on the Get Cooking! committee, and producing more publications to build on the success of the pack.

A different but equally impressive success story was told by Sue Dibb. Also launched one year ago, the report *Children: Advertisers' Dream, Nutrition Nightmare?* continues to send ripples throughout the food and advertising industries. Initially these industries' reactions had been entirely negative, as had those of the regulatory bodies. One year on though and Sue and the working party behind the report could draw no small satisfaction from a number of developments including: the start of negotiations with the Independent Television Commission on their code of advertising practice, the inclusion of non-industry bodies, for the first time, in the code review process of the Committee on Advertising Practice; and the Government's Nutrition Task Force incorporating advertising into their priority work programme.

The Nutrition Task Force has also included as one of its priorities the problems of eating healthily on a low income. The NFA was therefore delighted that, as part of this initiative, we have been funded by the Department of Health to produce an information pack. Suzi Leather who, with Tim Lobstein, is developing the pack explained that it was aimed at professionals such as health visitors and community workers. Since they often come into contact with low income families this pack would provide practical suggestions for how to tackle some of the problems associated with healthy eating on a tight budget. Although the project is in its early stages Suzi noted the tremendous response there had been to requests for information on this issue. Once a Cinderella subject, the importance of dealing with food, health and low income was now firmly on the political agenda.

The length and breadth of the political agenda was covered by the afternoon's final speaker, Professor Tim Lang. Once just plain Dr Tim Lang of Parents for Safe Food, Tim had recently been asked to head a new Centre for Food Policy at Thames Valley University. From this new vantage point Tim covered an extraordinary range of food policy issues from the consumer movement's successes – blocking the introduction of new and undetectable food processes such as irradiation and milk produced using BST – to the failure of consumers to make common cause with the source of their food; farmers. Covering, on the way, areas such as employment, trade and the under-used power of chefs and other caterers, Tim concluded with a call to build networks to reach out to the new generation of public health activists and reinvigorate the food and health movement.

In the good-humoured and animated discussions which followed, all were agreed on the need to set popular, single issue campaigns in the broader food policy context. The NFA and its members should play a prominent role in developing ways of balancing these dual demands. As Geoffrey Cannon pointed out, if we do not do it, who will and if not now, when?

New members

The latest new member was approved at the AGM.

The National Dental Health Education Group encourages the development of oral health promotion through information, research, training and campaigning.

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

Officers:
Professor Philip James (President)
Geoffrey Cannon (Chairman)
Jack Winkler (Treasurer)
Jeanette Longfield (Secretary & Co-ordinator)
Margaret Obabuko (Assistant Co-ordinator)

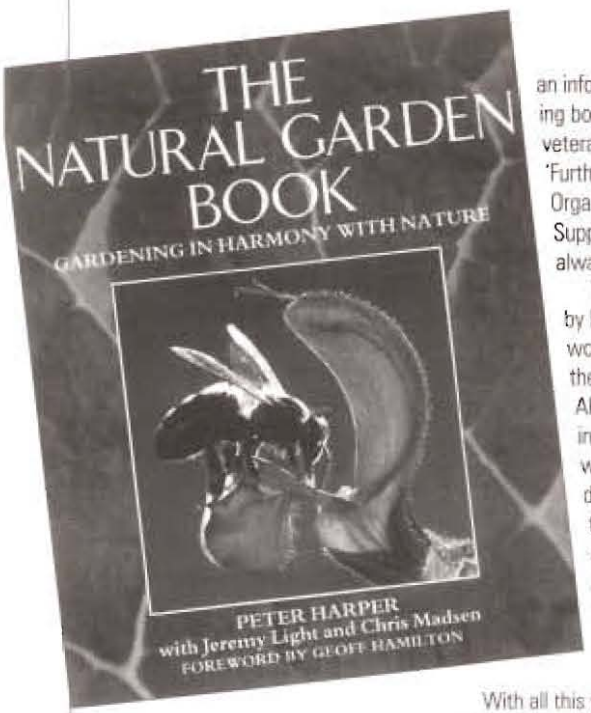
This page has been contributed by the National Food Alliance

Aims and membership of the NFA
The National Food Alliance is an association of voluntary, professional, health, consumer and other public interest organisations. Its purpose is to develop food and agriculture policy in order to improve the health of the general public, increase knowledge and appreciation of the way in which food is produced and distributed and the effect this can have on human health and the environment.

Members of the NFA include:
Action and Information on Sugars
Baby Milk Action
British Dental Association
British Heart Foundation
British Organic Farmers
Campaign for Real Ale
Caroline Walker Trust
Children's Society
Christian Aid
Committee on Biotechnology and Food
Common Ground
Community Nutrition Group
Coronary Prevention Group
Council for the Protection of Rural England
Elm Farm Research Centre
Food Additives Campaign Team
Food Commission
Friends of the Earth
Genetics Forum
GMB (Britain's General Union)
Green Network
Henry Doubleday Research Assoc
Institute for European Environmental Policy, London
McCarrison Society
Maternity Alliance
National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology
National Dental Health Education Group
National Farmers' Union
National Federation of City Farms
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Federation of Women's Institutes
National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention
Parents for Safe Food
Pesticides Trust
Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union (TGWU)
Soil Association
Vegetarian Society
Women's Farming Union
World Cancer Research Fund

Observers of the NFA include
British Dietetic Association
British Medical Association
Consumers' Association
Guild of Food Writers
Health Education Authority
Institute of Trading Standards Administration
National Consumer Council
Royal Society of Medicine Food and Health Forum
SAFE Alliance
Scottish Consumer Council
Welsh Consumer Council

books



The Natural Garden Book

Peter Harper
Gaia Books, 66 Charlotte Street, London W1P 1LR. ISBN 1-85675-085-X, £18.99 hardback

Beginning with an explanation on the evolution of the world (your garden), and how the different soil types and minerals came to be where they are, proceeding on to the coexistence of early man and nature and how nature deals with all its different elements up to today with your garden, this book is an inspiration both to the armchair and practising gardener.

By working with your gardens natural attributes *The Natural Garden Book* can definitely be an aid to the starter-gardener. Help is here for you to make the most of your garden by finding out what actually suits it, as opposed to trying to grow plants in an area where the soil, climate etc. are unsuited. In showing what type of garden you CAN have, a forest garden, a spiritual garden, a wetland garden, a coastal garden or even a mountain garden to name a few, this book enables everyone to achieve their garden's full potential and diversity. It also covers soil improvement advice and the growing of fruit, veges, herbs and trees of all kinds.

A definite must for 'Gaians' and an informative and fascinating book for beginners and veterans. There are also 'Further reading', 'Useful Organizations' and Suppliers' lists which are always handy.

This book is written by Peter Harper who works as a gardener at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth, Powys where he has designed and maintained the gardens, and also runs courses on Organic Gardening. The foreword is by Geoff Hamilton.

With all this wonderful advice and the beautiful photographs *The Natural Garden Book* promises to be a lovely companion.

Carol Dale.

The Organic Gardener

Bob Flowerdew
Hamlyn Books, Mitchelin House, Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB. ISBN 0-600-57461-X, £14.99 hardback

My bookshelf sports several large books on gardening and I refer to them frequently – do I really want another one, I was asking myself as I thumbed through this one? Well, it is certainly 'another one', but it is not just any other one.

For a start, it is written by Bob Flowerdew, who has recently been drafted in to the BBC1 Gardeners' World team to add some extra organic spice to what is already a very good programme. He is doing this with great success and panache – even my 9 year old daughter recognised his picture on the flysheet! OK, it might have something to do with his carefully positioned plait, but seriously, everything about the man speaks not only of originality and flair, but also of someone who really knows his onions. You can really feel the dirt under his fingernails!

He is, by the by, Chairman of the Norfolk Group of the Soil Association and HDRA and has just helped the Soil Association revise its range of gardening booklets. So he does have something of a pedigree!

One of the first things that caught my eye was the sketch, inside the front and back covers, of a fairly complex looking garden. No theoretical drawing this, as I discovered in chapter 5, instead it was a diagram of how Bob's own 1 acre organic garden in Norfolk is laid out. He had designed it from scratch and I pored over it for ages, enthralled.

It is always fascinating to see how somebody has combined beauty, practicality and efficiency in their planning and design. It is also nice to see it as a whole. The book has superb colour photographs from his garden and in such cases, one often wonders how all the different parts fit together. Now I know!

The second thing that I noticed was that, actually, it's not quite all photographs. Two sections are all colour illustrations – pests and diseases, and weed control. Is it that Bob is such a good organic gardener that he doesn't have any examples of these problems in his garden to photograph, so they have to be drawn instead?

And the third thing, having got down to reading the book, is its contents. It has all the normal sections you would expect of such a book, including plenty on the ornamental garden and a good index. Written in Bob's inimitable style it is positively packed with comprehensive information, sound advice and down-to-earth practical tips.

Bob's philosophy is to create with careful planning and management, an environment in which nature does as much as possible of the work for you. After all, sitting outside and enjoying your garden 'is one of the most important aspects of gardening'! Yes, I think this is a book for me.

Francis Blake.

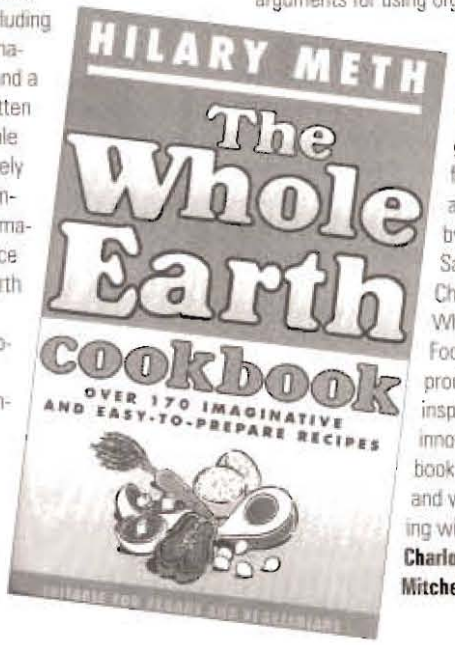
Whole Earth Cookbook

Hilary Meth
Vermilion, Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA. ISBN 0-09-176598-7
£7.99 Paperback

An increasing awareness in conventional medicine today that a plethora of diseases are best (both cheaply and effectively) treated by diet and the exclusion of certain foods can pose problems to a family faced with this sudden culinary change. Here is a book that gives exciting yet easy solutions to cooks having to try a vegan, vegetarian or sugar free diet for the first time, particularly in the case of children.

The Whole Earth Cookbook by Hilary Meth is an example of passion translated into down to earth reality - namely, easily produced vegetarian food. The author makes free use of the idiosyncratic food products from Whole Earth Foods and this opens up the repertoire of a vegetarian cook to a new approach which works. Ever tried orange soda in your soup?

The introduction includes the arguments for using organic products, excluding sugar and hydrogenated fat and has a foreword by Craig Sams, Chairman of Whole Earth Foods whose products have inspired this innovative book. It's fun and worth playing with.



Charlotte Mitchell

events

IFOAM - 10th international organic conference

to be held in Canterbury, New Zealand, 11-16 December 1994. Themes will include Self Sufficiency, Trade, GATT, Certification, Biotechnology as well as Health, Diet and Social Objectives.
More details avaiable from the Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.

Sweets off the Checkout Day

A national campaigning day to raise public awareness of the continuing problems of supermarkets promoting sweets at the checkout will be held early next year. The Campaign is now looking for people to help monitor what is happening in their local supermarkets from October.
Details: Iona Smeaton, tel: 081-770 8323.

Fifth Annual Apple Day

October 21st. Ideas for promoting apples and apple activities, and details of those already being planned: Common Ground, 41 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HJ.

Scientific Expertise in European Public Policy

London, September 14-15. A conference examining the role of scientists in public policy debates, with speakers from the EC, government, industry, academia and green groups.
Details from Shiraz Oshidar, London School of Economics, (071-955 6813)
Attendance free but book early.

Local events

Brighton and Lewes *Sunday 24 July*: Adur Enviro fair *6/7 August:* Organic weekends. For more information contact: Sue Craske – 0273 603646

Norfolk Organic Gardeners
25 July: Potato day in collaboration with the vegetarian society, tasting and talks. *22 August*: competition and talk on tomatoes. *29 August*: stand taken at Aylsham agricultural show.
12 September: Bob Flowerdew talk on no work gardening. For more information contact: Janet Bearman – 0603 403415

Heart Of England Organic Group
6/7 August: organic gardening weekend. For more information contact: Julian Stanley 0926 58459. *17 July*: wild flower walk. *1 September*: Fruit and vegetable tasting and display evening. *6 October*: talk and show by Brian Self, on pest and disease control.
3 November: AGM followed by question time. For further details contact: SA Headquarters for addresses & telephone number.

Ipswich Organic Gardeners
13 August: visit to Beth Chatto gardens. *10 September*: Organic fruit, vegetable & flower show. *27 September*: Bob Flowerdew talk on disease control. *25 October*: talk on management of organic waste. For further details contact: Hanni Beedel 0394 286384

Suffolk Group *21 July*: visit to the Cambridge botanical gardens. *10 August*: visit to Beth Chatto gardens. *13 September:* talk on glass in the garden, cloche's frames and greenhouses. For further details please contact: Nigel Moir Bacton 781298

West & Mid Yorkshire group
5/6/7 August: Leeds show. *21 August:* visit to Jack First's organic smallholding. *3 September:* Organic show. *29 October:* Combined Yorkshire Groups AGM. For more details contact: Elsie Ostle 0937 572237

classified

FREE OFFER!

THE FIRST 190 Soil Association members to send an A4 self addressed envelope with £1.90 in stamps will receive a free copy of The UK Green Growers Guide. (RRP £11.95).

GARDENER required at the Sheiling School Thornbury, a Camphill centre for children and young adults with special needs. Should be experienced in biodynamic work to take responsibility for a beautiful walled garden providing vegetables and flowers. The garden is in excellent order and additional help is available. Applicants would be able to live in one of the family houses together with other co-workers, the children and young adults.

Applications to The Staff Committee, Sheiling School Camphill Community, Thornbury Park, Park Road, Thornbury, Bristol, BS12 1HP.

NORMANDY 60 acre Organic Farm for sale (French) Symbol holder. Excellent pasture but perfect for true organic rotation with grain crops. Presently supports 100 ewes, 14 suckler cows. Beautiful large farm house, extensive barns. One hour Channel Ferries, 20 minutes to beaches. Income from Gite. Owner's disablement forces sale. Hansen, La Griserie de Hallt, 50510 Lengronne. Tel (010 33) 33 61 43 18

REGISTERED FLOCK Lleyn sheep; 40 ewes, 30 Shearlings, 30 ewe lambs, 1 ram. 3 Hereford suckler cows, strong calves at foot.

Polaris 4x4 bike under guarantee. Tel: 054 555255

12 ACRE SYMBOL HOLDING situated in the Clettwr valley, 12 miles west of Lampeter, West Wales. With 8 acres versatile land. Very good buildings, well equipped traditional house 4/5 beds, full central heating. Private and mains water.
Suitable growing, craftwork, guesthouse, retirement etc.
For full details telephone: 054 555255

TREE ENTHUSIASTS read The Dendrologist quarterly for a digest of tree news and information £4 per year from the Denrologist
PO box 341, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 2RD.

CLASSIFIED RATES - inclusive of VAT at 17.5%

Lineage	
Non members	60p /word
Members	40p /word
Box number	£4
Semi-display	£5 plus lineage

All classified ads must be paid for in advance of publication. Please sent payment with the ad copy and make cheques payable to the Soil Association.

LOCAL GROUPS

The Soil Association have always encouraged their local groups to participate in national projects implemented from their Colston Street headquarters, but recently they have developed some new plans which will bring new benefits for their local groups.

Stephanie Jones the newly appointed Membership secretary said 'I am really excited by our programme for our local groups. We have worked out some really good offers for them that previously were not possible. I am committed to developing all our membership services and would welcome input from our local groups as to what they would like to see from us'.

If you want more information on local groups in YOUR area, or how to start one up yourself please contact Stephanie at the Soil Association.

Lastly, a BIG thank-you to Annabel Milne for all her hard work on behalf of the local groups, Annabel is moving to Devon, and we wish her well.

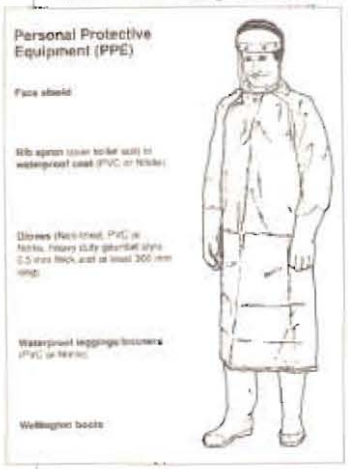
backbites

MAFF speak 1

It seems only days since we had to bring you the bad news: Gillian Shephard had decided sheep dips were A Good Thing. She declared that her scientists told that the nasty pesticides in the dips were perfectly safe as long the sheep-handling person (obviously not a Shephard) used the chemicals with a bit of common sense.

It might have been the lawyers who pointed out that such cavalier attitudes towards the health and well-being of sheep handling persons (shp's) could expose MAFF to prosecution for damages if even a single shp. could show that he or she had suffered a crippling ailment as a result of the supposedly safe dip.

And so it must have come about that MAFF felt obliged to issue a few guidelines for shps, in order to make clear that if they don't follow the guidelines than it's their own silly fault. In fact they have issued two sets of guidelines, one for dipping sheep out in the open, and one for dipping them in a poorly ventilated building. What they have come up with as appropriate clothing for dipping sheep in 'safe' pesticide in the 'safe' open air is shown here. Indoors the poor shp has to wear a mask with respirator attachments capable of filtering vapours to BS EN141, whatever that is.



Fill us up!

The detection in Germany of small amounts of carcinogenic benzene in bottles of olive oil has led to some products being withdrawn from shelves. What caught out eye, though, is that one report of this action noted that the products were being removed *"...even though some food products sold in service stations can sometimes have higher levels of benzene than these olive oil samples..."*

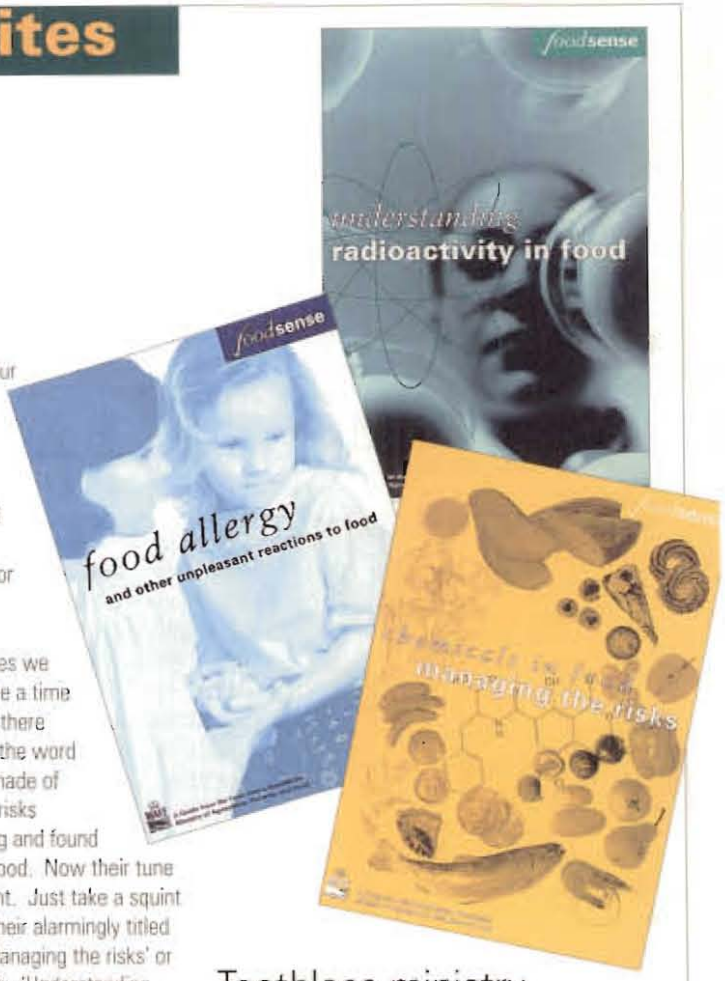
Assuming benzene vapours are getting inside the packaging then fatty foods would be the worst, like chocolate and crisps. If anyone has data on the levels of benzene in service station food products, please let us know.

MAFF speak 2

Someone has a sense of humour at MAFF. Normally, they happily spend our money by printing millions of pamphlets designed to reassure us that everything is fine with our food supply, and if it isn't then it is because we don't understand or forgot to wash our hands.

But their latest series of pamphlets includes several titles we couldn't resist. There was once a time when MAFF would tell us that there was nothing frightening about the word chemicals – all our food was made of chemicals, and there were no risks because they tested everything and found everything they tested to be good. Now their tune is different, remarkably different. Just take a squint at the hideous, lurid cover to their alarmingly titled leaflet 'Chemicals in food – Managing the risks' or the nuclear fears engendered by 'Understanding radioactivity in food'.

We think the prize goes to the much more discreet cover that refers to rather unmentionable things. You can hear the whispers in the corridors or behind closed doors, eyes averted .. 'Food allergy and other, er, unpleasant reactions to food'.



Dry bacon

Remember the days when bacon sizzled in the pan, rather than boiled in a mess of white bubbles?

Those were the days when bacon was made by soaking pork in brine for a few weeks and then hanging it up in a cool dry shed to keep till needed – after a few days in the smokehouse if you liked the flavour.

Well, try this news from a Sainsbury press release last May:

'At last Sainsbury's has solved the problem of wet bacon! The company has developed a unique process for producing a dry cured bacon...'

Unfortunately they have not decided to sell us the traditional product instead of the usual water-logged one. Rather they seem to have found a way of turning pork into bacon in minutes, without the use of water at all. They also claim there will be less salt.

They won't say how they are doing it but we can imagine. If you can get bacon flavour crisps you can get bacon flavour pork: a few hypodermics full of the right chemical should do the trick. And why not chicken flavour pork for that matter, or chocolate flavour...

Mind you, a bit of genetic engineering should soon create a bacon flavour pig.

Toothless ministry

It must be a good two years since the government's *Health of the Nation* was launched upon an unsuspecting public, full of wonderful targets which the DoH knew it had met already, or would never try to meet.

But at least they were saying something. Not so with another publication which has been sitting around for more than 18 months in the DoH – and, as we go to press, has still not surfaced.

It is a worthy document called *Dental Health of the Nation*. Usually reliable sources tell us this: that there are only two important recommendations and the government cannot bring itself to announce either of them. One is the thorny issue of mass fluoridation, which won't win them many votes. The other is that we've all got to eat less sweet food and drinks, especially children. That won't win many votes either, and it might lose them party patronage from the processed food and soft drink giants (see below).

Tories take the biscuit

United Biscuits was one of the companies which successfully persuaded the Government to scrap the London lorry ban as part of its Deregulation Bill. In 1992 United Biscuits were the largest single donor to Tory funds, donating £130,000.

Other companies which lobbied for the ban to be scrapped include the supermarket giant Sainsbury's. Tim Sainsbury MP, who has a significant shareholding in the company, is the minister charged with guiding the Deregulation Bill through the Commons.