

# LIVING EARTH



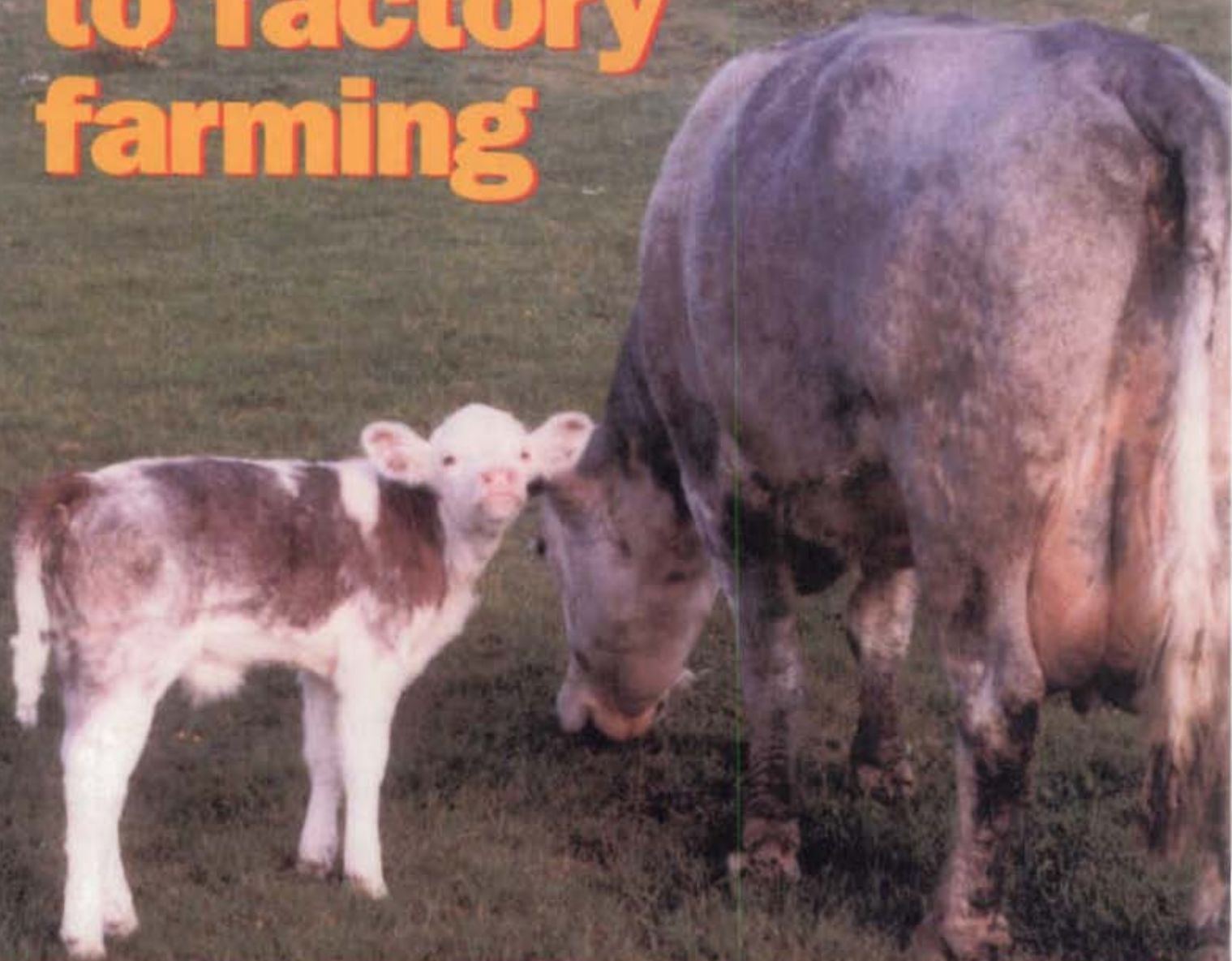
THE  
**FOOD**  
MAGAZINE

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## Alternatives to factory farming



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





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

The Soil Association's Symbol Scheme is run by SAOMCo Ltd and licenses commercial food production to the highest organic standards and acts as a consumer guarantee of organic quality.

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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.

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## editorial

The last three months have seen an astounding groundswell of public opinion turn against the exploitation of animals. Transport conditions on channel ferries, slaughter methods in Greece, veal crates in France and Holland — all have been illuminated by public concern over live animal transport.

But the issue of the export of veal calves has much wider implications. It results from a surplus of male calves from Britain's dairy herds, and the point soon realised by journalists and consumers alike is that the ethical questions raised are just as much an issue for vegetarians who continue to consume dairy products as they are for meat eaters.

And so the choice for the conscientious consumer becomes narrower. For some of our readers, the upholding of animal rights will remain fundamentally incompatible with the consumption of any livestock products. The only satisfactory resolution to this moral conundrum will be to turn to veganism. But we believe that there are many consumers who would rather continue to include dairy products, eggs and meat in their diets, so long as the lives of the animals involved are protected by a set of comprehensive ethical principles, further supported by independently-policed farm production standards.

For this growing number of concerned individuals we include in this issue an 8-page feature which tackles the complex issues involved and offers a guide through the growing and often confusing maze of apparently welfare friendly labelling schemes. The organic movement is no stranger to this territory. For over twenty years the Soil Association has pioneered the development of organic livestock standards which are regarded by most leading animal welfare groups as having the highest welfare standards currently in use on UK farms. They have been referred to as the Soil Association's best kept secret, but not any longer! At last the story is getting out.

Also reported in this magazine is new evidence showing that irradiated food is being sold in this country illegally, without the required labelling. The Food Irradiation Campaign has been one of the Food Commission's most successful campaigns of the last decade, forcing companies to abandon plans for mass food irradiation. So scared are the companies that, it now appears, they will risk fraudulent mis-labelling to get their products sold.

### 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 Tony Muir on 0117 929 0661.

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# SA closes veal calf loophole

Unlike their conventional counterparts, organic farmers have taken swift, unilateral action to ensure that no calves from organic farms will end up in the abhorrent conditions of continental veal crate production systems. The Soil Association and British Organic Farmers held an emergency meeting of the Livestock Committee in February, which resulted in a further tightening of the Soil Association Symbol's animal welfare standards. These now prohibit sending calves under one month old into

livestock markets. This means, because an animal of this age will be taking a mixed diet, that it will no longer be suitable for 'white' veal production.

Francis Blake, director of the Symbol Scheme, said, 'Yet again organic farmers have voluntarily imposed a restriction on their enterprises to ensure that the highest welfare and environmental standards are maintained. This is an excellent example of our ability to communicate consumer concerns to our pro-

ducers, and with their cooperation take rapid and practical action.'

Animal welfare groups have welcomed the closing of this potential loophole, with Compassion in World Farming's campaigns director, Phil Lymbery, commenting, 'The message to consumers is clear. If you care about animal welfare and want to support those farmers who do too, then why not buy organic meat?'

■ See Factory Farming eight-page special feature, starting on page 11.

## DoH U-turns on baby milk

Despite assurances from the UK government that its implementation of the EU directive on baby milks would lead to a ban of formula milk advertising, regulations laid before Parliament this spring permit companies to promote their products in hospitals and baby clinics.

Contrary to the advice of 48 health, consumer and development bodies, including the Food Commission, the original proposals were weakened under pressure from the baby milk industry, allowing the distribution of promotional material through NHS services – the most effective route for marketing baby milk – and allowing advertising of products in trade magazines. An all-party motion in Parliament condemning the Regulations has attracted widespread support.

■ More details from Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX (Tel 01223 464420).

## Unlabelled irradiated food on sale

Unlabelled irradiated food has been found on sale in Suffolk, trading standards officers have discovered.

Twelve per cent of foods tested from supermarkets, health food shops and small specialist shops were found to be irradiated without the process being declared on the label – a legal

requirement. Samples included dried herbs and spices, fresh herbs and soft fruit.

Samples of paprika were confirmed to have been irradiated with other foods suspected of being irradiated. Assistant county trading standards officer, Mike Holden, said he could not

reveal the brand name or where the product was purchased because legal proceedings were likely.

Martine Drake the Food Commission's Food Irradiation Campaign says 'The results are probably just the tip of the iceberg as this is likely to be a national problem.' The Food Commission warned several years ago of the dangers of legalising food irradiation before adequate tests were developed and proper monitoring procedures set up.

## New Zealand Health Ministry investigates soya baby milks

The New Zealand Health Department has launched an enquiry into the safety of soya baby milks after a report<sup>(1)</sup> indicated that soya formula milks for babies could contain dangerously high levels of naturally occurring oestrogens, known as phytoestrogens (see *Living Earth/Food Magazine* Jan 1995). The Health Department has circulated a questionnaire to importers and manufacturers of soy-based products and asked scientists from around the world to contribute to the inquiry. It is anticipated that the matter may be referred to the World Health Organization for further investigation.

Meanwhile UK government ministries have been slow to respond to the Food Commission's questions into why research into levels of phytoestrogens in soya baby milks and other soya

foods for children, recommended by the government's expert Committee on Toxicity in 1992, has not been carried out. Though aware of the New Zealand research, the Department of Health does not appear to have examined its findings. In a letter to the Food Commission Baroness Cumberlege writes, 'The Committee (on Toxicity) considered that it was extremely difficult ... to predict the actions of ingested phytoestrogens in humans.... We agree that this is an area which requires further investigation.' So far the Food Commission has received no response from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the department responsible for commissioning the recommended research.

Phytoestrogens are found in many plants, are abundant in soya and can

mimic the effect of oestrogens in the body. They are becoming of increasing scientific interest, in particular, evidence that they may help to protect women against breast cancer and men against prostate cancer. However, the evidence also indicates that their action in the human body is complex, and that exposure to endogenous oestrogens, including phytoestrogens in the womb and during early childhood, may pose risks to sexual development.

A new academic review throws light on the effects of phytoestrogens. US researcher Claude Hughes and colleagues conclude that exposure to phytoestrogens in the womb and during childhood 'could easily exceed the narrow bounds of optimal or physiologic levels and thus be of significant toxicologic concern.'<sup>(2)</sup>

Many experts are now questioning the suitability of soya milks for infants. Reproductive endocrinologist, Professor Clifford Irvine, quoted in the *Ecologist*<sup>(3)</sup> says: 'In my opinion, the satisfaction with which the soy lobby highlights the beneficial effect of isoflavones on a number of Western diseases and brushes aside potential effects on neonates and infants is almost obscene.'

(1) *The Toxicity of Soybeans and Related Products*, James RF, James VA, Woodhams DJ, Fitzpatrick MG, Auckland, New Zealand, 1994.

(2) *Estrogenic Soybean isoflavones and Chronic Disease, Risks and Benefits*, Clarkson T, Anthony M & Hughes C, *Trends Endocrinol Metab* 1995;6:11-16.

(3) *Swimming in a Sea of Oestrogens*, Dibb S, *The Ecologist*, Vol 25, No1, Jan/Feb 1995.



## Hairy tales ...

Despite complaints by the Soil Association, Elida Gibbs has continued with a £15 million advertising campaign for its 'Organics' range of shampoos and conditioners. No doubt, many readers will have seen the TV adverts, where apparently cloned naked young men and women 'grow' from a ploughed landscape stroking their glossy hair. There are also print versions of the same. In response to our complaint to the Trading Standards Office, Elida Gibbs claimed that they are using the word 'organics' in a context which removes it from the controls that prevail in organic farming and food production. They also offered the view to the Trading Standards Office that their products are, 'designed for use on the human body which is made up of various organs and that this is the link with the name of their products.'

The Soil Association is investigating a number of publicity and legal avenues to put pressure on Elida Gibbs and their parent company Unilever.

### You can help

The Trading Standards Office say that they have received only 'half a dozen complaints' to date. So please add your voice, objecting to this flagrant abuse of the good name of organics, by writing to: West Yorkshire Trading Standards, County Trading Standards Officer, PO Box 5, Nephshaw Lane South, Morley, Leeds LS27 0QP.

You may also want to complain to the Advertising Standards Authority, which deals with print adverts. Organics adverts have been running in several of the weekend supplements. Complaints Department, ASA, 2 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HW.

Then there's the Independent

Television Council. The ITC deals with television advertising. The Advertising Officer, ITC, 33 Foley Street, London W1P 7LB.

Lastly, Elida Gibbs are also keen to receive consumer response as they provide a free telephone and postal 'Questions/Comments' service. So let them know what you think of their 'green con', ask them why they chose the word 'organics', and what the full list of their ingredients are, and which of them they consider to be truly organic: Elida Gibbs, Organics Questions/Comments, Consumer Bureau, Freepost, Leeds LS14 2YT. Freephone: 0800 591720. Please send us any responses you receive (mark the envelope 'Organics Shampoo').



## First 'green' furniture for sale

A Welsh chair is the first item to go on sale bearing the Soil Association's Woodmark for timber products made from sustainably managed sources. The Pengelli Chair is made from oak grown in Dyfed Wildlife Trust's Pengelli Forest and will soon be available in Harrods.

The Woodmark scheme provides an independent assurance that products have come from forests meeting strictly defined environmental, social and economic criteria. Pengelli Forest, the first area of woodland to be certified by Woodmark, is managed in a way that not only encourages a diverse

range of habitats and wildlife but also benefits the local economy.

The Pengelli Chair is being produced as part of Dyfed Wildlife Trust's Living Forest Initiative, which has won a Community Action Partnerships for the Environment (CAPE) award from the World Wide Fund for Nature for encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources as a contribution towards saving the rainforests. The project is generating jobs in a rural area of high unemployment.



## Organic chocolate wins fair trade award

Green & Black's Organic Chocolate has scooped the Booker Tate Award for Small Business at the sixth annual Worldaware Awards. The award recognises Green & Black's contribution to sustainable agricultural development among the 140 Mayan farm-

ers who grow cacao under rainforest cover without chemical pesticides or fertilisers. The organic cacao is bought at a higher price than that on the world market, with the security of long term contracts. The chocolate made from it is the first product ever to be awarded the Fairtrade Mark by the Fairtrade Foundation.

Accepting her trophy from Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Josephine Fairley of Green & Black's said, 'For the first time these farmers have a future, instead of worrying about whether or not they will be able to remain on their land, or be pressured to make way for loggers or plantation farmers. And the irony is that the higher prices they are paid for their cacao make little difference to cost the of the end product. If every chocolate company paid the same price as we did the price of the average chocolate bar would rise by about a penny.'

## Organic farmer wins small grower of the year award

Andrew Cross of Gold Hill Organic Farm has won the small grower category prize at the 1995 Grower of the Year Awards which are sponsored by the Grower magazine and the National Farmers Union. Andrew grows nearly 50 varieties of vegetables and salads in the course of any one year and his efforts are supported by his wife, Sara who sells the produce through the farm shop and

also at Castle Cary market. They also raise a rare breed of beef cattle on their diminutive holding which is less than 5 acres. They control pest attack by companion planting and crop rotations. Their commitment to forging close links with the local community means that the farm is host to regular visits by parties of school children and gardening club members.



# European Commission approves organic farming

In a report published in February, the European Commission says it sees 'the organic side of farming... as unquestionably holding out major development potential'. In particular, the Commission believes that organic farming is the most suitable land use for areas with particularly stringent ecological requirements, such as drinking water catchment areas.

Considering that some commentators have stated that to meet the legal limits set for nitrate levels in drinking water, some 3 million acres of arable land in south and east England might have to come out of

conventional arable farming altogether, this could offer a significant boost to organics. The report also recognises the employment potential of organic farming. 'Labour intensive-ness is a particularly interesting feature in the present general economic context of serious unemployment, and as a means of preserving the countryside as we know it.'

The report also states that organic farming is 'unlikely ever to be as important as conventional farming,' and proposes 'a realistic aim' of achieving 2.5% of the EC market by the year 2000. Nevertheless, for the

UK this still means at least a tenfold increase in production. If the EC were serious about achieving such growth, it would shift the balance of agricultural support away from wasteful, negative policies such as set-aside into organics. A mere £1 million per annum is allocated currently for UK organic farmers out of a total agricultural budget of £1.8 billion.

■ *Green Europe Organic Farming Catalogue No CC-AK-94-002-EN-C, available free from EC Information Service, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT, Tel: 0171 973 1992.*

## Royal Commission investigates soil management

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) is undertaking a study of 'Environmental problems associated with soil'. The Soil Association has put in its submission to the RCEP, highlighting the positive soil management practices of organic farmers.

While intensive agriculture can in the short-term largely ignore what's going on in the soil, substituting natural fertility by reaching for a bag of fertiliser, organic farmers must work with natural processes to maintain soil fertility and quality.

Although there are many studies relating to wind and water erosion, and to the loss of agricultural soils due to the expansion of urban areas, very little up to date work has been done on understanding the role of soil fauna and flora in promoting soil and crop quality. This was one of the foundation stones of the Soil Association's founding philosophy, as expounded by Lady Eve Balfour in her book, *The Living Soil*.

It is fitting that in the year leading up to the organisation's 50th anniversary, the Soil Association will be undertaking some new research in this area, the Soil Association has also been in discussion with Dr Bob Evans, the soil scientist who is setting up a Friends of the Earth soil monitoring exercise, to consider including a comparative survey of erosion rates on organic farms.

■ The Soil Association's submission to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution is available from the Soil Association, price £2.50 (inc p&p).

## New organic alliance

The Soil Association and Organic Farmers and Growers Ltd (OF&G) announced a merger of the two bodies in February, marking the end of a twenty year estrangement. Under the new arrangement, certification of OF&G members, who account for almost 90% of UK organic farmers, will be carried out under contract by the Soil Association Symbol Scheme. In addition OF&G's marketing expertise will be available to Soil

Association licensees.

Francis Blake, Director of the Soil Association Symbol Scheme said, 'This new and exciting collaboration will enable us to be more effective in delivering the solution to the problems of conventional agriculture, in terms of the standards consumers want in farming, the structure of the market, publicity for organic food and the promotion of organic farming as a serious policy option.'

## Cambridge seminar

A Seminar on the reform of the CAP, organised by the Agricultural Reform Group (ARG) at King's College, Cambridge, was attended by 35 key representatives of agriculture and the environmental movement, who previously held opposing views, but discovered they shared a common agenda for the future of UK agricultural policy.

Patrick Holden, Policy Director of

the Soil Association, a member of ARG, commented: 'Participation in a forum where Jonathon Porritt and Charles Clover find themselves in agreement with Oliver Walston and Sir Simon Gourlay has been one of the most gratifying experiences since I first became involved with the organic movement around 18 years ago. ARG would certainly accept that organic farming would be one

## Minister visits organic farm

Agriculture Minister, William Waldegrave, paid his first visit to an Organic farm on 24 February 1995, when he spent more than four hours looking round Helen Browning's 1,350 acre mixed farm near Swindon. He was accompanied by two MAFF officials and the MAFF Wessex Regional Director.

Commenting on the visit, Ms Browning said, 'The Minister seemed very interested in all aspects of the farming system, and I very much hope that he will consider applying organic farming principles to his own dairy unit in Somerset.'

Helen Browning is a tenant of the Church Commissioners. The farm has two dairy herds, 600 ewes, 80 sows and around 600 acres of cereals.

means of enacting ARG's vision of a less intensive and more environmentally friendly agriculture.'



## ASA criticises butter adverts

The National Food Alliance has called on the Advertising Standards Authority to issue tough new rules on food advertising and to speed up its complaints procedure, after the ASA took four months to uphold a complaint by the NFA against adverts for butter. The NFA complained that Butter Council adverts, entitled 'The Low Fact Spread', which were partly funded by the EC, were misleading and undermined progress towards healthy eating by confusing the public about the relative health benefits of butter and margarine. The ASA agreed that the Butter Council claims added to, rather than dispelled, confusion about healthy eating.

The ASA's announcement, four months after the ads appeared, is too late to clear up that confusion, says the NFA. 'The ASA's ruling highlights the need for a thorough review of the codes of practice, for pre-vetting of adverts making healthy claims about foods, for a speeding up of the com-



plaints procedure and for effective sanctions including fines,' said Dr Mike Rayner, Chair of the NFA's Advertising Working Party.

The Committee of Advertising Practice (the industry body which draws up the codes of practice which the ASA implements) has so far failed to review its rules in the light of the *Health of the Nation*, as recommended by the government's Nutrition Task Force. The only sign of action has been for the CAP to set up a secret committee of industry representatives to consider whether changes should be made. In contrast the Independent Television Commission (ITC) introduced new rules for TV advertising of food and slimming adverts in February, after wide consultation. The new rules acknowledge the health implications of food advertising and make clear advertisers responsibilities not to mislead or confuse consumers. The NFA has welcomed the new ITC rules as a step in the right direction but say they will not change the high level of advertising for fatty and sugary foods, particularly to children.

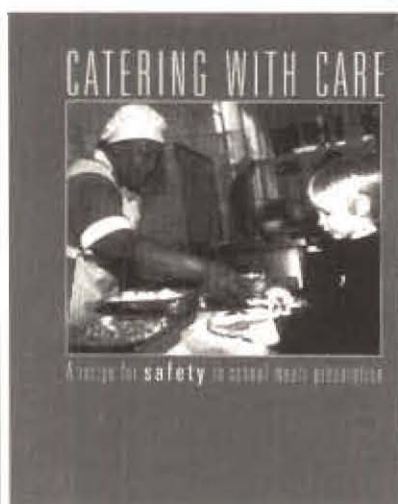
■ For more information contact the NFA's Food Advertising Project: 0171 628 2442.

## School meals in Northern Ireland

A survey of school meals in Northern Ireland found school meals to be very high in fat (46% of calories) and saturated fat (16% of calories), most meals do not provide enough iron, calcium or folate and many do not provide enough vitamin C. Northern Ireland has one of the highest rates of coronary heart disease in the world and suffers from higher levels of poverty and unemployment than the rest of the UK.

Ninety five per cent of teachers and 71% of pupils taking part in the survey of 17 secondary schools believe that healthy eating education has no influence on what pupils choose to eat. However the survey did find considerable interest in, and support for, healthy eating and the school meals service. The researchers recommend that schools should establish school meal committees and develop healthy eating policies.

■ *An investigation into the nutritional quality of school meals in Northern Ireland*, Jan 1995 (Price £6) commissioned by the Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke Association, 21 Dublin Road, Belfast BT2 7FT. Tel: 0232 320184.



This is an excellent manual by the trade union UNISON, prepared for school meals staff but of value to all workers in the catering services. Covering food safety, equipment, hazards, accident reporting and some more general food issues such as food irradiation. Contact UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ (Tel 0171-388 2366).

## Lone parent diets

A survey of nearly 200 single parents found that the poorest consistently have low levels of nutrient intake, with levels of iron, calcium, folate, vitamin C and dietary fibre falling below 70% of the Reference Nutrient Intake (the level which would be adequate for 97% of the population). Those who were eating foods typical of black British or Afro-Caribbean households tended to do better nutritionally than those eating meals typical of white households. And, as has been shown in earlier studies, the effects are more pronounced among parents than their children indicating that parents protect their children from the worst nutritional consequences of poverty.

■ *Nutrition and diet in lone parent families in London* by Elizabeth Dowler and Claire Calvert, published by Family Policies Study Centre, 231 Baker Street, London NW1 7XE, ISBN 0-907051-790, price £9.50.

## Dental data

Two surveys of children's dental health have found continuing cause for concern, with an official survey showing overall figures for tooth decay falling over the last decade (1) but a more recent survey showing that they are now beginning to rise (2).

OPCS data show regional figures for 1993 and 1983, indicating a decline in dental decay rates over the period. Social class figures for 1993 show greater decay among children from lower-income families.

For the first time, the survey record-

ed a measure of dental erosion, the loss of tooth surface due to chemical action on the teeth other than that caused by bacteria. Soft drinks with a high acid level are considered a major cause of dental erosion, affecting fifty per cent of children aged five.

The second survey, run by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry, found similar rates of decay among children aged 5 years, but comparing figures for 1991-2 and 1993-4, found that in 13 out of 15 regions dental decay is increasing. Commentators suggest that the overall trend of declining tooth decay 'bottomed out' in 1989 and is now show-

ing an noticeable increase.

(1) *Children's dental health in the United Kingdom 1993*, OPCS 1994, ISBN 0-11-691607-9, £12.95.

(2) *BASCD Survey Report, Community Dental Health*, 12, 1995, pp 52-58.

### Percentage of children aged 15 with one or more decayed teeth

| Region                | 1983 | 1993 |
|-----------------------|------|------|
| England               | 92   | 60   |
| Wales                 | 94   | 72   |
| Scotland              | 98   | 79   |
| Northern Ireland      | 100  | 85   |
| Social Class          |      |      |
| I, II, III non-manual |      | 58   |
| III manual            |      | 68   |
| IV, V                 |      | 72   |



# Juice Plus 'a waste of money'

Juice Plus, a food supplement which claims to offer the benefits of eating fruit and vegetables, is a waste of money according to independent tests featured in BBC 2's *Food & Drink Programme*. Rather than containing the equivalent of the claimed 5-7 portions of fruit and vegetables, the recommended daily dose of four capsules actually provides only the equivalent of half a portion of fruits and vegetables at a price of £35.50 a month.

The capsules, distributed by the US company NSA, are not sold through shops, but by network marketing where members of the public buy a supply of the pills and are encouraged to become sellers themselves. It is estimated that 5,000 people have become sales people for Juice Plus in the UK and *Food & Drink* secretly filmed sales reps making claims that Juice Plus contained five to seven portions of fruit and vegetables and could help

increase sex drive, encourage hair growth, boost energy and prevent cancer. In just one of many cases followed up by the TV programme, a woman in Scotland was persuaded to buy a whole year's supply of the pills at a cost of over £400 because the distributor said it would treat her husband's cancer.

In July last year the Food Commission wrote to the Advertising Standards Authority complaining about misleading claims that were being made for Juice Plus in its promotional literature. We urged the ASA to investigate the claims being made for this product as 'a matter of urgency' as 'this new product to the UK is already attracting interest from the

public and the media'. Yet the ASA took over eight months to publish its ruling (in April 1995). While the ASA has now asked NSA to tone down its claims that the supplement could replace fruit and vegetables, it also surprisingly reports: 'The Authority took expert advice and concluded that the amounts of most nutrients in the product compared favourably with those of the source foods...' The Food Commission has written to the ASA requesting to know on what basis the ASA is able to make this judgement

as independent analysis shows that this is not the case.

Meanwhile trading standards officers are investigating the whole Juice Plus operation. NSA has said that it has withdrawn one of its promotional booklets and says that, if anybody has bought Juice Plus because of health claims made about the product, they can have a full refund. The Food Commission would like to see an official investigation into network marketing of health supplements and for Juice Plus to be withdrawn.



## Keep eating the fruits and veg

Beta-carotene (which the body turns into vitamin A) has been hailed as an important protective anti-oxidant nutrient, along with vitamins C, E and the mineral selenium. Companies have been quick to offer us beta-carotene in food supplements and in fortified food. But now scientists in the US are beginning to ask whether the evidence for beta-carotene is really that strong.

A Finnish study last year found that smokers who were given beta-carotene supplements had a higher, not lower, risk of lung cancer than smokers who didn't take beta-carotene. There is good evidence that people eating more carrots and all kinds of green and orange vegetables and fruit are at lower risk of many cancers but such foods contain

about 40 different types of carotenoids. And as we reported in the last issue of *Food Magazine/Living Earth* fresh fruits and vegetables contain a whole host of other important phytochemicals from phenols to flavonoids that all seem to play some kind of protective role. Quite how beta-carotene became elevated to such a high status is a little unclear. However one thing is certain. We may not know exactly what makes fresh fruits and vegetables so good for us, but as long as we keep eating the real thing rather than popping pills we'll be making sure we reap the benefits.

■ *Beyond Beta-Carotene* by Bonnie Liebman, *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, Jan/Feb 1995, Centre for Science in the Public Interest, Washington.

## Toddler diets 'one quarter sugar'

The government's *National Diet and Nutrition Survey of Pre-School Children*\*, published as we go to press, shows young children are eating twice the recommended maximum of sugar and salt and are not eating enough fruit and vegetables. The survey covered a sample of almost 1,700 children aged 1.5 to 4.5 years and included details about the children's dietary habits and food intake, linking the results with the nutritional status gained through blood samples as well dental checks.

Results show biscuits, white bread, non-diet soft drinks and savoury snacks, along with chips and confectionery are the most commonly eaten foods, consumed by more

than 70% of children. Non-milk extrinsic sugar contributes 19% of the total energy, derived mainly from soft drinks and confectionery. This 'empty calorie' diet has led to nutritional problems with almost a quarter of children in the 1.5-2.5 year age group having iron intakes below the recommended level and 1 in 8 classified anaemic. Dental decay is also a problem affecting 17% of the children. The use of bottles, especially at night, leads to higher levels of decay.

\**Volume 1: Report of the diet and nutrition survey*, HMSO, 1995, £42.00, ISBN 0 11 691611 7. *Volume 2: Report of the dental survey*, HMSO, 1995, £14.50, ISBN 0 11 691612 5.

## The cost of fruit and veg

Fruit and veg in supermarkets is generally more expensive than street markets according to a pilot study in south-west London carried out last June. Of the 20 vegetables and 10 fruits compared, only five were cheaper in the supermarkets. The survey compared produce of the same quality (grade A) in two markets and three supermarkets.

Greatest price differences were for green beans (£1.10/lb more expensive), leeks (70p/lb more expensive) and mushrooms (60p/lb more expensive). The best supermarket buy was broccoli which was 20p/lb cheaper in the supermarkets.

■ For more information: Prof Tim Lang, Thames Valley University 0181-280 5070.



# Baby drink hazards

**Despite increasing evidence that children's soft drinks are a health hazard, Britain's biggest food companies continue to introduce new products aimed at babies as young as 3 months old. Tim Lobstein reports.**

In what can only be described as a slap in the face for the government's health advisors, food companies as big and reputable as Boots and Robinsons are introducing new high-sugar drinks to be sold for babies only a few months old.

The new products, sold in cartons with straws, are specifically aimed at the youngest market. Sainsbury has started a range of Toddler juices drinks, with straws attached, suitable for children from the age of 1 year. Robinsons (now owned by Co-operative Food) have a similar Baby and Toddler carton with straw designed for babies 'from 4 months' and not to be out-

done, Boots have Baby juice cartons with straws 'for babies from 3 months'.

All these products follow the trend to sell ready-to-drink diluted fruit concentrates to babies on the grounds that the products contain vitamin C. However, sweet drinks are not the best way to obtain essential nutrients, and the government's recent COMA committee report on Weaning and the Weaning Diet (1994) specifically recommended: *'Infants should be weaned onto foods and drinks free as far as possible of NME sugars'* due to their potential harm to newly emerging teeth. (NME stands for Non-Milk Extrinsic i.e. all sugars including those in fruit juice and fruit puree, with the exception of those found in milk and those found 'intrinsic' in fruit eaten raw.)

The committee also recommended that the sugar content be shown, but some products do not do this (including the Boots carton for the youngest babies). And they criticised the use of phrases such as 'free of added sugar' when the product contains NME sugars in the form of fruit juice which may be equally damaging to teeth. Both Sainsbury and Boots boast 'No Added Sugar' in products containing just such NME

fruit sugars.

Furthermore, the use of straws has also been criticised by the dental profession for encouraging sweet fluids to remain in contact with teeth for longer periods of time, compared with drinking from a cup or glass. How babies as young as 3 months are expected to use the attached straw is not explained — Boots don't say how the drink should be given to babies at three months, but put underneath the straw the instruction that 'once your baby's teeth appear' a feeder cup should be used. They then add that the straw is provided for toddlers and older children. Sainsbury says 'pour into a trainer cup or use the straw provided' while Robinsons says 'To protect young teeth follow these instructions carefully. Use the straw or... serve in a beaker...'

The main sales feature of these products is their vitamin C content. As virtually all the products are made from reconstituted concentrates, where the natural vitamin C will be somewhat depleted, the main source of vitamin C in the products is synthetic. The presence of fruit is not to provide the vitamin C but to provide a flavour — and a lot of sweetness.

## Pre-school children never drink water

Nearly three quarters of a sample of pre-school children never drink water, according to a recent survey by Southampton University. The children, aged between 2 and 5 years old, were drinking squash and fruit 'drinks' (together these accounted for 37% of all drinks), milk (18% of all drinks), diet drinks (14%), tea, pure fruit juices and other products. Barely one in ten was drinking water more than once a day.

The figure is slightly better for children attending infant school, with half of the sample never drinking water. Again, the main type of drink was squash/fruit drinks (30%) along with tea, milk, juice and diet drinks. Only a third of the infants drank water more than once a day.

Besides the potential damage to teeth that can follow consumption of sweetened drinks, the

researchers found evidence that soft drink consumption could also contribute to loss of appetite and possibly to poor weight gain and loose stools. Poor appetite and poor behaviour at meal times, which some mothers described, were both greatly reduced when the quantity of soft drinks was reduced. This may be a direct consequence of the amount of calories the drinks contain: some pre-school children were estimated to be getting as much as 54% of their daily calorie needs from the sugar in soft drinks.

Failure to thrive and poor weight gain have been linked in some children to excess consumption of juice drinks in previous research. In the Southampton study all children gained weight after the frequency of squash drinks was reduced.

The researchers suggest that many children may

suffer from 'squash drinking syndrome', featuring:

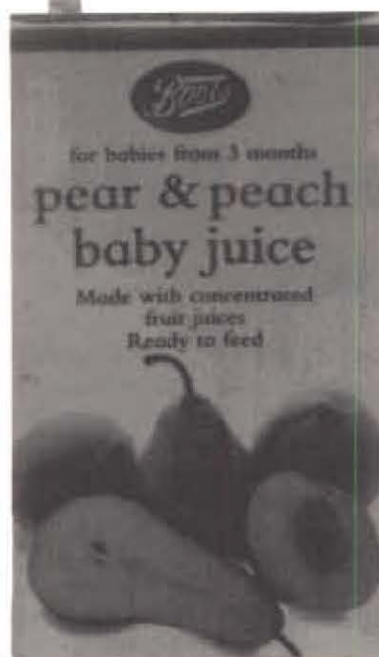
- poor appetite or reluctance to eat at mealtimes; with breakfast typically the best meal
- normal levels of activity and energy
- over 30% of dietary energy derived from drinks other than milk
- may have loose stools or 'toddler diarrhoea'
- the above features improve following a cut in the energy taken in drinks.

The authors suggest a gradual approach, replacing drinks with low-calorie versions, and then gradually diluting these. Sudden changes from sweet drinks to plain water can upset the child and disrupt the family.

The authors also express concern over promotional practices. The promotion of the drinks as healthy, and industry reports that claim a large potential for growth of sales of soft drinks for young children, show how manufacturers exploit a vulnerable population for their own benefit.

■ *Archives of Diseases in Childhood* 1995, pp 137-140 and 141-143. Details from Dr C J Rolles, Dept of Child Health, Southampton General Hospital, SO9 4XY.





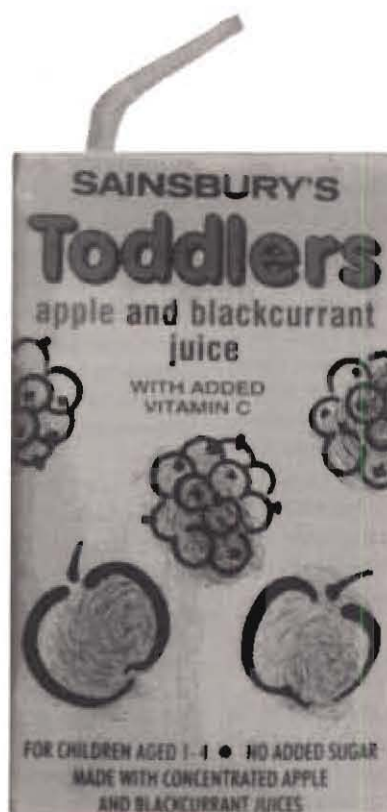
Getting babies into the soft drink market — the new generation of baby and toddler carton drinks which undermine official weaning advice (see main text). Besides the general criticisms of these products, the Boots carton also runs foul of UK labelling laws: its claim 'Rich in Vitamin C' on the side panel must be accompanied by a quantified statement showing how much of the recommended daily amount the pack provides. That declaration is missing from their carton.

## Herbal drinks under scrutiny

The presence of herbal extracts in drinks designed for young babies has been referred to the Committee on Toxicology for further investigation.

Fears that the levels of herbal material may have adverse effects on new-born babies were expressed by members of the COMA Weaning committee, despite denials from manufacturers that their products contained enough herbal extract to have any pharmacological effect. Insufficient testing of herbal extracts on new born infants, whose physiology may be sufficiently different from adults to put them at risk, led the COMA committee to call for the use of any herbs which are not commonly used in adult diets to be avoided. Apparently the companies could not supply any figures to indicate how much of these drinks some babies might be consuming.

It is, of course, quite appropriate for the Committee on Toxicology to be concerned about the traces of herbal extract. Yet it is perhaps ironic that a main ingredient of many herbal drinks being marketed for babies is sugar, a substance with known tooth-toxic activity.



## Soft drinks for babies

The table below shows the main baby drink products on the market analysed for their sugar levels, when made up according to instructions.

The quantity of sugar will affect how much the drink may dull a baby's appetite by filling them up with sweet calories; and may also encourage an expectation that drinks should be sweet.

Tooth damage will occur even at low concentrations, and will depend on how long the drink is in the mouth, how frequently it is in the mouth, and whether it is taken between meals or only during a meal.

Some manufacturers have replaced sugar with maltodextrin, a soluble starch which is also believed to cause tooth decay and which also serves to dull the appetite with non-nutritious calories but allows manufacturers to claim 'low sugar'.

### How much sugar in baby drinks?

sugars per 100ml

#### 'From 4 weeks'

|                                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Boots herbal powders 'sugar-free' | 3.8g (maltodextrin) |
| Boots water with a hint of fruit  | <0.1g               |

#### 'From 3 months'

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Boots bottled juices                    | 9.7-11.0g |
| Boots First Harvest bottled juices      | 9.0-12.0g |
| Boots Mother's Recipe bottled juices    | 8.3g      |
| Boots concentrates*                     | 3.0-4.0g  |
| Boots cartons with straw                | 9.4-10.2g |
| Heinz ready-to-drink bottled juices     | 9.1-9.8g  |
| Sainsbury ready-to-drink bottled juices | 6.5-6.7g  |
| Sainsbury concentrates*                 | 6.5g      |

#### 'From 3-4 months'

|                                   |          |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Cow & Gate Olvarit bottled juices | 6.7-7.4g |
| Cow & Gate Olvarit concentrates*  | 6.7-7.4g |

#### 'From 4 months'

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Cow & Gate Robinsons cartons with straw | 8.1-9.4g |
| Cow & Gate Robinsons concentrates*      | 5.8-6.1g |

#### 'From weaning' or unspecified

|   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Milupa 'sugar free' herbal granules       | 0.0g                         |
| Milupa regular herbal granules            | 3.6-3.7g                     |
| Baby Ribena 'sugar free' cartons          | 0.0g                         |
| Baby Ribena concentrates*                 | 5.7g                         |
| Woodwards 'reduced sugar' herbal granules | 3g, of which 2g maltodextrin |

\*Figures for these drinks apply when the concentrate has been diluted as recommended on the pack.

Thanks to West London Health Promotion Agency for permission to quote data from research undertaken by The Food Commission, February 1995. Figures may change if manufacturer's have reformulated since this survey.



## Government clears three new genetic foods

Three foods from genetically modified plants have cleared the UK's voluntary and mandatory regulatory procedures and may appear in our shops before the end of the year. The Food Advisory Committee has agreed that no special labelling will be needed but has called on firms to give information voluntarily.

The first, Zeneca's 'Biomato' has not been by the committee on releases into the environment as Zeneca claims it will not be growing the tomato in Europe, or importing live tomatoes, only processed tomato paste. Zeneca has been pressing supermarkets to take the biomato paste to sell under their own labels and in own-label products such as pasta sauce and pizza toppings. So far the Co-op has refused and other retailers are not saying what they will do.

By marketing only the tomato paste, Zeneca have avoided criticism that their product contains antibiotic resistance to

kanamycin: the paste will have been sufficiently processed that the resistance is destroyed. And, as the product will not contain live seeds, there is little chance of self-seeding from waste. Effectively these problems have been removed from the European market, presumably to be dumped in some part of the world where releases into the environment and kanamycin resistance are not a regulatory concern.

The second GE product to be given approval is rapeseed developed by Plant Genetic Systems (PGS). The plant has resistance to an antibiotic, neomycin, and also resistance to a weedkiller made by Hoechst and sold under the names Basta and Challenge. The idea is that fields of PGS rapeseed can be heavily sprayed with the weedkiller, leaving the rapeseed unscathed. Cooking oil made from the rapeseed need not be labelled as genetically modified (indeed it may

not even be labelled as rapeseed oil, but may simply say 'vegetable oil'). There appears to have been no examination of the effects of feeding cattle with the residual rapeseed cake.

Third is Monsanto's soya bean which is resistant to a weedkiller made by Monsanto, called Roundup. The company does not intend to grow the beans in Europe, but does intend to import live beans for processing. They have re-engineered the bean to remove the kanamycin and neomycin resistance genes, undermining Zeneca's argument that it could not be done for their biomato.

Also in the pipeline are long shelf-life pineapples, slow-ripening bananas, and low caffeine, high aroma coffee beans.

■ Source: *Splice of Life*, published by Genetics Forum, 3rd Floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH (Tel 0171-638 0606).

## MEPs kill patents directive

Nearly seven years after the European Commission proposed a directive extending the scope of the patent system to include human, animal and plant genes, and after sustained debate on the ethical, environmental and economic implications, members of the European Parliament voted on 1st March to reject the Commission's proposals.

This was the first time they had exercised their new powers of co-decision making granted under the Maastricht Treaty.

Non-governmental organisations who had lobbied

hard against the law were taken aback at the size of the vote — 240 against the proposals and 188 for — and there was sustained cheering in the chamber in Brussels when the result was announced. The key factor was the decision the night before by the Socialist Group, the largest voting bloc, to recommend rejection. Although MEPs had serious misgivings about the impact of patents on food crops, animal welfare and farming generally, what really swung the vote was the question of the ethics of patenting human genetic material, placing it effectively in private monopoly ownership.

The genetic engineering industry, which had set great store by the self-proclaimed need to 'protect' their inventions, and had virtually dictated to the Commission that a directive should be on the statute books otherwise it would relocate outside Europe,

declared that the decision was of little real consequence.

The focus of attention now shifts to Munich, the home of the European Patent Office (EPO). This is not an EU institution, but does regulate the granting of patents in 14 of its 15 member states. They had delayed a final decision on the controversial cancer-mouse patent until after the parliamentary vote but must now make decisions within their charter which, though containing some limits to patentability relevant in this field, was written before the commercialisation of biotechnology became an issue.

The Patent Concern Coalition is seeking to get an Early Day Motion tabled in the Westminster Parliament calling on the EU to reassess its policy on biotech patents in the light of these events and also calling on the EPO to reassess three recent patents on human, animals and crop plants which breach the spirit of the MEPs' decision.

■ Details from Genetics Forum: 0171 638 0606.

### Northern Food Network

The Northern Food Network was relaunched earlier this year to provide a regional forum to exchange information, ideas and experiences on improving access to, and information about food. A series of meetings are planned for coming months. For more information contact Geoff Tansey on 01422 842752 or Ann Hobbiss on 01274 385517.

### Safeway announce sweet-free checkouts

Safeway has joined Sainsbury's and Tesco in offering completely sweet-free checkouts. The Safeway announcement came after a survey by the Chuck Sweets Off The Checkout Campaign criticised the company as stores generally fell well below head office policy of 50% sweet-free checkouts. The survey also found that 59% of major food store checkouts are now free of sweets following the survey of 6200 checkouts in 636 branches of 23 major stores. Safeway are also considering extending the policy to its Presto stores which came out worst in the survey.

■ For more information: Iona Smeaton, 0181-770 8311.

### High levels of OP residues found in carrots

High levels of residues from organophosphate (OP) pesticides have been found in 1-2% of carrots sampled by MAFF. A change in sampling techniques found that levels found in some carrots were 25 times higher than expected from composite samples. The MAFF research found that residue levels can vary greatly between individual carrots, even from the same row and have recommended that spraying of the pesticide should be limited to 3 times a year from the current maximum of 9 times a year. OP pesticides can cause adverse neurological effects in both long and short term and the Pesticides Trust is calling for an urgent reduction in their use.





# Factory farming

**In a special 8-page feature the Soil Association and The Food Commission take a close look at factory farming and the alternatives.**

**A**nimal farming has been shown to abuse the welfare of animals in what can only be described as a concentration camp scale. All classes of farm animals are being mistreated, from veal crate calves to de-beaked battery chickens, from tethered sows to high performance dairy cows. It involves the adulteration of livestock feeds with a whole range of nasties that seem to have undreamed of consequences — from salmonella to BSE, writes *Patrick Holden*.

And it is sustained by a massive scale of drug abuse, including routine use of antibiotics to maintain the 'health' of animals that would otherwise get sick as a consequence of the unsustainable nature of the production systems of which they are the victims.

A growing number of consumers are becoming vegetarian as the best means of registering their rejection of this unacceptable face of modern farming. They give up eating meat whilst continuing to enjoy eggs and dairy products such as yoghurt and cheese. But, tragically, milk and egg production also requires the widespread abuse and slaughter of livestock, and a vegetarian may be just as much a part of the 'circle of suffering' as a meat-eater.

What about the welfare, food or medication of the cow that provides the milk for the yoghurt that complements our muesli, or the cheese that forms the core of our vegetarian quiche? And what about eggs, where we may know that battery farming is brutal, yet it emerges that there is, tragically, little difference between free range and battery egg production in terms of welfare, feed or drug treatment standards? And have we also acknowledged that every dairy cow and egg laying chicken eventually meets an unnatural end or that 50% of dairy calves will be male and therefore become part of a meat production cycle? A newly converted vegetarian could find themselves just as much a part of the problem as their meat eating counterparts.

Perhaps the only way to avoid continuing to be part of the problem is to become a vegan? For those who oppose the unnatural termination of the life of any animal this is certainly true.

But it seems likely that there are very many people who would be prepared to eat eggs, dairy products and meat so long as they could be sure that the animals concerned were kept according to principles and standards which governed the wel-



fare conditions under which the animals lived, right up to their deaths. This would include the nature and quality of their feed stuffs and the conditions under which medication and drug use was administered.

## The alternative

The resolution of the ethical animal question is clearly a vitally important issue for our country. It involves no less than the entire future of British livestock farming, which still occupies more than 50% of the farmed area of the UK and far more again if one counts the huge area of cereals grown overseas that are dedicated to the production of UK livestock feed. To address it, the Soil Association and the Food Commission have joined forces to research and produce this 8 page report on the way ahead for humane, safe and nutritious livestock production.

The report highlights the existing problems of the livestock industry; it evaluates the alternative products currently available in the market place and the integrity of the production systems that lie behind them; and it suggests how you can do more to expose the problems and encourage both Government and retailers to act to improve things.

This was not an easy or a comfortable research project. Our searching questions were not always greeted with enthusiasm by those we investigated.

## You are what you eat

What the farm animal eats may eventually arrive on your dinner plate, to be eaten and absorbed by you. As a consumer, if not on animal welfare or environmental grounds, you have reason to be worried that factory farming can affect your health.

● **Fats:** the general lifestyle of animals, as well as the fats in their diets, affects their meat and milk quality. Wild animals have a higher ratio of unsaturated fat to saturated fat in their body tissue compared with intensively-reared farm animals. The fat profile of milk can also be influenced by a cow's diet; indeed the fats in human milk are influenced by the mother's diet.

● **Vitamins:** the use of vitamin A as a growth promoter in intensive farming has led to high concentrations of vitamin A in animal liver, leading the Department of Health to warn pregnant women to avoid eating liver.

● **Hormones and other illegal drugs:** the use of 'Angel Dust' for growth promotion in cattle has led to several deaths of beef consumers in Spain.

● **Antibiotics:** widespread use of antibiotics in animal feed has led to the growth of resistant super-salmonella, already causing higher than expected death rates among human sufferers.

● **Colourings:** The use of colourings such as canthaxanthin in fish and egg production is causing concern: canthaxanthin is banned as a direct additive to human food because of potential damage to eyes.

Neither does the report make comfortable reading. But we believe that if enough people become aware of the current malpractices, register their dissent and call for an alternative then change could come, perhaps more quickly than we ever imagined possible. Please read on...



# Animal welfare

**The pressures on farmers to produce more meat at cheaper prices has led to intensive systems of food production where animal welfare has come second to profit. Here we highlight some of the problems and what is being done to improve standards.**

## Battery hens

30 million hens, producing 88% of all eggs, are kept in battery sheds each of which can contain between 10,000 and 60,000 birds. In each small cage, five hens live in an area measuring 46cm x 51cm — that's less than the area of an A4 piece of paper for each hen. The light is entirely artificial and switched on for 17 hours a day to promote greater egg laying. The birds are unable to express normal behaviour such as pecking and scratching at the ground, dust bathing, perching, or making a nest for their eggs. This lack of movement causes weak bones and around 30% of battery hens have broken bones when they are sent for slaughter. The painful mutilation of debeaking is often used to stop cannibalism.

Animal welfare organisations are calling for battery systems to be outlawed and to be replaced by less intensive systems, in particular small free range units. The EU is due to review the current legislation which could improve standards, however this is already several years behind schedule.

There are also calls for battery eggs to be labelled as such and for misleading labels such as farm fresh or country fresh on intensively produced battery eggs to be prohibited

## Broiler chickens

Over 600 million broiler chickens a year are reared in windowless sheds typically in flocks of 10-20,000. Their fast rate of growth, encouraged by selective breeding and growth promoting drugs mean that many suffer



bone deformities. They are typically slaughtered at 6-7 weeks old.

## Turkeys

Most turkeys are reared intensively, crowded in huge windowless sheds. The filthy litter on which they stand can cause painful breast blisters and ulcerated feet. In the crowded conditions turkeys peck at each other

causing injuries — they are often debeaked — and cannibalism is common.

## Pigs

There are around 7-8 million pigs in the UK. Pigs prefer to live in family groups and to build large nests for their piglets. However Britain's sows are often kept indoors in sow stalls or





tethers during their sixteen week pregnancy. The sow stall is a narrow, metal-barred stall which is so narrow that the sow can't turn around or mix with other pigs. In a tether stall the pig is tied to the concrete floor by a chain. Tethering causes much distress as well as lameness, sores and hip problems, with animals frequently exhibiting repetitive behaviour symptoms.

Thanks to campaigning by animal welfare groups such as Compassion in World Farming, sow stalls and tethers will be banned in the UK from 1999, although in the rest of Europe only tethers will be banned by 2006.

Shortly before birth a sow is put in a farrowing crate which is even narrower and more restrictive — farmers use them to prevent piglets being squashed — but the need for them is challenged by free-range pig producers whose sows do not squash their piglets. There are no plans to ban farrowing crates in which 80% of British sows are forced to give birth.

Piglets are taken away from their mothers prematurely at just 3-4 weeks so the sow can be made pregnant again. Although an increasing number of pigs are now reared outdoors, the majority are reared indoors in highly intensive systems. Early weaning and the overcrowded and

barren pens can make piglets aggressive with tail biting common, which many farmers then prevent by tail docking, a painful mutilation. Even outdoor-reared pigs may be weaned rapidly and brought indoors for fattening.

The alternatives include family pig pens — the pigs are still kept indoors but in groups where they can behave more naturally. Piglets are allowed to stay with their mother until they go to market, there are nesting and rooting areas and mutilations are not carried out. Compassion in World Farming would like to see pigs kept outdoors in free range conditions without tail docking or early weaning.

## Cows

The modern dairy cow is arguably one of the most overworked of farm animals, producing levels of milk in excess of her natural capacity. She's fed high protein foods to pep up her milk supply. The combination of unsuitable food and bad flooring makes her go lame like 25% of her sister cows. Over one third of dairy cows develop mastitis. By the age of around five she is so worn out she is usually sent for slaughter. The natural lifespan of a dairy cow is up to 20 years.

## Calves

Many calves are sent to market when they are only a few days old with many destined for the veal trade. Veal crates have been illegal in the UK since 1990 but calves continue to be exported to veal farms in France and Holland at just a week old. At the peak of the trade over 1,000 British calves were exported every day to be reared for three to six months in narrow wooden crates in the dark, unable to turn around and fed on milky liquids low in iron to develop the 'white' meat of veal. Protests have reduced the trade by 30% according to the Meat & Livestock Commission.

In the UK veal is reared more humanely — calves live in groups with bedding on the floor, with a diet that includes iron and roughage. However even these calves have been taken away from their mother at around a day old, and spend their life indoors.

Organically-reared calves are no longer sold under one month old, excluding them from the export veal trade. There is no organic veal production in the UK.

## Animal Transport

Every year 2.5 million chickens die on the way to the slaughterhouse through injury, suffocation or shock. In 1993 Britain exported 2 million live sheep and lambs and 450,000 young calves to Europe.

Protests against the export of live animals have highlighted the conditions many animals face while transported on long journeys to the continent or to slaughterhouses. Animal welfare campaigners want to see animals slaughtered in local abattoirs, journeys limited to a total maximum of eight hours, and the practice of exporting live animals outlawed. UK agriculture minister, William Waldegrave is seeking European support for limiting journey times, but a stalemate between northern and southern European countries has prevented agreement of a common European position. Journey times are at present limited in the UK to intervals of 15 hours followed by a rest period but it is poorly policed with no guarantee that animals get adequate food and water during their journey. On the continent the present limit is higher with intervals of 24 hours.

## Slaughter

Humane slaughter gives the impression that farm animals are gently put to sleep, like the family pet. The law requires animals to be stunned into unconsciousness and to remain unconscious until they are dead, but in poorly run slaughter houses this may not happen. Many pigs are not properly stunned as slaughter houses may use too low an electric current and many calves, sheep and pigs may regain consciousness while bleeding to death. Animal welfare groups have been calling for improved standards but so far the government has refused to act. They would like to see a ban on the use of carbon dioxide gas for stunning pigs as this can cause great distress, minimum stunning currents laid down by law and a legal requirement to cut both of a chicken's carotid arteries.



# Reading the 'welfare' labels

**New green and animal-friendly labels have appeared on supermarket meats. But how can consumers know what they are buying? We take a closer look under the wrappers to see what the labels really mean.**

Concern about animal rearing practices have led many consumers to pay a premium for meat produced to higher standards than typical factory farm products. Supermarkets have been quick to jump on the 'green' bandwagon and a bewildering range of labelling schemes declaring environmentally and animal-friendly credentials have appeared. Words like 'free-range', 'organic', 'traditional', 'heritage' and 'farmhouse' conjure up images of contented animals living in rural bliss. However, the truth may not always be so idyllic and standards can vary between the different schemes.

## Organic

To carry an 'organic' label, producers and retailers should ensure that strict standards, covering meat production from the farm to the shop are adhered to, with an audit trail that can be traced back to the farm. EC organic live-stock

standards are expected to be enshrined in law later this year. The main organic certifying body is the Soil Association and its standards guarantee that animal feed must be organically grown and pesticide-free, the routine use of drugs and growth promoters are not allowed and stocking densities must be kept low with animals able to graze outdoors. Battery cages for hens and farrowing crates for sows are not permitted, neither are debeaking of hens and tail docking of piglets. Standards also cover animal transport and slaughterhouses.

The Soil Association sets its farmers additional environmental standards through its Guidelines for Conservation.

Products labelled 'organic' which do not bear a Soil Association or similar certification may not have been independently inspected. In such cases the producers are responsible for complying with the organic food regulations and, as with any labelling claim, it would be up to local trading standards officers to prosecute if they have evidence of false labelling.

Organic meat is available in a limited number of Sainsbury and Safeway stores; and the supermarkets say they can't get hold of enough stocks to supply more shops. A full list of independent butchers selling organic meat and mail order suppliers is available from the Soil Association.



## The Real Meat Company

The Real Meat Company supplies meat and meat products that have been produced to its own Codes of Diet and Welfare which include transport and slaughter (the company uses only 2 slaughter houses, one for chickens and one for mammals). The farm addresses are available to customers and medication is permitted only in cases of actual illness and with double the normal withdrawal period. A key difference from 'organic' is that Real Meat Company stan-

dards do not insist that animal feed is organic or guaranteed pesticide-free.

The Real Meat Company's meat and meat products are not sold through supermarkets but through independent shops in London and Central and Southern England and by courier service.

## Barn and Perchery Eggs

Standards for barn and perchery eggs are defined by EU regulations. Unlike battery cages, hens can in theory move about but are often so crowded that they become aggressive and fight for food and space. There is no access to the outside.

## Free-range eggs

The EU's free-range egg regulations set standards which many animal welfare organisations argue are too low. There is no limit to the number of birds that can be kept in a 'free-range' chicken house and the number may commonly exceed 7,000 birds, of which only a small percentage manage to venture outside. Even when they do go outside the area





may be barren and unattractive. Campaigners would like standards that allow no more than about 300 birds in a flock, in small movable houses which allow regular fresh pasture and genuine freedom to range.

EU regulations also permit free-range birds to be exposed to extended daylight using artificial light to encourage greater egg laying but which also places unnatural stress on the birds. The practice is widespread, as is adding artificial yolk dye to colour egg yolks.

## Free-range poultry

There are three sets of 'free-range' standards for poultry, 'free-range', 'traditional free-range' and 'free-range total freedom'. Only the latter provide hens with complete outdoor access — such as that enjoyed by chickens chased around French forests by Dudley Moore in Tesco adverts — but even these are permitted to be routinely fed antibiotics and other drugs.



## Free-range meat

The term free-range is defined by the EU only for eggs and poultry, not for the production of other meat. A label claiming 'free-range' may be mean-

ingless unless there are published definitions and, preferably, an independent certifying system.

## Freedom Food

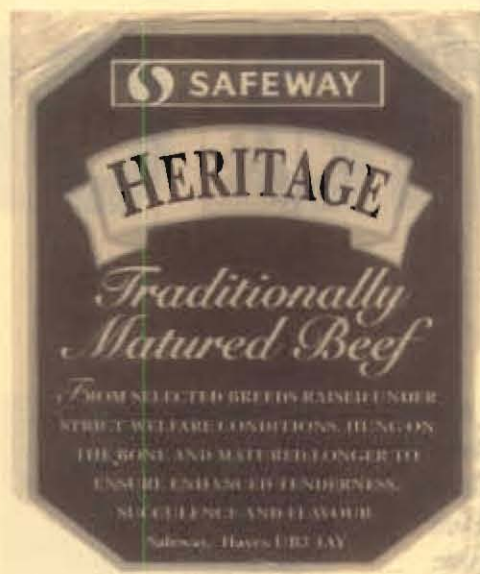
The RSPCA launched a certifying scheme for animal products reared according to their 'five freedoms' definitions in 1994 (see *Living Earth/The Food Magazine* November 1993). Both Tesco and the Co-op have adopted the RSPCA symbol on certain lines of eggs, pork and bacon and



Tesco plans to extend the scheme into beef and lamb later this year. While many of the RSPCA's standards are high compared with regular factory farming, the scheme has received criticism for failing to set standards high enough. Eggs can bear the RSPCA symbol even when they have been laid by hens that have never experienced natural light and the scheme currently permits farrowing crates, debeaking (beak tipping) of chickens, tail docking for piglets and gas stunning of pigs in slaughterhouses. Live animal transport for over eight hours is banned.

## Safeway

In addition to stocking organic meat in a small number of stores, Safeway have introduced a 'Heritage' range of meats including free range chicken, 'outdoor reared' pork and bacon, and traditionally matured beef and lamb. The Safeway Charter for Heritage Poultry boasts a 'cereal-based' diet and 'no herbicides or artificial fertilisers' used on the pasture on which the chickens roam. They do not say what else is allowed in feed, nor what other types of agrochemicals can be used on pasture.

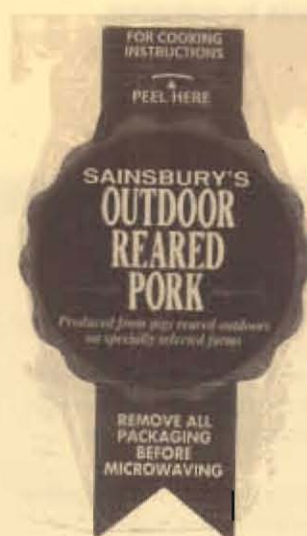


Outdoor reared pork gives the impression of pigs in fields but after a 70 day period outdoors the pigs are herded together to be fattened in open barns. The pork, along with lamb 'from naturally fed flocks' and beef 'from suckler herds' are accredited by the National Farm Assurance Scheme but this only provides an audit trail, not an improvement on current livestock practices.

## Sainsbury

A spokeswoman for Sainsbury says that organic pork is too difficult to obtain in commercial quantities but that its outdoor reared pork is 'just as good'. Sainsbury's outdoor reared pork is, like Safeway's pork, reared in fields and in barns, fed cereals and medicated 'for medicinal reasons only'. The company's 'Tenderlean' lamb and 'Traditional' beef are stated as grazing freely on grass in fields, with supplementary feeds in winter of silage, vegetables and cereals as are the vast majority of UK-produced beef and lamb.

Sainsbury claims that the 'difference between organic and non-organic meat is that the animals' pasture and feed is approved by UKROFS', the UK organic regulating agency. This appears to ignore the additional organic standards that UKROFS requires on animal welfare, medication, transport and slaughter procedures.



■ **Researched by the Food Commission. Additional research Gillian Pitt.**



# The organic

The strict animal welfare regulations laid down in the Soil Association's standards have been described as organic farming's 'best kept secret'. Running to 33 pages, the standards for organic livestock cover everything from feed, restrictions on the routine use of veterinary drugs, conditions for housing to maximum journey times for transporting livestock. No wonder that they are held up by animal welfare groups, like Compassion in World Farming, as the best standards in operation.

### Five things organic farmers don't do to their animals:

- ❖ They don't let calves go for export to end up in continental veal crates.
- ❖ They don't confine sows in farrowing crates, dock pigs' tails or routinely cut their teeth.
- ❖ They don't debeak chickens or keep them in battery cages that allow each bird no more space than this A4 page.
- ❖ They don't keep any animals permanently indoors.
- ❖ They don't practice unnatural breeding techniques such as embryo transfer or routine caesarean section.



**T**he main principle of organic husbandry is the promotion of animal health through appropriate, natural management, writes Robin Maynard.

All animal husbandry practices on organic farms are founded upon the findings of the Brambell Committee, set up in 1965 to investigate factory farming methods. The Committee recommended to the government that every farm animal should have the right to 'Five Freedoms': freedom from malnutrition or starvation, from thermal or physical discomfort, from pain, injury or disease, from fear or distress, and sufficient freedom of movement to be able without difficulty, to turn around, groom itself, get up, lie down and stretch its limbs.

The Committee's findings were ignored by the Ministry of Agriculture, causing one member, Dr Thorpe, to complain in a letter to *The Times*: 'I think it would be fair to say that pressure from people in the battery busi-

ness has been taken more note of than our recommendations. We said quite clearly that there was no justification for keeping animals in greater densities than the absolute maximum we laid down.'

Organic farmers have not ignored the findings, indeed they have taken them a stage further, to the extent that organic husbandry practised to Soil Association standards fulfils the aim laid down in Sweden's progressive Animal Protection Act of 1988 which states: 'The techniques shall be adapted to the animals and not the other way round. It shall therefore be possible to test the technique from the point of view of animal protection before it can be used.'

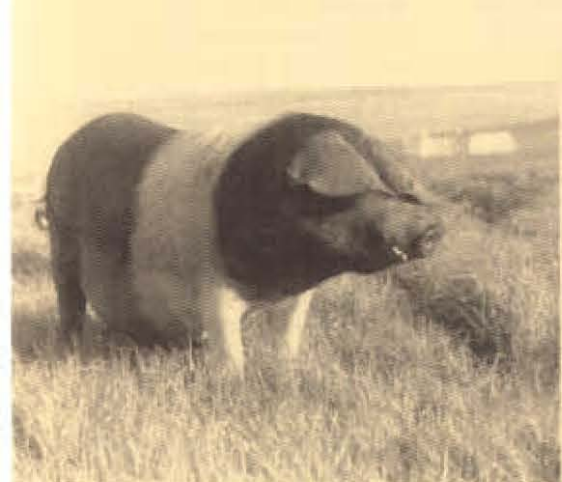
In general terms, this means eliminating stress and keeping the animals happy leading them to grow faster and become ill less often. Organic farmers are not permitted to use animal antibiotics routinely and other veterinary drugs, so they must

### Five things organic farmers do for their animals:

- ❖ They feed them on the food they're naturally adapted to eat. So ruminant (grazing) animals get to eat forage (hay, silage) or grass — not recycled animal by-products, such as manure and feathers.
- ❖ They give them bedding (generally straw) for their housing.
- ❖ They won't allow them to travel for longer than 8 hours in any single journey.
- ❖ They rely on good husbandry to keep their animals in good health, and only use veterinary medicines as a last resort.
- ❖ They provide their poultry with adequate 'free-range' ensuring continuous and easy daytime access to open air runs, and observing a maximum stocking density of 250 birds per acre.



# alternative



ensure that feed and stocking conditions promote natural good health. However, medication must not be withheld if an animal is seriously ill, or suffering and not responding to husbandry or alternative treatments, such as homeopathy. Such emergency treatment will result in a withdrawal period before the animal can be sold for slaughter. Intensive livestock farmers face no such restrictions, and can override their animals' natural reactions of ill-health and stress to cramped, overcrowded housing conditions by resorting to routine use of veterinary medicine (often referred to as prophylactic use).

There is increasing evidence that this routine use of veterinary medicines to 'prop up' intensive livestock systems is having a negative impact on human health. As consumers, the public may welcome 'cheap meat', but if they become patients they may find that they have to pay a dearer price. For recent medical research has identified strains of 'superbugs' that are developing resistance to antibiotics used on humans. Although animal and human antibiotics are meant to be

kept separate to prevent such transference of resistance happening, it appears that the bugs have outsmarted us, and that some intensive livestock farms are acting as superbug 'incubators'.

For most readers of this magazine, ethical concerns about treating livestock humanely will be the primary motivation for buying

organic livestock produce; but for many other people self-interest will be the strongest persuader for them to change their purchasing habits. The Soil Association's founding principles, put into practice by organic farmers, are that what is good for the land and its soil, and for the crops and livestock produced thereon, is also good for humans. Increasingly evidence is mounting to show those principles to be well-founded, and in particular that high animal welfare standards are not a sentimental luxury, but a necessity, both for the health and the well-being of the animals and the people who consume their products.

## Will Best



## What the farmers say about the standards

Gerry Minister, the farm manager for Luddesdown Organic Farms Ltd near Cobham in Kent started his career in conventional farming, but 'certainly wouldn't want to go back.' Managing an intensive dairy herd, he saw first hand how stressed the animals were, suffering from constant foot problems and other ailments. Although now managing a mainly arable farm, he runs a 85 head beef suckler herd, a system where the cow suckles its own calf (or calves in the case of twins) until it is naturally weaned. What he finds galling, is to find that having produced meat to the highest welfare standards, I have to compete in selling it to retailers and butchers with meat claiming to be welfare and environment-friendly that has no such comparable standards.'



Gerry Minister

George & Jeni Curtis, farm pigs and beef cattle on 42 acres up a hill in Powys. 'We've found that our traditional breed of pigs (Gloucester Old Spots) seem to have got more natural instincts left in them than the more intensive breeds. They don't get bored, because they're out of doors, so we've never had any problems with biting. And we've never wanted or needed to do anything that's not allowed in the standards.'

Louise and Mathew Unwin also began life as conventional farmers but after seeing the way their stock were treated when waiting to be slaughtered for sale into a major retail chain, they became converts to both organic farming and the direct marketing of their produce.

'Our customers want to know what they're eating, and I like to know who's eating what we've spent so much time and care producing,' says Louise, who travels weekly to three organic markets in London, as well as organising both local and nationwide deliveries. Their 600 chickens free-range in small groups over 35 acres, and their cattle and sheep do their bit for nature by grazing land owned by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Will Best, who with his wife Pam, farms just over 30 acres in Dorset believes that the essence of successful organic livestock farming, 'is to grow forage that is intrinsically health-giving and therefore fundamental to the welfare of the stock.' When he took over the farm tenancy from his father in the 1970s, he set about modernising it, but became uneasy, 'as the sprayer seemed to be out more and more with fungicides, insecticides and residual herbicides joining the hormone herbicides as essential elements in crop growing.' Livestock and rotations became the way forward for weaning the land off chemicals and into greater fertility; and the animals themselves, through organic husbandry, and homeopathy were kept clear of reliance on drugs — creating the classic organic relationship between healthy land and livestock to produce healthy foods for human consumption.



# What you can do

By demanding more information about the way our food is produced, consumers can encourage supermarkets and the meat trade to set higher standards. We have seen how the campaigns against the export of live animals have helped focus media and public attention on the wider issues of animal welfare and food production.

Retailers are sensitive to the views of their customers and by exerting our consumer 'muscle', through writing letters and asking questions, we can all help to campaign for improved standards. And the best message we can send to the supermarkets is to choose products produced to higher standards. It may cost a little more, but it is a price well worth paying.

## Questions to ask

If you want more information about how your meat is produced, here are some questions to ask your supermarket or butcher:

**Standards:** Has the meat been produced to higher animal welfare standards than those required for all animals in the UK? If so, how do you obtain a copy of these standards?

**Drugs:** Are the medication procedures more strict than those that apply to all farm animals in the UK? If so, what additional restrictions are imposed?

**Feed:** Are there any restrictions on the type of feed used by the farmers beyond those that apply in the UK

generally? What are these? Are yolk-colouring compounds permitted in hen feed?

**Inspection:** What inspection procedures operate apart from those required by law, by normal veterinary practice and by the contracting parties? What, if any, independent agency inspects for animal welfare standards?

**Environment:** What environmental and conservation management standards are required beyond those required by law? Are these part of the supplying contract? Are the standards published?

**Track-back:** What methods are used to trace products back to the farm? Is there a list of current suppliers available for consumers?

## Where to get more information

### Organisations:

**The Soil Association** has produced 5 Regional Guides to buying organic produce covering Scotland; Wales; Northern England & Midlands; South & East England; West Country. They cost £3.00 including p&p each. There is also a free list of organic meat outlets including suppliers who operate mail-order meat delivery.

Address requests to: Organic Meat Info, The Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB or Tel: 0272 290661.

**Compassion in World Farming** is the leading UK organisation campaigning for an end to cruel factory farming systems. CIWF has already achieved UK bans on veal crates and sow stalls and is campaigning peacefully for a ban on the export of live animals and for an end to battery cages and farrowing crates. For more information and details of publications contact Compassion in World Farming, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 3EH. Tel: 01730 264208.

**The Farm Animal Welfare Council** is the official body advising MAFF on animal welfare. FAWC, Government Buildings, Hook Rise South, Tolworth, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7NF.

**The Humane Slaughter Association** campaigns for humane methods of slaughter, reform of livestock markets and improved transport facilities for live-

stock. More information from: The Humane Slaughter Association, 34 Blanche Lane, South Mimms, Potters Bar, Herts, EN6 3PA. Tel 0707 659040.

**RSPCA's Freedom Food** can be contacted c/o RSPCA, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG Tel: 01403 272366

### Retailers:

**Co-op:** CWS, MR 9473, FREEPOST, Manchester, M4 8BA  
tel Freephone 0800 317927

**Safeway:** Customer Relations, Safeway Stores plc, Beddow Way, Aylesford, Kent, ME20 7AT, tel 01622 712547

**Sainsbury:** Customer Services, J Sainsbury plc, Stamford House, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LL, tel 0171 921 1000

**Tesco:** Customer Relations, Tesco House, PO Box 18, Delamare Road, Cheshunts, Waltham Cross, Herts EN8 9SL, tel 01992 632222

**The Real Meat Company,** East Hill Farm, Heytesbury, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 7BZ Tel: 01985 840436; Fax: 01985 840243.



## Spring is sprung, the grass is...

... nowhere to be seen in the inner cities. A new project jointly managed by the NFA and the SAFE Alliance hopes to show how growing food in cities can not only improve the urban environment but also improve public health and support local communities.

What better way to improve access to cheap, fresh fruit and vegetables than to grow your own? At the same time as increasing your intake of anti-oxidant rich produce, you're likely to be increasing your levels of physical activity (harvesting, digging, planting, weeding...); a double bonus for your health. All that greenery can hardly fail to improve the quality of the environment in which it's grown and – another double bonus – by growing and eating local fruit and veg, there could be less long distance transport of bulky produce and therefore less transport-related environmental damage.

Add to these benefits the community development aspects of getting together to grow food and you've got a very juicy project! Well at least this is what several members of the NFA and SAFE think! The idea is to gather together a selection of case studies which illustrate the advantages of growing food in cities and, on that basis, develop guidelines to help others wanting to set up similar initiatives. The project will also examine local, national and European policies which might help – or hinder – such projects, and make recommendations.

The National Federation of City Farms is, of course, a key member of the working party set up to guide the project. Support has also been expressed by a wide range of other bodies including Common Ground, the Soil Association, and the Schumacher Society. Get in touch with Tara Garnett, who will be the project officer, if you're running a project which you think should be included in the publication.

## Welcome back!

Peta Cottee, formerly assistant co-ordinator as part of her one-year student placement, has rejoined the NFA team.

The HEA has very generously agreed to fund a series of conferences to promote the NFA's *Food and Low Income* pack, and Peta has been contracted to arrange these and write a report on the key themes to emerge from the events. We are delighted to report that the conferences – in Newcastle, Birmingham and London – have been very popular (in some cases oversubscribed!) and look set to be lively affairs. Watch this space for a report back.

## Fighting back!

Meanwhile, the NFA's Food Advertising project continues successfully to fend off the slings and arrows of outrageous journalists, seeking to cast doubt on the credibility of this project and its supporters. Recent extraordinary allegations – which didn't make it into print thanks to robust challenges by Sue Dibb and the project working party – have included; that the NFA has a budget of £500,000 (chance would be a fine thing!), that the Government and the Nutrition Task Force do everything we say (in our wildest dreams!), and that we want to ban all advertising (no we don't). It's reassuring to know that investigative reporting – where the facts are allowed to get in the way of a scandal-laced story – is still alive and well in some parts of the media.

## Back to the boil!

The *Get Cooking!* project is coming back to the boil, with Newsletter 6 soon to hit the streets, the working party set to expand, and preparations well advanced for a new publication to follow up on the success of the *Get Cooking!* pack. With the generous support of Health Promotion Wales, we also held a successful *Get Cooking!* conference in Cardiff, and we are seeking other supporters for similar events around the country.

## A pat on the back!

And finally, a small pat on our own back. On 1 March 1985 the National Council for Voluntary Organisations held the first meeting of what was to become the National Food Alliance. Some of the people gathered round a table in the elegant Bedford Square rooms are still involved in the NFA today. Who among them would have thought that the informal network they started would develop into a thriving alliance of diverse groups? Happy birthday to us!

## New member

The Hospitality Management Learning Consortium was established four years ago to promote scholarly interaction and research between the hospitality departments at Brighton, Napier, Oxford Brookes and Manchester Metropolitan universities. Tutors in the four departments have expertise in nutrition, gastronomy and food technology and write for publications such as *The British Food Journal* and *Nutrition and Food Science*.

### National Food Alliance

3rd Floor,  
5-11 Worship Street  
London EC2A 2BH  
Tel: 0171 628 2442  
Fax: 0171 628 9329

### Officers:

Professor Philip James (President)  
Geoffrey Cannon (Chair)  
Jack Winkler (Treasurer)  
Jeanette Longfield (Secretary and Co-ordinator)  
Samantha Montal (Assistant Co-ordinator)  
Pip Collings (Project Officer)  
Peta Cottee (Project Officer)  
Tara Garnett (Project Officer)

### Alms 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:

Action and Information on Sugars  
Association of School Health Education  
Co-ordinators  
Baby Milk Action  
British Association for the study of Community Dentistry  
British Dental Association  
British Heart Foundation  
British Organic Farmers  
Campaign for Real Ale  
Caroline Walker Trust  
Children's Society  
Christian Aid  
Common Ground  
Community Nutrition Group  
Coronary Prevention Group  
Council for the Protection of Rural England  
Diet Breakers  
Elm Farm Research Centre  
Food Additives Campaign Team  
Food Commission  
Friends of the Earth  
Genetics Forum  
GMR (Britain's General Union)  
Green Network  
Henry Doubleday Research Association  
Hyperactive Children's Support Group  
Institute for European Environmental Policy, London  
McCamison Society  
Maternity Alliance  
National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology  
National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations  
National Farmers' Union  
National Federation of City Farms  
National Federation of Consumer Groups  
National Federation of Women's Institutes  
Pesticides Trust  
Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union (TGWU)  
Scottish Food Poverty Network  
Society of Health Education and Health Promotion Specialists  
Soil Association  
Vegetarian Society  
Women's Farming Union  
World Cancer Research Fund  
**Observers of the NFA:**  
British Dietetic Association  
British Medical Association  
Consumers' Association  
Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians  
Guild of Food Writers  
Health Education Authority  
Institute of Trading Standards Administration  
National Consumer Council  
National Forum for CHD Prevention  
Royal Society of Medicine Food and Health Forum  
Royal Society for the Promotion of Health  
SAFE Alliance  
Scottish Consumer Council  
Trades Union Congress  
Vega Research  
Welsh Consumer Council

This page has been contributed by  
the National Food Alliance



## The Nursery Food Book

A lively and practical book exploring all issues relating to food, nutrition, hygiene and multicultural needs, with tips, recipes and sample menus along with cooking, gardening and educational activities involving food. Excellent handbook for nursery nurses and anyone caring for young children. £9.99 including p&p.

## Food Adulteration

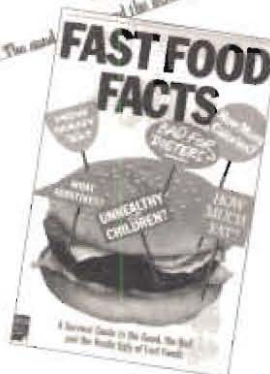
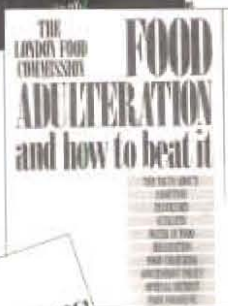
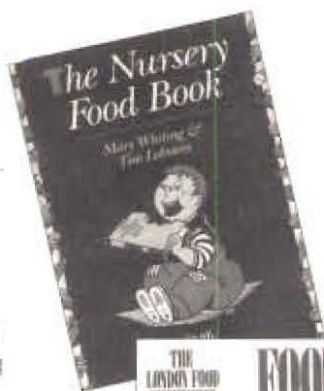
A penetrating expose of the shocking state of food quality in Britain, revealing the facts on additives, pesticides, food poisoning and irradiation. £5.95 inc p&p.

## Children's Food

Teething rusks sweeter than a doughnut? Fish fingers less than half fish? Beef burgers made with pork? A book packed with trade secrets and sound advice. £4.75 inc p&p.

## Fast Food Facts

Full of useful tables of nutrients and additives, along with a unique look into the secretive world of fast foods. £5.95 inc p&p.



## 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.

## More than rice and peas

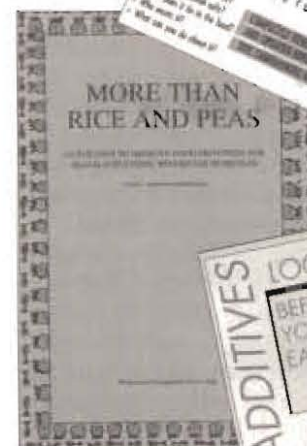
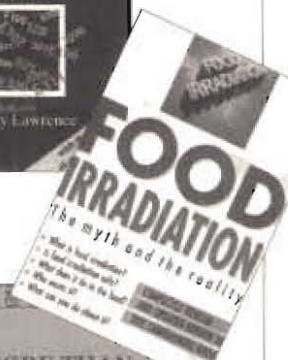
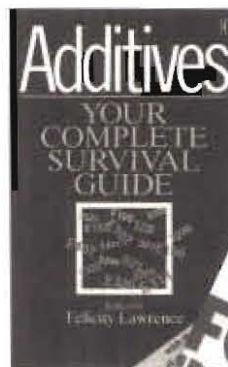
Essential guide for caterers - providing the wealth of detail which they need to improve their service for black and ethnic minority customers. £17.50 inc p&p.

## Additives chart

published by Channel . Lists all additives allowed in UK with short summary of safety data. Also indicates if additives allowed in foods for babies & if derived from animal sources. £2 inc p&p.

## This Food Business

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# The green gourmet

Mass produced food destroys local communities and poisons the soil, while local, fresh produce sustains local agriculture and the community. So argues Alice Waters, who has put her belief into practice in her world-class restaurant in Berkeley, California. John Whiting reports.



**A**lice Waters is the principal founder and public face of Chez Panisse, a world-class restaurant serving eggs to eggheads and caviar to the general. Waiting for lunch in the upstairs cafe, you queue alongside movie stars and Nobel Prize winners. Celebrities are treated like locals and locals like celebrities; often they are the same.

But it is behind the scenes that the unusual nature of Alice's restaurant is

revealed. Alice's encouragement of small-scale local food producers has helped to bring about a renaissance of organic market gardening all over California. It springs from her guiding principles: 'If you choose to eat mass-produced fast food you are supporting a network of supply and demand that is destroying local communities and traditional ways of life all over the world. And you are supporting a method of agriculture that depletes the soil and leaves harmful chemical residues. But if you decide to eat fresh food, locally produced, then you are contributing to the health and stability of local agriculture and local communities.'

Nor has she merely climbed aboard the latest ecological bandwagon. Her political and gastronomic apprenticeship began in 1964, when she transferred to the University of California at Berkeley and, during the summer prior to beginning her studies, enrolled for a credit-earning tour of Europe. She never got beyond France: its gourmet delights captured her attention, and a single dinner in Brittany changed her attitude to food and ultimately her life.

She returned to Berkeley just in time for the Free Speech Movement, which was the beginning of her political education. The two experiences came together as she simultaneously joined the Movement and attempted to recreate the food she had experienced in France, using Elizabeth David's *French Country Cooking* as her guide. It was not long before she was feeding crowds of fellow campaigners on fare as fresh and invigorating as their principles, and by 1967 her dining room had become known as Alice's Restaurant (no relation).

It was not until 1971 that Chez Panisse actually materialised. Strongly imbued with a sense of community, Alice made no attempt to embark on an ego trip but gathered together a small group of like-minded friends who would divide the work and share the responsibility.

One of their models was Marcel Pagnol's trilogy of Marseilles-based films, and the sail-maker Panisse was adopted as the restaurant's eponymous patron.

Alice soon discovered that the principles by which she wished to run her restaurant necessitated basic changes in the food supply structure. Ever optimistic, she set about creating a network of suppliers who would grow the food she wanted in accordance with organic principles. Precisely because she was both communitarian and not formally trained in the food industry, she enlisted the help of friends who were prepared to experiment with the growing of vegetables and herbs in their gardens and window boxes. 'Ignorance,' says Alice, 'was an important if unwitting factor in allowing Chez Panisse to become what it is.'

Fame ensued, if not fortune. As Chez Panisse became busy, then fashionable, then even legendary, Alice Waters became perhaps the only world-famous restaurateur to adhere unwaveringly to the principles with which she started. To avoid waste of food and money she served and still serves a fixed menu at a fixed price. As the turnover has risen, the most dramatic result has been the increase in the size of the 'family'. In fundamental opposition to the fashion for 'downsizing' staff, she now has about a hundred, twice that of a typical three-star French restaurant serving meals in sumptuous surroundings at twice the price. (And in an effort to remain affordable to impecunious gourmets, Monday night meals at thirty dollars are about half the price of weekends.)

Last year a staff meeting was called to discuss a new pension scheme. A show of hands revealed that about half of those present (about 85 per cent of the total) had been employed for more than seven years. And that doesn't include the volunteers, some of them famous foodies in their own right, who come trooping in during the garlic season to help prepare the harvest for the annual 14 July garlic festival.

'I believe that how you eat, and how you choose your food, is an act which combines the political — your place in the world of other people — with the most intensely personal — the way you use your mind and your senses, together, for the gratification of your soul,' says Alice. 'It can change the way we treat each other, and it can change the world.'

■ John Whiting, an international sound designer and visitor to Chez Panisse over the years, is honorary treasurer of the Global Commons Trust.

■ Chez Panisse Cafe and Restaurant, 1517 Shattuck, Berkeley, California 94709. (Tel Berkeley 548 5525)



# Cubans take up organic production

**When Cuba's sugar harvest failed twenty years ago, Fidel Castro called it *Venceremos*, the year of victory, saying that from such failure they would learn to succeed. Now a new economic crisis is forcing Cuban farmers to turn to alternative – organic – solutions. Simon Wright reports.**

**F**inancially Cuba is in a bad way. Since 1989 Cuba has lost almost all its Warsaw pact trading partners, who used to account for 85 per cent of exports. To compensate for this, in 1990 Castro announced the beginning of a special period during peacetime designed to reverse the country's economic down-turn by encouraging the island to become self-sufficient in food. Since Cuba is unable to afford imported fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides this means that much of the agriculture on the

island now uses organic farming techniques ie 'passive' organic farming. Many such techniques have been developed at INCA (Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Agrícolas) a research association on the outskirts of Havana which employs 450 workers. INCA's function is to carry out research into crop plants of economic significance to Cuba. These include sugar cane, citrus fruits, rice, bananas, coffee, tomatoes, potatoes, cacao, legumes and grasslands. There is an entire department devoted to sustainable agriculture, plus other departments which investigate bio-fertilisation and crop rotation. Current projects include developing four new varieties of potato specifically designed to grow in Cuban habitats without the need for artificial inputs.

The work that INCA has done on sustainable agriculture has undoubtedly helped boost agricultural production for domestic consumption. However the citrus research organisation IIC (Instituto Investigaciones de Citricos) has taken these techniques one stage further and is ready to investigate selling organic citrus fruit to Europe. Already organic grapefruit, oranges, limes and tangerines are being produced in commercial quantities using sustainable techniques that appear to be compatible with European organic legislation. This makes Cuba a potential exporter of organic citrus.

The IIC has even installed a small packing line at its headquarters in Playa, just outside Havana. Here fruit is inspected, washed and coated with

natural carnauba wax — a non-toxic treatment permitted by Appendix V1 of the EC Organic Regulation as a means of preventing fruit dehydration during shipping. The fruit is then rotated under hot air to spread the wax evenly before being packed into boxes. In addition to this facility, juice concentration equipment has been installed on the Isle of Youth which could permit the export of organic citrus juice concentrates for subsequent dilution and bottling in Europe.

A key organisation in disseminating sustainable agricultural techniques is ANAP, the National Association of Small Farmers. The function of ANAP is to improve the social conditions of rural communities by introducing the appropriate technology developed in Cuba's research institutes such as INCA and IIC. Small farmers are very important to Cuban agriculture; 85 per cent of all cacao and 60 per cent of all coffee is grown by small farmers. Together the members of ANAP farm 1.7 million hectares of land, half as co-operatives. Several of these co-operatives now produce their own biological pesticides, based on the fungal and bacterial diseases of key insect pests. The co-operatives also breed and release parasitic wasps and flies, natural enemies of many crop pest caterpillars.

Also involved is DECAP (Departamento de Coordinación y Asesoría de Proyectos), an ecumenical organisation whose stated aims include the sustainable development of local communities. Their projects include importing neem trees from

Nicaragua to use as natural pesticides and providing the equipment for residents of a housing estate in Havana to preserve their own vegetables such as carrots.

Much of this activity will be brought together in May 1995 when the Association of Cuban Organic Agriculture holds its inaugural meeting. The organisers are hoping to invite participants from Europe to share their commercial skills and knowledge of marketing, and that commercial alliances will form between organic producers in Cuba and appropriate organisations and commercial concerns in Europe.

With limited political reform underway in Cuba, major companies such as BAT and Tate & Lyle are already beginning to explore the investment possibilities. Thanks to the constraints applied by economic circumstances, sustainable agriculture has helped the Cuban people to deal with their present difficulties. Still further benefits could result from Cuba exporting organic crops to Europe in exchange for much-needed hard currency.

■ Simon Wright is author of *Handbook of Organic Food Processing and Production* (Blackie, 1994). He attended the First Symposium On Sustainable Agriculture, in Havana, November 1994.

■ For more details, read *Two Steps Backwards, One Step Forward — Cuba's Nationwide Experiment with Organic Agriculture* edited by Rossett P and Benjamin M (Global Exchange, San Francisco, 1993).



Cuba: Organic citrus fruit is washed and sorted



# Sugar cane workers face bitter future

Europe has traditionally purchased a quota of sugar cane from its ex-colonies. But with bumper UK sugar beet crops and surplus EU sugar stocks, who in Europe will now resist GATT requirements to end this support for sugar cane producers? Michelle Harrison reports on the prospects for the plantation village of Duanvale, Jamaica.

**A**t the height of the sugarcane harvesting season in the late spring in the Jamaican village of Duanvale, small field gangs of cane cutters labour hard with machetes under the sun. As men chop down the ten foot stalks in the dense green foliage, women tie the canes in bundles for transportation to the nearby Long Pond sugar factory, where grinders and boilers extract a sticky mass of molasses and unrefined sugar. For generations, those living in this impoverished village have depended upon the sugar industry for their livelihoods. With sugarcane dominating much of the best farmland throughout rural Jamaica, there are few opportunities for alternative employment

or self-sufficient small-farming.

After three hundred years of plantation production, however, the Jamaican sugar industry is in crisis. On each of the island's nine sugar estates and factories a complex of problems exist. The historic lack of investment in the factories - the most recent having been built in 1948 - and a contemporary shortage of capital for maintenance and repairs mean that factory operations during the harvesting season are constantly interrupted by breakdowns. Poor field practices, inefficient reaping and inadequate transport facilities have resulted in ever declining yields. And the notorious work conditions and low pay of an industry still associated with slavery mean that absenteeism and strike is frequent amongst the lowly motivated, unskilled and aged workforce. At present production is less efficient than at any time during the industry's history and Jamaica is consequently experiencing high production costs relative to other sugar exporting countries.

But an even more serious threat to the industry's viability has recently been posed by a series of policy developments in Europe. Jamaica sells most of its sugar to the European Union through a special trading agreement conditioned by the Lome Convention. Under Lome, former colonies of member states receive a guaranteed market for their produce, and, in the case of sugar, receive the same price for their crop as European farmers receive for sugar beet. This special treatment that has afforded Jamaica protection from the vagaries of the world sugar market is, however, unlikely to last. For a start, the success of European sugar beet farmers

means that the Union itself is more than self sufficient in sugar. Indeed, at present, the combination of quotas and the excessively protected priced granted in respect of a high level of production provides the EU each year with about 40 per cent more sugar than it needs, making it the world's largest sugar exporter. Implicit in the resolution of the Uruguay round of GATT was a commitment of the EU to tackle the excesses of the CAP, and a consequent agreement of



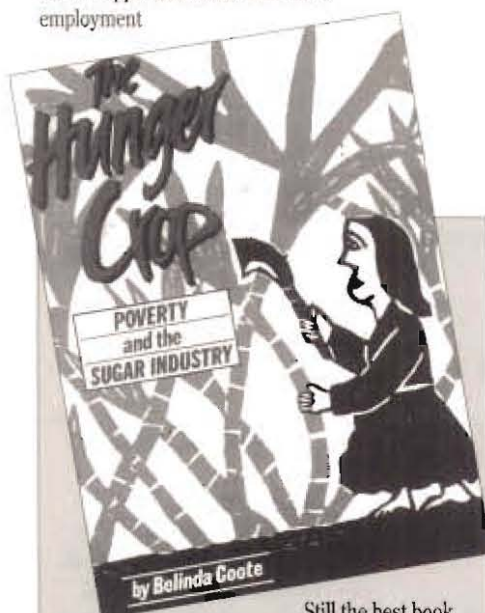
Plantation work: spreading fertilizer by hand

a base cut in the price of sugar. BookerTate, the multinational with world-wide interests in sugar production, expects a very significant fall in price in the longer run on special price arrangements such as those provided under Lome.

Secondly, the resolution of GATT, together with the lessening geopolitical importance of the Caribbean region as a whole, mean that the ending of special trade agreements altogether is likely. In 1993 a GATT panel ruling indicated that EU preferential trading relations with a limited number of nations were a violation of GATT provisions. And within the EU itself, there is a groundswell of opinion that after Lome expires in the year 2000, no further arrangements of that nature should be made.

As one of the most heavily indebted nations in the world, Jamaica is not able to make the investment needed to ensure that its sugar industry can compete on the world market. The loss of preferential price arrangements will mean the demise of the traditional rural economy and unprecedented hardship for rural people. Many of those living in Duanvale predict that the community will be 'dead out' if Long Pond closes, and fear an escalation of crime and violence. Yet at the same time, the industry is recognised to be responsible for the widespread poverty suffered by Duanvale people, and the land shortage that constrains their domestic farming, while employment in the sugar factory and the cane field is commonly loathed. The crisis in the Jamaican sugar industry illustrates the terrible dilemma inherent in plantation production in general: those living in its confines are trapped in perpetual poverty with few opportunities for real development; yet its overthrow, with the potential for true emancipation in the longer term, necessitates the loss of a survival wage and even greater suffering for rural people.

■ Michelle Harrison visited Jamaica for her research thesis on the impact of the GATT.



Still the best book on the subject, Oxfam's 1987 book *The Hunger Crop* by Belinda Coote identifies the need for Europe to continue taking responsibility for the plight of ex-colonial sugar plantations, and for the need to develop alternative crops and rural income-generating activities.



## 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 0171 628 0817.

## The price of organic certification

The group of organic growers which I belong to thought very hard this year before deciding to continue with the Soil Association Symbol Scheme. We resent the fact that new government legislation now rules that we may no longer describe our fruit and vegetables as 'organically grown' unless we pay to be inspected annually even though we are using exactly the same methods we have always used and will continue to use.

I understand that customers buying organic need to have proof that produce is genuinely organic. What I resent is that the already hard-pressed grower is having to finance the monitoring of their own production methods. I am not expected to pay for the official visits from the Weights and Measures Department, so why are we expected to pay to prove that we are growing organically?

If the government cannot be persuaded to finance the symbol scheme, I think it is likely that our names will be added to the list of those who are leaving the scheme. This would be a tremendous shame because the demand for our produce is enormous. We could expand our business many times over if only we could find more growers, but the cost of applying for a symbol is just one expense too many in a fairly precarious and unsupported business.

**Betty Whitwell, Barrow-on-Humber, South Humberside.**

*Francis Blake, SA Symbol Director replies:* My heart goes out to Betty Whitwell and to the many small growers who are also faced with this predicament. One of our objectives has been to achieve official recognition of organic agriculture based on standards. Both the SA and the organic organisations in Europe continue to exert a strong influence on the future development of official standards. Whether we like it or not, this legislation has to be a precursor to any substantial financial aid, as no government is going to give sensible money to a system which does not have proper legal controls. We now have the Organic Aid Scheme — the level of grant is pitifully low, but it will

increase as we apply more pressure, based on sound economic and environmental reasons.

Unfortunately it is unlikely we will be able to get it weighted in favour of smaller producers in the foreseeable future. However, it has been, and will continue to be, our policy to support the small scale producers by subsidising the costs of certification for them, within the constraints of our own financial situation. My plea to Betty and others is: please don't forsake the ship now, just when the tide is turning in our favour.

**Re: the BBC Good Food Exhibition, Olympia, London March 9-12, 1995**

It was not so much an urgent feeling of concern, my eye sweeping the stands overflowing with commercial bonhomie in search of an honest face, more a gradually-forming over-riding question ... Where are they? The Vegetarian Society, the Vegan Society, Food Commission, Biodynamic farming, Henry Doubleday, Women's Environmental Network, Soil Association? Community Supplies, Suma Co-operative, Alara Wholefoods, Clearspring, Meridian, Whole Earth, Fair Trade products, Green & Blacks?

As General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army is apocryphally reported to have exclaimed 'Why let the Devil have all the best tunes!' Now we may not feel like preaching Blood and Fire but like the good old Sally-Ann's if we don't blow our own trumpet who can we expect to do our work for us?

I'm not suggesting anything more than some of the above organisations, producers, wholesalers and retailers getting together and creating a much-needed oasis in the midst of a sparsely-cultivated desert.

**Peter Browne, London E2**

*Ed note:* With the cost of taking even the smallest stall at the BBC Good Food Exhibition being in the region of £3-4,000 we suspect that many of the producers, organisations etc just couldn't afford it!

## New Soil Association organic gardening booklets

Seven excellent booklets are now available from the Soil Association. They have been revamped from earlier editions by Bob Flowerdew, and in the case of Worm Compost, by Jack Temple. The books are clearly laid out, informative and give sound advice on specific subjects within organic gardening. The print is more widely spaced than in previous editions, and so is easier to read. There are also several new tips within the text.

### Friend and foe in the garden

A concise account of garden wildlife stating which are the good, the bad (and the ugly). There are a few useful updates such as the inclusion of a couple of biological controls and a little information on the control of each pest. An excellent book for the beginner but latin names would have been helpful to look up further information.

### Garden Compost

Well worth getting this one even if you have the old edition as there are a lot of changes. A great improvement.

### Make your plants work for you

Some useful tips and interesting ideas. A little too much overlap with Some Good Companions.

### Some good companions

Bob Flowerdew is an expert on Companion Planting. I wish he had been allowed a little more of a free hand to put in some more of his knowledge. Nevertheless, an informative little booklet. Bob did manage to squeeze in an extra bit on plants to attract beneficial insects. With pesticide legislation as it now stands, Bob has pointed out that it is illegal to make your own sprays from nettles and garlic to control pests...so you will have to use them as a liquid feed instead.

### The value of weeds

An interesting booklet. Take care with the recipe for Fat Hen, eating too many leaves is not good for you, as it contains high levels of oxalic acid, which can be toxic. Nice to see latin names included for further reference.



## Gardening on difficult soils

Useful tips on soil whether it is difficult or not. A good soil is essential to the organic gardener.

## Worm compost

If you have the old edition, there is no need to get an update as there is only a small but nevertheless significant alteration. That is the use of manure or garden compost instead of peat. It is very refreshing to see advice on making your own worm bin as the commercially available bins are very expensive. A very good read, but I would like to have seen more information on how to use the worm compost, for the beginner.

All the booklets are available from the Soil Association booklist, priced 3.50.

**Jo Readman**, writer, researcher and horticulture consultant.

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## PREVENTING BREAST CANCER THE POLITICS OF AN EPIDEMIC



DR CATHY READ

## Preventing Breast Cancer, The Politics of an Epidemic

by Dr Cathy Read  
Pandora, £7.99  
ISBN 0 04 440909 5

Breast cancer was comparably rare 200 years ago. Now it is the most common cancer found in women and has achieved the proportions of an epidemic in the industrialised world with the UK topping the death rate league from the disease. In this book Dr Cathy Read argues that if the rate of breast cancer can go up, then it ought to be possible for it to come down again as well. Many scientists believe that breast cancer is eminently preventable but Cathy Read argues that not enough emphasis is placed on prevention.

Although diet is a known risk factor, there are no large-scale prevention trials in the UK looking into diet and breast cancer, although a controversial study is treating healthy women with the anti-breast cancer drug, tamoxifen, even though it has known side-effects. The book also highlights the links between many pesticides

and the risk of breast cancer. The author reports that during the 1970s young women in Israel were twice as likely to die from breast cancer as women living in other countries with comparable diets, but that deaths in premenopausal women fell by 34% once three carcinogenic pesticides, DDT, lindane and hexachlorocyclohexane were banned. However these chemicals continue to pollute the global environment and other pesticides that are known carcinogens are still permitted in many countries including the UK.

This book shows that women are no longer powerless against breast cancer; in the US particularly they are making their voices heard loud and clear. Cathy Read puts the case for public health policies that promote health messages on diet and breast cancer, for changes in food and agricultural policies that make healthy eating more affordable and for policies that improve children's poor diets.

This is a powerful book that should be read by every woman and by governments and policymakers at every level.

**Sue Dibb**

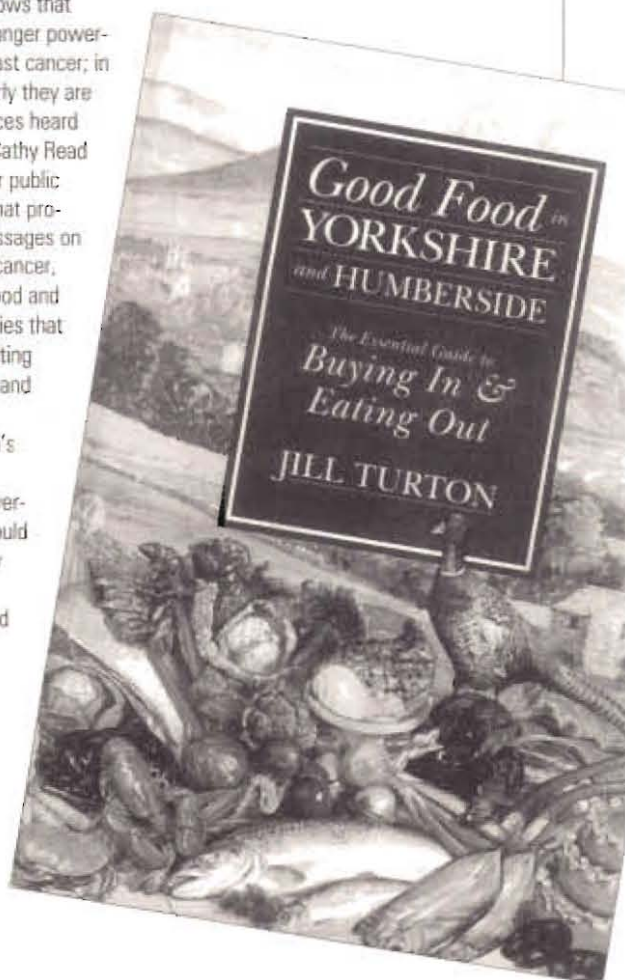
## Good Food in Yorkshire and Humberside

The Essential Guide to Buying In and Eating Out, by Jill Turton  
published by Fig Tree Press ISBN 0-9524714-0-x. £6.99

A mine of information on where to find good food in shops, restaurants, bistros, cafes, market, farms, WI stalls and even a Japanese food van!

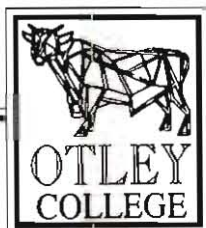
Full of local knowledge. If you need to hire a fish kettle, pick bilberries, buy homemade icecream, learn to cook, go to a cheese-making demonstration, find a caterer, wholefoods or organic wine – or a thousand other things, this book has plenty of suggestions. Clearly laid out, it's arranged by subject and has a geographical as well as a general index.

**Mary Whiting**





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**APPEAL** for an air-screen cleaner and laboratory gravity separator for Camphill Devon Community Ltd. New equipment being ferociously expensive as we all know, a plea goes out to anyone who might own or know of an unused or under-used piece of similar

equipment which might be donated or sold to the Camphill Devon Community: Technical data Laboratory Gravity Separator, 250 kg in weight; power required 870 watts; 0-500 rpm. Technical data Laboratory Air-Screen Cleaner, 300 kg in weight, power required 870 watts, 0-500 rpm, pre-

scalping, main scalping, main sifting screen frames: 250 mm x 250/500 mm. Contact Karin Herms at Camphill Devon Community, Hapstead Village, Buckfastleigh, Devon TQ11 0JN Tel: (01364) 642631.

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## Male on Sunday support for breastmilk?

A *Mail on Sunday* attack on breastfeeding ('Tiny victims of breast-is-best zealots') didn't quite give the whole story. The article featured poor Celia Atkin, struggling to breastfeed but producing too little milk and endangering her son, Ross', health. Celia, it said, had banned the health visitor from her house so as not to reveal her son's failure to gain weight. It continued '...fortunately Celia's husband, Edward, intervened on the tenth day and put Ross on supplementary bottle feeds.'

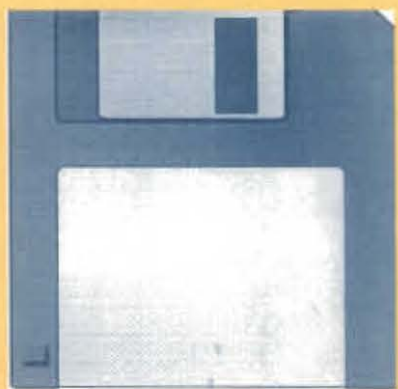
Then a sharp-eyed reader spotted a familiar name. A *Wall Street Journal* article about the UK's leading baby bottle maker, Avent, mentioned one Edward Atkin, who is the owner of Avent's parent company, Cannon Rubber of London, and who, would you believe, has a son called Ross. Bottled, of course.

According to one food trade journal, the *Mail's* pages 'are regularly the best PR the industry gets.'

## HMG attack on consumers

Rumours abound that in the run up to the election the government is trying to make itself as unpopular as possible. The latest move is to cut its support for consumer organisations: the National Consumer Council has seen a swingeing cut in its government funding, and the Consumers in Europe Group have similarly lost their main source of finance, from the DTI, resulting in a freeze on their food-related activities.

MAFF's Consumer Protection Department, set up to respond to concerns about food and the government's role, is also rumoured to be suffering. Of five key staff, three may, to use a kindly phrase, find their jobs are to be rationalised. And then there is the question of checking food for chemical residues: we hear that MAFF is considering massive cuts in its funding for food surveillance including their routine checks for contamination levels and drug residues.



## Re-usable directives

The latest idea for circulating draft EU directives comes from MAFF, where their 531-page Additive Specifications draft appeared in a small padded envelope. They were offering a high-density floppy instead of the usual low-density sheets of A4. It certainly helps the recipients, as we can find more uses for a floppy than a pile of paper, but what will their Forestry Commission colleagues have to say?

## Train your daughter for her future McJob

With over 40 per cent of Americans getting their first taste of work under the golden arches, this Barbie McDonald's Restaurant play-set is just the thing to introduce your daughter to the real world of work. The set comes complete with counter, burgers and a speak-your-order panel which has Barbie welcoming you to McDonald's and asking for your order. Mercifully it's not yet available in the UK!



## Sch... the secret of Scheese

We berate big food companies when they don't give us full information about their products but it seems that some health food manufacturers are not above the same criticism. Scheese is a non-dairy alternative to cheese made by Bute Island Foods to appeal to vegans and others wishing to avoid dairy foods. Made mainly from soya, oil (including hydrogenated oil) and water, the product claims to be a healthier alternative to real cheese. So why is the company so secretive about the nutritional content of Scheese, going as far as refusing to tell inquirers how much calcium or vitamin B12 is in the product, important to many vegans wanting to eat a healthy diet.

'These details are irrelevant,' said a spokeswoman. 'We don't provide nutritional information because we think it's unnecessary and confusing. Our main purpose for our products is the knowing that to eat animal produce in any form is to eat something not meant for consumption by the human body. In fact, it is to eat disease.' Very helpful!

## Sweet rumours

Following Sainsbury's successful 'partnership' with Reading University — a university which had developed a world-wide reputation in agriculture and food research — in the form of the Sainsbury Wing, we now hear that South Bank University is toying with the idea of taking industry money to

fund a £1m research programme into food policy issues. The donor? Well, it might break confidences if we were to mention the British Sugar Bureau.

Then there's the industry-funded British Nutrition Foundation. Is it or isn't it being wooed by the International Life Science Institute? And does or doesn't the ILSI depend for much of its funding from the likes of Pepsi Cola?