

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food

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Polyfiller – or babyfood?

A new Food Commission survey of the UK's leading babyfood products finds that the vast majority, from leading manufacturers such as Cow & Gate, Boots, Heinz and Farleys, are failing to meet the criteria for infant feeding set out in last year's Department of Health's expert report on weaning foods.

Four years ago the Food Commission exposed some of the poor practices of baby food manufacturers, but it appears there has been little change for the better among the bigger companies. Manufacturers are continuing to market foods for babies who are too young, to include gluten in foods for babies 3 or 4 months old and to use unnecessary extrinsic sugars in first foods and savoury foods. Out of more than 400 products examined by the Food Commission, the majority failed on one or several counts to meet the recommendations of the UK government advisory group (the COMA Working Group on the Weaning Diet).

The Food Commission's report also criticises manufacturers for continuing the unnecessary practice of reducing the quantity of 'real' food by bulking out their products with starches and added water – a process condemned by the Food Commission as providing babies with 'tinned paste' and 'polyfiller' meals. Over 70 per cent of products were being bulked out with low-nutrient starches, and some manufacturers were adding low-nutrient starches to their entire range. Although unnecessary, the practice of adding these bulking agents (such as modified starch and maltodextrin) has been widespread for many years – and forthcoming EU legislation will permit high levels of bulking agents: a Baby Lamb Dinner for example is permitted to be up to 90% low-nutrient starch and water.

The labels on babyfoods also come in for criticism. The health expert's recommendation that labels should give useful information contrasts with

most manufacturers' (83% of products) use of misleading and empty phrases which had already been condemned by the government's Food Advisory Group.

'These practices may be legal, but they do little for shoppers and even less for babies,' said Dr Tim Lobstein, co-author of the report. 'Babies don't choose what is bought for them and babies can't complain to manufacturers. In the absence of tough

legislation we urge parents to read the small print carefully, check for unnecessary starches and maltodextrin, and do the complaining for them.'

For a summary of the report see pages (9-11).



WHO takes Nestlé advice on soya milks

Amid growing worldwide concern about the safety of soya formula milks for babies, the Food Commission has discovered that the expert advice used by the World Health Organisation was supplied by Nestlé, a company with a commercial interest in soya baby milks.

Documents released under the New Zealand Official Information Act include a five page fax, dated 5 January 1995, from Mr James Akre of the WHO's Nutrition Unit in Geneva to Mr Martin Edwards, a toxicologist with the New Zealand Ministry of Health, in which Mr Akre states: 'Not having any information of direct relevance to your specific questions, we referred the matter to the Nestlé Research Centre in Lausanne, which we understood has specialist knowledge in this regard. Mr Anthony Hugget of the Centre was kind enough to provide the following four pages of information, which we are pleased to share with you now.'

Nowhere in its reply to the New Zealand government did the WHO indicate that Nestlé, the

world's leading manufacturers of baby milks, also has a commercial interest in soya and soya baby milks. Patti Rundall of Baby Milk Action, which co-ordinates the UK Nestlé boycott, was concerned a WHO's handling of the New Zealand government's enquiry. 'I'm surprised that the WHO should have referred such a sensitive request to an interested party,' she said.

While the Nestlé report is superficial in its review of the literature and also inaccurate in its calculation of the oestrogenic activity of phytoestrogens, it nonetheless acknowledges that the 'potential estrogenic activity of these products' is a 'major safety issue which has not been conclusively resolved'. After pointing out the need for further crucial research, it goes on to state 'we feel that there is currently not sufficient data available to exclude the possibility of estrogenic effects following chronic exposure of neonates to soy-based infant formulas or to argue that such effects are equivalent to those from breast milk or cows milk based formulas.'

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THE FOOD COMMISSION

Publishers of The Food Magazine

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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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Welcome to the new *Food Magazine*. As we announced with our last issue, both the Food Commission and the Soil Association have decided, after a happy collaboration, to relaunch our respective publications independently. Instead we are giving all Food Commission members a copy of the National Food Alliance's regular bulletin *Update*, free with each issue of the *Food Magazine*.

And what more fitting occasion for a relaunch than our tenth anniversary? The original London Food Commission was launched in 1985 at a time when food and health, and concerns about industry pressure to water down healthy eating recommendations, were hitting news headlines.

So what's changed? We asked the first director of the Commission, Dr Tim Lang, now Professor of Food Policy at Thames Valley University, to review the first ten years of the Food Commission's life and to celebrate our victories. In 1985 who had heard of food irradiation or genetic engineering? There may now be a much greater consensus on what is a healthy diet, but as we report on page 14, the industry is still up to its old tricks of 'damage limitation'. This time it's salt as we report on the food industry's attempts to water down government recommendations.

We also revisit baby foods. Our report in 1991 alerted parents and health professionals to the poor nutritional quality and value of most commercial baby foods. Four years later, and with new EU guidelines, we reveal that most companies are still selling 'tinned paste and pollyfiller' rather than real food.

Looking at food for children has always been one of the Food Commission's priorities. That's why we are concerned about reports on the possible risks of soya baby milks. But equally worrying to us is the way in which the World Health Organisation used Nestlé, a company with a commercial interest in soya products, as its source of expertise on the subject.

In ten years, perhaps we have learned to see just how much the things we took for granted are open to challenge.

Sue Dibb
Tim Lobstein

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Support The Food Commission's campaign for safer, healthier food

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Food firms pester kids in the classroom

The Food Commission has criticised food firms for using schools to promote their products. In recent marketing promotions Kellogg's gave away 800,000 packets of Coco Pops to children in primary and secondary schools. McDonald's has been offering vouchers for free burgers to children as prizes for good behaviour and in another scheme, schools were offered a team sports strip, in exchange for 5,000 Snickers chocolate bar wrappers.

At Decoding Kids, an industry conference held in London at the end of June, delegates were told how to market their products 'through education' and how to convert an 'enquiring infant into a powerful pest.'

Quoted in the *Sunday Times* (11 June 1995) the Food Commission's Sue Dibb said: 'Schools are for learning, not marketing. Businesses know that getting kids when they are young can mean getting them for life.'

One company that is taking advantage of an opportunity to promote products in schools is First Impressions Marketing. The

company's promotional material says 'Children have always been a notoriously difficult market to target... Not any more.' By providing sampling bags to schools — a Primary Bag aimed at 5-6 year olds, a Secondary Bag for 11-12 year olds and a Trendsetterz (sic) bag aimed at 14-15 year olds — the firm says it can deliver a company's product or message 'directly into the hands of the child in the one place you can guarantee he or she will be — the school.'

First Impressions Marketing sets six criteria for product inclusion including one on healthy eating. However products in the bags have included Fruesli Bars (high in sugar), Capri-Sun drinks (high in sugar), Dorito corn chips (rich in fat and salt) and Kellogg's Corn Pops cereals (also high in sugar) — hardly the kinds of foods that are going to encourage children towards healthier eating.

The Food Commission will continue to highlight companies that use schools to promote their products. Keep sending us examples.



Farmers are queuing up to benefit from the government's Organic Aid Scheme with nearly a hundred applications approved this spring, covering nearly 16,000 hectares of land. Aid is only available for new schemes and extensions of schemes, not for land already farmed organically. Meanwhile Germany is streaking ahead of other European countries in its conversion to organic or 'ecological' farming, having added over 200,000 hectares since 1991 — making a total of nearly 5000 farms in 1994 (compared with the UK's 700, and Italy and France with 3000-4000 each). *Elm Farm Research Centre Bulletin*, 16, April 1995.

Coca-Cola still leads the world as the biggest company with major food interests, and is valued at \$62bn with annual sales of \$14bn. Nestle comes highest in Europe, valued at \$35bn and sales of \$45bn, followed closely by Unilever, valued at \$33bn and sales of \$44bn (*FT* Jan 1995). To put these figures in context, the Republic of Ireland has an annual GDP of under \$30bn.

Sugar erodes the soil as much as it does our teeth, with up to 380 tonnes of soil per hectare being lost in areas of Queensland, Australia, according to the Queensland Consumers' Association. The average losses amounted to 150 tonnes/hectare/year, compared with wheat land losses of 2-53 t/ha/y. Acceptable sustainable losses are estimated at under 13 t/ha/y. *Eco-consumer*, April 1995, OCA, PO Box 12046, Brisbane Elizabeth Street, 4002 Australia.

A document posted on a computer bulletin board from a Mark d Gold raises health concerns about the artificial sweetener aspartame (NutraSweet). It cites research indicating that aspartic acid (40% of aspartame) can over-excite and damage nerve cells, and could be linked to epilepsy. It gives a contact address for the Aspartame Consumer Safety Network, PO Box 780634, Dallas, Texas 75378, USA, phone (001) 214 352 4268. (Thanks to Linda Lazarides)

New guidelines for educational materials

The Nutrition Task Force is drawing up guidelines for educational materials, including those produced by commercial companies for schools. The aim is to ensure that the nutrition messages materials give are consistent with current government health policy. The proposed guidelines also state that material should not be misleading

and that they should not be overtly promotional. The guidelines will also include specific recommendations for materials aimed at schools and younger people.

■ For further information contact: Mileva Novkovic, NTF Secretariat, Department of Health (Tel: 0171 972 5099).

Soya baby milk

continued from page 1

The Nestle report also confirms that an infant fed exclusively on soya milk would consume about 20mg of phytoestrogens a day. On a weight-for-weight basis this is three to five times higher than the amount of phytoestrogens from soya that has

been found to disrupt the menstrual cycles of women in other studies.

Meanwhile, independent scientists and doctors writing in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* (24 May 1995) raise concerns about the potential adverse effects of phytoestrogens in soya baby milks and call for information to be made available to doctors and parents. The Food Commission is supporting their recommendation for soya baby milks to be available only on the advice of a

doctor until further research has been carried out.

A New Zealand Health Ministry internal briefing paper, also obtained under the Official Information Act, lists possible health effects of toxicants in soya as 'growth depression, immunosuppression, abnormal responses to hormone stimulation, and cancer' but concludes that it would be difficult to establish 'actual harm to consumers' and that more research is needed.

'We are urging the UK government to review all the available information and for research to be urgently carried out,' says the Food Commission's Sue Dibb. 'In the meantime, if there is any doubt about the safety of soya baby milks, babies should not be put at risk. It's an avoidable risk as there are alternatives to soya milks for those babies with a cow's milk intolerance.'

■ A free information pack is

New pesticide tests show carrots still a problem

Instructing farmers to cut back on the number of times they spray carrots with toxic organophosphate (OP) pesticides is failing to reduce the level of residues in the carrots, according to the results of new MAFF monitoring.

In April *The Food Magazine* reported that residues from organophosphate (OP) pesticides had been found in 1-2% of carrots sampled by MAFF at levels up to 25 times higher than expected from composite samples and exceeding, in some cases, the acute Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) safety levels. MAFF told farmers to limit applications of the pesticides to three times a year from the then maximum of nine applications.

In May MAFF released new figures for the monitoring of OPs in the UK 1994/5 crop. Overall the new results are similar to the previous results and throw up the same concerns despite the reduction in applications.

OP pesticides, which are used to control carrot fly, were developed from 'nerve gases' and can cause adverse neurological effects in both the long and short term. The Advisory Committee on Pesticides said the residues 'did not represent an immediate threat to health' but

considered that steps should be taken to restore the normal safety margins built into pesticide approvals.

Earlier this year MAFF warned that consumers could experience an upset stomach and recommended peeling and removing the top 2-3 millimetres of carrots — even though they admit that some OP residues will still remain in the carrot. Sales of organic carrots soared as the media drew attention to the problem.

MAFF say they will continue to carry out monitoring and will be extending their investigation of variation in residue levels of pesticides to other fruit and vegetables, including apples, pears, tomatoes, celery, oranges, bananas and peaches.

David Buffin of the Pesticide Trust's says: 'Nobody yet understands why some carrots contain high levels of OPs and other's don't. To try and put the risk into perspective, he explains that although the acceptable daily intake (ADI) was exceeded in some carrots, there is a built-in safety factor of a hundred, so technically they are still safe. However he does advise peeling and topping carrots and agrees that organic carrots are unlikely to contain OP residues.

The Food Commission and other

groups, including the Pesticides Trust, are calling for MAFF to take a lead on research into non-chemical methods of pest control.

■ For further information: contact the Pesticides Trust on 0171-274 8895. For information on where to buy organic produce contact the Soil Association on 0117 929 0661.

Buying organic?

A new nationwide scheme will deliver fresh organic produce to your door. The Fresh Food Company will provide a seasonal 20lb box of fresh vegetables and fruit on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The company also sells organic meat and boxes of Cornish fish.

■ For more information contact Thoby Young, Freepost Fresh Food, 326 Portobello Road, London W10 5BR. Tel & fax: 0181 969 0351; E-Mail: 100600.3527@compuserve.com.

■ For further information on local organic box schemes contact the Soil Association: 0117 290661.

Codex captured by companies

A survey by the consumers' body Consumers International (formerly IOCU) has found that national consumer groups feel they have very limited input into decisions by the global food standards-setting body, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex).

Codex is responsible for setting standards for international trade in food, and their remit includes food hygiene, food additives, pesticides and veterinary drugs. Codex meetings are attended by national delegations which often comprise individuals drawn from government and industry, and less often from consumer groups.

Eighty per cent of consumer groups said they worked on food issues but their national governments were not inviting them to consultations about Codex. Of those that were consulted, nearly half did not receive papers in advance of meetings. A third of those invited to consultation meetings said no other consumer groups were present but that industry representation ranged up to 80 per cent of total participants.

Only a half of the consumer groups in developed countries were sent minutes, with only a third of those in Latin America, and none of those in the Asia Pacific region.

■ Consumer Involvement in Codex, from Consumers International, 24 Highbury Crescent, London N5 1RX (tel (+44) 171 226 6663, fax (+44) 171 354 0607).

Packaging inks are contaminating food

Chemicals used in printing inks on packaging are migrating into food at levels that exceed guidelines limits, according to a new MAFF report¹. Nine out of 31 samples of food wrapped in printed paper and cardboard packaging were found to have levels of phthalates (DBP and DEHP) in excess of EC guideline limits. The highest concentrations of DBP and DEHP were found in chocolate-coated cakes, sausages, vegetable burger mix, gravy granules, vegetable fat and cookies. In 1990 MAFF's Steering Group on Food Surveillance² recommended that

steps be taken to reduce phthalate contamination after tests by MAFF found high levels of DEHP and DBP in crisps and chocolate bars sold in printed plastic films.

Phthalates have been found to be weak oestrogens which may accumulate in the human body. In animal studies DEHP has been found to be a reproductive toxicant in both sexes significantly decreasing fertility. It has been estimated that exposure to phthalates from packaging in the UK can reach 4.37 mg/person/day. However as phthalates are commonly used in plastics they also widely

pollute the environment and humans are likely to consume additional amounts through contamination of foods such as cheese and butter. In a recent report³, the Danish Environmental Protection Agency states that phthalates 'are the most abundant man-made environmental pollutants'.

In Denmark DEHP is not permitted in plastic materials that may come into contact with food though in the UK there is no such restriction. MAFF's action in response to their latest monitoring is to 'discuss the results with industry to ensure that

contamination ... is as low as possible.'

(1) *Phthalates in paper and board packaging*, Food Surveillance Information Sheet, MAFF Food Safety Directorate, 1995. Copies are available from Miss E Reynard 0171 238 6245.

(2) MAFF, *Plasticisers: Continuing Surveillance*, Food Surveillance Paper No 30, HMSO, 1990.

(3) *Male Reproductive Health and Environmental Chemicals with Oestrogenic Effects*, Danish Environmental Protection Agency, 1995.

MAFF say unlabelled irradiated food 'not our responsibility'

The Food Commission has criticised the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for refusing to determine the extent of illegally unlabelled irradiated food on sale to the public after tests by trading standards officers found that twelve per cent of food samples had been irradiated without the process being declared on the label. The Minister of Agriculture, William Waldegrave, has told the Food Commission that it is not his department's responsibility.

In April the Food Commission published the results of sampling by local authority trading standards officers in Suffolk. In what is thought to be one of the first sampling surveys in the country, twelve per

cent of foods tested from supermarkets, healthfood shops and small specialist shops appeared to be irradiated without the process being declared on the label. Samples included dried herbs and spices, fresh herbs and soft fruit. Samples of paprika were confirmed to have been irradiated while other samples, including imported soft fruit were suspected of being irradiated.

Further evidence of a problem emerged in June when BBC Radio 4's *Food Programme* found unlabelled irradiated paprika on sale in a North London delicatessen.

As a result of these tests, the Food Commission wrote to William Waldegrave, Secretary of State for

Agriculture, asking what plans MAFF has for monitoring the extent of illegally unlabelled irradiated food on sale to the public. The letter of reply states: 'It is not the responsibility of this Department to carry out front-line monitoring of the importation and sale of unlabelled irradiated foods. This is for local Authority Trading Standards Departments.'

But with tests costing up to £130 a sample, public analysts and trading standards officers have told the Food Commission that the expense means that regular monitoring by local authorities is likely to be limited. Some are asking why local authorities should foot the bill for an international problem.

Martine Drake of the Food Commission's Food Irradiation Campaign said: 'It is ridiculous for MAFF to expect local authorities to police an international trade. We were always worried that manufacturers were being allowed to use a new process before proper



controls were in place. Now as tests come on stream and evidence is emerging of a possible problem, we think MAFF should act to co-ordinate a national monitoring programme.'

To date MAFF has approved detection tests for irradiated poultry meat, herbs and spices and bone-containing meat. Other tests to detect irradiated shellfish, fruit and vegetables, other meats and eggs, have yet to be approved.

Campaign Action: If you are concerned about unlabelled irradiated food, write to your MP and send us a copy of the reply you receive.

No life patents

Animal welfare, environmental, food and consumer organisations are supporting a call for all human, animal and plant life to be excluded from patentability following the European Parliament's rejection of the EC's proposed directive on patenting of life forms earlier this year.

■ For more information: Patent Concern Coalition, Tel: 0171 638 0606, Fax: 0171 628 0817, e-mail: geneticforum@gn.apc.org.

Sheep dip evidence

The campaign by farmers who say their health has been wrecked by exposure to sheep dips has received support from new research. A three year study at Birmingham University, commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive has found that dips can impair mental ability and cause chronic nerve damage. Campaigners have called for sheep dips which contain organophosphorous (OP) compounds to be banned but MAFF's advice is that farmers should wear protective clothing. However scientists in Edinburgh have found that, even when farmers wore the full range of protective clothing, they still absorbed OPs.

■ Stephens et al, An investigation into the possible chronic neuropsychological and

neurological effects of occupational exposure to organophosphates in sheep farmers, HSE, 1995.

Sssch... it's a secret

A new report reveals the extent of government secrecy over food. Of the 43 committees advising MAFF, not one is required by law to lay an annual report before Parliament, none is required to publish its advice, and the government is not required to respond publicly to the advice of any. Only six of the 43 voluntarily publish a register of members' interests, and only one publishes the minutes of meetings. None hold open meetings.

■ *Behind Closed Doors*, by Stuart Weir & Wendy Hall, available from Despatches, PO Box 4000, London W3 6XJ, price £2.00.

Refined carbohydrates, such as white bread and pasta, are the target of new nutrition research showing overproduction of glucose after eating refined starch in people with insulin resistance (a pre-cursor of diabetes and possibly linked to obesity). Insulin resistance is estimated to affect a quarter of non-diabetic US adults. For these people, losing weight by cutting fat intake is not sufficient if refined starches are encouraging weight gain. *New York Times*, Feb 8 1995.

Tesco's venison in animal welfare controversy

Supermarket giant Tesco has been forced to change country-of-origin labelling of its diced venison and venison steaks following pressure from trading standards officers, writes *Audrey Boyle*.

Investigations revealed that venison, reared and slaughtered in New Zealand, where deer farmers remove and sell antlers (a practice banned in the UK) is being shipped to Britain to be packaged and labelled 'produce of the UK'. Tesco denied deliberately misleading shoppers: 'We found out there was a problem and we are now reacting to it.'

Founder member of the British Deer Farmers' Association, Nichola Fletcher, claims the New Zealand product is displacing British venison. 'New Zealand farmers are able to sell their venison at below the cost of production in the UK. A substantial part of their industry is involved in the sale of velvet antlers which are cut off the live animal, dried and sold to the Far Eastern medicine trade as a tonic and aphrodisiac.' Last year New Zealand antler velvet export revenue reached a record high of over \$100 million. The removal of antlers in velvet was banned in the UK in 1980.

Adding vitamin B12 to a pregnant woman's diet may reduce the need to supplement with folic acid in order to reduce the risk of spina bifida and other neural tube defects, according to researchers. Moves to fortify foods with high levels of folic acid to ensure pregnant women get sufficient may prove to be unnecessary if vitamin B12 levels are raised. Mills et al, *The Lancet*, 1995, 345:149-151.

The state-of-the-art genetically engineered Flavr Savr tomato from Calgene has floundered on an old-fashioned problem: it doesn't like to travel. Up to 30% of the shipments from California and Florida to Chicago were found unmarketable. Special 'soft touch' packaging plants are now being built. *Biotechnology*, June 1995, 13: 540.

The Food Commission: The First Ten Years!

Founding director of the London Food Commission in 1985 and now professor of food policy, Dr Tim Lang looks at the achievements of the last decade.



Just as I had cleared my desk to write this article I was interrupted by a call about the imminent publication of a survey on food poisoning. Produced by the industry, the survey was worrying in two respects: twice as many people said they had suffered food poisoning since the year before and, more significantly, the industry was back to its old tricks of blaming the consumer for the upswing.

Ten years ago, when the London Food Commission was launched, laying blame on the consumer (all too often 'the housewife') for ills in the food chain was common. Today, public awareness about food is far higher and more sophisticated, but the direction the food industry is going leaves much to be desired. The former is within the Commission's remit — it was set up to promote public health through food — but the latter, the need to control the food industry, is a political question concerning wider societal spheres.

But to see how far we have travelled, we need to go back to where we started. The London Food Commission was formally launched in Spring 1985, at a packed meeting in the Royal Festival Hall. Set up with funding by the Greater London Council, its origins lay in work by the GLC's Industry and Employment branch. Despite this unlikely parentage, the vision for the LFC was always to voice wider public issues. If groups like the Coronary Prevention Group were born from the medical tradition within food policy, the LFC was a return to an equally honourable tradition — dating from the debates around the Second World War — to create a food economy which was good for jobs, health and justice.

Like many a good idea, the LFC was born in a bath, the idea of a GLC officer, Robin Jenkins, now of Genetics Forum. The first meetings to clarify the idea were held, wonderfully, in the Elephant House at London Zoo: a trustee, Professor Michael Crawford, now of Hackney's Queen Elizabeth Hospital, then worked at the Institute of Zoology. The LFC was a voluntary group, welding together

the interests of public bodies, such as school and hospital catering and environmental health; voluntary organisations such as health campaigns and charities; professionals in teaching, the health services and research, and food production workers in trade unions.

Blessed with formidable staff from a wide range of professions and backgrounds, the FC was attacked by government before it had even begun work. My favourite was the criticism that we were 'Red Ken's food leninists'; the reply was 'lentilists, please!' The work quickly took shape. Reports and surveys began to pour in to the office, enquiries and invitations to meetings poured out. The impact was astonishing for such a small organisation facing up to a giant industry and a 'market'-oriented government. This owed much to the hard work and long hours of staff. Quietly at first, because the style was measured and research-led, the Commission's work was taken up by a wide range of interests and reflected through the serious and popular media.

The Commission has always aimed for a balance in its work, exploring existing concerns such as additives alongside issues then unfamiliar to the public, such as food irradiation. From the first moment, we worked with relevant professional and community groups; and had enormous impact on nursery food, food for black and ethnic minorities and food poverty. And for each piece of work which got into the newspapers and into Parliamentary debates, there was more which did not: the consultancy work for local authorities on contract catering, the advice to voluntary groups and health authorities; and the education courses and public speaking.

It is hard today to realise the difficult path the Food Commission trod. Food is a highly charged area of work. Ironically, it was the FC's sensitivity to this issue which I think helped it to succeed. Drawing upon unfashionable notions of public-interest research, the Food Commission achieved its goal of being a trustworthy and invaluable source of information.

With a Prime Minister who denied the existence of society, with an ever-centralising government machine, which too often denied problems or said they could only be solved through market mechanisms, or, in the last resort as with food poisoning, blaming the consumer for ills further up the food chain, the Food Commission's attempt to research and produce a coherent position on the subjects it explored was indeed to swim against the tide. The many people swimming alongside made this a convivial experience. Life at the Commission has been always hectic, sometimes fraught (deadlines, press releases, juggling commitments), but fun too.

For a body sometimes described in confrontational terms, the FC's style was and is admirably consensual. Topics were chosen to try to reflect the broad range of public concerns about food: health, quality, standards, social aspects, new technology. Working parties were set up,

bringing diverse groups and sources of information together. Trades unions provided first hand information on the effects of pesticides, which was also a concern for consumers. Health specialists could advise on difficulties and unanswered questions about cook-chill catering systems. Health visitors gave examples of difficulties with diets in the community. And so on. It was an extraordinary privilege to witness this powerful process develop. Many groups were strengthened by it. Some, such as FACT (the food additives campaign), Genetics Forum, the Pesticides Trust and the National Food Alliance, were helped into life by it, and have now taken the lead in their fields, even as the Commission took over the lead from others.

People outside the Food Commission can easily take for granted its potent mixture of research, advice and information. The 1988-90 scandals were directly fuelled, for example, by the Commission's report on food poisoning, the result of trying to answer questions raised in three previous reports on additives, cook-chill and food irradiation. This first raised the scandalous failure of hygiene controls that sparked the questions that led to the eggs and salmonella debacle. If that strand of research hit the national big time in the late 1980s, others — such as on children and advertising — are now doing likewise. You can bet that somewhere *The Food Magazine* has covered a given topic or alerted the food movement to an issue bubbling. The magazine was set up after readers of the Commission's large, heavyweight reports said they wanted more accessible forms of information, hence the style you have today.

So the last 10 years have been a tremendous success. Facts, arguments and debates have been created that frankly would not have happened without the Commission. It is not that others can't or won't; it is just that the FC's broad remit — linking production and consumption, health and environment, social justice and information — enables it to analyse issues with a fresh, independent perspective. That tradition is invaluable.

Has the Commission still a role to play? Despite the Food Safety Act 1990, or Health of the Nation, despite the campaigns, despite the publicity, there are ever more mountains of non-food food being sold from supermarket shelves. Heart disease is dropping slowly, but class gaps are widening; food poisoning figures are up, so is food poverty.

A spokesperson from the food industry told me recently that the Commission's impact had been enormous, but the industry would never again let itself be 'taken to the cleaners' (his words). If the Food Safety Act 1990 was the testament to the Commission's first five years of work, the second 5 years (which saw a change of constitution to create the Food Commission UK) have witnessed the Commission keeping food high on the public policy agenda. Many of the themes first seen as contentious and dismissed by politicians and industry — such as food poverty — are now mainstream. The Department of Health's Nutrition Taskforce Low Income Project Team, for instance, is due to report soon. I think, too, of the Food

Commission's role in highlighting the government's unequal treatment of consumers as compared to industry. Now there is a Consumer Panel and a regular meeting between MAFF and chairs of consumer groups.

No-one at the Commission expects a medal for taking on the \$1 billion investment by pharmaceutical companies into developing BST. The reward was in building a coalition, now serviced by Genetics Forum, which raised a critical question of our times: for whom is new technology developed? Science policy and European Commission circles now talk of the Fourth Hurdle in evaluating new technologies — the first three being safety, efficacy and quality, and the fourth being whether there is a social need. The Food Commission can be proud of a decade's pioneering work on that question.

Much that is great is built on work that is

decidedly unglamorous: labelling, writing letters, begging for grants and donations, and servicing meetings. And much is frustrating: the work to create a 1987 Private Member's Bill with help from the Coronary Prevention Group to bring back nutrition standards to school meals — the government minister who talked that out said standards weren't needed and that it was a matter for parental responsibility and caterers to decide. In today's recession, with social fissures widening, this looks short-sighted indeed.

So Happy Birthday Food Commission! So much to be proud of, so much yet to do. All of us should celebrate with you, redouble our efforts to think strategically about what lies ahead, forge new alliances, debate the priorities tugging for our collective attentions.

■ Tim Lang is Professor of Food Policy at Thames Valley University

Ten years old and fighting fit!

The Food Commission has been and still is at the forefront of campaigning for healthier, safer food. And we are fiercely independent, taking no subsidies from government, industry or advertising. Our award-winning team of investigators, backed up by international experts, continue to bring you the facts.

Industry complacency: Despite its fetish for secrecy, the government does occasionally publish valuable guidelines, but does industry take any notice? Our survey of baby foods shows how the COMA weaning report has been completely ignored by the baby food industry — see page 1.

Ingredients: For ten years we have called for the removal of unnecessary additives and for better safety testing of all processes and ingredients. But products are still marketed before they have been fully tested, or after they have come under suspicion, as we show with infant soya milks — see page 1.

Pesticides: in 1986 we reported on the widespread residues found in food, and in 1993 exposed the haphazard testing methods for residues. Now MAFF still cannot solve the problem see page 4.

Misleading adverts: False claims and fraudulent products? We monitor the supermarket shelves to see what's new — see page 12.

Food irradiation: we helped derail the industry's determination to flood the UK with irradiated foods. Now the only irradiated food we get is being sold illegally — see page 5.

Pester power: Food companies are targetting the classroom to tap the influence children have on their parents' shopping choices. Now the national press are reporting our campaign against the promotion of junk through schools — see page 3.

Nutrition policy: We cover the latest moves in the battle between commercial interests and the public's health. Why, for example, has the government Chief Medical Officer contradicted his department's expert panel advice on salt? See our report on page 15.

And we continue to research and report on all the major food issues **additives** and **adulteration, poverty** and **nutrition, mad cows** and **genetic engineering**.

Join us today!

Co-op raises ethical stakes

Britain's biggest co-operative retailer, CWS, has launched an 'ethical retailing' initiative which promises to highlight products made to high ethical standards, and to provide more information on the sources of products.

Battery-produced eggs will be labelled 'intensively produced' and the secrets of who makes co-op branded products will be given to the public. In-store promotions will move towards encouraging healthier eating, fat and calorie information will be declared on the front of packs, and trans-fats will be declared where they are present.

The CWS, which takes some £2bn of our annual £60bn grocery bill, commissioned Gallup to question 30,000 people on ethical shopping issues and found 70% are concerned about animal welfare, nearly 70% want clearer labelling, and nearly 70% believe manufacturers and retailers have a duty to the environment. Half of those surveyed

say they were more concerned about ethical issues than they were five years earlier, and 60% say they would be prepared to pay extra for goods meeting ethical standards. And a third of the sample say they had boycotted products or stores because of ethical concerns.

Other retailers will monitor the CWS venture with interest. Increasing information to customers is sometimes viewed as a problem: a Safeways spokeswoman recently commented that extra information about animal welfare on the label would only confuse customers. Tesco, Britain's largest supermarket group, said 'We take pride in being a customer-led company ... if customers want us to do this we will look into it.' but the company did not announce plans to ask customers what they wanted.

■ *Responsible Retailing*, CWS Ltd, PO Box 53, New Century House, Manchester M60 4ES.

Nearly half slimming adverts are misleading says ASA

In a survey of slimming adverts, the Advertising Standards Authority says 41 per cent misled the public while a further 7 per cent were 'borderline'. Despite the high level of misleading adverts the ASA says it receives relatively few complaints. 'This may be because consumers are too embarrassed to admit being misled.'

While the ASA says it will introduce stricter rules on slimming adverts, these will apply only to advertisers who are found to break the rules more than three times and will only require the adverts are pre-vetted. Hardly the hard-hitting sanctions many consumers would like to see!

New artificial sweetener labelling

The EC is proposing that foods containing artificial sweeteners may have to declare 'with sweeteners' next to the name of the product. Foods containing sugar and sweeteners will have to declare 'with sugar and sweeteners'. In addition foods containing more than 10% of the bulk sweeteners known as polyols will need to state 'excessive consumption may induce laxative effects.' However the big debate is whether these new rules will apply to all foods containing artificial sweeteners or just a selection. The issue is expected to be resolved in the autumn, according to MAFF which seems to be supporting the industry view for declarations to be limited.

Olestra resurfaces

The controversial fat replacer, Olestra, is being considered for regulatory approval in the UK. However MAFF's Food Advisory Committee is not yet satisfied that the company has provided sufficient evidence for Olestra's approval.

Controversy over its safety has already caused Olestra to fall foul of the US regulatory authorities. Test rats fed Olestra developed liver changes and the company were asked to undertake further safety studies. Questions have also been raised about the nutritional consequences of consuming large amounts of substances with no nutritional value. Olestra can also deplete the body of the fat soluble vitamins A and D though the company has said it will add these to the product.

Despite these setbacks Olestra's manufacturer, Procter & Gamble, believes that the product will be approved in the UK within the next year though they are now seeking initial approval for its use only in savoury snacks and crisps, a far narrower range of uses than originally planned. Consumer groups including the Food Commission are not permitted to know the extent to which the company has addressed safety concerns, as in the UK, information submitted by the company in support of its application is kept confidential until after a decision has been made.

Nestle has lost its battle to open up the \$2.5bn baby milk market in the USA. They had challenged the current market leaders, makers of Simulac and Enfamil, and the American Academy of Paediatrics over restrictions on the marketing of breast milk substitutes. Nestle claimed their rivals were conspiring to prevent Nestle entering the market by agreeing to promote their products only through sales representatives visiting physicians and by offering samples to hospitals — much like the present restrictive code in the UK.

Nestle's attempts at direct consumer marketing in the USA in the 1980s drew widespread complaints from consumer groups.

The links between AIDS, the immune system and the need for good nutrition were the theme of a recent conference organised by The McCarrison Society. A full report is to be published in the Society's journal *Nutrition and Health*. Details from Richard Longhurst, 8 Clermont Terrace, Brighton BN1 6SH.

Fatty acids in the brains of breast-fed babies are different to those of bottle-fed babies, and bottle milks should contain the appropriate polyunsaturated fatty acids in ratios similar to breast milk, say researchers at Glasgow University. Farquharson et al, *Archives of Diseases in Childhood*, 1995, 72: 198-203.

Measurements of trans-fats in body tissue of those suffering heart disease in various European counties has failed to show evidence of a link between trans-fats and the disease. The link appeared to be present in some countries but not in others, suggesting that additional factors need to be considered. McKeigue, *The Lancet*, 1995, 345: 269-270.

Norwegians head the list of high breast-feeding rates, scoring 98% of women leaving maternity wards, 90% at three months and 75% at six months. Maternity leave is one year at 80% pay or 46 weeks at full pay. Working women are allowed two-hours per day breastfeeding breaks. *Briefing on Baby Milk Law*, 3.1995, Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX (tel 01223-464420).

Biotechnology companies are very keen to get products onto the market as soon as possible. Why the hurry? Because the top 15 agri-biotech companies alone lost \$100m last year, and an estimated \$3,200m since their investment plans began. They'll be wanting to see some returns from us customers in the long run. *Biotechnology*, June 1995.

Two hundred Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders have petitioned the US Congress to demand an end to the patenting of human genes and transgenic animals. *Splice of Life*, Genetics Forum: (tel 0171-638 0606).

CHECKOUT

A special Food Commission investigation into commercial baby foods

Baby food in the 1990s ?

An American advertisement from frozen babyfood manufacturer Growing Healthy shows a wide-eyed baby asking 'Are you going to feed me jarred vegetables that sit on the shelf for three years? Does Grandma know?'

In contrast, UK manufacturers like to cover their labels with reassuring phrases such as *carefully developed ... specially formulated ... provide a balanced, highly nutritious diet ... properly balanced amounts of nutrients ... every recipe carefully planned to contain the right balance ... all the nourishment needed for healthy growth and development.*

These are more than rival marketing ploys. The babyfood industry is in a fierce battle for the tastes and tummies of tiny eaters, or at least their parents' purses, with the two main producers Heinz (who took over Farley's last year) and Cow & Gate (who took over Robinson's Babyfoods last year) now being challenged by supermarket own brand

products from Boots, Safeway and Sainsbury, and smaller independents offering specialist food, such as organic babyfood makers Organix. And at the centre of that battle rages the issue of quality: are parents being sold good value, high quality food for their money or are they getting diluted, over-processed junk?

In a detailed report on weaning diets prepared by a committee of experts for the Department of Health* a series of recommendations were made about the quality of food that should be given to babies and the ages at which certain foods were appropriate. Taking their recommendations as a consensus expert view (interestingly the committee included no consumers but did include an industry representative) the Food Commission has undertaken an examination of over 400 widely available babyfood products to see how well they match the recommended practice.

As the table overleaf shows, the great majority of products failed on at least one count and many failed on several. In addition the Food Commission found that products were frequently diluted with unnecessary low-nutrient starches and bulked out with added water. Labelling practices were poor, sometimes misleading and claiming spurious authority. Images on labels implied main ingredients which were only present in much smaller amounts or absent altogether.

An EU directive on babyfoods is in the pipeline, and although it may tighten up on marketing methods — e.g. requiring a four month minimum age on the labels — it is likely to permit high levels of low-nutrient starch bulking, and high levels of sugar. It is, says the Food Commission, an opportunity lost. It leaves only one defence for a baby: a vigilant parent, able to take the time and trouble to read the label small print and only choose high quality products.

**Weaning and the Weaning Diet, Report of the Working Group on the Weaning Diet of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, Department of Health, HMSO 1994.*

Extracts from the report follow on the next two pages.



Maltodextrin — how they love it!

Manufacturers, that is. The great majority of instant baby food manufacturers are in love with this odd chemical — a highly refined starch which easily absorbs water to create an instant gluey paste (and which is used on envelopes and postage stamps for just that purpose). It has a pleasant taste but provides no useful nutrition apart from empty calories, and it may well encourage tooth decay.

It's a cheap ingredient, less costly than the dehydrated meat and vegetables they show in colour on the front of the pack. It helps mix the other ingredients up and, like talcum powder, can act as a lubricant to stop the mix from clumping and help them flow smoothly through the processing machinery into the pack.

But how is it good for a baby? It is a pure starch, with no nutritional value — no vitamins, minerals, protein etc — except pure calories. The only thing manufacturers can say in its favour is that it is easy to digest, which doesn't mean very much. Are the other ingredients hard to digest? Do they give a baby problems?

Furthermore, maltodextrin is very similar to sugar, both in providing empty calories and also in potentially encouraging dental caries. Simple starches are easily acted on by saliva enzymes to turn into sugar, and it has been suggested that in fact maltodextrin can be at least as harmful to newly emerging teeth as sugary drinks can be.

We believe that until companies can show us that maltodextrin has real value in a baby's diet and that it is not a health threat to new teeth, they should stick to giving us real food instead. It can be done — several companies don't use maltodextrin at all in their instant baby foods. We challenge the rest to follow suit.



Sugar, wholemilk and gluten for a 3 month baby? Wrong, wrong, wrong and wrong say health experts — see our report.

CHECKOUT

Living out of tins and packets



The Food Commission's new survey of over 400 baby foods has found many failing to meet health experts' criteria. Tim Lobstein reports.

An analysis of the major companies' popular brands of baby foods found the majority were falling short on one or more count, compared with the recommendations of government health and food advisors. The Commission found many products were being sold as suitable for babies that were below the

recommended age, many first stage foods contained sugars, gluten or both, and a high proportion used low-nutrient starch fillers to reduce the quantity of real food.

All these practices run counter to the expert opinions of the Department of Health advisory panel on weaning foods. Labelling practices were also found to run against the recommendations of the government's Food Advisory Committee. The full details of the Commission's criticisms are given in their report*. A summary table is given on this page, in which the following criteria were used to judge the products:

Selling too young

'The majority of infants should not be given solid foods before the age of four months,' said the COMA panel of experts. They recommended 'solid foods should be introduced between the ages of 4 to 6 months. By this age the infant's physiology and development have matured to cope with the weaning diet ... weaning should not start before gut and kidney have matured to cope with a more diverse diet ... a start to weaning no earlier than 4 months is most appropriate advice for the great majority of infants.' This is the experts' recommendation. We know

that many mothers like to feed their babies earlier than this, but that is not an excuse for manufacturers to directly encourage earlier weaning by making claims on the labels like 'For babies from 3 months' or 'suitable from 3-4 months'. This is irresponsible marketing, encouraging parents to risk their baby's health by introducing food too early.

Giving gluten too young

'Cereals given to infants less than six months should preferably be gluten-free,' said the COMA panel of experts. Coeliac disease — a disorder in which the walls of the intestines are damaged and fail to absorb adequate nutrients — is triggered by the consumption of gluten, a protein found in wheat, oats, rye and barley. Coeliac disease affects some 50,000 people in the UK, and it is not possible to predict who will develop the disorder. The COMA report states that the disease 'commonly manifests during the weaning period when a diverse diet including foods containing gluten is first encountered' and the panel were anxious to ensure that the onset of coeliac disease should be delayed as long as possible. Manufacturers who use gluten-containing cereals in first stage baby foods are unnecessarily increasing the risk of serious nutritional problems at a baby's most vulnerable age.

Encouraging a sweet-tooth

'Weaning foods should be free of, or low in, non-milk extrinsic sugars, including sugars derived from fruit juices and fruit concentrates,' said the COMA panel of experts. With dental caries in young children increasing over the last few years, COMA urged that 'infants should be weaned onto foods and drinks free as far as possible from NME sugars.' NME (non-milk extrinsic) sugars are all types of sugar except those in milk where they are found naturally, and those still bound into the cellular

How the products rate:

Proportion of all products with meaningless phrases #

Proportion of savoury and complete meals that include low-nutrient starch fillers

Proportion of savoury and complete meals containing extrinsic sugars

Proportion of first stage foods under six months containing wheat/gluten

Proportion of first stage foods that include extrinsic sugars*

Proportion of first stage foods encouraging use before 4 mths

Number of products compared

Boots (including First Harvest, and Mothers Recipe) — jars	68	26%	50%	13%	0%	24%	63%
Boots (including First Harvest, and Mothers Recipe) — dried	33	19%	56%	48%	29%	79%	100%
Cow & Gate — Olvarit	48	100%	73%	10%	32%	39%	100%
Cow & Gate — Dried	17	100%	73%	13%	37%	93%	100%
Farleys dried	26	62%	54%	38%	50%	90%	100%
Heinz — jars/cans	96	100%	61%	24%	12%	97%	100%
Heinz — frozen	18	100%	50%	30%	0%	0%	100%
Milupa dried	46	59%	50%	41%	36%	89%	100%
Organix dried and jars	25	0%	8%	31%	0%	0%	32%
Safeway jars	13	100%	57%	14%	0%	0%	100%
Sainsbury jars	17	100%	85%	8%	54%	72%	0%
Sainsbury dried	14	50%	50%	50%	36%	100%	100%

* i.e. the sugars criticised by the COMA panel, including sugars derived from fruit juices, concentrates and syrups.

i.e. the phrases criticised by the Food Advisory Committee such as 'nutritious', 'wholesome', 'natural goodness' etc.

CHECKOUT

structure of plants (intrinsic sugars). As pure fruit purees are recommended by COMA as suitable weaning foods, we took the COMA description of added sugar in the form of table sugar, honey and sugars from fruit in the form of fruit juices (and their concentrates and syrups). Recognising that some older babies may reasonably share family desserts, we examined the presence of NME sugars in all first stage baby foods for babies under 6-7 months, and their presence in savoury and complete meal products (i.e. excluding foods obviously described as desserts) for both first and second stage foods, as we believed manufacturers had no reasonable grounds for adding such sugars to these foods, and were putting babies' teeth at risk.

Leaving out real food

Concern over the misuse of low-nutrient starches as bulking agents which displace real food has led some companies to advertise their abandonment of such starches in place of real food (e.g. Beech Nut in the USA). US researchers estimate that up to three-quarters of real food (e.g. fruit puree) is replaced by thickened water using the low-nutrient starches, and the recent EC draft Directive on baby foods allows

even greater use of such starches (see box below). Although COMA recognised that starches are an easily digested food, they go on to say 'Cooked cereal products and vegetables provide suitable sources of starch in the weanling's diet and rice starch is well-absorbed...'. They do not recommend low-nutrient starches, and while rice products are often recommended as a first weaning food (being gluten-free) the use of other chemically modified food starches have little justification. We examined the use of

low-nutrient starches as alternatives to real food by checking for the presence of: modified cornflour, modified starch, starch, wheatstarch and maltodextrin. Regular cornflour was accepted in some dishes as an appropriate ingredient e.g. in custards and gravies — but considered a low-nutrient bulking agent in others — e.g. fruit purees.

Meaningless or intimidating phrases

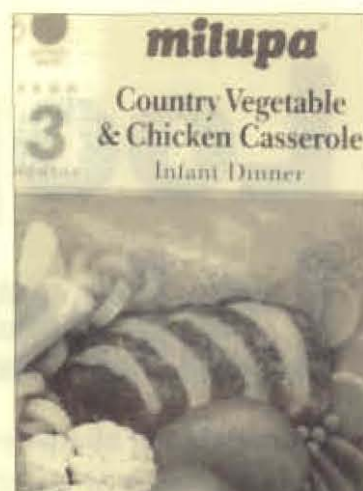
In an earlier report by MAFF's Food Advisory Committee, the presence of meaningless phrases on food labels — such as 'wholesome', 'nutritious', 'natural goodness' — was condemned and calls made for the removal of them. We felt that the use

of these phrases could be especially undermining in the case of baby foods as parents may feel unsure about using the adequacy of their own home-made foods, and that manufacturers are in a strong position to imply that a commercial product is the better food to give. We checked labels for the use of phrases such as *nutritious, wholesome, providing the right balance, properly balanced for your baby, all a baby needs*, etc., even if the manufacturers went on to admit that their product should only be 'part of a baby's diet'.

■ Thanks to Diane Brockbank, Mary Whiting and others for their advice and assistance compiling the report.

Tinned paste and polyfiller: baby foods in the 1990s, a 40-page report on the problems with commercial baby foods, including a product-by-product listing

Available only from Food Commission Publications, 3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH. The price (including postage and packing) is £10 for individual/non-profit members of the Food Commission, and £30 for commercial members and all non-members.



Above: Lots of slices of chicken on the front but very little inside — less chicken than added maltodextrin starch.

Below: Several companies have shown it is possible to produce babyfood without starches, maltodextrin or other thickeners.



Problems with the EU directive on babyfoods

The minimum requirements for babyfoods have been laid out in an EU directive officially published this spring, although drafted and discussed for at least five years. The EU directive allows much of the poor manufacturing processes that consumer groups in the UK and USA have criticised, in particular the use of low-nutrient starch-and water fillers:

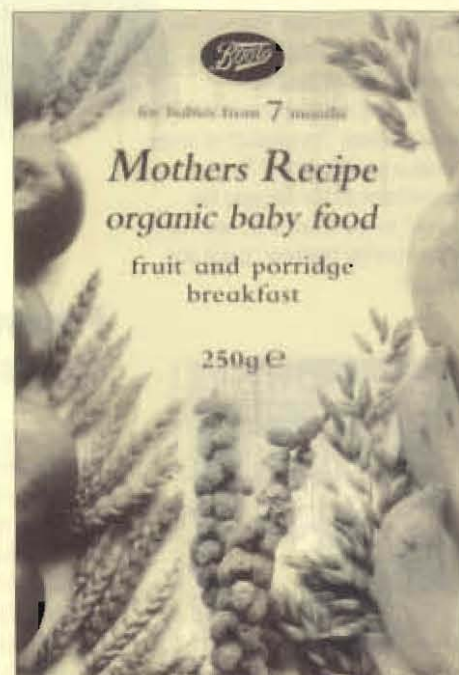
	allowed
'meat-only' dishes (eg Pureed Chicken)	60% non-meat fillers
'mainly meat' dishes (eg Chicken and Sweetcorn, Lamb Hot-Pot, Turkey Dinner)	90% non-meat ingredients and fillers
other 'meat' dishes (eg Vegetable and Beef Stew)	92% non-meat ingredients and fillers

The same rules apply for other protein sources, such as fish, cheese etc, in place of meat, so that Macaroni Cheese can be 92% non cheese ingredients and fillers, and Egg and Bacon Breakfast can be 90% non-egg and non-bacon ingredients and fillers.

Babyfood recipe European Directive-style

To increase calories in these products the manufacturers are permitted to add fat or oil. For the first two categories above they can boost the fats up to a total of 54% of the calories coming from fat or oil. In theory, therefore, a product calling itself, say, Premium Steak Dinner may consist of:

10% beef carcass offcuts	5% cooking fats
4% denatured starch thickeners	1% flavour-boosting agents
80% water	



CHECKOUT

Loopy labels

Once again our sharp-eyed shoppers have sent us a batch of weird and wacky products



The case of the missing beans

Seen separately you might not notice the latest case of the shrinking can. Crosse & Blackwell (a Nestle subsidiary) have tastefully redesigned their vegetarian Baked Beans with Vegetable Sausage by trimming the top and bottom off the label. More significantly they have trimmed the 425g weight to 405g — but taken nothing off the price.

The label has also changed in one other way. The product no longer carries a royal crest and 'By appointment to Her Majesty the Queen', to which we must ask: has it fallen from her highness' grace and flavour?

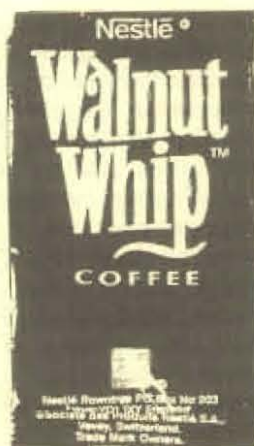
Cling-film coconut

Supermarkets justify their enthusiasm for over-wrapping everything on the grounds that it protects delicate fruit or that it keeps grubby hands off edible surfaces. But when it comes to a coconut, which must have one of the most indestructible, inedible shells in the vegetable kingdom...? Clearly Safeways were living up to their name when they cling-wrapped their entire coconut stock.



Prawn cocktail crisps

Full marks for trying. But tell us, do, what 'Freshly Cooked Flavour' means for prawn cocktail crisps? With a shelf life of several months and with a flavour made from 'flavourings' and monosodium glutamate, we are none the wiser. Except that the product is not freshly cooked and has never seen a prawn in its life.



Ribena 'Juice and Fibre'

'Juice & Fibre' is the name of this new version of Ribena. Water, juice and additives would be nearer the mark. The product offers you three grams of vegetable and cereal fibre buried in a soft drink with two artificial sweeteners, a preservative, a stabiliser, a colouring agent and some added flavouring. The amount of juice was 'confidential' said the spokeswoman for Ribena manufacturers SmithKline Beecham, and we are not surprised: we estimate it to be less than 10 per cent (blackcurrant variety) and 15 per cent (orange and apricot variety).

The label quotes the 1991 COMA report recommending we eat an extra 6 grams fibre per day (to make a total of 18 grams). Perhaps not surprisingly, they don't quote the bit in COMA which says the evidence on cardiovascular benefits points to a diet which happens to be high in fibre, rather than the fibre itself. Nor does Ribena quote the bit that says our dietary fibre 'should be from a variety of foods whose constituents

Walnut whip

Nestle's again, I'm afraid. Their 'coffee flavour fondant cream covered in a milk chocolate flavoured whirl' happily prints the nutrient details for 100g of the product. It doesn't help much, though, as nowhere does the pack say how much you are actually eating or the weight of the pack. A confidential secret, perhaps.



contain it as a naturally integrated component rather than as an isolated supplement or as products enriched with fibre.'

We think this drink is a silly way to try to improve your diet. Costing anywhere from 59p to 85p per individual (250ml) carton, you could get three or four oranges for that money, and just one orange can give you around three grams of fibre. Indeed, three grams of fibre can be found in a slice and a half of wholemeal bread (4p), or a smallish jacket potato (7p) — and you won't need to swallow the cocktail of additives that come in this Ribena drink.



Cornish Ice Cream

This must be a Devonish trick on Cornwall. Coming from Hele, Exeter, is a 'Cornish-style' catering product that consists of skimmed milk (reconstituted), sugar, hydrogenated vegetable oil, dextrose, emulsifier E471, stabilisers E401, E339, E466, flavour, colour E100, E104, E110. No thanks.

Thanks to Diane Brockbank, Helen Adams, Pip Collins, Simon Wright and an anonymous reader (sorry — no room for your Apple Pie From Hell).



Fat-reduced junk

Are food companies leading us in the wrong direction when it comes to healthy eating? Awarding winning food journalist, Joanna Blythman, investigates.



A visiting American gave me a copy of a US *cooking magazine* called *Prevention's Guide - quick and healthy cooking*. And a riveting read it is too. Its key selling point is its use of low fat ingredients. Thus you get Sunshine Chicken with a jar of 'fat-free chunky salsa' (news to me that there was any fat in salsa), cabbage rolls with sour cream sauce — featuring 'fat-free egg substitute' and non fat sour cream — yummy!

Whizzing past the right-on spiced mashed yams, bean skillet dinner and — go on spoil yourself — a cleverly-adapted banana cappuccino pie, I came upon a multitude of low-fat items which I've mercifully yet to eat.

Try reduced-fat chicken broth. Or buttered-flavoured non-stick spray. Or liquid margarine or non-fat cream cheese, or evaporated skimmed milk. What about fat-free ranch-style dressing with peppercorns, reduced-fat condensed cream of mushroom soup, non-fat sour cream, and butter-flavoured granules. These are but a taste of the products which have been developed to diminish the spreading thighs and bulging stomachs of the average, overweight American.

I find even thinking about such food depressing. Forced to eat it for my own good, I would slide into such a black trough of inconsolable grief that death would come as a great release.

Low-fat thinking in Britain is going the same way. Milk has become public enemy number one in its whole form. Yet the fatty acids in milk, along with enzymes and volatile aromas, are what give it its flavour. Skim these off, and it's watery and tasteless.

Public enemy number two is butter which, modern dairying notwithstanding, is par excellence a 'natural' food which tastes good, being nothing more than churned cream. But it commits the cardinal sin of being high-fat. So it's widely boycotted by the healthy eating lobby, which has instead rushed to lend its considerable authority to margarine in its many, and constantly multiplying forms.

How can one be expected to buy the argument that margarine — that foul concoction of vegetable fat, emulsifiers, stabilisers, colourings, flavourings and prominent 'added vitamins' — can be good for your health? Don't get me wrong. I come from working class Glaswegian stock. My father died at 61 from a massive coronary. I'm open to eating less saturated fat in my total diet.

But don't ask me to suspend my common sense, or my criteria for evaluating food quality. How can any product which is so heavily processed ever be considered as wholesome food which we should all be encouraged to eat?

The recent debacle over hydrogenated vegetable fat — it may be as bad or worse than the saturated

fat in butter — illustrates how sections of the healthy eating lobby have got themselves into a tangle. No sooner do you start recommending the stuff, than it gets discredited. How's that for strategic thinking?

The only long-term approach to promoting healthy eating is to stick with natural, raw ingredients, tell people much more about their method of production — and whether its low, medium or high-fat. Then tell them not to eat too much of the latter. Current thinking, on the other hand, appears to be that any sophisticated low-fat message is too complex. Better to accept that people eat crap, but woo them on to eating low-fat crap.

But in doing so, we deliver the typically uninformed consumer into the hands of the large food manufacturers who make a fortune adulterating and downgrading raw ingredients. We align ourselves with those interests who see food in its natural form as just material which can be played around with to come up with ever more bizarre — and profitable — concoctions. We put ourselves in the same camp as those who favour quick-fix technological 'solutions' to intractable problems.

These are testing days ahead when genetically-engineered leaner pork comes on stream. Will the low-fat lobby recommend that we all eat it because it contains less calories? Or might a more intelligent approach be to tell people to stick with humanely-reared, fatty but tasty breeds and eat less of it?

My affiliations — which are purely secular and nothing to do with fear of tampering with God's great order — lie with those who have respect for the environment and therefore raw ingredients in their natural form. What hubris makes us think that we can better nature and develop a more 'healthy' way for humans to eat?

There's the hedonistic argument too. No low-fat food tastes any good or can rival its natural equivalent.

Last but not least, there's my unscientific observation that everyone I know with a weight problem has a kitchen full of low-fat items, majoring on skimmed milk, low-fat yogurt and diet crispbreads. Low-fat foods don't work because they make for such unrewarding eating, and we are left wholly unsatisfied. But organic wholemeal bread with a thin slice of a full-flavoured, unpasteurised Jersey milk cheese? Now that's a different story.

Viewpoint feedback:

Let us know whether you agree or disagree with Joanna. Write to us at Feedback, The Food Magazine, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH or fax us on 0171-628 0817.

Salt suspicions

Why has the Department of Health apparently gone soft on salt? Tim Lobstein reports.

When the COMA report on cardiovascular disease and diet* was published last autumn it included some very specific recommendations for changing diets. In the past, such reports tended to talk vaguely about cutting fats, sugars and salt and increasing dietary fibre. More recently — starting with the World Health Organisation's report on dietary guidelines in 1991 — specific food groups are being listed, such as nuts, pulses, fruits, meat. The 1994 COMA cardiovascular report took this one further, and gave a list of typical

foods eaten at present and how they could be replaced in order to lower the risk of disease.

There are large vested interests in the provision of the nation's food, and perhaps not surprisingly they were becoming increasingly concerned at the level of detail being given about individual foods and the need to eat less of some of them.

As might be expected, before the COMA report was published there was some intense lobbying of government. On the day of publication, as we reported at the time (FM 28), the food industry's Food and Drink Federation took the government to task over the aspects of the report dealing with salt. The FDF published two press releases, the first furious with the report and threatening to pull out of their co-operative activities with government

in the Health of the Nation programme, and the second welcoming the Chief Medical Officer's statements saying that the targets for salt 'refer to population averages and are in no way relevant to, or for, individuals.'

This was a little bizarre, as it meant that the Chief Medical Officer was denying the statements made in the COMA report that individuals, as well as food manufacturers and caterers, should try to cut the salt. Many observers wondered what lay behind the Chief Medical Officer's decision to appease the industry and contradict his own panel of experts.

Then in March this year the long-awaited report on the diets of pre-school children was published. It found children eating an average 1.5g sodium (equivalent to nearly 4g salt) with virtually all children eating more than their recommended amount (the RNI — an amount considered sufficient for the needs of virtually everyone in that population group) and some were eating over five times the recommended amount. And the quantities they ate, the report admits, were for salt already present in foods, i.e. before any salt was added in cooking or at the table.

The obvious question was, Where is all this salt coming from? Which are the foods which supply most salt to a child's diet?

The report was excellent in its study of the sources of iron in pre-school children's diets, giving a list of the main foods that they get their iron from. And it does the same for calcium. And for phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, zinc, copper and iodine. But for sodium it remains utterly silent. It refuses to state which foods are contributing the high levels of salt. When the Food Commission raised the point at the press conference we were told that crisps and savoury snacks were one source, but no other details were



available.

For guidance, we went back to the 1991 *Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults* which also lists the sources of nutrients in the diet. In the section on minerals it happily gives the foods that contribute our daily iron, and also the foods that contribute our calcium. But on sodium it remains uncannily silent.

In a last resort we turned to MAFF and its annual National Food Survey. There we could find how the different purchases for households contribute to overall salt intake (see table opposite), but meals eaten out and many snack foods are excluded from the MAFF survey, so — for children's diets especially — we may be none the wiser.

Nor is this the end of the affair. The Department of Health is responsible for an advisory group, the Nutrition Task Force, which has a sub-group working on how the food industry might improve its products. To the surprise of the sub-group members, the product development work on salt reduction appears to have been quietly dropped from their agenda. And no questions asked, thank you.

■ *Nutritional Aspects of Cardiovascular Disease*, COMA Cardiovascular Review Group, Department of Health, HMSO 1994.

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Salt and blood pressure

Last autumn the food industry claimed that the COMA cardiovascular panel had no scientific basis for publishing advice to cut our salt intake. Dr Malcolm Law of the Wolfson Institute for Preventive Medicine believes that COMA's advice was correct

In Western countries average blood pressure levels increase with age, from about 115 mmHg systolic at age 15 to about 145 mmHg at age 65. While often considered 'normal' this increase in blood pressure with age does not occur in hunter-gatherer societies: blood pressure remains at about 115 mmHg throughout life. When hunter-gatherer peoples migrate to urban environments, however, their blood pressure increases to levels characteristic of Western societies.

Mortality from ischaemic heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases increases with an increase in blood pressure. The high average blood pressure levels in Western countries is a major determinant of the high cardiovascular mortality, and a small reduction in average blood pressure levels would prevent more deaths than drug treatment of those with the highest blood pressure (hypertensives) although the two are not alternatives and both strategies are important.

Several dietary and lifestyle factors contribute to the Western increase in blood pressure with age, including higher dietary salt, lower dietary potassium, higher alcohol consumption, lower habitual exercise and greater bodyweight. Tackling all these factors is important in lowering average levels of blood pressure.

But salt is particularly important for three reasons: its effect on blood pressure is large (about 40 per cent of the difference between Western and

hunter-gatherer societies); dietary intake in Western populations is high so there is the potential for a substantial reduction; and — with the co-operation of the food industry — lowering dietary salt could be easy and straightforward.

Typical daily salt intake in Western countries is about 10g in men and 8g in women. Discretionary salt (which is salt added by individuals during cooking or at the table) accounts for about 15 per cent of this and salt occurring naturally in food accounts for a further 10 per cent. The remaining 75 per cent is added during processing to a wide varieties of foods.

At the age of 60, a reduction in a person's daily sodium intake of 3g of salt would lower blood pressure by an estimated 5 mmHg systolic on average. This in turn would reduce mortality from stroke by an estimated 22 per cent, and mortality from ischaemic heart disease by an estimated 16 per cent. This would be equivalent to the prevention of 6,000 deaths per year in people under the age of 65 in Britain, and 40,000 deaths per year at all ages — an enormous effect.

A reduction of 3g of salt is realistic and corresponds to the COMA recommendations. It could be obtained by health education measures to encourage people to use less discretionary salt, together with a reduction in the amount of salt added to manufactured food.

Trials have shown that lowering the salt content of manufactured food does not result in a loss of palatability. Few people prefer heavily to moderately salted foods, and after a gradual reduction in dietary salt people choose less heavily salted food as preferable in taste to the more heavily salted foods they had previously been accustomed to.

A concerted plan by the food industry to gradually reduce the amount of salt added to manufactured food should be devised. People would prefer the taste, and the health benefit would be great.

Salt supply

An estimated three quarters of our daily salt intake comes buried in our food, with only a quarter or less added during cooking or at the table. According to MAFF's National Food Survey, which measures the foods purchased by households, the main foods that contribute salt to our diet are the following:

Bread (all types)	17%
Meat products — burgers, sausages etc	11%
Cured meats — ham, bacon	7%
Butter, margarine and spreads	7%
Milk (whole and low-fat)	6%
Breakfast cereals	5%
Canned vegetables	5%
Cakes, pastries, biscuits	5%
Cheese	4%
Other vegetable products, crisps	4%
Others: snacks, soups, ready meals	11%

It should be noted that many sources of salt, including snack foods eaten out and meals etc eaten away from the home, are excluded from the MAFF survey. Although bread appears a major problem here, and crisps and snacks a minor one, the reality for the average diet may well be different — the trouble is that no-one wants to say what the reality is (see *Salty Suspicions*, this page).

The Food Commission would like to see industry conduct a Salt Audit, along the lines of the Fat Audit currently being encouraged by the Department of Health. Wherever there are opportunities to reduce salt without compromising the microbiological preserving characteristics, these should be taken.

Seasoning tips

■ Check the labels, and remember the aim is keep down to around 6 grams of salt a day, equivalent to 2.5 grams (2500 milligrams) sodium per day. So if the pack says a portion contains 500mg sodium, then that would be a fifth of your daily average target.

■ If the label doesn't give a sodium or salt level then look at the ingredients and see if there are alternatives that don't contain salt, sodium chloride, or other sodium molecules like monosodium glutamate or bicarbonate of soda.

■ Watch out when eating out: most caterers will add salt in cooking, and may have ready-salted ingredients, too. Even fast food French fries often come ready salted — plus a portion of salt for you to add!

■ Try cooking with less salt: leave it out when you make pasta, rice or boil vegetables and potatoes. Leave it out when you make sauces — instead try using herbs, spices, vinegar, lemon or strong cheese to give the flavour a boost.

■ Throw away the table salt cellar. Try a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese, a drop or two of vinegar or lemon or lime.

Watch out for those meats and sauces!

	grams of salt
Two sausages	3.4
Spare ribs in sauce 8oz	6.2
Two large slices bacon	2.5
Ham and cheese sandwich	3.5
Individual pork pie	2.6
Quarter pound cheese burger	3.7
Large slice pizza, 8oz	5.3
Baked beans, smallest tin	2.0
Bread, a medium slice	0.5
Instant soup, one sachet	2.0
Soy sauce, a teaspoon	3.6
Baking powder, a teaspoon	1.3
Table salt, a teaspoon	5.0
Salted nuts, 50g bag	0.5
Ready-salted crisps, a bag	1.0

Action and research

HELP in Berkshire

An attack on the food problems faced by low-income families is being tried in Bracknell, Berkshire. Although the home counties are not renowned for their poverty, pockets of serious deprivation exist — as this project identified in the Great Hollands and Priestwood wards in Bracknell.

Titled the *Healthy Eating for Life Project (HELP)*, local meetings co-ordinated by dietitian Karen Hunt raised six areas of concern: school meals, transport to supermarkets, low-cost recipes, weaning foods, access to fresh fruit and vegetables, and — perhaps fundamental to all the others — increasing the self-confidence of participating families.

The main activities rely on HELPers — a core group of local people, mostly on benefits and aged from 22 to 82 — who liaise between their neighbourhood and the professional health workers available in the area. They are working to persuade local retailers to provide much-needed transport and creche facilities. And a survey they ran covering 162 families with babies found 34% wanted to learn about home-prepared baby foods and 86% asked for a baby food recipe book. Assessment of the HELPers' own confidence shows strong gains over the first year of the project.

■ More details from Karen Hunt, East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust, tel 01753-636730.

Help for E Midlands fruit and veg eaters

Fresh fruit and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet, but they can also be expensive. Now, if you are a group of neighbours, pensioners, unemployed people or a community cafe then you can call on the help of Sandwell Food Co-operative to help you buy in bulk at lower prices. Anyone living or working in the borough of Sandwell, East Midlands, can join for free, and Sandwell Food Co-op will deliver the produce you want direct to your community group.

■ Contact the Co-op on 0121-520 6900 or 0121-520 7868.

Low incomes

In our enthusiasm to give publicity to the Family Policy Studies Centre report on diet in lone parent families (see FM 29) we overlooked the same organisation's report on social and cultural aspects of food among low-income families, *Diet, Choice and Poverty*.

The research, from Loughborough University's Centre for Research in Social Policy, examined eating preferences and attitudes in 48 households in the Midlands. They found families wanted to maintain a 'mainstream' diet despite their restricted incomes, and resisted making radical changes. At the same time there was some resentment towards their wealthier neighbours who appeared to have more flexibility in the choice and timing of meals.

As has been noted in previous studies, women did most of the shopping, and mothers often sacrificed their own meals to be sure their children did not go without. Children in low-income families paradoxically appeared to be more indulged than their more affluent peers, as their mothers bought only the sort of food which they knew their children would eat, and would not be wasted, and to ensure their children would not feel stigmatised.

■ *Diet, Choice and Poverty*, B Dobson, A Beardsworth, T Keil and R Walker, Family Policy Studies Centre, 1994 (tel 0171-486 8179), £7.50.

Free food from UK retailers

The initiative to provide local charities with free food by the retailers' organisation, the Institute of Grocery Distribution, is currently providing handouts worth £2m a year. The programme, called Provision, has been criticised by some as encouraging a mentality of 'gratitude for private benevolence' rather than asserting one's right to social welfare and good nutrition.

Publications

Eating well for older people

As a society aware of the importance of food and health, it is surprising that there have been no minimal standards until now to guide those responsible for providing food for the elderly, writes Diane Brockbank.

Eating Well for Older People is a comprehensive and practical set of guidelines for those preparing food for the elderly both in residential homes and in the community (meals on wheels and lunch clubs). Far from being a dry document, it speaks a non-technical language that is easily understood and in a format that is clear and concise.

The eight chapters cover the specific nutritional requirements of older people, a description of food types and their sources, through to practical examples of actual meals and guidance on portion size. A recipe book will be available in 1996. It incorporates techniques to identify those at risk of malnutrition and explains the health problems common to the elderly and the vital role good nutrition can play.

Produced by a working party for the Caroline Walker Trust, the document also considers measures to encourage appetite, to improve presentation and choice, to ensure ethnic suitability, the proper timing of meals and physical exercise. It is sensitive to the physical and mental problems that prevent elderly people from taking various foods and offers realistic advice round these very real difficulties.

As we have a growing population of elderly people both in residential care and in the community, specific nutritional guidelines are long over due.

We hope the Caroline Walker Trust's recommendations will be adopted by local authorities as a minimum standard for food prepared in this area.

■ *Eating Well for Older People*, The Caroline Walker Trust, 6 Aldridge Road Villas, London W11 1BP, 1995, £10.



Low birthweights

Figures from the government's Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) show continuing links between low income and low birthweight, as well as links between low income and congenital abnormalities such as neural tube defects¹. Low birthweight babies are more likely to suffer illnesses and more likely to die, for a year or more after birth.

Figures from the OPCS survey of households² show one in every six adults has no natural teeth (an improvement from one in four adults ten years earlier). And over two-thirds of adults had taken no physical exercise in the four weeks prior to interview — indeed, nearly a third of adults had taken no exercise apart from walking in the previous year!

(1) 1992 *Congenital Malformation Statistics*, and *OPCS Monitor*.

(2) 1993 *General Household Survey* All published by OPCS, HMSO Publications, 1995 (tel 0171-873 0011).

US tries universal free school meals

Pilot projects examining the benefits of no-fee school meals for all students are being tried in four areas, to test the savings in administration

Publications

costs compared with the current means-tested schemes that work on similar lines to the UK. Early results show an increase in meal uptake of some 10% overall, and federal re-imbursement costs to local education authorities rising 33% to cover the loss of fee income. The large administrative savings have yet to be costed. Currently some 13 million children receive free or reduced-fee meals, out of 25 million students nationwide.

■ US General Accounting Office document T-RCED-94-184, 1994.

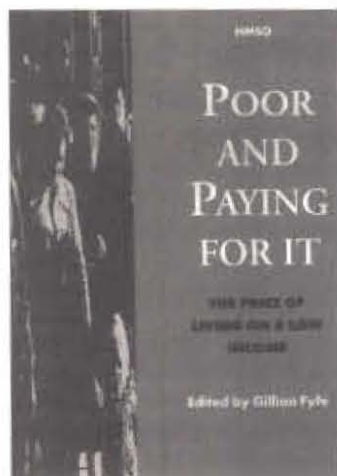
Electronic food stamps

Assessment of the food stamps programme in the USA, which provides some 27 million people with coupons to exchange for food, has shown that some savings could be made by replacing the coupons with electronic benefit transfer deducted from a debit card by the retailer. However, the main savings would only be apparent if all benefits, not just food stamps, were made electronically. Currently some \$7.4bn overpayments are made in the \$24.8bn food stamps programme, with fraud accounting for \$1.8bn and assessment errors \$5.6bn.

■ US General Accounting Office document RCED-95-13, 1995.

DoH forgets school meals

The Department of Health's consultation paper *Child Health in the Community: A Guide to Good Practice*, March 1995, covers every aspect of health from head lice to home visits — except food and nutrition. No mention of teaching children how to eat healthily, no mention of cooking or home economics, and no mention of school meals. Sadly, we fear they will try to pass the buck to Education.



How the poor pay

The Scottish Consumer Council have perhaps gone further than any other orthodox consumer body in moving away from a narrow interest in products and services and into the mainstream of politics and policies, with the publication of their report *Poor And Paying For It* late last year. It covers the usual areas of goods and services, including housing, education, fuel, food and health, but the thrust of the argument is on the impact of poverty: its ability to cause substantial disadvantage on a day-to-day basis and its chronic effects over a lifetime.

The section on food is written by Glasgow community activist Damian Killeen, director of Strathclyde Poverty Alliance. He accepts the view that legislation cannot automatically equalise the position of low income consumers in gaining access to affordable quality food, but that raising benefit levels such as Income Support could go a long way in improving access. 'Food poverty is largely a question of income and even the current market would find more effective ways of delivering food to low income households if they had more money to spend.'

■ *Poor And Paying For It: The Price of Living on a Low Income*, Scottish Consumer Council (tel 0141-226 5261), HMSO, Edinburgh, 1994, £13.95 (ISBN 0-11-495206-X).

Setting the agenda for inequality

'There can be no doubt,' pontificates Gerald Malone for the DoH, 'that health in this country is steadily improving in all social groups and in all regions.'

To say there is 'no doubt' begs the question, for the opposite assumption is made in *Tackling Inequalities in Health: An Agenda for Action*, a weighty report published by the King's Fund and co-authored by Margaret Whitehead (of *The Health Divide* fame) and with a foreword by Sir Donald Acheson, formerly the government's Chief Medical Officer. They show an increasing gap in the death rate figures between rich and poor areas in Britain, both in relative and, in some cases, real terms (for example the increasing death rates among younger men after many decades of decline).

As this magazine showed several years ago (FM 15), there has been a distinct widening of dietary differentials in the last two decades showing that while high income groups have improved their diets in many respects, low income groups have only done so a little if at all. Although similar patterns for illness rates are not given in the King's Fund report, example after example of social class differentials in health measures are given, and frequent reference is made to increasing gap in family income levels in the last decade — leading to the inference that the health measures should show a similar widening of the gap in the same period, something Gerald Malone will dispute until he loses office.

But it is not the arguments over health measures that really matter in reports like these; it is their prescription for resolving inequalities. Unlike many reports on poverty, the strategies and demands for change are limited to the final few pages but form a large part of the book. Strategies for improving housing, education, unemployment, childcare needs and reducing smoking are given. Proposals for improving the NHS's promotion of equity in health are discussed. And above all, for those of us concerned with food and nutrition, a section of the book is

devoted to family poverty: proposals are made to improve family finances by national insurance and income tax adjustments, improvements in work opportunities and increases in means tested benefits such as Income Support and Family Credit.

Not a revolutionary set of measures



perhaps. But certainly another useful call for change, from a group of people with the clout to prompt Malone to issue a public response from the government — a response which, even if it refuses to mention poverty, did acknowledge the presence of inequalities and the need to address 'the health needs of those who are most vulnerable.'

■ *Tackling Inequalities in Health: An Agenda for Action*, Kings Fund, London, 1995, £14.95 (ISBN 1-85717-088-1) (tel for book orders 0800-262260).

Food poverty survey

A new survey has revealed that the barriers to healthy eating include:

- resistance from family members
- believing healthy food costs more
- believing healthy cooking takes longer
- lack of transport.

It all sounds familiar, but this isn't the UK but a suburb of Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. Run by the local Medical Research Foundation, it also found that children were highly influenced by TV ads to eat fast foods.

Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune, 27 June 1995.

marketplace

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

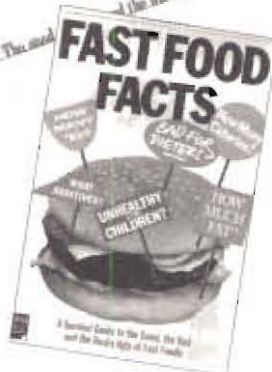
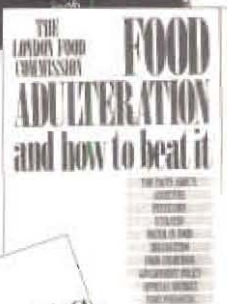
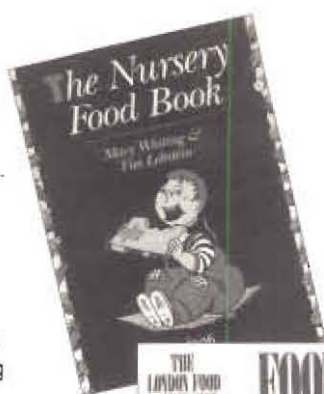
A penetrating expose of the shocking state of food quality in Britain, revealing the facts on additives, pesticides, food poisoning and irradiation. £5.95 inc p&p.

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 guidelines for multi-cultural catering. £17.50 inc p&p.

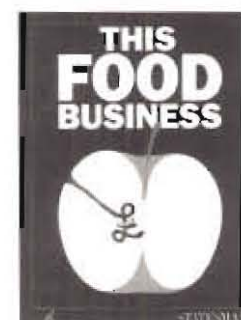
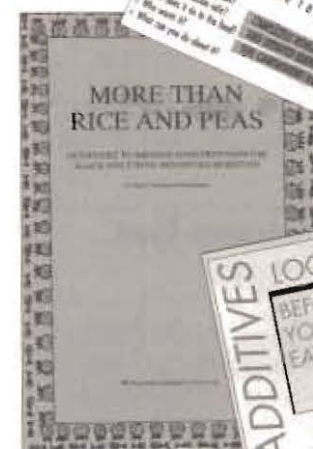
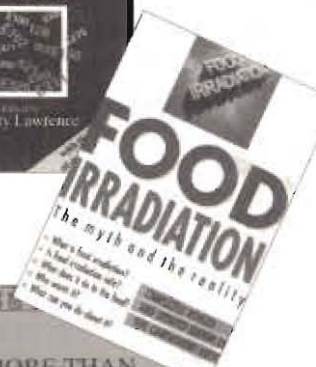
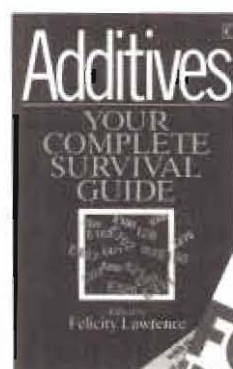
Additives chart

published by Channel 4 £2 inc p&p. An easy to use guide listing all the additives currently allowed in the UK under European legislation.

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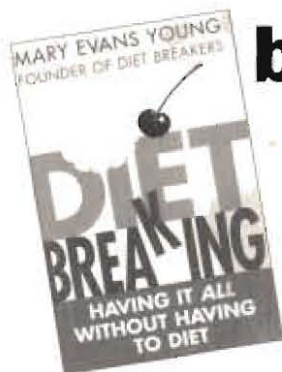
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Diet Breaking: Having it all without having to diet.

by Mary Evans Young
Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, £6.99
ISBN 0 340 63790 0

If you want to step off the diet treadmill, or work with people who do, this is a book to recommend. Unlike the scores of diet books that make publishers fat, this is a book that shows how to break free of the guilt trip and the diet trap and start to feel happy with the way you are.

The book is written by Mary Evans Young, the founder of Diet Breakers, an organisation set up to educate, promote and celebrate a healthier way of living. Mary started dieting at fourteen and it took her over twenty-five years to stop disliking her body and to realise that happiness was not the latest diet but finding her natural size and discovering she counted more than calories.

The book looks at why most diets don't work and offers help to tackle the insecurities and pressures that most women, and an increasing number of men, share. It includes many case histories and a useful list of organisations and publications. **SD**

Community Assessment: Guidelines for developing countries

D Stockman, IT Publications, 103-105
Southampton Row, London WC1B
4HH, 1994, £7.95, ISBN 1-85339-
224-3

Ill health results from many inter-related factors, and any community-based intervention needs to be aware of these. Evaluating the causes, including water, land, labour and money — and their lack — may lead to better local projects than focusing on only one. This book gives the practical as well as the theoretical tools to help make these evaluations.

The Food Mood Guide

A Resource Pack For Work on Food,
Feelings and Society, For Use With
Young Women. ISSN etc etc

An unfortunate sad fact of living in a country where food is plentiful is the existence of eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia and compulsive eating. So says *The Food Mood Guide* as it disentangles fact from fiction in one of its exercises to help young women face the pitfalls of eating problems.

Its aim is not to offer a quick cure but to focus on prevention through a greater self-awareness of personal emotional needs. It helps demonstrate through a range of group exercises how food preoccupation and misuse evolves from a complicated mix of society's conflicting pressures of image and an unconscious expression of emotional stress.

The Food Mood Guide is well introduced with its aims, advice on group management and a brief but succinct outline of the eating disorders. It goes on to give a range of exercises and games that explore all aspects of food and how it links with areas ranging from media influence and body image to emotions, associations and culture.

Each task is clearly explained with notes on its objectives, materials required and possible follow on discussion. Exercises encouraging admission of feelings and how they are expressed are good thought provoking areas along with group solving of 'problem page' type letters and 'how I see myself' studies.

It would take a very dynamic and uninhibited group to take part in emotion song writing and a form of emotion charades, not to mention a group shout, but the pack clearly advises the selection of exercises appropriate to the group.

Eating problems are being identified at an alarmingly high rate mainly amongst adolescent women and it is well timed to target this vulnerable group with preventive measures such as the excellent *The Food Mood Guide*. **DB**

Keep on writing but keep your letters short! You can fax us on 0171 628 0817

Dear Food Commission

My children have several food allergies and intolerances. In August we will be travelling in France and this presents a problem: how can we identify the right foods for them? We need to know the French terms for maize, soya and dairy products and their derivatives, as well as several other additives. Can you help?

Ms S Keane
Poole, Dorset

Eds: We asked the food additive and ingredients specialist research unit at Leatherhead if they could help. The short answer is no, although they said that the more technical the term the more likely that the same word would be used in both languages. They also they pointed us to wards a publication called The Four Language Dictionary of Food Technology, edited by E Luck and published by the Behrs Verlag, Germany, ISBN 3 860 22 0101. Have other parents and allergy-sufferers got any suggestions?

Dear Food Magazine

In my supermarket I noticed two marmalade products which had the same list of ingredients and were the same weight but were differently priced.

I asked the staff why and they promised to find out. The answer proved to be that the cheaper marmalade was made with low quality oranges treated with preservative sulphur dioxide, while the expensive marmalade used high quality oranges with no preservative. It seems the manufacturers don't have to mention the sulphur dioxide as an ingredient as it is used on the oranges before they are made into marmalade. This seems a sneaky loophole, concealing the use of something people may prefer to avoid.

Mrs T Bailey, London SE12

Eds: Sad but true. Chemicals added to ingredients before they get processed into the final recipe do not need to be mentioned on the final list. They are often called processing aids or carriers, and unscrupulous companies may specify high levels of such chemicals which can affect the food, but without any need to declare its use.

Dear Food Magazine

I understand that some apples are sprayed with wax. Is this true?

Eds: We asked the Fruit and Vegetable Information Bureau, and they said that some countries do wax and others don't. English, South African (Cape) and New Zealand (ENZA) should be unwaxed, while some French apples (red varieties) are waxed and so are Washington apples. The wax is derived from beeswax or from shellac (which is made from crushed insects). They say the wax can be washed off under cold water, and that no pesticides or fungicides are used in the wax.

Dear Food Magazine

Thank you for highlighting the insidious trend of giving very young children fruit drinks and squash instead of water or milk. I am concerned about the difficulty of obtaining drinking water when out shopping or travelling with young children. These days public water fountains seem such a rarity.

In addition, eating out at fast-food companies and motorway service areas seems to mean an inevitable fizzy or sweetened drink for the kids. Self-service water dispensers and cups are seldom provided. By subtly making water seem unavailable or inconvenient, the catering industry encourages consumption of less healthy alternatives.

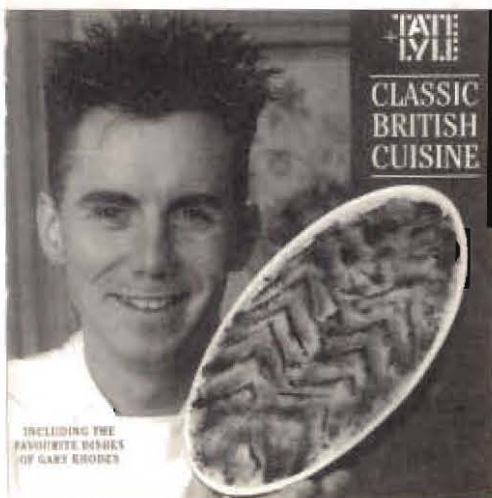
Kate Leivers
Chingford, London E4.

£500 Caroline Walker Prize and £2500 Caroline Walker Bursary

Details of the awards, the first for a student's essay of 5000 words and the second for a postgraduate research initiative, are available from

Mrs Sarah Ivatts
The Caroline Walker Trust
12 Thistle Grove
London SW10 9RZ.

Closing date for submissions is
September 23rd.



Classic British Cuisine

Gary Rhodes, TV chef and promoter of British cuisine, has teamed up with Tate & Lyle to promote its sugar products with a glossy booklet, *Classic British Cuisine*.

It comes as little surprise, therefore, to read that Gary's favourite recipes include

- Bubble & Squeak ('1 teaspoon Tate & Lyle caster sugar'),
 - Braised Oxtail ('1 dessert spoon Tate & Lyle demerara sugar'),
 - Steak & Kidney Pudding ('2 teaspoons of Tate & Lyle demerara sugar')
- let alone the desserts, such as
- Summer Pudding ('2oz Tate & Lyle icing sugar, 12oz Tate & Lyle caster sugar')

WHO runs WHO?

It's not just Nestlé that is assisting the World Health Organisation (see front page). Codex, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisations and World Health Organisation's jointly run food standards programme, is opening its doors to commercial sponsorship.

Codex, which sets food standards for the new global world order and held its impressively titled Third Session of the Codex Committee on Import and Export Food Inspection and Certification Systems in this spring in Canberra, Australia, with an official printed programme boldly stating: *The Australian Dairy Corporation is also a sponsor of this session.*

The ADC also provided the pouch for the official codex papers emblazoned with the ADC logo and the recommendation *'You need at least 3 serves of dairy food a day.'*

We've not heard of 'serves' used as a noun before, though it is used as a verb — as in 'serves our purposes nicely'.

Happy Birthday McLibel

'The world's longest-running libel trial' as it has come to be tagged has now celebrated its first year at the High Court, and its fifth year since proceedings began. The two impoverished defendants, Dave Morris and Helen Steel, face exhaustion and bankruptcy but are determined to see the trial through to a judicial decision. Their support campaign can be contacted on 0181-808 4265 (phone/fax). McDonald's, whose current UK operations brought in over \$1bn last year and who plan to open a new restaurant every week in the UK for the next ten years, are on 0181-700 7000.

Meanwhile McDonald's have been forced to abandon their bid for a restaurant in Glasgow's Southern General Hospital following public outrage that their tender had won the contract to replace a Red Cross snack bar. 'People felt it was inappropriate, given the health record of the West of Scotland,' said local MP Ian Davidson. The area has the highest rate of diet-related illnesses in the UK.

Domestic flame throwers

The government's Food Advisory Committee was recently faced with giving approval to a new generation of 'vegetable spray products'.

One, which sprays garlic flavoured gunge onto bread to make garlic bread, was given approval. But one which sprays vegetable oil onto your frying pan was not. Why? Because the propellant involved was going to be propane or butane — and spraying the product anywhere near a naked flame would have led to severely singed eyebrows, if not a burnt-out kitchen.

BT Potato

No, not a telephonic tuber, nor a silicon chip, but a genetically engineered spud, with added bacterial genes from the killer bug *Bacillus Thurengensis*.

Why should anyone want to put the nasty bit of a bacteria into our humble potato? Answer: to kill pests like the Colorado beetle.

And who should want to do this clever piece of 'franken-food' surgery? Our old friends Monsanto, the company that has worked very hard to bring us the milk-boosting hormone BST. Or at least, that's what Monsanto hoped. They have been stopped for the time being by a company called Mycogen, who claim that they own the patent on putting BT genes into plants.

A long law suit is likely to follow. While it unfolds we confidently predict that the Colorado will be biting into the trial crops of BT potatoes — and starting to adapt and develop resistance. By the time the lawyers collect their fees at the end of the trial, the patent may well be worthless and the Colorado beetle will be even more deadly than ever before.



Call to ARMs

Is there a minor war going on among government advisory committees?

The Advisory Committee for Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) is worried about the presence of antibiotic resistance markers (ARMs) in genetically engineered maize, as it doesn't like the idea of antibiotic resistance developing in people or animals that eat the food.

Who should they pass the question to? The Advisory Committee on Releases into the Environment might be appropriate, but they appear to be unwilling to take this on — or perhaps not competent to do so. There didn't seem to be anyone else, so the ACNFP report asks for the matter to be dealt with by 'the UK Competent Authority for Directive 90/220/EEC' and hopes the minister can sort out the mess.



AUSTRALIAN DAIRY CORPORATION