

# The FOOD MAGAZINE

## Campaigning for safer, healthier food

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# Irradiated food — where is it going?

**At the end of September, MAFF granted the Swindon irradiation company, Isotron, a three year extension to its licence to irradiate herbs and spices. MAFF says it wants to ensure that consumers are 'able to choose for themselves whether they want to buy irradiated food or not', but, asks the Food Commission, can we be sure irradiated food is properly labelled?**

**T**he Food Commission has discovered growing evidence that unlabelled irradiated foods are on sale to the public, not just in the UK but throughout Europe. Earlier this year, we reported on tests by local authority trading standards officers in Suffolk and on tests by BBC Radio 4's *Food Programme*, which found unlabelled irradiated products, primarily spices, on sale to the public (see FM29 & FM30). A more extensive sampling programme is currently being conducted by Suffolk, in collaboration with East Anglia, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Buckinghamshire Trading Standards Officers.

However, a European-wide study by the French organisation CRII-RAD (the Independent Commission for Research and Information on Radioactivity) shows that non-labelling of irradiated food may be widespread across the EU\*.

In tests last year, CRII-RAD found unlabelled irradiated frogs legs from China, Indonesia and Vietnam on sale in a number of stores in France, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium and the UK. The UK sample, an Indonesian brand, Timur Jaya, was purchased from Harvey Nichols in Knightsbridge. CRII-RAD concludes that there is insufficient testing being carried out to determine in full the extent of the problem.

Isotron (owned by Amersham International) is

the only UK facility licenced to irradiate foods, but its licence is limited to herbs and spices. CRII-RAD reported that Isotron is irradiating mainly imported products from India and Pakistan, destined for the EU market, but in recent correspondence with the Food Commission, Isotron state that most of what they irradiate is for export outside the EU. Isotron refused to disclose the source or destination countries.

In 1992, Europe's big three irradiating countries, France, Belgium and the Netherlands were jointly irradiating over 37,000 tonnes of food including seafood, frogs legs, poultry, egg, vegetables and around 10,000 tonnes of herbs and spices. However the question must remain as to where these

products end up as the Food Commission is not aware of any foods labelled as irradiated on sale in European shops.

CRII-RAD report that the vast majority of irradiated foods end up as ingredients in processed foods.

Although the laws throughout Europe differ, in the UK irradiated ingredients must be labelled

unless they make up less than 25% of a compound ingredient (eg black pepper in salami, used in a pizza). But MAFF has also told the Food Commission that in practice it is impossible to test processed foods for irradiated ingredients.

Meanwhile the companies identified by Suffolk

TSO's as selling falsely labelled irradiated spices are unlikely to be prosecuted. Suffolk Trading Standards office, Mike Holden says: 'At the moment there are no plans to prosecute any of the companies involved in the recent supply of falsely labelled irradiated spices. Investigations so far indicate that the companies were not deliberately attempting to mislead the public but were unwittingly trading in irradiated food.'

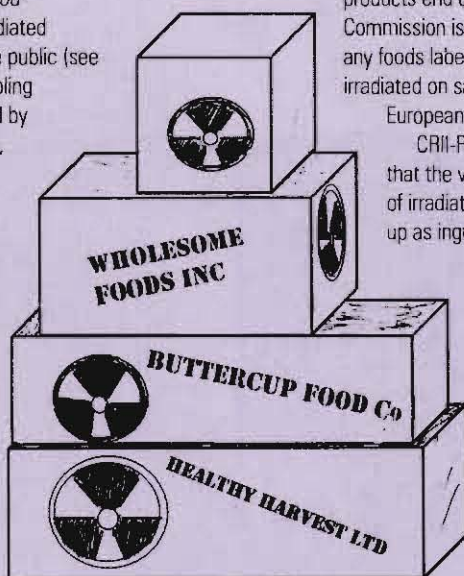
Suffolk investigations have revealed that the chain of supply goes beyond the UK shores. They are experiencing difficulties pin-pointing the exact source of supply, although the foods are believed to have originated in Spain. Once the source is identified, Spanish officials will be asked to investigate further. TSO's say they rely on their counterparts in other European countries to monitor products' compliance with labelling regulations, but in the case of irradiation this problem is compounded by the different laws for labelling irradiated products which exist in different EU countries. In addition, port health authorities can only intervene in food traded between EU member countries where public safety is at risk, not to check compliance with labelling regulations.

*\* Food Irradiation: Enquiry into the compliance with legal obligations in matters of labelling, a report for the EC's Consumer Policy Services, CRII-RAD, 1994.*

What are the supermarkets doing to protect consumers from falsely labelled irradiated food? See our report on page 3.

**Stop press: Australia extends ban on irradiation.**

As we go to press we have news that the Australian National Food Authority has decided to extend the Australian moratorium on food irradiation indefinitely.



**Get the facts with The Food Magazine**



## THE FOOD COMMISSION

Publishers of The Food Magazine

The Food Magazine is published quarterly by The Food Commission, a national non-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food. We rely entirely on our supporters, allowing us to be completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising.

We aim to provide independently researched information on the food we eat to ensure good quality food for all.

The Food Commission Research Charity aims to relieve ill health and advance public education through research, education and the promotion of better quality food.

**Co-directors:** Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein  
**Information Officer:** Mary Whiting  
**Research Officers:** Diane Brockbank, Jane Bradbury, Kate Godden  
**Office & Subscriptions Administrator:** Ian Tokelove  
**Food Irradiation Campaign Officer:** Martine Drake

**Editorial Advisors:**  
Joanna Blythman, Dr Eric Brunner  
Tracey Clunies-Ross  
Prof Michael Crawford  
Derek Cooper, Alan Gear  
Robin Jenkins, Prof Tim Lang  
Suzi Leather, Dr Alan Long, Jeanette Longfield, Dr Erik Millstone, Dr Melanie Miller, Charlotte Mitchell  
Dr Mike Nelson, Dr Mike Rayner,  
Prof. Aubrey Sheiham, Iona Smeaton  
Simon Wright

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■ Typesetting and design by Ian Tokelove of the Food Commission and Sarah Dobinson of Artworkers, 1a Berry Place, Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0JD. ■

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**The Food Commission (UK) Ltd**  
3rd Floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH  
**Telephone: 0171 628 7774**  
**Fax: 0171 628 0817**

**P**lus ça change... Ten years ago the food industry and the government were riddled with secrecy and back-room dealings. Ten years on and we find that industry and government are still thick as thieves, and their dealings as hidden as ever. For example, the Nutrition Task Force, the only body that might have fleshed out the Health of the Nation targets and spelt out how they could be reached through practice, is to be disbanded and most of their work left as a set of worthy recommendations.

Why? Because the food industry says so. It could not tolerate the suggestion that it might be helpful if we generally ate a bit less food — particularly less processed, salty, fatty and sugary foods. After all, that's where their money comes from.

And while they are putting the squeeze on the Department of Health, their buddies in MAFF are handing out grants and giving licenses including three more years for Isotron to irradiate herbs and spices to be put, we believe, into processed food where it can be hidden without needing a label declaration. To check our suspicions, we asked Isotron if they would tell us where their irradiated products are going. 'No, we won't,' they told us. 'It's a secret.' ...*plus ça même chose.*

And so it is down to us individuals to choose a healthy diet. But how healthy are the foods with the healthy images? Our survey of vegetarian bangers and burgers (see page 10) found the majority to be high in fat, much of it hydrogenated, sold at a premium price up to £9 per kilo. Products like these don't help your health or your pocket, and they give vegetarian food a bad name.

For years manufacturers have told us 'there's no such thing as bad foods, only bad diets.' Now they are trying to sell us individual products claiming specific health benefits, such as lowered cholesterol from yogurt-style Gaio (see page 5) and from Ribena Juice and Fibre, with only a mention in the small print of the need to consume these products 'as part of a low-fat diet'.

It isn't difficult to complain about misleading claims. You don't have to be an expert. Inserted with this issue is the NFA's paper *How to Complain about Food Advertising*. If something bugs you, get writing — it's not difficult and it does make a difference.

Sue Dibb  
Tim Lobstein

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# Testing for irradiated food

## A Food Commission survey of supermarket attitudes

In the light of concerns about non-labelled irradiated foods on sale to the public (see our front page report), the Food Commission contacted leading UK supermarkets to ascertain what precautions, if any, they were now taking to ensure that falsely labelled irradiated products were not on sale in their stores.

The results of our survey show that none of the supermarkets which replied are currently carrying out tests to ensure that unlabelled irradiated food is not on sale in their stores.

Even though a limited number of tests have now been validated by MAFF (see box) the supermarket's replies indicate that some are confused about the tests now available. One did not appear to realise that legislation now permitted food irradiation and another was concerned about costs of testing.

### What the supermarkets say

**ASDA**

'Our current policy is

that we do not stock irradiated food under our own label and our suppliers are fully aware of this position. Any testing carried out is inevitably

reflected in the price of food to the consumer and we would not wish to unnecessarily increase costs if adequate control can be exercised by alternative means. We are currently reviewing ingredient control measures... and will implement independent testing if we consider this necessary.'



'We are currently reviewing the test methods and the laboratories which can carry them out, with a view to discussing a joint programme with our suppliers.'



'While I am aware of recent advances in analytical techniques there is still no authoritative method 'validated' by government. When this does become available then naturally we will instruct suppliers of products at risk to test for irradiation on a regular basis.'

### MARKS & SPENCER

'In the event of irradiation becoming legal, we would press for a clear,

precise statement on the packaging of treated products which highlighted that the product or its components had been irradiated. As a company we have very good control over our manufacturers and distribution system and we have no intention to pursue the use of irradiated foods in St Michael products.'

### SAINSBURY'S

'We are fully aware of the MAFF validated methods that exist for the detection of irradiated foods... Our suppliers are fully aware of their responsibilities under the UK Food Safety Act and adopt a programme of testing using MAFF validated tests where appropriate.'

### TESCO

'We do not feel that the tests currently available are suitable to our requirements... All companies are audited on a regular basis to ensure that they comply with our production specifications, and suppliers are fully aware of our policy not to supply irradiated foods.'



### Testing, one, two, three

Three tests have been developed and validated by MAFF for detecting irradiated foods. These can be used on foods containing bone such as meat or fish (ESR Spectroscopy), herbs and spices (Thermoluminescence) and poultry (Limulus Amoebocyte Test). Other tests for use on a wider range of foods are still being developed and tested.

## Denmark bans animal drug

The Food Commission is calling for a UK review of the use of the antibiotic, avoparcin, in poultry and pig production following a Danish ban in May this year. The drug is widely used as a growth promoter by suppressing the development of diseases which can break out in intensive animal production. However there are concerns that the use of avoparcin is leading to the development of resistance to the

antibiotic vancomycin, often used as a lifesaving antibiotic to treat human disease when other antibiotics may have failed.

In the UK 80% of broiler chickens, 30-40% of pigs and 30% of dairy cows are routinely fed avoparcin (trade name Avotan) in their food. It is also used for calves and beef cattle.

In a report to the European Commission, the Danish Veterinary Laboratory states that the use of

avoparcin as a feed additive poses a serious risk to human health with infection caused by vancomycin-resistant bacteria emerging as a world-wide problem.

By adding the antibiotic avoparcin to the feed of healthy animals, producers reduce the level of infection brought about by keeping large numbers of animals in intensive production units. By decreasing infection, growth rates are improved. However, the Danish concern is that avoparcin's widespread use has led to the development of resistant bacteria and this resistance has spread to the human antibiotic vancomycin, a

closely related antibiotic to avoparcin.

Studies in Denmark have found vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus faecium* in uncooked chickens and pork on sale to the public which the Danish health authorities consider a threat to human health. The Danish report notes that with patients infected with *E faecium* there is higher mortality among patients infected with resistant strains like the vancomycin resistant *E faecium*.

Cyanamid, the company which manufactures Avotan told the *Food Magazine* that there was 'no justification for a ban on the product.'



# DoH reviews soya milk

The Food Commission has welcomed the Department of Health's decision to refer concerns about phytoestrogens in soya milk for babies to its Committee on Toxicity (COT). The COT last considered the subject in 1992 but did not issue a report. In a letter to the Food Commission the Department of Health says: 'In view of the period which has passed since the COT's 1992 review of phytoestrogens, and the interest there now is in these substances, we consider it important that the COT review is updated. To this end we are actively considering new data on phytoestrogens which has been published in the scientific literature since 1992, with a view to taking the topic back to the COT later this year'.

Meanwhile the World Health Organisation has conceded that a 4-page document prepared by Nestlé, which the WHO sent to the New Zealand Government following their request for further information, has

'no special status other than being a contribution of one food toxicologist to the continuing enquiry into unresolved issues where the safety of soya formula is concerned'.

The WHO said that they 'not infrequently' supplied governments with 'information obtained from the food industry, among other sources'. But they accepted that 'we certainly understand your concern that any information provided by WHO should not be influenced by other than strictly scientific criteria'.

Meanwhile in New Zealand a number of cases of individuals who were fed soya as infants and who have subsequently suffered from unexplained hormonal health problems have come to light. Scientists in New Zealand are seeking funding to carry out an epidemiological study to determine whether the consumption of soya in infancy could account for such health problems.

## Pesticide misuse continues

At least one in every hundred food samples tested for pesticide residues contains levels of pesticide above the maximum acceptable level, indicating misuse by growers and suppliers, says a new government report. A further 30% of food samples contained traces of pesticides at 'acceptable' levels.

According to the latest annual report from the government's Working Party on Pesticide Residues:

- 6% of samples of honey contain traces of pesticides used to combat the bee disease varroa;
- 18% of lettuces contain residues

at levels so high they indicate serious misuse by lettuce growers, including the use of two fungicides that are prohibited. In five cases legal proceedings are being considered;

- 30% of milk samples showed traces of organochlorine pesticides;
- 82% of UK-made chocolate contained residues of gamma-HCH (lindane);
- organophosphorus residues in carrots continue to show unexplained wide variations.

*Working Party on Pesticide Residues Annual Report 1994, HMSO 1995.*

## Baby food survey

The Food Commission's widely-publicised report on the quality of commercial baby foods (see FM 30) attracted some interesting comments. Here are two:

*"Rubbish... simplistic, absolutely wrong and a load of nonsense... it misrepresents advice that came out last November,"* said Heather Paine, spokeswoman for the Infant and Dietetic Foods Association (the baby food manufacturer's mouthpiece) cited in *Nursery World*, 27/7/95.

*"You and your colleagues have produced a comprehensive and important analysis of the many products marketed as suitable for weaning infants. The information obtained will allow dietitians, nutritionists and others involved in*



*giving advice to clearly judge the quality of these weaning products."* Professor Forrester Cockburn, Chair of the COMA Working Group on Weaning and the Weaning Diet, whose report last November prompted our survey.

## GM squashed tomatoes

Zeneca's attempts to exploit their genetically modified tomato have at last begun to see light, with the announcement by Sainsbury's and Safeway's that they would be selling the tomatoes in the form of paste, even though the Co-op has said they don't want to touch it.

Sainsbury's have promised the GM tomato paste will be clearly labelled as such, following the lead taken by the Co-op in labelling GM foods even when there is no legal obligation to do so.

The tomatoes have been modified using its own manipulated genes, which have the effect of strengthening the tomato's skin, allowing better firmness while the tomato is transported to market.

However, the modified genes have been combined with a genetic marker using genes from bacteria found in human faeces that show antibiotic resistance properties. To ensure antibiotic resistance is not

transferred to other organisms, the tomato has to be processed (to break down the genes) before being allowed on sale. Processing the tomatoes into paste effectively fulfils this safety requirement, but of course defeats the purpose of having a firm-skinned tomato in the first place. Only Zeneca's determination to get some return on their multi-million pound investment has led to this unnecessary product being sold in our supermarkets.



## High cost of CAP

An average family of four is still forking out nearly £20 a week to fund the Common Agricultural Policy, despite reforms to CAP in 1992 and the more recent GATT trade agreement, says the National Consumer Council. Furthermore the CAP disregards nutritional advice as good-quality fruit and vegetables are destroyed to keep prices high; butter

is sold cheaply to schools and the elderly to reduce milk surpluses; full-fat dairy products are sold at reduced prices to biscuit, cake and ice-cream manufacturers, giving these products a competitive advantage over healthier alternatives, and domestic support policies and high import duties raise the price of olive oil a relatively 'healthy' oil.

■ For more information: Emma Hellyer, National Consumer Council, 0171-730 3469.



# Gaio yogurt faces claims challenge

The Food Commission has complained to the advertising regulatory bodies that the health claims for the Danish yogurt-style product Gaio are misleading.

Gaio, a blend of yogurt and soya oil with added fruit, has been promoted as 'unique in that it is made with *Causido* culture which can actively help reduce blood cholesterol levels ... Controlled clinical tests conducted by scientists in Denmark proved that the *Causido* culture, when eaten regularly as part of a low fat diet, can help lower the level of harmful cholesterol in the body.'

The experimental data produced to defend these claims is a single study of middle-aged men paid for by the manufacturers, MD Foods, and published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (49, 346-352, 1995).

The study monitored the serum cholesterol levels of 58 men for six weeks, with half of the men eating 200ml Gaio every day, and half eating a placebo.

Apart from the limited population characteristics (all were men aged 44 selected for their normal levels of cholesterol and freedom from cardiovascular or metabolic problems) an additional question concerns the nature of the placebo. The study compared Gaio with a similar milk-soya blend that had not been fermented with live cultures but with an acid. The study did not compare *Causido* cultures with any other live yogurt culture.

The use of an inappropriate placebo is unfortunate, for it fails to show the main claim being made by the company, that their new *Causido*-

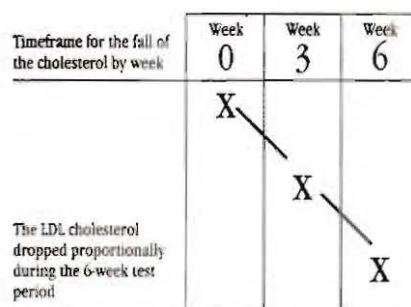
cultured product has unique properties. The Danish research paper refers to earlier studies of other types of yogurt also having a cholesterol-lowering effect.

A second question concerns the presentation of the cholesterol-lowering figures. The Danish study found a drop of 5% in LDL cholesterol in 3 weeks, and a further drop, also of 5% in the next three weeks, when the trials finished. The diagram (reproduced here) shows an effect which might be construed as somewhat more than 10 per cent in the period.

A few of the men experienced gastrointestinal upsets (obstipation, loose stools and borborygmia). Whether these were due to the culture used for Gaio — a blend of bacteria including human-derived *Enterococcus faecium* from the faeces of Ukrainians — was not revealed.



The Gaio graph which the Food Commission says could mislead.



## Contaminated fish oils

Tests by Greenpeace on fish oil supplements have found detectable levels of organochlorine and other toxic chemicals such as DDT, lindane, PCBs and hexachlorobenzene in 9 out of 10 top UK brands of fish oils.

■ For more information: Greenpeace: 0171-354 5100 or 0171 359 4837.

## ASA snubs public health

The National Food Alliance has criticised the Advertising Standards Authority for failing to update its rules on food advertising in the light of the Health of the Nation as recommended by the government's Nutrition Task Force. In August the ASA announced the results of a review by an industry-only committee which the NFA has described as an 'evasion of responsibility towards the nation's health.' Earlier this year, the Independent Television Commission, which regulates advertising on TV, introduced tougher rules following the Nutrition Task Force recommendation.

■ For more information: Jenny Smith, NFA Advertising Project 0171-628 2442.

## Artificial sweetener information

It looks likely that all foods containing artificial sweeteners will have to declare this information on the front of products, according to the latest draft directive from Brussels. While the move has been welcomed by consumer groups, the UK government has been fighting to prevent the directive from becoming law under pressure from the food industry.

## Study shows GE animals' misery

A new report from Compassion in World Farming exposes the suffering experienced by genetically engineered farm animals. So-called 'self-shearing' sheep, injected with GE hormones, suffer increased abortion rates; GE chickens with supposed greater resistance to salmonella die from cancer; GE pigs and sheep have damaged joints, diabetes-like symptoms, impaired vision and shorter lives.

■ Gene Transfer and the Welfare of Farm Animals, from Compassion in World Farming, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EH, price £2.50



The label from a can of HAPPINESS — the inspired product of Enough (the anti-consumerism campaign) which launched National No-Shop Day in September. 'Everyone knows happiness can't be canned,' said organiser Paul Fitzgerald. 'Consuming more doesn't make us happier, and it drains the earth of resources, pumps out pollution and impoverishes the Third World.'

Contact Enough, One World Centre, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS (tel 0161-237 1630).





Scientists at Harvard University have developed a genetically engineered mouse that automatically develops cancer, for use in cancer research. They have patented the mouse, first in the USA then at the European Patent Office (patent no 0169672). The patent is to be reviewed on November 21-22 as a result of complaints from over 300 organisations raising 17 different objections.

■ Postcards bearing the picture above and stating an objection to the granting of a patent, are available from the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, 16a Crane Grove, London N7 8LB. Objections should be sent to the European Patent Office, D-80298 Munich, Germany.

## Hormone-mimic found in canned vegetables

A chemical used to coat the inside of food tins, bottle tops and water pipes has been found to mimic the female hormone oestrogen. The chemical, bisphenol-A, has been found by Spanish researchers at the University of Grenada to leach from tins into vegetables such as asparagus, sweetcorn and peas. MAFF is to commission research into the contamination of tinned foods by the chemical and would re-appraise safe limits for bisphenol-A.

As reported in our last issue (FM30), certain pesticides and chemicals used in plastics can act as weak oestrogens in the human body. Links have now been established

between such chemicals and falling sperm counts and an increase in reproductive problems such as undescended testes and testicular cancer. In July a report by the Medical Research Council's Institute for Environment and Health called for urgent research to assess the risks and identify the causes\*. However, independent scientists accused the government of complacency for failing to act now to restrict the use of oestrogenic chemicals.

■ *Environment Destroys: Consequences to Human Health and Wildlife*, Medical Research Council Institute for Environment and Health, University of Leicester (tel 0116-252 5530, fax 0116-252 5146).

## Mad cow fears continue

The news that three dairy farmers have died from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease — the human equivalent to 'mad cow' disease — has fuelled fears of a connection between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and the human disease.

In July MAFF announced a tightening of the rules to prevent tissue potentially infected with BSE from entering the cattle feed chain after it was discovered that previous regulations had not been 100% effective in excluding potentially infected material from cattle feed. Loopholes in the regulations had also allowed rendered tallow made from banned or specified bovine offals to be used in animal feed. Tighter controls of rendering and head-boning activities will be

introduced later this year. MAFF admitted that there was 'room for improvement' in the application of the current rules in Britain's slaughterhouses.

The loopholes may explain the continuing occurrence of cases of BSE — nearly 19,000 so far — in cattle born after the 1988 ban on the use of animal products in cattle feed. The Food Commission has criticised MAFF for its failure to implement and monitor the original ban adequately, and has called for companies that failed to meet the regulations to be prosecuted.

The Food Commission also said that MAFF's admission of failure must raise questions about the effectiveness of the ban on specified offal entering the human food chain.

## Soya baby milk

Several readers have contacted The Food Commission because of their concern about phyto-oestrogens in soya baby formula products (see Food Magazine issues 29 and 30).

For vegan mothers who do not wish to breastfeed and who wish their babies to be fed on a vegan diet, soya formula products are their only option and, like us, they are concerned that only the highest quality product should be available. They are also concerned that soya

formula are no longer available as an option under the welfare milk provisions, which give pregnant women and new mothers on benefits vouchers exchangeable for fresh cows milk or infant formulas — but not soya formula.

■ A campaign to include soya formulas within benefit entitlements is being run by the Campaign for Milk Tokens, c/o Will Thomson, Merseyside Trade Union, Community and Unemployed Resource Centre, 24 Hardman Street, Liverpool L1 9AX (tel 0151 7009 3995, fax 0151 708 8862).

## BST labels required in Vermont

State laws requiring all products which have been, or may have been, derived from cows treated with the milk-boosting hormone bovine somatotropin (BST) to be clearly labelled, have been passed by the Vermont legislative assembly in the USA. Signs must be placed in all

grocery stores listing such products and producers must report to retailers and the state government if their products may have been derived from BST-treated cows.

The dairy industry, arguing that the regulations are unenforceable as BST and non-BST products cannot be distinguished, and that the laws are unfairly discriminatory and branded BST products as inferior, nonetheless failed to overturn the legislation in the courts.

■ More details from Genetics forum, 3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH (Tel: 0171-638 0606)



# Added fibre does not make soft drink a food says VAT man

In a test case between Customs and Excise and SmithKline Beecham, the question of whether Ribena Juice & Fibre constituted a beverage (VAT chargeable) or a food (VAT exempt) was decided in an appeal tribunal in favour of Customs & Excise. The result, placing the added fibre version of Ribena firmly in the beverages category, may put a dampener on companies planning to market functional foods by adding 'functionality' to snacks and soft drinks.

In evidence submitted by the company it was argued that the product was developed as a fibre-rich food to assist people wishing to increase their intake of soluble fibre as a means of helping to reduce their excess blood cholesterol. The characterising Ribena flavours were added secondarily, and hence the

product was in the first instance a food, more suitable on health food or cereal shelves. In evidence submitted by the Food Commission, it was argued that the product had all the appearance of a soft drink, was marketed as part of the soft drinks brand name, and that the health claims were not proven for this particular product.

The tribunal of three adjudicators retired for five minutes and then announced that their decision was unanimous, and the product was a beverage and liable for VAT. The tribunal was not in a position to judge the merits and reliability of health claims, which remain a grey area in law, although explicitly medical claims require a medicinal products licence.

A working group under the National Food Alliance will be



preparing a position paper on functional foods — details from the NFA on 0171-628 2442.

## McLibel enters sixth year

The McLibel Two, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, have passed their fifth anniversary since being served with a writ for libel by the multinational burger giant McDonald's in September 1990.

Their High Court trial, which began in June 1994, is expected to continue at least until spring 1996. By August 1995 the trial had heard evidence from 60 witnesses, but a further 120 are still listed for appearance. Recognising the damaging publicity they were earning, McDonald's senior executives are reported to have approached the defendants unofficially to seek ways of ending the case. Steel and Morris refused unless McDonald's agreed not to sue anyone ever again for making similar criticisms, apologise to those they have sued in the past, and pay a substantial sum to a third party in lieu of costs. Not surprisingly, the trial continues.

Meanwhile, the defendants are appealing for funds of £35,000 to help continue fighting the case.

■ Details: McLibel Support Campaign, c/o 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX. Tel/fax 0171 713 1269.

## Nutrition Task Force submits to food industry

The government is widely assumed to have abandoned any remaining interest in the workings of the Nutrition Task Force and its various sub-groups, due to make its final report this October. The Task Force was set up by the Department of Health two years ago to make practical recommendations on how to meet the government's Health of the Nation nutrition targets, but its work has been continually hampered by having to make compromises to suit the interests of the food industry.

Food company members on Task Force sub-groups are rumoured to have been unhelpful and to have blocked access to commercial information, as well as lobbying ministers to have the recommendations weakened. The latest example is the weakening of the recommendations of the sub-group concerned with nutrition and physical activity, whose report predicts that within ten years 18% of



men and 25% of women will be medically obese.

The group were expected to call for a target of 30% food energy from fat — in line with WHO recommendations — but instead the unpublished report, *Reversing the Increasing Problem of Obesity in England*, is now expected to call only for 'a greater reduction in dietary fat' beyond current targets. The group's chair is Professor Philip James of the Rowett Institute, Aberdeen, who is a strong proponent of a reduction in fat in the diet, and played a leading

role in the WHO recommendations.

According to senior Department of Health officials, as reported in the *Daily Telegraph* (30/9/95), the reasons for the weakening of the NTF sub-group's report, and its delayed publication, lie in government embarrassment at the failure to improve the health of millions of Britons through exercise and a healthier diet.

But others outside the Department of Health are quoted as saying that the Department is itself responsible, having capitulated to the food industry. 'The Department of Health is under instructions to block anything that would cause a riot in the food industry. Food manufacturers have already gone berserk over this,' a Whitehall official is reported as saying. A 30% limit would have caused 'total uproar' in the food industry, whose members, said the un-named official, have displayed 'outrageous behaviour'.

### The Anti-Corporations Fayre

Saturday 28 October, Conway hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn) 11am-8pm, entrance free. Called by London Greenpeace and McLibel Support Campaign

### Demonstration outside the Management Summit 95

conference (which includes Nestlé, McDonald's etc), 8 and 9 November — details from McLibel Support Campaign, 0171-713 1269



# Carrageenan controversy continues

**Consumers should be able to rely on regulatory agencies to ensure that consumer safety is put before commercial considerations in the approval of a new food additive. But, as Sue Dibb reports, this may not always be the case.**

Over the summer, a letter of consultation was circulated by MAFF to consumer groups, the industry and other interested parties, asking for comments on a European Commission proposal to permit a new food additive, named as 'alternatively refined carrageenan', as additive E407a. MAFF's letter gave no hint of the controversy that has surrounded this proposal. However the Food Commission has been following the approval process closely and in its reply to MAFF, stated the EC proposal has 'more to do with political lobbying from the Philippines government than it has to do with proper safety evaluation and consumer protection'. The Food Commission is highly critical of the European Commission for bowing to political pressure from the Philippines government over the proposed approval of the additive which has not yet been adequately tested for safety.

Conventional carrageenan, E407, is a highly refined seaweed extract used for many years to give a moist and succulent 'mouth feel' to a wide range of processed foods from ice cream and other dairy products to sausages and other meat products. It also increases the water content of products such as cooked hams and poultry-based convenience foods. However the Philippines product, originally called 'Processed Eucheuma Seaweed' (PES), but subsequently also described much less accurately as 'Philippines Natural Grade' (PNG) and even more recently as 'Alternatively Refined Carrageenan' (ARC), differs markedly from conventional carrageenan in its method of manufacture and its overall composition and purity. Consequently PES has a different specification from carrageenan and is therefore a different product.

While conventionally refined carrageenan is extracted from the original seaweed, then purified, the much simpler and cheaper process used to prepare PES leaves almost all of the original seaweed's impurities and contaminants in the final product which the EC now proposes to add to its list of permitted food additives. Furthermore, the PES production process makes it necessary for subsequent sterilisation to be applied to reduce unacceptable levels of microbiological contamination. Recently, Hungarian government tests have detected significant quantities of the banned carcinogen ethylene oxide, used as a

fumigant to try and clean up the product, in samples of PES imported from the Philippines. Similar results have been found in the USA, as a result of which the Philippine manufacturers of PES gave an undertaking to discontinue its use of ethylene oxide for PES destined for the USA. They are now understood to be using an alcohol washing process which is more expensive and less efficient but this is leading to the detection of unacceptably high levels of residual alcohol in the product.

In 1992 the *Food Magazine* reported (FM 16) that politics rather than science appeared to have played a significant role in the US Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) surprising and strongly contested decision in 1991 to approve PES for the American market. Reports at the time linked the product's US approval to political decisions involving the extension of leases to strategic US military bases in the Philippines. The manufacturers of PES claimed that their success in gaining US FDA approval was a triumph for political lobbying, and that food safety was not an issue.

Following their US success, Philippine diplomats were instructed to turn their attention to lobbying within the EC at the highest levels to gain approval for PES despite its lack of adequate toxicological safety data. This is because the European market for PES is potentially larger than that in the US. In 1991, however, the EC's Scientific Committee for Food (SCF) asked for the most preliminary form of safety evaluation to be carried out. Following the receipt of preliminary reports of that study, the SCF gave temporary approval to PES towards the end of 1994. However, when the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives of the WHO and FAO (JECFA) examined the final report of the same study early in 1995, it concluded that the toxicological data were not adequate as the 90 day feeding study, conducted in Manila, had not been carried out to the accepted modern standards. JECFA therefore requested the results of a new study to be submitted by 1998. JECFA also made it clear that if any species of seaweed, other than *Eucheuma cottonii* was used as the source of the PES product (as has been admitted to be the case) then each separate species of seaweed must be the subject of additional separate safety evaluation.

In contrast the EC's SCF decided to temporarily permit the use of PES made from seaweed species

different from that actually tested. So far as we are aware, the SCF has apparently not yet rescinded its prior decision of 1994. The Food Commission considers that some re-consideration by the SCF is now essential if European consumer safety is not to be compromised.

What has surprised consumer groups, MEPs and trade representatives is that, despite JECFA's decision, the European Commission, started to push unexpectedly strongly for PES to be approved urgently as E407a under the name 'Alternatively Refined Carrageenan' simply because the product 'has a commercial importance for the Philippines'. Rumours in Brussels abound that it is officials in the EC's DGII who have been pressurising the food safety advisors in DGIII to accelerate their normal safety approval considerations. Should this indeed be the case, there is now a clear indication that political and trade considerations are beginning to take precedence over the proper scientific safety evaluations necessary to ensure consumer safety.

In mid-September 1995, consumers' groups, food experts, scientists and legislators, brought together by the Danish MEP, Mrs Karin Riis-Jørgensen, agreed that the European Commission should distinguish clearly between Carrageenan (E407) and Processed Eucheuma Seaweed, agreeing also that the new name 'Alternatively Refined Carrageenan' and the proposed number E407a, were not acceptable as their use could be misleading to the consumer.

Both the Food Commission and the European consumer organisation, BEUC, also consider that in the light of JECFA's 1995 decision, PES should not be given approval as an additive at present under any name or E number.

The Food Commission believes it to be essential that no decision be taken by the EC until the results of the toxicological re-evaluations called for by 1988 by JECFA become available, through open publication, to permit assessments by independent experts to be made.

The latest news is that the Philippines government is now extending its campaign by seeking approval for its PES product in Australia. And guess what? Yes – they've come up with yet another name; this time it's 'Natural Grade Carrageenan' (NGC)! In this latest marketing-driven search for the most user-friendly, consumer-acceptable name the use of the word 'natural' is inappropriate to describe a chemically processed product.

The Food Commission will continue to follow this clearly controversial debate and will continue to insist that it is consumer safety and not political/commercial considerations that is paramount. Further developments will be reported as they become known.



# CHECKOUT

The supermarkets can't agree on how to colour-code our milk.  
Jane Bradbury reports.

## Milk top madness

**H**ave you ever bought a carton of semi-skimmed milk only to find when you got home and read the label that you had actually bought skimmed milk? You thought red-top was semi-skimmed and green was skimmed? Or was it the other way around? Nearly all use blue for full-fat milk — except for Sainsbury's where blue means skimmed. But get it wrong and, as far as the supermarkets are concerned, that's your punishment for being unfaithful.

The fact is that bottle-top colouring — and milk carton colouring — are in a mess. The Food Commission surveyed eleven retailers to find out what they used and why. Six were in agreement on their colour scheme: red for skimmed, green for semi-skimmed and blue for whole milk (see table). But if you purchase a pint from Sainsbury's, Boots, Gateway/Somerfield, Lord Rayleigh's Farms or Tesco and you don't, or can't, read the label, you may find you have not bought the milk you wanted.

The reason is that producers of carton or polybottle-packed milks are free to choose any colour they like, with no regard for the confusion this might cause their customers. Until 1994, when the government abolished the rules, the coloured foil tops on doorstep glass bottles were controlled by legislation and a voluntary Code of Practice. The National Dairymen's Association, realising that the cap colour codes provided a universally recognised method of quickly identifying the type of milk contained in a bottle (perhaps for the delivery man as much as for the customer) incorporated the old regulations into a new voluntary Code of Practice thereby preserving the existing cap colour codes.

But these regulations and Codes never covered supermarket polybottle milk and tetrapack cartons. They weren't thought justified given that cartons and polybottles provide plenty of space for labelling.

The Dairy Industry Federation, which represents milk suppliers, is aware that the lack of harmonisation is potentially confusing for the consumer. A spokesperson told the Food Commission: 'We as an industry would be supportive of one of two options: either that all retailers agree to adopt a particular colour cap for a particular type of milk, or that all caps are the same colour and the information is on the label.'

The problem could be getting some of the

multiples to change. They have their own ideas about the most appropriate colours to use to sell their products, and causing confusion could actually encourage customers to stay loyal. If buying milk in a different supermarket means you end up with the wrong milk, you might well be tempted to stick with your usual. Helping customers become unfaithful shoppers is not in the supermarket's interests.

Boots claim to be following market trends and have no plans to change. The same with Waitrose. And Gateway/Somerfield said that they had no plans at the moment but could foresee a time in the next few years when all retailers would use only white caps for all types of milk. They admitted their main interest in such a move: using only white caps would be cheaper.



Colour chaos among polybottles and cartons

## How they colour code your milk

SUPERMARKET	SKIMMED	SEMI-SKIMMED	WHOLE
ASDA	Red	Green	Blue
BOOTS	Light blue	Red	Blue
CO-OP	Red	Green	Blue
DAIRY CREST	Red	Green	Blue
GATEWAY/SOMERFIELD	Turquoise	Red	Blue
LORD RAYLEIGH'S FARMS	Turquoise	Green	Blue also Red
MARKS & SPENCER	Red	Green	Blue
SAFAWAY	Red	Green	Blue
SAINSBURY	Blue	Red	White
TESCO	Green also White	Red also White	Blue also White
WAITROSE	Red	Green	Blue
DOORSTEP BOTTLES	Blue/Silver	Red/Silver	Silver



# CHECKOUT

## Alternatives to meat

**The image of vegetarian food glows with health. But, asks Checkout, just how healthy are some of the meat alternatives on the market?**

Ten years ago, little was done by mainstream manufacturers to cater for vegetarians. Now that's all changed. Supermarket shelves are stacked with products to tempt both the devout veggie as well as the increasing number of people who say they are eating less meat.

Our Checkout investigators have looked at a range of vegetarian sausages and burgers available in supermarkets and health food stores and asked how they compare with

their meaty counterparts. And our conclusion? These products are not as healthy as most people would expect. Most of the products we sampled are high in fat and some are as fatty as regular meat sausages and burgers. With overall fat content ranging from over 80% of calories to under 30%, you'll need to choose carefully if you're looking for a healthy product.

And these products don't come cheap. The most expensive cost over £9.00 a kilo — that's more expensive than prime steak. With most products based on soya and vegetable ingredients and some containing relatively large amounts of water, the high cost of ingredients can hardly be used to justify the high prices. In some cases it would appear manufacturers are trying to cash in on the growing interest in vegetarian food.



Hydrogenated fat in this one...

Ten out of twelve brands of veggie sausages and seven out of eleven of the veggie burgers we sampled are high in fat — that is, more than 50% of their calories come from fat. The fattiest products in our survey, from Granovita, contain over 80% of their calories from fat — that's fatter than a regular pork sausage. And when we looked at the amounts of saturated fat in the products, the picture was no more reassuring — over half the products (11 out of 20 for which are able to get information) were also high in saturated fat (more than 15% of calories).

We also found that the majority of manufacturers are using hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable oil and fats in their products. Hydrogenation is the synthetic hardening of vegetable oils, a process which creates trans-fatty acids, a form of fat that is now widely believed to be at least as harmful to health as saturated fat. Companies using hydrogenated oils include Granose, Realeat, Linda McCartney, Sainsbury's, Quorn, M&S, Cauldron Foods and Vegetarian Choice. Only Tivall, Tesco, Granovita and Good Life do not use hydrogenated oils in their products. The ingredients list should indicate if oils or fats are hydrogenated but manufacturers may use phrases such as 'vegetable fat' or 'vegetable margarine' to disguise the presence of hydrogenated fat.

Whether or not manufacturers



...while this one has no hydrogenated fat — but an incredible 82% of the energy is from fat.

use hydrogenated fat, they may use highly saturated fats from vegetable sources, such as palm, coconut and palm kernel. There is conflicting evidence over whether these tropical fats are as harmful to health as the saturated fat in animal and dairy foods. We contacted the companies and found a number of manufacturers using palm and coconut fats but you won't



Hydrogenated fat in this one, though Linda's message says the ingredients are 'wholesome'...

### What's in a veggie burger?

Soya is the most popular ingredient used to make vegetarian burgers and sausages and has the advantage of being a valuable source of protein and, as a raw ingredient, of being low in fat. The majority of the products in our survey contained soya and several contained other bean and vegetable

bases.

We included two products made of Quorn in our survey. Quorn is made from a sheet of fungal mycelia bound together with egg albumin which means that it is not suitable for vegans. It is a good source of fibre, biotin, iron and zinc, and is low in fat.



# CHECKOUT

## Fatty substitutes for meat — at premium steak prices

SAUSAGES	Price/Kg	Fat/100g	% kcal from fat	% kcal from sat fat	Hydrogenated fat
GRANOVITA Vegetable wieners	£9.25	31.0	82%	36%	No
GRANOVITA Vegetable frankfurters	£8.75	27.0	81%	35%	No
VEGETARIAN CHOICE Vegetable protein sausages	£4.95	12.8	62%	39%	Yes
GRANDOSE Vegetarian sausages	£5.00	13.0	62%	?	Yes
TIVALL Vegetarian sausages	£8.87	15.0	62%	7%	No
TESCO Vegetarian sausages	£6.30	16.0	61%	7%	No
REALEAT Vege Bangers	£2.92	12.2	59%	?	Yes
LINDA McCARTNEY Vegetarian sausages	£5.68	13.8	57%	12%	Yes
M&S ST MICHAEL Vegetable sausages	£4.66	13.5	57%	26%	Yes
CAULDRON FOODS Premium sausages	£4.22	10.5	54%	24%	Yes
GOOD LIFE Bean bangers	£4.62	13.9	45%	6%	No
QUORN Lincolnshire-style sausages	£6.64*	4.5	31%	13%	Yes
<b>BURGERS</b>					
VEGETARIAN CHOICE Vegetable protein burgers	£4.95	13.3	61%	37%	Yes
SAINSBURY'S Vegetarian burger	£3.95	15.8	58%	26%	Yes
SAINSBURY'S Spicy bean burger	£4.42	14.5	52%	25%	Yes
TIVALL Char-grilled burgers	£6.50	10.5	53%	9%	No
REALEAT Vege burgers	£5.68	15.0	52%	?	Yes
TESCO Char-grilled 1/4lb burgers	£6.12	9.0	51%	6%	No
CAULDRON FOODS Vegetable burgers	£7.47	9.2	51%	17%	No
BIRDS EYE Steak House vegetable burgers	£4.95	8.1	45%	26%	Yes
GOOD LIFE Mexican cutlets	£4.83	9.7	45%	3%	No
QUORN Burgers	£6.95	4.6	35%	18%	Yes
TIVALL Vegetarian drumsticks	£8.87	6.0	32%	3%	No

\* Estimated from mixed pack of Bar B Q sausages, burgers and fillet.

? Information unavailable

necessarily find this information on the label.

Though the jury remains out on the tropical oils issue, there is agreement that cutting down on all types of fat is beneficial for health. A vegetarian diet can be healthier, but only if you're eating a wide variety of foods including lots of fruit and vegetables and starchy carbohydrates. A diet high in processed foods, even if they are vegetarian, will not provide the same kind of health benefits. And as our research shows, simply swapping meat for the meat alternatives in our survey will not guarantee a lower fat diet.

## The market for meat alternatives

Contrary to popular belief, the numbers of strict vegetarians has not increased significantly over recent years. Estimates are around 4%, depending on which survey you read. However, the number of so-called 'demi-vegetarians' have been reported to account for up to 20% of the population.

Providing foods for vegetarians and the growing number of 'demi-vegetarians' is a booming business. In 1993, the market research company

Mintel, claimed that sales of all types of vegetarian foods, including staples such as fruit and vegetables, as well as dairy products, meat alternatives, pulses and specialist foods, topped £11 billion in 1991, up from £8.8 billion in 1988. In addition, the sales of meat alternatives such as Quorn and tofu increased dramatically from £6.6 million to £25.5 million.

Vegetarian ready-meals have also seen growth. Findus claims that when the frozen ready meals market

was stagnant, vegetarian frozen ready meals kept growing. Cauldron Foods, who manufacture tofu, estimate that the vegetarian market accounts for at least 5% of the £360 million frozen ready meal market and shows steady growth. Realeat have estimated that by the end of the century over 50% of the population are likely to be actively cutting down on meat, and there are plenty of manufacturers that are poised to profit from this trend.



# CHECKOUT

## Loopy labels

### Watch the Weight Watchers (1)

Anyone buying slimming foods will be familiar with the let-out clause *'This product can help slimming or weight control only as part of a calorie controlled diet.'*

The idea is that eating the product cannot guarantee you will lose weight — you have to watch the calories in your whole diet. Fair enough, but we might at least expect the product to give us a helping hand with fewer calories than the regular version.

A leading brand name in slimming products is Weight Watchers, made by Heinz and carrying the endorsement of Weight Watchers International. One of our readers is fond of chocolate biscuits and was pleased to be able to buy their very tempting Real Chocolate Chip Cookies, boasting 40% less fat. Mmmm — and slimming tool!

The cookies are made for Heinz by Walkers of Scotland 'using only the finest ingredients' (principally white flour, sugar, starch and hydrogenated fat) and claim they 'contain at least 40% less fat for a calorie controlled healthier

choice.'

We hunted round for a comparison. Heinz don't appear to make a regular, non-Weight Watchers version, so we plumped for brand leader Maryland. Their Double Choc Cookies with Real Chocolate Chips have more fat but both products give you 99 kcals for two biscuits. How is this possible? Answer: because Weight Watchers cookies have extra sugar and starch and make their biscuits more than 10% larger.

The Weight Watchers cookies are packed in pairs to provide an 'individually wrapped portion' giving 'Less than 100 Calories'. Perhaps it is this packaging that justifies their 'calorie controlled healthier choice' as it can be an effort to undo the cellophane seals. What else but the extra cellophane could explain Weight Watchers' higher price: £4.28 per kilo against Maryland's £2.80 per kilo?

The same calories per biscuit



### Watch the Weight Watchers (2)

Heinz have also entered the competitive breakfast cereal market with their delicious-looking Weight Watchers Perfect Balance Toasted Multi-Grain Flakes, a product which combines 'the goodness of maize, wheat and rice' and screams 'No Added Sugar' on the front, and adds 'No Artificial Colour, Flavour or Preservative' on the back.

And, oh yes, it is 'a great tasting, calorie controlled choice'.

First, it may have no added sugar, but Oh my word — it is sweet. There may be no artificial this and that, but — there is a heap of the artificial sweetener Acesulfame Potassium with every flake.

Second, we don't think much of the 'goodness of maize, wheat and rice' suggestion, when the wheat is actually just wheat bran — a part of the grain which contains no nutrients, only fibre.

And lastly we are not greatly impressed by its low calorie and high fibre credentials. Perfect Balance has the same calories as Bran Flakes, and more calories than All Bran, while containing barely half the fibre. Cereals without added bran, like Shreddies, Shredded Wheat and Weetabix, have similar levels of fibre to Perfect Balance, and their calories range from 325 to 342kcal/100g, compared with Perfect Balance's 318kcal/100g.

### Bag snacks news (2)

Golden Wonder, while admitting to international theft, are perhaps not being strictly honest about exactly what it is they are stealing.

Their Bandidos totilla chips boast that their 'flavour bandits' are 'stealing flavours from around the world'.

Try Tomato Salsa flavour: 'From deep in the heart of the mountains of old Mexico ... our Conchita's own recipe for Tomato Salsa — delicious ripe tomatoes with a spicy dash of chillies as hot as the midday sun.'

But the ingredients list doesn't mention tomatoes. It lists maize, oil and something called Tomato Salsa Flavour, consisting of 'flavourings' along with saccharin, monosodium glutamate and its sister, sodium guanylate. Suspecting that the golden boys had stolen a march on us, by keeping the tomatoes to themselves, we asked GW how many tomatoes they had in each pack.

The answer is less than a quarter of a gram — the flavourings include 0.6% powdered tomato. Still, that's more than we thought.

Just for the record, we thought we should check other crisps for the authenticity of the flavourings. For example, could vegetarians eat or not eat a meat-flavoured crisp?

We asked Brannigans, whose thick cut potato crisps 'are made to traditional standards'. What about their Roast Beef and Mustard flavour crisps (flavouring and monosodium glutamate)? Can a vegetarian eat these with a clear conscience?

'I'm afraid not', they said. 'There's a small amount of beef fat, and some lactose.' Lactose? That's surely news to people with lactose intolerance.

It is time companies were obliged to list the actual ingredients, and not hide behind this cover-all word 'flavourings'. (For more on flavourings, see Spreading Problem on page 20.)

### Bag snacks news (1)

If you sit in a pub long enough you will find something worth laughing at. KP's dry roasted peanuts boast on the front of the pack 'Prime Peanuts — Foil Fresh' which doesn't take long to interpret as meaning that the peanuts themselves may not be fresh, though the foil surely is.

Well, if that's not what they

meant, then what did they mean? Turning the pack over and using your glass to magnify the small print, you find an odd phrase: 'Packaged in a protective atmosphere'.

Again this is open to some mistaken meanings — what is a protective atmosphere... something arranged by Group 4? Are the nuts packed by convicts?

Of course KP only want to tell you

that, as they told us, 'the packs are nitrogen flushed, thus removing any oxygen.' This apparently 'enhances product freshness' which actually means it extends the shelf life — so the product may be even older than you thought.

But it doesn't explain your headache after a long night in the pub!



# One word of criticism — and they'll sue!

**New anti-defamation laws in the USA will cover food products and prevent consumer criticism. Ronnie Cummings, USA Co-ordinator of the Pure Food Campaign, put this report on the Internet.**

'Food Slander' laws, now in force in at least eleven states, make it a civil crime to denigrate or criticise food products without a 'scientific' basis. Industry lobbyists admit that these laws are probably unconstitutional in most states, but their real purpose is to intimidate activists, journalists, and concerned consumers.

Something stinks. And it's not just left-over junk food or contaminated meat from filthy slaughterhouses. It's not just the scent of pesticides on fruits and vegetables. It's not just the pus, antibiotics and growth hormones souring the public attitude toward BST dairy products and other untested genetically engineered foods.

It's more than just this. It's in the tap water, the topsoil, the air. In the alarming statistics on increasing cancer, food poisoning, chemical hyper-sensitivity, antibiotic resistance, allergies, sterility, and immune disorders. But now perhaps the most putrid smell of all seems to be wafting out of the halls and back rooms of Congress, where a bipartisan effort is underway to weaken already inadequate food safety laws.

Instead of government and industry dealing with the ever more serious crisis of food and environmental contamination and deteriorating public health and nutrition, we are being slapped with cutbacks in food and environmental safety, and threatened with food defamation laws.

Instead of giving us what we want: affordable, healthy, natural, clean food — safety-tested and clearly labelled to enable consumers to exercise free choice — the powers that be seem intent upon taking away our right to know what's been done to our food. Instead they deliver another message: Let them eat hormones, faeces, chemicals, dioxin, antibiotics... Government and corporation hacks use so-called 'risk assessment' and 'cost accounting' to tell us it's 'too expensive' to clean-up food industry practices, even as the Centres for Disease Control admit that 20 to 80 million people in the USA get food poisoning every year; and published data indicating increasing environmental and food-related cancer rates.

Eighteen months after the introduction of America's first major genetically engineered food product, Monsanto's synthetic Bovine Growth Hormone, the Pure Food campaign and allied activist groups have all but destroyed BST economically. Recent statistics indicate that 95% of the nation's dairy farmers are

boycotting the drug, while a full 80% of consumers still want it taken off the market or labelled — so that they can avoid it.

Since 1993 E-coli and other forms of food poisoning appear to have grown worse. Promises by the USDA to do more than just visually inspect beef and poultry carcasses (for one to nine seconds each) have for the most part gone unfulfilled. Recent studies show that the majority of feedlot cattle are regularly being dosed with antibiotics in their food, despite an emerging antibiotic resistance problem in both children and adults. Pesticide residue levels in fruits,

vegetables, baby foods, and grains remain high, with the National Academy of Sciences warning in 1994 that children may be ingesting dangerous levels of carcinogens — even under the current EPA 'allowable limits'.

And finally, as independent scientists point out, there are still no reliable safeguards or limits protecting consumers from ingesting multiple pesticide residues simultaneously, nor on protecting consumers from ingesting dioxin (spewed out of incinerators burning PVC plastics) — known to concentrate in fish, meat, and dairy products — said to be 'the most dangerous substance ever produced by man.'

■ For more information contact:

Pure Food Campaign  
860 Highway 61E Little Marais, MN 55614, USA  
Phone (218)-226-4164

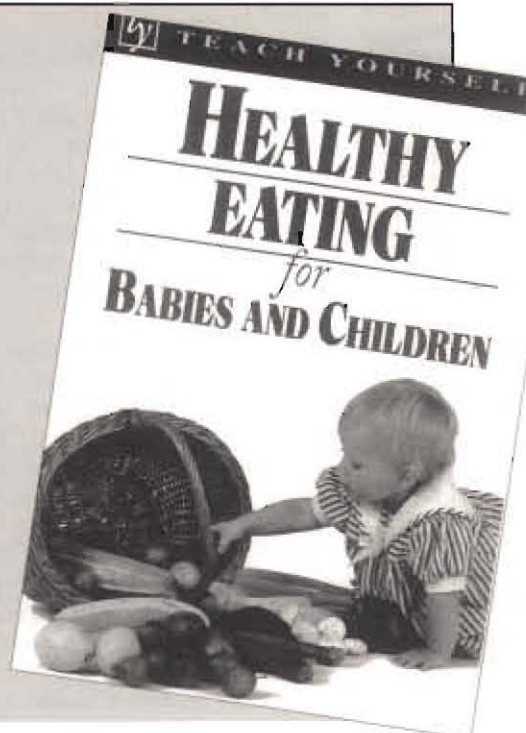
## NEW BOOK!

'Take this pill before you are pregnant'  
'Liver is full of iron, but don't eat liver'  
'Don't give strawberries to a three month baby'  
'There are forty additives banned for babies'  
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Are you confused by all the messages — some official, some commercial, and many conflicting — about feeding your children. Are you worried you might not be giving them all the nutrients they need for their present and future good health?

If so, this authoritative yet down-to-earth guide will give you the information you need to be confident that you are making the right choices for your family. And it gives a range of gardening tips and the most delicious recipes ever devised!

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### The book covers:

- health eating before conception
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Commission writers Mary Whiting and Tim Lobstein can be ordered from the Food Commission for £6.99 (includes £1 p&p). Just send your name and address and a cheque payable to *The Food Commission* to Publications Department, The Food Commission, 3rd Floor, 5/11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH.



## Viewpoint Feedback



Joanna Blythman's attack on the 'low fat industry' (see our last issue) prompted a flood of letters. Here are some extracts.

**Yes, thanks to Joanna Blythman** for her comments on the low-fat sub-foods that litter the food shelves these days. And yes, it is worse in America. On a visit there 3 years ago, I was hard put to find a proper yogurt, and proper milk for my morning cereal (muesli). Only health shops might have them. One could put a synthetic tasting 'half-and-half' (light cream) into the milk, but it wasn't very nice.

Funny thing, too, how they can charge the same price for low fat milk and yogurt as for the normal product — then someone sells the fat for butter and maybe doubles their money. Yummy.

**R Franklin, Stroud.**

**I couldn't agree more heartily with Joanna**

Blythman. I edit a retail magazine and come across all manner of horrors masquerading as food (lamb and mint 'lollipop' anyone?!). Denuding food of its taste and nutritional value in the name of 'healthy eating' is a crime against our taste buds, and ultimately a danger to our well-being.

Unfortunately, promoting real butter, real bread, real cheese, real food, seems to be confined to the recipe features in the quality press. To help educate a wider audience, anything low fat/fake fat/low cal/no cal should have a 'taste warning' on it, e.g. 'Eating this product may in rare instances help you lose weight as part of a calorie-controlled diet, but you may not enjoy it; it is no substitute for the real thing'.

**D Thomas, London SW17**

**I wish to agree with Joanna Blythman's**

condemnation of margarines and low-fat spreads of all kinds. I congratulate Joanna on her article and commend to her the following two points.

1. Natural fat as part of a reasonably mixed diet does not cause obesity. The consumers of low-fat foods who, as she has observed, are enormously fat, have put on weight because they make up with refined carbohydrate foods — white flour and sugar with everything. They are probably eating about 100 lbs of sugar per head per annum.

The late T L Cleave demonstrated persuasively how refined carbohydrates, not dietary fats, caused obesity, diabetes, and coronary heart disease.

2. Cleave pointed out that the rising consumption of sugar during the 19th century led to the explosion of coronary thrombosis, starting in this country in the 1920s. In Scotland, the first case of coronary thrombosis (acute myocardial infarction) was recorded at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary in 1928. One reliable medical writer noted that, in the 1920s in the Western Infirmary, one of the big hospitals in Joanna Blythman's native Glasgow, he did not see a single case of coronary thrombosis. It is maybe significant that we did not begin eating margarine until the turn of the century; but we have been eating butter since the dawn of history.

**Dr W W Yellowlees, Perthshire.**

**Joanna Blythman echoes all I believe about fat**

reduced foods. Perhaps she could do a similar job on the processed organic junk food currently swamping the shelves of so-called health food shops and the 'green' supermarkets.

It seems to me the people involved in producing fast food and food replacement snacks are given a licence to print money when they are awarded the organic 'symbol of food excellence' — and as for the Soil Association awarding the symbol to denatured milk I am sure Lady Eve Balfour would have taken no part in such hypocrisy. Instead she would no doubt have fought with great feeling and conviction against it and many other aspects of the symbol scheme such as the use of conventional seeds and transplants permitted for use in organic growing.

**C Wye, Stow-On-The-Wold, Glos.**

**Three cheers for Joanna Blythman.** As a freelance Nutritionist I run short courses in nutrition.

Delegates are shocked to discover exactly what goes into their food. I agree with Joanna's view

that good quality food with flavour and a high nutrient density should be the aim of food manufacturers and not the cop-out low fat, artificially sweetened versions of the real thing. However such a change must also go hand in hand with a change in people's beliefs about food, health and their own body image.

**Dr C Fenn FRSH FRGS, Aberdeen.**

**Whilst I agree with many of the points raised by**

Joanna Blythman, I cannot concur with her assessment that all low fat products are tasteless and have little potential to improve the nutritional quality of the national diet.

Milk is a nutritionally important food which can actually be enhanced by the removal of a proportion of the fat without seriously impairing its taste (in fact many people prefer low fat dairy products). Whilst margarine would have few supporters for its taste, not everyone would support her contention that butter is a must on a slice of bread (particularly if cheese is also added). Whether butter is better for you than margarine is not an important argument as low fat spreads have substantially less fat than both and meet the needs of those merely looking for something to spread on their bread. Very large improvements in the fat composition of pork have been achieved through selective breeding and attention to feeding without any apparent adverse reaction from consumers.

This not only means that consumers are getting a low fat meat but that less pork fat is made available for inclusion in processed food products.

The notion that high fat foods are somehow more satisfying and satiating is not borne out by appetite research. In fact fat is the least satiating of all the nutrients and diets composed of foods high in fat consistently lead to excessive intake of calories. Neither is it strictly correct to contend that full fat meats and dairy products are in some way more 'natural' than the reduced fat versions as dairy cow herds and domestic animals produced for meat have all been manipulated through breeding, rearing and feeding practices to produce far more fat than their original 'wild' relatives.

There is a lot of sense in what Joanna Blythman is saying about the fixation with low fat products as the only means to reducing the excessive consumption of fat in the UK diet today. However to condemn all reduced fat foods as 'unnatural' and sensorially inferior is as dubious as the prohibition of all full fat foods from a healthy diet.

**T Gill, Bucksburn, Aberdeen.**



# I'm sick of vegetarian hypocrisy



You don't eat meat and scorn those who do? Campaigning journalist and broadcaster James Erlichman calls your bluff.

**M**y childhood chum, Glen, and I were walking in the Arizona desert. We were there to re-discover stuff. All kinds of stuff. Walk miles and conversation is your only distraction. We talked about the early years of his marriage when I visited him in upper New York State where he worked, and still does, as a probation officer, keeping a few animals on a small holding. I remembered how his station wagon would sit in the driveway while his garage was a home for Hamburger, a steer Glen had raised for slaughter.

In the desert, trudging on, I asked what had happened to Hamburger. 'Oh, we fattened him up and sent him off to the local slaughter house,' Glen said.

Did you eat him, any bit of him? I asked. 'No way, couldn't eat Hamburger,' he said. 'We just took the money.'

I was smug. 'So you couldn't dare eat anything you had raised?'

'Oh that's no real problem,' said Glen. 'We kept pigs and chickens, and we ate them.' He described the slaughter of the pigs. 'Didn't like that much,' he said. 'Nice creatures pigs. But I grabbed a handful of food and walked toward them with a rifle. They came up to me, took a snout full of food and I blew their brains out. Hated it, tricking them. Awful.'

The chickens were easier. 'We had a chicken coop and I would grab the easiest one to catch. Took it outside, wrung its neck, cut its head off and then slit its guts with the feathers still on. Heaved the guts back in the coop and walked toward the kitchen. Can you believe it, the other chickens set about fighting over the guts. What disgusting animals they are.'

I tell you all this because, as much as I love my childhood chum, the story sums up for me our frequent hypocrisy toward food production. OK, organic vegans, your hands are clean. If you eat no meat or animal products and never buy vegetables whose yield or cosmetic appearance have been improved by fertilisers and pesticides, then you can be excused from this outburst of anger.

But the rest of us have a lot to answer for, and I speak, not as an organic vegan socialist, but as a reluctant and rather ashamed, capitalist carnivore. And conventional vegetarians, it is you, who most deeply annoy me in the hypocrisy stakes.

Could some one please tell me what vegetarian virtue there is in consuming the animal products — milk, cheese, cream, yoghurt and eggs — in large

quantities, of creatures — dairy cows and laying hens — that are subject to the most intense and cruel forms of animal agriculture? Better surely to kill them quickly for meat than to torture them while you vegetarians help siphon the protein from them, slowly. You don't escape just because you don't consume the flesh, for heaven's sake. It is as if the bank robber said: 'I enjoyed the proceeds from the hold-up, but I'm innocent because I did not pull the trigger.'

OK, so I have had my rant. That is what this delightful column is for and I am honoured to be asked to write for it. But the fact is that all of us — except organic vegans — have a lot to answer for. The real trick is that we have been distanced from food production, and especially the death of animals. We slaughter some 800 million beasts and poultry every year in Britain alone.

The food industry has helped us with this self-deception. Few of us buy meat from the butcher anymore. Most of us will remember buying slab meat from the counter, and the name and function was clear: BUTCHER. That was the previous generation. Then came the supermarket and the meat is in plastic packets with a coating of shrink wrap.

And now we have the ubiquitous ready made meal: lasagnes, shepherd's pies and Thai green curries, those frozen and cook-chilled meals which grace the shelves of our upmarket supermarkets. People think they are avoiding meat, but total consumption does not fall. We are part of a quiet revolution which exists only in our minds.

I watched protesters drinking milk and eating bacon sandwiches at Shoreham and Brightlingsea while they bemoaned the fate of calves and sheep being trucked across the channel. The principal cruelty is to breed, incarcerate, raise and slaughter animals in their millions in the first place. Where you take them to, adding relatively minor transport pain to their short, nasty lives, is almost neither here nor there.

Or, put most starkly: how do we cuddle our pets and yet kill for a great British breakfast?

## Viewpoint Feedback

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



## Global hunger

Despite British supermarket shelves overflowing with the best of the world's crops, this could become the world's hungriest decade. The US wheat harvest is expected to be six per cent down on last year, with stocks at their lowest for 20 years. Russia has suffered its worst drought since 1981 and the southern Africa region is calling for nearly \$100m in emergency food aid.

Oxfam is now raising concern over the potentially destabilising effects of increasing global poverty and hunger. Warning that one in four of the world's population now lives in a state of 'extreme poverty' the organisation is calling for a 'new vision for human security and poverty eradication' which it believes will be justified by western self-interest as much as by compassion.

Deepening poverty, it claims, is the driving force behind civil conflict and unprecedented numbers of refugees, and that sprawling urban slums and environmental degradation are leading to a vicious circle of social decline.

## Switch to low-fat milk

A seven week intensive media campaign in West Virginia, USA, encouraging consumers to switch from whole or semi-skimmed milk to 1% fat or skimmed milk — known as the 1% or less campaign — led to a doubling of sales of low fat milk from 18% to 37% of all milk sold. Overall milk consumption remained unchanged.

Run by the Washington-based non-profit group, Centre for Science in the Public Interest, the campaign included adverts showing a cup of milk having as much fat as five slices of bacon. It also included a 400lb block of fat displayed in the county courthouse to show a typical lifetime consumption of fat from milk. The cost of the campaign was around \$50,000, 'equivalent to one coronary-bypass operation'.

■ Details from Margo Wootan, CSPI, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20009-5728. Tel 00-1-202 332 9110, fax 00-1-202 265 4954.

## Pregnant and poor

A new report jointly published by Maternity Action and NCH Action for Children is expected to be launched in early November. It brings together updated material on the cost of eating healthily for pregnant women, and how these compare with benefit levels, and a survey of the foods actually being eaten by pregnant women and new mothers living on low incomes.

Watch this space for details.

## Better school food

The School Meals Campaign is calling for details of projects promoting healthy eating at school, to be added to their forthcoming directory of initiatives due next spring.

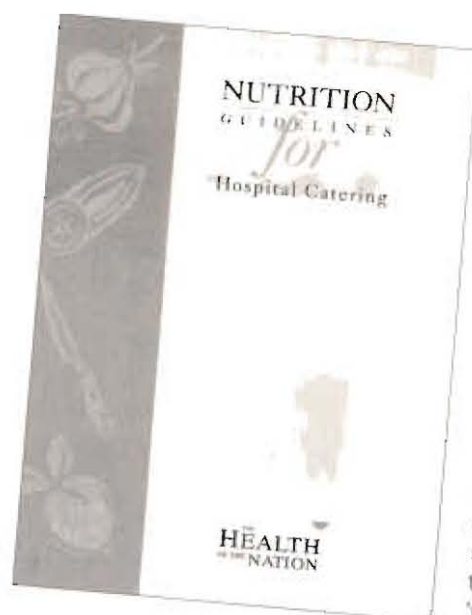
If you know of any healthy eating activity — not just school meals but tuck shops, classroom activities, out-of-school projects, indeed anything that can be shared with others involved in promoting better eating at school — please send you information, or your phone number, to Sam Church, School Meals Campaign, P O Box 402, London WC1H 9TZ (tel 0171 383 7638, fax 0171 413 0341).

## Men from Mars

Meanwhile Mars is promoting its vending machines for schools. Gain significant extra revenue from Mars confectionery and ice creams they tell caterers. Pupils spend 39p a day on confectionery but only 9p within schools. Increase the spend within your site with our free display equipment and our confectionery vendors ... up to 2000 bars per week. Visit us at the Local Authority Caterers Association Conference and collect your free Christmas present.

## NCC calls for benefit costings

A seminar organised by the National Consumer Council called for government acceptance of the need for proper costings of food, fuel, clothing and other essential items



hospital guidelines table we read *Salt: No specific recommendation*, although the accompanying text mentions the COMA recommendations to cut to 6g per day for adults. However it does not mention the more specific point that nearly all excess salt is added by manufacturers and caterers. The guidelines simply suggest looking for ways to lower the salt content 'while maintaining acceptability of the

The government-appointed Nutrition Task Force is due to meet for the last time as we go to press. Its various sub-groups include one on low income, and we will bring news of its activities in the next issue.

The sub-group working on hospital catering has not waited for the big meeting but has already brought out its report in the form of guidelines for hospital catering. There is a lot of white space in its eighty-odd pages, but more noticeable than all the white space are the two missing recommendations in the first table: one for salt and one for sugar.

Readers will recall our concern that the Department of Health seems to be backtracking on its expert COMA panels reports calling for lower salt consumption. In the

finished product'.

And sugar? Just the same. *Sugar: No specific recommendation.* The accompanying text is even worse, saying how valuable sugar can be for providing energy. Having then suggested that 'foods which contain sugar' can provide useful calories for patients with poor appetites, they go on to say: 'The use of low sugar products is therefore not normally necessary, nor is a decrease in sugar on the menu.'

A pity, because otherwise the document is good at bringing out the cultural and individual needs of various patients, and the value of meal times in a hospital day.

■ Copies of Nutrition Guidelines for Hospital Catering are available from Department of Health, P O Box 410, Wetherby, LS23 7LN.

which benefit payments are supposed to cover.

Previous research by the Family Budget Unit has shown that a modest-but-adequate budget for food for a single person ranges from £19 to £25 per week, while the amount in Income Support is estimated at around £16, although no figure has been disclosed by the government.

In 1992 a House of Commons Committee on Health heard evidence from the Department of Social Security admitting that they had no figures on which they could justify Income Support levels, and had no plans to create a costing for a realistic diet. The Committee recommended that they undertake

research on the costs of diets, but in 1995 the Secretary of State for Health said no action had been taken to implement this recommendation.

Indeed there is vigorous government opposition to the idea of costing the various elements of expenditure covered by Income Support. Their argument has largely been that if one person can manage on the payments made at present, then anyone can manage and there is no need to look into the matter further.

The NCC report, edited by Suzi Leather, is due to be published shortly.



## The increasing cost of a healthy diet

How easy is it to buy healthier food on a low income? The Food Commission went shopping around Camden's housing estates and Hampstead's villas to find out.

**S**even years ago this magazine reported a survey by then community dietitian Cathy Mooney comparing the cost of a shopping basket of 'healthy' foods recommended in her District Food

Policy with a similar basket of less healthy alternatives (*The Food Magazine*, issue 3, 1988). She was concerned that the cost and availability of the healthier options might be a problem, especially for people living in areas characterised by higher unemployment, one-parent families and council housing.

She found that the healthier items were generally more expensive and that this 'health premium' was greater in shops in lower income areas than higher income areas (based on census data provided by the borough).

This summer we repeated the survey using the same shopping baskets, and costing these in the same shops — eight nation-wide supermarket branches in Camden and Hampstead (a ninth had closed since 1988). As table 1 shows, the difference in cost between the healthier and less healthy alternatives has doubled, with the health premium now reaching a hefty 41% in the less affluent areas.

Since 1988 the availability of healthier alternatives has improved only marginally in less affluent areas, with up to six items from the healthier basket not available (compared with up to seven in 1988). And, as was found in 1988, more brand options and pack size options were available in the shops in more affluent areas.

Pack sizing can be a problem for shoppers if small quantities are required. When costing the baskets we took standard sized products, as near to 500g as we could. But for several items we found both larger and small quantities available, and in virtually every case the smaller item cost more per unit weight. If you have no freezer and your fridge is small, and you cannot store larger packs of foods that deteriorate rapidly, such as fresh milk or meat, this can add considerably to your shopping bill.

In our survey the added costs of buying products in small amounts appeared to be particularly severe for the less healthy basket of goods where, weight for weight, the extra cost could set a shopper back 44% more than buying larger versions. This small-items price premium was less marked for healthier items (13% extra

cost) and there was little difference between shops in deprived and more affluent areas.

Food and health policies recommend eating healthier diets, but if you live on a limited budget this can be hard to achieve. The most economical method of shopping is to find a national chain store in a deprived area, and to buy the foods that are less healthy in the biggest packs you can use.

If you are on a tight budget, and perhaps cannot store your food in large quantities, all the pricing factors will work against your health. You can least afford to buy healthier alternatives — and you may find it hard to find some healthier items that are available only in more affluent areas.

Lastly, as table 2 shows, the cost of buying healthy foods has been increasing at a faster rate than that for less healthy foods. Over the last seven years the cost of the less healthy basket rose 13% but the cost of the more healthy basket rose 31%. For many, the health premium must have become too big a burden to bear.

■ Research by Nicola Hollington and Carmel Newby, June 1995.



Table 1 The extra cost of healthy alternatives

	More healthy basket	Less healthy basket	Extra cost of health
Deprived areas	£15.25	£10.84	41% (20% in 1988)
More affluent areas	£14.87	£11.38	31% (16% in 1988)

Basket costs were calculated on 500g of each item, based on the cheapest available brand at a weight nearest to 500g.

Table 2 Healthy food prices have leapt ahead

	1988	1995	7 year increase
Average cost of less healthy basket	£9.78	£11.04	13%
Average cost of more healthy basket	£11.56	£15.11	31%

More healthy basket	Less healthy basket
Cottage cheese	Cheese spread
Edam	Cheddar cheese
Semi-skimmed milk	Whole milk
Polyunsaturated margarine	Soft margarine
Polyunsaturated vegetable oil	Ordinary vegetable oil
Wholemeal bread	White bread
Weetabix	Cornflakes
Brown rice	White rice
Wholemeal spaghetti	White spaghetti
Wholemeal flour	White flour
Tinned beans — reduced sugar	Tinned beans — added sugar
Tinned peaches in fruit juice	Tinned peaches in syrup
Low fat burgers	Regular burgers
Low fat mince	Regular mince
Low fat sausages	Regular sausages



## The Nursery Food Book

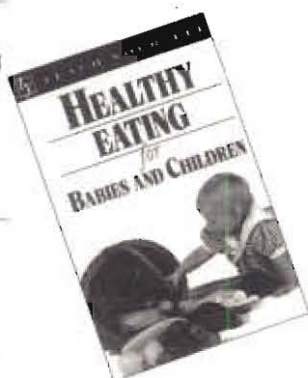
A lively and practical book exploring all issues relating to food, nutrition, hygiene and multicultural needs, with tips, recipes and sample menus along with cooking, gardening and educational activities involving food. Excellent handbook for nursery nurses and anyone caring for young children. £9.99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

## Healthy eating for babies and children

An authoritative yet down-to-earth guide giving you the information you need to confidently feed your family. £6.99 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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## The Unmanageable Consumer – Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentation

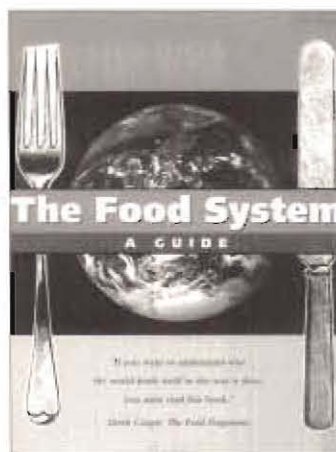
Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang  
Sage Publications, 6 Bonhill Street,  
London EC2A 4PU  
ISBN 0-8039-7745-X, £12.95 (£37.50  
hardback)

First, the good news. There's something in this book for (probably) everyone. Eleven chapters chock full of every possible angle on the consumer you can think of, plus a few new ones. For Gabriel and Lang the consumer is, simultaneously, a communicator, explorer, hedonist, victim and rebel, to name but a handful.

And there are plenty of startling facts: One estimate of the impact of biotechnology on consumers' food choices is that, if genetically modified corn was widely grown, it could affect 80% of the processed food on sale in the average supermarket. A study of American soldiers in the Second World War found that 'high on the priority list of soldiers on a beach-head during an invasion was the desire for a coke!'

The bad news? Although by and large the book is highly readable (if disorganised and occasionally repetitive), there are also plenty of good candidates for inclusion in Private Eye's Pseudo Corner. And, for the amount of research that has gone into this book (15 pages of references!), there is — in the end — too much in the way of breathless description and not enough analysis of what it all means nor, most important, what can be done about it. The concluding chapter is a cop-out, making no predictions or recommendations.

The authors, both university-based, may argue that their purpose was to raise questions about the nature of the contemporary consumer, rather than to answer them. But the book recognises that current patterns of consumption in the industrialised world may threaten the very survival of the human species. Given this fact, it is deeply disappointing that the book ends irresolutely. **JL**



## The Food System: A Guide

Geoff Tansey & Tony Worsley  
Earthscan Publications, 120  
Pentonville Road, London N1 9JN  
ISBN 1-85383-277-4, £15.95.

The web of relationships between producers and consumers of food is made transparent by this highly readable and absorbing book. It has been written for a wide audience, from students of food-related courses (studying anything from nutrition to retail management) to anyone concerned about the balance between public good and private interests, or food safety and the environment.

The book gives a comprehensive overview of the food system using up-to-date case studies, providing an excellent grounding for further investigations. Part 1 outlines the nature of food from environmental and social perspectives as it has emerged from ancient to modern systems of production. Part 2 exposes the nature of the producers and distributors as economic and political figures before concentrating on consumers, describing their various desires and the constraints which influence their purchasing decisions. Finally, in part 3, the authors examine the tools and institutions of legal control exerted by the key players through food policies.

The strength of this book is that it not only points to associations so often hidden or ignored, but goes further by arguing for changes to the food system in order to put the priority on safety and sustainability. **MD**

Our review of **The Food Mood Guide** for young people should have said: Available from Youth Club UK, 11 St Brides Street, London EC4A 4AT (tel 0171 - 353 2366) price £7.95.

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

## Spreading problem

A reader asks: What is this thing called spread? Why isn't it called jam?

The answer probably lies in the fact that the government has not yet achieved its target for 'removing red tape from business', which is to say that there are still some food

regulations in place.

Amongst these are the regulations defining jam. According to the regs, strawberry jam has to contain a minimum of



35g fruit per 100g. All jam (and jelly and marmalade) has to state the recipe used, in terms of fruit content and the sugar content.

What does a manufacturer do who wants to undercut the price by reducing the fruit? Or who wants to use fruit juice concentrate instead of sugar?

Avoid calling it jam, of course. The picture shows a 'Strawberry Spread' which contains fruit, apple juice concentrate, water and pectin. It has no fruit content or sugar content statement. It breaks the jam labelling laws — but then it isn't jam, is it?

(For a more bizarre version of the spreading phenomenon, see *Backbites*, page 20.)

## Free burgers

Following your request (FM30) for information on food firms activities in the classroom. Two years ago when I started teaching in London, I thought the British Gas Safety Competition might be worth entering. I was told on the phone that the gift vouchers were for 'meals out' so we entered the competition.

At the presentation, we discovered the vouchers were for McDonalds! I was very angry and wrote and told them that I would not enter pupils again.

Mrs E Milton, London NW10.

## Caroline Walker Trust

7th annual lecture  
Thursday November 16  
Speaker Chris Haskins, Chairman  
of Northern Foods, on Food in the  
Public Interest  
Details: Caroline Walker Trust  
0171 727 6751

## Apple Day is October 21st.

For details of activities  
contact Common Ground  
on 0171 379 3109.

## Breastfeeding: A woman's decision... A baby's right?

A conference organised jointly by The Maternity Alliance, The National Childbirth trust, The Health Visitors' Association and The Royal College of Midwives, to address the key issues in promoting breastfeeding and the impact of political, social and economic factors on a woman's choice.

Wednesday 22 November 1995  
The Institute of Education, Nr  
Russell Square, London.  
Cost £39.95 including lunch.

Contact Sarah Leigh,  
0181 566 1902.

## Food Policy: Making a feast of it.

A conference organised by the National Food Alliance aimed at developing food policies for seven government departments: Health, Social Security, Environment, Education, National Heritage, MAFF and the ODA.

Tuesday 19 December 1995  
Brunel Gallery, Russell Square,  
London  
£40.00 including lunch

Contact Peta Cottey  
0171 628 2442.



## Breakfast at the Post Office

There I was at the post office collecting my family allowance when this nice young person behind the counter said "Here, please have this as well" so I took it and had a look at it and do you know what it was? It was a lovely colour leaflet telling me how important it was to eat a healthy diet for all my family, see, here it is, and isn't it just lovely, all colourful and so informative, look and it even says how Cheerios is packed with wholegrain goodness and is low in fat and has lots of vitamins and is full of fibre and everyone loves it, see, even toddlers find it easy to eat with small fingers it says...

No kidding. Post Office Counters Ltd have been happily handing out promotional leaflets for Nestlé's Cheerios. Not



Free with every Family Allowance

their pocket that very day. And, of course, the leaflet forgets to mention that the 'cereal' is nearly one quarter sugar, and that the fat they use is partially hydrogenated. And that the vitamins are mostly added ones (indeed, you add some yourself when you pour on the milk).

In September, Ribena hit the headlines with their proposal to promote their soft drinks through the National Blood Transfusion Service, hoping to replace the regular cup of tea for blood donors with a carton of so-called juice and an advertising leaflet. As we go to press there has yet to be a decision on this.

Competition time: what other products could be promoted through our once-public services? What should Inland Revenue promote? Or the police?

## Professor sought

Marks & Spencer's is seeking a suitable candidate for the University of Cambridge Veterinary School, where the post of Professor of Farm Animal Health, Food Science and Food Safety needs filling. Why M&S? Because M&S, along with ten of their main suppliers, are paying £1.55m to fund the new chair.

## Soft drinks from birth

Not content to corner you when you collect your benefits, food companies will cover any available



surface with their product image. Even a baby's bottle. For a mere £2.50 you can buy a baby bottle emblazoned with your favourite soft drink logo — 7-Up, Pepsi and Diet Pepsi are all available, thanks to a tie-up between US bottle-makers Munchkin and the global giant PepsiCo Inc.

Gone are the cuddly teddy bears and fairy tale images. And if you think it might give an appalling nutritional message to new

### A soft drink?

mothers, and want to make a fuss about it, beware. An internal document from Pepsi Public Relations (leaked to Baby Milk Action) tells staff how to deflect any criticism that might be raised by 'special interest groups' who might 'take an extreme and very public stance against Munchkins.'

The main tactic is to accuse their critics of being kill-joys. Staff should say: 'This is a high quality product that consumers love because it's practical and fun.'

Doesn't it encourage parents to give their babies soft drinks? Staff should say: 'We don't advise parents what to feed their children. That decision should be based on advice from a doctor.'

Dentists and nutritionists don't like it? Staff should say: 'This is a child care issue, not a beverage or bottle issue. Parents decide what to feed their child. Munchkin has provided more educational information about bottle feeding on its package than any other baby bottle out there.'

And the final sting: 'Any royalties we (Pepsi) receive will help fund our Magic Playrooms for pediatric AIDS patients.'

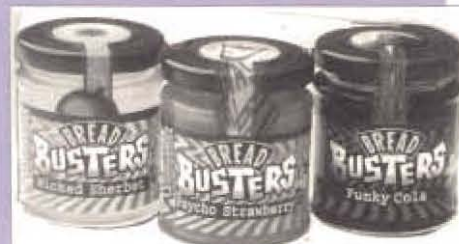
To complain, contact Shaun W Rhodes, Jumbo Distribution, Ashworth Estate, 124 Beddington Lane, Croydon CR0 4YZ, tel 0181-684 4448, fax 0181-689 0086 — and if Shaun says anything more useful than the pat responses above, let us know (and we'll pass it on to Baby Milk Action, who are campaigning against these products).

### No-a feeding bottle!



## Spreading disasters

The jam market is about to be squeezed by a new range of sweet spreads. We are no defenders of sugar-laden conserves, but at least jam has a bit of fruit in it. The latest idea from jam-makers Chivers Hartley is to push aside their competitors on the shelf with something called Bread Busters.



### Spreadz for kidz

Offered in three varieties, Psycho Strawberry, Funky Cola and Wicked Sherbet, the trade literature says the products are targeted at 10-12 year olds, and 'will be aspirational to younger brother/sisters and not alienate older children or parents' and the 'psychedelic packaging clearly highlights radically new range of spreads with real "street cred".'

They promise an advertising campaign in the children's press, and add 'Parental endorsement (is) achieved with the addition of vitamin C and added reassurance of Chivers branding.'

One more thing. Despite the use of the term strawberry, Psycho Strawberry contains only nature-identical flavouring compounds, not real strawberry. They call their product strawberry flavoured, which we feel is misleading and may be illegal — the term strawberry flavour (not flavoured) is normally required when there is no real strawberry present.

## Heart attack

An amusing little paper was presented to an Oxford seminar last May on the misrepresentation of science. The speaker, a Dr James McCormick of Trinity College Dublin, warned listeners not to put too much faith on the links between diet and heart disease.

Pointing out that the risk of heart disease had been linked to several factors, such as family history, being male, age and poverty, he added that it had also been linked to speaking English as a mother tongue, not keeping appointments and not having siestas. He dismissed dietary advice — 'the notion that modification of diet will prolong a healthy life is wishful thinking' and concluded:

'It would surely be better were we to encourage people to live lives of modified hedonism so that they may enjoy to the full the only life that they are likely to have.'

Incidentally, Ireland tops the European league table for coronary heart disease. The disease is the single biggest cause of death among men in their 40s and 50s.