

# The FOOD MAGAZINE

***Campaigning for safer, healthier food***

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## Functional foods make a fool of the law

**Misleading health claims and confusing nutritional messages are exposing the weakness of food labelling laws.**

New 'functional' food products claiming to bestow special health benefits are sailing close to the legal wind, according to a new report from the Food Commission. Only products with medical licences are permitted to claim they can treat or cure specific diseases, but the Food Commission's survey found over forty different food products on sale in supermarkets claiming or implying they can 'help prevent' diseases or improve physical health, although no direct evidence was offered to support the claims.

The survey also found nearly two hundred products containing added vitamins or minerals that would not normally be found in food of that sort, or in quantities that far exceed normal levels. Such products create nutritional confusion about which foods are normally good sources of nutrients, and make a nonsense of advice on how to eat a healthy balanced diet.

Functional foods are those which, on the basis of a specific ingredient, claim or imply a health benefit. The term has been coined by marketing companies and has no clear definition. It generally includes regular foods with added vitamins as well

as foods with particular novel ingredients, such as yoghurts with bacterial culture claiming to boost the immune system or biscuits with added fish oil claiming to prevent heart disease. The Food Commission's survey, which included a broad range of foods making health claims and/or containing added nutrients, found foods claiming to improve the immune system, prevent heart disease, reduce blood cholesterol, promote a healthy nervous system and maintain a healthy blood system — and yet little or no evidence to support the claims was provided, and several companies have fallen foul of the advertising watchdogs for exaggerating their benefits.

Instead of encouraging a balanced, wholesome diet that can supply a good range of nutrients, the manufacturers of functional foods claim, usually without any direct evidence, that a nutrient extracted from its original source and added to a very different food can offer all the original benefits. For example, a white, sliced bread claims: '...doctors and nutritionists recommend that everyone should eat oil-rich fish regularly. Countries with the highest consumption enjoy some of the lowest rates of coronary heart disease. If you can't eat enough oil-rich fish... you can still meet the needs of your family by choosing Heartwatch Omega Bread.' Such phrases are designed to make the purchaser feel their normal diet may be inadequate, and that only supplemented food, with the extra dose of certain nutrients, can make up the loss.

Food labelling regulations prohibit an express or implied claim that a food can prevent, treat or cure

a disease — meaning any 'injury, ailment or adverse condition, of body or mind' — unless the product has a medicinal product licence. A medicinal product, says the Medicines Control Agency, is 'any substance presented for treating or preventing disease' and a medicinal claim includes phrases like 'may help with', 'is said to benefit', 'traditionally used for' etc., as well as such claims as 'can lower cholesterol', 'strengthens the immune system' or 'stops cravings for...'

The Food Commission believes that many health claims being made on food products come very close to those prohibited under the Food Labelling Act and the Medicines Act, and a test case should be taken to establish the law. We also believe the claims, and the practice of adding large amounts of vitamins, minerals or other substances to foods which normally provide little or none, create confusion and undermine Department of Health targets to encourage better diets.

The Food Commission also wants to see clear rules on the types of claims that can be made, and the types of food they can relate to.

■ Research: Jane Bradbury, Vivien Lund.

■ Details on pages 9-11.

■ *Functional Foods Examined*, a Food Commission survey of over 700 products, their health claims and the law, price £125.

**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.

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## BSE, the Food Commission – and you!

Eleven TV appearances, 34 radio interviews, and over two hundred and eighty enquiries from journalists — all in the space of fifteen days!

We would not have been here to respond to the crisis, and to churn out the facts, the figures and the overall questioning of factory farming methods and government policy were it not for your continued support.

It is with pride that we reply to the interviewer's question 'And what is the Food Commission?' with our self-description 'A consumer watchdog and campaigning group, *completely independent of industry and government*'.

Independence seems to be something the government forgot to consider when it sent off its civil servants to sit as directors of food companies (see opposite). We know that MPs take directorships. We know that retiring civil servants move quickly from Whitehall to lucrative jobs in the very businesses they formerly regulated.

But now we find that directorships are quite compatible with service to the crown, and to be encouraged as a form of 'bridge-building'! It has the same ring of decency as the abandoning of consumer protection by de-regulating industry, in the name of 'removing unnecessary red tape'.

The same 'hands off' approach dominates the regulation of functional foods, whose ludicrous claims to provide 'health' with magic ingredients are so easily sabotaging the Department of Health's small attempts to encourage better, nutritionally balanced diets — not over-processed, over-hyped gimmicks.

And with olestra — the fat-free fat which depletes the body of essential nutrients — it could happen again, unless we campaign to stop its introduction here.

And together we CAN stop them. We are winning the campaign for MRM labelling (see page 7). We can win on olestra and functional foods, too. With your support, of course!

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## Support the Food Commission's campaign for safer, healthier food

If you are not a regular subscriber to *The Food Magazine* why not take out your own subscription and help support the Food Commission's work? We are a national not-for-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food and are completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising. *The Food Magazine* is published four times a year.

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# MAFF staff are directors of food companies

In an astonishing admission by the government of the links between the food industry and civil servants, *The Food Magazine* has learnt that five senior civil servants in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are also members of the boards of directors of leading companies with interests in food and agriculture. The companies include Cadburys, RHM and Dalgety, the animal feed makers.

The five are part of an incredible list of 57 civil servants whose activities would appear to present a conflict of interest between their duties as servants of the crown and their duties as company directors

protecting and promoting their company's trading interests. The list came to light when Lord Avebury queried a statement in the Scott report from the Foreign Office admitting that staff were sitting on the board of the armaments company Vickers. In a written reply to him, the Ministry of Defence listed the 57 civil servants and quoted a Cabinet Office booklet published in 1993 which set out the rules for civil servants taking up directorships for 'developmental' reasons or 'on an *ex officio* basis' saying that the directorships should be non-executive, unpaid and that 'conflicts of interest should be avoided'.

As company directors are legally liable for the trading activities of the company, there is not only a distinct possibility for a conflict of interest, especially where the civil servant has official duties in an area of work in which the company has a trading interest, but there is also the possibility that the civil servant could be liable for any improper trading or misrepresentation of company financial status. These latter liabilities might be a disincentive to take on a directorship. But fear not — the government has accepted that any civil servant-director whose company gets into trouble will have all their costs covered by their department (i.e. the tax paying public).

And, of course, directors make important decisions about how to spend profits — and whether to make donations to party funds.

The table below lists the details we have obtained. They relate to food-related company directorships held by civil servants during 1995.

## Conflicts of interest? Civil servants on the board of food or agriculture companies

Civil servant	Office	Company	Appointed to board	Company sales and profit	Party donations
Mr A R Bourne	MAFF Agriculture Resources Policy Branch	Albert Fisher: multinational food sourcing and distribution	1994-	£1424m, £35m (1994)	
Mr R A Hathaway	MAFF Cereal Set Aside Division	RHM (formerly Ranks Hovis McDougal): cereals and food ingredients, part of Tomkins	1993-	Tomkins: £3725m, £303m (1995)	Tomkins: £52,000 to Tory party (1994)
Mr G A Hollis	MAFF Milk Pigs Eggs and Poultry Division	Dalgety: animal feed, petfood, Spillers, Golden Wonder, additives and ingredients	1992-	£4906m, £93m (1995)	
Dr M M Parker	MAFF Environment and Fisheries International	Cadbury (in Cadbury Schweppes): Coca-Cola UK, drinks, confectionery	1993-	C-Schweppes £4030m, £479m (1994)	
Mr R G Purnell	MAFF Flood and Coastal Defence Division	HR Wallingford: hydraulics and civil engineering	1994-	£15m, £? (1993)	
Mr C V Balmer	Ministry of Defence AUSMS Division	Marks & Spencer: food and clothing retailers	1993-	£6807m, £924m (1995)	£40,000 to Tory party (1995)
Mrs N Oppenheimer	Lord Chancellor's Dept, Finance & Establishment	Marks & Spencer: food and clothing retailers	1995-	£6807m, £924m (1995)	£40,000 to Tory party (1995)
Mr R Allen	Dept of Social Security, Head of A Division	Marks & Spencer: food and clothing retailers	1994-	£6807m, £924m (1995)	£40,000 to Tory party (1995)
Mr J F Stoker	Dept of Environment (until 1995)	Hanson — owns Seven Seas, New Era (and Imperial Tobacco)	1991-	£11,199m, £1346m (1994)	£100,000 to Tory party (1994)
Mr D Y A McFaden	Scottish Office, Locate in Scotland Dept	United Distillers, owned by Guinness	1990-	Guinness £4690m, £915m (1994)	
Mr E Mackay	Scottish Office, National health Service	Moray Firth Maltings, owned by Scottish & Newcastle	1988-	Scottish & Newcastle: £2022m, £264m (1995)	Scottish & Newcastle: £50,000 to Tory party (1995)
Mr L Jones	DTI (until 1995)	Glynwed Consumer Products: Aga, Rayburn, owned by Glynwed International	1994-	Glynwed Int: £1025m, £67m (1994)	Glynwed Int: £40,000 to Tory party (1994)
Mr M K O'Shea	DTI, Under Secretary FRM Division	Seven Seas Ltd: food supplements, owned by Hanson	1992-	Hanson £11,199m, £1346m (1994)	Hanson: £100,000 to Tory party (1994)

Sources: Food Commission, Hansard Written Answers WA119-122 (H of Lords) 1.2.96, and the Labour Research Department.



## ASA upholds our complaints against Gaio

Three complaints made by the Food Commission against the cholesterol-lowering health claims made by MD Foods for their yoghurt-style product Gaio (see the *Food Magazine* 31) have been upheld by the Advertising Standards Authority.

Leaflets and advertisements promoting Gaio claimed that the

product was unique because 'it is made with Causido culture which can actively help to reduce cholesterol levels.' The leaflets showed a graph appearing to demonstrate the cholesterol reduction achievable.

The Food Commission complained that the cholesterol-lowering effect was not sufficiently proven in scientific trials, that the graph exaggerated the effect and that the comparison with other yoghurts was misleading as they, too, have been found to have some cholesterol-lowering effects. All these complaints were upheld by the ASA who found the claims were unsupported, the graph 'grossly exaggerated the effects' and the advertisers had 'exaggerated the potential benefits of their product.'

■ See our reports on functional foods, pages 1 and 9-11.



## Fatty food eaten out

MAFF figures for the sort of food we eat outside the home show that over 50% of the energy in these foods comes from fat — compared with a recommended 30 to 35%. Discounting soft drinks, sweets and alcohol, the survey found that 50.3%

of calories were from fat, including 19.2% from saturated fat. The equivalent figures for food eaten at home were 40.5% and 15.7%.

■ *National Food Survey 1994*, tables B9 and C3, MAFF, 1995, £26, ISBN 011 2430007.

## Ethical retailing is 'Out of this World'

'The most radical experiment in British retailing for one and a half centuries' is how the *Sunday Telegraph* described Out of this World, the ethical grocery store chain that held its first AGM in Newcastle on Saturday 23rd February, writes Simon Wright.

The unique feature of Out of this World is that it is a co-operative wholly owned by its 3,770 members, and you have to be a member to shop in one of its outlets, currently established in Newcastle, Bristol and Nottingham. The AGM saw over a hundred members from as far apart as Belfast, London and Glasgow spending the day discussing in detail a number of social and environmental issues such as product selection criteria and store presentation.

The Out of this World management team was there to receive at first hand the praise and criticism of its customers — an initiative designed to allow consumers to help shape where and how they buy their food. Managing Director Richard Adams explained how Out of this World had grown from a concept scrawled on the back of an airline sick-bag to his current vision of 'consumerism in support of the progressive and creative'. Out of this World has set itself demanding growth targets for 1996-7 when it will find out if there are enough ethical consumers in the UK to put their money where their mouths are.

■ For more information on Out of this World ring 0191-272 1601

## Nuts banned from baby foods

Evidence that peanut allergy is on the increase have led manufacturers Boots and Cow & Gate to review their use of nut extracts in baby foods, and the makers of Kamillosan cream are reformulating their product. Recent estimates have put the numbers of children allergic to peanuts at over 65,000 in the UK, with over a thousand at risk of anaphylactic shock and sudden death. The rising numbers of children sensitive to peanuts is thought to be due to the use of peanut derivatives in baby

products, including nipple creams and baby foods and milks.

'About a quarter of children have a genetic predisposition to developing allergies, and if they are exposed to allergenic chemicals at an early age it can sensitise their immune system and make subsequent exposures potentially lethal,' said Dr David Hide of the Asthma and Allergy Research Centre, whose study found about one child in 80 showing adverse reactions to eating peanuts.

## Shiny red apples not for veggies

What could be more suitable for a vegan than an apple? Think again, reports Jane Bradbury

Modern fruits come not only blemish-free, uniform-sized and air-freighted from the far end of the globe; they come treated with a coating that might be derived from insects. Some apples, and almost all citrus fruit, are treated after harvest with a wax which could be shellac — an insect secretion — or beeswax, or a combination of both. As these are both from animal sources, fruit treated with these products are unsuitable for vegans. So how do you know whether the fruit you have just bought has been waxed? It's not easy.

If citrus is not labelled as unwaxed, then it's a safe bet that it is waxed. Waxed fruit do not have to say they are waxed with insect-derived waxes or other waxes — indeed they don't have to say if they are waxed at all. If they are unwaxed, then

the supermarkets like to tell you: Waitrose, Safeway and Sainsbury's sell labelled unwaxed oranges and lemons.

Apples are more likely to have been treated if they are American or French, and red apples such as Red Delicious are particularly likely. Sainsbury and Safeway don't sell apples which have been treated with beeswax or shellac, but Waitrose, Tesco, Somerfield, Marks & Spencer and the Co-op do. We asked the supermarkets why they did not display the information and one supermarket said that the more information given to consumers, the more chaos it causes, and that giving information causes the customer to start asking questions!

### Fruit with shellac or beeswax

STORE	APPLES	CITRUS	OTHER
CO OP	✓	✓	✗
M&S	✓ Red Delicious.	✓	Melons
SAFEGWAY	✗	✓	?
SAINSBURY	✗	✓	✓ Melons, Pineapples
SOMERFIELD	✓	✓	?
TESCO	Red Delicious, Empire, McIntosh	✓	?
WAITROSE	✓ Some American fruit, Fuji	✓	✓ (A little)

(Information supplied by the supermarkets.)



## COMA must decide olestra's future

The 'fat-free fat' product olestra, recently given approval in the United States, is to be evaluated by the Department of Health's expert COMA Panel on Novel Foods. The eventual fate of olestra in Europe will almost certainly rely on MAFF's Food Advisory Committee's (FAC) decision when it receives COMA's report, although this is unlikely to happen before 1997.

The COMA panel, chaired by the Rowett Research Institute head, nutritionist Professor Philip James, has the difficult task of assessing the nutritional benefits of a product which — unique among food ingredients and additives — actually deprives the body of valuable nutrients. Although not digestible, olestra is a fat and soaks up fat-soluble nutrients including vitamins A, D, E and K, carotenoids and sterols.

The FAC has already called for a Department of Health toxicological

evaluation, and, although the results have not been published, the manufacturers of olestra, Procter & Gamble, have been circulating letters stating 'the DH has told us they are comfortable with the toxicology database'.

In January this year olestra was given US clearance for use in a limited range of savoury snacks, crisps and biscuits. The approval was conditional on the addition of a dose of vitamins A, D, E and K to olestra products, in an attempt to reduce the anti-nutrient effect. But the problem of carotenoid-lowering by olestra (see box below) has raised concern among several leading US public health workers. Professors Walter Willett and Meir Stampfer at Harvard have written repeatedly to the US Food and Drug Administration expressing their view that carotenoids — a range of nutrients found in fruits

and vegetables — play a preventive role in age-related irreversible blindness and cataracts, along with stroke, heart disease and various cancers. 'The odds are that olestra's adverse consequences would not be detectable for at least several decades, during which time enormous harm could have been done,' wrote Willett and Stampfer.

### Oil-in-toilet

References to anal leakage and yellow-orange underwear stain have been dismissed by Procter & Gamble, who claim that re-formulation has ensured that no anal leakage problems now exist.

However the documents they cite show the problems do continue,

although at a lesser level (around half the level found with more oily formulations), and linked to how much olestra is eaten. No measures have been taken of the accompanying psychological stress resulting from the appearance of stains on tight-fitting light-coloured leggings in public.

Procter & Gamble investigators also report 'Oil floating in the toilet after bowel movement is an event associated with the consumption of olestra,' and reported the event for a quarter to a third of the groups under study. The phenomenon may lead some olestra-eaters to believe they may be suffering ill health, especially if combined with diarrhoea and nausea, leading to unnecessary visits to doctors and unnecessary pathology laboratory testing, to say nothing of the unnecessary stress.

## Full labelling

In order to protect consumers from mistaking olestra-caused problems for other ailments, the Washington-based Centre for Science in the Public Interest has called for comprehensive labels, of the sort shown here:

### Back of pack:

**NOTICE.** IF YOU TAKE COUMADIN, HAVE A BOWEL OR MALABSORPTION DISORDER, SUCH AS ULCERATIVE COLITIS OR IRRITABLE BOWEL, CONSULT YOUR PHYSICIAN BEFORE EATING THIS OR OTHER OLESTRA FOODS.

Children and older people should limit their intake of olestra foods. If you experience a problem after eating this product, AVOID ALL OLESTRA FOODS and call this toll-free number: 1-800-xxx-xxxx.

### Front of pack:

**Notice:** This product contains olestra. Olestra can cause diarrhea, loose stools, fecal urgency, nausea, gas and bloating. Olestra can cause underwear staining, anal leakage, greasy bowel movements and oil in toilet. Symptoms should go away within 48 hours after you stop eating olestra foods. If symptoms persist call your doctor.

Olestra reduces the absorption of some nutrients, and vitamins A, D, E and K have been added to compensate. However, other nutrients, including carotenoids, have not been replaced. Loss of carotenoids may increase the risk of cancer, heart disease and blindness.

## Six reasons for saying 'no' to olestra.

The Food Commission believes olestra offers little benefit in encouraging better eating habits or ensuring sustained weight loss, while it puts consumers of fatty snacks at risk of under-nutrition. According to the Washington citizens action group Centre for Science in the Public Interest, there are several specific concerns:

- **carotenoid depletion:** just 3g of olestra, the amount likely to be found in less than half a bag of olestra crisps, lowers the levels of lycopene (a carotenoid found largely in tomatoes) in the blood by 40%. 8g of olestra (the typical amount to be found in a bag of crisps) lowers lutein (a carotenoid found in green leafy vegetables) in the blood by 20% and lycopene by 60%. Studies of lutein consumption show people with low levels are twice as likely to suffer irreversible deterioration of the retina, leading to incurable blindness.
- **vitamins:** fortification with vitamin K has not been adequately tested, and may interfere with anti-coagulant medication.
- **greasy faeces:** despite assurances that olestra has been reformulated to prevent anal leakage, new 'stiff' forms still cause occasional leakage, underwear stain and oil-in-toilet problems.
- **gastric upset:** diarrhoea, nausea and intestinal gas and discomfort were linked to both oily and stiff forms of olestra for a minority of experimental users. Diarrhoea itself can cause the loss of further nutrients from the diet, and the impact on poorly-nourished children and older people has not been assessed.
- **cancer:** liver lesions, a possible precursor to liver cancer, were found in two studies of rats fed olestra. Lung cancers were found in one study of mice fed olestra (though not in a second study).
- **no safety margin:** the usual safety margin for food additives is set at one hundredth of the lowest level at which problems occurred in animals, or one tenth of the level at which problems occurred in humans. No safety level has been set for olestra as adverse effects (carotenoid depletion and gastrointestinal disturbances) have been found at the lowest levels tested.

We believe the COMA panel should not recommend approval for this product while so many outstanding problems remain. If approved, the panel must ensure that any approval is linked to ensuring consumers are fully informed of the possible problems eating olestra. Use the campaign sheet inserted in this issue and write to the Food Advisory Committee to say you want your questions answered before they approve olestra.



# Beef Watch

## Science lessons

**At the height of the BSE 'mad cow' crisis, government ministers with little public support did their best to hide behind scientists with little hard evidence. It was one of many interesting lessons.**

It was the stuff of science fiction. A deadly disease appears to have infected an unknown number of the British population, possibly hundreds of thousands. Our children will live in the shadow of doubt for decades. Early victims are buried in double-depth graves, using sealed coffins and quicklime. The infectious agent remains present in thousands of foods on supermarket shelves.

Whether science fiction or science fact, as far as the media were concerned all this was true, and much more besides. The damage to the beef industry will be huge. But what of the damage to science and its credibility?

The reason ministers gave for refusing to act was that their scientific advisers had not recommended it. Indeed, all government policy on BSE for the last ten years has been attributed to scientific advisers, and it holds lessons for other crises where science and economic interests may be thrust into high profile by nervous politicians.

In the first instance it was clear that most scientists are inexperienced in sound bite strategies, being trained in the value of description and elaboration and the qualification of their conclusions, rather than a quick summary of known facts.

It was equally clear that scientists, like most of us, had little idea what went on in the meat industry. They

made their recommendations — such as the removal of brain and spinal cord from human food, or the removal of animal protein from ruminant feed — but years later were forced to make further recommendations to take account of the failure of the industry to comply. Abattoirs were failing to remove all the brain or cord and were instead spattering the stuff all over the carcass, and cows were still being fed animal protein long after the ban because feed manufacturers or farmers continued to use old stocks. The industry was not behaving like a properly-run laboratory.

Monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations was wholly inadequate. You can't blame scientists for the lack of proper meat inspection, but perhaps they were naive to make recommendations without ensuring they could be rigorously monitored.

And it was also clear that scientists never go shopping. They had no idea how hard it is for consumers to choose among meat products. The industry has a long history of using every part of the animal 'except the squeak'. Nothing is wasted. Every part of a cow can be used to make some food product, be it gelatine, beef 'extract' or the cover-all 'meat stock'. Labelling regulations are quite inadequate for the job.

But the problems of 'science' run deeper. SEAC members in academic departments are not free of the political purse-strings. And, increasingly, academic researchers are not free of industrially-sponsored research funding. Sometimes scientists are simply self-deluded. And sometimes they are prepared to say what they believe their paymasters would like to hear. And sometimes scientists act as consultants for the very interests they are being asked to judge impartially — for example a member of SEAC admitted to being a consultant for the burger chain McDonald's.

Lastly, the science of public health and veterinary disease, even at its best, is not exact. While governments must make decisions, the science of public health talks a different language, of probabilities, statistical likelihood, chance and risk, and never does it talk of proof and certainty. As a result, SEAC members and their predecessors failed to say much more clearly and publicly, 'We do not know'.

There are other aspects to this crisis, ranging from corruption in high places to the role of poor nutrition and pesticide poisoning contributing to BSE. There is the power of MAFF and the meat lobby and its ability to overrule the Department of Health. There is the ideology of deregulation, the removal of 'unnecessary red tape'. And there is the bigger picture, in which the true costs of intensive farming and a cheap meat policy are passed onto the environment and the health of the population to pay for. All these need debate and exposure.

It is commonplace to call for greater openness in government, and greater exposure of the linked interests of politics and commerce — particularly after the Scott enquiry. But we also need to call for greater openness in the scientific realm, to allow scientific discussion greater public scrutiny, to see that scientists do not always have a clear answer. Not science fiction, but science in the real world.

## Did you know?

**Q:** Are calf brains still allowed in meat pies?

**MAFF:** Er, yes. Offal from calves under 6 months has not been prohibited from human food (Confirmed in writing, 12.4.96)

## No more 'meat'

MAFF proudly announced that in July the generic term 'meat' will not be allowed on food labels. Phrases such as 'other meats' and 'meat stock' will have to declare the species.

We asked: What about 'animal fat'? 'Er, sorry, no. That isn't mentioned', said MAFF.

## Trade union fury

'We have workers not only losing their livelihood but also their lives — it is not good enough that a ministry responsible for food production should also be expected to monitor hygiene and safety standards,' said Alan Dalton, T&G's health and safety coordinator, calling for a reversal of the planned Health and Safety Executive cuts. Details from T&G on 0171-828 7788.

A Charter for Sustainable Farming as an antidote to mad cow intensive lunacy has been prepared by the SAFE Alliance (phone 0171-823 5660). The Soil Association are also proposing a similarly-titled Charter (details from the SA on 0117-929 0661). And the National Food Alliance is coordinating a broader Food Policy position as a basis for consumer campaigning.

**Correction:** In the last issue of the Food Magazine we suggested that organic farms were suffering as much from BSE as others. The Soil Association says that farms inspected and approved by them have not had BSE provided the animals were born and reared organically, and not brought into the organic system later in life.

## EWES & LAMB NUTS

A complete and balanced feedstuff for Sheep to be fed in

Ingredients: Barley, Wheat, Linseed Meal, Maize Gluten, Soya Meal, Fish Fat, Soya, Fish Meal, Molasses, Vitamins & Minerals.

CORN MILLS LTD  
Lancs.

*Out in the fields this Easter and we find that rare thing, a well-labelled feedstock bag. But why are we feeding fish to sheep?*



# The true cost of 'cheap' food

**Fabulous prizes! No entry fee!**

**Win a healthy diet for two!**

Government ministers and the food industry were telling us day after day throughout the BSE crisis that intensive farming 'is what consumers demand' as it provides such wonderfully cheap food. If customers want cheap meat, they say, then factory farming will give it to them.

But is it really true? Of course no-one wants to pay more than they need to. But is the food we eat really so cheap? Is the price on the shelf the true price, or are there further, hidden costs in agribusiness which we have to pay for in other ways?

Just fill in our easy table with your estimates, and win a healthy diet for yourself and your loved ones!

## MRM victory in sight!

Thanks to the large number of letters sent by readers of this magazine to the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, the government has renewed pressure to get a European-wide ruling that requires all manufacturers to declare mechanically recovered meat – the carcass scrapings known as MRM – on the label of MRM-containing products.

It is a victory for the Food Commission Campaigns, and a

victory for you! The last activity was in 1994, when MAFF left the issue on the table with the European Commission.

MAFF admitted that 'following pressure' a meeting with the EC was convened in early April, in which the majority of member states agreed that MRM should be shown separately on lists of ingredients, and that the Commission will issue an 'interpretative communication' to make this clear.



## COMPETITION

### Guess the hidden costs in 'cheap' food

Loss of farming jobs (averaging around 10,000 per year). Cost of unemployment benefits: £?

Loss of investments and livelihoods (a third of smallholdings closed down in 20 years). Banks' written-off debts: £?

EC payments for set aside (effectively concentrating production into fewer acres). Cost of set aside to UK taxpayer: £?

Soil erosion (up to 40 tonnes per hectare per year). Cost in future to redeem dust-bowl fields: £?

Loss of wildlife (1685 insect species, 149 plant, 51 bird, 25 mammal 'endangered', 'rare' or 'vulnerable'). Future cost in protection and re-stocking: £?

Water pollution (over 25% water supply zones exceeded one or more pesticide residue limit in 1993).

Cost of proper water treatment to remove all agrochemicals: £?

Transport of food (eg: potatoes from Egypt, apples from California, yoghurt from Germany).

Cost of removing pollutants and replacing fossil fuels: £?

Food processing (de-naturing, adding fat, sugar, salt). Cost to NHS of increased rates of heart disease and stroke, tooth decay, some cancers etc: £?

Under-nutrition from poor diets (low birthweights, poor learning and development, increased incapacity in old age). Cost to NHS, education and social services: £?

Food hygiene (over use of animal antibiotics, poor hygiene training, unregulated catering). Cost to employers and NHS of food poisoning incidents: £?

Plus: the cost of cleaning up the BSE mess £?

Plus: the cost of escapes of genetically modified antibiotic-resistant bacteria £?

Plus: £?

Plus: £?

Total £m?

#### Rules:

(1) The total figure must be above £1000 per household per year, £20 per week on the shopping bill. We suspect the true cost, taking into account the less measurable impact on family finances of ill health and the loss of environmental amenities, to be many times that figure.

(2) Send your answers to The Permanent Secretary, The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Whitehall Place, London SW1. The winner will be the first person to convince the government to drop their support for intensive systems and put taxpayers' money into sustainable agriculture instead.

(3) Seriously – send us a copy of your reply, and we will start a Food Audit campaign to reveal the true cost of our food.



# Government ignores Rome summit

Like the Earth Summit in Rio, the first ever World Food Summit, planned for November this year in Rome, has so far attracted little attention in Britain, writes *Geoff Tansey*.

The aim of the Rome Summit is to get heads of government to back a commitment and plan of action to ensure universal food security — food for all. This means 'that all people have at all times secure access to the food they need for an active and healthy life with dignity', according to the draft policy statement.

Food security requires wide-ranging action beyond the capacity of Ministries of Agriculture, according to Dr Jaques Diouf, director general UN

Food and Agriculture Organisation and prime mover behind the summit. He wants to see widespread involvement of NGOs and farmers' groups in preparations as well as the relevant national government ministries.

However, there are no plans for Britain's Prime Minister to attend, nor the Ministers for Health or for Agriculture and Food. Instead, the Minister for Overseas Development is expected to lead the UK delegation. So far there has been little interest from groups dealing with food poverty and other food issues in the UK, according to an Overseas Development Administration (ODA) spokesperson co-ordinating preparations for the summit.

The problems facing developing countries in achieving food security are the most acute. Today, some 800 million people go hungry, including 200 million children. But only focusing on how the UK influences security elsewhere in the

world is not enough says Jacqui Webster of the National Food Alliance's Food Poverty Network. 'There is definitely a need to look at the UK position on food security, in the context of food security in general.'

'All countries have at least some pockets of food insecurity and undernutrition' says FAO's *Food Security Assessment* paper. One commitment in the draft plan of action calls for governments and local authorities to develop a hunger map showing which people in which areas are most at nutritional risk. The NFA's Food Poverty Network will be trying to develop this, at least in outline, for the UK.

There is also a commitment to 'incorporate nutrition and home economics training in public schools and in curricula of schools of agriculture and teachers' training institutes.' This will be of interest to many who were at a conference on *Food skills, cooking skills and food poverty* in Leeds in March, where many teachers were angry at the optional placing of home economics in the design and technology part of the national curriculum with some 40% of pupils having to fund ingredients for cooking lessons.

For those working on food issues

in the UK, it seems there are two challenges. One is to see what needs to be done here to end food poverty and food insecurity — which is not yet being taken seriously in the run up to the summit. The other concerns how the UK can help bring about food security throughout the world. This is the main focus of the ODA and the UK Food Group which brings together a range of UK development and food charities and lobby groups.

■ The World Food Summit draft declaration and plan of action and background papers are available over the internet on FAO's home page, <http://www.fao.org> or by contacting Ms Kay Killingworth, Secretary General, World Food Summit, FAO, 00100 Rome, Italy. Fax: +39 6 5225-5249, E-mail: [food-summit@fao.org](mailto:food-summit@fao.org)

■ UK Contact: Mr J C Machin, UN and Commonwealth Department, Overseas Development Administration, 94 Victoria Street, London SW1E 5JL. Tel: 0171 917 0152, fax: 0171 917-0194

## Transferred allergies

A study of soya beans which have been genetically engineered to include Brazil nut proteins has found the modified soya to be an allergen for people who suffer from Brazil nut allergy.

Allergies to nuts are among the commonest food allergies, and the symptoms can range from mild itching to sudden death. The attempt to improve the soya bean by adding nut proteins has shown that allergens can be transferred by genetic engineering.

## Genethical labelling

A consortium of consumer groups are calling on CODEX, the world food standards body, to ensure genetically engineered foods are fully labelled. Labels should cover consumer concerns including health and ethical issues.

Additional concerns about the environmental impact of the release of new organisms should be regulated through an international Biosafety Protocol, as agreed to (but never implemented) at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992, says the consortium.

■ Food of the Future: The Risks and Realities of Biotechnology, Conference Proceedings, available from Sara Jarvis, Consumers International (0171-226 6663).

## Organics benefit butterflies

A survey of eight organic farms matched against eight conventional ones found non-pest butterflies to be twice as abundant on the organic farms. The research, by Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, follows an earlier study by the British Trust for Ornithology which found significant benefits for farmland birds on organically farmed land.

■ Details from the SAFE Alliance, 0171-823 5660.

■ Nordlee et al, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 334, 688-692.

## Lindane: call for ban

The trade union UNISON is calling for a ban on the use of lindane, a

pesticide used in agricultural sprays and some domestic fumigants. The chemical has been linked to breast cancer — a disease killing one in twelve women in the UK.

■ Details from Sarah Copsey, Head of Health and Safety, UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ. Tel: 0171 388 2366.

## Food Miles Action pack

The SAFE (Sustainable Agriculture Food and the Environment) Alliance is preparing a campaign pack to develop its Food Miles project.

With a 50 per cent increase in the distance travelled by food around the British Isles in the last 15 years, and a doubling of fruit and vegetable imports brought in by air in the same period, the miles travelled by the food we eat has escalated, at the cost of environmental damage,

burning of fossil fuels and loss of local farming jobs.

The pack is a comprehensive source of material with ideas for campaigning and an excellent checklist for taking action. Details from Angela Paxton, Food Miles Campaign, SAFE Alliance, 38 Ebury Street, London SW1W 0LU, tel 0171-823 5660, fax 0171-823 5673.



# CHECKOUT

The claims being made on so-called functional foods are very alluring. But are they mostly marketing hype? The Checkout team investigates.

## Functional Foods: What should we believe?

In an examination of over seven hundred products claiming enhanced health or added nutritional properties The Food Commission found the majority to be foods of poor nutritional quality whose main justification was the added 'functional' ingredient. Such foods, from soft drinks with special 'rehydration' properties, confectionery with added vitamins, or cakes with extra fish oil, work directly against the efforts of the Department of Health to encourage a healthier diet through a better nutritional balance of foods.

For all but a very few of the functional foods surveyed, the claim to improve health was not based on testing of the product itself, but on the implication that the added ingredient would be beneficial because foods naturally containing it are considered to be beneficial. Thus Horlicks (64% sugar) with added vitamins A, C and E implies a benefit because 'these vitamins have a special role helping to protect your body from some of the harmful effects of today's stresses.'

The fallacy of the argument has been highlighted by the two trials of beta carotene conducted in Finland and the USA. The assumption was made that, because populations eating plenty of carrots appeared to suffer lower cancer rates, even among smokers, it followed that giving smokers extra beta carotene pills would lower their cancer risk. In fact both trials found a raised risk. Whatever the health benefits of carrots, it could not be replicated by extracting the beta carotene.

Yet manufacturers persist in selling this fallacy. Some of the most outrageous examples are shown overleaf. The survey found nearly 200 products — many high in fats or sugars — to which the manufacturers had added vitamins. It found 47

products with added dietary fibre although the COMA advice is to eat a diet that has fibre 'as a naturally integrated component', and specifically cautioned against using added fibre. And we found nearly 100 products claiming to be high in protein — although protein deficiency is virtually unknown in the UK.

We are particularly concerned that

- the marketing and labelling of these foods compromises a consumer's ability to select a healthy diet through the misleading claims and implications;
- the foods themselves may have an adverse impact on diet, such as excessive consumption of sugar or salt, notwithstanding the functional ingredient;
- the concentration of specific nutrients may introduce safety concerns: as is the case with beta carotene.

The UK's Food Advisory Committee is currently considering what restrictions, if any, should be put on the marketing of functional foods in Britain. We believe a restricted list, permitting the promotion of only genuinely health-giving foods as is the case in the USA (see box), would do much to counter the distortions being generated by so-called functional foods and would, for once, put the labelling responsibilities of MAFF into harmony with the nutritional responsibilities of the Department of Health.

**Functional Foods Examined**, a survey and report by The Food Commission 1996, £125.00 (£20.00 to non-commercial organisations)

### In the USA the Nutrition Labelling and Education Act 1990 permits the linking of products to specific diseases in just seven instances:

- high calcium products can be linked to osteoporosis prevention claims
- low fat foods can be linked to reduced cancer risks
- low saturated fat and low cholesterol foods can be linked to heart disease prevention
- fibre-containing grain products, fruit and vegetables can be linked to cancer and heart disease prevention
- fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins A and C can be linked to cancer prevention
- diets low in salt (sodium) may reduce the risk of high blood pressure

Health claims cannot be made on foods that are high in fat or salt. Even when the health claims can be used, they should be accompanied by a general statement on the links between diet and disease and the role of other factors in influencing disease.



# CHECKOUT

## Functional mayhem?

The addition and/or promotion of 'functional' nutrients and novel ingredients can cause confusion about what constitutes a healthy, balanced diet. The Food Commission survey found manufacturers selling extra functionality in a range of forms:

'Functional' claim	No. of products
Vitamins/minerals	300
Dietary fibre	232
Fish oil, omega-3, other oils and fats	111
Proteins	92
Bacterial culture to aid digestion	10
Bacterial culture for other effects	9
Cholesterol-lowering ingredient	5
Other claims (isotonic, restoratives)	36

Number of products citing scientific evidence for their functional claims: 7.

The survey found 'functionality' being claimed for a wide range of food types, many highly processed and high in sugars, fat or salt:

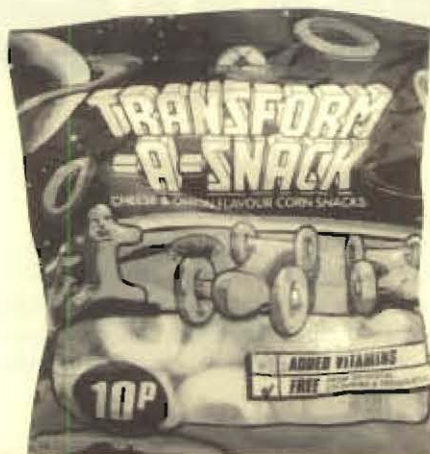
Type of product	No. claiming functionality
Oats, muesli, cereals (sweet + regular)	149
Baby foods	66
Meat and poultry	56
Fatty spreads	49
Snacks, crisps, biscuits	41
Bread and cake products	37
Oils	35
Fruit juices	34
Frozen vegetables	32
Tinned fish	32
Yoghurt and yoghurt drinks	31
Dried fruit and pulses	30
Milk: fresh, UHT, evaporated, dried	22
Soft drinks: squashes	22
Soft drinks: carbonates	21
Baby drinks	20
Tinned vegetables	18
Soya foods and drinks	18
Frozen and marinated fish	16
Fruit juice drinks	14
Hot drinks	13
Sweet and savoury spreads	10
Tinned pasta	10
Flour	8
Cheese	4
Mayonnaise	4
Powder potato	4
Tinned soups	3

Source: Food Commission

# Functional Food

## A case of nut

BioGreen must be good! But the added sugar makes it good for rotting our teeth!



Refined starch, fat, salt and monosodium glutamate — and a vitamin pill.



Added sugar in the widely-promoted Japanese milk-based drink Yakult.



This boasts bacteria in cheddar (like most cheddars) only these are 'believed to promote healthy digestion'. The fat is at least reduced (by a third) but this is still a high fat food, and probably high in cholesterol and sodium (it doesn't say).

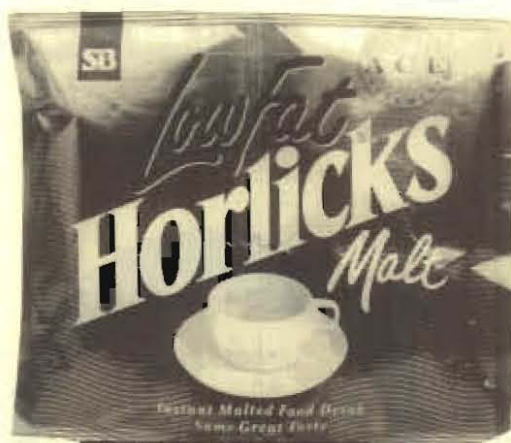


Heart shapes again — and a claim for 'healthy hearts and minds' on a product that is 60% fat (of which 28% is saturated fat).



# CHECKOUT

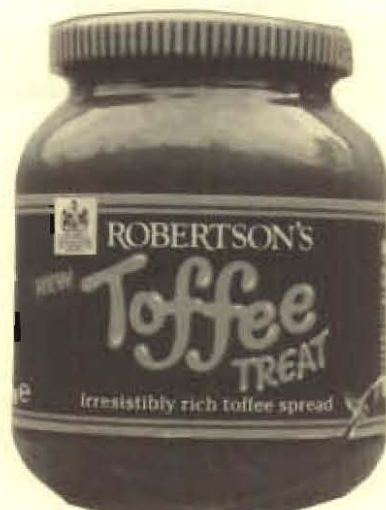
## Food: Nutritional confusion?



Nearly two-thirds pure sugar in this pack which claims to 'protect your body from some of the harmful effects of today's stressful lifestyles, because of its added vitamins.'



Multiple heart symbols, but this white bread contains hydrogenated fat and a hefty dose of salt: to get a day's omega-3 you would need to eat half a large loaf, giving six grams of salt (a recommended maximum for adults).



"Each serving provides 25mg Calcium (7% RDA)" says the label. On this basis you need 14 servings for a day's calcium, giving you 187 grams sugar (three times the recommended daily maximum).

### ASA finds claims to be unsupportable

Although retailers may be laughing all the way to the bank, the food manufacturers are increasingly concerned that their research investments may fail through public dismissal of all claims as unsubstantiated. 'One spurious claim would undermine the lot of us,' said Roger Clarke, commercial director of MD Foods UK and responsible for Gaio and Pact. Ironically, MD Foods' own claim that Gaio reduces cholesterol was found to be unsubstantiated by the Advertising Standards Authority (see page 4). They aren't the only ones:

Product and claim	ASA decision
Juice Plus+ 'the natural way of getting all the most essential nutrients in one swallow'	Benefits exaggerated
MeltDown Fat Burning Liquid 'attacks the body's unwanted fat cells'	Contravenes advertising Code
Creatabolin C10 'increases strength, speed and endurance'	Claims not substantiated
Bee Natural Propolis 'effective against most infectious diseases'	Claims not substantiated
Thermogen-5 'fat antagonist'	Benefits not demonstrated
Phyto Products Asparagus Juice 'excretes cholesterol'	Claims not substantiated
Ribena Juice and Fibre 'helps lower cholesterol'	Exaggerated likely benefits
MD Foods Gaio 'lowers levels of cholesterol'	Exaggerated potential benefits
MaxiMuscle Creatine Monohydrate 'Cycle up hills easier, twice as fast'	Claims not substantiated

Source: ASA/National Food Alliance



# CHECKOUT

## Loopy labels

Another peep at provocative packages and silly statements



The European Directive says 4 months is the earliest allowed on baby food labels. But these products (above) are still on sale. With sell-by dates of late 1997 they can't simply be 'old stock' — unless companies make baby food to last over two years on the shelf? ... And these contain gluten — a wheat protein not recommended before six months of age.

**Dear Food Mag** (writes a reader). *I bought a Cornetto in the park and found it very hard and dry, and the chocolate rather stale-tasting. I looked on the wrapper for a sell-by date but couldn't find one. The shop in the park had been closed all winter — could my cone have been out of date?*

Yes, and you wouldn't know it. For no particular reasons we can discover, 'edible ices in individual portions' are exempt from the 'Use By' and 'Best Before' legislation applying to virtually all other foods, so you won't find a sell-by date.

The other exemptions are foods sold loose (like fruit, veg and baked goods), drinks over 10% alcohol, salt, vinegar, sugar and chewing gum.

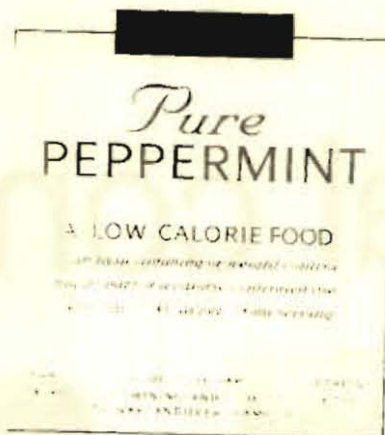
**Vegetarians can eat bacon**, thanks to Betty Crocker and her 'bacon flavour' soya chips (right).

They can, except they can't, for Bacos chips are about to become illegal.

The trouble is not the E321 (butylated hydroxytoluene, or BHT), an additive designed to stop the oil in the product going rancid during the product's one-year shelf life, and which has been linked to birth defects in laboratory animals and is banned from baby foods.

No, it's the E127, a colouring called erythrosine, which Betty also chucks on the chips. E127 has been linked to thyroid damage in laboratory animals, and — more to the point — is under a Europe-wide ban from being used in any food except cocktail cherries.

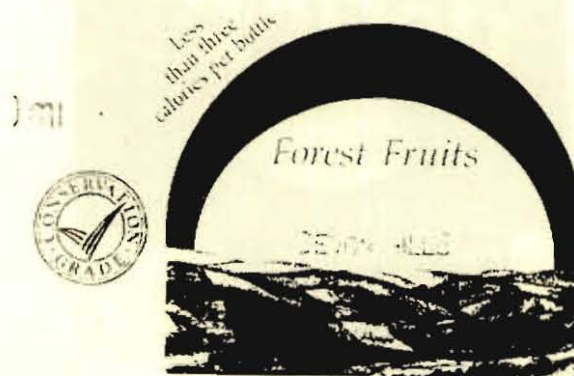
Sorry, Betty, but Bacos has had its chips. E127 has been on the banning shortlist since an EC draft directive in 1990, and under the *Colourings in Food Regulations 1995*, Bacos will be illegal from the end of this coming June. Time to reformulate, Betty!



It must be a satire on all those high-calorie so-called slimming foods.

Why else would Twinings feel the need to tell us that a drink made from pure peppermint leaves and boiled water is 'A low calorie food' and that it 'Can help slimming or weight control only as part of a calorie controlled diet.' (left).

Ironically, of all the teas that Twinings sells, the peppermint is probably the highest in calories, having more aromatic oil content than most other herbal infusions, and more than regular tea.



Dartmoor Water Ltd have gone to great trouble to bring us all the benefits of Conservation Grade spring water (above), which may sound daft but apparently enjoys 'periodic inspections from the Guild of Conservation Grade Producers' ensuring that the water does not come from an area of intensive farming or potential industrial pollution — or so the company told us.

What a tragedy, then, that they add a cocktail of chemicals: flavouring agents, acids, a preservative (sodium benzoate, linked to hyperactivity and allergies) and two artificial sweeteners (acesulfame K and aspartame). And the label boasts '... made from the finest ingredients'!

**Keep on sending us your specimens!**



# Vitamin A, liver and folic acid

Readers, we need your help!

Women are being told to take folic acid supplements when planning a pregnancy, in order to reduce the risk of foetal neural tube defects (such as spina bifida). Yet one of the richest natural sources of folic acid, liver, is denied to them because of its high vitamin A content — high because, we understand, the animal feed merchants add large quantities of vitamin A to promote growth.

The problem we have is to find data to show what vitamin A and folic acid levels would be in the liver of animals raised without a huge vitamin A boost. Has anyone got the data to show that, for example, organically-reared animals have lower vitamin A levels?

In 1990, the government's Chief Medical Officer issued advice to women who were, or who might become, pregnant not to take supplements containing vitamin A, unless advised to by a health professional, because of accumulating evidence suggesting that high intakes of vitamin A could cause birth defects. Furthermore, analysis of liver had also shown it to contain such high levels of vitamin A that it was considered 'prudent' to advise against consuming liver as well.

This prohibition on eating liver effectively removed it as a food source for women likely to become pregnant. Not only is liver cheap, it is also a good source of B vitamins — thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, B6, B12 and folic acid — as well as iron and phosphorous, and a fair source of vitamin C, besides being rich in vitamin A.

So far, a 'safe' intake of vitamin A for pregnant women has not been determined. The government recommended a daily limit of 3,300 micrograms

(mcg) in 1991. Later research has indicated an increased risk of birth defects for women whose intake of vitamin A exceeds 3,000 mcg vitamin A per day. In 1990 when MAFF analysed liver samples, they found a range of levels such that an average portion could contain between 4 and 20 times the 3,300 mcg limit.

This high level of vitamin A in liver was in part due to the addition of the vitamin to animal feedstuffs. Values from food tables show a dramatic increase in the levels of vitamin A between 1960 and 1991: for example in 1960 the mean value for calf liver was 1,500 mcg per 100g. In 1991 it was 29,730 mcg.

Regulations governing the permitted quantity of vitamin A which could be added to feedstuffs were first introduced in the UK at the end of December 1989 following Dutch reports that excessive levels of vitamin A in chicken feed could cause toxicity problems to pregnant women eating chicken livers. Further data from Finland, showing high levels of vitamin A in the livers of other animals, prompted the introduction of a voluntary code to limit the addition of vitamin A. This was superseded by the Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1991 which set out maximum levels. These limits are still in force.

But the legislation appears to have had little effect on the levels of vitamin A in liver. MAFF carried out a second survey in 1993, and although the results are difficult to compare, the highest values for three of the five species studied are actually higher in 1993 than they were in 1990. For pig liver the highest value is five times that found in 1990.

Despite government action, liver is still unsafe for a large number of women. Prior to the introduction of legislation, the Agricultural Research Council

published recommendations on the levels of vitamin A to add to animal feeds. But the maximum levels permitted in the Feeding Stuffs Regulations were set much higher than the ARC recommendations. Why, we might ask, were they set so high?

■ Research: Jane Bradbury



'High in vitamin A' boasts Tesco about their fresh pig's and lamb's liver. Sainsbury's frozen chicken, lamb and pig liver all claim to be 'Rich in vitamin A'. How rich? The Recommended Daily Amount used in the UK for labelling of foods is 800 mcg. One portion (100g) of their liver would provide between 11,840 mcg and 22,820 mcg — as much as 2800% the RDA and seven times the maximum recommended daily intake for pregnant women. Nowhere on the packaging was there any indication that levels this high pose a risk of foetal damage.

Analysis of the selenium content of eleven commercial brands of **infant formula** (term, preterm and soya) by researchers at South Bank University has suggested that infants fed formula milk as their sole source of nutrition may be at risk of selenium deficiency. Of the 174 samples, only 18% met the UK Dietary Reference Value for infants aged 0-3 months. (Foster, L.H. et al, Nutrition Research Centre, South Bank University, London SE1 1AA, 1995.)

**Vegetable ghee** is obtained by partially hydrogenating vegetable oils and contains high levels of trans-fatty acids. Specimens of subcutaneous fat collected and analysed for fatty acid composition at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases in Karachi revealed that those who used vegetable ghee had significantly higher percentages of trans-fatty acids

and lower percentages of linoleic and linolenic acid in adipose tissue than those who used only non hydrogenated vegetable oils. As vegetable ghee is used by South Asians who have settled overseas, this may help to explain their mortality from coronary heart disease. (BMJ, 312, 1996 p508)

A world-wide collaboration between research groups involving 450 000 people has found that people under 45 with **high blood pressure** are 10 times more likely to suffer a stroke 20 years later than those with low blood pressure. (Lancet 22.12.95.)

A six year trial designed to test whether **beta carotene** and vitamin A supplements could reduce the risk of developing lung cancer has been called off two years early. Preliminary results from the Beta

Carotene and Retinol Efficacy Trial (CARET) showed 28% more cases of lung cancers, and a 17% higher overall death rate, among the men taking the supplements, than in the control group taking a placebo. This study confirms the findings of a Finnish study published in 1994 which also found an increased risk of lung cancer in male smokers taking beta carotene compared with other male smokers. (New Scientist 27 Jan 1996.)

A Finnish study looking at the association between dietary intake of **flavonoids** and subsequent coronary mortality found increased flavonoid intake linked to decreased mortality in men and women. The association was stronger in women. The main food source of flavonoids in this study were apples and onions: consumption was lower among those who

died, who also showed lower total intakes of fruits, vitamins C and E and beta-carotene, but higher intakes of saturated and monounsaturated fats and lower ratios of polyunsaturated to saturated fats. (BMJ vol. 312 p478-481)

Further evidence that consuming **fruits and vegetables** can help to protect against heart disease comes from a study in Massachusetts. They examined the association between consumption of carotene-containing fruits and vegetables and cardiovascular disease (CVD) mortality and found that for total CVD death, and fatal myocardial infarction, risks were lower among those in the highest quartile (2.05 servings per day) as compared to those in the lowest. (Ann.Epidem vol. 5, No. 4 July 1995: 255-260)



# Why slimming ads are bad for health

**Instant solutions and inappropriate products only makes losing weight more difficult, reports Sue Dibb.**

The UK slimming industry is estimated to have an annual turnover of approximately £1 billion. Yet the number of overweight and obese people in the UK is increasing at an alarming rate. If current trends continue, it has been estimated that 18% of men and 24% of women will be obese by 2005. At the same time there is increasing concern about the incidence of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.

The majority of people who embark upon diets to lose weight fail to do so in the long term, yet the dream that a slim body can be achieved through the latest diet fad retains its appeal. According to the medical and scientific consensus, the way to maintain a healthy weight is to ensure that calorie intake does not exceed calorie expenditure; that is by eating a healthy balanced diet and by being physically active throughout life.

The myth is maintained through advertising promoting 'miracle' or easy weight loss schemes. Slimming adverts are a special area where many of those reading adverts want to believe the claims (however outrageous) of advertisers because of the vulnerability and often desperation of those who have sought (usually unsuccessfully) to lose weight permanently.

There is growing evidence about the ill-effects

on health of rapid weight loss and 'yo-yo' dieting. Safe weight loss is generally considered to be no more than 1-2lbs a week. An EC Directive on Foods for Use in Energy Restricted Diets, due to be implemented in the UK in 1997, states that no advertising, labelling or presentation of a product should make any reference to the rate or amount of weight loss which may result from their use, or to a reduction in the sense of hunger or an increase in the sense of satiety. This is a welcome step and the NFA Advertising Working Party proposes that this requirement should apply to all slimming products and services.

Alongside growing concern about obesity, the problems of anorexia and bulimia are increasingly being recognised. A significant proportion of both teenage and pre-adolescent girls say that they are on weight reducing diets. Undernutrition at a time of physical growth and development has been found to have detrimental effects on metabolism and may lead to retarded growth, delayed puberty and to osteoporosis later in life. Many adult women restrict their diets to a level that may be harmful to their health.

Dieting has been shown to have wide-ranging consequences for psychological function including altering the way information is processed, impairing

Ads for 'Miracle' slimming claims which contravene the Code appear regularly in newspapers.

cognitive performance and increasing preoccupation with food. Concern about food and weight can lead to eating problems and, in more severe cases, anorexia and bulimia. Research has found that girls aged fifteen who diet are eight times more likely to develop eating disorders than non-dieters. Therefore every effort should be made to ensure that all advertisements, not just those for slimming products, do not encourage undue preoccupation with slimmness or dieting or encourage anyone, but particularly children and young adults, to lose weight unnecessarily.

While the advertising Code does preclude slimming adverts from being targeted at the under 18s, the use of ultraslim models in advertising generally is not prohibited.

*(Reprinted from Adwatch, the newsletter of the NFA Advertising Project)*

Despite their low calorie image, biscuit for biscuit, Weight Watchers Chocolate Chip Cookies are almost identical in calories to regular chocolate chip cookies. The NFA report considered this ad was misleading.



# Slimming ads break the rules

A survey of slimming advertisements has found the great majority are breaking the British Code of Advertising. Sue Dibb reports.

Nearly ninety percent of slimming advertisements are failing to comply with agreed standards and are undermining health messages, according to a new report, *Slim Hopes*, from the National Food Alliance (NFA) Advertising Project. The NFA monitored advertisements for products and services in women's, teen and slimming magazines and tabloid newspapers last June and found that a staggering 88% did not comply with the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion. The report criticises the Advertising Standards Authority for failing to ensure effective implementation of the Code.

The report finds that misleading advertisements which offer or imply 'miracle' or easy weight loss are undermining the accepted consensus that the way to maintain a healthy weight is by eating a healthy balanced diet, cutting down on fatty and sugary foods, and being physically active throughout life. Obesity is a major national health problem with a quarter of British women predicted to be obese by 2005, yet, as Jeanette Longfield of the NFA points out, 'The kind of misleading advertising found in our survey does nothing to help reverse these alarming trends and may even make them worse.'

Researchers assessed 89 advertisements for 49 slimming products and services including creams, pills, slimming clubs, body wraps, books and videos, alternative treatments and cosmetic surgery. The largest category was foods making slimming or calorie control claims. Problem areas identified by the survey included:

- foods which failed to state that they cannot help slimming except as part of a calorie controlled diet;
- 'miracle' claims such as spiritual power for slimming tablets and Chinese herbs;
- excessive weight loss claims or claims which failed to state the period over which weight was lost;

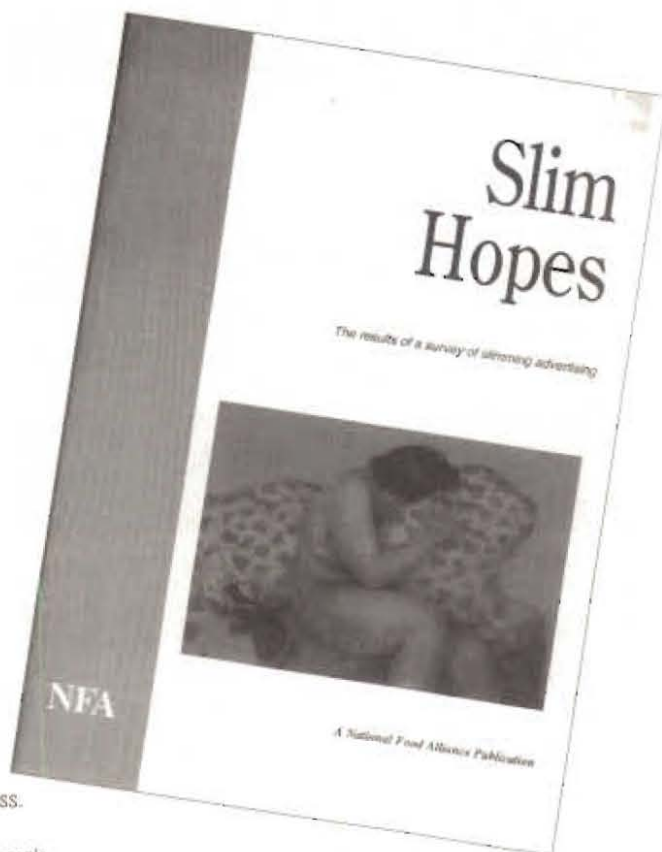
- creams that claimed a slimming effect;
- wraps, thinning belts or exercise equipment which claimed weight loss.

The report found that slimming and women's monthly magazines contained the largest number of misleading adverts (59 out of 78) although most 'miracle' slimming claims were found in tabloid newspaper advertisements. Advertising rules forbid slimming advertising to be aimed at the under 18s but one magazine broke this rule.

The report argues that at present there is little incentive for advertisers and publishers to comply with the Code. The ASA acknowledges that slimming advertising is a problem area, and that its own surveys have found unacceptably high levels of adverts failing to comply with the rules. Yet, at the same time, the ASA argues that its procedures provide an effective deterrent — a claim challenged by the NFA which has put forward a number of recommendations. These include prior vetting for all slimming adverts and tougher sanctions including fines against advertisers and publishers, and an obligation to publish corrections. In addition the NFA proposes a prohibition on references to the rate or speed of weight loss in advertisements in line with an EC Directive, and for the current ban on the use of underweight models in slimming advertisements to be extended to all advertising.

The ASA says it is investigating the advertisements the NFA considers to be in breach of the rules and will be conducting its own survey of slimming, health and beauty advertising in April.

■ *Slim Hopes, the results of a survey of slimming advertising* is available from the National Food Alliance, 3rd floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH (Tel: 0171-628 2442) Price £25 (£7.50 to voluntary and public interest groups and individuals).



## MP backs regulation of diet industry

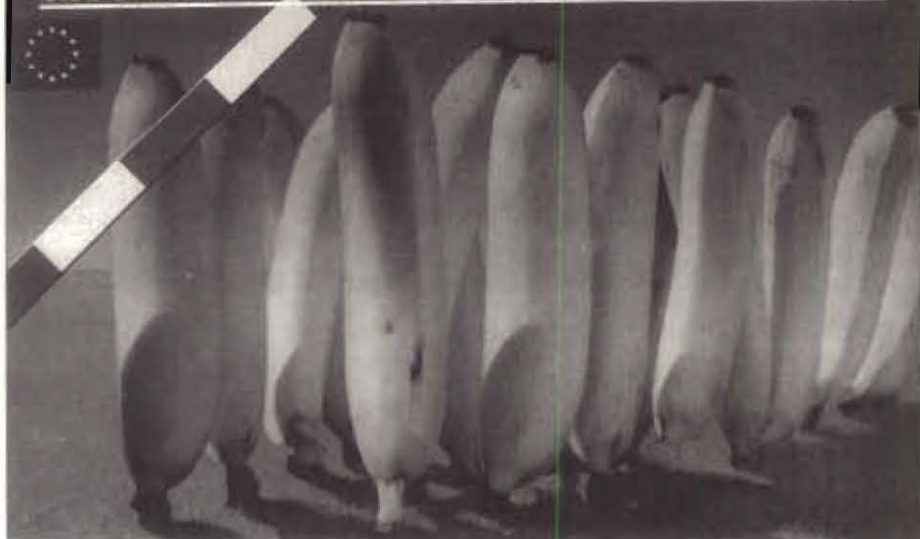
MP Alice Mahon's bill to regulate the diet industry received its second reading in the House of Commons in March. Accusing the diet industry of trading on people's vulnerabilities and misery, she called for stricter controls and measures which would:

- ensure all medicines claimed to aid dieters would be registered under the Medicines Act;
- require that all dieting products and treatments contain health warnings that 'rapid weight loss may cause serious health problems';
- give customers information about the potential health risks of any programme and its nutritional content.

She said: 'Women are being subjected to a tyranny of thinness. At the moment the diet industry can claim almost anything they like about their products and when they fail, as they invariably do, the woman — it's usually a woman — blames herself and moves on to the next useless and usually expensive product. The multi-million pound industry is completely unregulated. It fails totally to warn potential clients about health risks and adverse side effects associated with rapid weight-loss programmes.'



## Give Fair Trade Bananas A Fair Chance.



## What you can do

- Buy bananas from the Windward Isles — most carry Five Isles labels — or buy Fyffes bananas if these are not from Colombia.
- Don't judge the fruit by their appearance — spotless fruit may mean heavy use of pesticides. Ask for smaller fruit.
- Write to your MP and MEP urging them to support bananas produced with respect for human rights and the environment, by companies who pay a decent wage.
- Write to the banana company public affairs manager to explain you will only buy fruit that meet these conditions.

While we now eat twice as many bananas in Britain as we did a decade ago, a battle has developed between our traditional suppliers — small farmers in the Windward Islands — and the multinational plantation owners in the 'dollar banana' countries of Costa Rica and Colombia. Alistair Smith argues in favour of fair trade.

# Cheap bananas: the cost to farmers

Since the Single European Market came into being in 1993, Caribbean farmers and their small island economies have become caught up in a full-scale international banana war. On the one side range the huge multinational companies — Chiquita, Dole, Del Monte and Nabors — who between them control over 70 per cent of the world banana market. They produce low-cost 'dollar' bananas using large plantations (usually where rainforests have been cleared), relying on cheap labour, mechanisation and large quantities of pesticides.

On the other side are the traditional suppliers to Britain and some other European countries, consisting of small and medium farmers on the Windward Islands, supplying 'Caribbean' bananas — usually smaller and sweeter fruit — and relying more on traditional farming methods, with higher labour costs and less pesticides. Pressure on production means that these farmers, too, are succumbing to more intensive practices, clearing land, with soil erosion and pesticides undermining the remaining ecology.

Three days before last Christmas the banana farmers' sole exporter — the banana division of Geest plc — was sold to the Windward Island Banana Development and Exporting Company (WIBDECO) in a 50:50 joint venture with Fyffes, the Dublin-based fruit multinational.

The joint venture has given farmers their first chance ever to own shares in their own banana company. Small farmers' demands for a 'fair price' and the push to unite farmers across the islands around the ownership of WIBDECO are getting stronger by the day. Since February, WINFA, the Windward Islands Farmers' Association based in St. Vincent and long-time Oxfam partner, has been co-ordinating efforts to achieve both these aims.

Meanwhile, the big banana companies, Chiquita in particular, have been trying to 'break into' the Windward Islands. Their favourite for the US Presidency, Senator Dole, has been leading the campaign to end the relative protection afforded to the vulnerable Windwards by the Single Market Banana Regime — a European device putting a limit to dollar banana imports — by having the Regime declared illegal under GATT. The war is truly on between those fighting to preserve development-friendly principles for some seventy of the poorest countries of the world, and those who argue that free trade must prevail, whatever the economic, human and ecological costs.

British consumers have been thrust into a role laden with historic and symbolic significance for our globalised economy. As the war of words reaches a formal trade dispute in the World Trade Organisation, the arbiter for GATT disputes, concerted pressure is mounting: from plantation workers, smaller-scale exporters, and European consumers, all calling for respect across the 'ever-so-bent world' of the banana.

On March 19th, the European Banana Action Network (EUROBAN) presented over 150 000 postcards to Franz Fischler, Agriculture Commissioner in Brussels, demanding minimum social, environmental and ethical standards to be included in trade deals. The European Commission, impressed with the consumer demand, is reported to be preparing a special Fair Trade Banana labelling initiative, to be announced later in the year.

For information on WINFA and the struggle of banana farmers, contact Banana Link (see box).

■ Alistair Smith runs Banana Link and is International Programme Officer of Farmer's Link.

## Banana Link

The new Norfolk-based co-operative, Banana Link, is currently co-ordinating efforts by the 25 members of EUROBAN — the European Banana Action Network — at international level to ensure access to the EU market for 'Fair Trade' bananas.

### Campaign resources

- ◆ Slides set: "Plantation bananas" (20 slides from Latin America and the Philippines) and "Family farm bananas" (20 slides from the Windward Islands); £15.00 per set (including user's notes)
- ◆ Video from Costa Rica: "The Bent World of the Banana" (27 minutes). £10.00 per copy (including notes)
- ◆ Campaigners' Guide (36 pages): Just Green Bananas! £2.00 per booklet
- ◆ Leaflet: The Pick of the Bunch (10p each)

All prices include postage and packing. All material can be obtained from Banana Link, 38 Exchange Street, Norwich NR2 1AX. Tel/Fax: 01603-761645 E-mail: flink@gn.apc.org



## Older people need more than meals

Frozen meals have crept up the menu for meals-on-wheels services. But, argues Tim Lobstein, community meals should mean more than a plastic package once a day.

**I**ncreasingly local authority community meals services are relying on frozen meals deliveries to replace the hot meals-on-wheels services. Frozen meals may have their place in convenience, but an analysis by the Food Commission of one company's products — *Apetito*, considered among the best frozen meals for older people — found three quarters of the main courses to be low in calories, and nearly half the vegetarian options to have low levels of protein. Of five meals for which more detailed information was available, four had low levels of dietary fibre and four contained high levels of salt.

The results follow a recent *Which?* report which found that another company's frozen meals used in community meals services were very low in vitamin C even when tested immediately after re-heating. Vitamin C, being easily destroyed, is an indicator of the quality of the meal at the time it was first frozen. Poor quality vegetables, stored for long periods, soaked before cooking, cut fine and then left standing, cooked too long or allowed to stand for long periods after cooking can be expected to be lower in nutrients, and vitamin C can indicate this.

The nutritional quality of meals for older people can be important. A twenty-year follow-up study of older people who had taken part in a survey in 1973-4 found that those with the best mental abilities at the time had the best vitamin C status and also had the lowest death rates subsequently. The study involved 921 subjects controlled for age, gender and other cardiovascular risk factors, and found both vitamin C consumption and vitamin C blood levels were linked to lower subsequent death rates, especially from stroke. Either the vitamin itself, or other dietary correlates of vitamin C, appear to have a protective role in prolonging mental ability and freedom from strokes.

Undernutrition in old age poses a significant risk to health. Over the age of 50 many of the links between heart disease risk factors (smoking, obesity etc) appear to be reduced — principally because those at greatest risk do not survive — while other factors begin to emerge. Poor general nutrition is one: deficient diets and being underweight is associated with earlier death among those aged 70 and over. Declining activity levels and loss of the senses of smell and taste can lead to insufficient calorie intake, illness, weight loss and further loss of appetite. Even something as common as poorly-fitting dentures can significantly limit access to a healthy diet.

Ensuring that older people get sufficient access to good nutrition can be of benefit to the community services as well as to the individuals themselves. Improved nutrition prevents illness and disability, including strokes and falls, so reducing the need for

supportive services. Weight loss of more than five per cent predicts the degree of disability eight to sixteen years later. Malnourishment increases the risk of falling, and of more severe disability following falling. Outcome from hospital admission for older people is correlated with the degree of undernutrition at admission. Improving the diets of older people — even those who are apparently healthy — can improve their immune response and reduce the numbers of infections suffered.

For meals on wheels services two themes need to be explored. The first is the need to set nutrition standards which the meal provider — whether providing conventional hot meals or frozen meals — must meet. The standards should form part of the contract specification and will need spot checking to ensure adequate contract compliance.

The second is to look beyond the meals service and consider developing a community food service: a service which embraces lunch clubs, shopping, cold food delivery, home help and cooking facilities. Older people have small budgets and few opportunities to buy in bulk and make savings in food costs, and they are often left out of planning strategies when supermarkets are built and transport services designed. A community food service considers purchasing in bulk to make small portion delivery possible. It considers how to prepare and deliver fresh fruit and salads in attractive forms. It delivers fruit juices, yoghurts, bread and cereals — it offers choice with good nutrition, not take-it-or-leave-it plastic-wrapped frozen meal packs.

### Children turn to drink

Nearly one boy in five and one girl in seven, aged 12-15, drinks alcohol regularly, according to a government survey. Sixty percent of children in the age range drank alcohol occasionally.

The figures for regular drinking (drinking every week) have risen by about a third in the period 1990 to 1994. For those drinking regularly the amount of alcohol consumed has risen in the period from an average of 5.4 units to 6.4 units each week. In Scotland the average amount was 8.7 units, and in Wales 7.4 units. Among Scottish boys aged 15 the weekly average was 15.2 units — around eight pints of beer.

■ *Teenage Drinking in 1994*, HMSO, 1996, £12.95, ISBN 011 691671 0.

**Researchers at Southampton University** have found that the babies of mothers who had high carbohydrate (starch and sugar) intakes in early

pregnancy had smaller placentas and lower birth weights. Low intakes of animal protein in late pregnancy were also associated with lower placental and birth weights.

A mother's own weight at birth was also found to be linked to the weight of her baby: mothers who had a low birth weight had lighter babies, and this was independent of the mother's height. (*BMJ* 17 Feb 96.)

**The much-leaked report** of the Nutrition Task Force's Low Income Project Team is due to be published as we go to press.

The report, which was not allowed to make recommendations on the adequacy or otherwise of benefit levels, calls for a national strategy co-ordinating retailers, local authorities and the NHS. It also recommends support for local partnerships linking community, public and private sectors, backed up by a national network and database on food and low income initiatives.

**Hansard, 14 March 1996:** *Baroness Robinson of Kiddingdon* 'Can the Minister say whether the all-party Health Committee's recommendations that the government should undertake research into the food-buying patterns of pregnant women — a matter which is important not only for the mother but for the beginning of life — have been implemented, because as far as I am aware they have not?'

*Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish* 'Talking about particular research projects is a little wide of the question... But I shall certainly look into the specific research project which the noble Baroness suggests.'

*Baroness Robinson* 'My Lords, it was suggested in 1992!'

The summer edition of **SNAG News**, the newsletter for School Nutrition Action Groups, is out. Details from the SNAGs advice line 01789-773915.



# marketplace/subscriptions

## 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. £10.99 including p&p.

## Food Adulteration

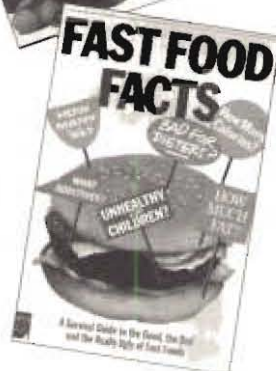
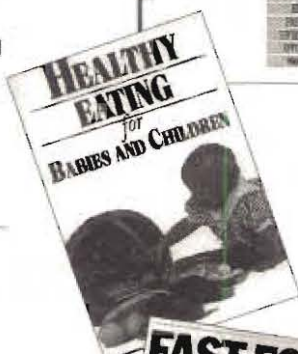
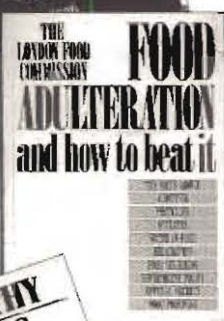
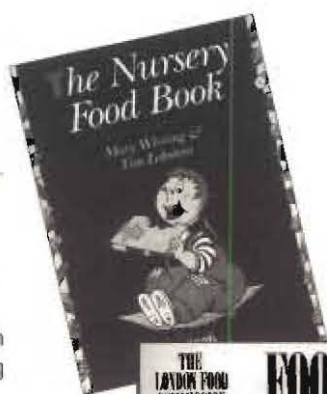
A penetrating expose of the shocking state of food quality in Britain, revealing the facts on additives, pesticides, food poisoning and irradiation. £5.95 inc p&p.

## Teach Yourself Healthy Eating for Babies and Children

An authoritative yet down-to-earth guide giving you the information you need to feed your family. Includes over 60 pages of excellent recipes. £5.99 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

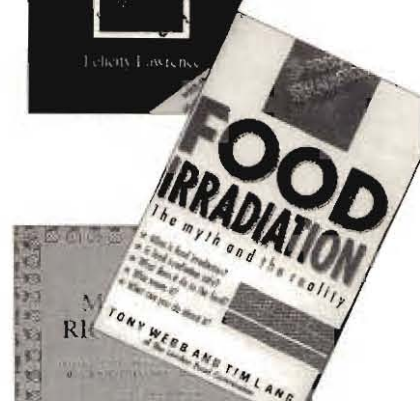
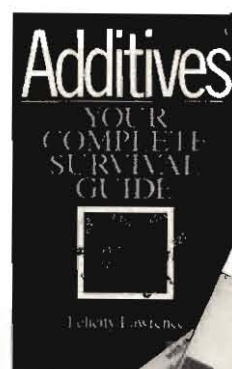
Good food doesn't need irradiating yet the UK has now legalised the process. £6.50 inc p&p.

## More than Rice and Peas

Essential guidelines for multi-cultural catering. Includes over 90 pages on specific cultural beliefs and practices, and 40 pages of local projects and initiatives. £17.50 inc p&p.

## Poor Expectations

Written by with The Maternity Alliance and NCH Action for Children. A devastating report on under-nutrition among pregnant women on low incomes, showing the poor diets being eaten at present and the difficulty of affording a healthy diet on Income Support. £5.50 inc p&p.



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news stories and features in past issues. Stocks are limited and some issues are already out of stock. Please use order form below.

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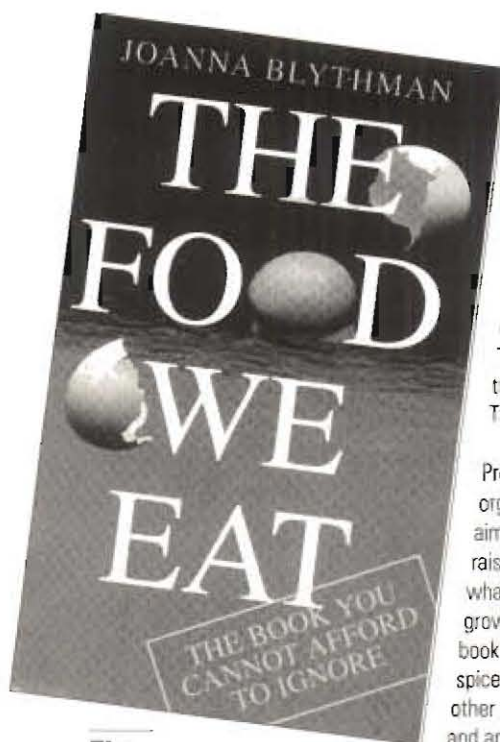
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☐ £35.00 organisations/companies

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## The Food We Eat

Joanna Blythman, Michael Joseph, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, 1996, £7.99, ISBN 0-7181-3912-7.

If you're a regular reader of *The Food Magazine* you'll already know that much of the food we eat is processed or treated in some manner, and that it may well not be as 'fresh' or as 'wholesome' as we are led to believe. In *The Food We Eat* Joanna Blythman examines almost every ingredient of the British diet, from staple foods like meat and potatoes to more exotic fare such as salami or green tea.

She tells us how to pick out the best produce from the shelves and gives us good reasons for leaving much of the rest behind. Although she stops short of naming particular brands she does identify those countries or districts which excel at particular produce, as well as identifying those areas which are producing inferior foods that only masquerade as something much better. Animal welfare, methods of preservation and the use of pesticides are all examined and explained.

For anyone who is genuinely concerned about eating better and healthier food this is an invaluable guide that will leave you itching to get down to the shops to try out your new found purchasing skills.

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## Tropical Commodities and their Markets

Peter Robbins, Kogan Page, 120 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JN, 1995, £40 (but low-cost copies are available to Third World agriculturists and their advisers — contact TWIN Trading 0171-628 6878).

Produced by the development organisation TWIN, this manual aims to answer the questions raised by small tropical farmers on what crops they can realistically grow for an export market. The book lists some two hundred herbs, spices, fruits and vegetables and other sustainable crops (minerals and animal products are excluded from the listing) giving some details on the classifications and grades used for trading, and the sorts of bulk prices paid for the products.

It sounds terribly dry, but hidden in the pages are some odd facts. Every clove bud must be cut from the bush by hand. It takes over 10 million dried buds to make a tonne of cloves, but the producer gets less than a thousand US dollars — they pick ten to fifteen thousand clove buds for a single dollar.

TL

**The Great Vegetable Challenge** is the title of a seminar organised by The Guild of Food Writers at the Savoy Theatre, London, on 21 May. Speakers include John Ash, Dr Jeremy Cherfas, Professor Phil James, Professor Tim Lang, Diane McCrea and Colin Spencer. The concluding debate will be chaired by Derek Cooper. Details from Christina Thomas, tel/fax 0171-610 1180

The Postgraduate Medical School at the University of Exeter has established an *award for the best scientific paper in Complementary Medicine*. The prize will be awarded during an annual Scientific meeting on December 12-13, and the deadline for submission is 1 August. For further details contact Professor E Ernst, tel/fax 01392

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

### Dear Editors

Your item in Backbits in the last issue of your magazine ('I know what I like and I like what I know') is an example of surprisingly sloppy reporting. The Working Paper *Concepts of Healthy Eating: an Anthropological Investigation in South East London*, arising out of a research project which I directed at Goldsmiths College, is not mentioned by name, and your report is misleading in a number of respects:

First of all, the study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, not by the government.

Secondly, the fact that 'only' 134 people were interviewed is beside the point; this was an anthropological study, placing food in its social and cultural context, and utilising primarily qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation, in an attempt to answer the question 'Why do people eat what they do?'

Thirdly, your report castigates the study for an alleged bias towards 'better-off families'. The study aimed to cover a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds, and did just that. It did not set out to be a study of food and poverty, but a study of concerns about the relationship between food and health, a matter which affects all class levels.

Readers might prefer to judge the Project Report by reading it for themselves: it is available from the Anthropology Department, Goldsmiths College, London SE14 6NW for £8.50.

Professor Pat Caplan  
Goldsmiths University of London

### Dear Food Magazine

I commend your report 'Tinned paste and polyfiller?' (*Food Magazine* 30) which I have read with much interest. What a disservice to the youngest and inarticulate in our society is done by those food manufacturers who are persuading mothers to give them inadequate or even harmful food.

I have a couple of examples in front of me:

Cow & Gate Olvarit (from 7 months) Mrs MacLachlan's Winning Recipe Mediterranean Vegetable & Lamb Risotto. Amongst other things the label claims 'No artificial thickeners' but the ingredients include cornflour. Why is this in risotto? Isn't

## Human Health and Toxic Chemicals

An international conference at the University of Warwick 26-28 July 1996, organised by Green Network. The aim is to link together organisations and individuals for the publication of A Declaration on Food and Healthy Living to present to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation at the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996.

Contact Vera Chaney, Max Fox or Melanie Snell on 01206 46902

## Caroline Walker Trust Bursary and Essay Prize

The Trustees are offering a £2,500 bursary to students in full or part-time postgraduate education who wish to carry out a specific, food related project within a voluntary group or statutory body. Applications from people who work in the field (e.g. dietitians, home economists) will also be considered. Proposals to be received by 6th September 1996.

The Caroline Walker Trust is also offering a prize of £500 to students for an essay based upon work they have done as part of their post or undergraduate degree or diploma course, in the area of food and health. Essays to be received by 30th June

Contact Sarah Ivatts on 0171 373 7020 for further details about both these prizes.

rice, mashed up, thickener enough?

Heinz Farmhouse Vegetable Special, (from 3 months). This age statement is reinforced by a further statement on the label '...perfect for babies starting on solids from 3 months old.' Cornflour in this one, too. But isn't three months too young?

With best wishes for the work of the Commission,

S Tillyard  
Norwich



## Passing the salt

A merry time was held at the Cafe Royal to launch a leaflet for caterers, as the culmination of the Nutrition Task Force's group on fast food and catering.

The day was led by Dame Barbara Clayton, head of the NTF, who reminded a packed audience of the need to reduce strokes and heart disease. She nearly said, and certainly implied, that this meant cutting back on salt and fat. The leaflet, *Dine Out Eat Well*, offers over 54 tips for cutting fat, a handful of tips for cutting sugar, and one, just one, on cutting salt.

This is it: 'Let the customer decide how much extra to add when serving fish and chips' — something which caterers would say they do already.

It passes the buck nicely, completely failing to mention all the salt being added *before* serving by, of course, the caterer.

## What doctors do know

In their six or seven years of training, family doctors get less than two afternoons' instruction on food, diet, and the value of good nutrition in preventing ill-health. We've long called for an improvement in this sorry state of affairs.

So imagine our pleasure at being called by the European Union for General Practitioners and asked to write three pages of editorial on the role of food, food supplements etc in preventing ill-health for a forthcoming guide for GPs.

'Sounds great,' we said.

'You will get three pages at no cost, and a full page advertisement,' said the EUGP spokeswoman. 'It's an excellent opportunity to ensure doctors are well-informed about all aspects of nutrition and the organisations that can help them.'

'Is there a cost for the advertisement,' we asked, cautiously.

'£2359,' she said.

'Can we have the pages without the advertisement?'

'Sorry, that is not possible,' she said.

'So the only people who will appear in this guide are those who can pay?'

'It is not like that. It is being edited by Norman Willis.'

'And who is he?'

'Under Secretary of the BMA,' she said.

'Really. Impressive. Is he representing the BMA or doing it in his own name, for a private fee?'

'Erm... In his own name,' said the saleswoman.

A complete scam, we think, and we trust that GPs are well-trained in one particular task — throwing junk mail unread straight into the bin.

## House beef

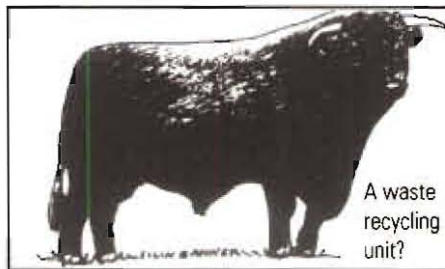
And what do MP's themselves eat? Is beef on the menu in the House of Commons?

Yes, it is. The Houses of Parliament Refreshment Department has an order for beef — which it gets from the Duke of Buccleuch's estate. And, of course, the beef comes with a guarantee that the animals have not been offal-fed.

The Duke was a Tory MP and a PPS under Harold Macmillan, and still gives donations to Tory party funds. Not that such a fact can buy you a catering contract, of course.

## Eat and spend?

Pension companies are offering bigger pensions to people who are overweight. They predict a cash gain for the company as clients taking up the offer will live for fewer pensionable years.



A waste recycling unit?

## Dunn roaming

What was Professor Roger Whitehead of the prestigious Dunn Nutrition Unit at Cambridge doing talking to Professor Andrew Tomkins, of the equally prestigious Centre for International Child Health in London?

According to the campaigning group, Baby Milk Action, Whitehead was trying to persuade Tomkins that he should take some third world students from Uganda for post-graduate training. And why should Professor Tomkins refuse? Because the students come with strings attached, that's why.

Professor Whitehead had been in Uganda offering fellowships to Ugandan post-graduate students, but it wasn't until the Ugandan Ministry of Health found out that Professor Whitehead sits on the Nestle Foundation that they smelled a rat. Quite rightly, for it turns out the students would be funded by the Nestle Foundation. And also quite rightly, Professor Tomkins reminded Whitehead that his unit doesn't accept support from baby milk companies and would not look kindly on receiving the students.

PS Watch out for INMED, the International Medical Services for Health, a 'non-profit' agency founded by Nestle and designed to enable people to accept money without a direct link to the company.

■ Information from Baby Milk Action's *Update*. Details from 01223-464420.

## Currie beef

The last time the Min of Ag found itself up to its neck in a massive public health scare (setting aside the minor ones we like to report in every issue!) was the great Salmonella in eggs scandal. On that occasion, you may remember, MAFF failed to stop the Department of Health, who had seen food poisoning deaths escalate, from going public and issuing advice like 'don't eat soft-boiled yolks', 'don't eat mayonnaise made with fresh eggs' etc. This, we might add, is advice that still stands.

But before the Department of Health had got as far as such advisory action, one of their number had 'gone nuclear' in the form of a statement from the then Health Minister, Edwina Currie, admitting to TV cameras that when it came to Salmonella 'most of British egg production is, sadly, infected'.

Edwina broke eleven months of secret plotting between the two departments on how to handle the egg clean-up without harming egg producer's profits. Mrs Currie's open-ness to the public infuriated MAFF and led to her losing her job — and indeed she has held no government post since.

The BSE crisis brought out the best in her. On Channel 4's *Week in Politics* (23.3.96) she told viewers that eight years ago MAFF was 'little more than a trade union for the worst kind of farmers.'

If that wasn't enough revenge, the message was brought home two days later. Professor Tim Lang, sitting on a sofa with Mrs Currie for a breakfast TV show, suggested to her that, when it came to the Salmonella scandal, 'they sacked the wrong minister, didn't they?'

Uncharacteristically, Edwina said nothing. But she smiled broadly.

## Sweet CB?

We reported in issue 30 that the Post Office were handing out leaflets promoting Nestlé Cheerios to people collecting their benefits. Now we hear that Nestlé have gone a step further by adding Cheerios to child benefit — anyone getting their CB at the post office may also be the lucky recipient of a box of this 'nutritious' product (12% sugar).

