

# The FOOD MAGAZINE

**Campaigning for safer, healthier food**

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**In this issue: \*\*\* The 'sleaze' MP who took an exclusive BSE contract from MAFF, and failed to get results — see page 5.**

**\*\*\* Unsafe burger labels — we name the burger companies that are failing to follow *E Coli* 0157 advice — see pages 9-11.**

## MAFF and the meat industry

**Documents leaked to the Food Magazine show close links between MAFF and the Meat and Livestock Commission, the marketing body for the meat industry.**

**T**he notes of internal meetings of the Meat and Livestock Commission, held during 1996 and obtained by the *Food Magazine*, show the lengths to which the MLC is prepared to go to persuade people, especially children, that eating beef is safe and good for them. They also demonstrate the close links — publicly denied — between the industry and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF).

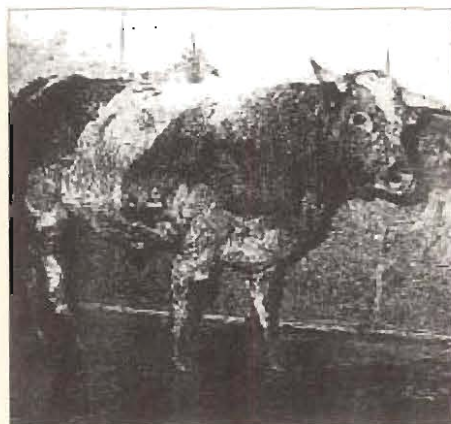
While admitting the 'inadequacies in policing and control of many aspects' of meat handling, and 'severe misbehaviour over veterinary certificates' the thrust of the MLC marketing strategy has been to target schools and education authorities that banned beef from their menus. 'We have gained agreement by the Minister' the document says, 'to use SEAC scientists (the supposedly independent scientists advising government) ... to tackle education authorities which have gone away from beef.'

The MLC's strategy included

- Using 'direct mail to households with children assuring them of the value of meat in their diet';
- Working with MAFF to identify local authorities most likely to change back to beef. 'We need an early win,' says the MLC, 'to serve as a positive demonstration to parents that all is well';
- Avoiding been seen to be close to MAFF which was 'not considered a credible source of information' but instead working with

supermarkets, which have 'the unique feature of holding the guardianship of consumer interest';

Most extraordinary of all are the close links between MAFF and the MLC, which both organisations strenuously needed to deny in public. Regarding their schools strategy, 'MAFF wishes to distance itself from MLC' says the document, but it goes on to show its deep penetration of MAFF — 'we need to get ourselves into a position with the (MAFF) Animal Health Division to be able to orchestrate this activity.'



Cattle caked in excrement. Abattoirs are now being told by the discredited Meat Hygiene Service to send the poor beasts back to the farm. See page 5.

To influence local authorities, two MLC staff 'will work on this with the (MAFF) Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer', says the document, and goes on to describe the 'collaborative attitude' among staff at MAFF, and the setting up of a team to visit schools consisting of a MAFF senior official Kevin Taylor, and two scientists, Ray Bradley and Richard Kimberlin (the latter a consultant to McDonald's). The two scientists, both of whom sit on MAFF's supposedly-independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, 'are very close to us' says the MLC.

## Strawberry growers damage the ozone layer

As British strawberries come into season it is time to put on your sunscreen. The pesticide methyl bromide, used in much strawberry growing, is damaging the ozone layer. While some European countries now grow all their crops without the chemical, the UK is dragging its heels in moving towards safer alternatives.

With your help we are campaigning for supermarkets and pick-your-own farms to sell strawberries grown without methyl bromide. We are also calling for fruit to be labelled so customers can choose environmentally-friendly fruit this summer.

Read our strawberry report on pages 14-15.



Ozone-damaging pesticides may have been used on this fruit — but how do you know?

**Get the facts with The Food Magazine**

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

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

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

*Co-directors:* Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein  
*Information Officer:* Mary Whiting  
*Research Officers:* Brigitte Griffiths  
*Office & Subscriptions Administrator:* Ian Tokelove  
*Food Irradiation Campaign Officer:* Martine Drake.

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

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

## editorial

# Twentieth century re-inventions

**W**hether it is Barbie Doll pasta shapes (see back cover) or repackaged milk (page 12) or intensively-reared lamb (page 4), the companies that make our food are continually re-inventing themselves and their products. They have to if they wish to continue trading.

The big revolutions in science (the next one is gene engineering) provide new products, new markets and new processes, but it is the small, day-to-day re-inventions — repackaging, re-formulating, and cost-cutting — that keep company shareholders happy in the short term.

But there are dangers. Cutting the corners or 'streamlining' production has proved to be the undoing of the meat industry, where commercial pressures to speed up production lines have led to unacceptably high levels of food contamination and an increasing risk of food poisoning.

The meat industry should not be singled out. M&S had a hygiene problem with baby milk this January, and eggs are still the subject of a Department of Health warning to ensure the yolks are cooked. Even the growing of strawberries, beloved of English summers, has evolved into an ozone-damaging trade (pages 14-15) despite the promises of supermarkets that they are taking steps to cut the use of agrochemicals (page 13).

The problem lies in the prevailing view that intensive farming is much more productive than extensive, low-input farming. It is a view still widely held in scientific and policy-making circles, despite increasing evidence that the intensive methods developed in the last 40 years are showing diminishing returns on their capital inputs, and have passed their peak in terms of cost-benefits. The next revolution, genetic engineering, is equally likely to be a short-term solution, and an unpopular one at that.

The long term solution involves a different sort of farming with a different sort of economic relationship underpinning it. Fair farming gives back to the land as much, or more, than is taken out, and should provide farmers a fair return for their work. Fair processing means less processing, selling fresh food with short shelf-lives, not over-preserved, over-wrapped and over-travelled products.

There may be less profit to be made this way. But maybe we should re-invent what we want from life.

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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.

**Turn to page 18 for subscription details.**

### Advertising Policy

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The government may change ... but it will take more than an election to improve the nation's food.

## New policies for a new parliament

### Put people first

For too long, consumer interests have come a poor second to commercial interests, and their cosy relations with politicians and civil servants. From genetic engineering to food hygiene standards, from mad cow disease to organophosphate poisoning, consumers have been kept in the dark, exposed to unnecessary risks and seen their interests ignored by Ministers and departments far more concerned in supporting farming and food businesses.

The old cosy consensus that excludes consumers must pass into history. Public health and the rights of consumers must now take priority in every aspect of food policy.

### Audit food supplies

Food producers gain from subsidies that promote intensive, chemicalised farming. The price of food in the shop does not reflect its real cost — the environmental damage, lost wildlife, road congestion and packaging waste, along with the health costs of eating over-processed diets.

Let us have a full environmental and social audit of the true costs of food production. Where subsidies are given, ensure they go to less intensive, sustainable farming methods.

### Open the doors

No more secrecy in the corridors of power. It is time to let in the light. We need a vigilant press and active campaigning groups — and they need to know what is going on. This means a Freedom of Information Act, and a guarantee that food decisions will be based on published agendas, published minutes, available papers, and full disclosure.

At present food companies can select the evidence they submit to get approval for new products. In the USA companies must disclose all the evidence they have, and we must demand the same full disclosure in the UK.

### Regulate

The era of de-regulation should end. De-regulation has put public health and food safety at risk. Companies have been expected to regulate themselves, but time after time, from abattoirs to advertisers, genetic engineers to functional food producers, we have seen commercial pressures pushing good standards out of the window.

Regulation means more than tightening up the laws. It means adequate inspection services. It means better detection methods. And it means strengthening the laws that make producers liable for the food they produce — at present agricultural products are virtually exempt.

### Provide the facts

Consumers are given too few facts about the food they are sold. Nutrition labelling is confusing, and unfounded health claims abound. Products can rarely be traced to their sources, genetic altering may not be revealed and there is no declaration of the sprays and chemicals used.

There is room on the label for all this and more: food bar-codes could reveal the secrets. You could take your purchase to the scanner and be given a screenful of details about what you are buying. Even if only one person in a hundred makes the effort, the companies will be having to reveal the facts — and in the process they might decide to improve their practices.

But facts mean little on their own. School's should be teaching label-reading and the meaning of ingredients, how to get value for money, how to ask questions and how to ask again. Home economics is but a part of the range of skills for daily living that is currently missing from the curriculum. Children have a citizen's right to be taught cooking skills and how to shop wisely.

**Whoever wins the election, little will be changed by creating agencies at ministry level. Like re-arranging the furniture on the doomed Titanic, nothing will improve until the basis and direction of food production changes. No easy task — but here are some Food Commission proposals.**

### Boost local incentives

Food travels thousands of miles, while local producers cannot find customers. A map of where your food came from, and where your shopping money goes to, would quickly show how badly your supermarket serves your neighbourhood. Impoverished areas remain impoverished, high streets close down, corner shops struggle to survive and small farms go bust.

Regenerating a local economy means more local food production and less air-freighted peas from Zimbabwe. Fresh seasonal food, not standardised imports. Get Gardening projects, city farming, school-farm links, community supported agriculture, box schemes — even setting up farmers' market stalls in supermarket car parks — can all be started under local incentive schemes.

### Promote the best

Britain trails the rest of Europe in assisting organic agriculture and promoting environmental support schemes. And it colludes with the companies in keeping standards low. It needn't be like that. Let us learn the lessons of the food disasters — BSE, *E coli*, organophosphates, veal calves, the falling quality of school meals and the rise in the rates of obesity — and make a revolution. Let us make UK food something to be proud of.

We can use our influence in Europe to insist that food should be made to the highest standards, not the lowest ones which currently dominate the logic of 'harmonised' markets. Let us pioneer environment-friendly farming, regenerate rural small-holdings, promote the skilled producer and gain an image for producing the best.

And let us tell the politicians that we will not settle for less!

# Tesco may force lambs indoors

British lamb, in greater demand since BSE took beef off the menu, may have to become an intensive, indoor-reared product if supermarket company Tesco has its way. If ever we needed an example of how the supermarkets control the food business and encourage intensive farming methods, here it is.

At present, lamb production follows traditional patterns of rearing from early spring to late summer, and slaughtering from late spring to late autumn. Customers wanting fresh British lamb out of season, especially in the low season after Christmas, must accept 'mature' lamb with

darker meat and stronger flavour.

Unhappy that the prices tend to rise as the quality deteriorates, Tesco meat trading director Andrew Batty told a meeting of lamb producers in February that he wanted the seasonal output profile changed, i.e. autumn-born lambs. Unlike chickens and pigs, lambs are slow to convert feed into meat, and so will have to spend all their lives indoors eating feed concentrates and growth promoters to make Tesco's scheme viable.

If you want to tell Tesco's what you think, give them a call on 01992 632222.

## GMO maize falls on stony ground

Genetically engineered maize has been banned in Austria and Luxembourg, and must not be grown commercially in France and Italy. Most UK supermarkets have asked their meat suppliers not to use the maize in animal feed.

In the USA, the GMO maize importers Northrup King have been fined for bringing engineered maize into the USA from Chile before a licence was approved. It has also become clear that the modified maize

has only been given restricted authorisation in the USA, and the companies are required to implement long-term resistance management plans.

And in answer to the question of why the European Commission waved through approval of the maize last December, the notes of the meeting of December 18th show that the Trade Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, argued that approval for the maize 'will make relations with the US easier', and that requiring separate crops and full labelling would risk trade conflicts with the US.

■ More details in *Splice of Life*, vol 3, no 5, April 1997, from Genetics Forum, tel 0171 638 0606.

**Pesticide residues are very variable.** Somewhat masked by the election announcement, the Pesticides Safety Directorate announced their first major survey of the variability of pesticide residues in fruit crops, showing large differences (as had been shown last year in a survey of carrots). Some individual fruit carried doses nearly thirty times the average for the batch. In such cases, a single apple or peach could take an individual over the acceptable intake of a residue.

■ Unit to unit variation of pesticide residues in fruit and vegetables, Pesticides Safety Directorate, 1997.



What do we want fields to be? 41 suggestions can be found in **A Manifesto for Fields**, and a companion booklet **Field Days — Ideas for Investigations and Celebrations**, available from **Common Ground**, tel 0171 379 3109, price £3.50 each incl p&p.

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Protection Act 1990 by the Secretary of State. The content is  
in a programme of releases and files under the Commission  
Decision 90/307/EEC establishing a simplified procedure for  
the release into the environment of specially modified sys-  
tems.

The original commitment is Sager Best (from oil/gas)  
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(pph/chem).

The general purpose of the release is for the Office of Regis-  
tration (under the auspices of the National Institute for  
Agricultural Research, 10000 Regent Road, Cambridge CB3 0E  
and also to develop legal and technical assistance to be used in  
collaboration with Herfordshire, to provide farmers with  
alternative waste management systems for commercial sugar  
beet plantations.

The local release will take place at:  
Mr G. Heyn, Mansfield House, Long Street, East 78 12  
SL1

Between March-April and September 27-February 1998.

The programme of releases covers additional releases for  
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**There are many more stories to be told about BSE and its wider ramifications. Here are just three of them. Not even the names have been changed to protect the guilty.**

## MAFF's private deals

Just two weeks after the BSE research committee was announced (see right) *The Economist* (22.2.97) published an account of how two Californian researchers have developed what they believe is a test for BSE in live animals. But astonishingly they have been denied access to BSE infected material from MAFF because MAFF had signed an exclusive deal with a company called Electrophoretics International.

Given that up to 30% of cattle with suspected BSE turn out not to have the disease when their brains are examined after slaughter, and given that CJD in humans is difficult to diagnose until the brain pathology is examined after death, any test that can establish the presence of the disease in live animals and humans is worth having. A reliable diagnostic test would be cheaper — and possibly less risky — than having to examine brain tissue, and also could speed up the urgent research into how the disease is spread.

MAFF should have been only too willing to help,

but they were not. They had signed an exclusive deal with the UK company that wanted to develop a test. Share prices in Electrophoretics soared when the deal was announced, only to collapse when it became clear nothing useful was going to emerge during the entire year of the agreement. The company chairman is Sir Michael Gylls, a Tory MP, and deeply implicated in the cash-for-questions enquiry.

MAFF has also been criticised for sitting on the epidemiological data it has collected on the spread of the disease. Only one group, at Oxford University, has been allowed access, and they have a legally binding contract not to show it to anyone else.

*The Economist* suggests that this is a classic case of how science should not be done. Instead of a broad, decentralised effort to crack the problem, as happened with AIDS, MAFF chose to keep the data and the tissue materials under tight secrecy. How this has served the public interest is not clear, though no doubt Michael Gylls was not displeased.

## Vets are not assured

Certification of the source of meat is suddenly being seen as a solution to failed consumer confidence. Farmers particularly have come a long way in just a single year, with the National Farmers Union coming down firmly in favour of farm assurance schemes, not least because the supermarkets are already forcing herd certification on farmers as a condition of buying the meat.

But certifying that a herd is free from BSE is not as simple as it might seem. Vets are not happy about it at all. Vets are the ones who have to sign a certificate stating the herd is free of BSE, but in a discussion in the *Veterinary Record* (1.2.97), the British Veterinary Association points out several difficulties which make it uncomfortable with the role its members are supposed to play:

- The nature of the disease and the absence of a live test make it impossible to verify that BSE does not exist in any animal or herd. The term 'BSE free' cannot be applied to any animal, herd or holding as it may be just about to show itself. There were over 90 cases of farms having their first case of BSE in 1996, and over 1100 in 1995.

- Animal identification throughout its life is difficult to achieve. Single ear tags are unreliable, and the passport system relies on the ear tags. The passport must be tamper-proof, and every farm on which the animal resides must be properly recorded. An animal's identity also needs to be maintained during slaughter and cutting.

- Herd status is equally difficult to verify. There are many examples of just one or two BSE cases appearing on a farm, and the animals may then be moved before the BSE is recorded. Farms that deal only with early rearing or with fattening may have no cases recorded against them, but may actually produce many animals which show BSE later on.

- Vets cannot substantiate the absence of infected meat or bone meal in the cattle feed, yet are asked to certify that the animals have not been exposed to such feed.

- At what point will a herd or holding be considered BSE free? If they had one case in the 1980s are they ever going to be able to supply BSE-free certified cattle? If not, how many of the 32,000 farms that have had BSE — of which 13,000 have had only one case — will be condemned to bankruptcy?

## Our best brains

February the government announced yet another advisory committee to advise the health and agricultural ministers on food, but this one is enough to blow the socks off all the rest.

The extraordinary membership sounds like it should be Blair's new Food Agency, but no. The prime purpose of this very senior committee is a remarkably simple one — to co-ordinate spending on BSE research.

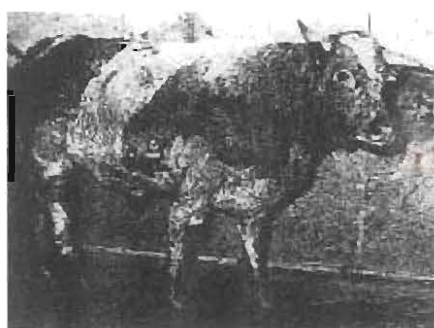
Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary (and Head of the Civil Service) Sir Robin Butler, it includes the most senior civil servant at MAFF (Permanent Secretary, Richard Packer), the Dept of Health's Chief Medical Officer, Sir Kenneth Calman and its Director of Research, Professor Swales, the heads of the research councils (the Medical Research Council's Professor Radda, the Biological Science Research Council's Professor Baker and the Director General of Research Councils Sir John Cadogan) and the Chief Scientist (and Head of the Office of Science and Technology) Sir Robert May.

What is going on? We suspect:

- it shows that the last ten years of dither and squabbling has exposed MAFF's appalling inability to conduct its own research or even commission the research that is needed
- that MAFF cannot sort itself out internally, and its prolonged bitter fighting with the DoH (from Edwina's salmonella-in-eggs onwards) has led the DoH to round up some friends and give MAFF a thrashing.

Sadly, this heavyweight committee is restricted to discussing BSE. The *E. coli* scandal will throw up an even more difficult conundrum, with MAFF and the DoH again in dispute, because the *E. coli* organism is harmless to cows but potentially fatal to humans. 'We won't be paying,' says MAFF, 'it's a human disease.' 'Yes you will,' says the DoH, 'because your cows are causing it.'

Meanwhile we all suffer.



**Dirty cows sent back:** for more details contact MAFF on 0181 330 8335 and ask for a copy of the Meat Hygiene Service report *Dirty Animals* published this March

# Baby milk code-busters exposed

**Repeated violations of the International Code on marketing baby milks have been revealed in an independent survey set up by church and development agencies published in January.**

A new survey, *Cracking the Code*, gives details of baby milk company violations in the capital cities of Bangladesh, Thailand and Poland, and in Durban, South Africa, and combines these with interviews with mothers and health workers in representative clinics in each city. Unlike previous reports of code violations, the structure of the research allows quantitative estimates to be made of the extent and effect of code violations in each city.

This exposé of the activities of leading baby milk companies — predominantly Nestlé, Gerber, Milco, Nutricia (Cow & Gate) and Wyeth (SMA) — arose as a direct result of Nestlé's own challenge of the Church of England's support of a boycott of Nestlé goods. At Nestlé's request, the Synod agreed in 1994 to suspend its boycott while a detailed survey was undertaken by an interagency team independent of the companies and of the Nestlé boycott campaign. The result is a vindication of the boycott's supporters and will put pressure on the Synod to re-introduce its support for the boycott. Nestlé has claimed that it was not consulted (although there are letters to show it was) and that the survey 'does nothing to end the controversy'.

Examples of violations of the WHO International Code on the Marketing of Breastmilk

Substitutes are illustrated in the report, including leaflets given to mothers in shops, free samples given out at clinics, brand-named gifts to health workers, and posters showing products and implying their superiority to breastmilk.

Evidence of the impact that company-sponsored anti-breastfeeding messages can have on women can be found in detailed tables appended to the main report. Taking the interview data from mothers in all four cities, our graphs (see box) show the link between the failure to maintain exclusive breastfeeding and receipt by the mother of anti-breastfeeding messages from named companies. A further analysis shows that receipt of a free sample of formula milk also has a serious impact on breastfeeding.

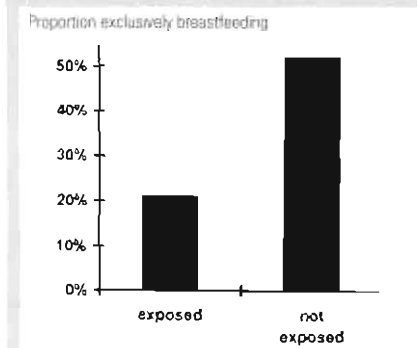
■ *Cracking the Code: Monitoring the International Code of Breast-milk Substitutes*, Anna Taylor and Alison MacLaine, Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring, c/o UNICEF, 55 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3NB, (tel 1071 405 5592), price £6.50.

For details of the Nestlé boycott, contact Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrews Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX (tel 01223 464420).

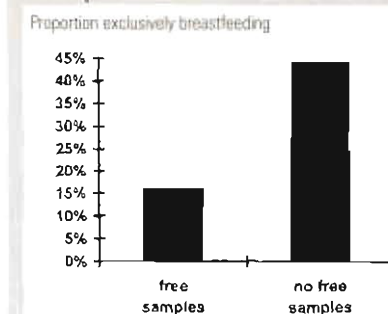
## Code-breaking does reduce breastfeeding

Conclusive evidence that code-breaking activities by companies reduces the number of women maintaining exclusive breastfeeding is given in the appendices of the *Cracking the Code* report. The figures, combined for all countries, are shown below. The percentages are for the women who had not used any commercial baby milk, shown according to whether or not they had been exposed to company marketing information (top graph) or free samples of baby milk (bottom graph).

### Exposure to company information



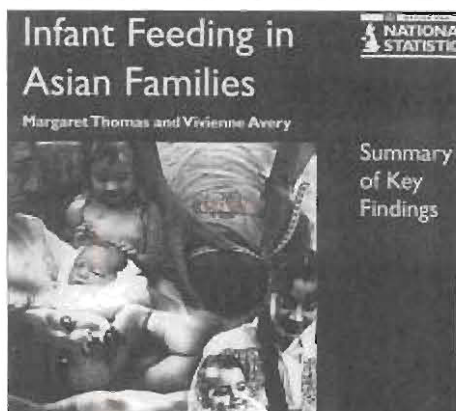
### Given free samples



A Department of Health funded study of Asian mothers in the UK found much higher breastfeeding rates than among white mothers living in similar or neighbouring areas. Only 10% of Bangladeshi, 18% of Indian and 24% of Pakistani mothers bottlefed compared with 38% of white mothers.

White mothers were also more likely to start weaning their babies onto solid food at an early age. By eight weeks nearly 20% of white mothers had introduced solid food to their babies, compared with less than 5% for all Asian groups.

■ *Infant Feeding in Asian Families*, M. Thomas and V. Avery, The Stationery Office, ISBN 011 6916931, 1997, £40.00.



Modified starch may adversely affect babies' digestion. Beech-Nut, producers of baby food without modified starch, have issued figures from a study conducted on the effects of modified starch on infants. The figures show raised frequency of loose stools, and raised breath hydrogen (indicating poor absorption of carbohydrate) in babies given modified starch compared with those given natural starch (maize). The effect was aggravated by the presence of sugars, such as those found in fruit.

Modified starch is used widely in the baby food industry as a low cost bulking agent. It is made from chemically treated cornflour.



# NCC slams health claims

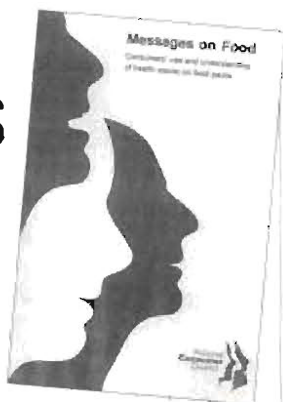
A strong recommendation that all health claims on food products should be banned has been made by the government-funded National Consumer Council in a report published in February.

The report, *Messages on Food*, surveyed consumers and found they did not distinguish between nutrition claims (which are regulated) and health claims (which are generally not) on food products, and that some

of the claims could be confusing and potentially misleading.

The NCC concludes that the best solution would be an outright ban on health claims, but that failing such a move, there should be regulation at European and national level. While this is pending, they suggest MAFF should issue guidelines and should ensure compliance through continued monitoring and enforcement.

■ Contact NCC on 0171 730 3469



# Companies bury sweetener labels

The spirit of new legislation due to take effect on July 1st and designed to ensure that consumers can easily see which products contain artificial sweeteners is being circumvented by soft drinks companies.

The Sweeteners in Food Regulations 1996 requires manufacturers to add the phrase 'with sweeteners' to the name of the food when that food contains any artificial sweeteners. When the food contains both added sugar and added sweetener, the name of the food should include the words 'with sugar and sweeteners'.

It was widely assumed that manufacturers would have to declare

this information on the front of the pack, as this is where the name of the food is usually placed. However, careful wording of the regulation shows that no specific positioning of the sweeteners declaration is stipulated, and manufacturers have taken to re-stating the name of the food in small print on the side or back of the pack, and only there are they adding the required phrase.

Casual shoppers will, just as before, have little idea what they are buying until they have the time to read the small print. One big step forward, followed by an equally sized step back!

# MAFF consults on claims

MAFF's Food Advisory Committee has issued a consultation paper concerning functional foods and health claims, including proposals that:

- claims about nutrients should be based on good evidence of a likelihood of a deficiency in the population, or clear benefit of reducing or increasing the intake of a particular nutrient;
- the claim must relate to the food as eaten rather than to general properties of an ingredient or component, and the claim should be fulfilled when the food is eaten in normal quantities;
- claims should be supported by a dossier of scientific evidence demonstrating the specific

physiological effect and how this benefits human health, and toxicological data on the product;

- the scientific evidence should include human epidemiological evidence on a representative sample of the population showing more than a transient effect, and should be available to the public.

*Food Advisory Committee review of Functional Foods and Health Claims*, a call for comments. Details are available from Denise Love, Food Labelling and Standards Division, MAFF, tel 0171 238 6281. The closing date was 31 March, but given that deliberations have already extended over seven years, late comments should still be sent in to MAFF, with a copy sent to us at the Food Commission.

**Food labels** are to be the subject of a campaign undertaken jointly by the Guild of Food Writers and the Guild of Health Writers, who hope to launch their Food Labelling Action agenda (FLAG) this coming June. The intention is to put pressure on companies to provide better

information on their products, including exactly what is in the food, how it is produced and, where health claims are made, whether those can be substantiated. Details of FLAG from Sarah Stacey, 22 Ashchurch Grove, London W12 9BT.



Not mentioned on the front, where consumers were supposed to find it, but in small print on the side, or even smaller print on the back. These two examples are from Boots, but most manufacturers are expected to adopt the same sneaky strategy.

# MD Foods takes Gaio off the shelves

The soya-based yogurt-style Gaio has been withdrawn by its manufacturers, MD Foods. The move comes just months after the Food Commission successfully complained to the Advertising Standards Authority about the health claims being made for the product.

Promoted as having a unique cholesterol-lowering bacterial culture, the product relied on a single Danish study on a small group of 40-year old men, and which admitted that the findings should not be extrapolated to the general population. Yet MD Foods promoted its cholesterol-lowering effects on television and in magazines, and printed misleading graphs on the product packaging.

It is understood that the bad publicity, combined with a second, unpublished trial showing that the bacterial culture — derived from the excrement of Ukrainians — had less effect than first shown, led the manufacturers to cut their losses and ditch Gaio.



# Food Irradiation Campaign - 10 years on

**For exactly a decade the Food Irradiation Campaign, run within the Food Commission, has led public awareness over the problems of irradiation technology, writes Martine Drake.**

**T**he success of the Food Irradiation Campaign can be judged by the continued refusal by consumers to ask for irradiated food, and the cautious approach by supermarkets who don't put it on their shelves. As the table shows, not a single supermarket is knowingly selling irradiated produce.

## Six years of legalised irradiated food — and still no-one wants it!

The UK approved irradiation in 1991. This spring we asked the leading supermarkets whether they were now selling any food products known to be irradiated. Here are their answers:

ASDA  
Co-op  
Kwik Save  
Marks & Spencer  
Safeway  
Sainsbury  
Somerfield/Gateway  
Tesco  
Waitrose

No

Research: Anne Kirstine Petersen and Charlotte Poulsen.

In the 1980s, the supporters of food irradiation technology assured consumers that the process had no impact on the quality of the food, and was so benign that you could not detect any difference. The 'invisibility' of food irradiation did not endear the technology to consumers, and the Campaign led a successful demand that irradiated food should be clearly labelled as such.

From the Food Irradiation Campaign we can draw several useful lessons which may prove valuable for campaigns on other technological issues, such as genetically engineered food.

- ◆ Avoid blanket condemnation of the technology (too unscientific) but counter the industry's statements that there is 'no problem' by showing the evidence for being cautious — from nutritional, environmental and other angles.
- ◆ Remind consumers that the driving force for the technology is to fulfil commercial rather than consumer needs.
- ◆ Find a slogan reflecting this — such as *Good Food Doesn't Need Irradiating*.
- ◆ Develop links with other campaigners globally, something that should be easier now than it was a decade ago.
- ◆ Accept that you may not stop the technology, but you can argue for consumer choice and the right to know — i.e. call for clear labelling — which even the most avid free market supporter should accept.

The Food Irradiation Campaign's calls for the right to know and the right to choose were legitimate and valuable 'non-political' demands. So influential were these demands, that the Home Office admitted they would not serve irradiated food in prisons, on the grounds that prisoners should not be made to eat irradiated food without a choice, and choices were not offered.

With MAFF junior minister Angela Browning reportedly overheard saying 'For heaven's sake, don't let genetic engineering become another food irradiation' it is clear that the strategy succeeded. Consumers were not forced to swallow an



unwanted technology. There is only one commercial food irradiation plant in the UK, and that has a licence only for herbs and spices. Despite government moves to make licences easier and cheaper to obtain, there appears to be no investment interest in developing more irradiation facilities in the UK.

The Food Irradiation Campaign continues to operate and reports on the uses and abuses of food irradiation in the pages of the *Food Magazine*.



This cheeky 'subvertisement' from US campaigning group Food & Water, warns readers that the US food corporation, Hormel Foods, makers of SPAM, is considering the use of food irradiation. Contact Food & Water at RRI Box 68D, Walden, Vermont 05873, USA (tel 001 - 802 - 563 3300).



# CHECKOUT

**Our exclusive burger survey finds many companies give poor food safety advice despite repeated official requests**

## Burger labels fail to follow guidelines

**S**ix years after the Department of Health warned of the need to cook burgers 'right through, till the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside' the Food Commission has found many companies are still failing to do anything more than give recommended grilling and frying times on their labels. More than a third of popular products surveyed gave no indication of the need to cook the burger thoroughly, and three quarters of the products failed to remind consumers to ensure the juices ran clear or ensure there were no pink bits inside. None of the products gave raw meat handling advice. See survey results overleaf.

Undercooked beef burgers were identified as an especially hazardous source of *E coli* food

poisoning. This is because the mincing of beef spreads the possibly contaminated surface throughout the product. After a series of *E coli* outbreaks in the US and UK, fast food companies increased the cooking temperatures of burgers, but little has been done to ensure domestic burger-eaters are better advised.

There is no excuse for this poor response. In June 1995 an advisory committee repeated the need for detailed instructions to be included on burger labels. MAFF promised to draw these recommendations to meat manufacturers' attention and in June 1996 they published the advice in guidelines issued to food manufacturers and their trade associations. Yet, as our survey overleaf shows, most companies have yet to change their ways.

### How long must we wait?

- ◆ 1985-90: Rising numbers of *E coli* food poisoning noted in the UK and the USA, and linked in the USA to hamburger consumption
- ◆ January 1991: Thirteen cases of food poisoning with *E coli* 157 in Lancashire, nine of them linked to a branch of McDonald's in Preston
- ◆ February 1991: Chief Medical Officer issues warning to caterers and consumers to ensure all burgers are cooked right through, with clear juices and no pink bits
- ◆ 1991-1997: continuing increase in *E coli* poisonings in the UK, and *E coli* deaths doubling in number in the period.
- ◆ June 1995: The government's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) recommends all raw minced beef and beef products are labelled with handling and cooking instructions, and that burgers are cooked thoroughly, with clear juices and no pink bits.
- ◆ 1996: series of *E coli* outbreaks in Japan
- ◆ June 1996: MAFF issues advice to manufacturers urging burgers be labelled with cooking instructions following ACMSF advice.
- ◆ November 1996: Start of *E coli* outbreak in Lanarkshire leading to at least 18 deaths, linked to cross-contamination from raw minced beef.
- ◆ December 1996: ACMSF receives evidence that many burger manufacturers fail to give adequate cooking instructions on labels (the survey is not published)
- ◆ April 1997: Food Commission survey finds similar failure to give adequate labelling.



Cooking times on these labels, but nothing more. We fried according to the times given and still found pink meat inside and blood in the juice of some samples, despite a golden-brown exterior.



# CHECKOUT

## Burger companies put customers at risk

Cases of food poisoning are hitting record levels, and deaths from *E coli* food poisoning have doubled in five years. Yet we found many manufacturers, including leading brand names, have failed to follow government guidelines when it comes to helping us cook high-risk meat products correctly.

### Burgers cooking and handling instructions

Products (frozen unless shown 'chilled')	stated cooking times	'thoroughly cooked' or 'piping hot throughout'	'juices run clear'	'no pink bits'	raw meat handling instructions	score out of 5
Asda beefburgers	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Asda quarterpounders	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Bird's Eye Steakhouse quarterpounders	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Bird's Eye Steakhouse 100% beefburgers	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Bird's Eye Steakhouse original beefburgers	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Budgens beef burgers with onion	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Budgens quarter pounder beef burger	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Crofters Kitchen beef steaklettes	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Dalepack chopped beef grills	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Farmlea beef cutlettes	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Fullers Foods chopped meat Sandwichsteaks	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Iceland chilled burgers with onion	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Iceland chilled 100% beef quarterpounders	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Iceland beefburger with onion	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Iceland 100% beef burgers	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Iceland chargrilled quarterpounders	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Key Country Foods 100% beef quarter pounders	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Ross Tendergrill Beef Grillsteaks	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Rowleys economy burgers	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Safeway beef burgers	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	3
Safeway quarter pounders	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Sainsbury chilled mince grill steaks	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	3
Sainsbury beef burgers with onion	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	3
Tesco healthy eating beef burger	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Tesco beef burger	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Tesco economy burger	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	2
Waitrose chilled beefburgers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	4
Waitrose beefburgers with onion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	4



# CHECKOUT

Last June the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issued labelling guidelines to all food companies. Burger manufacturers should label their products with clear instructions to ensure the food is cooked thoroughly, with no pink bits inside and the juices running clear.

This followed strong recommendations in 1995 by the Department of Health's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) calling for full cooking and handling instructions on all raw minced beef and minced beef products.

An informal survey conducted last autumn by Dr Norman Simmons, chair of ACMSF's sub-committee on *E Coli*, and presented to ACMSF in December, found 'about half of the products reflected the Committee's recommendations'. Dr Simmons — a consultant to Waitrose, Marks & Spencer and McDonald's — told us he did not wish to publish his survey after submitting it to his committee.

So the Food Commission conducted its own survey and found that a good deal more than half the products were failing to comply with labelling recommendations. We found most products give cooking times for frying or grilling the product, but many fail to provide further instructions (see table). Cooking times alone are prone to error as cooking equipment differs between households, and cooks often grill and fry until the product looks ready, not by counting the minutes.

Many products fail to mention the need for thorough cooking or for the food to be piping hot and few indicate the need to ensure there is no blood in the juice or pinkness in the product. None of the products give raw meat handling advice.

## Labelling is not enough

There is no excuse for the inadequate labelling found in the survey of beefburgers featured here. But even if we had found every manufacturer to be fully complying with the recommended guidelines, we would have been concerned that this would not have been enough. Warnings on labels cannot replace manufacturers' responsibilities to ensure the food is free of contamination when it is sold.

Contamination can start on the farm, where cattle faeces carry the bacteria and poor hygiene and animal care can spread bacteria throughout the herd. Slaughterhouse practices can then distribute the bacteria across hundreds of carcasses — several reports show greater *E Coli* contamination in slaughterhouses where hygiene practices are poor and where meat handlers are not adequately trained. Meat processing and packing plants are also areas where a small amount of contamination can be spread to many products. Consumers' kitchens are the last line of defence, but must not be relied upon as the only line of defence.

Yet, despite rising food poisoning cases, the government has been substantially *weakening* the Food Safety Act since its arrival in 1991. Two key parts of the Act — the registration of commercial food handling premises, and training in hygiene for all commercial food handlers — have already been undermined. In early 1993 the government quietly 'lifted the burden' on food producers by allowing them to decide for themselves which of their staff should be trained and what standard they should achieve. Two months later the government also removed the requirement for many commercial food premises to be registered.

The Food Commission has long supported the call by environmental health officers to have a food premises *licensing* system — including regulations requiring inspection *before* new premises can start operating commercially — along with proper training for all food handlers to an externally approved level. Greater powers to seize foods, greater frequencies of unannounced spot checks, and a better budget for food sampling and analysis are also needed.



## A better label

Although the Food Commission believes that adequate labelling cannot solve the problems of food poisoning while the causes of contamination remain in place, there is no excuse for manufacturers to continue with inadequate labelling. Department of Health advisers recommend all raw minced beef products, including sausages and reformed steaks as well as burgers, should carry instructions to avoid cross-contamination and to cook thoroughly. Such a label might say:

### Food poisoning warning

#### This product contains raw minced beef

- Wash all surfaces and utensils that come into contact with this product
- Wash hands after handling this product
- If defrosting, do not allow drips to contact other foods

#### Cooking

- Ensure this product is completely cooked, with no raw meat inside and no blood in the juice



## Loopy labels

Our sharp-eyed readers have sent us this latest load of labelling laughs.



### Same price, but 12 % smaller

Beware the metrification of milk — or rather the rip-off that can follow.

We found several shops mixing 2-litre packs with their 4-pint packs — and charging just the same for both. The two packs look similar — indeed the smaller container is taller!

Four pints is 2.272 litres. The new 2 litre packs are therefore some twelve per cent smaller.

#### INGREDIENTS

BLACKCURRANTS · SUGAR · WHEATFLOUR · BUTTER · EGG · MODIFIED STARCH · DRIED SKIMMED MILK · RAISING AGENTS-E450, SODIUM BICARBONATE · FLAVOURING.

#### TOURTE AU CASSIS

PÂTE BRISÉE FUR BEURRE À BASE D'ŒUFS ET DE SUCRE, FOURÉE DE CASSIS.

INGREDIENTS: CASSIS (19.7%) · SUCRE · FARINE DE BLÉ · BEURRE (10.7%) · ŒUF · AMIDON MODIFIÉ · LAIT ÉCRÉMÉ EN POUDRE · LEVAIN-E450, BICARBONATE DE SODIUM · AROME.

CURIOUS: THIS LIPSTICK COLOURING AGENT, E450, IS IDENTICAL WITH A...

### The French tell you more

In French, this Marks and Spencer blackcurrant tart tells you two extra facts: the amount of blackcurrant and the amount of butter.

For nearly ten years the European Commission has been slowly putting together its ideas on quantitative labelling — making manufacturers declare how much of each ingredient they have used in their product. From a strong consumer position (requiring the quantity of every ingredient to be declared) to a weaker one (only those over 5% of the product) to an even weaker one (only those given

emphasis on the front of the pack — blackcurrants and butter in this case), the EC has dithered and delayed.

Now we hear that the charade may grind to a halt, or at best take several more years to adopt the weakest regulations. MAFF is putting it about that consumers don't really care, and only just fish fingers and fruit juice arouse any interest. Well watch our lips, MAFF: *We want the facts — all of them!*

And, by the way, it is ten years since MAFF promised action to ensure fish fingers declared their fish content. They still do not.



Gourmet, hand-cooked potato chips, probably the finest you'll ever taste.

Lightly Salted

£30.91

lightly salted



Low Fat  
OVEN BAKED  
Gourmet Potato Chips

### The less... the more!

Lightly salted regular Kettle chips, a mere £1.29 for a gigantic 150 grams.

But the fat content is 28.7%, so the healthy gourmet shops around for a lower fat alternative... and finds Kettle crisps, just 5% fat. Brilliant. The trouble is that now you are asked to pay £1.79. And, worse still, you get a measly 113g of crisps. Weight for weight, that's nearly twice the price.

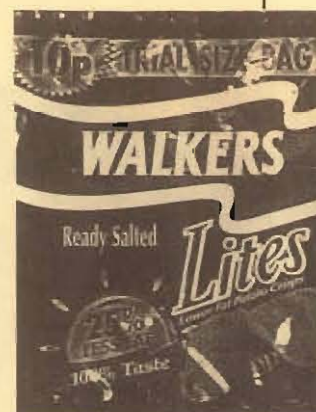
While on the subject of low fat crisps, Walkers have brought in a '25% less fat' crisp called Lites. Sounds good, but it turns out to contain just as much fat as Kettle's regular! Walker's Lites offer us a hefty 28.5% fat, while Walker's regular crisps offer a staggering 38% fat.

### 'Ideal' — but for whom?

Nestlé has the nerve to suggest on this sweet soft drink that it is 'Ideal for school lunch boxes', giving a novel meaning to the word 'ideal'.

Water and sugar the first two ingredients, showing how little real juice is present. The list also includes flavouring and artificial sweeteners.

And the reader who sent us this pack says 'It didn't taste nice even though I have a sweet tooth.'



Thanks to Helen Adams, Sheila Ross, Bob Stevens, anon.



# Integrated Crop Management

## Integrated with What? Managed by Whom?

Supermarkets are claiming their fruit and veg no longer use 'unnecessary' pesticides and are grown with environmentally friendly 'integrated' methods. What does this mean? Caroline Dumonteil reports.

**I**ntegrated Crop or Pest Management schemes, ICM or IPM, were originally intended to achieve a systematic reduction of pesticide use. Over 30 years ago FAO established a Panel of Experts on Integrated Pest Control, which went on to create the Co-operative Global Programme for the Development and Application of Integrated Pest Control in Agriculture with the UN's Environment Programme in 1977.

The idea was to develop 'a combination of pest control methods which does not rely solely or, in some instances, at all on the use of agrochemicals. The methods are based on an understanding of the pest problem in the full environmental context. The approach is therefore an "ecological" one<sup>1</sup> using cultural, physical and biological control by natural predators and chemicals such as pheromones.

ICM schemes were in operation in Europe well before their development in the UK, where the idea was picked up by the supermarkets. Tesco's set up a scheme called Nature's Choice and most of the remaining food retailers followed, joining the National Farmers Union in an 'NFU-Retailers ICM Initiative'. This consisted of a series of protocols, listing permitted chemicals and giving instructions on their use.

The Royal Agricultural Society also developed and promoted ICM through a scheme called Linking Farming and the Environment or LEAF. LEAF is a curious body. It has been registered as a charity, while relying for support on a long list of companies selling agrochemicals, spray machinery, and related industries such as protective clothing.

LEAF states that ICM 'does not lay down a set

of specific principles'. Commercial goals are prioritised: its aims are 'to improve economic performance, gain a market edge, meet insurance and legislative requirements, address public concerns and enhance environmental performance.'

The retailer David Sainsbury has added that ICM also aims 'to underline the safety and quality of production for consumers ... and ... help buyers obtain produce of a uniform standard from home sources.' Sainsbury's intention was to impose Europe-wide ICM standards for all Sainsbury suppliers by the end of 1996.

In fact, the introduction of these ICM schemes is timely for retailers, farmers and chemical companies. Pests eventually develop resistance to virtually any pesticide, a phenomenon described as 'a problem reaching crisis proportions.'<sup>2</sup> The cost of researching and producing new pesticides has risen sharply, and it is in the chemical companies' interests to prolong the life of existing products. Innovations consist of minor changes to existing products, designed to 'target' them more accurately. But ingredients with higher levels of toxicity are sought, to reduce the total quantity required.

### 'ICM protocols permit 68 pesticides on potatoes'

What they had to ensure was that farmers would continue to use them, but in lower quantities — precisely what ICM requires. Pesticide use has indeed fallen but there seems to be little joy among farmers as they are continually squeezed by the supermarkets.

For retailers, ICM is good for marketing to customers and it strengthens their hands against farmers. Imposing ICM protocols on all their suppliers allows them to play one supplier off against another, picking the lowest-costing grower anywhere they choose in a global market. Since these are their own codes of practice, they can set standards compatible with their own commercial goals.

And what of the protocols themselves? They are changed every year, but recent examples permit an extraordinarily wide range of chemicals

to be used — 68 pesticides are permitted on potatoes, for example, and 58 on strawberries — many of them highly toxic and persistent. If the supermarkets had to list the chemicals used on the crops next to their display it might shock consumers into seeing how different the reality is from the image.

Good pest management systems require complex, knowledge-intensive technology and considerable outreach effort to educate farmers. They require a government-led co-ordinated approach. Yet all the UK has developed are private sector schemes from the food retail industry, and promotion by a charity sponsored by the very firms whose products caused much of the problems in the first place.

Pesticides should be thought of like antibiotics and their use seen as treating, not preventing disease. Their use encourages resistance. Even the so-called 'biological' controls involve mass production and the importation of outside agents to a growing area, rather than the development of stable biological systems. Their use assumes a low level of pest infection, with the biological agent acting to enhance the presence of natural predators, which runs counter to the supermarkets' demands for blemish-free crops.

In the 1950s in the USA some 30% of harvests were lost to pests. Forty-five years later, 30% is still lost, but to different pests, and now the soil and our bodies carry the residues of a dozen persistent chemicals. Left to private interests we cannot expect matters to improve. We need regulations, not voluntary codes, and we need a government committed to public and environmental health.

© Caroline Dumonteil, 1996, adapted from a talk given to the Guild of Food Writers.

Caroline Dumonteil is a free-lance researcher and writer on food and agricultural issues.

<sup>1</sup> Watterson, A (1981) *Pesticides in Your Food*, Guildford Biddles Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, FB and Barry, JW (1995) *Biorational Pest Control Agents: Formulation and Delivery*. Washington DC: American Chemical Society.

# Strawberries

**When enjoying a bowl of delicious strawberries this summer don't forget the sunscreen. The depletion of the ozone layer has now reached record levels and methyl bromide, the pesticide used in much strawberry growing, is adding to the problem. Sue Dibb reports.**

**T**he ozone layer is unlikely to be on your mind as you tuck into a dish of strawberries this summer. But perhaps it should be.

The connection is the pesticide, methyl bromide, which is commonly used to fumigate soil before strawberries, and other salad crops, are grown. It is used to kill pests in the soil which could damage the crop, but as it escapes into the atmosphere it's also highly damaging to the ozone layer.

Over the last ten years strawberry growing in the UK has become much more intensive. While the area of strawberry production has declined by nearly a quarter since the mid 1980s yields have risen, in part due to the increasing use of methyl bromide. More methyl bromide is used for strawberry production than for any other crop — strawberries account for 75% of the usage of methyl bromide on outdoor soil grown crops.

It is used to treat soil before planting to prevent the diseases *Verticillium* which causes wilt and *Phytophthora*, to control nematodes and weeds and for what is called soil sickness. The main variety of strawberry, Elsanta, is very susceptible to *Verticillium* wilt but Elsanta's firm skin, long shelf life and good looks make it attractive to the supermarkets. As a result, strawberry growers and fumigation companies are arguing against the methyl bromide phase out and are lobbying for exemptions under what are called 'critical agricultural uses'.

The traditional way of controlling diseases in strawberry production is to use crop rotation and less intensive production. Modern high input bed systems require trickle irrigation with expensive equipment. Such investments prohibit crop rotation and fallow periods.

All strawberries grown in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany are grown without the use of methyl bromide, yet it is still commonly used in UK open-field strawberry production, including pick-your-own and in many other countries worldwide including the USA and Spain, from where the UK imports many strawberries.

In 1994 the UN's Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion concluded that the elimination of agricultural and industrial emissions of methyl bromide by 2001 would make the largest single contribution to further protecting the ozone layer.

Methyl bromide has been classified as a Class I Ozone Depleter and developed countries, including the UK, have agreed its use should be reduced by 50% by 2005 and phased out completely by 2010 under the Montreal Protocol. But as the serious extent of the damage to the ozone layer becomes

clearer, there's pressure for it to be phased out earlier. Later this year countries will decide whether to support a US proposal for an international phase out by 2001.

Apart from its use on strawberry farms, methyl bromide is also used to sterilise the soil for some glasshouse lettuces, celery, tomatoes, cucumbers and also in mushroom production. Safe and effective alternatives exist for over 90% of current use, and Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland already produce almost all food crops without methyl bromide, but, as reported in the *Food Magazine*, 35, Oct 1996, the UK is dragging its feet. Greatest use is in Kent, but in some areas strawberries are produced by soil-less methods using peat bags — a method favoured in the Netherlands. In Germany integrated pest management or steam sterilisation is used.

While methyl bromide does not leave harmful residues on the fruit, it is a highly toxic chemical. In the Netherlands all soil uses of methyl bromide were phased out by 1992, largely because of concern over water contamination.

## Action

- Support our campaign for an early phase out of methyl bromide and to encourage growers who are moving towards more environmentally sound and sustainable food production. We aim to add the UK to the list of countries which have either already banned, or scheduled an early ban for methyl bromide including the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Canada.
- Ask your supermarket or greengrocer for strawberries produced without methyl bromide.
- Ask your supermarket to label produce grown without the use of methyl bromide.
- Find out whether your local pick-your-own strawberry farm uses methyl bromide.
- Write to your MP (C/O House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA), your MEP (address from your local library) and the Secretary of State for the Environment (2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB) asking for the UK to support European Union proposals for methyl bromide to be phased out more rapidly. It is feasible for the major uses to be phased out by 1999 and other uses by 2000.



# and Suncream

## Where is methyl bromide used?

All strawberries grown in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark are produced without methyl bromide. Apart from in the UK, it is also used for strawberries in Spain and the USA, Morocco, Kenya, Belgium, France, Israel and Italy. In Zimbabwe, which supplies some UK retailers, major producers stopped using methyl bromide in 1993.

In the UK the major use of methyl bromide is in the preparation of open-field strawberries including pick-your-own. This alone accounts for around 30% of all the methyl bromide used in the UK. It's also used to fumigate the soil for other horticultural crops and to fumigate some grain, nuts, dried fruit, herbs and spices and to fumigate containers, machinery and processing facilities.



## What the supermarkets say

We asked the supermarkets how shoppers could get methyl bromide-free strawberries and whether the supermarkets were demanding produce grown without methyl bromide in their contracts with farms.

The **Co-op**, **ASDA** and **Safeway** told us that some of the strawberries in their stores would be produced without methyl bromide. However they would not label them as such. The **Co-op**, **ASDA**, **Safeway** and **Sainsbury's** said they would try to inform enquirers which products had been produced or treated with methyl bromide, although most said it was unlikely that they could provide this information for individual packs of strawberries. Shoppers will not be able to choose strawberries guaranteed to be produced without methyl bromide unless they choose organic ones.

**Marks & Spencer** said 'The industry is actively seeking an alternative to methyl bromide for soil fumigation and indications are that the targets laid down in the Montreal protocol will be met.'

**ASDA** said 'We are working closely with suppliers to find alternatives'.

**Safeway** said 'Shoppers will from time to time be able to buy fruit which has been produced without the use of methyl bromide ... We work in close association with our growers to produce the fruit our customers demand with minimal impact on the environment.'

**Sainsbury's** said 'Sainsbury's is reducing the use of methyl bromide with its suppliers through integrated crop management systems, which have encouraged suppliers to use alternatives wherever feasible or reduce application rates and frequencies.' The company is supporting research into alternative soil sterilants.

**Somerfield** was 'not prepared' to answer the questionnaire. 'We are taking steps to ensure that we meet the obligation (of the Montreal Protocol) but are also aware of some of the problems that are being faced at the present time by the industry in trying to phase out the use of methyl bromide.'

**Waitrose** was 'actively discouraging the use of this chemical, but at present it is not possible for all our products to be grown on land treated without it'.

**Tesco** said they have a policy to reduce the use of methyl bromide, but that they could not label strawberries produced without methyl bromide, and they could not tell customers which products had been treated with the chemical.

## Going, going...

Damage to the ozone-layer has reached record levels. The 1996 ozone hole over the Antarctic was the longest lasting on record, measuring twice the size of Europe. In the Northern Hemisphere ozone depletion of 25% has been observed with substantial thinning over populated areas including the UK.

## Sustainable Menus

As part of its Sustainable Menus Campaign, the SAFE Alliance is examining strawberries and the impact of current production practices on the environment. The campaign, which we hope to feature in the next *Food Magazine*, aims to show consumers how to make the best choices for their health and the environment this summer.



## Over two in three adults get too fat

An extraordinary seven out of ten adults will become clinically overweight by late middle-age, according to figures from the government's latest *Health Survey for England*. The survey of more than 16,000 adults examined in 1995, found 72 per cent of men aged 55-64 were overweight, including 21 per cent obese. Sixty nine per cent of women aged 65-74 were found to be overweight, including 24 per cent obese.

Taking all ages 16-64, male obesity rates have risen from under 13 per cent in 1991 to 15 per cent in 1995, despite a target in the Health of the Nation strategy of reducing this to just six per cent by the year 2005. In the same period, women's obesity rates have risen from 15 to nearly 17 per cent, despite a target of eight per cent.

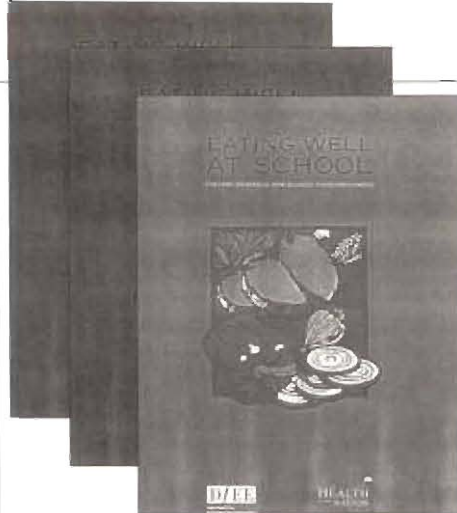
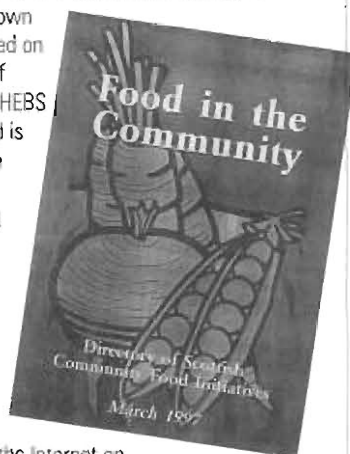
The better news is that the nation's blood pressure has fallen a little in the period 1991-95 (men's systolic bp from 140 to 138mmHg, women's from 137 to 134mmHg). This may be explained by a rise in the amount of treatment given to adults with high blood pressure: the proportion receiving treatment rose 20% in the five-year period.

■ *Health Survey for England 1995*, commissioned by the Department of Health, The Stationery Office (tel 0171 873 9090), ISBN 011 322021 9, 1997, price £60.

## Where Scotland leads...

With over a hundred community projects aimed at tackling the problems of healthy eating on a low income, Scotland is leading the rest of the UK with innovative and imaginative approaches to local action.

Funded by the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) and supported by the Scottish Office, the newly-launched Scottish Community Diet Project is being run by Bill Gray in the Scottish Consumer Council (tel 0141 226 5261). His directory of initiatives (shown above) is based on a University of Glasgow and HEBS database, and is available from HEBS in Edinburgh (tel 0131 447 8044). The database is available on computer disk, and can also be accessed on the Internet on <http://www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk>.

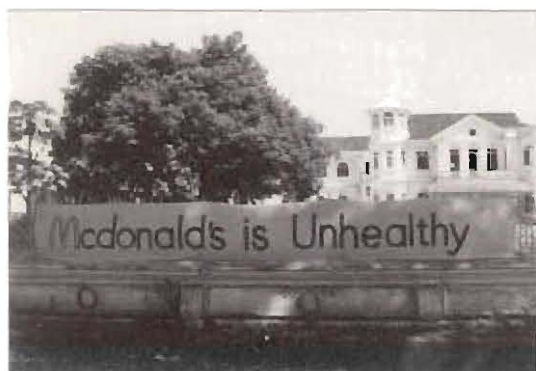


Nearly three years in the making, the government's school meals guidelines have now been published. Nutritionally, they reflect the Caroline Walker Trust guidelines for school meals, with additional material geared towards schools and school governors (booklet one), local authorities and contract managers (booklet two) and caterers (booklet three).

The guidelines are seen by many as an admission by the government of the serious deterioration of school meals since the 1980 Education Act removed the obligation to provide meals for all children and abolished the prevailing nutritional guidelines. The new guidance seeks to re-instate the principles of good nutrition but have been criticised for being purely voluntary.

Schools, parents and health professionals wanting to improve school food should work to ensure that the nutritional elements of the guidelines are incorporated into their catering contracts for the school meals services.

■ The set of three booklets is available free of charge from the Department for Education and Employment Publication Centre, PO Box 6927, London E3 3NZ (tel 0171 510 0150, fax 0171 510 0196). May we encourage readers to request these booklets, if only to show the Department that people do care about school meals.



While we in Britain wait with bated breath for the judgement in the McDonald's libel trial, activists in Penang, Malaysia, have been protesting against the company's attempts to promote a global fast food culture.

Demonstrators, including members of the Consumers Association of Penang, the Penang Heritage Trust, Third World Network and Consumers International, accused the company of encouraging unhealthy diets and damaging the environment to ensure a continued supply of meat. As part of the campaign, the Consumers Association of Penang has been distributing free, organically grown vegetables.

■ Contact CAP at 228 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia (tel 04-2293511).

A pioneering healthy eating project in schools combining oral health promotion and healthy eating, the Heart in the Mouth project in Kent has now published a series of useful documents including a Model healthy Eating Policy for schools, a Teachers' Resource and a Guide for School Governors. A video is available and a report evaluating the project.

The Department of Health-funded experimental project found that children will choose healthier options if these are widely available, attractively presented and competitively priced.



■ Details from Wendy Plimley, Senior Dental Officer, West Kent Community Dental Service, Foster Street Clinic, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6NH (tel 01622 751526).

## Dietary diseases cost NHS £m.

That diseases cost money is obvious, but putting a precise figure on the costs is notoriously difficult. A brave attempt has been made in a little-known document released by the NHS Executive last autumn, *Burdens of Disease*.

Visits to the dentist cost the NHS some £1bn. Heart disease cost £500m in drugs alone. Bowel cancers costs over £1.1bn for in-patient care.

Other gems are also buried in the tables, but you won't find it easy to extract them. The problem is that the document is for distribution to Health Authority Chief Executives and their directors of finance, purchasing, public health and research. It states that copies may be 'sent to other government departments and some outside bodies for information'.

■ *Burdens of Disease*, NHS Executive, October 1996. With the correct headed paper you might get a copy from the Department of Health, PO Box 410, Wetherby LS23 7LN. Otherwise you can try pestering Raphael Wittenberg, Room 564C, Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LW.



# Fast food revisited

Ten years ago our report on fast food, *Grazing in Peckham*, found a third of fast food eaters ate fast food every day. We went back this winter to see if the same startling eating patterns still prevail. They do.

**W**hen, in 1987, the then London Food Commission asked over 300 fast food eaters in Peckham how often they ate fast food the results showed that virtually a third of our respondents — 31% — ate fast food five times a week or more, and over 70% ate fast food more than once a week.

For these people, fast food snacks formed a major part of their diet, and they were the first to admit that their diet was far from healthy.

This winter we went back to the same high street in Peckham to find out if the next generation of fast food eaters was still so keen to eat fast foods. We asked 171 people coming out of fast food stores (McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and several smaller companies) how often they ate different fast food meals and snacks.

This time we found an incredible 49% of our fast food eaters were eating fast food five times a week or more, and 95% were eating fast food more than once a week. As our figures show (see below), over half of those aged under 20 were eating fast food at least five times a week, and so were those aged 20-35, and the proportion was a little higher in men than in women.

Asked if they felt the food was healthy, only one in eight thought the food was 'very good' for them while a third thought it was poor or very poor.

An overwhelming 79% said they would not believe a food company who said the food was good for them.

And a similar number — 78% — wanted more nutritional labelling, preferably on the packaging itself.



## Frequency of eating fast food (percentage within each gender)

	Men	Women
under 1 per week	4	3
1 - 2 per week	13	15
2 - 3 per week	15	9
3 - 4 per week	1	14
4 - 5 per week	13	15
5 or more per week	53	46

## Frequency of eating fast food (percentage within each age group)

	age under 20	age 20-34	age over 34
under 1 per week	1	5	11
1 - 2 per week	10	18	22
2 - 3 per week	13	10	6
3 - 4 per week	5	8	28
4 - 5 per week	19	8	11
5 or more per week	52	52	22

Researched by Brigitte Griffiths and Shelby Meirlik

*Still Grazing in Peckham, a ten-year follow-up on the eating habits of fast food eaters, The Food Commission, 1997, £20.*

## McLibel trial update

Latest suggestions are that the judge will deliver his verdict in mid-May. Meanwhile a branch of McDonald's in Lyon, France, has opened an internet-themed store with two computers to allow customers access to the Web. Whether they have blocked access to the McSpotlight site (<http://www.mcspotlight.org.uk>) with its alternative views on the company is unknown.

## 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.

## 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. £6.99 inc p&p.

## The Food We Eat

The award-winning author Joanna Blythman's examination of the best and worst in British food today. £8.99 incl. p&p.

## Back issues of The Food Magazine

Back issues cost £3.50 or £30.00 for a full set of available issues. Send for index of major news stories and features in past issues. Stocks are limited and some issues are already out-of-stock.



## 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 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.

## order form

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## The Ecologist



## Food Insecurity: Who Gets to Eat?

The Ecologist,  
Nov-Dec 1996,  
Agriculture  
House, Bath  
Road,  
Sturminster

Newton, Dorset DT10 1DU, ISSN  
0261-3131, £4.00.

We don't usually review journals, but this edition of the *Ecologist* is special.

Firstly Oxfam's Kevin Watkins blows away last year's the FAO Food Summit myth that the god of free trade will solve world hunger. Not only does free trade grossly distort underdeveloped countries' domestic economies and subject them to the vagaries of forces far beyond their influence, he argues, but also what the West likes to call free trade is not free at all. Poorer countries must open their borders to multinationals bringing in, and removing, all the agricultural commodities they please, while the West subsidises its own intensive agriculture, effectively depressing world prices. The rich set the prices, the poor pay the costs.

And then there is the shadowy CGIAR, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research — a body which promotes intensive agriculture with an annual research programme exceeding \$300m. It was formed from UN agencies (FAO, UNDP and the World Bank) yet has no legal status, takes decisions by consensus, includes private foundations along with national governments among its members — and charges \$500,000 per member per year. The group determines the funding for 16 International Agricultural Research Centres with 12,000 staff — more than either the FAO or the WHO, yet far less public.

Further articles look at the environmental damage that genetic engineering may bring, the contribution intensive agriculture is making to global warming, the social creation of food 'scarcity' and the importance of growing food in urban areas. Smaller articles back up the main themes. The magazine as a whole is as valuable as a regular book — at a fraction of the price!

## First World Hunger: Food Security and Welfare Politics,

G Riches (ed), Macmillan Press,  
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hants RG21  
6XS, ISBN 0-333-64526-X, 1997,  
£14.99.

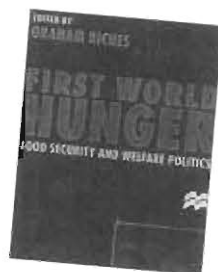
The notion that hunger in its third world, starving-children sense, could be found anywhere in the first world may be hard for some to countenance.

But hunger does stalk the Western nations, as this review of the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand testifies. The material presented makes a fine complementary text to the *Ecologist* food edition (see left), focusing on the internal aspects of the developed Western economies, and how those economies fail their own populations.

In the UK, the Salvation Army serves over a million meals each year, and expects to help 3,000 people on any given day. Similar charitable food banks in Canada have swelled in number from just one in 1981 to 75 in 1984 and an alarming 456 in 1995, bringing an inevitable institutionalisation of what was meant to be an emergency response (there is now a Canadian Association of Food Banks).

But it is the de-politicisation of hunger that worries the Canadian editor, Professor Graham Riches. Central government in Canada, he argues, is off-loading its welfare activities and abandoning responsibility for ensuring food is available as a right. The same might be said of the UK government, whose Nutrition Task Force was forbidden from discussing benefit issues and encouraged to recommend local initiatives as solutions to food poverty.

Despite public horror at the existence of beggars on the street, governments know that such poverty serves them well, in order 'to encourage the others'. Professor Riches' book, by focusing on food as a right, may help to flush out such attitudes.



## Politics of preservatives

We are a wholefood shop in Scotland and we are thinking of stocking a soft drink which includes the preservative sodium benzoate.

The company making the drink assures us that sodium benzoate is harmless in low doses and is found occurring naturally in soft fruit such as blackberries and strawberries. Do you have a view on this?  
M Martin, Glasgow

*While we accept that benzoates are found in soft fruit, and we also accept that in low doses benzoate is likely to be harmless to most drinkers we still have two problems with the preservative.*

*Firstly, some people seem to be sensitive at even low doses, and benzoates are thought to provoke allergies in such sensitive people.*

*Secondly, and perhaps more significantly from your 'green' point of view, we need to ask what the alternatives are. The purpose of preservatives is to stop food going 'off', which would otherwise become undrinkable or uneatable, and possibly even dangerous because of the growth of micro-organisms. Traditionally, preserving food was valuable to ensure you had something to eat when fresh food was unavailable.*

*But nowadays preservatives are used to extend shelf lives and commercially undercut the price and sales of fresh equivalents. They are used to sell you old food instead of fresh food. One might also argue that they serve to encourage greater 'food miles' by encouraging the transport of food across continents, effectively reducing the consumption of locally produced food to the detriment of local economies.*

*So please ask yourself if your customers wouldn't be better off if you stock fresh rather than preserved products?*

## More drinks, but not better

My twelve year-old daughter is concerned about her teeth and so has decided to stop drinking regular soft drinks such as cola and orangeade. Instead she is drinking the diet and no-sugar varieties but your magazine keeps saying that the added sweetening chemicals are harmful. So please, which is worse — sugar or artificial sweetener?  
Riya Brandt, Camberley

*There is a simple answer and a complicated one! The complicated one tries to weigh up the known risks, evaluating the damage sugar does and the damage artificial sweeteners do, in so far as these can be assessed.*

*But to save space, let us give you the simple answer. Diet drinks of the sort you mention are usually very acidic. Acid erodes the surface of the tooth (see out feature on tooth erosion in Food Magazine 34).*

*Thus diet drinks cause damage to teeth, possibly as much as regular drinks do. We hope to bring you the results of comparisons between the two in the near future, but for now we can say this: avoid them all! (Dentists recommend drinking water and milk — not soft drinks or diet drinks)*

## Dear readers

We have had lots of copies of correspondence you are having with various MPs, MEPs, the Food Advisory Committee and all. It is very heartening to know so many are putting pen to paper and getting the civil servants and politicians to justify themselves and acknowledge your concerns.

Keep it going! Even after the election we — you and us — will need to keep up the pressure on those that make decisions.

And do keep writing to us with your comments, criticisms and questions.

## Appeal

## The SAFE Alliance — 'The Planet on your Plate'

- ◆ The SAFE Alliance Food Miles Campaign told you how far your dinner travelled before it reached your plate and what that means for people and the planet.
- ◆ We are pressing the greysuits in Whitehall and Brussels to put our money into farming which benefits the environment and rural economies.
- ◆ You can help us with our campaigns for food production which is healthier, fairer and safer now and in the future.

Please send donations to The SAFE Alliance, 38 Ebury Street, London SW1W 0LU.



## Monsanto's free lunch

Realising they have made a public relations gaff in Europe with their engineered soy beans, Monsanto rang the Food Commission and several other UK green groups to call a meeting. 'We have our senior staff flying in from the USA and our European Public Affairs director also available — please come,' they begged. 'We feel we have not done enough out-reach work with NGOs.'

Out-reach indeed! They went on to say they wanted to 'move the debate forward' by discussing their great ideas for genetic engineering's contribution to sustainable agriculture.

Swallowing back the nauseous feelings, we are left with a policy decision. If we meet Monsanto will they claim a publicity coup — 'We talk with our critics' — or, worse, will they claim we've reached agreement — 'Monsanto sides with green groups' — and we find we have played into their hands? And is refusing to meet them even worse?

Lunch is included, entirely at their expense...

The meeting, if we go, is after this magazine goes to press, so watch this space!

## Claim shame

It is an offence to promote a food or food supplement with a claim that it can 'prevent, treat or cure human disease' unless the product has a licence from the Medicines Control Agency.

Imagine our horror on finding that Kwai's garlic tablets were being sold with the bold assertion 'avoid heart disease' on the front of their leaflets, though the tablets have no medicine licence. The label on the shelf said 'The only proven garlic for the heart'. A year's supply could cost around £100 but if the claim had any basis in truth then it would obviously be money well spent, and should appeal to the government's health expenditure review.

Inside the leaflet the company made the claim clear: 'How taking Kwai garlic tablets as part of a healthy lifestyle could help you avoid heart disease'.

'We believe the claim breaks the Medicines Act. The company says in the leaflet they have a £12 million

programme of research showing how Kwai helps us avoid heart disease, with the reports 'published in reputable journals'.

We rang the number printed in the leaflet as the Kwai Customer Information Line and found ourselves talking to the Garlic Information Centre. 'Could you send us copies of the published research?'

'No, we can't release that information,' said the nice person the other end. 'But why not?' we asked.

'If we released the information,' she said, 'you might think we were making a medical claim. And that would be illegal.'

Quite so.



## Sheep's brains

Sheep are smarter than you may think. Faced with a cattle grid, sheep in the New Forest have been seen rolling across to get to lush gardens beyond. And in one case a sheep lay herself down on the grid to be walked over by the rest of the flock.

## A pizza cake

Here is a press release from The Great Texas Pizza Company of yes, dear reader, Texas!

*'The latest innovation is a new range called Great Texas Munchers with two exclusive varieties: baked bean and chip pizzas and sausage and chip pizzas.'*

*'Great Texas Munchers, the world's first pizzas with chips on, are ideal for the school menu, offering all the kids' favourites in one simple meal solution.'*

Apparently they are not alone as Heinz is also thinking of a baked bean pizza. But they must be alone in hailing this as the 'exciting and radical alternative to the usual cheese and tomato pizza.'

## A blind eye for bacteria

A curious comment from the baby milk company Milupa, a subsidiary of Cow & Gate (the parent of both is the Dutch company Nutricia) after their nasty salmonella-in-babymilk debacle in January.

The evidence all pointed to one particular factory in France belonging to the company. The fact that the outbreak occurred in the UK — where 12 babies were reported to be infected with a rare type of salmonella, *salmonella anatum* — is believed to stem from the better, centralised reporting and monitoring we have, in the form of the Public Health Laboratory Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre (threatened with privatisation, but now reprieved). Two Milupa-drinking infected babies have come to light in France since the UK outbreak.

Anyhow, the point of this backbite is what the man from Milupa said when confronted with the nasty outbreak his babymilk had caused. He said 'The company would like to stress that its rigorous testing procedures have never shown the slightest sign of contamination.'

No doubt he meant to impress us. Instead we are all the more alarmed.

## Barbaric tastes

Heinz has decided that more girls should be eating their canned pasta shapes. Aware that they have catered to the boys by shaping the pasta as dinosaurs and monsters, they have hunted round for the perfect girlie pasta shape — and ended up with the most predictable and nauseating image they could find.

