

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food

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High levels of dioxins found in fish oils



Fish oils similar to these could give toddlers 'undesirably high' doses of toxic chemicals

Two years ago we reported Greenpeace had found toxic chemicals in fish oil supplements, including dioxins, PCBs, DDT and lindane in nine out of ten top UK brands of fish oil supplements. The results were criticised by companies for being alarmist. But now, research from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has confirmed the findings, with government safety advisers warning that toddlers and school children consuming cod liver oil could exceed acceptable levels.

MAFF's scientists looked for dioxins and PCBs in fish oil supplements and medicinal products, such as cod liver oil. According to MAFF 'the results confirm earlier reports of relatively high concentrations of these contaminants in fish oils, particularly fish liver oils.'

For most people, MAFF's advisers say, there is no problem of exceeding 'safe' amounts. However the experts on the Committee on Toxicity were concerned to note that 'the potential intake (of PCBs and dioxins) of toddlers consuming bottled fish oils was undesirably high.' Furthermore they concluded that 'the intake of such levels is

undesirable, since it potentially leads to the TDI (tolerable daily intake) being exceeded by toddlers and schoolchildren for a sustained period and thus reduces the safety margin between intake and the toxicity observed in animal studies. However, we consider that this intake is unlikely to pose a risk to health.'

MAFF, the Department of Health and the Medicines Control Agency have met with representatives of the fish oil industry to discuss

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Gene soya given a health warning

As the first foods made with genetically modified (GM) soya arrive on supermarket shelves this new year, new evidence is emerging of possible health effects. Scientists from the UK, Germany and India are calling for the removal of GM soya from the food chain, warning that the gene beans may contain higher levels of plant oestrogens, raising questions over the safety of the soya for consumers, particularly children.

Monsanto's Roundup Ready (RR) soybeans have been genetically modified to make the plants resistant to the company's weedkiller, Roundup, which contains the chemical glyphosate. While the company has carried out extensive studies on GM soya and its potential impact on human health, German scientists accuse Monsanto of 'blatant scientific omission' in the design of safety tests.¹ Although consumers will eat RR soya grown in

fields treated with glyphosate weedkiller, Monsanto's tests were done on GM soya beans that were grown without the application of glyphosate. This is a fundamental omission, the scientists claim, because the application of glyphosate causes legumes such as soya to produce higher levels of phytoestrogens than are normally found in the beans.

The increased amounts of these biologically active hormones are thought to be responsible for the higher levels of fat found in milk from cows fed the soya.² Monsanto's own research has shown that cows fed GM soya produce milk with higher levels of fat than those fed ordinary soya. Monsanto had claimed that the GM beans were no different to conventionally produced beans but this new research indicates a significant difference when the GM soya is grown as intended.

As a result, a group of eight scientists from the UK, Germany and India, meeting in Montreal last October at the UN Biodiversity Convention, called on all governments to revoke their approval for the sale of the soya, warning that young children may be especially vulnerable to elevated levels of oestrogen, and calling for further independent scientific investigation. Until these investigations are completed they advise governments to adopt the precautionary principle and to remove GM soya from the food chain.

¹ Monsanto's Genetech-Soybeans: Safe for Consumers? Safe for the Environment? *Gap Analysis and Flaw Identification in Monsanto's Testing* by Dr Beatrix Tappeser and Christine von Weizsacker (1997).

² Hammond et al, *Journal of Nutrition*, 1996.

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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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Unwrapping the label

A student of late twentieth century capitalism could complete a Ph D from the twists and turns of the arguments concerning nutrition labelling.

With a food industry creating packaged, processed food, where the ingredients may not be visible or familiar, a purchaser has to rely on statements written on the label.

Historically, laws were required to punish those who misleadingly labelled their products. It became a criminal offence to label foods as having a greater weight than they really have, or to describe margarine as butter or to water down whisky. More recently, labels had to list the ingredients contained in the product, in descending order of weight.

Yet short measures of food, or the order in which ingredients are listed, are of less consequence to a purchaser's health than is the fat content, or the salt, or the sugar. Yet mandatory nutritional information has been delayed and delayed, and even now is put on the label only on a voluntary basis (unless a nutritional claim is made for the food). That such valuable health information should be voluntary while other food safety aspects such as the best-before date are compulsory, is illogical.

For years the British Government has stalled moves to make nutrition labelling compulsory for all products. It has argued for less 'red tape' for industry, putting the need to make profits ahead of the need for consumer protection. For a decade, the government has been de-regulating food composition standards in the name of 'increasing consumer choice' — we would have more products to choose from, we were told, even if we were denied the information needed to make our choice in a rational manner.

Now we see a turnaround. The very same department that supported voluntary nutrition labelling under the previous government, MAFF's Food Labelling and Standards Division, is now calling for a review of the matter, and is proposing to Europe that all foods should have compulsory nutrition labelling.

Perhaps MAFF is now listening to consumer and public interest groups. 'In order for consumers to benefit fully from the use of nutrition information and thereby improve their diet and enhance their health, it is important that nutrition labelling should appear on all labels,' MAFF announced in November. And this, they say, should include saturated fat, sodium, sugar and fibre.

A welcome change of heart, we hope. Continued pressure at European level from governments and consumer groups could give us better labelling in a few years' time.

Though it cannot come soon enough — see our Checkout special feature on what the labels do and don't tell you on pages 9-12, and Loopy Labels on pages 14-15.

Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein

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Lucozade sugar content

SmithKline Beecham, manufacturers of Lucozade products, have 'required' that we apologise for incorrectly stating the sugar content of Lucozade Energy as 'more than 13 level teaspoons in a 300ml bottle' (see last issue). We are happy to retract this estimate and to print the correct amount. However, despite repeated requests, the company has refused to tell us what the correct figure should be.

We have recently moved to a new address

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Will the FSA be up to the job?

As we go to press the government is expected to announce the White Paper setting up the new Food Standards Agency. But, we ask, can the new agency meet the challenge?

The Food Commission has long argued that public interests will never be well-served so long as control over food regulation remains with a ministry dominated by the need to promote commercial food production. The present Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) set itself the task of promoting farming interests in the 1950s and thanks to the ascendancy of the CAP in European affairs, MAFF has remained farm-oriented ever since. A body that puts the public first has long been needed.

The rising awareness of the role of diet in the genesis of chronic disease and the role of hygiene in the genesis of food poisoning has shown the yawning gap between current food policies and those needed for the protection of public health.

We have joined with others in the National Food Alliance to call for a coherent, integrated food policy which puts public interests before commercial interests. Will the government's proposed new agency fulfil this? The government have promised an independent body that will deal with issues from farm to fork, including nutrition and novel foods. But, when the Food Standards Agency White Paper is published, we urge readers to ask these ten questions:

1 Does the public interest come first?

What sits at the heart of the Agency? Is the Agency defending and promoting the public good, or is it compromised by trying to balance commercial considerations within its own remit? The latter would gravely undermine its ability to ensure it can gain public confidence.

2 Does it cover the food spectrum?

There is little point having an Agency that cannot comment on everything from farm to fork. Will BSE be covered? Animal welfare issues? Battery hens and the labelling of egg boxes? Health claims on foods? Nutrition information? Novel foods such as genetically modified soya? The whole of food production must be open to the Agency to examine.

3 Does it have the power?

The Agency must have the power to investigate, inspect and expose the inner workings of our food supply. Those who transcend the regulations should be brought to account by the Agency. Where the regulations are inadequate the Agency must have the power to propose better ones.

4 And the resources?

Without the cash, the good intentions will come to

nought. Some resources will come from the ministries whose functions the Agency will adopt. But extra money will be wanted to ensure that the Agency can fulfil its increased responsibilities, and fulfil them promptly.

5 Does it link with enforcement bodies?

The Agency will need friends in the enforcement agencies. These include the (somewhat depleted) armies of food inspectors working in Trading Standards, Meat Hygiene, Environmental Health and Public Analysis labs. These agencies should be integrated into the Agency's decision-making structure.

6 Is the Agency independent?

Real independence means the ability to criticise, commercial activities, and criticise government policies, too. Like the Audit Commission and the Health and Safety Commission, the Agency must be prepared to name names and expose poor practices.

7 Will the Agency operate transparently?

Documents, decisions, agendas and minutes should be on the record and available to the public — for example by being on a web site. Commercially sensitive documents should be summarised for public access. Commercial interests must be required to supply all relevant material, not just that which supports their case.

8 Will decisions on risk be compromised?

Evidence of a hazard should be assessed on the 'precautionary principle' that there is assumed to be a risk until proven risk-free. Risks cannot be balanced against commercial costs — such judgements are the provenance of ministers and Parliament.

9 Is regulation and promotion separate?

The Agency has no role as promoter of the farming, fishing or food industry. The new Agency is being established to regain confidence by inspecting, monitoring and regulating the food business, not protecting and promoting it.

10 Can the Agency monitor government departments?

A national food policy should affect many government departments — from Education to Health, Environment to Social Services — and the Agency should have a remit to ensure food policy is harmonised across the different departments.

We are 40!

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Olestra: can they make it stick?

Doubts about the long-term effects of the synthetic fat-substitute olestra have been reinforced by scientists researching the degradability of the substance in sewage.

Olestra can be used to replace fat in processed foods and deep-fry cooking, offering all the taste but none of the calories of regular fats and oils. Olestra is currently permitted in a range of products in the USA but approval has not yet been given for marketing in the UK. Olestra passes through the gut undigested leading to nutritional concerns (it leaches out fat-soluble vitamins) and reported physical problems with 'passive oil loss' or anal leakage.

But new research now shows that sucrose-polyesters similar to olestra resist bio-degradation, raising the spectre of blocked greasy toilet drains and sewers. Tests of sewage sludge applied to soil showed up to 99% of the sucrose polyester in the sewage remained un-degraded after twenty weeks, whereas less than 20% of regular fat remained un-degraded, according to figures published by Environmental Data Services (*ENDS Report* 272, Dec 1997).

The research was undertaken by scientists at Unilever, arch rival to olestra manufacturers Procter and Gamble. Unilever developed its own sucrose polyester compound a decade ago but decided the chemicals had no future in human food.

■ Procter and Gamble's application to have olestra approved in the UK is being considered by MAFF's Food Advisory Committee, who have referred it to the COMA Panel on Novel Foods for advice. Procter and Gamble have asked for the decision to be postponed while new evidence is being prepared. It is assumed that the company were anticipating rejection and have suspended the process to find an alternative means of gaining approval.

■ The Heathrow fire which caused considerable damage and disruption to the airport early last December appears to have started in a ventilation duct from a Burger King store. Grease in the fumes from the cooking area can cling to the walls of ducts and present a fire hazard if not frequently cleaned away.



fish oils continued from page 1

ways of reducing consumer exposure to dioxins and PCB's from their products. Yet no advice has been given to parents to suggest that they might consider alternatives to cod liver oil.

Cod liver oil was traditionally given to children because it is a good source of vitamins A and D.

More recently we are being encouraged to eat more oily fish because the omega-3 fatty acids they contain are good for our hearts. There is also some evidence that fish oils may be beneficial to sufferers of rheumatoid arthritis. As a consequence the market for fish oil supplements has expanded, encouraged by manufacturers' claims to offer the oils in a more convenient form.

■ For further information: *Dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls in fish oil dietary supplements and licensed medicines*, Food Surveillance Information Sheet, No 106, June 1997, MAFF Joint Food Safety and Standards Group.

BSE - is there a methyl bromide link?

An extraordinary piece of investigative journalism published in the *Kent Messenger* in December reveals a possible link between leaks of methyl bromide, the pesticide used as a soil fumigant, and diseased cattle that may have formed the first wave of mad cow disease.

The paper reports that a small factory owned by Rentokil and set in fields near the Kent village of Smarden was manufacturing methyl bromide and other agents including fluoracetamide — a deadly enzyme-blocker — without a licence and without planning permission in the early 1960s. In May 1963 several sheep died on a farm just a mile from the factory. Three cows died on a neighbouring farm within days. Tests on ponds and streams found the ground water to be heavily contaminated with bromides and fluorides.

Cattle that survived were sent to a knackers yard, where they were described as 'frightened, with funny breathing and some seemed to be trying to climb the walls.' The carcasses went to rendering plants where, it is assumed, they could have been

turned into meat and bone meal for adding to cattle feed.

Further cattle died but it took four months before Ministry of Agriculture officials ordered the remaining herd to be slaughtered and burnt. Ponds and ditches within a mile of the plant were drained and the water tipped into the sea on an out-going tide. Two months later, in December 1963, cattle which had been allowed to graze on the fields began to die, and between January and March 1964, 2000 tonnes of soil were then removed from three farms, mixed with concrete and dumped at sea.

A local biochemist, John Williams, claims that methyl bromide could well have caused the start of the BSE epidemic. 'Exposure of animals to methyl bromide would have resulted in multiple mutations and modifications of cellular proteins,' he said. The paper reports that Rentokil has kept no records of the incident. A company spokesman said that the 'government of the day took responsibility for action deemed to be appropriate.'

Kent Messenger, 5.12.97, p38-39.

■ Last summer we urged *Food Magazine* readers to help campaign for the speedier phase out of the ozone destroying pesticide, methyl bromide. And last September a new agreement was reached at the Montreal Protocol by governments around the world. For industrialised countries the final phase out has been brought forward five years from 2010 to 2005 and developing countries will need to phase out use of the chemical by 2015. This welcome agreement shows the effects that campaigning by environmental and consumer groups can achieve.

■ Reductions in the use of methyl bromide, have been used as an excuse to re-introduce the idea of food irradiation in Australia. The country's Quarantine and Inspection Service is reported to be proposing irradiation as the only alternative to fumigating soft fruit, and is putting pressure on New Zealand to lift its moratorium on irradiated food.

GMOs show big rise

While agribusiness boasts of rapidly growing acres of genetically modified plants, consumer groups and supermarkets continue to urge for segregation of crops, and organic food growers fight to retain organic as 'GMO-free'.

World crop areas devoted to GM plants have increased six-fold, according to EFIC, the industry-funded European Food Information Council (see table). Yet the increasing domination of major crops by GM varieties is proceeding far from smoothly. Austria's refusal to permit GM maize to be imported, despite rulings from the European Commission that they were acting illegally, was supported last autumn by the UK representative Michael Meacher, who refused to support a motion of censure against Austria. The use of humanised milk from cows to turn into commercial baby milk has been held up on the basis that it would not be publicly acceptable at present. And there is increasing evidence that genetically-induced resistance to weedkillers can spread to neighbouring weeds and commercial crops, making environmental control of the altered genetic material impossible.

World planting of GM crops (hectares)

Crop	1996	1997
Maize	525,000	4,400,000
Soybean	400,000	5,250,000
Potato/tomato	40,000	500,000
Oilseed (e.g. rape)	200,000	1,600,000
Cotton	810,000	1,200,000

China is reported to have several hundred thousand hectares of GM tobacco.

Source: *Food Today*, EFIC Newsletter, 11, 1997.

Moves to enforce Europe-wide labelling laws to identify GMO foods (at least those with GMO genetic material in them, but not extracted products such as soya oil) continue to founder as manufacturers complain about testing procedures to verify their label statements. Earlier in 1997 MAFF officials were stating that putting information on labels could not be enforced as there were often no demonstrable differences between GM and non-GM ingredients. Labelling was pointless, they said as 'consumers can only make informed choices if they can be assured that they have access to accurate information,' and a label declaration could not be guaranteed accurate. In fact tests can

detect differences in proteins between GM and non-GM foods.

UK food and drink retailers and manufacturers are introducing their own voluntary labelling for foods containing GM soya and maize protein ingredients. However, they insist that labelling should not say 'GMO-free' as this implies a criticism of other foods, and that only positive labelling should be allowed. 'May contain' labels are thought to be 'too confusing'. However, forthcoming proposals from Europe are expected to allow negative labelling. Meanwhile, producers of organic crops in the USA are facing a battle to convince the regulatory authorities that the term 'organic' should by definition exclude GMO material.

Food Magazine readers' requests to supermarkets asking them to confirm that they are insured against prosecution if GMO products should turn out to be harmful have met with brick wall silence. It is possible that no-one is sure about the answer as to who would be liable. The EC Novel Foods Regulations only specify that products should not present a danger to the consumer, and market approval is given to products following a safety evaluation by the Commission based on an applicant's own research dossier.

The European Commission is planning to extend product liability laws to agricultural products (these were previously exempt) so that by 1999 the producer or importer of a defective product must provide compensation for damage if there is a causal link, without the need to prove negligence. The problem, though, may be in showing the direct link. The risks, such as an increase in food allergy and the transfer of antibiotic resistance, cannot easily be traced to specific products.

Genetic Engineering: Too Good to go Wrong?

Greenpeace's study gives ten cases showing how genetically engineered products can go wrong. Copies from them at Canonbury Villas, London N1 2PN tel: 0171 865 8100, fax: 0171 865 8200.



UNICEF unmoved by Nestlé's pleas

A call by the children's organisation UNICEF asking baby milk companies to declare their current marketing practices has been ignored by all manufacturers except Nestlé, and the response by Nestlé left UNICEF reconfirming its disagreement with the company's views and practices.

Following a report by the UK-based Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Practices (see *Food Magazine* 37) showing widespread breaking of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, UNICEF called on companies to 'set out, country-by-country, their range of marketing practices, in order to demonstrate through full disclosure, precisely how those practices are consistent with the International Code.'

Only Nestlé responded to this call, and the company met with UNICEF last October and provided an outline of their activities in Canada, Guatemala and Thailand. UNICEF were unimpressed with Nestlé's interpretation of the Code and wrote to Nestlé afterwards in blunt terms:

'...we have come to the considered conclusion that there do not appear to be opportunities for cooperation that would be of mutual benefit to our respective organisations at this time. ...Our meeting regrettably reconfirmed the historical and on-going divergence between the best interests of children as represented by UNICEF and those of the infant feeding industry. As you well know, we have endeavoured in the past, unsuccessfully to resolve those differences.'

'It continues to be clear that the divergent views are simply not reconcilable in specific and critical areas. Therefore, much as we appreciate the opportunity to have had the meeting, it does not seem to us to be useful to maintain such contact in the future.'

Links between low birth weight and risk of heart disease in adult life may be due to inappropriate diets, according to researchers. Low birth weights are more common among babies born to mothers eating poor diets. A lack of essential fatty acids and anti-oxidants in the parental, fetal and neo-natal diets could predispose a baby to later cardiovascular disease, as well as the more immediate problems of low birthweight such as intraventricular haemorrhage, retinopathy of immaturity and bronchopulmonary dysplasia.

■ Are deficits of arachidonic and docosahexaenoic acids responsible for the neural and vascular complications of preterm babies? Crawford et al, *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 66 (suppl), 1032s-1041s, 1997.

Slimming foods

Six years after the Food Commission's first damning survey of meal replacement slimming foods we ask whether manufacturers are now offering better products. Our new survey finds that not one product yet meets the regulations due to come in early next year.

Back in 1992 we took a close look at meal replacement slimming products — the bars, biscuits and shake mixes sold as aids to slimming. Our survey of 12 leading brands found that products offered poor nutrition; encouraged unhealthy eating habits and promoted unrealistic and unsafe weight loss. Our report formed the basis of a Food Commission submission to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which we urged them to support an EU directive aimed at setting nutritional standards for such products and curbing claims on packaging and advertising about weight loss.

Six years later we are pleased to announce that the EU directive has finally become law, although

companies have until 31 March 1999 to comply with it. But in a welcome move to speed up compliance, Food Safety Minister, Jeff Rooker has urged manufacturers to start following the new rules as soon as possible. In October last year he said: 'Many responsible manufacturers of slimming products already meet these rules. Those that do not will now need to sharpen up their act'.

To discover which companies are 'responsible' and those which are not following Mr Rooker's advice, we took a new look at meal replacement slimming foods to see just what had changed.

What we found

Fewer products

Firstly, we found fewer products on sale in supermarkets and chemists than in our previous surveys — only seven products (see table). Most of the products we found on sale were drink mixes with only one biscuit type product. Market research company Mintel confirms that a number of products have been withdrawn in recent years.

However, the market for meal replacement products has not declined. According to Mintel, sales of meal replacements increased more than six-fold between 1990 and 1995, reaching nearly £74 million, in large part due to the heavy promotion given to leading brands such as Slim Fast. But, despite manufacturers' attempts to persuade would-be slimmers that their products are 'healthy', the popularity of meal replacement

foods could face a downturn as the regulations begin to bite.

Nutritional content

The new rules state that products must meet the following nutritional requirements:

Energy: content should be between 200-400kcal per 'meal'.

Protein: must make up 25 - 50% of energy.

Fat: must constitute no more than 30% of energy.

Vitamins and minerals: each 'meal' must contain at least 30% of specified amounts of 23 vitamins and minerals.

Despite these long anticipated requirements we were disappointed to find no significant nutritional improvements since our last survey. None of the products in our survey met the nutritional requirements of the forthcoming rules in every respect.

We found:

- All but two of the products would meet the fat requirement. The exceptions are Crunch and Slim with 44% of energy from fat — far higher than the 30% that will be permitted — and Complan with just over 30% when made up with water.
- Two out of seven products would fail to meet the energy requirements. Both NutraSlim and Thigh and Hip Slim have fewer than 200 kcal per serving.
- Three out of seven products would fail to meet the protein requirements. Crunch and Slim, SlimFast ready-to-drink and Complan contain too little protein.
- Three out of seven products would fail to meet the vitamin and mineral requirements: Crunch and Slim has too little iron, Slimma Shake has inadequate levels of vitamins A and D and biotin while Complan fails to provide adequate levels of nine vitamins and minerals.
- Although the EC directive includes no requirements for sugar, we found all products were high in sugar — in five out of the seven products over half the calories are from sugar.

Fluid intake

The new rules will also mean that products must warn of the importance of maintaining an adequate daily fluid intake. We found that three products — Thigh and Hip Slim, Complan and NutraSlim — do not currently do so.

"I'd been on and off dieting for years, but then I discovered THIGH & HIP SLIM™ and went from size 18 to size 10 in just 9½ weeks"... Susan Nabby



Most of us Susan had tried dozens of different diets for years. She found ultra starvation diets and harsh exercise routines really hard work and impossible to sustain. She tried this New Healthy Solution from the U.S. and amazed at how quickly she shed those excess inches.

Within days she felt it beginning to work and by week four she had dropped a full size, and eventually down to size 10. Tens of Thousands of Americans have used this scientifically developed technology to lose inches fast and effectively. Now you can.

Soon to be outlawed: Thigh & Hip Slim package showing rates and amounts of weight loss.

slow to shape up

Sugar and fat, but not enough protein, vitamins or minerals, and virtually no dietary fibre in Complan.



Eight teaspoons of sugar in this can, and the name SlimFast implies rapid loss of weight — soon to be outlawed.

Claims

Products will no longer be able to make any reference in their labelling, advertising or presentation 'to the rate or amount of weight loss which may result from its use'. Furthermore, products must not refer to 'a reduction in the sense of hunger or an increase in the sense of satiety'.

We found six out of the seven products make references to the rate or amount of weight loss. Slimfast and NutraSlim refer to 'fast' weight loss, Slimma Shake refers to 'quick' weight control (although it was ambiguous as to whether this referred to weight loss or preparation time) and Crunch and Slim claims you could 'lose up to 6lbs in your first week'.

Worse still is the claim made for Thigh and Hip Slim, which carries the testimony 'I went from dress size 18 to size 10 in just 9 and a half weeks. Although called Thigh and Hip Slim the product says in the small print that the product will not especially help you lose weight from your thighs or hips. Trading Standards Officers have told the Food Commission that the restrictions on claims will also cover names of products, so it is likely that SlimFast will need to change its name to stay within the law.

Crunch and Slim would also fall foul of the rules for claiming that the product will 'fill you up, providing long lasting satisfaction'. Only Complan would meet the forthcoming claims requirement.

Our conclusion

All companies in our survey have some way to go to meet the requirements of the new rules. Apart from the nutritional inadequacies highlighted here, meal replacement foods are not a highly recommended way of losing and maintaining weight. They do little to re-educate slimmers' eating habits, and make it all too easy to return to poor habits once dieting is stopped — thus encouraging unhealthy yo-yo dieting. For this reason many labels recommend slimmers to keep on using the products indefinitely.

Who are the 'responsible' manufacturers who already comply with the directive? Slim Fast told us they were planning a new formulation. Otherwise, we found that the manufacturers of all the products we surveyed, need, in the words of Jeff Rooker, to 'sharpen up their act'.

How today's products shape up to tomorrow's regulations

Product (manufacturer)	Energy requirement 200-400kcal	Protein requirement 25-50% of energy	Fat requirement < 30% energy	vitamins & minerals requirement	% of energy from sugars	Weight-loss claims requirement	Price
Complan (Heinz)	✓	X	X	X	39%	✓	£2.45 (4 servings)
Crunch and Slim (Heinz)	✓	X	X	X	20%	X	£4.19 (6 servings)
NutraSlim (Boots)	X	✓	✓	✓	51%	X	£5.49 (12 servings)
SlimFast (powder mix) (Sun Nutritional Inc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	61%	X	£6.49 (12 servings)
SlimFast (ready to drink) (Sun Nutritional Inc)	✓	X	✓	✓	61%	X	£1.09 (1 serving)
Slimma Shake (Davina health and Fitness)	✓	✓	✓	X	54%	X	£5.99 (12 servings)
Thigh & Hip Slim (Thigh & Hip Slim)	X	✓	✓	✓	58%	X	£16.95 (12 servings)

✓ = meets requirements X = fails to meet requirements

Farmer-ceuticals

Dear Sir...

According to an article I have from the *New Scientist* in 1989, 'Farmers could effectively eradicate salmonella in poultry by adding certain sugars to their drinking water. John DeLoach, of the US Department of Agriculture in College Station, Texas, dramatically reduced the number of *Salmonella typhimurium* bacteria in infected chickens by adding lactose, a natural sugar found in milk and D-manose, a natural sugar produced by a Mediterranean plant, to their water.....DeLoach found that the birds treated with manose and lactose had 99.9 per cent fewer salmonella bacteria than a control group of birds which drank ordinary water.'

Perhaps I was being unduly naive in assuming that the work described would arouse immediate interest in Britain, and that DeLoach's work would be followed up and built upon without delay. I have neither seen nor heard any subsequent reference to the matter.

At the very least it opens up a promising and new approach that it would be crazy to ignore. There is a good chance that other pathogens beside salmonella might react similarly to the sugars, and that other livestock might be similarly treatable.

Furthermore, it has been found in Georgia that pathogenic bacteria can be successfully destroyed by using their natural predators, the bacteriophages (specific viruses), than by antibiotics. Bacteriophages evolve to keep pace with their hosts' evolution, and are easy to culture; they are harmless to us and all else. Yet it seems we are so bewitched and obsessed by antibiotics as to have little interest in any alternative approach. I am really exasperated by the apparent apathy of our authorities when faced with such promising discoveries elsewhere.

Yours -
A Allen,
London SE



Facts belie Burgen Bread claims

Much hype surrounded the launch of Burgen Bread last autumn. The new bread made with added soya and linseed implied it could help women suffering from hot flushes during the menopause. Allied Foods, the makers of Burgen Bread, said that the phytoestrogens (plant oestrogens) in these ingredients may have a range of health benefits including lowering blood cholesterol and 'keeping bones strong'.

Yet the scientific evidence to support these claims is inconclusive. In one Australian study which has been used to support the claims for the bread, menopausal women whose diets were supplemented with soya flour reported less hot flushes but so did women in control groups eating wheat flour. The researchers conclude that there was 'no significant difference between the two flours'. Researchers at the Medical Research Council's Institute for Environment and Health, who looked at linking phytoestrogens to health benefits in a MAFF-funded study, concluded that it is too early to make such links. Allied Foods was unable to provide the Food Commission with any published

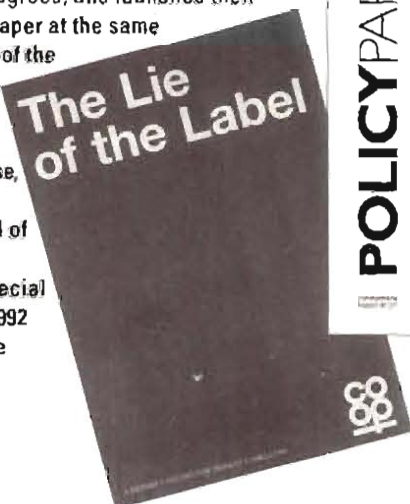
academic research which showed the claimed effects in women eating Burgen Bread.

Soya has become the focus of increasing nutritional interest, largely on the basis that it's consumption in countries such as Japan and China explains their lower rates of many diet-related diseases including breast cancer. But nutritionists point out that traditional diets in these countries are also much lower in fat and meat, and higher in fibre and vegetables, and until more research has been carried out, it would be unwise to place too much emphasis on any one particular food or ingredient.

Furthermore, too little is known about the effects of oestrogenic substances in men and children. In some animal studies, high levels of phytoestrogens can cause infertility and other reproductive problems, while in men oestrogenic chemicals have been linked to falling sperm counts. And because of concerns over phytoestrogens, the Department of Health advises that soya formula milk for babies should only be given on medical advice.

'Product labels mislead' says the Co-op in its new strategy document calling for greater honesty in food labelling. The Consumers' Association agreed, and launched their own policy paper at the same time. Details of the

Co-op booklet from CWS, New Century House, Manchester M60 4ES, and of the CA paper from their special order line 01992 822 800 (price £5.00), quote UNDWA.



Under wraps - what lies behind the label?

POLICY PAPER

Under wraps - what lies behind the label?

Product labels are a vital part of the information provided to consumers. They tell us what we are buying, how to use it, and whether it is safe. But they can also be misleading. This policy paper looks at the ways in which food labels can mislead consumers, and what can be done to make them more honest and helpful.

The Consumers' Association has produced this policy paper to help consumers make better choices when buying food. It looks at the ways in which food labels can mislead consumers, and what can be done to make them more honest and helpful.

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The British Agrochemical Association is calling on its friends to lobby the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) in order to ensure that curriculum content — which currently includes reference to the damage done by pesticides, the loss of hedgerows and the pollution of rivers — should be balanced to explain to children how 'modern farming methods provide a reliable, plentiful, cheap supply of wholesome foods'. If you wish to counter-lobby by re-asserting the damage done by modern farming, send your comments to the SCAA at Newcombe House, 45 Notting Hill Gate, London W1 3JB before the end of February.

CHECKOUT

In this special checkout feature we look at some of the hidden ingredients and added extras that can come with our favourite foods.

What the label doesn't tell you

Just how much do you know about the food you eat?

Shoppers are being kept in the dark says the Food Commission's co-director, Sue Dibb. Her new book* lifts the lid on the secrets in our food.

Hidden health hazards

Processed foods provide at least half of the unhealthy fat, sugar and salt in our diet, yet shoppers often have no way of knowing just how much is in their favourite foods.

Fats and sugars can come in many disguises and the food industry uses a whole range of cosmetic additives to make high fat, sugar or salty foods look more attractive or healthier than they really are.

And if you've ever tried to find out how much sugar is in a can of cola or fibre in a tin of beans, you'll know that such information is often absent from labels.

Nutrition labelling is voluntary - that means it's up to manufacturers to decide whether or not to tell us what we are getting. While many do provide some information, too many don't. Even when nutrition information is provided it can be for too few nutrients and hard to understand.

And nutrition claims that a food is 'low fat' or 'sugar-free' can be misleading. There's no law to define most claims.

*** What the Label Doesn't Tell You, by Sue Dibb, Thorsons, £6.99 — see page 12 for our Readers' Special Offer!**

Hidden additives

Most additives have to be listed on food labels, but not all. Flavourings don't have to be listed by name, and certain additives such as solvents, enzymes and others used as processing aids (but which may remain in the food) escape a listing altogether. And certain foods are exempt from having to declare any of their ingredients, including additives. These include:

- wine and alcoholic drinks
- some confectionery and chocolate
- cheese, butter, most milk and cream products
- unwrapped foods such as bread and cakes
- take-away foods
- eggs and farmed fish (may contain dyes fed to chickens and fish to enhance colour)
- citrus fruits and apples treated with preservatives on skins.

All additives, except flavours, have E numbers although it's increasingly difficult to find E numbers in ingredients lists. A growing number of manufacturers use only the chemical name of the additive rather than the E number in the hope that shoppers won't take as much notice.



13 teaspoons of sugar in this DG Ginger Beer but no sugar declaration to tell you. Sprite gives no nutrition details at all.



The label says 'cholesterol-free' and claims 'low in saturates'. With over 21% of the fat being saturated this is potentially misleading to consumers.

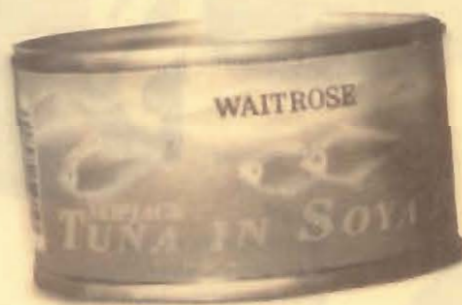
CHECKOUT

Look behind

Hidden genetically engineered ingredients

Until recently consumers were told that, with a few exceptions, there was no need for them to know whether the food they bought contained genetically modified ingredients. But faced with the introduction of genetically modified soya into a vast range of foods, the anger that this lack of labelling provoked, not only from shoppers but also from retailers and some food companies, has meant a rethink. Proposed new labelling laws may mean that some genetically modified soya will be labelled, but not all. Foods containing soya protein will need to be labelled but the many foods containing soya oil (often just listed as vegetable oil on ingredients lists), or additives such as lecithin which can be made from soya, will not be, nor will foods which are exempt from labelling such as take away and restaurant food, or unwrapped bread which may contain soya flour.

And for other foods already on our supermarket shelves, such as cheese made with a genetically modified enzyme, or tomato paste made with genetically modified tomatoes, there is still no law that says they must be labelled — it is up to the manufacturers to decide whether or not to tell us.



This tuna is packed in soya oil but there will be no obligation to say if the oil is from genetically modified soya.

Hidden chemicals

When you are piling the fruit and veg into your shopping trolley do you worry that you're getting a hidden dose of unwanted pesticide residues along with all that goodness? The trouble is there's no way to tell. There's nothing on the label to inform us which added extras we might be getting. We can't see them and sometimes we can't even wash them off. We're advised to peel, top and tail our carrots and parsnips and peel apples for children because some have been found to contain higher than expected levels of the toxic insecticide, organophosphate. For the vast majority of produce, pesticide residues are within legal limits but an increasing number of people are choosing organic food, grown without the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, and in the case of meat, without growth promoters or the routine use of drugs such as antibiotics, residues of which can sometimes turn up in conventionally produce meat.

Other chemicals contaminants can come from packaging. Clingfilm in particular has caused worries in the past with chemical plasticisers migrating into fatty foods. And there are newer concerns about chemicals which can mimic the female hormone oestrogen — so called gender-bender chemicals, including some pesticides, phthalates (used in plastics) which have been found in baby milks, and PCBs and dioxins, environmental pollutants from waste burning. The food we eat and the water we drink are the main way that many of these chemicals get into our bodies.

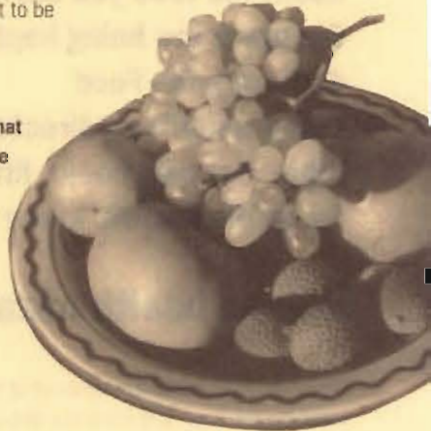
Hidden bugs

Cases of food poisoning have increased at an alarming rate and tougher, more virulent bugs are appearing. Modern large scale farming has increased the spread of bacteria, but for consumers there is no way of knowing whether the foods they purchase are contaminated. Half of fresh and frozen chickens tested by the Consumers Association in 1996 contained either salmonella or campylobacter bacteria. Cross contamination of cooked meat from raw meat was behind one of the world's worst cases of *E coli* food poisoning in Scotland in which 19 people died. In early 1997 the government was accused of watering down and then suppressing a damning report into

hygiene practices in abattoirs which were likely to increase the risk of contamination and food poisoning.

The only safe way to treat foods, especially meat, eggs and foods made with them, is to assume that there might be a risk of contamination. That means ensuring good kitchen hygiene and cooking foods thoroughly, particularly if using a microwave oven. But the only way to tackle the problem effectively is at source, that is for hygiene practices throughout the food chain, from farm to supermarket to be improved.

Fruit and what else? Do we know what hidden extras we are getting?



Hidden allergens

As many as 1 in 200 people are thought to have an allergy to peanuts and other nuts such as walnuts, almonds, brazil and hazelnuts. Many other common foods including milk, wheat and eggs can also trigger reactions in sensitive people. Yet for allergy sufferers it can often be difficult to know whether foods contain ingredients that might provoke a reaction. Campaigns for better labelling were started after the tragic death of one young girl who unwittingly ate peanuts in a lemon meringue bought in a department store restaurant.

Peanut oil (also known as groundnut oil) can turn up in quite unexpected places, even in children's lollies — but most likely it will only be listed as vegetable oil. Some companies now warn that foods may contain peanuts and the government has asked companies to improve manufacturing practices to prevent cross-contamination. It is also urging the catering industry to be more aware of the problem.

CHECKOUT the label

Hidden animal products

Vegetarians and vegans need to be eagle-eyed shoppers when it comes to identifying foods and ingredients that may be of animal origin.

- animal fat can be found in biscuits, cakes and pastries;
- gelatin, made from animal bones and skin, is increasingly used in yoghurts, jellies, sweets and low fat dairy products and spreads;
- whey, lactose, casein and caseinates are all derived from milk;
- constituents of eggs such as albumen, lecithin and emulsifier may be found in a range of products from chocolate to mayonnaise;
- many fruits, particularly apples and citrus fruits, are often waxed with shellac - an insect secretion - and beeswax;
- 'finings' for clarifying beers and wines may be derived from milk, eggs, fish or from mineral earths and seaweed, but the label won't tell you;
- cochineal is a 'natural' colouring made from crushed female Mexican cactus beetle;
- mono and di-glycerides of fatty acids are emulsifier additives which may be derived from animal sources.



Yogurt for vegetarians? No — this one contains gelatine.

Hidden beef ingredients

With concerns about BSE many people are wary of beef. But not all beef ingredients are easy to spot. Hidden beef ingredients or beef derivatives can turn up, often quite unexpectedly, in foods such as chicken gravy granules, chicken stew with dumplings, salami, stuffing mixes, ready meals, biscuits and Christmas pudding. Perhaps even more worrying for some parents is the hidden beef in baby foods. Many non-beef sounding savoury baby foods may contain 'meat extract', beef bouillon, beef stock or gelatin.

Hidden truth

Companies use a whole host of tricks of the trade to pull the wool over our eyes about what we are really buying. The big words on the front of the pack often tell only half the truth — that breakfast cereal may be a 'low fat food' as claimed on the front, but you'll have to read the small print very carefully to know that it might also be high in sugar and salt and low in fibre, if it tells you at all. And other foods claiming to be 'free from' an ingredient or additives such as colours or preservatives, may not be as special as they sound.

There's no law yet for most foods to tell you just how much of the main ingredients you are getting. Fish fingers don't have to tell you how much fish they contain, and juice drinks can be as little as 5-10% juice.

Even the name of the product may not be all it seems. The main ingredient in tinned mince and onions, for example, can be mechanically separated chicken. Pictures of fruit on the label can give the impression the food contains much more than it does, and words like 'farmhouse', 'traditional', 'natural', 'premium' and 'wholesome' paint a rosy picture but without any further explanation are typically meaningless. And meat products like bacon, ham and sausages can come laden with added water — but the full amount is not always declared on the label.

Fancy packaging can disguise just how much — or how little — you are buying. And it's not just expensive products like luxury chocolates — plastic pots for yoghurt and desserts can come with a domed bottom to reduce the contents while giving the impression of a larger pot. And some

manufacturers have even resorted to reducing the pack size and charging more. One juice manufacturer reduced the size of their pure orange juice carton from 1 litre to 750 ml, upped the price, while at the same time redesigning the smaller carton to make it taller and thinner so it actually looked larger!

Hidden exploitation

When we go shopping, most of us think little about the conditions of agricultural workers in developing countries who produce much of our food. Many can face poor pay, be denied trade union rights or suffer ill-health from exposure to dangerous pesticides.

In Costa Rica for example, around 100 people die and 10,000 are severely poisoned every year by the \$55 million worth of pesticides drenched over Costa Rican vegetables and fruit destined for export. And in Kenya, workers on pineapple estates spray pesticides banned in developed countries. While minor food scares make front page news, this human misery, largely in developing countries, goes unreported.

Buying fairly traded produce ensures that workers not only receive a fair wage for their labours but that working conditions are safe. Campaigners for fair trade want to see supermarkets, with their huge buying power, use their muscle to ensure that all the food they sell has been produced safely and traded fairly.



CHECKOUT

Your right to know

The Food Commission is campaigning for your right to know exactly what you are eating.

Better labelling with clearer, standardised information will help, but labels alone are not enough. We also need regulations and standards to ensure that we feel confident that our food is safe and healthy.

We are promised a new Food Standards Agency which will put consumers' interests first. That should be a great step forward but we also need more openness, with less decisions being taken behind closed doors, more honesty and better communication from those charged with protecting our interests.

A 10-point charter. *You have a right to ...*

- **The truth** Nutrition labelling on foods to be mandatory, not just for the 'basic four' nutrients - energy, protein, fat and carbohydrate - but also for saturated and *trans* fat, sugar, sodium and fibre.
- **The whole truth** Labelling of all genetically modified ingredients in food - not just some - to provide consumers with a genuine choice
- **Nothing but the truth** New rules on claims on foods and in advertisements to prevent misleading health and nutrition claims
- **No exceptions** There is no excuse to allow certain products — eg. chocolate, baby food, alcoholic drinks — to evade the labelling regulations. Drinks should show the units of alcohol they contain.
- **A sustainable future** More food to be grown with fewer chemical pesticides and fertilisers, and greater support for farmers to convert to organic farming. Labelling of produce treated with chemicals after harvest
- **Reduced pollution** Action to reduce contamination of food and drinking water with 'gender-bender' chemicals
- **Improved inspection** Strengthening food monitoring and enforcement to improve hygiene and safety practices throughout the food chain
- **Transparent processes** All government advisory committees and working parties to publish their minutes and a full public disclosure of members' interests or links to the food industry
- **Open access** Freedom of information legislation to allow data on food additives and pesticides to be available for independent scrutiny, before decisions are made to permit their use
- **Consumer education** To make the best use of label information there needs to be a national initiative to improve shoppers' knowledge.

What The Label Doesn't Tell You

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY AND PAY NO POSTAGE AND PACKING*

Food Magazine Readers Special Offer

Are you worried about food scares?... Confused about which foods are safe?... Unsure who to trust? Sue Dibb, co-director of the Food Commission has produced a no-nonsense consumer's guide to help us through the maze of food marketing hype, government hush-ups and media scare stories.

For all consumer watchdogs and all those interested in making good food choices, this book uncovers the food industry's tricks of the trade and decodes mystery ingredients so that you and your family can eat wisely and well.

ADDITIVES - which chemicals can damage your health?

GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS - what will the future hold?

IT'S A SECRET - government reports kept under wraps

BEEF - a hidden ingredient in many foods... what is the real health risk?

'FRESH' FOOD - can we believe what the label tells us?

CUTTING FAT - the good, the bad and the 'no-fat' foods

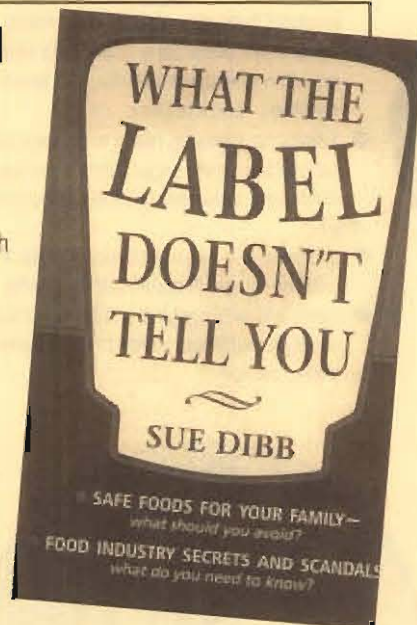
DIET FOODS - are they too good to be true?

'DESIGNER' HEALTH FOODS - why you should be wary of miracle claims

FOOD FOR THE FAMILY - making safe choices for babies and children

What the Label Doesn't Tell You by Sue Dibb is published by Thorsons price £6.99. ISBN 0 7225 3497 3, 238 pages. Available from good bookshops or simply phone Food Commission Publications on 0171-837 2250 (credit card payments only) or send us the order form with your cheque for £6.99 a copy.

* except overseas orders



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Should we fortify our food with folate?

In a bid to reduce the number of babies born with neural tube defects such as *spina bifida* the USA is adding the vitamin folic acid (folate) to food products. Margaret and Arthur Wynn ask whether the UK should follow suit.

From January 1st 1998 all grain products in the USA will have to be fortified with folate. An editorial in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 1997 said:

Fifty years after its first discovery and synthesis, folate is coming of age with the recognition that folate is important not only in the widespread form of vitamin related anaemia in the world, but also in four conditions as dreaded as the four horses of the apocalypse: cancer, heart disease, stroke and neural tube defects.

Ten years of research has shown that the risk of these dreaded diseases is reduced as folate intake increases through what was regarded as the normal range of intakes. Folate has in consequence achieved a prominence in the USA never before achieved by any micro nutrient.

There is a debate going on in US medical journals about how much folate should be added to foods. The Centre For Disease Control in 1993 recommended 350mcg per 100g of grain products. The 140mcg now mandated by the Food and Drug

Administration will increase the daily intake of the average American adult by 100mcg, which is regarded by many writers as not enough.

There is also a debate as to whether only grain products should be fortified. Not everyone has an intake of grain products large enough to give them the necessary additional folate from fortification.

Many food manufacturers support mandatory folate fortification. It is easier for manufacturers of processed foods to have mandatory fortification than to compete with other food processors about folate content of their products. Mandatory fortification prevents criticism for destruction or loss of folate during food processing.

Other vitamins have their advocates in the USA. Indeed one pressure group has called on all members of the American Society of Clinical Nutrition to write to the Food and Drug Administration advocating the addition of 25mcg of Vitamin B12 to the 140mcg of folate per 100g of grain. This has wide support in the medical literature, showing that a B12 deficiency is associated with risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer and also with Alzheimer's disease. Five per cent of persons over 70 are reported to be affected by B12 deficiency.

There should be a public debate in the United Kingdom about folate and about fortification. Some breakfast cereals are already fortified with vitamins including folate in some varieties. White flour is fortified by law, but not with folate. Some breads now have added folate. *The Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults 1994* showed that 12 per cent of British men and 47 per cent of British women had intakes below the Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI) of 200mcg per day. Some American papers now suggest that the diet of adults should include 400mcg, the level advised for pregnant women.

It is possible to choose a diet that will provide the RNI of 200mcg but it would require a major (and expensive) change in eating customs of most of the population in the United Kingdom to provide the higher level of 400mcg now suggested in the USA as desirable.

The debate continues. Should we follow the US example and fortify our grain products with folate? Should only grain products be fortified? What is the right level of fortification? Should other vitamins be added, for example B12? How should results be monitored?

In the USA it has been thought impracticable to increase folate consumption by education alone. The poorest members of society are least able to purchase the necessary foods. It is hard to believe

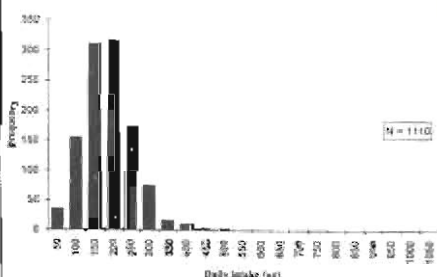
Reasons to reconsider

The Food Commission is always keen to promote the best practices in public health. Fortification of food with extra nutrients is not always the most appropriate way forward and in the case of folic acid we are concerned that there may be additional factors that need consideration:

- Food fortification allows the manufacturers of highly processed and refined foods to justify their anti-nutritional practices, selling us 'junk with added vitamins'
- Fortification without offering choice (i.e. not offering similar foods without fortification, at similar prices) is resented as social engineering and mass medication by some
- In the case of folic acid there is new information coming to light all the time:

- (i) the amounts needed to ensure reasonable reductions in neural tube defect (NTD) risks may be less than originally thought. *The Lancet* reports¹ that the currently recommended supplement of 400mcg may be unnecessary, and that 200mcg and even 100mcg, reliably given, would 'produce an important decrease in NTD'.
- (ii) the need for extra folic acid may be due to a genetic deficiency involving folate metabolising enzymes: up to 15% of the population appear deficient in this respect, and that these people respond well to daily supplements in the range 100-200mcg².
- (iii) other links to the development of neural tube defects need to be investigated, especially those linking NTDs to farm pesticides. A recent study in Norway³ found *spina bifida* cases to be two to three times more likely in farming families exposed to pesticides in orchards and greenhouses compared with non-farming families living in similar agricultural areas.

Daily folate intake for women from food sources



Source: MAFF *The Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults: Further Analysis*, HMSO, 1994.

that folate fortification is good for the health of the Americans, but not for the health of the British.

Adapted from a paper sent to the UK Minister for Public Health, Oct 1997.

References

- ¹ Minimum effective dose of folic acid for food fortification to prevent neural tube defects. Dally et al, *The Lancet*, 350, 1566-9 (6 Dec 1997).
- ² Commentary: Recommendations on folate intake, Whitehead & Bates, *The Lancet*, 350, 1642 (6 Dec 1997).
- ³ Birth defects among offspring of Norwegian farmers: 1967-1991, *Epidemiology*, 8, 537-544 (Sept 1997).

If companies had to tell the truth...

Junk food with added vitamin pills are forcefully marketed as healthy, nutritious products. But suppose a product which carried a health claim had to divulge the full facts... We take a look at the facts they don't print, but ought to.



Weight-for-weight, Nutri-Grain has 50% more sugar than a doughnut

Sweet, fatty cereals

'Fortified with vitamins and iron,' boasts the front of the pack of Kellogg's latest attempt to dominate the morning food supply. 'Good food on the go!' they claim on Nutri-Grain bars.

The product is packed with sugar — glucose syrup, sucrose and honey. Indeed, as a percentage of their weight, Nutri-Grain bars contain far more sugar than a jam doughnut (29% compared with 19%), and while offering less protein (4% compared with 6%).

Nutri-Grain contains 8% fat, the main source being hydrogenated oils. Kellogg's Cornflakes, in contrast, has virtually no fat and greater amounts of added vitamins.

Honesty

This product is nearly 30% NME sugars and may encourage tooth decay.
This product is not a low fat product, being well over 5% fat.

Start up with squash

Soft drinks with a vitamin pill, and a steep price tag to match. Sanatogen have dreamed up a new way to flog vitamins, by adding sugar, water and a dash of fruit juice, and adorning their pack with the slogan 'Do you Feel Alright?'

A single ready-to-drink carton contains around 30g sugar — six teaspoons.

Sanatogen state on the pack that adults and children of 12 may consume four such cartons a day. For the average child of 12 such a dose of sugar would supply over twice their maximum recommended sugar intake for the day.

Honesty

This drink supplies a large number of calories from sugar.
It may be a hazard to teeth, and may reduce the appetite for regular foods.



All at sea?

Water biscuits?

'Unfavourable storage conditions on board ship meant that ship's biscuits required a low fat content in order to stay fresh. Accordingly, water instead of fat was used to blend the fine ingredients. Thus the unique Table Water recipe came to be, and in its present form it has remained almost unchanged since then.'

Almost, but not quite. 'Ingredients: Flour, Vegetable Oil and Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil, Salt.' Nutrition panel: Fat 9.2g/100g.

Honesty

This is not a low fat product (it has almost twice the fat allowed for a low fat claim).



Less real fruit juice, more sweetened water



Sugar and candy are happily promoted as fat-free products!

No fat - not surprisingly

A pact between juice and milk

Having failed to storm the market with their misleadingly-advertised soya yogurt-type dessert Gaio, and struggling to maintain sales of their fish oil enriched margarine Pact, the company MD Foods are launching their latest brainchild. Also confusingly called Pact, it consists of orange juice mixed with skimmed milk powder and a couple of extra vitamins (C and D).

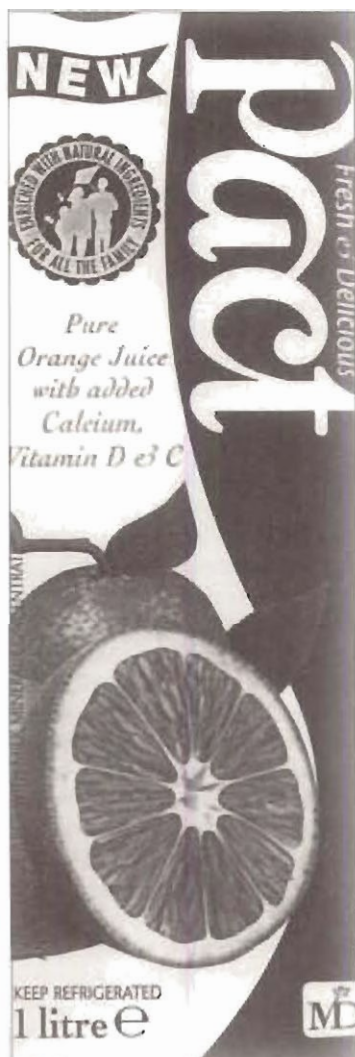
In fact, a glass of milk and an orange might do you more good, and certainly save you money (especially as the small print tells us to drink nearly a third of the pack if we want to gain 50% of our recommended calcium and vitamin D).

The problem with fruit juice is that by definition the sugar in the fruit is no longer intrinsic, but is extrinsic and so comes within the recommendations of the Department of Health's COMA panel to limit sugar to an average of no more than 10% of your daily energy needs. Pact contains similar levels of sugar to Coca-Cola, equivalent to around six teaspoons of sugar in the recommended two glasses.

As for the marketing, we were not impressed by the logo 'Enriched with natural ingredients for all the family' which looked remarkably like the crest for a private health insurance scheme.

Honesty

High in extrinsic sugar, this product may damage teeth.



Mixing orange juice with milk — the latest functional food?

We once ran a cartoon of a pack of lard labelled sugar-free, and a pack of sugar labelled fat-free. Now we see manufacturers turning such nonsense into serious marketing hype.

Jelly Belly beans, the latest candy craze from the USA, boast their lack of fat: A Fat Free Food! 4 Calories Per Bean! But — with no nutrition panel on the package — the product fails to tell you that it is little more than sticky sugar. Nor is it genuinely fat free, as it contains chocolate, dried cream, cocoa butter, peanuts and peanut flour, all good sources of fat.

Spreadable icing sugar is also promoted in press releases for its lack of fat. 'What's more, a virtually fat free product, the icing is ideal for all the family.' (We also liked the anti-educational preceding sentence: 'The simplicity of the product allows children to join in and learn the skills of cake and bun icing without the complications of careful water additions'.)

These confusing claims make a mockery of any attempt to improve nutrition education among consumers. Claims by sugar producers to be making 'low fat' products cry out for tighter regulation.

Honesty

Low fat, but fat is not the only problem with today's diets.

The high sugar levels in these products may pose a threat to teeth.

Why the CAP is bad for your health

Very rarely does the reform of the CAP mention diet or nutrition. Tim Lobstein argues that it should.

There are five arguments I would like to present: two regarding intensive agriculture generally, which the CAP regime has done much to promote with huge financial incentives, and three arguments that relate to specific mechanisms within the CAP regime which are in need of immediate review.

Firstly we have the loss of biodiversity in our main food crops. Crop varieties are selected for various reasons but rarely nutrition. They may be selected for heavy cropping, fast growth, early fruiting, disease resistance, pesticide resistance, resistance to damage during transport, uniformity of size, long shelf life and a host of other commercial benefits — but not to preserve or enhance their nutritional value.

Yet there is evidence that we have lost nutritionally valuable varieties of crops: varieties that have been sidelined in the race for productivity. There are several varieties of apples with double, and in some cases treble, the vitamin C content of Golden Delicious, the variety that now takes over 50% of UK sales.

The widely-used navy bean (for tinned baked beans) has barely half the folic acid (the spina bifida-preventing vitamin) compared with rarer cranberry beans and small red beans. And the protein content of wheat varieties varies inversely with the yield: the higher yield varieties tend to have the lowest protein content.

A review by Ann Marie Meyer of the minerals available in fruits and vegetables, comparing current crops with those of fifty years ago, showed that we had lost significant amounts of valuable trace elements: copper, magnesium and calcium in vegetables, and copper, magnesium, iron and potassium in fruit. These were the main elements measured, and we can expect other valuable nutrients to show similar declines over the period. The water content showed an increase.

Secondly, we have seen a decline in the nutritional value of animal meat. The fattiness of livestock animals is a result of a combination of high-energy feed for rapid growth, lack of exercise

and genetic selection for weight gain. A comparison of similar breeds of cattle reared intensively and reared extensively (peasant farming) found the latter animals had just 9% adipose fat on the carcass compared with 28% on the intensively-reared animals. In general terms, the ratio of fat to protein is nine times greater in intensively reared animals. Since the beginning of the century the fat content of a chicken carcass has risen ten-fold, i.e. 1000%.

And the nature of the fat has changed. Wild pigs show a ratio of one gram of saturated fat to 2 grams of polyunsaturated fat. The modern intensively-reared pig has a ratio of one gram of saturated to just 0.2 grams of polyunsaturated fat.

Turning to the CAP and its specific effects, there are three concerns. First comes the distribution of surpluses: the CAP has a history of encouraging high production, even of over-production. We create excessive quantities of animal meat in Europe, mostly beef, which is frozen or canned and put into storage. We create excessive quantities of milk-butter and milk fat. We also create an artificial market for sugar beet producers who provide us with more sugar than we can eat, at prices well above world sugar market prices. And we also produce more fruit and vegetables than we are currently eating.

Too much meat, milk, milk fat and sugar, and too much fruit and vegetables. Current dietary advice is to *reduce our meat, milk, fat and sugar consumption and increase our fruit and vegetable consumption*. The surpluses of meat, milk fat and sugar should not be entering the human food chain — we don't need them and should be finding means of removing the causes of such excess. The surplus fruit and veg should be widely distributed — they are not a problem of overproduction but of underconsumption.

What we see, though, is CAP intervention that is quite contrary to dietary advice. CAP schemes actively encourage the consumption of surplus meat through give-aways to charities and institutions.

CAP schemes also actively encourage the consumption of butter by making it available to food companies specifically to put into butter-enriched pastry, ice cream and chocolate. They are feeding back to us all the fat we carefully avoid when we select our pints of low-fat milk.

The sugar is used as a low cost ingredient in a wide range of processed foods and drinks, and some is processed into alcohol for yet more uses — cheap liquor and alcopops.

And the fruit and vegetables we should be eating more of? Over 2 million kilograms of apples were withdrawn from the market last year, and a similar quantity of pears, and nearly 14 million kilograms of cauliflowers. What happened to these valuable elements in our diet? There is a scheme to make these surpluses available to schools and hospitals, but there is no publicity for this scheme. As we revealed in the last issue of the *Food Magazine*, all this valuable produce was ploughed back into the soil or minced up for pig feed. The amount that went to schools or hospitals totalled zero kilograms.

Free fruit for schools

Following our revelation in the last *Food Magazine* that thousands of tonnes of fruit for schools are being pulped for animal feed, we have had several enquiries about how schools can get their free fruit and vegetables under the EU distribution schemes.

The details are contained in the leaflet *IM(C)2 Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Market Support* available from the UK Intervention Board, P O Box 89, Reading, RG1 3YD (tel 0118 958 3626, fax 0118 959 7736). This is not a user-friendly document.

You may also want to ask for the useful-sounding leaflets *CP 45 (rev 11/96) EC Surplus Food Scheme General Conditions and Operation of the Scheme*, and *IM(L)46 A Guide to the Surplus Food Scheme for Designated Organisations*. You will find (surprise, surprise) that these both relate to the distribution of beef!

Let us know how you get on. We hear that a new document should be ready soon, thanks to our publicity.

Win a prize!

The Food Commission is offering a prize to the first school to lay its hands on a free crate of apples under the EC scheme!

S Europeans move from a Grecian diet to a greasy diet

That's the surplus. The second element is the promotion budget for the EC. The promotional budget includes a sum for the promotion of certain EC foodstuffs. In the last few years we have seen this restricted to the promotion of - yes - meat, milk products and especially butter. And, in one case, in Italy only, olive oil.

In the UK we have seen full page advertisements in national magazines promoting the wonders of butter, and how we should eat more of it, published by the Butter Council - the trade body for butter-making companies - but paid for by the EC, i.e. tax-payers money.

In the UK we have the following subsidies available:

Milk

14p off a pint of full fat
9p off semi-skimmed
0p off skimmed

Yogurt

3p off a serving of full fat
0p off a serving of low fat

Cheese

75p off a kilogram of full fat
0p off a kilogram of reduced fat

Lastly CAP budgets are used to subsidise the consumption of foods. The EC pays subsidies to encourage public institutions such as schools to purchase foods. But only certain foods. Butter is also available cheaply to institutions such as schools, hospitals and homes for the elderly. The amount is 'limited' to 2 kilograms per person per month, about 75 grams of butter fat per day, providing 44 grams of saturated fat — double the maximum recommended amount for an average adult. Once again the over-consumption of health-threatening fatty diets is being subsidised from EU finances.

And that's it. Fruit and vegetables available to schools for free are instead sent for pig feed. But full fat cheese, butter and milk is encouraged, directly contrary to UK healthy eating guidance.

We need to take the UK presidency as a serious opportunity to change the perception of our food supply and the rules that govern it, and to introduce nutrition to the CAP agenda.

■ Adapted from a paper discussed at a workshop in the conference *Agenda 2000 — CAP Reform*, organised by CIIR and the UK Food Group, London, December 3rd 1997.

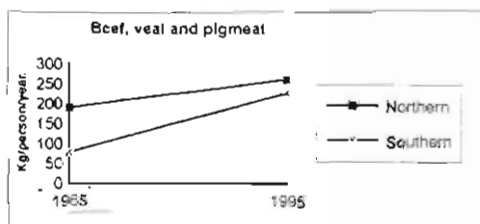
Comparisons between average diets in Northern and Southern Europe over the last thirty years show a remarkable convergence, with a rapid rise in meat and sugar consumption among Southern member states.

Figures from the Food and Agriculture Organisation comparing Denmark, Germany, Netherlands and the UK with Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal show a near-trebling of meat consumption by Southern states, and a similar rise in animal carcass fat consumption, while Northern states have been cutting their animal fat. Milk and milk product consumption has nearly doubled in Southern states and the decline in whole-fat milk in the North has been matched by a rise in the South.

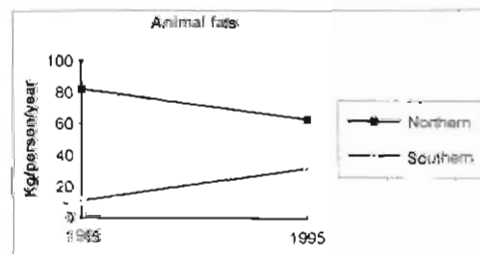
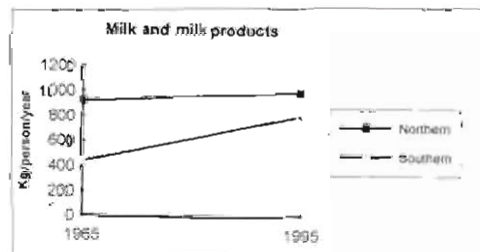
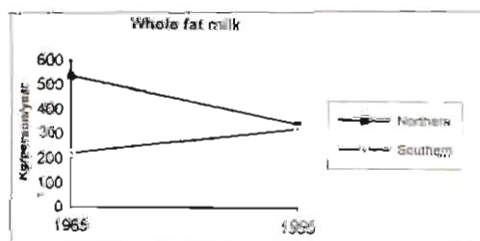
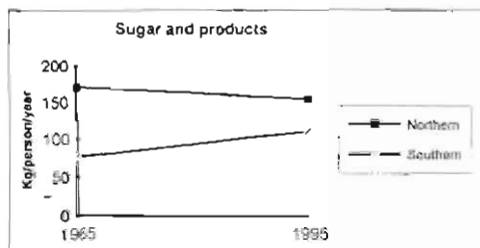
Fruit and vegetable consumption remains 40-50% higher in Southern states, but sugar consumption has risen rapidly.

The statistical series are based on national supply figures, taking account of imports and exports. Data collection will soon meet problems, however, as open borders in the EU mean that food production and consumption figures cannot easily be

monitored. Danish bacon, for example, could be sold anywhere between Stockholm and Seville, or Danish Blue eaten anywhere from Athens to Aberdeen, and there will be little paperwork to trace it.

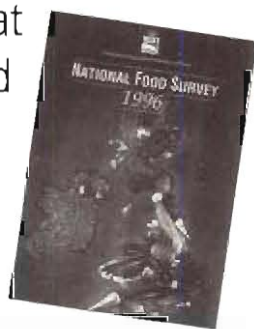


■ Source: FAO on-line database (www.fao.org), 1997.



UK: poor eat white bread and marge.

The latest National Food Survey figures from MAFF show continuing differences between higher and lower income groups.



Families on low incomes are reported as purchasing barely two thirds the quantities of fresh vegetables, and just over half the fresh fruit and fruit juice of families on highest incomes. Low income families bought three times the amount of white bread, twice the amount of full-fat milk, three times the amount of margarine, and three times the amount of table sugar, compared with high income families. (Figures are for purchases per person in households with total incomes below £150 per week and above £820 per week.)

■ National Food Survey 1996, MAFF, The Stationery Office, 1997, £27, ISBN 0-11-243031-7.

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.

Healthy Eating for Babies and Children

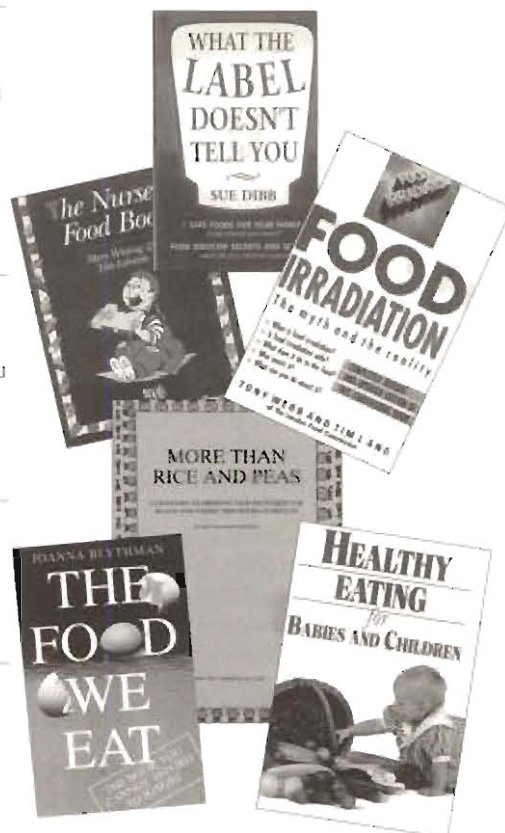
An authoritative yet down-to-earth guide giving you the information you need to feed your family. Includes over 60 pages of excellent recipes. £6.99 inc p&p.

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.



What the Label Doesn't Tell You

Food labels will only tell you so much. This no-nonsense consumer's guide will help you through the maze of food marketing hype, government hush-ups and media scare stories. Special offer - postage and packing free! £6.99.

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.

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If you do not wish to cut this form out of the magazine please either photocopy it or write in giving full details of your order and delivery address.

Keep on writing but please keep your letters short! You can fax us on 0171 837 1141

Sunflower marge?

I have not been eating beef because of the BSE scare, but have now discovered I had been unknowingly spreading it on my bread every other day for years. I enclose some interesting letters from Van den Burghs in response to my complaint that Flora Light does not appear to be vegetarian, although the original Flora is:

(1) Thank you for your enquiry regarding Flora Light 38% Vegetable Low Fat Spread. Flora Light spread does currently contain gelatine which is manufactured from bones sourced from outside the UK. No mechanically recovered meat is used in Flora Light Spread.

(2) I am sorry if you feel that the product labelling is misleading. We have never attempted to claim that the product is free from beef derivatives. Gelatine is produced by a complicated process by hydrolysis of collagen, which is a constituent of the connective tissues found in meat, particularly bones and hide.

You may be interested to know that as part of our continuous product development, I am pleased to be able to let you know that we have been able to change the product formulation to remove gelatine of any type, and the product will be available in the shops within the next few weeks.

M Robinson

'Sunflowers' by Van Gogh



'Beef' by Van den Burghs?



Long life in the South?

I am concerned about the claims made in the current advertisement for Olivio margarine. The advertisement says that one reason why people live longer in the Mediterranean is because of the olive oil in their diet.

1) I thought that the correct claim was that there was less heart disease in the Mediterranean because of the diet. Do people really live longer?

2) There is only a very small percentage of olive oil in Olivio - about 22% - and the rest of the fat is very much like every other margarine.

I think that this advert is misleading in promising a longer life on a very small amount of olive oil mixed with other less healthy ingredients.

J Ridgeway, London W2

Editors' comment: The latest figures for life expectancy that we have seen (Population Trends, 85, Autumn 1996, HMSO) shows Western Europeans to be several years ahead of Eastern Europeans, but no obvious North-South divide. Longevity — which may reflect medical services as well as good health — is spread across the latitudes:

European countries where women can expect to live to 80 years or more:

Italy, Spain, France, Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland.

European countries where men can expect to live to 74 years or more: Greece, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland.

Food supplement claims

As a retailer of 17 years experience I am extremely concerned that I might soon lose the right to supply my customers with food supplements of their choice. We have already lost a raft of useful and low-risk supplements and many useful herbs, forcing people back to the NHS and its preoccupation with drugs.

I have no problems with your campaign for more honest descriptions of products and health benefits, and in exposing bogus claims — in fact I heartily support you in this activity. However, I am surprised at your preoccupation with generic nutritional substances which can be used for genuine and measurable health benefits and for which there is a considerable body of scientific support.

May I urge you to consider the following proposals:

- Pursue your campaign for the MCA, the FAC and MAFF to be staffed by truly independent experts, and that vested interests have no access to the organisations either financially or through seconded staff and that the manufacturers' interests are clearly segregated from those of the consumer.

- Lobby the BMA to make human nutrition a major and fundamental subject in a doctor's training at university. After all, Hippocrates' rules were based on taking a nutritional approach before resorting to stronger medicine. At the moment it hardly gets more than a passing mention in the whole five years' course.

- Recommend the creation of a new classification of nutritional supplements distinct from those of drugs/medicines and food. This will avoid the problems currently experienced in trying to evaluate a food supplement under the present separate regulations for food and for medicine. Clearly supplements are best described in their own context.

- Set up a Nutritional Supplement control agency independent of government and industry interests, staffed by qualified nutritionists, who can ensure that where applicable, those supplements well supported by scientific research can be sold accompanied by relevant information.

There is much evidence that the bottom line savings in NHS costs alone would be worth any one of these measures, achieving them all would significantly reduce the nation's health bill.

Meanwhile keep up the good work! I feel in general you are providing an essential support to the health of the nation.

Mike Abrahams.
Bristol

The Essential Guide to Food Hygiene and Safety

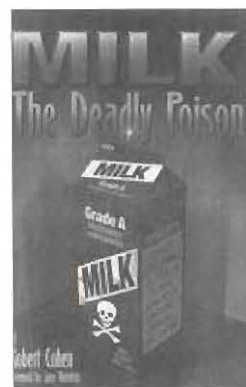
Eaton Publications, P O Box 34, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, KT12 1LN, ISBN 0 9522633 1 9, 1997, £18.50 (£16.95 direct from the publisher on 01932 229001).

A recognised handbook for students of food hygiene, the well-illustrated text provides an introduction to practical and theoretical aspects of handling food, with interpretations of the law, guidance on taking samples, and examination questions for readers to test their knowledge.



Milk The Deadly Poison,

R Cohen, Argus Publishing, 301 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632, USA, ISBN 0 9659196 1 7, 1997, \$14.95.



An extraordinary book of abuse aimed at milk and the dairy industry, this book is a passionately-felt plea to the American people to wear themselves from the nation's favourite

'perfect food'.

Try this from the back cover: A sip of milk contains hundreds of different substances ... Pus, blood, feces, allergenic proteins, growth hormones, fat, cholesterol, pesticides, viruses and bacteria ... all combine to produce a vast array of ailments in our society.

The author, Robert Cohen, has campaigned for many years on the issue of BST, the milk-boosting hormone, and this book is largely an account of his activities. In 1995 he took the US Food and Drug Administration to court over the poor safety evidence for BST, losing his case only on the grounds that Monsanto were entitled to withhold data from rat trials under the Freedom of Information Act.

He lists the staff who have moved from Monsanto to the FDA where they regulated — or failed to regulate — their former employer.

He accuses Monsanto of paying cash to congressmen who then stalled the proposed milk labelling bill. Behind it all is his strongly-held belief

that milk, especially BST milk, can be a killer.

The potentially libellous claims in the book may prevent distribution in the UK. For more details, try the web site

www.NOTMILK.com.



100% Recycled Board
Consumer advice - To maintain freshness, keep refrigerated after purchase.
Government advice states that all eggs are thoroughly cooked before consumption. Eggs from organic hens.
Produced in the U.K. for Tesco Stores Ltd., Chesham CH8 9SL, U.K. © June '98

Large eggs, small print

End of term report for Tesco eggs: We give them 1 out of 10.

Tesco promised our readers last summer that they would bring in full labelling of battery-hen eggs, so that customers could easily see which were free range, which barn/perchery and which were battery.

They will label their boxes 'Eggs from caged hens', they said. When our researchers went shopping at Tesco to see if they had kept to their

word they returned to say, no, there was no labelling yet.

They were wrong, but only just. Mean-minded Tesco has indeed printed the 'caged hens' declaration. But in the smallest possible print, on the rear side of the carton. We show the actual text from the back of the box in its full size above.

Shoddy work, Tesco. You didn't really try at all. Bottom of the class.

Sales promoters

BBC Good Food Magazine, we understand, gave its Best Speciality Food Award to a turkey producer in London's green belt, near Harrow.

Pinner Park Farm, we are told, produces free range, traditionally reared KellyBronze turkeys.

According to the local paper, *The Harrow Informer*, 'Hundreds of the turkeys are reared in the open air on grain, protein and growth promoters.'

Which nicely points out the fact that 'free range' doesn't guarantee a drug-free diet.

New Deal for food companies

Rumours that food companies have visited Peter Mandelson to twist his arm in softening the role of the forthcoming Food Standards Agency were denied by him in a reply to a parliamentary question on the issue. It is thought they threatened somebody, if not Mandelson, with withdrawal from supporting the government's Welfare-to-Work scheme.

But it is the companies, not the government, who stand to gain most from Welfare-to-Work. Several food companies are hoping to benefit from the publicity the government is planning around the scheme. An £18m national advertising campaign funded by tax-payers and due to start in February will promote Welfare-to-Work and raise the profiles of the

companies participating — of which the first ten to be named include Sainsbury, Tesco, Bass and Northern Foods.

'Businesses signing up to the New Deal can look forward not only to effective recruiting but also the chance to participate in a campaign to grab the public's attention,' offered a spokesman for the education and employment secretary, David Blunkett.

Good value for the companies, who will not even have to promise jobs to the jobless but only to consider such candidates alongside other applicants. If the company takes a jobless person on, they stand to gain £750 flat fee plus £60 per week towards the wage bill.

When the chips are down

The British eat 2 million tonnes of chips a year. That's 37kg per person, equivalent to two McDonald's regular portions of fries (50g) per day for every man woman and child.

But it's not enough, says the British Potato Council. Convinced that we could be eating more chips if we tried, they are launching Chip Week this coming February.

And they use cartoons like this, which do nothing to help the image of parents or health educators trying to improve children's diets.



A sign of our times, perhaps, as North Londoners are now being offered tinned cheese imported from Turkey. And not sheep or goat cheese, but Holstein-Friesian cows' cheese, from the country's floral pastures, it seems. Floral pastures — or dusty, hot sheds and a diet of imported feedcake?

For more on the changing diet of Southern Europe, see page 17.

Menus — or agendas?

Renowned chef Albert Roux told cookery students in Norwich to cheat by serving ready meals instead of home made food, reported the *Daily Express*. 'Buy Marks and Spencer daube of beef and when your husband comes home say "Darling I've cooked something special for you",' the master chef is reported to have said, and was pictured with a Marks and Spencer package in his hands.

Marks and Spencer may have been pleased but not, according to *Private Eye*, altogether surprised. M&S have had him as a well-paid consultant for the last four years.



Meanwhile Raymond Blanc was given a fine spread in a Waitrose freebie. 'I have long used sugar as an integral part of my cuisine,' he crowed, as part of a four page special promoting the wonders of sugar as an ingredient in savoury recipes as well as sweet.

This begs the question of whether Tate & Lyle may be thinking of dropping their favourite chef, Gary Rhodes, who has been promoting their sugar for the last three years.

