

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food

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Ribena causes dental storm

The campaigning group Action and Information on Sugars accused the BDA of accepting poor standards of evidence when agreeing to endorse the Ribena product on the basis of unpublished data assessed by a committee of four which included two of the researchers, assessing their own work. 'The lack of rigour and transparency in its procedures undermine the authority of its endorsement,' said Jack Winkler, AIS chairman. 'This product is being launched onto the market without any independent assessment of its unusually strong health claims.'

Professor Aubrey Sheiham, of University College London's Department of Community Dental Health, criticised the BDA for being led into a ridiculous position. 'A product made from diluted fruit juice and artificial sweeteners cannot be described as kind to teeth. As the COMA sugar report acknowledged several years ago, diluted fruit syrups can be just as damaging as other sugar solutions. If it is genuinely kind to teeth, then why does the company warn parents to avoid serving the drink in a baby bottle or using it with a dummy, and to keep drinking times short — the standard warnings for tooth-damaging baby drinks?'

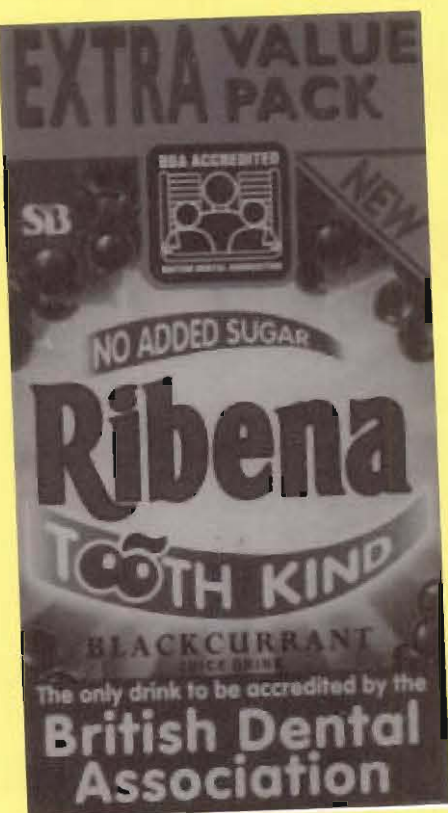
Dental health educators are also concerned that parents may associate the name Ribena with a

'good health' image, creating confusion among parents about how damaging many such soft drinks can often be to young teeth.

The new product contains diluted blackcurrant juice, two types of artificial sweetener, added flavouring, two forms of preservative including one that can provoke asthmatic reactions, as well as a small amount of chalk which, presumably, is the key ingredient to reduce the tooth-attacking acidity of the drink.

The BDA's John Hunt told the *Food Magazine* that the BDA had not made any money out of the endorsement, only enough to cover their administrative costs. He was also scathing of his critics, saying they should 'learn to live in the real world'.

In the event it may be the BDA that needs to live in the real world when it realises how much damage it has done to its reputation, for remarkably little financial gain. The move is reminiscent of the row last year in the National Childbirth Trust when the management of the NCT accepted sponsorship from the supermarket chain Sainsbury's, a manufacturer of baby milk powder. Significant numbers of NCT supporters resigned their membership, and a subsequent revision of policy by the NCT has failed to repair the damage.



Dental health workers are furious at a decision by the British Dental Association to endorse a soft drink. The BDA's approval for a new version of Ribena, prominently displayed on product packs, is the first time the professional body has endorsed a food or drink. Their chief executive, John Hunt, went on record as saying 'If children want soft drinks then Ribena Tooth Kind is the one dentists can recommend'.

The claims made on these spreads break the industry's own code of practice. Find out more on pages 9 – 11.



Get the facts with the Food Magazine

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

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

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

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editorial

And now ... the good news!

In our last issue we launched a 10-point charter demanding better food labelling and tougher regulations and standards to improve consumer confidence in our food supply. We sent the charter to the government food minister, Jeff Rooker. We received back a four-page reply from MAFF, agreeing with many of our demands and promising to take forward many of the points we raised including mandatory nutrition labelling, labelling of genetically modified foods and misleading health and nutrition claims (see page 8). It's a promising start and good to see MAFF taking a positive attitude towards initiatives that would benefit consumers. But we argue, there is still a long way to go.

If the government is serious, then there is no excuse for the labelling of GMO foods to have stalled for the last six months at EU level, while the UK is currently EU president. Leaving such labelling to an industry voluntary code is simply not good enough.

Misleading health claims have been criticised not only by consumer groups such as the Food Commission, but by the government's own Food Advisory Committee's reports in 1996, in 1991, in 1989, and even in 1966! It's time for some action.

Equally important, the food inspection services need a boost. High standards should be set for environmental health, trading standards and food analysis services, and an adequate budget granted to ensure these standards can be met. Only a diligent, well-funded inspection service can guarantee that the tougher regulations are actually being applied in practice.

And, to ensure that the inspectors themselves can be inspected, we need fully transparent processes, operating under the proposed Freedom of Information Act, allowing public interest groups such as ourselves to keep an eye on what is going on. No more secrecy!

Meanwhile MAFF is carving up its food and farming sections in preparation for the new Food Standards Agency, trying desperately not to lose its historically generous budgets (see opposite). Little thought is going into what will be needed by the new Agency, only into what can be defended within the present Ministry. This is irresponsible, and will serve only to cripple the proposed new Agency. It is time that some senior civil servants were put out to pasture, and a new generation brought in with a more progressive attitude.

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We have recently moved to a new address

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Loose inserts are accepted subject to approval - please contact Ian Tokelove at The Food Commission for details

FDA caught in battle over phytoestrogen safety

The controversy over the safety of oestrogen-like compounds in soybeans (see previous issues of the *Food Magazine*) has been brought to a head following an extraordinary move by US soya processing giant, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), which has petitioned the USA Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to have soy 'isoflavones' general recognised as safe (GRAS) for use as a food supplement and a micronutrient added to foods.

The soya industry has been eager to promote soya, which is rich in naturally-occurring phytoestrogens (of which isoflavones are one type) as being the latest wonder food capable of preventing cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis and prevention of menopausal symptoms in women. But the evidence to support the claimed health benefits is limited and a new report from the UK Medical Research Council's Institute for Environment and Health¹, funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, concludes that 'though some epidemiological studies suggest that consumption of foods containing phytoestrogens may have beneficial effects, almost no

evidence exists to link these effects directly to phytoestrogens'.

There is also a growing body of evidence pointing to possible adverse effects of isoflavones with particular concerns being raised about the consumption of soya infant formula by babies. Recent US research² has shown that low doses of phytoestrogens at dietary levels can cause breast cancer cells to proliferate. Furthermore new US government research from its National Center for Toxicological Research³, published last year, and of which the FDA should be aware, indicates that isoflavones could inhibit thyroid hormone synthesis, inducing goitre and even thyroid cancer. The authors raise concerns about the widespread use of soya products in infant formulas, the significant consumption of soya products by vegetarians and the promotion of soy-based products as health foods claiming beneficial oestrogenic and anti-carcinogenic properties.

It is unlikely that ADM would have submitted its petition to the FDA if it had not been given some indication of acceptance. GRAS classifications

normally apply to non-controversial food ingredients and mean that the substance would be exempt from premarket approval requirements. It appears that the submission could have gone unchallenged if it were not for an article in *Food Chemical News*⁴ which alerted researchers around the world who are now challenging ADM's assurances of safety. The Food Commission has also made its own submission to the FDA calling for ADM's submission to be withdrawn and asking to be kept informed of progress.

¹ Institute for Environment and Health, *IEH assessment on Phytoestrogens in the Human Diet*, Final Report to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, November 1997, 176 pages. Available from the MAFF library tel 0171 238 6575.

² Dees C et al (1997) Dietary estrogens stimulate human breast cells to enter the cell cycle, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol 105, Supp 3, Apr 1997.

³ Divi RL et al (1997) Anti-Thyroid isoflavones from Soybean, *Biochemical Pathology*, Vol 54, 1087-1096.

⁴ Isoflavones and refined soya oil are first GRAS notices, *Food Chemical News*, March 2, 1998.

MAFF vs FSA, round 1

Reports reaching the Food Commission suggest that MAFF has been busy trying to stitch up the forthcoming Food Standards Agency before it is even born.

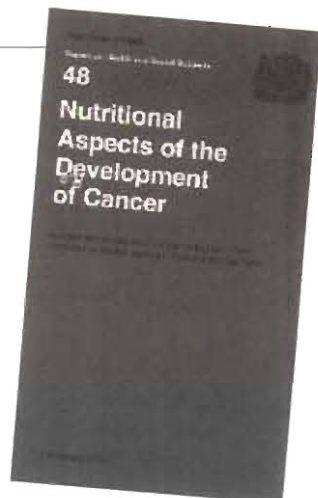
Most recent has been the attempt to move its food research into its other research centres. The government's leading food research establishment is the 120-staff Central Science Laboratory, Norwich, across the road from the independently-funded Institute for Food Research. MAFF's agricultural, environmental and fisheries laboratories have mostly been closed and their work transferred to a costly new site outside York. MAFF has now been busy trying to sew up a deal whereby the CSL Norwich site is closed and the work integrated into their York site — a move which is bitterly opposed by the Norwich staff,

and which would make the independence of food research hard to ensure given that the labs would be buried inside a MAFF site at York. Furthermore, it would leave the new FSA with no in-house laboratories of its own.

Unhappy at the idea of moving to York and losing many of his staff in the process, CLS Norwich's director, Dr John Gilbert, listened with interest when the local university suggested moving his group in with them, to establish an independent centre which could take contracts with the new FSA. MAFF's permanent secretary, Richard Packer, got wind of this after the university's vice chancellor mentioned the idea to food minister Jeff Rooker. Packer was furious, summoned Gilbert to his office, and told Gilbert he was relieved of his

duties in Norwich for at least six months. Staff were told that the loss of Dr Gilbert was to prevent him 'being drawn into discussions by others on the future of the Norwich laboratory'.

This sorry saga, designed to prop up the York white elephant (proposed cost £41m, latest cost over £130m and rising) as much as to scupper the new FSA, follows attempts by MAFF to hide the extent of their food-based research budget. According to figures they gave to the authors of the Food Standards Agency white paper, MAFF and Department of Health research on food amounts to £25 million a year in total. This is the figure the FSA accepts as its inheritance when it starts its own research operations, but is this enough? 'What the FSA needs is a research budget to discharge their responsibilities, not a budget based on MAFF's current patterns of expenditure,' commented science policy analyst Dr Erik Millstone.



The Department of Health's long-awaited publication of the COMA report on cancer is now available. The report was due to be launched at the end of last September, but the launch was cancelled at the last moment on the grounds that, according to a press release, COMA had not had enough time to discuss the detail of the exact amount of red meat that might pose a cancer hazard.

That press release, announcing the need for a re-print, said that COMA had met the previous day and agreed the following: 'the average consumption of red and processed meat should fall: those with intakes at or above the current average of 90g per day should consider a reduction'.

So presumably the re-printed COMA report should say just that. But no, not according to the announcement that came with the publication in March. This says 'Average and below average consumers need not change.' (press release, March 5th 1998).

And in fact even this is not the whole truth. The COMA report itself actually says that adults consuming amounts greater than the current average would benefit from a reduction, and that there is no recommendation for a reduction for those adults eating less than the average. Nothing is said about those at the average level.

To be absolutely clear on one point, COMA says 'It is not recommended that adults with intakes below the current average should reduce their intakes'. This is not quite what the meat industry wants — they would prefer COMA to say that it is recommended that those below average should not reduce their intakes.

■ Department of Health COMA report no 41 *Nutritional Aspects of the Development of Cancer*, The Stationery Office, 1998.

CODEX clamps down on nutrition claims

A sub-committee of CODEX, the international food standards-setting body, has adopted guidelines on the use of nutrition claims for food products (see table). The guidelines go further than previous proposals in the UK and Europe where there are few regulations, but are broadly in line with US laws.

The definition of low fat will make a mockery of many UK products such as low-fat spreads which currently contain up to 41% fat.

CODEX has avoided detailed guidance on health claims, but has stated that foods should not imply that they can, in and of themselves, impart health except in so far as they contribute to officially recognised dietary guidelines. In addition, health claims should not be based on selective consideration of certain aspects of a product.

It is unclear how these guidelines will be used in the UK, but MAFF says it wants to see them adopted Europe-wide.

Claim	Defined as not more than
Low energy	40kcal per 100g solids, 20kcal per 100ml liquids
Low fat	3g per 100g solids, 1.5g per 100ml liquids
Fat free	0.15g per 100g/ml
Low saturated fat	10% energy and either 1.5g per 100g solids or 0.75g per 100ml liquids
Low cholesterol	fulfils low saturated fat claim and 10% energy and either 20mg per 100g solids or 10mg per 100ml liquids
Sugar free	0.5g per 100g/ml
Low sodium	120mg per 100g
Very low sodium	40mg per 100g
Sodium free	5mg per 100g
Claim	Defined as not less than
Source of fibre	3g per 100g or 1.5g per 100 kcal
High fibre	Twice the value for 'source'
Source of protein	10% NRV per 100g solids, 5% NRV per 100ml liquids, or 5% NRV per 100 kcal
High protein	Twice the value for 'source'
Source of vitamin or mineral	15% NRV per 100g solids, 7.5% NRV per 100ml liquids, or 5% NRV per 100 kcal
High vitamin or mineral	Twice the value for 'source'

Organic genes?

Moves in the USA to permit genetically modified food to be labelled as organic have led to fierce resistance. Submissions to the US Department of Agriculture can still be made by concerned individuals, even those living outside of America. For details, see web site www.ticketplease.com/safefood.

EU hormone ban

The World Trade Organisation's ruling on the European Union's ban against US hormone-reared beef did more than just give the EU a breathing space. It specified that the evidence needed to justify a hormone ban could include risk assessments based on risks other than those from laboratory tests of safety.

For example it could include the risks arising from farmers failing to comply with veterinary instructions, and failures of adequate inspection and enforcement. The ruling also confirmed the right of governments to establish higher levels of health protection than those accepted for international trade.

Iceland takes a lead

In a double whammy designed to take the moral high ground (over the heads, even, of the Co-op), the supermarket chain Iceland has sworn that none of its own-brand products will contain GMO ingredients, starting this May.

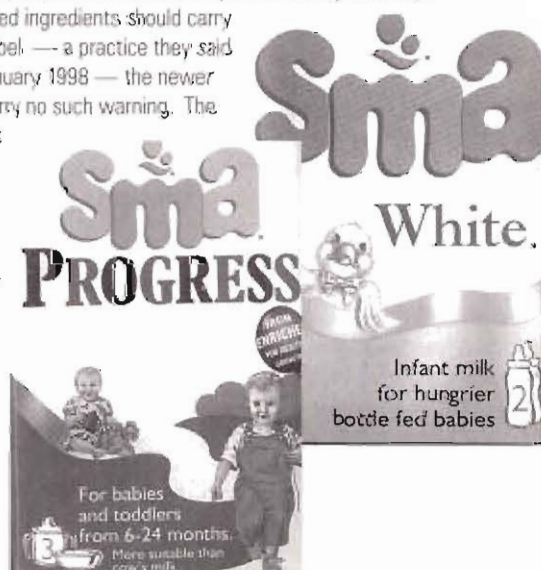
The company is also the first to try large-scale marketing of frozen organic vegetables. Priced at 99p per pound, the organic veg are cheaper than corner shop Birds Eye prices.



Mums search for old baby milk

Baby milk company SMA Nutrition, makers of SMA baby milk powders and Progress follow on milks, have promised the *Food Magazine* that products with 'best before' dates up to October 28, 2000 can be guaranteed free of genetically modified soya.

A search of London branches of Boots and Superdrug found tinried SMA powders to have 'best before' dates after that date. Despite recommendations from the Food and Drink Federation that all products likely to contain genetically modified ingredients should carry a notice on the label — a practice they said would start in January 1998 — the newer SMA products carry no such warning. The only way mothers can be sure they are purchasing gmo-free baby milk from SMA is to hunt down any remaining stocks of older powder.



'Sorry' says Monsanto

In an extraordinary move by the multinational at the heart of the storm over GMO products, Monsanto has publicly apologised for its high-handed approach to pushing its genetically engineered soya beans onto the European market.



They are not thinking of withdrawing their products, though, but they are considering segregating their crops from non-engineered crops to allow European labelling schemes to take off. In a separate statement, made to the local newspaper *The St Louis Post Dispatch* (15.3.98) Monsanto's Tom McDermott said his company had no problem with a separate distribution system for non-engineered food, but that such food would cost more. 'You should not force everybody to pay a higher price simply because you want a higher standard,' he said, begging the question as to why non-GMO foods should cost more, and why such foods would be a higher standard.

Meanwhile Monsanto's European branch is trying out a new 'friendly' tactic with campaigning groups. They approach a group and offer them a joint advertising deal: Monsanto will pay for a full page advertisement and publish whatever the campaigners want on half the page, along with Monsanto's reply on the other half.

Presumably this is a tactic dreamt up by their new staff member, Ann Foster, formerly an advocate for consumers at the Scottish Consumer Council. It embarrasses campaigners who don't want to be accused of avoiding debate. The tactic needs to be exposed for what it is: a public relations stunt which is a substitute for reasoned argument, and which is designed to make Monsanto look reasonable, rather than as a first step in making real changes.



Beware company tactics

As if in answer to Monsanto, a new publication from the recently-formed group, The Corner House, looks at how multinational corporations attempt to engineer their opposition through dialogue and other tactics.

Industry might like to promote the view that there is no contradiction between working for social equity and working for an expanding market. But as veteran campaigner Saul Alinsky wrote, 'conflict is the essential core of a free and open society'. Conflict and controversy are a necessary part of the political process, says this paper, while industry-initiated 'dialogues' may give the impression of openness and responsibility without leading to any shift in industry practices. Beware, it warns, of a dialogue that amounts to information gathering about campaigning groups, or that creates diversions or even causes division with a campaign.

Or dialogues can be used just to enhance the image of the company concerned. 'We've talked with the Food Commission,' they might say, implying that now they are a socially responsible company.

The fact that we might still disagree with the company may never get mentioned. The image is given of a friendly, open company able to meet its critics – without having to change one bit.

■ *Engineering of consent: Uncovering corporate PR* by Judith Richter, 16 pp. Single copies are available by request. Send a stamped, self-addressed C4 envelope to The Corner House, PO Box 3137, Station Road, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 1YJ.

Health food shops losing GMO battle

Holland & Barrett, the UK's leading chain of shops selling so-called health foods and food supplements, has admitted it can no longer guarantee its products are 100% GMO-free.

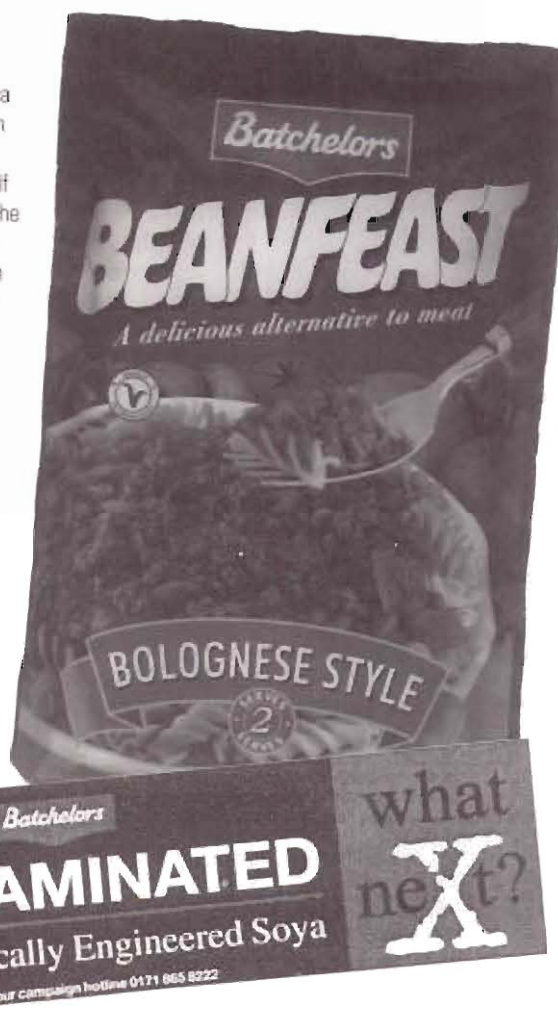
'Last year we could be sure that our products did not contain GMOs,' spokeswoman Sharon Flynn told the *Food Magazine*. 'We are trying to avoid their use in our own products, but it is getting more and more difficult to guarantee supplies.'

Rival chains Health and Diet Centres and GNC, both controlled by American-owned General Nutrition Centres Inc, said that their UK board of directors has taken the position that no products containing GMOs

will be knowingly sold in their UK outlets. They may face a tough time, as their US parent company held a press conference in New York heralding the dawning of an age when 'bio-engineered food products intended to provide specific health benefits' will be a 'boon for disease prevention and healthful living' creating a 'new health-centered supermarket of the future'.

Several specialist manufacturers, such as the makers of Provamel soya milk, secured stocks of GMO-free soya which they are still using. Provamel makers Vandemoortele told us that they believed their stocks would last them through 1998.

The first products to be labelled as containing genetically modified soya (using a small asterisk in the ingredients list) is Batchelor's Beanfeast. If you want to help bring the public's attention to the novel ingredient you can get stickers like the one shown here from a joint Greenpeace/FoE/GEN campaign hotline on 0171 865 8222.



Spuds U don't like?

The latest report from SAFE, the Sustainable Agriculture, Food and the Environment Alliance, reveals a disturbing picture of the nation's potatoes, detailing the environmental, health and social problems arising from their production.

Thirteen million litres of sulphuric acid were poured onto potato fields last year to control the size of potatoes to meet supermarket buyers' specifications. The supermarkets mark up the prices by more than 250%, and are increasingly turning to Egypt, Portugal and Spain for the early crops despite the extra pollution in transporting these over long distances.

Pesticide practice

MAFF's newly-revised code of practice for using pesticides expects farmworkers to apply the nasty chemicals using protective clothing such as this, and to wash down their tractors wearing similar outfits. The TGWU trade union Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers section reports considerable difficulty gaining access to farms to ensure the code is properly applied in practice.

■ *Green Code: Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Pesticides on Farms and Holdings*, available free from MAFF Publications, London SW1A 2XX, tel 0645 556000, fax 0181 694 8776.



Potatoes, People and Pollution



■ *Potatoes, People and Pollution* by Chris Emerson, price £4 from SAFE Alliance, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, tel 0171 837 8980, fax 0171 837 1141.

Menu labelling

It can be done! Despite complaints from caterers that they can never put warnings and labelling details on menus, we find that it is already happening in practice — but not in the UK. Germany has been encouraging catering companies to indicate the presence of additives and other possible hazards on menus for some years, to some effect.

In the UK, the secretary to the Hotel and Catering Industry Management Association's Technical Advisory group,

Rosemary Morrison, told the *Food Magazine* that their organisation would always

resist menu labelling as 'impossible to implement in practice'. She claimed that menus

were usually exempt from labelling regulations, possibly unaware that the regulations regarding irradiated food explicitly require caterers to declare any irradiated food on their menus.

Low fruit drink?

It looks like fresh orange juice. It's priced like fresh orange juice. It calls itself an 'Enriched Citrus Beverage'.

But in fact this drink — strongly promoted as 'The Great Stuff Kids Go For' in branches of Sainsbury's this spring — contains only 5% fruit juice (a mixture of orange, tangerine, lime and grapefruit juices).

The rest of the product is water and sugar (one half-litre bottle will give a child more than the average daily recommended maximum dietary intake of sugar) plus a long list of additives, including one we have never seen before: starchsodiumoctenylsuccinate. It also contains 'natural' flavouring agents, thickeners, emulsifiers and preservatives, all designed to make water look like juice.

And as for the 'California Style', the product is made in the UK by Sundor Brands, and distributed by soap-flake manufacturers Procter & Gamble.



German menu: the footnotes indicate the additives

Pesticides pose a risk to children

Increasing evidence points to children being at greater risk from exposure to pesticide residues yet the UK is lagging behind the USA in the way it seeks to protect children. Sue Dibb investigates.

A new report from the Environment Working Group (EWG) in the US says that each day one million US children under five consume unsafe levels of organophosphate (OP) insecticide residues. The figures are disturbing, yet for those who have been aware of the growing concern about children's exposure to pesticides, they are not altogether surprising.

The EWG report¹ published earlier this year analyses US pesticide residue data on OPs and finds:

- one million children under five — that's one child in 20 — each day consume unsafe levels of OP insecticides;
- a child has a one-in-four chance of eating a peach with an unsafe dose; a one-in-seven chance of eating an apple with an unsafe dose and a one-in-eight chance of eating a nectarine with an unsafe dose;
- more than 100,000 children will exceed the 'reference dose' (a safe lifetime daily dose) by a factor of 10;
- most risks are associated with apples, peaches and grapes.

The EWG report is the latest in a series of US research reports to highlight the greater risks that pesticides pose to children compared to adults. While there are differences between the US and UK (one of the OP pesticides associated with the highest risk in the US is not used in the UK) the UK's Pesticides Trust says that the overall message echoes that given by the UK's Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) in its report² last year. This found unexpectedly high variations in pesticide residues in carrots and some fruit and it now seems to be the case that nearly all pesticides may produce unexpectedly high residues.

What also makes the US different to the UK is that the US 1996 Food Quality Protection Act requires the government to regulate cumulative exposure to groups of pesticides with similar health effects (such as OPs). Previously residues for pesticides were individually compared to 'safe' dose levels, which is still the case in the UK. Now in the US residues of pesticides with a similar type of effect will be added together before being compared to the 'safe' dose levels.

Furthermore the new law requires specific protection for children, who are more vulnerable to pesticides and other toxins. One aspect of this is that Acceptable Daily Intake figures must in most cases be based on a safety factor of a thousand

fold whereas the UK and Europe adopt a lower safety threshold using a safety factor of a hundred fold.

According to Professor John Wargo, Director of the Center for Children's Environmental Health at Yale University and author of *Our Children's Toxic Legacy* (Yale University Press, 1996), childhood is a time when the organs of the body show rapid rates of growth and development. 'From the point of conception through the age of 18 there is one or another organ system like filtration of the kidneys or detoxification capacity of the liver that is immature and therefore vulnerable to toxic insults.'

His comments follow the 1993 US National Academy of Sciences report into pesticides in infants and children which stated 'exposure to pesticides early in life can lead to a greater risk of chronic effects that are expressed only after long latency periods have elapsed. Such effects include cancer, neurodevelopmental impairment and immune dysfunction.'

Yet, according to Wargo, we know very little about the immunological effects of most pesticides, their potential to disrupt the endocrine system which secretes hormones which govern normal growth and development, and very little about delayed effects such as nervous system damage. 'Governments around the world have licensed these compounds in a way that was based upon incomplete scientific understanding of the toxicity', he says.

A further reason children are especially at risk is that their intake of certain foods, such as apple juice, milk, sugars and wheat, is proportionately much higher than adults. For example, their intake of apple juice, per kilogram of bodyweight, is about eight times higher than adults. 'If you assume everybody has an adult average intake you would be underestimating kid's intake by a factor of 20, 30, even 40 times and for any level of contamination on any of these foods that translates into a differential pattern of exposure at 10, 20, 30, 40 times.'

By looking at dietary patterns of individual children, identifying the foods kids eat the most of and then looking at the chemicals that are allowed for use to remain on these foods, Wargo's research provided a regulatory strategy for controlling exposure to the most toxic compounds on foods like apple juice and some of the fruits and vegetables which children consume the most. Such regulation relies on there being adequate surveillance and monitoring but Wargo argues that

no government has the capacity to do this at the level that would protect the individual health of children.

'In the meantime,' he told a conference this February,⁴ 'all governments should adopt standards for contamination that are protective of children's health. This is a crucial first step but it is not enough. We clearly need consumers to be confident in the market place, to be able to make informed judgements and to be able to buy less risky compounds. They can't do that unless we revise our labelling system.'

In the US, the Food Quality Protection Act requires that foods that are treated with pesticides be so labelled, although the Environment Protection Agency is struggling to come up with some kind of generic labelling. 'But,' warns Wargo, 'if we sit back and trust in Government to take care of it for us I think our capacity to reduce exposure and risk is extremely limited. There's a whole lot that individuals can do. With respect to food purchasing, I encourage everyone to go to their supermarkets, to encourage retailers to stock their shelves with organic produce. Be thoughtful about how you could accumulate exposure across different environments from food, to water, to air. Think about accumulation of risk. Our government is only beginning to think about it but we have to take greater responsibility and accountability for how we release these compounds into the environment.'

Wargo's message is one that needs to be put into practice in the UK. Here we have no legislation equivalent to the US Act to protect children's health. While Peter Beaumont, Director of the Pesticides Trust told the February conference that 'the UK government Working Party on Pesticide Residues is more alive to consumer concerns particularly the impact of pesticides on children', writing in the latest issue of *Pesticides News*⁵ he says 'Consumer groups in the UK and the US emphasise that fresh fruit and vegetables are part of a health diet. Nevertheless pesticide residue safety issues require urgent attention'. For many youngsters it may already be too late.

¹ Richard Wiles, Kert Davies and Christopher Campbell (1998) *Overexposed: organophosphate insecticides in children's food*, from EWG, 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW Suite 600, Washington DC 20009, USA Fax: +1 202 232 2592 also available at www.ewg.org.

² *Unit to Unit Variation of Pesticide Residues in Fruit and Vegetables*, Pesticides Safety Directorate, York, March 1997.

³ National Academy of Sciences (1993) *Pesticides in the Diets of Infants and Children*, National Research Council/National Academy of Sciences, National Academy Press, Washington DC.

⁴ Food, Children and Health, conference organised by Baby Organix, London, February 1998.

⁵ Children at risk - more evidence against OPs, *Pesticides News*, 39, March 1998.

Government backs Food Commission charter

Our 10-point charter demanding better food labelling and standards in our last issue prompted a four-page reply from MAFF, agreeing with many of our demands and promising action soon. But, we argue, there is still a long way to go.

In our Ten-point Charter on food published in January, we called on the government to make a series of changes to the present regulations, and ensure they were being upheld. 'Yes,' came the reply from MAFF, 'we agree'.

- (1) We called for mandatory nutrition labelling including saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, sodium and fibre.

'The Government is very concerned that consumers should be given as clear and comprehensive labelling information as possible ... the UK has written to the European Commission making suggestions very similar to those proposed here: mandatory nutrition labelling with the inclusion of more nutrients.'

We say: watch this space!

- (2) We called for labelling of all genetically modified ingredients.

'The Government will be pressing at EC level for all foods to be labelled if they contain genetically modified (GM) material to give consumers a real choice in what they buy.'

We say: why have these stalled in the EC during the UK's presidency?

- (3) We called for new rules on misleading health and nutrition claims.

'There is potential for health claims to be misleading, and the Government has made clear to the European Commission its view that the progress in achieving international consensus on nutrition and health claims made by Codex Committee on Food Labelling should be supported and the agreed guidelines eventually adopted at EC level. In the UK, the Food Advisory Committee is reviewing the use of health claims. The drafting of guidelines is being taken forward by a "Joint Initiative" of consumer groups, enforcement officers, and the food industry.'

We say: Codex doesn't cover the full range of health claims. The UK Food Advisory Committee made strong recommendations in 1966, renewed in 1989, 1991 and 1996 but there has been little movement. The "joint initiative" which is still in negotiation, will be a voluntary code — will it stick?

- (4) We called for a lifting of the labelling exemptions for products such as chocolate, baby food and alcoholic drinks. Drinks should show the units of alcohol they contain.

'Chocolate products are subject to separate specific requirements which control their composition,

labelling and advertising... Proposals to extend the ingredient listing requirements of the labelling regulations to all alcoholic drinks are under discussion at EC level ... the European Commission has undertaken to carry out a study on the feasibility on an EC-wide system of units of alcohol.'

We say: The chocolate regulations are weak, baby foods don't have to declare the meat contents and the EC received a report on units of alcohol in 1993.

- (5) We called for the labelling of products treated with chemicals after harvest.

'At present, there is no requirement to label produce treated with pesticides or other agro-chemicals. Many of the pesticides used do not leave a detectable residue and, therefore, it is not possible to ascertain whether a particular pesticide has been used. In addition, produce from different areas is likely to have been at risk from different pests and diseases. This would mean that, as produce from different producers is often packed together, individual items or batches would require separate labelling. This would add greatly to the cost of the food.'

We say: Yes, but it might encourage producers to reconsider their practices rather than face such costs.

- (6) We called for action to reduce contamination with 'gender-bender' chemicals.

'MAFF has taken a leading role in research funded by the Government in this area. Its extensive research and surveillance programme includes over 30 projects. These focus on exposure (including that of critical groups such as infants), test methods and physiological effects of these chemicals. Results of some recent MAFF surveys have shown that intakes from food of some endocrine disrupters (e.g. PCBs, dioxins) are falling as industrial emissions are controlled.'

We say: It has taken a lot of campaigning to reach even this level of acceptance that there is a real problem here. There's no room for complacency yet.

- (7) We called for stronger food monitoring and enforcement throughout the food chain.

'Under the proposals for the Food Standards Agency, local authorities will remain responsible for day-to-day food law enforcement (except for meat hygiene). The government will also examine whether new powers should be made available to the Agency to ensure that individual food enforcement authorities meet their responsibilities towards the consumer.'

We say: Good, but will the budget improve? We already have one of Europe's lowest rates of sampling

and analysing foods. New resources are needed to improve this.

- (8) We called for all government advisory committees to publish their minutes and members' interests and links to the food industry.

- (9) We also called for 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.

'The Government acknowledges that its business should be conducted in a way that is as transparent and open as possible... For food additives which are assessed in the UK, the toxicological data are currently made available via the British Library once the evaluation is complete. These arrangements will obviously have to be reviewed in the light of the general policy on freedom of information.'

We say: There is no obligation for companies to publish all relevant data known to them. Stronger measures are needed.

- (10) We said that, to make the best use of label information, there needs to be a national initiative to improve shoppers' knowledge.

'MAFF publishes a series of booklets under the general title of *FoodSense*, two of which are specifically aimed at helping people understand the information given on food labels. These are available free of charge on request.' MAFF has also provided significant funding for the development and production of a schools' food and nutrition programme by the British Nutrition Foundation. The issue of understanding and using food labelling information is dealt with in some detail, and hundreds of packs have already been sold to schools all over the UK. This should ensure that information on this important subject reaches many young people who will later be independent shoppers for themselves and their families.'

We say: This isn't good enough. The BNF pack is laced with pro-industry assumptions (not surprisingly as the BNF is largely industry financed). There is no requirement to study these topics in the national curriculum. Giving leaflets to consumers is a cop-out: we believe that health education material should be directed at food producers — and their products should be judged by healthy eating criteria. Similarly, producers' marketing and advertising strategies should be judged by health criteria, and they should be named and shamed for poor performance.

CHECKOUT

Checkout takes a look at the bewildering range of margarines, spreads and butter blends and the myriad claims they make, and asks which really are the healthiest?

Spreading confusion

Once there was butter and marge. Then along came a whole range of spreads claiming to be a healthier choice. We were seduced by the claims that sunflower oils, full of polyunsaturated fats, and low and extra low fat and light spreads were good for our hearts. The health bandwagon took a dive into the ditch when butter-makers, for years on the run over saturated fat, accused many of their rivals of containing harmful trans fatty acids from artificially hardened (hydrogenated) oils, which are now known to be equally bad for the heart as saturated fats.

But the bandwagon was soon back on track. Many manufacturers hastily reformulated products to remove or reduce trans fats, while others now tempt our health aspirations by adding olive oil or omega-3 fats (from fish oils).

Meanwhile the boundaries between butter and spreads have become increasingly blurred. When it comes to taste, there's little disputing butter's superiority so spread manufacturers have launched a range of products made with buttermilk, cream and even butter itself to impart a buttery taste. It may not be the real thing, but I Can't Believe It's Not Butter has spawned many imitators such as Utterly Butterly, Butterlicious and Don't Flutter With Butter. As many spreads become more like butter, butters are becoming more like spreads, with half fat butters and spreadable butters competing in the crowded supermarket chill cabinets.

But where do these new product developments and claims and counter-claims leave shoppers? Confused, is the simple answer. And it's easy to see why. Trying to assess the health merits of differing products while judging the competing claims – 'low in saturates', 'high in polyunsaturates', 'high in monounsaturates', 'low in cholesterol', 'virtually no trans fats', 'low fat', 'reduced fat', 'light', 'diet', 'made with olive oil', 'rich in vitamin E' – taxes the knowledge and

understanding of even the most dedicated label reader.

For our survey we looked at over 40 different spreads. We looked at how much fat they contain, and the different kinds of fatty acids – saturated, trans, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated and the claims relating to these. We also looked at the laws and the industry guidelines.

In summary, we found much confusion. We found some products breaking labelling laws by failing to declare prominently their fat content, others failing to use legal descriptions or display these clearly, while virtually half of the claims we examined failed to meet the manufacturers own guidelines. Even when followed we found the manufacturers guidelines for claims about saturates, monounsaturates and polyunsaturates to be confusing, anomalous and unhelpful to consumers. For example, products relatively high in saturated fat are able to make a 'low in saturates' claim while some lower fat spreads with less saturates are unable to make the claim.

The Food Commission wants to see rules enforced and clearer labelling to help shoppers, including:

- all products to use a permitted sales description as required by law and for these to be clearly printed alongside brand names;
- all products to declare prominently the total percentage of fat in the product as required by law;
- new rules on nutrient claims which are consistent with current nutritional advice, meaningful and helpful to consumers;
- all products to carry full nutritional labelling including trans fats.

What the law says:

Although the words margarines and spreads are often used synonymously they are, in fact, strictly defined categories defined by European Union legislation (EC Council Regulation 2991/94) which came into force at the beginning of 1996. These are defined by the percentage of fat of the product and the type of fat.

% Fat content	Description permitted
80-90%.....	Butter/Margarine
62-80%.....	Fat spreads X%
41-62%.....	Reduced fat spreads
39-41%.....	Half fat butter/margarine
< 41%.....	Fat spreads X%, low fat or light spreads

(Where X is the percentage of fat in the product)

Among other things, the law also says that margarine and spread labels must:

- use one of the permitted sales descriptions;
- prominently declare the total percentage of fat in the product;
- give the percentage of each type of fat ie vegetable, milk or other animal fat;
- declare in the ingredients list the percentage of salt in the product.

However there are no laws relating to most of the myriad of claims that appear on products. There are only industry guidelines and even these are not always be followed and do not cover all claims.

Claim confusion

Blue Band can claim it is 'low in saturates' but Gold Lowest Light – with less than half the saturated fat – cannot.



CHECKOUT

What we found

Fat declaration

The law says that margarine and spreads must prominently declare the amount of fat they contain. This should be in addition to any information given in the nutrition panel.

We found: Most of the products in our survey did make this declaration, but not all. Willow and Clover (Dairy Crest), Pact (MD Foods), Low Fat Butter Spread (St Michael), Safeway Soya Margarine and Olive Grove (Haldane) failed to do this.

Permitted descriptions

In addition to any brand name, the label should also describe the product using one of the descriptions permitted by law. This should help shoppers to be clear about the type of product they are purchasing. **We found:** Virtually all did although Willow and Clover (DairyCrest) did not carry such a description. However in many cases the descriptions were not always printed next to the brand name and were sometimes difficult to identify among the plethora of other information on the pack. Although the law for these products allows spreads to be described as 'low fat' if they contain less than 41% fat, this is far higher than other agreed standards. International guidelines agreed by Codex state that products should only be described as low fat if they contain less than 3% fat.

Claims

Most of the claims made for spreads and margarine are not specifically covered by UK or EU legislation but some are covered by an industry Code of Practice for Nutrition Claims for Margarine and Spread Products (Margarine & Spreads Association, 1 October 1997).

'Low in saturates'

For a product making a 'low in saturates' claim the Margarine and Spreads Association (MSA) Code of Practice requires that:

- Saturates and trans fats together must make up no more than 25% of the fat.

We found: Over half of the products we surveyed (23 out of 41) make a 'low in saturates' claim. Yet nearly half the products making a claim (11 out of 23) fail to meet the criteria as saturates and trans fats make up more than 25% of the fat. Those that failed to follow the guidelines as they were not including trans fats, included some products from Safeways, Waitrose, St Ivel, M&S, Heinz and Matthews Foods.

Poor criteria: The MSA criteria permit products to make a 'low in saturates' claim when they contain relatively high amounts of saturates. A margarine with 80% fat can be one-fifth saturated and trans fat (20%) and still claim to be low in saturates,

whereas a 'low fat' spread with 40% fat would only be permitted to make the claim if it contains less than 10% saturates and trans. Some low fat spreads cannot make a 'low in saturates' claim even though they contain less saturated fat than some margarines and spreads which can.

The MSA criteria are at odds with more recent guidelines. Codex says the claim should mean less than 1.5% saturated fat and MAFF's Rule of Thumb Nutrition Guide (*Use Your Label: Making Sense of Nutrition Information*, MAFF 1996) says that more than 5% saturates is a lot and less than 1% is a little. Only one product in our survey (Tesco Sunflower Lowest) contained less than 1% saturates. Manufacturers claim that margarines and spreads are a special case and that compared to butter many products are significantly lower in saturates (see table).

'High in polyunsaturates/monounsaturates'

To make a claim that a product is high in polyunsaturates or monounsaturates the MSA criteria state that:

- At least 45% of the fat must be polyunsaturated/monounsaturated;
- Saturated and trans fats together must make up no more than 25% of the fat;
- The product must be low in saturates and declare this;
- The product must contain at least 35% fat by weight.

We found: Twelve products made claims to be 'high in polyunsaturates', although only 6 met the

Fat facts

Saturated Fats

Saturated fats increase the risk of heart disease by encouraging the body to produce more 'bad', LDL (low density lipid) blood cholesterol. Some cancers such as breast and colon cancer are also linked to high intakes of saturated fats. Saturates are found mainly in foods of animal origin including dairy products, although 'tropical' oils such as palm and coconut oils, used in some spreads and margarines, are also highly saturated. Current advice is to reduce consumption of saturates.

Trans Fats

These fats are made by artificially hardening healthier vegetable or fish oils through a process called hydrogenation. Trans fats are considered just as bad as saturated

fats. They can increase 'bad', LDL, blood cholesterol and lower 'good' HDL (high density lipid) blood cholesterol. Hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fats and oils have traditionally been used in margarines.

Cholesterol

Some foods such as eggs, offal and shellfish naturally contain cholesterol, but the effect of this cholesterol in raising blood cholesterol levels, and hence increasing the risk of heart disease, is much less than the influence of fats such as saturated and trans fats. For this reason 'low cholesterol' or 'virtually no cholesterol' claims on spreads and other foods, can mislead because they confuse cholesterol in food with levels of cholesterol in the blood. Cutting down on saturated and trans

fats is the key to cutting blood cholesterol, rather than worrying too much about foods which contain it.

Polyunsaturated fats

Despite all the hype about polyunsaturated fats, particularly from the margarine and spread manufacturers, not all types actually are considered 'good' fats, although they are certainly healthier than 'bad' fats such as saturates and trans fats. There are two types of polyunsaturates — omega-6s and omega-3s — which act differently in the body (see below).

Omega-6 polyunsaturates

Omega-6s include linoleic acid, found in vegetable oils such as sunflower oil and margarines and spreads made with it. Small amounts are essential for health, and substituting saturates with polyunsaturates does lower 'bad' cholesterol levels — but too much can reduce the amount of 'good' HDL cholesterol. High levels may be

associated with other health problems. The current advice is not to increase consumption of omega-6 polyunsaturates.

Omega-3 polyunsaturates

We are advised to increase our intake of long-chain omega 3s (such as DHA and EPA found in fish oils). Not only can they protect against heart disease but they are thought to be of value in helping to treat inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Monounsaturates

Monounsaturates are found in olive oil and rapeseed oil. One of the theories as to why the Mediterranean diet is so healthy is the high level of olive oil used (along with the greater consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit). It is still not clear exactly how monounsaturates are beneficial, but they are thought to keep up levels of 'good' HDL cholesterol.

CHECKOUT

criteria in every respect. Ten products claim to be 'high in monounsaturates', but only 5 meet the criteria. For both types of claim this was largely because saturates and trans fats, together, exceeded 25% of the fats although Olive Grove (Haldane) did not contain sufficient monounsaturates.

Six products in our survey are made with olive oil; the amount ranging from 16 to 21%. Five claim to be high in monounsaturates – although only two meet the MSA criteria in full.

Low in cholesterol

To make a 'low in cholesterol' claim the MSA guidelines state that:

- Cholesterol content must be <0.005%.
- There must be no suggestion or implication that the food is beneficial to human health because of low level of cholesterol.

Three products in our survey claimed to be low in cholesterol (Haldane's Olive Grove and Granose Sunflower Margarines and Matthew Food's Pure Sunflower Margarine). In fact cholesterol in the context of margarines and spreads is a bit of red-herring (see Fat Facts). While consumers are likely to believe such claims imply a health benefit, for margarines and spreads, the total saturated and trans fat figures are far more significant. And as saturates and trans fats in all three products make up over 20% of the fat they are higher in potentially cholesterol raising fats than many other products which don't make a low in cholesterol claim. In addition both Vitalite and Vitalite Light claim to be cholesterol free - which can also give a misleading impression of the overall healthiness of the product.

Choosing healthier margarines and spreads

To choose a healthier margarine or spread, the main consideration is the total amount of saturates and trans fats. The difficulty for shoppers is that we are more inclined to be swayed by the claims on the front of the pack, than by the small print of the nutrition information panel. Secondly, not all products declare how much trans fats they contain so it can be impossible to judge for yourself.

Use our table to compare the total saturated and trans fats in products. On this basis the healthiest are spreads with less than 41% fat – the low fat and light spreads – except for low fat butter spread. Unhealthiest is butter followed by Krona Gold. From a health point of view choosing a spread high in monounsaturates or polyunsaturates is probably less important than reducing levels of saturates and trans. Pact Reduced Fat Spread is enriched with Omega-3 fats from fish oils and could help increase our intakes of these fats but many nutritionists advise that it is better to eat oily fish than fortified foods.

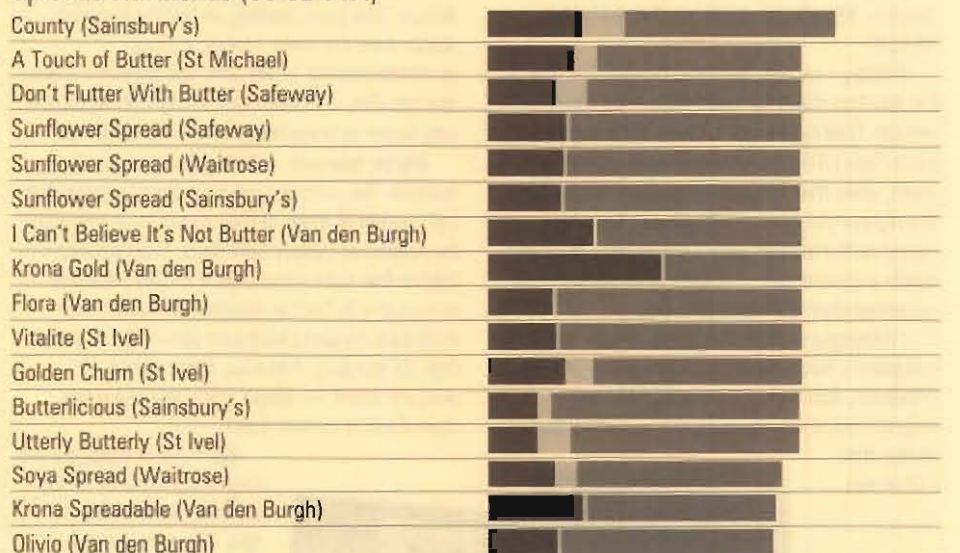
Of course, if you spread healthier spreads more thickly, then you'll end up eating more. The best advice is still to use all fats and spreads sparingly, even the so-called healthier ones.

■ Research Sue Dibb and Jayme Jainchill

Butter/Margarines (80-90% fat)



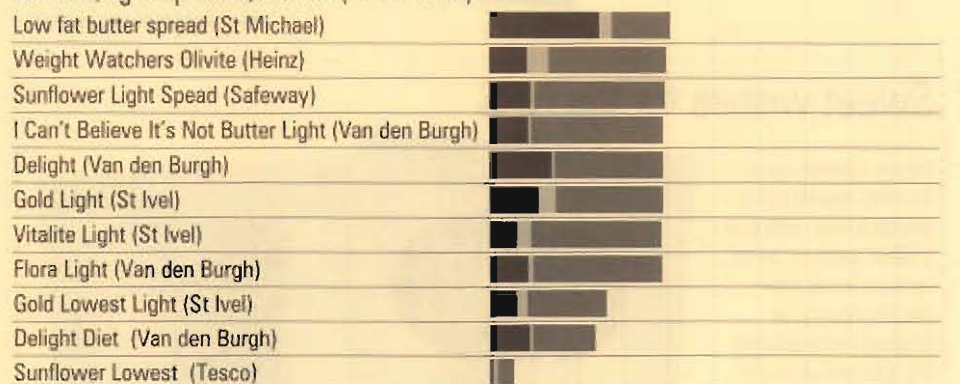
Spreads and blends (80-62% fat)



Reduced fat spread/blends (62-41% fat)



Low fat/light spreads/blends (<41 % fat)



Fat content in grams per 100g Saturated Trans Other

NB. Product research carried out in Feb/March 98. Product formulations may change

CHECKOUT

Loopy labels

More samples of silly-season nonsense spotted by our sharp-eyed readers

Flakey claims

'100 YEARS OF HEALTHIER PRODUCTS FOR A HEALTHIER NATION' boasts Kellogg's. And, cashing in on the 50th anniversary of the National Health Service: 'KELLOGG'S, SERVING THE NATION'S HEALTH'

Kellogg's cereals, like most cereals, are low in fat, but their claim for healthiness is on shaky ground. Their high-sugar Frosties (38% sugar) and Coco Pops (40%) do nothing to help children's teeth, while their biggest brand, Corn Flakes, has the highest salt level of virtually any breakfast cereal on the market, with a single bowl providing nearly a gram of salt — a sixth of an adult's total recommended salt intake for a day.

Challenged on their liberal use of salt, the company's 'Nutrition Affairs' manager, a Dr Kathryn O'Sullivan, acknowledged that COMA 'made recommendations regarding salt reduction' but denies that COMA has

relevance because the recommendations were 'not incorporated into the recently published UK Government Health Strategy, *Our Healthier Nation*'. This is misleading, as (a) *Our Healthier Nation* does not make specific dietary recommendations of any sort, and (b) when it does mention diet, it includes salt, along with sugar and fatty foods as being linked to chronic diseases.

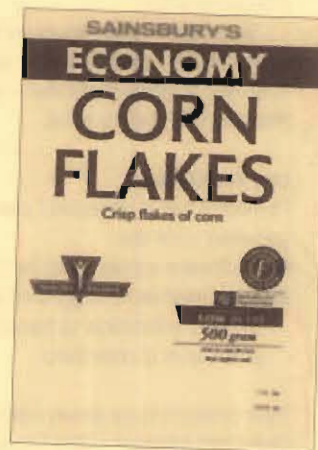
Worse, however, is Kellogg's hypocrisy. In Australia the company has been busy reducing the salt content of many of their products, in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Does Kellogg's believe that salty cereals are a dietary hazard in one country but not in another? Several of their Australian products have less than half the salt of their UK versions. And even some of their UK products boast 'no added salt'. Why make this claim if salt is so harmless?

We suspect Kellogg's will make a big virtue of taking out their salt in a year or two, when the pressure mounts up. Meanwhile, salt is a flavour-booster for their duldest brands, and they will sell salty cereals as hard as they can. 'SERVING THE COMPANY'S WEALTH' perhaps?

Frosted Wheats — boasting '98% fat free' while the small print shows 23% sugar, and not suitable for vegetarians



Kellogg's Corn Flakes — 2.5% salt, more salty than sea water according to research at London's St George's Medical School.



While we are at it, this is the only breakfast cereal we found with even more salt than Kellogg's Corn Flakes. At nearly 3% salt, just five bowls takes you over the recommended adult daily limit. And Sainsbury's has the gall to sell their salty cereal in the Healthy Balance range.

Pictures of health?

Did someone complain about the misrepresentation of the fruit in these sweet purees from Silver Spoon (i.e. the British Sugar Company)?

The pictures on their original packs shows half an apple plus half some other tempting fruit — but the actual content is rather different. The strawberry version, for instance, contains more than three times the apple (68%) to the strawberry (20%). The blackcurrent version is worse at five times the apple to blackcurrent.

The new products show a more modest two strawberries to one apple, though the company still misleadingly calls this 'Strawberry and Apple' rather than a more honest Apple and Strawberry.



Sweet wishes for the NHS

Dietary disease costs the NHS several billion pounds a year, with over a billion spent on dental services alone. How touching that Silver Spoon should celebrate the 50th anniversary of our services with a special edition of their sachets of, yes, pure sugar.



Breastmilk — riches in the midst of poverty

Mongolian families are so poor that the baby milk companies leave them alone — and infant mortality rates are improving rapidly! Gay Palmer reports.



"So you're in nutrition. That sure could be a good market here!" said the uranium-mining company president who shared my hotel table in Ulaan Baatar. He grumbled about the ubiquitous mutton stew and lack of fresh orange juice. Outside street kids hassled for coins to buy bread. Certainly, good nutrition was needed. As recent press reports describe,¹ public infrastructure and the quality of life is deteriorating whilst a few get rich.

The free market has come to Mongolia. Sex clubs, bars and prostitution are thriving. Workers get laid off as state enterprises disintegrate. The public sector health professionals I met in the Mongolian Nutrition Research Centre (MNRC) can barely make ends meet. Research by MNRC and World Vision indicates that more than one-in-five children is stunted from malnutrition. When poverty, food shortages and social breakdown increase, infant and young child mortality rates usually rise, but in Mongolia they are decreasing.

Despite being one of the poorest countries on earth (\$320 annual per capita income), more Mongolian babies and young children are surviving than ever before and maternal mortality is falling. Reports by UNICEF, WHO, World Vision and MNRC have all noted a quiet revolution in one key health practice: breast feeding.

In 1991 Mongolia adopted the WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI).² With support from UNICEF, the MNRC team invited the renowned Dr Natividad Clavano from the Philippines to lead their initial training session and after that there was no stopping them. With amazing commitment they set out to educate all health workers. The former socialist system had established a network of health facilities throughout the country. Mongolia's population of two million is scattered across 1.6m square kilometres (eight times the size of the UK), but around 99% of Mongolian women give birth in health facilities. These used to conform to the Soviet-style practices: separation of mother and baby, strict routines, supplementary bottles and all the usual saboteurs of breast feeding. Cheap state-produced artificial milk and bottles were provided and encouraged by doctors.

By 1997 BFHI practices were the norm. Now 98% of babies suckle within 30 minutes of birth. Babies

share their mothers' beds or are in cradles close by. Bottles and artificial milk have vanished from the system. As Dr Oyunbileg, the busy director of MNRC, said: 'Only if a mother is dead do we even consider artificial feeding.'

At four months 94% of babies are still exclusively breastfed and it really is exclusive: no water, no dummies. Solid foods are introduced at around 6 months but 81% are still breast feeding at 2 years and 35% into the third year. Dropping in on a BFHI refresher course, I was impressed with the accurate knowledge and sensitive attitudes of veteran doctors from around the country. Their skills were reflected in the attitudes of the relaxed mothers I met; even first time mothers were breast feeding their babies confidently. Unlike many traditional societies, the Mongolians value colostrum; in a country where there are more herd animals than humans everyone understands that it is essential. Dr Oyunbileg calls her breast feeding newsletter *Precious Colostrum*.

I visited a friendly unit in grey tower block suburb where neonatologist Dr Dolgor and her team were caring for 10 premature and low birth weight babies and their mothers. All babies, including twins were doing well and gaining weight on exclusive mother's milk feeding. One baby born at 28 weeks gestation weighing 1000g was now 1500g at 12 days. Exclusively fed on her mother's expressed breast milk she was already showing a suckling reflex when put to the breast. Dr Dolgor keeps scrupulous records and she is delighted with her falling infection and mortality rates. Other physicians note that post-partum weight loss is reduced and that jaundice, once common, is now rare.

In 1990 when UNICEF published its first investigation into the health of Mongolian children and mothers, the Infant Mortality Rate was 65/1000 and deaths of children up to five years old were 84/1000. In 1996 UNICEF figures report a fall to 55/1000 and 71/1000 respectively. These figures are still high by rich country standards but when viewed in the light of other data they are amazing.

Malnutrition was widespread in 1990 and stunting, a sign of chronic food shortage is still far too prevalent, but despite worsening conditions, Mongolian babies are doing better. The problem of adequate complementary foods remains a problem

because of poverty, food shortage and lack of information. For example some physicians still erroneously believe that rickets is due to calcium shortage in breast milk (this never occurs) and are unaware that regular exposure to sunlight supplies Vitamin D. Despite the bitter cold, Mongolia is a sunny country with enough UV light most of the year.

The fall in maternal mortality from 240/100,000 in 1992 to 175/100,000 in 1996³ is partly due to a change in government policy, co-operating with UNFPA to make family planning methods available. Still only 38% of couples use modern contraception yet the crude birth rate has fallen from 35/1000 to 22/1000. Lactational amenorrhoea is playing its part. A major cause of maternal mortality was post-partum haemorrhage (PPH) and this has fallen noticeably since BFHI. Early suckling appears to prevent or lessen the severity of PPH.

In 1996 maternity legislation guaranteed a full salary for six months and a small subsidy for up to two years. I asked Dr Oyunbileg what would happen if the International Monetary Fund forced the government to weaken its maternity legislation, as it so often does. She felt the legislation was too popular to be changed, but during my visit there was talk that the two-year subsidy was to be dropped.

Reports about a Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes were confusing and I never discovered whether there was a functioning government decree or not. However I saw no promotion during my visit. Nestlé's Nan and bottles were available but I had to seek them out. Fortunately it seems the 'market in nutrition', that the uranium mining president was so eager for me to exploit, is neglected.

Gabrielle Palmer is an independent nutrition consultant. She visited Mongolia on an assignment for WHO - Western Pacific Regional Office (WRPO) to look at BFHI progress.

¹ Guardian Weekly 16.2.1998.

² The BFHI was launched globally to motivate health facilities where mothers gave birth to implement The Ten Steps, a set of ten guidelines to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of breast feeding.

³ UNFPA and Mongolian MOH personal communication.

Fats fail the test

Economic theory says that a fall in the price of a commodity should lead to a rise in purchases. But the facts about fats tell a different tale. Tim Lobstein looks at the figures.

Professors of classical economics will tell you the general rule: if you put up your prices then people will buy less of your products, if you put them down then they should buy more. The trouble with classical economics is that it seems to be a rather poor predictor of actual behaviour, certainly when it comes to food shopping.

Overall purchases of fats (butter, margarine, lard, oils etc) in the UK have been declining year by year for four decades — and so too has been their average price. Fats and oils have never been cheaper, relative to our overall shopping basket, yet we are buying less than ever before. As the first graph shows, the fall in purchases for both higher and lower income households has been matched by a parallel fall in the average relative price (i.e. the average price for fats and oils after taking into account the general rise in food prices).

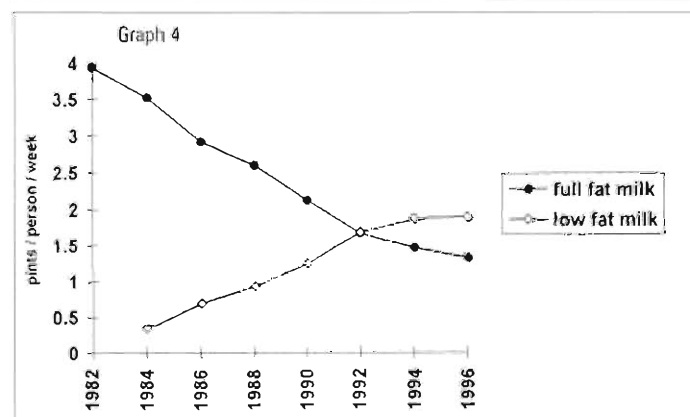
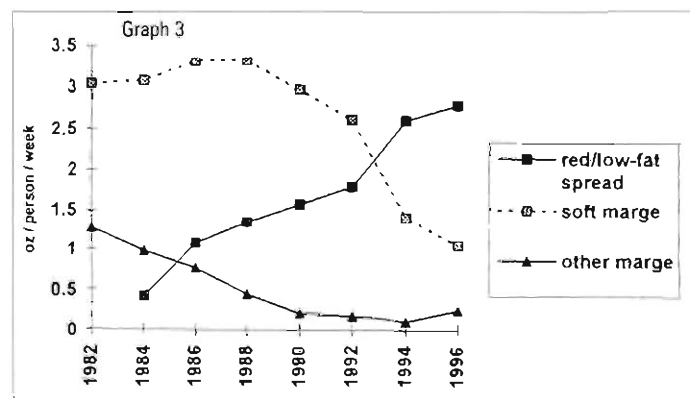
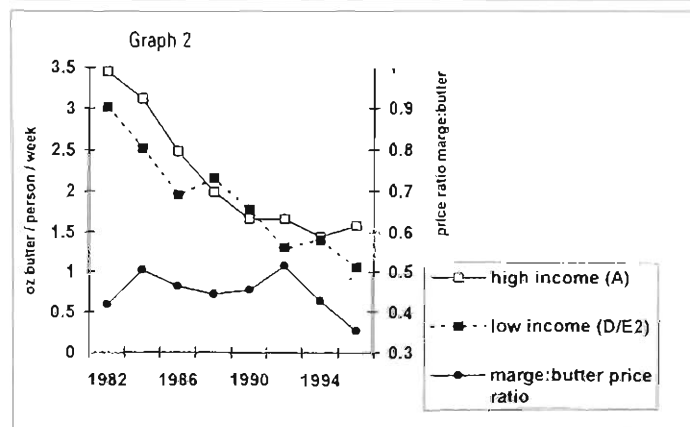
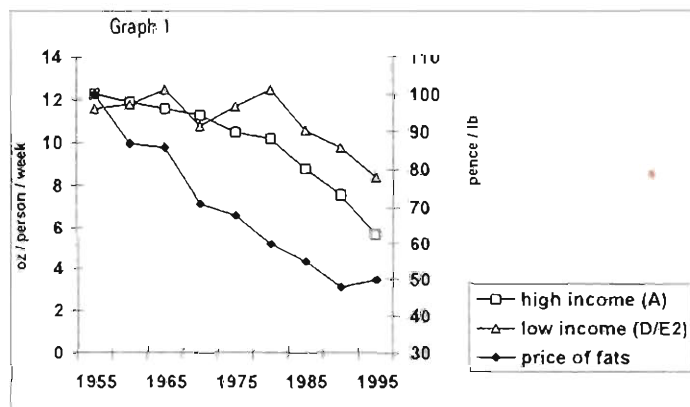
Clearly other factors besides price have been having an influence on purchasing patterns. One proposal suggests that the relative expense of butter has forced people, especially lower income households, to switch to cheaper margarine. However, the last fifteen years for which comparable data are available, show a strong and continuing decline in butter purchases by both richer and poorer households (see graph two) despite fluctuating changes in the relative price advantage of margarine.

Furthermore, a closer look at the market for butter replacements shows an increasing switch to low-fat and reduced-fat spreads, despite their relatively greater cost compared with soft margarine (see graph three). Shopping behaviour is not following classical economics — low- and reduced-fat spreads have taken a rapidly increasing share of the market despite the manufacturers charging a price premium for these products.

Purchasing patterns for fats are not determined, it seems, by price alone, if at all. A similar argument can be made for milk purchases. Despite little or no difference in price, purchases of

reduced-fat milk have soared while those of full-fat milk have plummeted (see graph four). The shift has been especially marked for higher income households, and less for low income households, once again implying that other factors besides price are influencing purchasing patterns. Price cannot explain the change in purchasing behaviour nor the social class differences.

Clearly other factors are playing a role in determining our shopping choices. These include changing patterns in bread consumption and reduced home cooking. In the next issue of the *Food Magazine* we shall look more closely at two other factors, the health message and the marketing message, and show how marketing messages with enough budgets can push up sales of products even if a health message says we should be cutting back.



of theory

EU policy: less fruit, more fat

While the EU pays to destroy fruit and vegetables they also pay to add saturated fat to our diet. Every household in Europe paid around £2 each last year to bribe food companies to use butter from the butter mountain — and the companies then sell that butter back to us in fat-laden foods.

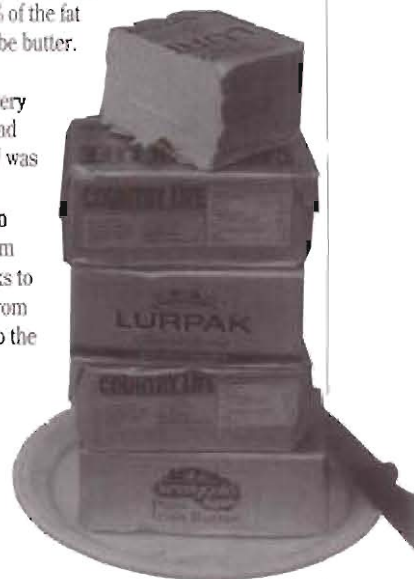
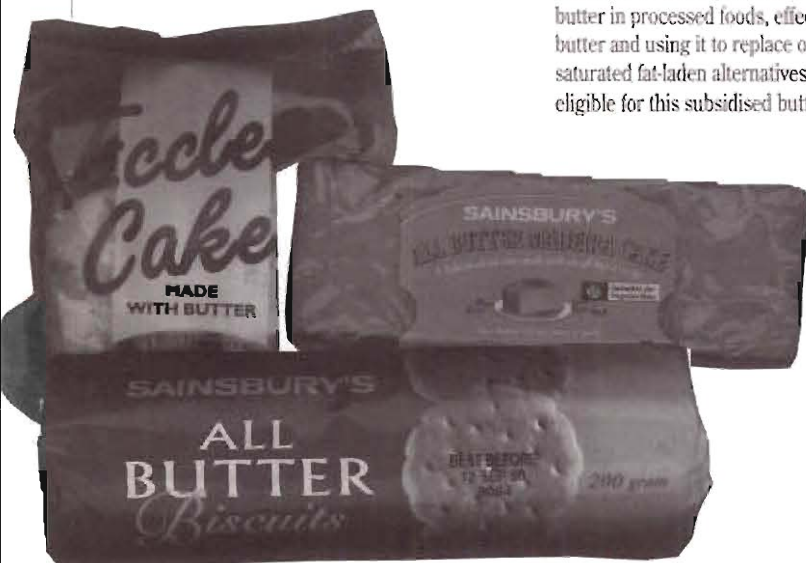
An amazing 434 million kilograms of butter, a quarter of all the European Union's production, was bought up by food companies, who received aid from the Community's tax payers at the rate of around 80 pence per kilo of butter. When the companies take the butter they have to sign a declaration that they will not re-sell it as butter, but will add it to other products. The companies must promise to use the butter in processed foods, effectively hiding the butter and using it to replace other, possibly less saturated fat-laden alternatives. The products eligible for this subsidised butter include

- Chocolate and chocolate fillings. The fillings must be at least 3% butter and can be up to 50% butter.
- Pastry and dough mixes. At least 90% of the fat used must be butter.

On average, every man, woman and child in the EU was sold an extra 1.18kg butter in this hidden form last year, thanks to the aid given from the tax-payer to the companies.

The extra 'hidden' butter for every EU citizen

- Ice cream and ice-cream whip powders. The ice cream must be at least 4.5% butter by weight and can be up to 30% butter.



But we still eat fat

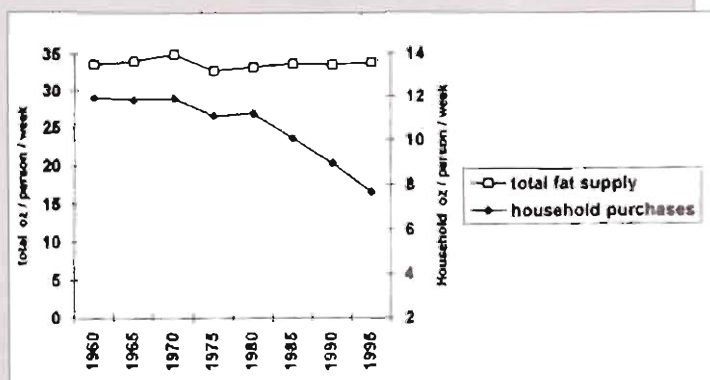
Despite our attempts to purchase less fats and oils, as discussed in the article opposite, the figures for the take-up of fats and oils in the UK indicate a continued high level of consumption.

Data collected by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, which estimates total production quantities, imports, exports, changes in stock levels and losses during processing, can give an idea of the trend in fat and oil consumption in the UK. The figures show little change over nearly four decades.

There is an increasing discrepancy between these figures and the figures shown opposite for household purchases of fats and oils. This discrepancy is probably due to the increasing use of fats and oils in processed foods and in foods eaten out of the home. We may be making efforts to purchase less fats and oils, but manufacturers are still selling us just as much as ever, in forms where we may not

realise how much fat we are buying — for example in deep fried fast food, ice-cream, crisps and snacks, chocolates, biscuits, cakes and pastries, rich desserts and sauces such as mayonnaise, all of which have shown increasing sales over the last few decades.

■ Source: Food Commission (Food Balance Sheet, FAO Rome and National Food Survey data series, HMSO London)



Falling food prices help the rich

The relative decline in the cost of food has been of little or no benefit to the large majority of low-income households in the UK, argues Tim Lobstein. Only those households in higher income brackets have seen a real gain from lower food prices.

Food prices have been falling consistently for nearly two decades. As the first graph shows, inflation in all goods and services (the retail price index) has risen more rapidly than food prices, effectively making food cheaper year by year. This might at first glance have been a boon for everyone, allowing us all to choose better quality, more varied diets.

But for many, possibly more than forty per cent of the population, the fall in food prices has been matched by rises in the prices of other goods, and no real gain has been made. Those on state benefits and state pensions have, for over a decade, had their income linked directly to the retail price index. A fall in food prices accompanied by a rise in transport, fuel and prescription charges, for example, would have resulted in a change in benefit levels that took all these into account, and the money needed to pay the higher costs of the latter services would have to be paid for by the savings made on food. Apart from those on benefits, anyone with incomes that rise only as much as prices do will find it just as hard as ever to make ends meet. There is no net gain from the fall in food prices.

To make this more visual, imagine a boy with £1 pocket money, which he likes to spend on a comic (50p) and an ice cream (50p). Over a period of time, the prices increase: the comic becomes 80p and the ice cream 60p. The ice cream rose relatively less than the comic. The total is now £1.40, but if the rise in pocket money is only to £1.30, the boy will face a difficult dilemma — he must either give up the comic or buy a smaller ice cream. Even if the child receives the full 'inflation-linked' increase to £1.40 he will be no better off in real terms, still buying only the same comic and the same ice cream.

For many lower-paid workers in the public sector, wages have been kept tightly restricted, and the

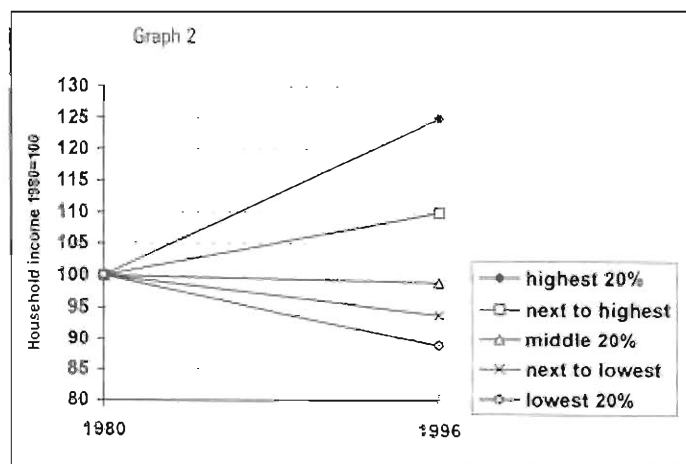
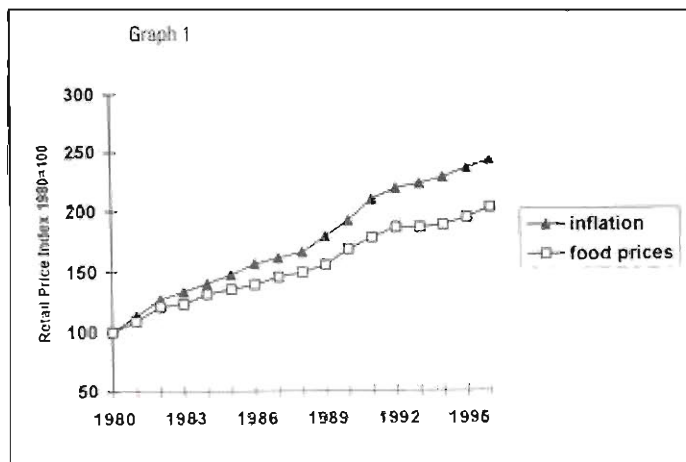
forthcoming minimum wage legislation may well set in stone the principle that low wages should rise at rates linked to the rise in inflation generally.

Figures from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) show that there has been a deterioration in household disposable income compared with inflation for those in the lowest 20 percent of households, and those in the next lowest 20 percent, and indeed very little gain for those in the middle 20 percent, too (see graph 2). After inflation, the lowest 20 percent have seen a real decline in average income of nearly 7 percent since the early 1980s.

Note that the FES data is a snapshot at a given moment in time. The families in the lowest group in one year may not be in the lowest group another year. But if the average for the group is falling then, for each family that manages to rise out of poverty, at least one other family has fallen into poverty.

As a large number of people in Britain have found, food prices may be rising less than those of other goods and services, but they are like the boy with £1.30 and can no longer buy the food they could before. Even those on middle incomes have seen little significant gain.

The situation will continue as long as poorer families have their disposable incomes limited to the rate of inflation. Relative improvements in the prices of one part of their daily basket of purchases, such as improvements in food prices, will make little or no real difference. Only when their incomes are allowed to exceed the overall rate of inflation can a genuine gain be enjoyed.



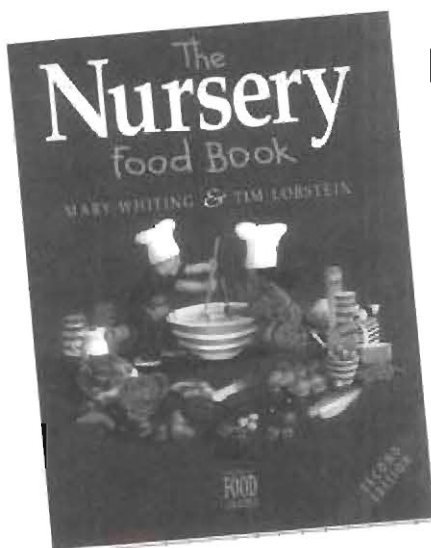
Children will eat their veg!

Encouraging five-year-olds to eat more vegetables may seem like a task fit only for a masochist, but it needn't be. Researchers at Bangor University have devised a programme encouraging children to be 'food dudes' encouraged to fight General Junk, using videos, games, competitions, with prizes in the form of badges and — yes — healthy foods!

And it works. Schools in the region have been trying the programme for influencing food preferences and choices and finding that, indeed, children were eating a range of fruit and vegetables they had previously rejected. Large changes were effected rapidly, and appeared to be set to remain long-lasting. The most effective interventions involved video-based peer modelling with rewards for increasing consumption of broad categories of foods, including fruits and vegetables.

Similar improvements have been found among 'fussy eaters' in domestic settings. Even children as young as 2 to 4 years old in nurseries have shown strong positive responses.

■ For details of the scheme, contact Michael Bowdery, School of Psychology, University of Wales at Bangor, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DG, tel 01248 382211.



Nursery food comes of age

The latest treat for young children from the staff at the Food Commission: the second edition of the popular book for nurseries, trainee nursery staff and any one responsible for the health and wellbeing of a young child.

What can we say except that it is packed with more tips and ideas, updated information, more emphasis on special diets and nursery practice, as well as excellent material on healthy nutrition,

multicultural provision, food hygiene and the social (and sociable) aspects of food — as well as fifty excellent recipes, a load of gardening tips and a stack of educational activities.

The book is published by Edward Arnold in May, ISBN 0-340-71894-3, price £11.99. You can order a copy from us with no extra charge for postage (offer lasts until June 30th). Send us a cheque or use your credit card and dial our publications hotline 0171-837 2250.



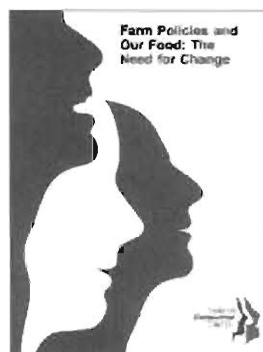
'CAP policy must change' says NCC

The consumer movement has changed a lot. National bodies are now calling for just the measures we have campaigned on for nearly fourteen years. Although still concerned with value for money and choice, the latest NCC report criticises the CAP for promoting intensive farming practices, it calls for the bans on hormones in meat and BST in milk to remain in place, restrictions on antibiotics in animal production, and controls on the use of GMDs.

Good as far as it goes, but it relies on carrots, not sticks, to bring about change. Although calling for a shift in the CAP to signal a change in farming

practices, with advice on how to reduce intensive farming, and support for environmental improvement schemes, the report still expects the market to do the main work: 'A shift away from price support... will enable the market to operate, and reduce the incentive to use expensive input associated with intensive production.' (p82)

Unfortunately, faced with falling prices, farmers often increase their intensification. Bank managers, investors and landowners expect a return on their capital, and the quickest way is to use the latest technology to boost the quantity of food produced out of their fixed land



and equipment. It will take more than market pressure to dismantle that aspect of capitalism.

■ *Farm policies and our Food: The Need for Change*. National Consumer Council, 20 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0QH (tel. 0171 730 3469) price £14.00.

Is Coca-Cola worth a dozen Nicaraguas?

If you wanted to buy Coca-Cola, the world's largest food company (if food is the right word for their product) it would cost you some \$151 billion, according to the *Financial Times* listing of the world's largest companies. The cost is estimated by taking the average share price and multiplying by the number of shares. If you did try to buy all the shares, of course, the stock exchange brokers would quickly mark up the price.

Other big food companies include PepsiCo (\$62 bn), Unilever (\$57 bn), Nestlé (\$54 bn) and McDonald's (\$33 bn).

In terms of sales (turnover) and profit during the last year, the figures compare with those of smaller countries.

Multinationals bigger than countries

	Sales (1996/7)	Profit
Unilever	\$53.7 bn	\$4.3 bn
Nestlé	\$41.1 bn	\$3.4 bn
PepsiCo	\$31.6 bn	\$1.1 bn
Coca-Cola	\$18.5 bn	\$3.5 bn
McDonald's	\$10.7 bn	\$1.6 bn
National economies 1995 (Gross National Product)		
Mozambique	\$1.4 bn	
Nicaragua	\$1.6 bn	
Zimbabwe	\$6.2 bn	
Romania	\$33.5 bn	
Ireland	\$52.3 bn	

Still those babymilk companies carry on breaking the International Code of Marketing. The latest review, prepared by the International Baby Food Action Network's regional office in Penang, reports a survey of 31 countries, finding code-busting practices in virtually every one. The companies named include Wyeth, Cow & Gate (Nutricia), Milupa, Farleys, Hipp and that old rogue Nestlé, as well as eighteen other brands. They are still pushing their milk-snatching products with point-of-sale promotions, free samples to mothers, gifts to clinic workers, advertisements and mislabelled products.

Challenged about their violations by members of the public, the companies reply with letters that are designed to be obscure, complacent and, occasionally, honest in that they admit they made a mistake. Mostly, though, they try to fudge the issue and make no promises for improving their behaviour. *The tip of the iceberg* is a collection of such letters along with comments by the UK group Baby Milk Action, and makes fascinating reading for students of semantics.

■ Further details on both of these publications from Baby Milk Action on 01223 464420.

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

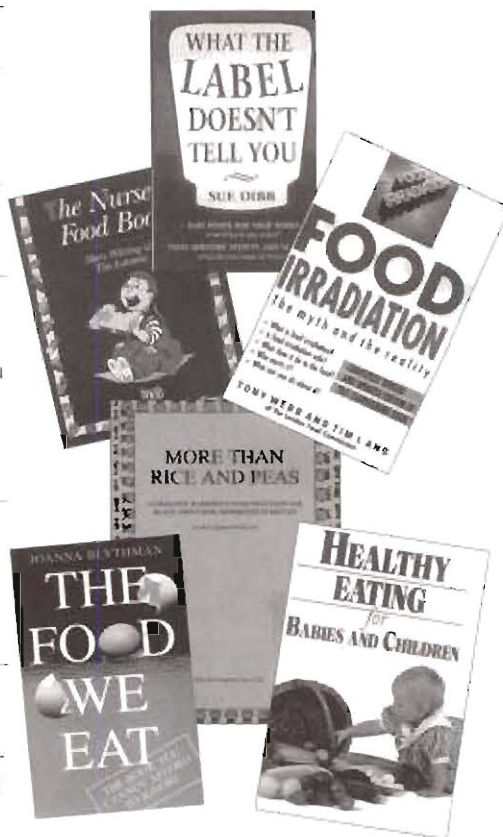
An authoritative yet down-to-earth guide giving you the information you need to feed your family. Includes over 60 pages of excellent recipes. £6.99 inc p&p.

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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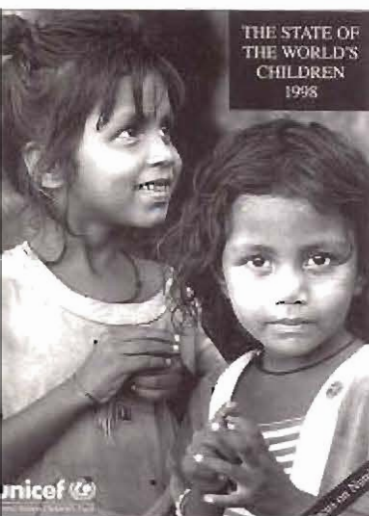
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The State of the World's Children 1998

UNICEF, Oxford University Press,
Walton St, Oxford OX2 6DP
ISBN 0-19-829401-8, 1998. £6.95

Malnutrition takes the lives of six million young children each year, a proportion which, in some underdeveloped countries, matches the Black Death of 14th Century Europe. UNICEF's annual report regularly carries summary statistics of this nature, but the 1998 edition focuses particularly on nutritional issues and their wider implications.

The report marks the small steps of progress — 60% of the world's salt is now iodised, vitamin A supplements are reaching more people in deficiency, zinc supplements are helping fend off malaria — but also acknowledges the larger problems to be faced.

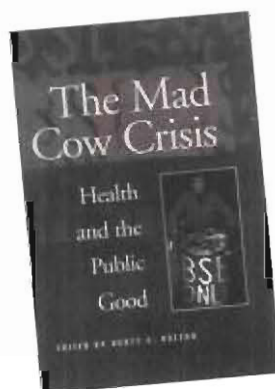
Poverty is a cause of malnutrition, and is also its consequence as malnourishment saps a child's potential and an adult's productivity. Access to adequate nutrition is a declared right under international conventions, but in many societies women and children have difficulty gaining access to a cash economy and may access good food only through their own farming endeavours. Land ownership and distribution should feature as much on the nutrition agenda as on the political one.

The Mad Cow Crisis: Health and the Public Good

Scott C Ratzan (Ed), UCL Press, 1
Gunpowder Square, London EC4A
3DE. ISBN 1-85728-812-2, 1998
£14.95

A strongly American influence adds to the pick-and-mix feeling this book gives, with the chapters written from very different perspectives. A US paediatrician talks of nvCJD diagnosis, Simon Hughes (LibDem MP) points to the need for a Freedom of Information Act and a separation of consumer and industry responsibilities in government, a press officer for the King's Fund talks of media handling of science, while Professor Tim Lang calls for reform of government committees and a change in perception of science and the assessment of risk. Steven Dealler contributes an analysis of the epidemiology of BSE and offers some predictions on the likely numbers of human sufferers of nvCJD (2,000 to 2,000,000).

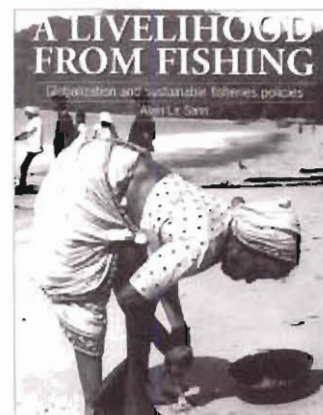
The book's editor, however, takes the first and last chapters (and bits in between) and offers a comprehensive analysis on how governments can control their health messages. A four-pronged approach, using social marketing (reducing resistance to a product, making a product socially appealing), public relations (defining the right message, getting it out), advocacy (joining in or using community organisations) and negotiation (directly influencing decision makers and opinion formers). Sadly, this sort of approach smells of insincerity, and it is possible that any government following such advice would end up — dare one say — much like our own did over BSE 1986-1998.



A Livelihood From Fishing: Globalisation and sustainable fisheries policies,

Alan Le Sann, Intermediate
Technology Books, (tel 0171 436
9761) ISBN 1 85339 398 3, £8.95.

Despite health workers recommending increased consumption of fish as part of a healthy diet, we are facing the real possibility of the commercial extinction of the world's fish stocks. The crisis is not only an ecological one, it is a priceless resource which can provide a living for millions of people — if we can manage the stocks sustainably.



Give us the facts

I have been intending to subscribe to the *Food Magazine* for some time and was interested to receive my first issue in February.

However I was rather disappointed at the lack of facts and figures in some of your articles. For instance in the front page article 'Gene soya given a health warning' we are told that glyphosate sprayed on soya beans causes higher levels of phytoestrogens to be produced. But how much higher? 5% or 100%.

On page 10 in Checkout there is a short piece on hidden chemicals. It talks about levels of organophosphates in carrots, parsnips and apples, and antibiotics in meat. Again there are no figures or facts.

Can we have more facts in future, rather than just comment?

P Markovits, Bristol

Editors reply: *It's always a hard editorial decision: how much to put in how much to leave out. Wherever possible we provide references or details of where readers can get more information — in both the examples quoted this was the case. However we would welcome more letters helping us get a balance to suit as many readers as possible — please write or fax your comments.*

Tomorrow's jam?

Is there no way of stopping food manufacturers putting chemical dyes in food? I was recently given a jar of Moorhouse's Strawberry Jam and was appalled to find that it contained the azo 'coal-tar' dye E124 Ponceau 4R red colour. It really is time that there was a complete ban on the addition of colours to jams and any other fruit product, fruits have sufficient natural colouring. I am also writing a strong protest letter to the producers, Chivers Hartley. I hate wasting food but I also do not wish to eat these 'coal-tar' dyes.

M. O. Yates
Goldsworth Park, Surrey

PS Many thanks for all your campaigns and exposures of what is being done to our food — long may you continue. The only snag is, after reading your magazines for a few years, one wonders if anything is safe to eat!

Letters

Label secrets

I am writing in connection with your article on Hidden Animal Products (*Food Magazine*, 40).

Gelatine has been and probably still is used to clarify various fruit juices. It is also added to various orange-coloured drinks to stabilise the beta-carotene. How many vegans and vegetarians have been drinking such juices without any idea they contained gelatine? There is no mention of it on the label.

J Cargill
Staffordshire

Mixed messages

A grand conference in Edinburgh this spring heard numerous eminent speakers pronounce on the problems of foodborne diseases. Consultant epidemiologists, consultant vets, directors of public health labs, a man from industry, a man from the medical establishment, Prof James for the new Food Standards Agency, and a consumer representative. Who was this, we asked?

Well, actually, it was the old campaigner Ann Foster, once director of the Scottish Consumer Council. The trouble is that she had changed job several months before the conference. She spoke for consumers, but by then her paymaster was that multinational master of insensitivity to consumers, Monsanto.

Who will be the official sponsor of the French team for the World Cup?

Why, that leader in health-giving foods, Nutella, the chocolate-nut spread aimed at the child in all of us. Nutritional composition: 55% sugar and 30% fat.

If the French team win on a diet of this sort, we shall eat a (Nutella-smear) beret!



It's us or them

Responses to the FSA white paper are largely favourable, with consumer groups surprised that they really do seem to have got nutrition and health, and even some aspects of farming, into the FSA remit. Organic farmers are sorry that food should be separated from agriculture, saying it was the order of priorities that was wrong, not the mixing of consumer and producer interests.

And the food industry continues to fret. It has even threatened to move out of Britain: in draft comments on the white paper, the Food and Drink Federation wanted to 'stress the real possibility of manufacturing re-locating outside the UK if the Agency becomes too onerous, either financially or in the restrictions and regulations it would seek to impose on the industry'.

If food manufacturers all left the country, of course, the FDF would cease to exist. But perhaps if they did all leave we could start some better companies in their place.

On the rocks

Just how gullible to the marketing men think we consumers are? I admit we have long got used to

buying bottled water at prices that make fruit juice look cheap. And we pay more for the packaging of many foods than we do for the contents. We will even buy high-fat foods with the words 'low fat' on the packet.

But buying a packet of plain stones? Just pop them in your fridge

like ice cubes, and use whenever you want a cool drink.

Yes, of course. Brilliant. Just listen to the benefits: *They do not dilute your drink. They can be used over and over again. Besides which they come from Sweden so they must be good.*

Discovered at the time of the Vikings (they claim), you can order them wholesale for about £32 for 500 stones.



Germ warfare 1

Much anxiety at Unilever and Sainsburys, we understand, as a result of concerns being expressed over the role of disinfectants in encouraging antibiotic resistance in microbes.

Sainsburys, whose newly-launched Microban kitchen products are impregnated with disinfectant, may have a public relations problem when a House of Lords committee on resistance to antibiotics publishes its report on April 23rd. The committee has received evidence from the US Food and Drug Administration on the role of disinfectant chemicals (biocides) in the selective survival of bacteria with antibiotic resistance. According to a confidential note seen by the *Food Magazine* both Sainsbury and Unilever, manufacturer of a range of biocidal products, and other companies have been holding frantic meetings to prepare their defence.

Rather than admitting that a proliferation of germ-destroying

products only leads to tougher germs, the companies are preparing a multi-pronged defence, claiming (a) that other problems lead to antibiotic resistance, (b) there's no proof of a causal link to biocides, (c) if there is a link it is probably small, or applies only to some disinfectants, or only to some bugs, and (d) some bugs respond to biocides by becoming easier to kill, not harder.

And if that doesn't serve to confound the public then try this: *'Should antibiotic resistance continue to reduce our ability to treat certain infections, then preventing infection, in which biocides play a key role, becomes even more important.'*

Meanwhile, it appears that the US Environmental Protection Agency is considering prosecuting the makers of Microban products for making misleading claims, leading consumers to believe the products are self-sanitising and need no cleaning care.

Germ warfare 2

Much fun has been had at the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food over the last year. Their annual report says they have been discussing whether to instruct everyone who eats beefburgers to use a thermometer in every burger during cooking. Apparently the instructions to cook until there is no pink bits is not accurate enough. Sadly they decided against the thermometer. We would love to have seen the new Food Standards Agency get off to a flying start with instructions to manufacturers that their products must be labelled:

Warning: These beefburgers may be contaminated with the deadly bacteria *E coli* O157. A thermometer must be used every time one is cooked.

The committee went on to discuss milk, and surveys showing that raw cows milk carried significant amounts of faecal contamination. The solution is not to clean up the dairy but to pasteurise the milk, so we all drink dead faecal contamination.

They also looked at eggs, and sadly found that the latest survey on Salmonella contamination showed no improvement over the last survey, conducted in 1991. All very regrettable, but what will they do?

Of the fourteen members of ACMSF, seven claim no links with the food industry. The rest are consultants and shareholders in a wide range of companies. The chair, Prof Georgala, is a consultant to Unilever, makers of Birds Eye beefburgers, as well as Dalgety, Northern Foods and Marks and Spencers.