

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food

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Schools are saying 'no' to gene foods

A sample survey of local education authorities conducted by the Food Commission has found that a large number are rejecting genetically modified food and food ingredients from school meals.

Twenty-one out of thirty-three councils in London and at least fourteen county councils in the rest of England have official policies against the inclusion of genetically modified (GM) foods in school meals or are actively seeking to avoid them (see page 3).

A spokesperson for the London Borough of Hackney told the Food Commission: 'Regarding food for our meals on wheels service and schools catering service, we have written to suppliers to ask if any food we buy from them is genetically

modified. We will then stop ordering this food as we are aiming to remove it from our menus.'

Where school meals are supplied by private sector catering companies, there is evidence that those companies are willing to ban genetically modified foods. Kent County Council, for example, has school meal contracts with Chartwells catering company, and a spokesperson for Chartwells told the Food Commission that they 'will not knowingly incorporate GM foods in school meals.'

Haringey Council, London, passed a motion 'to avoid using GM foods, where possible, until the safety of these foods can be guaranteed'. Due to the poor labelling requirements for genetically modified food, Haringey Council went on to endorse the move by their in-house catering service to avoid the use of soya-based food products except where they are medically necessary for specific children.

Schools are facing difficulties in guaranteeing that their food is not genetically modified because the law does not require all genetically modified foods to be labelled. 'Until the government issues labelling guidelines we can only do the best we can,' a spokesperson for the London Borough of

Sutton said. Ten councils in London and eleven in the rest of England expressed similar sentiments.

Because of the lack of labelling, some schools have taken steps to encourage the government to regulate GM foods. At a meeting on November 3, 1998, London's Barnet Council adopted a resolution that included a commitment to write to Jeff Rooker, MP, Minister of State at MAFF, calling for the clear labelling of all foods produced as a result of genetic modification and the segregation of GM from non-GM crops. Haringey and Redbridge Councils also have resolved to write to Members of Parliament to express their views.

Twelve councils in London and at least nine in the rest of England do not have any policy regarding genetically modified foods. 'Because the issue of genetically modified foods hasn't been of much concern in the local area, the council has no specific policy on the matter,' a spokesperson for Barking and Dagenham Council told the Food Commission.

Research: Leora Vegosen

We name the authorities: see page 3.

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See pages 9-11 for our full report.

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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

New year — new directions?

While prospects for the proposed Food Safety Agency blew hot then cold then hot again, other initiatives are making better progress.

The European Commission is moving on several fronts: not only considering the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy to turn it into a policy which, for the first time, might take health and nutrition into account, but also taking specific measures to protect consumers. We report (see page 5) on EU proposals to put tough restrictions on the amounts of pesticides allowed in babyfoods, effectively banning their use. We also report (see page 4) on the fines imposed by the EC on sugar companies who operated a cartel fixing high prices. And we also report on a joint conference between the European Commission and European Parliament which called for the establishment of a European Food Agency (see page 5).

In the UK, local authorities are taking matters into their own hands when it comes to genetic engineering. Increasing numbers are deciding to ban the use of GM foods in school meals and other socially-organised catering services. These moves not only serve to warn food companies that large purchasers are avoiding these poorly-tested technologies, but they also serve to show parents and others that the genetic engineering of food is not endorsed by all official bodies.

In a similar vein, public analyst services — also part of the local authority structure — are resisting the commercial interests trying to take over their role. Part of the food inspection services, the analysts have been subjected to enormous pressure to take on private work or to close down and be replaced by private laboratory services. But now a review of their work (see page 4) has supported their original purpose and called for better co-ordination at national level, rather than the disintegration seen in recent years.

Meanwhile the Food Commission has uncovered another area of poor regulation and lack of respect for consumers' needs. As our survey on pages 9-11 shows, a wide range of medicinal products and dietary supplements may contain unnecessary and unwelcome ingredients. These products are poorly labelled with some failing to declare their ingredients and others only giving the full facts in leaflets that you cannot read until you have bought the product. This is clearly not good enough, and a review of the ingredients of medicinal products is needed urgently.

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

If you are not a regular subscriber to the *Food Magazine* why not take out your own subscription and help support the Food Commission's work? We have been campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food since 1988 and are completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising. The *Food Magazine* is published four times a year.

Turn to page 13 for subscription details.

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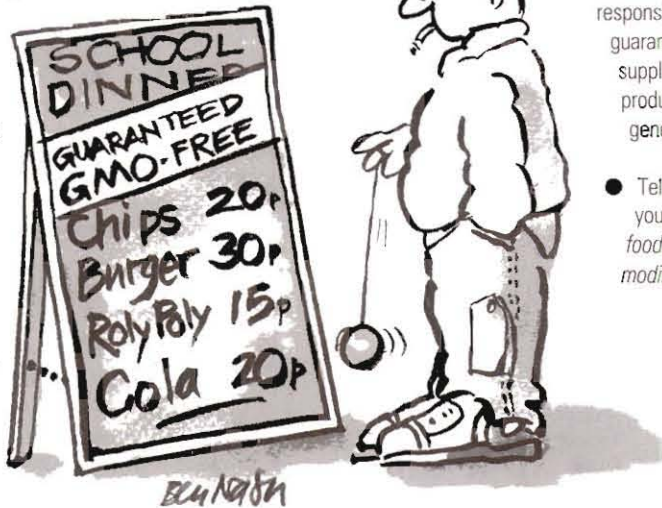
Children don't need genetically modified grub!

As we report on our front page, increasing numbers of local education authorities are coming down against the use of genetically modified foods for their school meals and institutional catering services. In our survey of 33 London authorities we found 21 actively seeking to avoid GM foods. And when we asked 46 other English authorities we found 20 of those also wanted to ban GM foods from schools.

The table below shows those authorities positively working to keep GM foods out of their catering services.

If your authority is not listed, then don't just get angry, get active! Contact the schools catering officer and ask if they have started thinking about the issue. And contact your own ward local councillors to ask if they have a view on the matter, and whether they would like to form one.

- Remind them that children are especially vulnerable as they will be exposed to any possible problem for the longest.
- Ask them if the local council has an insurance policy to cover their liability if GM food proves to be hazardous to health.
- Point out that the government has said it expects caterers to put labels on foods that contain genetically modified ingredients whereas no such labelling will be necessary if all foods are GM-free.
- Remind them that there is no evidence that GM foods will be cheaper, so that a GM-free policy should not cost anything to implement: all that is needed is that the responsible services obtain guarantees from their suppliers that their products have not been genetically modified.
- Tell them that it is your belief that *good food doesn't need modifying!*



These are the authorities that told the Food Commission they were developing policies and practices to restrict or ban genetically modified foods from their school meals services.

Trying not to use GM foods or have asked supplier not to

Bedfordshire	London:
Cheshire	Brent
Derbyshire	Bexley
Dorset	Camden
Hull	Enfield
East Riding of Yorkshire	Greenwich
Essex	Hackney
Gloucestershire	Hammersmith and Fulham
Herefordshire	Hillingdon
Kent	Hounslow
Nottinghamshire	Islington
Surrey	Lewisham
Wiltshire	Merton
	Southwark
	Sutton
	Waltham Forest
	Wandsworth

Official policy against GM foods

Oxfordshire
London:
Barnet
Haringey
Lambeth
Redbridge
Tower Hamlets

Currently forming a policy

Bristol
Devon
Isle of Wight
Leicestershire
North Yorkshire
Rutland

Brazilians say 'No'

The Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defence (IDEC) is asking for international help to defend its victory in the courts which has temporarily prohibited the government from authorising the planting and marketing of Monsanto's genetically modified Ready Roundup soya. The decision is supported by farmers, independent scientists and consumers as well as by the large Carrefour supermarket chain. IDEC is calling for international support to prevent Monsanto from overturning the court's decision. Brazil is the second largest grower of soya beans after the USA.

■ For further information contact Andrea Lazzarini at IDEC Fax: +55 11 3862 9844 or email idec@uol.com.br

Antipodeans want labels

Health Ministers from Australia and New Zealand voted in December by a narrow majority to label foods made from genetically modified ingredients. The decision, a major victory for consumer campaigners, was made despite intense pressure from the US, which wanted the two countries to agree to the current US position which effectively denies shoppers the right to know what they are eating, rather than follow Europe on labelling. The US has also used the threat of trade sanctions in Japan where consumer organisations continue to call for mandatory labelling of GM food and crops.

In New Zealand, cabinet papers reveal the threats of economic reprisals that have been made by US officials if the country backs GM labelling. Former associate Health Minister Neil Kirton says he was "bullied" by US Ambassador Josiah Beeman and later sacked from his job and replaced by another official who was willing to go along with the US 'no labelling' position — a position that the NZ government supported in the December vote.

■ For more information: GeneEthics Network in Australia, email acfgenet@peg.apc.org.

Boost for public analysts

A report submitted to MAFF makes proposals which MAFF may not like, reports Tim Lobstein.

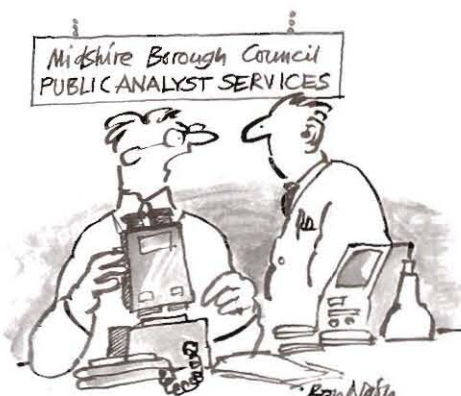
It took a short six months for the team reviewing the role of public analysts to make their recommendations to Jeff Rooker. Firstly, the team warned that there were potential conflicts of interest, with public analyst laboratories having to tender for work in the private sector, while those local authorities which no longer had local public analyst laboratories had to put their sampling work out to laboratories in the public and private sector.

The team also noted the lack of national co-ordination of food sampling, leading to gaps and duplication. These conclusions mark a notable shift in thinking after more than a decade of central government determination to splinter and privatise local services.

With so much food distributed at national level compared with the days when local authorities first undertook food inspections, and with far greater quantities being imported, analytical services need to be well integrated. The team concluded that the Food Standards Agency, not MAFF, should be given responsibility for co-ordination of a national sampling programme, and that 'If funding is to continue to be locally controlled, the rates of sampling should be based on a careful appraisal of needs in different local areas.'

It is rumoured that certain members of the MAFFocracy, who have long resented the

independence of public analysts and wanted to see them become quality control testers for the food industry, fought desperately to have the report shelved. The last thing they wanted was to see the analysts' role strengthened, and their work better co-ordinated outside of MAFF.



"Looks like its contaminated with vested interests"

What the public analyst does

Those shy heroes of the food police, public analysts spend their time taking bits of food to pieces to see what they are really made of. Responding to public complaints or to colleagues in local authority trading standards and environmental health departments, these laboratory workers produce the evidence needed for prosecutions of miscreant food companies. Their survey work looking at whole classes of food products helps provide a snapshot of the quality of the food we eat.

Last year they conducted tests on 80,000 food samples, down from nearly 100,000 five years ago, and well below the European Commission recommended level of 140,000 for the UK population.

Among other findings, their tests revealed the following problems:

	sample	unsatis- factory	reason
Cured meats	1208	15%	excess added water
Spirits	2864	16%	not authentically labelled, added water
Apple juice	194	7%	contaminated with patulin (from mould)
Nuts/nut products	573	5%	contaminated with aflatoxin (from mould)
Figs	176	0	aflatoxin
Fish	703	17%	wrong species
Minced meat	1307	20%	wrong species

Source: Association of Public Analysts, 1998

Shops put public at risk

A survey by Northamptonshire food inspectors found repeated instances of shops putting customers at risk by failing to remove out-dated stock and by failing to properly refrigerate cooked meat and other high-risk foods.

Of 157 shops surveyed in the county, one in eight were selling potentially dangerous out-of-code stock that should have been destroyed. Nearly a third of all shops were failing to properly refrigerate foods that were required to be chilled by law, although they appeared to be taking good care to refrigerate soft drinks.

The worst cases included a packet of ham over 35 days beyond its 'use by' date, and food that should have been refrigerated at 8° C being held at 22° C.

■ More details from Northants Food Liaison Group 01604 707909.

New CODEX observers

The International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, a global consumer body which includes the Food Commission UK as well as the Washington-based Centre for Science in the Public Interest, and the campaigning group, the Japanese Offspring Fund, has been granted observer status at the meetings of CODEX, the global trading standards-setting body.

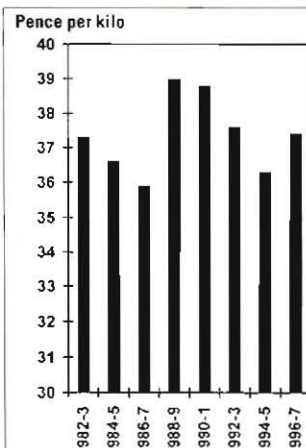
Fined sugar

Four UK sugar companies have been fined a total of nearly £35 million by the European Commission for rigging prices in an anti-competitive cartel.

Between 1986 and 1990 the four companies controlled 90 per cent of the British market for granulated white sugar, pursuing 'a collaborative strategy of higher pricing in which each company could rely on the behaviour of the others,' said the Commission. Fines totalling £2.5

million were imposed on two sugar merchants, Napier Brown and James Budgett, and a fine of £27 million imposed on British Sugar, considered the ringleader. Tate & Lyle were fined less than £5 million, a low amount because they co-operated with the Commission.

Clearly the fine was lower than it might have been because Tate & Lyle squealed on the others. But what happens to the fine? And how will customers who were illegally overcharged reclaim their money?



The price of a kilo of sugar went up in the late 1980s, due — says the European Commission — to a cartel of sugar companies agreeing to flout the laws on competitive markets. As a result, the British public paid just over £1 per person, in total, more than they needed to.

The fine on the sugar companies almost exactly matches the estimated extra income they made from shoppers, though presumably they also made a profit on sales to food and catering companies. And, no doubt, the fine is tax deductible.

EC may ban pesticides in baby food

The European Commission has proposed new legislation setting a limit of 0.1mg pesticide residues per kilogram of baby food, effectively declaring that residues should be undetectable.

Scientific advisors to the EU had already recommended that a level of 0.4 mg/kg would give no cause for concern, but the proposed tighter limit is 'intended as a precaution so that no acute health hazard would result if it were exceeded slightly'. This follows surveys showing that concentrations of pesticide residue can vary greatly from sample to sample within a single crop.



Currently, the limits are different in different member states, but the proposal would bring all the EU into line with the laws already operating in Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and Austria. An estimated 40 per cent of products in the European baby food market already meet the strict limit, and a three-year transition period is proposed for the remainder.

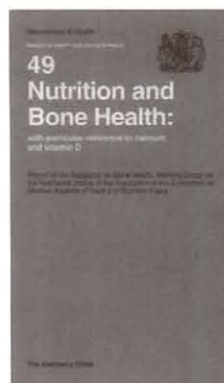
Concerned parents-to-be in the UK may want to seek organically-made products in the meantime, or delay giving birth until 2002!

"Good news! And it should be through in five years - if you can wait!"

Bone idyll

'No change' sums up part of this 124-page report's recommendation: no change in the existing UK Dietary Reference Values for calcium and vitamin D, or in the present fortification of flour with calcium and margarine with vitamin D. The report encourages us to lead a healthy lifestyle with age-appropriate exercise, to have a varied diet providing adequate calcium intake, and to maintain a healthy body weight.

It warns us about the danger of vitamin D deficiency, particularly in vulnerable groups such as young children and pregnant women from Asian families, as well as young Afro-Caribbean children being reared on strict exclusion diets, older people living in institutions or who are housebound or who eat no meat or



oily fish, and people who get little exposure to sunlight.

However, it does make 13 recommendations for further research across a wide range of issues involving

diet, supplementation, exercise, body composition, growth, pregnancy, and — urgently — the matter of vitamin D, sunlight and skin cancer. It calls for continued surveillance of minority groups at risk from vitamin D inadequacy and of low dietary calcium intake. A possible link between osteoporosis and salt intake is acknowledged but there is only a passing reference to the effect of the magnesium on bone strength, which is an aspect currently being researched.

MEPs call for EU Food Agency

A joint European Commission and European Parliament conference on lessons to be learned from the BSE Crisis heard near unanimity from speakers on the need to establish an EU Food Agency, reports Ben Duncan.

Closing the two day conference on 1st December, the European Commissioner responsible for agriculture, Franz Fischler, said that it was now time for the Commission to consider setting up an 'independent structure' to deal with all issues relating to food and food safety. He suggested that this should be along the lines of the structure already in place for the EU pharmaceutical sector (i.e. the European Medicines Evaluation Agency, which has been in operation since 1994).

Ken Collins MEP, Chair of the Parliament's Environment and Consumer Protection Committee welcomed Commissioner Fischler's remarks. Closing the conference on behalf of the Parliament, Collins saw this as a sign that the Commission may have recognised the mistakes of the BSE crisis and be prepared to learn from them.

The conference was remarkable for the degree of consensus amongst farmers' representatives, consumer organisations, politicians and scientists on the lessons to be drawn from the BSE crisis. All agreed that the EU's system of food quality regulation needed to be credible, independent and manifestly driven by consumer protection, rather than producer interest, if it is to win back the confidence of EU consumers. Most speakers went on to reach the logical conclusion that the creation of an independent EU Food Agency should be established to ensure that these objectives are achieved. Some stopped short of this, but no-one, either from the platform or the floor, spoke against the idea of an EU Food Agency.

Both Hans Jonsson, Vice-President of the EU farmers' organisation COPA, and Ben Gill, President of the UK National Farmers' Union, made clear statements in favour of creating an EU Food Agency.

Said Jonsson: 'It does not necessarily need to be an EU version of the [US] Food and Drugs Administration, but we must have

common rules. Otherwise there will be no Single Market'. As to the form of future EU food regulation Jonsson said: 'For science to be taken into account is not enough. EU rules should take into account ethical considerations and common sense. [In the case of BSE] feeding ruminants meat was clearly against common sense.'

Ben Gill's view was that an EU Food Agency needed to have a respected scientific base and sufficient funding to carry out its work. The precautionary principle should mean making research funding available to investigate new problems as soon as they arise.

The views that may carry most force with the Commission, however, were those expressed by Prof. Gerard Pascal, Prof. Michael Gibney and Prof. Philip James, who are all members of the EU Commission's Scientific Steering Committee, set up 18 months ago in an attempt to restore the credibility of EU policy in relation to emerging risks in general and BSE in particular. Most of its work to date has in fact been on questions relating to BSE, and the committee has been given a heavy

workload, forcing it to meet approximately once every two weeks. The eminent scientists warned the Commission that, given the Committee members' other professional commitments, this rate of work could not continue indefinitely.

Said Dublin University's Professor Gibney: 'The Commission needs to make significant investment in technical support for the committee. I do not care whether it is called an Agency or a Group or a Secretariat. Committee members cannot go on putting in the hours they are currently putting in.'

■ European Parliament and European Commission Joint Conference, *The EU and Food Security: Lessons to be learned from the BSE crisis*, held at the European Parliament, Brussels, Nov 30-Dec 1, 1998.

NB: Ken Collins MEP and the Environment and Consumer Protection Committee called for the creation of an EU version of the FDA some 10 years ago.

Excess salt — whose fault?

Continuing our occasional look at the salt in our diets, in this issue we ask: How easy is it to exceed the target?

Twenty years ago, in 1978, the UK Department of Health (then the DHSS) published a pamphlet *Eating for Health* which included the recommendation: 'to eat less salt might be beneficial'.

The pamphlet reflected a view in government which wanted to avoid direct intervention in dietary health (eg through legislation on fortifying foods) and instead to leave responsibility in the hands of the individual. The Department would issue advice but hence forth leave it up to us to follow that advice. If

we didn't, then of course we had only ourselves to blame if we became ill.

Since that time, numerous research reports have confirmed the need to limit the amount of salt in our diet, and numerous leaflets have been published by the Department and the Health Education Authority recommending us to cut down on the salt we eat.

The trouble with this approach is that it is very difficult for individuals to cut down on salt. Even if you add absolutely no salt during cooking, and add no salt at the table, you can still very easily exceed the recommended daily intake of salt because of the amounts being added to your food before you buy it.

We looked at a day's food being eaten by a primary school child, and by a working parent, to see where the salt was coming from. Neither child nor parent added salt during cooking or at the table, yet they both easily exceeded the recommended daily limit by at least 50 per cent and possibly 100 per cent without realising it.

The choices could be improved upon, largely by swapping the processed items for more home-cooked or raw foods. But the calorie levels are not



"He was a director of Acme Processed Foods - and took his job with a pinch of salt!"

high and indeed both child and parent may be tempted to have a further snack — a bowl of cereal or a piece of toast perhaps — which could add as much as another ten per cent to their salt intake.

Responsibility lies with food producers to cut back on salt, and with government to accept that a high salt diet is costing the NHS unnecessary millions of pounds treating high blood pressure and strokes.

■ To find out more about salt in our diets, contact the campaigning group Consensus on Salt and Health (CASH) on tel 0181 725 2409 or fax 0181 725 2959

Target maximum salt intakes

Child under 10.....less than 5 grams / day

Women.....5 grams / day

Men6 - 7 grams / day

NB: One gram of sodium is equivalent to 2.5 grams of salt.

Salt content of a typical day's food, none added in cooking or at the table.

Child aged 8-10, eating less than 1600 calories per day

	portion	salt g
Rice Krispies	1 bowl 30g	0.83
milk for cereal and to drink	250ml	0.63
slice of white toast	medium 35g	0.5
butter to spread	portion 10g	0.25-0.5
Hoops-style snack	bag 28g	0.5-0.75
fizzy drink, lemonade	glass 200g	0.07
baked beans	2 tablesp 80g	1.0
2 slices of toast	medium 35g	1.0
butter to spread	2 portions 20g	0.5-1.0
cheese triangle	one triangle 14g	0.35
frozen chicken nuggets	two ounces, 60g	1.20
frozen chips	15 chips 150g	0.10
tinned pasta (in sauce)	3 tablesp, 150g	1.50
peeled apple	1 apple	0.0
TOTAL		8.4-9.4

Adult

	portion	salt g
Bran flakes	1 bowl 40g	0.8
milk to add, and for tea	150ml	0.25
one slice brown toast	medium 35g	0.5
sunflower spread	portion 7g	0.13
yeast extract/Marmite	4g	0.55
salt & vinegar crisps	1 bag 30g	0.75-1.0
tea and coffee for day	5 cups	0.13
ham salad sandwich	1 pack 185g	2.25-3.70
instant cup-soup (low-calorie)	1 sachet	1.75-2.50
can of coke	330ml	0.05
two digestive biscuits	30g	0.5
pasta (unsalted water)	average portion 230g	0.05
bottled pasta sauce	portion to serve 110g	1.25-1.50
mixed salad	250g	0.03-0.5
fruit pie	3oz	0.4
pint of lager	pint 560ml	0.05
dry roasted nuts	2 oz bag 50g	0.5-1.0
TOTAL		9.9-13.6

Sources: Manufacturer's information on label; McCance & Widdowson 4th edition, and Healthy Eating, I. Skypala, Wisebuy Publications, 1988.

Bars to trade

Following the success of Green & Black's organic chocolate, a second company is hoping to attract the conscientious choco-phile by offering a fairly-traded bar of creamy milk chocolate, reports Leora Vegosen.

The new product, Divine, is produced by the Day Chocolate Company, which is a partnership between Kuapa Kokoo (meaning 'good cocoa growers'), a company owned by cocoa growers in Ghana, and Twin Trading Ltd. in London.

'We treat the farmers that we buy from as our trading partners,' said Pauline Tiffen, the director of Twin Trading. 'We have a long term relationship with farmers and we build security between each other. We believe that if we work hard for you, you'll work hard for us, and vice versa.'

In typical chocolate trading, most of the profits don't go to farmers because there are too many intermediaries, and when world market prices fall the farmers are the first to lose their incomes. With Divine, Twin Trading has agreed a guaranteed minimum price for buying cocoa from farmers, with higher prices if the world market price rises.

Because the Day Company pays more to farmers, the price of Divine is



higher than the price of other chocolate products. The recommended retail price of the Divine bar is £1.19.

There is, however, another reason why Divine is more expensive, according to Tiffen. 'Our priority is to emphasise the human beings at each end of the chain.' Divine is technically a better product, she says, and does not use genetically modified soya, synthetic vanilla or vegetable fat.

Other chocolate companies do not welcome the competition of Divine. 'Large companies are angry with little companies like ours,' said Tiffen.

When Twin Trading brought out Cafe Direct, a fairly traded coffee, in 1992, they didn't attract much attention from other companies. But within days of Divine's launch in September, Richard Johnson of Terry's was quoted as saying, 'our company takes exception to the implication that because Divine is labelled Fair Trade, the rest of the chocolate on sale results from unfair trade.'

Tiffen said, 'We must be doing something right because they're irritated. Lobbying for worthy causes like fair trade is resulting in progress, and our time has come!'

The topsy-turvy world of artificial sweeteners.

In pursuit of its love affair with food processing companies, the MAFF-ocrats have issued bizarre guidance on the use of sweeteners in soft drinks. It shows how companies can legally use artificial sweeteners at higher levels in already-sugared drinks even though they are not allowed to use them at lower levels.

In two worked examples, MAFF shows that a mixture of 8% sugar with saccharin at 80mg/litre would not be permitted in a soft drink, as the sweetener does not account for at least 30% of the sweetness and the drink thus fails to qualify as an 'energy reduced' food (a requirement under EU rules). But a second example using sugar at 9% and two artificial sweeteners, aspartame at 80mg/litre and saccharin at 45 mg/litre, does meet the definition of 'energy-reduced', as the sweeteners now account for over 30% of the sweetness of the drink.

Thus manufacturers can make drinks much sweeter than ever they were before artificial sweeteners

were used, and still call them 'energy-reduced' or 'low sugar' drinks.

MAFF has also indicated that there is no need to tell consumers that these products are energy reduced, and that it is enough to put the words 'with sweeteners' next to the list of ingredients on the back of the label. This makes a nonsense of the EU's requirement to declare the addition of sweeteners prominently, especially as the list of ingredients already declares the added sweeteners as part of the list.

We urge trading standards and public analyst bodies to resist these guidelines from MAFF and to have the issue clarified by law, based on the EC Directive, and not MAFF's pathetic and possibly illegal 'interpretation'.

Heart disease: deaths and ill-health diverge

Figures for treating heart disease in the UK show a continuing rise in treatments over the last few years, but a decline in death rates from the disease.

Two new publications — the government's *Key Health Statistics from General Practice 1996* (Office for National Statistics, 1998, £30) and the British Heart Foundation's *Coronary Heart Disease Statistics* (BHF 1998, £9.99) — agree on the diverging trends. According to the first publication, the prevalence of coronary heart disease rose from 54,000 cases in 1994 to 63,000 cases in 1996 in the survey area

(equivalent to a rise from 26.8 per 1000, age standardised, to 27.8).

The second publication shows another view: days off

sick due to heart disease rose from under 29 million in 1981 to a peak of over 67 million in 1993, falling back to 37 million in 1995 (the last year reported). Similarly, prescriptions for beta-blocker drugs to protect against heart disease rose from under 10,000 in 1981 to over 14,000 in 1996. Coronary bypass operations rose from under 6,000 in 1981 to over 24,000 in 1996/7 and operations for angina rose from under 10,000 in 1991 to over 20,000 in 1996.

Meanwhile the death rate from heart disease has dropped in the UK with men aged 35-74 showing 578 deaths per 100,000 men in 1978 down to 292 per 100,000 in 1996. The figures for women also declined dramatically, from 202 to 104 per 100,000. There is some evidence to show that much of this improvement has been for men and women in higher income brackets, with little or no improvement for those on lowest incomes. Regionally, the highest rates are still to be found in Scotland, with fairly high rates also found in



New soya baby milk warnings

The New Zealand Ministry of Health has issued new advice about the use of soya infant formula, warning that the isoflavones (phytoestrogens) in soya-based infant formula may have the capacity to affect the thyroid function of infants.

Clinicians who are treating children with a soya-based infant formula for medical conditions are being advised of the potential interaction between soya formula and thyroid function and the need to assess thyroid function if satisfactory growth and development is not achieved or maintained.

The new position statement¹ published in December 1998 also recommends further research to

determine whether there may be any other clinically significant interactions between phytoestrogens in soya-based infant formula and endocrine function in infants.

Meanwhile the Australian College of Paediatrics (ACP) has also revised its position statement on soya formula.² As in New Zealand and the UK, the advice is that soya formula should only be used when recommended by a health professional for specific medical conditions such as proven cow's milk protein or lactose intolerance. However even in these circumstances the authorities recommend the use of alternative non-soya-based infant formula. The

ACP statement also says there is some evidence that soy formula may impair immunity and that the long-term effects of contaminants of soy (e.g. aluminium and phytoestrogens) are unknown.

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority is considering whether further safeguards are necessary to protect the health of infants fed on soya infant formula.

¹ New Zealand Ministry of Health, December 1998, Soy-based Infant Formula (available on website <http://www.moh.govt.nz>).

² Australian College of Paediatrics, 1998 Position statement: Soy protein formula, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 34, 318-9.

Soya safety questions

A climbdown by the soya industry has been noted in the USA. As *Food Magazine* readers may recall, there are considerable doubts about the safety of soya-based infant formula, given the high levels of oestrogen-like chemicals found in such products, and the small body weights of babies. The soya industry has continued to deny any problems, but the food giant Archer Daniels Midland has withdrawn its application to the US Food and Drug Administration to have its soya isoflavone products given a Generally Regarded as Safe (GRAS) status.

The FDA had been showered with letters from campaigners in New Zealand and the UK, including the Food Commission, pointing out the scientific evidence for a potential hazard. The company made no statement on its reasons for withdrawing its GRAS request, except to say that it is 'in the process of incorporating additional information to update the file'.

New claims for old

The European Commission is proposing a new category of foods which may be able to make health and medical claims, in the guise of being 'Food for Special Medical Purposes'.

Food companies are currently facing increasing restrictions on their ability to make outrageous health claims for their products, with the UK Health Claims Code being endorsed by the industry (see *Food Magazine* 42), the Advertising Standards Authority getting more concerned about misleading promotion of foods, some tightening up of nutritional claims in CODEX regulations, and a sluggish market in the sales of so-called functional foods in the UK.

Draft EC proposals will allow public advertising of products claiming to be an aid in the management of any 'disease, disorder, or medical condition'. Each member state would be responsible for monitoring these claims, and MAFF has suggested that in the UK a 'light touch' should operate.

The Food Commission has responded by pointing out how the directive undermines consumer groups' attempts to bring health claims under control, and allows baby milk companies to break the marketing codes for breastmilk substitutes.

Fruit costs the earth

Two new reports from the Sustainable Agriculture, Food and the Environment (SAFE) Alliance highlight the disappearing varieties of apples and pears from UK orchards, and the declining numbers of orchards themselves.

Despite rising sales of pears, up from three pounds per person in the 1980s to over five last year, pear orchards have declined dramatically and crops reduced by a third in the same period. The difference is made up from imported fruit, transported longer distances and requiring more packaging and storage resources.

A similar story can be told for apples, where a decline in the varieties to a small number of heavy-cropping dessert and cooking types,

and an increase in overseas production for the UK market, has led to increasing transport, storage and a resulting increase in pollution and a loss of non-renewable resources.

The reports also trace the increasing use of pesticides, which leave residues in the food we eat and lead to a decline in wildlife and biodiversity in orchards. The solution, argue the reports, is to increase local production of less common varieties, with an emphasis on organic and sustainable production and distribution methods.

■ *The Pear Essentials Food Facts No 3, and How Green are our Apples? Food Facts No 4*, from the SAFE Alliance (tel 0171 837 8980) price £4.00 each.

Government-Bounty links

We are not the first to note that the Labour government seems intent on wooing commercial interests. Their latest wheeze is to use the Bounty packs — a bag of free samples of commercial baby products given to mothers in maternity wards — as a vehicle for giving advice on parenting skills. The idea is being mooted in the Home Office consultation booklet *Supporting Families*. Bounty packs have long been criticised by health workers as many packs include highly sugared and salted foods for

babies, along with so-called 'information' leaflets from babyfood manufacturers.

Will the government's proposals amount to an official endorsement of the Bounty scheme — or does the NHS do that for Bounty already? More details on the scheme, and an opportunity to comment, can be obtained from Katherine Bramwell, Voluntary and Community Unit, Room 230, Horseferry House, Dean Ryle Street, London SW1P 2AW.

Antibiotic ban

European Commission proposals to ban four veterinary antibiotics from routine use in animal feed is being challenged by the big agrochemical companies. Twelve of the 15 EU farm ministers voted to accept the ban in December (three abstentions were recorded for Belgium, Portugal and Spain), following advice from the Commission that the antibiotics could weaken the effectiveness of related chemicals needed for human use.

One company, Pfizer, is already suing the Danish government for its ban on one of the antibiotics, and the company said it was prepared to sue the European Commission also, as there were no scientific grounds for the ban. Rhone Poulenc, Alpharma and Elanco, a subsidiary of Eli Lilly, are also considering legal action. The drugs are virginiamycin, spiramycin, tylan phosphate and bacitracin zinc, and together are worth 300 million ECU in European sales. The ban is due to be implemented next July.

CHECKOUT

If you are taking dietary supplements or remedies for winter ailments, you might be adding more than you would expect to your diet. Leora Vegosen reports.

Surprises in our remedies

Want to avoid synthetic colourings? Do artificial sweeteners give you a headache? Want to keep your salt intake low? Don't like the idea of a dose of lead or arsenic? Then read on, because our survey of popular products found some nasty surprises.

We trawled highstreet chemists and supermarkets to check the ingredients of the pills and potions we are encouraged to treat ourselves with. We were alarmed at the number of additives being put into these products. We were further alarmed to find many manufacturers failing to declare what is in their products other than the supposedly active ingredients. And lastly, we were concerned by a recent government analysis of the levels of heavy metals and other contaminants found in some common supplements.

As a result we are calling for a tightening up of the labelling requirements on food supplements and remedies, with full disclosure on the label of all ingredients used. We also want to see a review of the approval arrangements for non-nutritive additives with a view to permitting their use only when they benefit the health and well-being of the consumer.

Dear Food Magazine

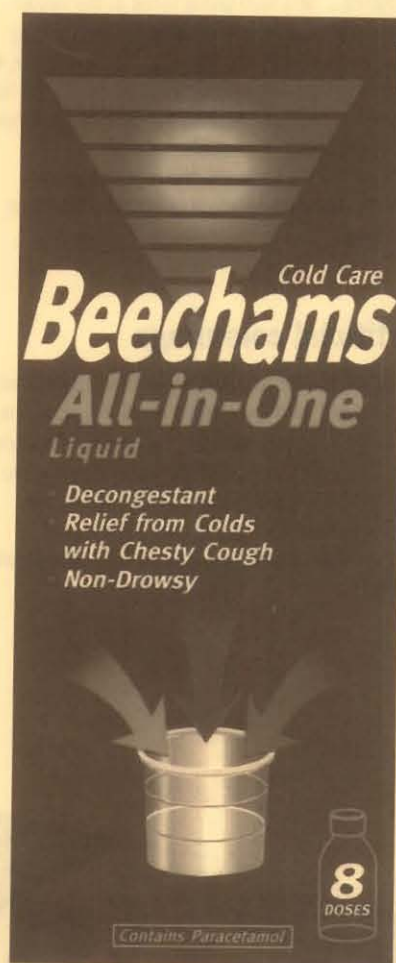
I bought a packet of vitamin C tablets from Boots, which said on the label 'free from artificial colours, flavours and preservatives'. When I got home I found the ingredients listed the chemicals magnesium stearate and aspartame. I wrote to Boots saying I felt misled, but their reply said that the sweetener, aspartame, is not legally a flavouring, and that magnesium stearate is there to 'help the ingredients flow freely and aids the tabletting procedure'. They may be technically correct but I do feel a deception is being practised. What do you think?

Michael Beal, Wolverhampton.



Resolve

Sweetened with glucose, sucrose, saccharin and cyclamate, and coloured with quinoline yellow, this product is supposed to help a hang over!



Beechams

Besides the decongestant, expectorant and paracetamol, Beechams have added two colouring dyes (sunset yellow and patent blue V), two intense sweeteners (acesulfame and cyclamate), a third sweetener (sorbitol) and alcohol.

CHECKOUT

Our survey found:

Poor and inconsistent labelling

Many companies fail to list the ingredients in their products, and give only the legal minimum indication of the supposedly active ingredient being promoted by the product. Some companies go a little further by saying the product is 'in a base including...' and then giving some of the further ingredients. Some give an 'also contains' listing which may or may not be complete. And some, like Ibuprofen from Superdrug, only tell you the full list inside the package! Making comparisons between products can be impossible in these circumstances. Ironically, the more consumer-friendly the labelling, the less you may like what you read.

Artificial colourings

Does the headache powder, Resolve, really need to be coloured with the coal tar dye E104, quinoline yellow? Or the stomach settling remedy, Rap-Eze, need the coal tar dyes, E104 and E124 (ponceau 4R) and E131 (patent blue V)? Or vitamin pills, Redoxon, need to be dyed with E104 and E127 (erythrosine), a colouring banned from virtually all foods?

Artificial sweeteners

Whether or not these chemicals help the medicine go down, they can certainly help the profit margins go up. We found sweeteners in a wide range of products, although some manufacturers did not declare which sweetener they were using. Beechams has decided to plump for the newly-permitted sodium cyclamate in their 'Cold Care' range of products. Lemsip, from Reckitt and Colman, goes for aspartame as do many of the vitamin pill makers such as Redoxon, Sanatogen (Roche), Bassett's, Super Ted and Superdrug, while Rennie sticks to saccharin, a sweetener which also finds its way into several other products, as does the other main intense sweetener, acesulfame.

Other, less intense sweetening agents are also used, such as the bulk sweeteners — usually sorbitol, xylitol or mannitol, or, in the case of Sanatogen Children's Gold, all three!

Insect products

Food additives derived from insects have been around for some years. They include the red dye cochineal (E120), sometimes known as carmine or carminic acid, derived from cactus beetle carcasses, and a glazing agent called shellac put on pills to make them shine, made from resinous secretions of tree-dwelling insects in India. Beeswax may also be used, and, of course, some food supplements — such as royal jelly and propolis — are derived from bee products.

We found cochineal in:

Bassett's Soft and Chewy Vitamins;
Sanatogen one-a-day multivitamins and iron.

We found shellac in:

Minadox chewable children's vitamins;
Redoxon slow-release vitamin C;
Kwai garlic tablets;
Hofels cardiomax garlic tablets;
Seven Seas once-a-day minerals for bones.

Animal products

It is not always obvious when food supplements and remedies are suitable for vegetarians. Many capsules and chewable pills use gelatine, a material derived from skin, bones and connective tissue of cattle and pigs. There is no evidence that gelatine derived from cattle bones can carry the infective agent for mad cow disease, but the European Scientific Steering Committee dealing with the issue has recommended restrictions on the production of gelatine to minimise the risk of BSE transmission.

Other animal products, apart from the insect products above, include stearic acid and magnesium stearate — both of which help prevent tablets clumping together, and glycerol (glycerin), a solvent. These additives can be derived from animal or vegetable sources and manufacturers rarely say which source they have used.

Preservatives

To give some products a longer shelf life manufacturers may add preservatives to some formulations. We found sodium benzoate — linked in some reports to hyperactivity and allergic reactions — in Slumber Cup, a sleeping draught, and in Verve Flight, a pill to help you cope with travelling.

High sodium levels

People trying to reduce the level of salt in their diet may not realise that sodium comes in other forms, too. These include sodium saccharin, sodium cyclamate, sodium benzoate, sodium ascorbate, and above all sodium bicarbonate, used in high doses to make tablets effervescent. Some products, such as the anti-hangover Resolve, warn in the small print that they are unsuitable for sodium-restricted diets, but others, including Boots effervescent vitamin C, give no such warning.



Wassen Garlic

Government tests found levels of lead and arsenic above those permitted in foods. The manufacturers, Wassen's, say this may have been due to a coating on the tablets which they no longer use.



Tums

The active ingredient being simple chalk, the manufacturers (SmithKline Beecham) presumably justify the price (£30 per kilo) by adding sugar, flavourings and four coal tar dyes (E124, E131, E104 and E110).

CHECKOUT

Talc, cellulose and other processing aids

A further range of chemicals find their way into food supplements not because they are health promoting substances but because they help the manufacturer make the product. These include talcum powder to prevent tablets sticking together, microcrystalline cellulose which helps turn liquids into powder, silicon dioxide, derived from sand, which is also an anti-caking agent, carnauba wax, a glazing agent derived from a palm tree, and various forms of methylcellulose, a thickening agent derived from wood pulp or cotton. All of these chemicals are assumed safe in small quantities.

Contaminants

A government survey of food supplements published in 1998 found high levels of lead and arsenic in a few of the products they examined. For both lead and arsenic, a general limit of 1 mg is permitted in each kilogram of the product but some supplements were found to contain higher levels. The small quantity of supplements being taken would minimise the lead and arsenic intake, and the government report did not believe there was a significant risk from these products, but nonetheless required the manufacturers to review their formulations.

Genetically modified ingredients

Few manufacturer can guarantee the sources of their ingredients these days, and many food supplements and remedies include possible sources of GM material. Garlic capsules from various companies (Superdrug, Kwai, Hofels, Boots) include soy oil or unspecified vegetable oil, and a Boots calcium supplement includes soya oil. Maize starch may be found in several products (Calcia, Osteocare, Seven Seas minerals for bones).

Government survey findings

Products with more than 1 mg/kg lead

Tropicana World zinc 15mg tablets (4.5 mg/kg)
Holland & Barrett high potency zinc capsules (3.2 mg/kg)
Hofels one-a-day garlic with parsley tablets (3.0 mg/kg)
Wassen's one-a-day garlic tablets (2.3 mg/kg)
Bee Health high potency propolis capsules (1.9 mg/kg)
Sainsbury multivitamin and mineral tablets (1.4 mg/kg)
Sanatogen one-a-day children's vitamin and mineral tablets (1.3 mg/kg)
Minalka muscular pain and stiffness tablets (1.3 mg/kg)

Products with more than 1 mg/kg arsenic

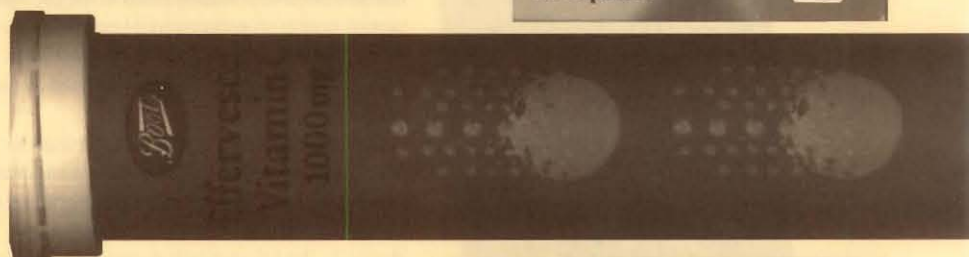
Hofels one-a-day garlic with parsley tablets (2.2 mg/kg)
Wassen's one-a-day garlic tablets (2.1 mg/kg)

Source: *Metals and Other Elements in Dietary Supplements and Licenced Medicinal Products*, MAFF Food Surveillance Sheet 156,



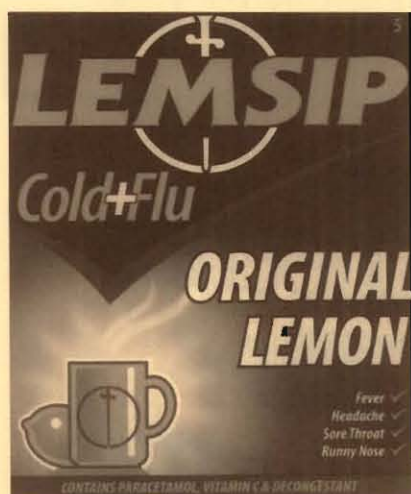
Ibuprofen

The pack says it contains four ingredients, but the leaflet inside admits to 13 ingredients, including sugar, talc and colouring (titanium dioxide).



Boots effervescent vitamin C

Government tests found these tablets to be 13% sodium; a single dose provides more than half the recommended maximum sodium intake for the day for an adult.



Lemsip

Only some ingredients mentioned here — but they include a dose of sugar and a dose of artificial sweetener aspartame.

Redoxon
£3.99 for this vitamin C also gets you gelatin and shellac, sugar, maize, talc and four colourings, including E127 (erythrocine) which has been banned from virtually all foods.



CHECKOUT

Loopy labels

Continuing our wry look at the weird and wonderful ways of the world of whacky food labels

Seaweed surprise

Made to a 'typical recipe from the Cantonese region of China' claims Sainsbury's, on their pack of Chinese Crispy Seaweed. Of course, we all know it isn't really seaweed, it's cabbage. But in the case of this product something odd is going on. The ingredients list — which should show the heaviest ingredients first — reads Spring cabbage,

Vegetable oil, Sugar, Flaked almonds, Salt and Fish powder (with monosodium glutamate).

With the cabbage listed first we were surprised to see on the nutrition table that more than two thirds of the product, 67.3 per cent, was oily fat.

It seems to us that the recipe may have started with more cabbage than oil, but that after deep frying, the product was more oil than cabbage. Much more oil. The product admitted a sugar level of 18 per cent, meaning that the cabbage and the nuts together couldn't be more than 15-20 per cent of the pack.

After cooking, the real ingredients list — as sold to us consumers — should have read Oil. Sugar, Cabbage and Nuts, etc.

A balanced breakfast

Dietary variety helps to ensure a healthy balance of nutrients, we are told. Perhaps this lies behind the latest promotion from two of Britain's largest food companies.

Fancy getting a McDonald's Big Breakfast of sausage, egg, fried potato and buttered muffin, for free? Just consume these eight bars of Cadbury products and rush to McDonald's before 10.30 a.m. Mmmm!



Low supper yoghurt

Not strictly a food label, although the message may soon be on one. The latest round in the battle to make us eat more in order to eat less comes from Sweden and is now on sale in the UK.

Eating a greasy emulsion by the name of *Olibra* added to an innocent low fat yoghurt puts people off their supper, according to research conducted by the University of Ulster for the company Scotia LipidTeknik of Stockholm.

Olibra, made largely from palm fat, was given to people at lunchtime and the amount of food they ate later in the day was found to be less than the amount eaten by people fed a regular yoghurt without Olibra. No attempt was made to see when people recovered their appetite or whether they ate more to compensate over the following days, or indeed if anyone ever lost weight.

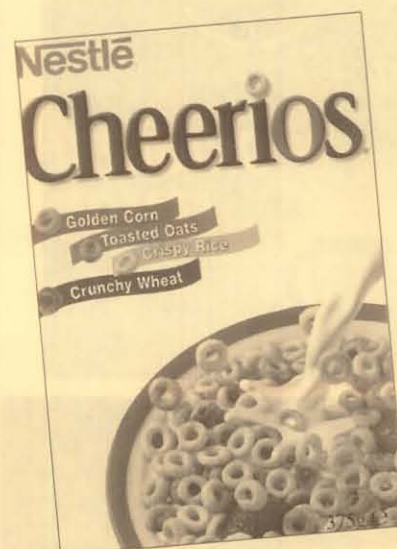
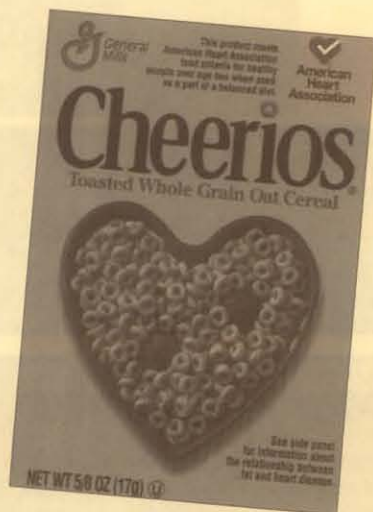
What will universities sink to, to bring in private sector cash?



Same name, different formula

One of America's most popular cereals, Cheerios, has also become a leading brand in the UK. The US version boasts an endorsement from the American Heart Association for meeting their criteria 'for healthy people aged over two when used as part of a balanced diet'.

We wonder if they would be so pleased to endorse the UK version. Somewhere across the Atlantic, as General Mills passed the right to the name to our friends at Nestle, the formula got changed. The US version is sweetened with sugar at about 5 per cent of the product. The Nestle version is sweetened with sugar, invert sugar syrup and brown sugar, adding up to over 22 per cent of the product. The UK product also has a dose of hydrogenated fat added to the pack which is absent from the US version.



marketplace

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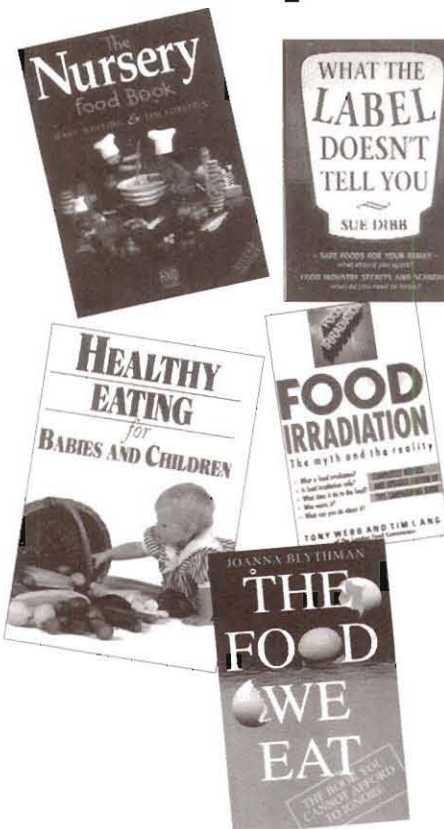
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Organic standards: where do we draw the limits?

Organically-labelled breakfast cereals containing more sugar than non-organic equivalents? Organic ham and bacon preserved with sodium nitrite? What do we want from organic standards, asks Tim Lobstein.

Five years ago there was some debate in the Soil Association about whether it was acceptable to allow the organic symbol to be used on genetically modified foods. It was argued by some that gene technology was not in itself an anti-organic process, and that some products of the technology could be beneficial to organic producers if, for example, it did no more than increase the speed of developing new varieties of crops, and made them hardier or better suited to organic inputs.

After some debate the view was rejected in favour of a complete rejection of the technology and its products. But in other areas of food production, the organic standards are not so easily defined. As we reported in the last issue of the *Food Magazine* the standards for farmed fish have recently been agreed, and have run into criticism for allowing far too high a stocking density. Fish farmer Lawrence Hutchinson, who has advised the Soil Association on aquaculture standards, said he was disappointed with the final draft standards which would allow 'battery fish farming'. There

were suggestions that the standards were tuned more to the commercial needs of mass marketing than to the biological needs of the fish.

Also last autumn, a row broke out within the Soil Association about the use of the preservatives sodium nitrate (saltpetre) and sodium nitrite in cured bacon and ham. The chemicals are used widely in conventional products as means of curing meat, but until last year were not allowed in organic products. Many foods contain small amounts of both nitrates and nitrites naturally, or they may be present as a result of the use of orthodox nitrogen-based fertilisers or the use of preservatives. There have been health concerns about their levels in food as they can be metabolised to potentially carcinogenic N-nitroso compounds.

Several organic suppliers of bacon and ham objected to the change of standards, both on principled organic grounds and on their loss of sales as their more traditional preservation methods were effectively undercut by the use of nitrous chemicals. There were also concerns that the pressure to allow the chemicals came from supermarkets who would not accept the small volumes of traditional products, and who were reported to have assisted in putting the Soil Association's case to the UK registration authority, UKROFS. The Soil Association acknowledges that it gains financially from increased sales of organic food bearing their logo but strongly rejects any impropriety. Their press spokesperson said that, although supermarkets now accounted for over 60% of organic sales, there was 'no question of compromising our Standards in order to promote organic food'.

Another row concerning organic accreditation concerns the approval of one brand of Lake Klamath blue-green algae. Algae supplements are often sold as aids for vitality and memory and to prevent hair loss, ulcers and other health problems. The scientific basis for these claims has been criticised by the Consumers Association, who also analysed samples and found traces of neurotoxins present in the supplements at levels in some cases exceeding those considered safe by the World Health Organisation.

The algae are collected in their wild state from Klamath Lake, Oregon, which has been the subject of pollution warnings from the Oregon state



"I'll have 20 organic Marlboro, please"

Organic nutrition?

With no added vitamins and with sugar levels of 16.9 per cent, these organically-certified refined rice cereals compare badly with vitamin-enriched non-organic versions (Kellogg's, Sainsbury's) which have less than 11 per cent sugar.

authorities. One local ecologist expressed concern in 1995 at the levels of agrochemical run-off entering the lake. In 1996 two local companies harvesting the algae had to suspend operations as the levels of contamination with other forms of more toxic algae rose too high. Despite their precautions, the Consumers' Association tests of Lake Klamath algae supplements purchased in 1997 found evidence of contamination from the more toxic algae. Although the tests did not include the organically certified products, the issue raises concern about the standards required to declare products as officially 'organic' when they are collected from 'wild', relatively uncontrolled sources.

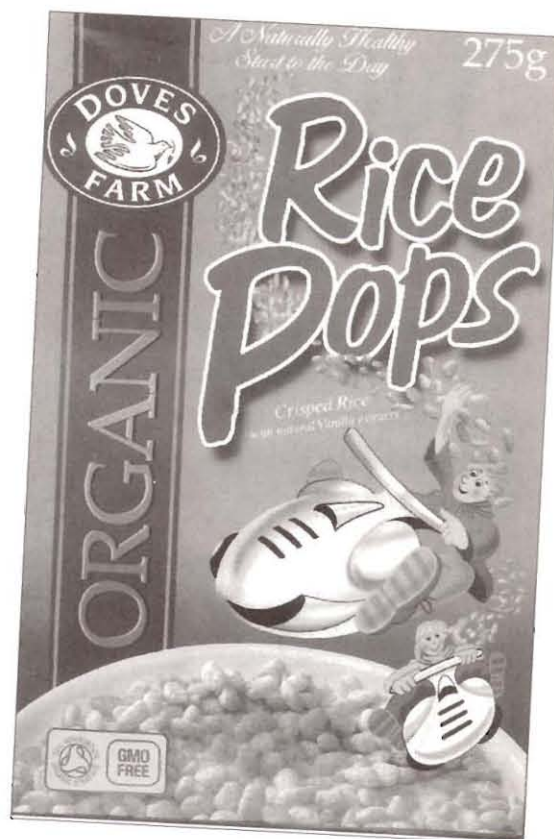
There is not only pressure from within the organic movement to allow a wider range of products and treatments to be accepted as organic, there is pressure from outside too. European moves are afoot to allow non-organic weaning pigs and calves to be sold as organic meat if they stay for a period on an organic farm. Earlier last year the USA federal authorities were drafting organic standards that proposed to permit the use of genetically modified crops — a proposal that was bitterly resisted by organic producers and has been dropped. There are also unresolved issues about the intensity of poultry production permissible under UKROFS organic definitions.

Lastly comes the more contentious issue of nutritional standards for processed food. Neither

UKROFS nor the Soil Association set nutritional criteria for their accreditation schemes. Breakfast cereals, for example, can be Soil Association approved, even if they are made of refined starches and white sugar. As long as the ingredients were organically grown there is little control over their subsequent use.

The danger is that organic foods will become no different from regular mass produced junk foods, apart from the farming methods. Ironically, because the organic standards do not permit added vitamins, some organically-approved breakfast cereals could have less nutritional value than regular ones. And Dove's Farm Rice Pops, sold in Sainsbury's has more sugar than the non-organic counterparts.

The Soil Association acknowledges that there are concerns with the setting of standards, and that they keep the standards continually under review. For example, organically-reared animals are permitted to be fed a proportion of non-organic feed, and this proportion is being reduced as more organic feed supplies come onto the market. Organic crops can be grown from non-organic seed, but this too, should change as supplies of organic seed become available. The list of permitted additives (see box) also represents a compromise with the needs of food processing technologies.



The Food Commission welcomes the views and opinions of readers on this matter. We have been invited to contribute to the Soil Association's standards-setting procedures and would like to do that with your assistance. Let us know where the line can be drawn on what should be declared as 'organic' and what should definitely be excluded.

The Soil Association allows a restricted number of additives and processing aids, some of them limited to specific foods or to specific levels of use. These include:

Calcium carbonate	Carrageenan	Magnesium chloride	Sulphuric acid
Lactic acid	Locust bean gum	Ethanol	Vegetable oils for greasing or anti-foaming
Carbon dioxide	Guar gum	Tannic acid	Hazelnut shell
Malic acid	Gum arabic	Egg white albumen	Rice meal
Ascorbic acid	Xanthan gum	Casein	Certain specified flavourings
Tocopherol	Pectin	Gelatin	Minerals and vitamins when required by law
Lecithins	Sodium carbonate	Isinglass	Synthetic cheese coating (without fungicide)
Citric acid	Potassium carbonate	Silicon dioxide gel	Micro-organisms and enzymes normally used for food processing (but not genetically modified)
Calcium citrates	Calcium sulphate	Activated carbon	Water
Tartaric acid	Sodium hydroxide	Bentonite	
Sodium tartrate	Nitrogen	Diatomaceous earth	
Potassium tartrate	Oxygen	Perlite	
Monocalcium phosphate	Sulphur dioxide	Beeswax	
Agar	Calcium chloride	Carnauba wax	

Nutrition follows income — official!

The lower your income the lower your intake of essential nutrients, according to the government's own survey of the food we buy.

In a departure from previous years, MAFF's National Food Survey has divided the respondents in their survey into net income brackets from the lowest ten percent to the highest ten percent, and tabulated these income groups against the nutrients found in the food each group buys. Previous surveys gave some of this information, but shown under crude headings of four income brackets based on the earned income of the head of household, taking no account of the size of the family living on that income or of the benefits and deductions that might affect net income.

By basing the new figures on the average income per person in the household, and dividing the range into ten categories, the pattern of nutrient consumption across income groups can be seen more clearly. The figures are based on a pooling of three years' surveys, giving a total of over 50,000 individuals.

Our three graphs show;
(i) the energy and fat intake,
(ii) the intake of three vitamins, and

(iii) the intake of iron and zinc.

A final table given in the MAFF report is for calcium, which showed a pattern almost exactly the same as that for energy.

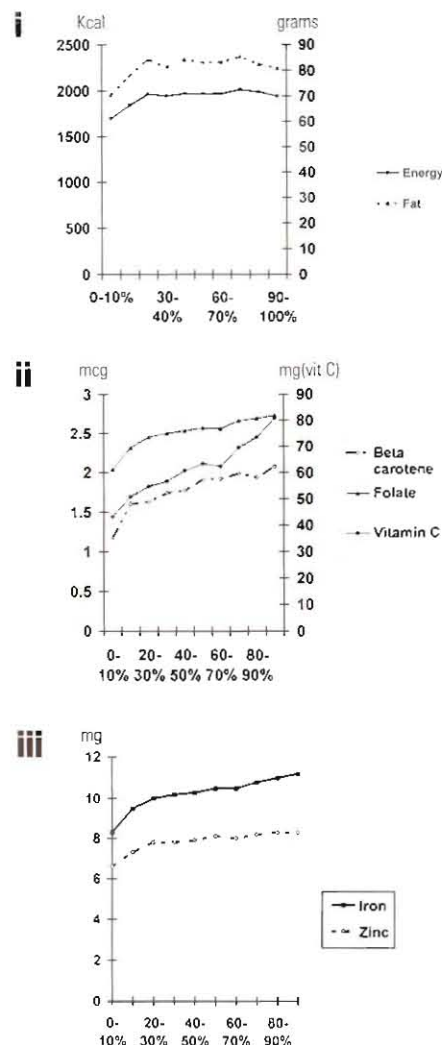
The strongest theme to emerge from these figures is the rising slope shown for all the micronutrients, implying a consistent link between better income and better nutrition. The best dietary patterns appear to be shown by the richest ten per cent of the sample, who are consuming the highest vitamin and mineral intake while eating relatively lower levels of fat as a proportion of calories.

The poorest twenty per cent of the sample, and especially the poorest ten percent, appear to be eating not only the lowest levels of nutrients but less food altogether. Their calorie and fat intakes are markedly lower than the rest of the sample. It is not clear from the text why this may be so, but the survey includes people on pensions and lone parents, both of which groups may include a proportion who are substantially under-eating.

Whatever the reason, the figures suggest that large numbers of people in these lower income brackets are getting less than the recommended Reference Nutrient Intake levels for iron, folate and, especially, zinc.

■ *National Food Survey 1997, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, TSO, 1998 (£28) ISBN 0 11 243044 9.*

Daily intake of nutrients, income deciles — lowest (0-10%) to highest (90-100%)



Inequalities: the struggle continues

Fresh from admitting to the BSE Inquiry that he should have been more circumspect in his pronouncements on the safety of beef, Sir Donald Acheson, Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health 1983-1991, spent a happier day launching his report *Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health*, reports Tim Lobstein.

Following the Black Report of 1980 and the Whitehead report of 1987, Acheson's team paint a similar picture of a divided Britain, in which poor health and an early death is more common among those less affluent. Twenty years has seen only moderate improvements in the figures for

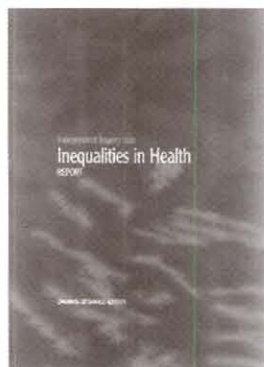
many common degenerative diseases among low income groups, while far greater improvements are seen among better off groups. The gap that existed in the 1970s has substantially widened now.

The report follows through with a series of recommendations, the most wide-ranging being one which proposes that any government policy which might have an impact on health should be evaluated for its impact on health inequalities.

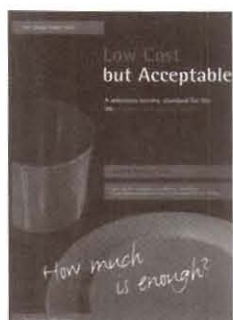
The two other main themes of the recommendations are firstly that a high priority should be given to the health of families with children, and secondly that further

steps are needed to reduce income inequalities and improve the living standards of poor households. The report also makes a timely nod in the direction of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (linking it to health policies), improving diets (increasing the distribution of fruit and vegetables, promoting breastfeeding, reducing salt levels in processed foods) and — particularly for mothers, young children and older people — reducing poverty by increasing benefits in cash or kind.

The details of how to increase benefits in cash or kind are left unspoken, but the Food Commission has long called for a review of the food benefits available, such as free formula milk for mothers on income support, free vitamin drops for infants, and the declining right to free school meals. Voucher schemes (such as those used in the USA food stamps and WIC programs — see right) can be criticised for stigmatising low income families and denying them the opportunity to prioritise their budgets. Perhaps what is needed is to respond intelligently to what families themselves say they need.



Defining a living standard



For more than a decade the Department of Social Security, and its predecessor, the DHSS, have refused to indicate what figure a family on benefits is expected to spend on food.

Benefit officials have gone on record

as saying that they do not believe it is useful to calculate such a figure as it would have to be 'a subjective assessment' as 'individual food preferences vary substantially'. Critics suggest that the reason is because any estimate of a family's food needs would show how inadequate the benefit levels are.

This, indeed, is just what has now been done. A survey of the costs of a modest but acceptable diet, along with estimates of the costs of other necessary goods and services, shows that the amount of money provided under income support is grossly inadequate. Even an income earned on the proposed minimum wage of £3.60 per hour would

fall short of what is needed — in fact the report indicates that a minimum wage of over £5 per hour is needed to meet basic needs, or nearly £7 per hour if only one adult in a two-adult family is earning.

The report marks a new departure for the Family Budget Unit, who produced figures for 'modest but adequate' standards eight years ago. In this report the researchers followed up their estimates of adequacy by trying the budgets out with parent groups in ten locations across the country, allowing the word 'acceptable' to be used in the title of the report. The authors acknowledge that in real life the various elements in a budget will be prioritised in different ways by different families. The budgets also incorporates a small safety element — the budget items for charitable giving, leisure and alcohol give a margin which may be spent on emergencies such as debts, breakages and illnesses.

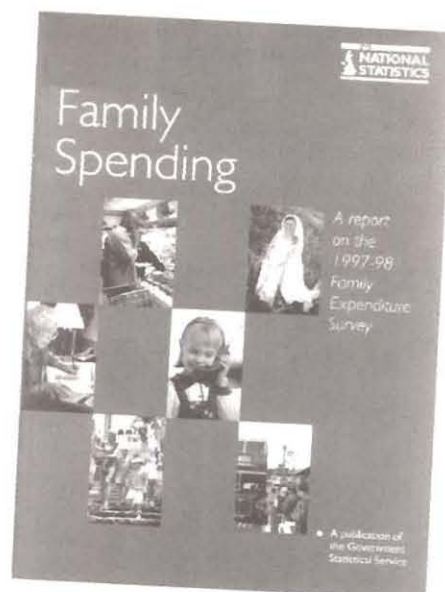
■ **Low Cost but Acceptable, The Family Budget Unit, 1998 (£19.99) ISBN 1 86134 136 9.**

■ **Further details from the FBU, Dept of Nutrition and Dietetics, King's College London, Campden Hill Road, London W8 7AH, 0171 333 4349.**

What they need and what they get £/week

	Weekly budget needed:	(Of which, food costs for acceptable diet):	Income support provides:
Couple with 2 children	£154	£55	£122
Lone mother with two children	£122	£33	£99

(Figures exclude any allowance for alcoholic drinks)



Family Spending

Thirty per cent of households spend less than £2.60 per person per day on all their food needs, including eating out and snack foods, according to the latest government survey of people's spending habits. High income families spend over £30 a week per person.

Spending on alcoholic drinks added another 40 pence per day for the lower income families but as much as £1.30 per day for those on highest incomes

■ **Family Spending - A report on the 1997-98 Family Expenditure Survey, Office of National Statistics, TSO 1998 (£39.50) ISBN 0965-1403.**

Food vouchers — the US method

Since its founding in 1972, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) has provided federal grants to state authorities to pay for food, health care and nutrition education for low income pregnant and post-partum women, infants and young children.

Typically, participants receive food benefits in the form of vouchers that they exchange at approved stores, to obtain free of charge certain foods, including infant formula. State agencies then reimburse the participating stores on the basis of the vouchers presented.

The program now covers all the USA and its offshore territories. In 1997 there were 7.4 million participants in the program, including 1.9 million infants — nearly half of all babies born in the

United States 1996. The criteria for inclusion can vary from state to state, but in 1997 the income limit in virtually all states was \$29,693 (about £20,000) for a family of four.

The supplemental foods that WIC provides include infant formula, milk, cheese, fruit and vegetable juices, iron-fortified adult and infant cereals, dried beans or peas, peanut butter and eggs, as well as carrots and tuna fish for breast-feeding participants. Each state can designate the types and amounts of foods that local WIC agencies can prescribe to meet participant's needs. Accounts for 1996 show food expenditure costs of the WIC program to be \$2.7 billion (about £1.9 billion). The cost of infant formula — the most expensive food item in the program — has been sharply cut by obliging the baby milk companies to

bid competitively for exclusive state-wide contracts.

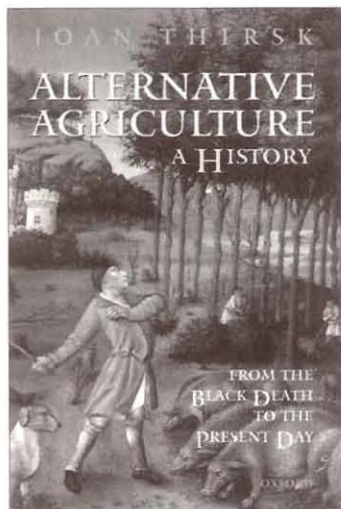
■ **Source: US General Accounting Office, Food Assistance: Information on WIC Sole-Source Rebates and Infant Formula Prices, GAO/RCED-98-146, Washington, May 1998**

Food poverty project gets 2-year extension

As this magazine went to press, the National Food Alliance's Food Poverty project received grant funding for policy and networking activities 1999-2001. Funding came from several sources including a large proportion from the National Lottery.

Alternative Agriculture: A History

J Thirsk, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, 1997, ISBN 0-19-820662-3, £25.00 (hardback).



Starting with the plague years (1350-1450) Joan Thirsk, economic historian and president of the British Agricultural History Society, describes the shifting patterns of agricultural enterprise and activities in Britain and Europe through six centuries, exploring in particular the pressures that led (and still lead) farmers and landowners to diversify from the prevailing orthodoxy.

The word 'alternative' is fairly loosely used to mean such diversification — thus the turn to dairying after the Black Death was an *alternative* from the grain growing tradition, as a shrinking population and higher labour costs made wheat-growing unprofitable. If dairying, too, was unprofitable then the grassland might *alternatively* be used for rabbit warrens. The alternative can quickly become the mainstream, and indeed the author happily states that 'Alternative agriculture dominated the rural economy until about 1500'.

There are fascinating nuggets. The fields of yellow rapeseed enthusiastically grown by farmers in Britain in the 1970s were not the alien crop the public might have thought, but the re-appearance of one seen as early as the 1560s. The blue fields of linseed appearing in the mid-1990s were also nothing new, as the crop

(formerly known as flax) had been grown since the 1600s.

Perhaps more to the point, the agricultural surpluses experienced in the 1980s, with Europe's bursting grain, milk and meat stores, were also nothing new. Crises of overproduction have been well-documented at least three times in the last thousand years, and this comes to the central theme of the book: alternative agriculture is the response to failing markets for mainstream crops and products, largely as a result of excessive production beyond the population's needs. Thus the falling population following the plague led to a crisis of overproduction in the 1350s, and a further crisis of overproduction can be seen in the early to mid-1600s which led to the successful diversification into rapeseed, woad and hops, and less successful attempts to grow madder, mulberries (for silk) safflower and weld, as well as a parliamentary act to lift restrictions on food exports.

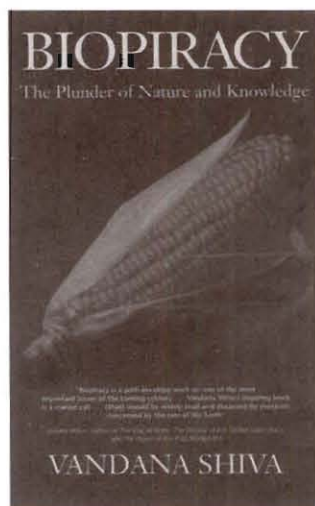
A third crisis in grain production was evident in Britain from the late 1870s, when poor harvests did not lead to higher prices but to imports of cheap North American grain. Domestic production of grain remained largely unprofitable for the rest of that century and into the present one. With the First World War, unreliable supplies from overseas led to the UK Corn Production Act of 1917 guaranteeing good prices to farmers for wheat and oats, swinging the pendulum back to orthodox agriculture for a while, although unemployment in the later 1920s and 1930s depressed the market and continued to encourage alternative agriculture. The alternatives consisted of moves into horticulture, poultry-keeping, and pig-keeping, plus a renewed interest in small-scale farming and in the adoption of vegetarian diets.

Now we are in the fourth crisis in orthodox agriculture, as the post-Second World War support for meat and cereals (especially in the form of the Common Agriculture Policy) has led to the crisis in overproduction witnessed in the last decade. The alternatives this time around, the author notes, range from golf courses to organic farming, genetically engineered crops to vineyards, crops for biomass fuel to herbs for herbal medicines.

This summary does little justice to the wealth of detail and accompanying references (44 pages of references and footnotes, 27 pages of bibliography and 27 pages of index). As with any good history book, the reader becomes more philosophical about the present and the future as a result of seeing more clearly the patterns of the past.

Bio piracy — The plunder of nature and knowledge

V Shiva, Green Books, Foxhole, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6EB, 1998, ISBN 1-970098-74-9, £7.95.



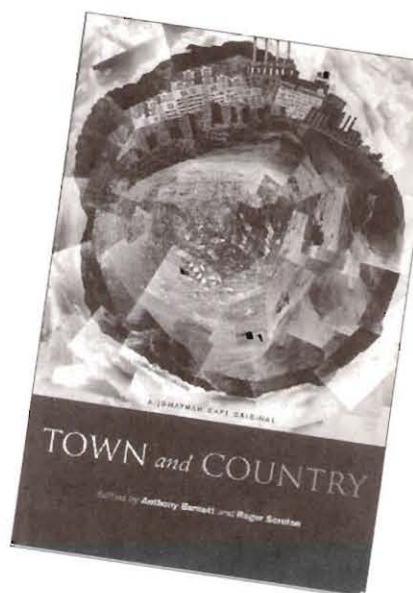
This is Vandana Shiva's account of modern colonialism, undertaken by western powers — governmental and multinational — to exploit indigenous biological and agricultural knowledge and culture, taking the ownership of nature away from the traditional farmer in less 'developed' countries and patenting it for the benefit of company shareholders in more 'developed' countries. The author argues for the development and support of self-organised communities based on decentralised power and local democratic control of resources and social justice.

Town and Country

Edited by A Barnett and R Scruton, Jonathan Cape, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA, 1998. ISBN 0-224-05254-3, £12.99.

This is a lovely collection of widely varying views on what is meant — or sometimes felt — by the term countryside. While some of the commentators included in the book refer to the political economy of urbanisation and the roots of cities in capital accumulation, much of the book is about the meaning of rural and urban environments, how these environments are interpreted by the dwellers in each of them, how these interpretations may clash against each other and how they can also grow from such contradiction. Thus we range from the perceptions of an Inuit (Eskimo) visitor to London to the battles between village shopkeepers and Tesco. We share with Jeff Rooker his insight into MAFF (e.g. he had to tell the Meat and Livestock Commission that MAFF was no longer 'the Ministry for red meat ... the guy nearly fell through the floor'). We examine the successful campaigns to preserve the face of the city of Bath.

But we miss certain sides of countryside activity: there is nothing in the index on protests, no mention of Friends of the Earth or of the Winchester or Newbury by-passes, or of any of the folk who live in benders. The nearest we get is a piece on Carmageddon from John Adams. Despite the shortcomings it is a stimulating collection, a bedside book to browse in and to graze upon.



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

Salt, Diet and Health

G A MacGregor and H E de Wardener, Cambridge University Press, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP (tel 01223 325 588), 1998, ISBN 0-521-63545-4, £14.95.

What John Yudkin did for sugar in his book *Pure White and Deadly*, so MacGregor and de Wardener are happy to do for salt in this book. They spend several chapters comprehensively identifying the harmful effects of excess salt (sodium) on our health — including raised blood pressure and strokes, osteoporosis, kidney stones, stomach cancer and possibly asthma. But they go a good deal further than this by identifying the powerful trade interests that have prevented a comprehensive public health programme from effectively cutting the nation's salt intake.

Land Stewards

Oliver Tickell's proposals for a Land Stewardship Scheme (*FM 43*) is interesting and highly desirable if indeed it provided a stepping stone from conventional to organic farming. The problem with such intermediate schemes, however, is that they tend to become the norm unless there is an incentive to improve.

Protection of wildlife should be an essential feature of arable farming, and would certainly mean an end to monoculture and drastic reduction in pesticides. Problems arise with livestock production, however, which in intensive systems is highly polluting.

The RSPCA's Freedom Food scheme provides basic standards within these systems. LEAF farms are funded by a large number of agrochemical firms and leading chemical manufacturers are represented on their Executive Committee.

Consumers have made it plain that the welfare of farm animals ranks highly in their priorities. Organic standards are the only ones which attempt to establish satisfactory conditions for livestock. The multiplicity of Assured schemes contain little beyond requiring farmers to abide by regulations and the voluntary codes. The close association of animals with the land should make this an essential part of a Land Stewardship Scheme.

Joanne Bower
The Farm and Food Society
London NW11.

from genetically modified maize by using the same spurious argument?

K Deuss
London SW6

Editor's reply: Most companies will be relying on this loophole to avoid labelling GM maize (and soya) products, as we pointed out in our feature article in Food Magazine 42. The regulations rely on detecting the presence of modified DNA to force a GM declaration on the label. We want to see GM declarations based on tracing the source of the product's raw materials, in the same way that other food labels rely on traceability, such as farm assured meat and organically-produced foods.

Incidentally, we also suspect that good quality humous doesn't need thickening with maize starch.

GM is not writ large

Yesterday I bought a container of Tesco's Extra Chunky Minestrone Soup. The ingredients list is just one millimetre per line. On line 1 it said *maize starch** and only if you got to line 5 did it say **genetically modified*.

Are these labels designed to confuse customers? Is the idea to put people off so they don't even attempt to read the labels? We are told the customer is always paramount, but this label is certainly not customer-friendly.

I should add that I did not eat the product — but I am feeling really unwell!

M Thornett-Roston
Gloucestershire

GM is not GM

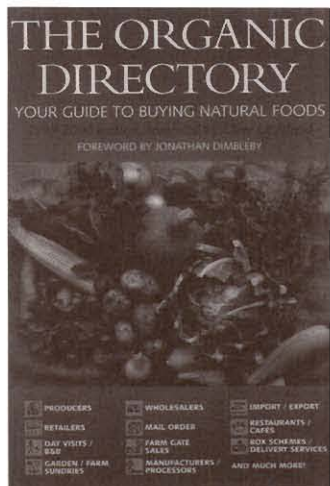
I received the following reply from Waitrose when I enquired if the maize starch contained in low-fat humous was genetically modified.

'... maize starch does not contain any protein, which is the DNA area which has been genetically engineered, therefore the starch in the low fat humous can be classed as not being produced from genetically modified starch.'

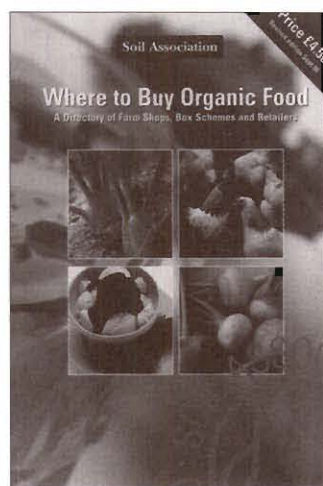
This reply seems to me to be utterly cynical and I wondered how many other food producers are failing to label their maize starch as derived

Food Awareness Week

The British Dietetic Association, the professional body representing State Registered Dietitians and others, is launching *Food Awareness Week* on 10-16 May. The week will focus on 'Give me Five' promoting fruit and vegetable consumption. Details from the hotline 0121 633 9555, or Lyndel Costain 0121 246 6945.



Two new directories of the rapidly changing market for organic products. The 120-page Soil Association book covers shops, market stalls, box schemes and home delivery services for organic foods. The 175-page Green Books directory covers a similar range of food suppliers, though not quite so well, plus trade suppliers, the odd organic restaurant, organic clothing supplier, and homeopathic supplier. The SA book includes Northern Ireland, the Green



Books directory includes a list of clubs, groups and organisations and is better indexed.

■ **Where to Buy Organic Food**, £4.50 from The Soil Association, Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6BY (tel 0117 929 0661), and **The Organic Directory**, £8.95 from Green Books, Foxhole, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6EB (tel 01803 863260).

remember your first taste of NutraSweet?

*NutraSweet® really doesn't contain
NutraSweet, but it might as well.
Aspartame is made from sugar
which comes from sugar beets, which
are just like the ones found in sugar beets.
NutraSweet is completely natural.*

*The principal components of aspartame
are two building blocks of proteins:
aspartic acid and phenylalanine, which
are just like those found in eggs, meat,
cheese and milk. And, aspartame is completely
natural.*

*No wrong public thinking. For a personal
test, just get the NutraSweet which you
truly will appreciate.*

NutraSweet

nothing else comes close

'Mother's milk doesn't contain NutraSweet, but it might as well' claims this advert for the artificial sweetener aspartame, made by a company owned by Monsanto. It shows a picture of a baby suckling at a breast and asks 'remember your

Sickly sweet

first taste of NutraSweet?' It then tells us just how natural their product is, with ingredients 'just like those found in mother's milk'.

A search in the medical literature may cast some doubt on this claim, as there are several reports associating aspartame with neurological disorders including migraine, epilepsy and, in one review, an increased incidence of brain tumours. The company strongly disputes these findings, but acknowledges that the sweetener is a hazard to people who cannot metabolise an ingredient, phenylalanine — which applies to some 2,800 people in the UK alone

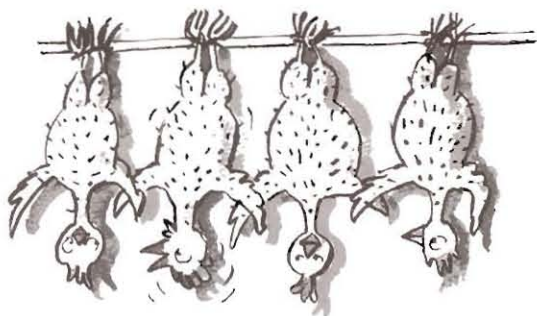
Two seconds view

How can a meat inspector at a slaughterhouse tell if a carcass is fit to eat? There is no time for a bacteriological assay. There is little time for an examination of the internal organs. Even looking at the skin is a rushed job — chicken carcasses, for example, pass along the line every two seconds.

So all an inspector can do is check there are no obvious blemishes — that the feathers have been removed and there are no blood clots or tumours visible. Who gains from this? The producers, of course, for the exercise is little more than a glorified quality control service ensuring the

meat looks good enough to be sold to the public whether or not it is fit to eat.

Does this sound like an ill-informed critique from an outspoken consumer group, or the view of an authoritative government report? The latter, of course, although from the USA. It is part of a call to make the industry pay for its own inspection services, being proposed by the US Government General Accounting Office (GAO RCED-98-224). Meat inspection currently costs US tax payers \$271 million annually but, says the report, does little to prevent contaminated meat from entering the market.



According to Andy Warhen, every chicken gets two seconds of fame!

A potato is a pesticide

The Internet Newspaper *Rachel's Weekly* reports that Monsanto has registered a potato variety as a pesticide with the US Environmental Protection Agency. The potato has been genetically engineered to repel any Colorado beetle that might nibble its leaves, by using a gene

fragment taken from the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis*, which produces a protein toxic to the beetles. With the *Bt* gene present in every cell of the potato, the potato itself can be registered as a pesticide.

Covering your back

We were delighted to receive a 12-page fax from PR firm Citigate promoting a new insurance product from underwriters Beazley and Enterprise Consortium called 'Restaurant Protect'.

Restaurant Protect provides insurance to catering companies to cover them if they suffer a loss of income due to an outbreak of food poisoning. The insurance also provides 'crisis public relations

support' to help 'restore shattered reputations'.

We say: *What about farmers?* They could well do with a policy to cover them against lost income and bad reputations following food borne illnesses — such as salmonella and e-coli. And what about governments? Perhaps Enterprise Consortium would like to cover MAFF's £4 billion mis-handling of the BSE crisis?

Satisfactory ban

'All our customers are satisfied customers,' is the proud boast of the Somerfield chain of stores, which includes Kwik Save.

How do they know? Simple — if you are not a satisfied customer then you are banned from their stores!

David Sutcliffe of Anglesey, North Wales, wrote regularly to his local Kwik Save pointing out products which were being sold beyond their best before dates, or items which were being sold at different prices in different branches. On leaving the store one day, he was handed a

sealed envelope from the local manager, which told Mr Sutcliffe he was no longer welcome.

'I told the manager he was a bit drastic,' said Mr Sutcliffe, 'but he replied "You're a dissatisfied customer. We don't want dissatisfied customers — you should take your business elsewhere."' A company spokesperson said 'We only take such action to ensure the smooth operational running of the store.'

They're at it again!

Remember the row over Pact margarine? The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) were critical of the fat-laden product that not only came in a heart-shaped pack but also linked its omega-3 oil content with the Department of Health's advice to eat more fish to prevent heart disease.

The ASA upheld a complaint that the package gave consumers the impression that eating the product was good for the heart, and the authority told MD Foods, the makers, to avoid giving the impression that Pact could impart a coronary care benefit. In its defence, the company claimed they were not claiming that the product itself was beneficial for the heart, only the omega-3 it contained.

Now we find a Norwegian company, Fjordland, has launched an omega-3 rich margarine in — yes — heart-shaped tubs. 'Eating four slices

of bread spread with our product will give consumers their daily recommended consumption of omega-3,' said a company spokesperson, implying once again that the margarine is an adequate substitute for fish.

Who manufactures the margarine for Fjordland? Our dear friends at MD Foods.

■ Meanwhile, our seven complaints against the advertisements MD Foods were running last Autumn in which they implied that the folic acid added to their foods would help prevent heart disease, are being adjudicated upon by the ASA (see last issue of the Food Magazine). We understand that the ASA is likely to find in our favour on every count.

