

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food

Published by The Food Commission

Issue 45 ♦ Apr/Jun 1999 ♦ £3.95

The GM Scandal

The introduction of GM food will go down in history, not as a food scare, but as a scandal.

Public concern about GM food reached fever pitch earlier this year with newspaper headlines condemning so-called 'Frankenstein foods'. Government ministers dismissed much of the reporting as 'hysterical'. But behind the headlines lie serious issues about the safety of GM foods, concerns for the environment and the way in which decisions about GM food are taken. The *Financial Times*, not known for its hysterical reporting, summed up the criticisms: 'The government's handling of the issue has been characterised by cosy commercial relationships, ministerial confusion and a disregard for official environmental advice.' (5 February 1999).

The Food Commission says it is a scandal that:

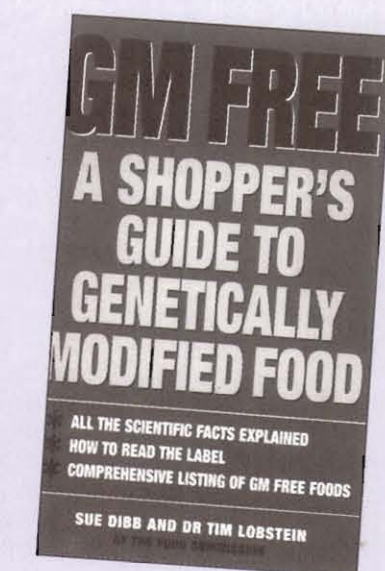
- GM food was initially introduced without proper public consultation, without segregation of crops and without any labelling
- even with new labelling rules we still can't always tell whether we are eating it or not
- companies may be allowed to call a food GM free even when it contains 2% GM ingredients (5% if you are unlucky enough to live in Australia or New Zealand)
- safety testing is not sufficiently rigorous to detect unpredictable effects of gene modifications
- no allergy testing of GM foods is required even though genetic changes may increase the risk of allergens
- scientific evaluation is based on evidence supplied by the companies wishing to have their products approved

- some GM ingredients such as enzymes don't need any approval whatsoever
- too many government committee members who decide on which GM foods and crops can be allowed have links to biotech or food companies
- inadequate precautions are being taken to protect organic farms or conventional farms without GM crops from cross contamination from nearby GM crops
- no-one is likely to be held responsible if something goes wrong.

Hidden GM ingredients - see our special Checkout feature on pages 9-11

US attempts to abandon irradiation labelling

US shoppers may soon lose the right to know if food has been irradiated. The US Food and Drug Administration is proposing that irradiated food need no longer be labelled as such, or can be described with euphemisms such as 'cold pasteurisation'. The Food Commission fears that a US decision may influence other regulatory bodies around the world to drop labelling standards. For full story see page 3.



GM free - a shopper's guide

The Food Commission's GM FREE, A Shoppers Guide to Genetically Modified Food is hot off the press. Its comprehensive listing of nearly 2,000 brand name products and company statements enable shoppers to choose genuinely GM free foods and avoid those which may contain a host of hidden GM ingredients. Authors Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein also explain the issues behind the headlines and how to read labels for GM ingredients. The book is available in good bookshops, or through the Food Commission (see page 18).



The international Radura symbol which the US wants to remove from irradiated food.

Get the facts with the Food Magazine

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

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

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

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■ Issue 45 of *The Food Magazine* - Apr / Jun 1999. ISSN 0953-5047.

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■ Printed by Spider Web, 14-20 Sussex Way, London N7 6RS. ■ Printed on recycled paper.

■ Retail distribution by Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN. ■ Unless otherwise indicated all items are the copyright © The Food Commission (UK) Ltd 1999 and are not to be reproduced without written permission. ■ The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Food Commission

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Choice, whose choice?

'Choice' has become the mantra of our times. But should we feel reassured by all the choices we are offered whenever we walk into anything other than the smallest supermarket?

Supermarkets give us the illusion that the customer is king (or queen) and that we are truly living in a free market. But like any illusion, look a little closer, and it has gone.

What value is it to have the choice between one type of over processed pap and another if our voices are not being heard where it matters, where the crucial decisions are being taken about food?

GM food is but the latest scandal. This largely untested technology has been foisted on an unwitting public, without any proper public debate about whether, we the consumers, who are supposed to wield so much power, need it or want it.

Now, after the banana wars, we're promised beef wars. Who, if all other factors were equal, would choose to eat beef that had been produced from cattle pumped with steroid hormones to make them grow faster? Yet the US is demanding that European importers should accept US beef, regardless of the way in which it is produced, and with nothing on the label to tell us how it has been produced.

Simply saying we don't want it, or that we don't believe cattle should be used as meat machines in this way, doesn't cut much ice with the new trade agreements of the global 'free market'. Things could be worse. In the USA the authorities are proposing to abolish the labelling of irradiated foods, or proposing that irradiated food can just be labelled as undergoing 'cold pasteurisation'.

And in high places who is making the decisions? As John Verrall writes on page 4, powerful trade interests are manipulating both national and international regulatory agencies. In a tacit acknowledgement of this bias, the UK government has accepted that there is insufficient representation of consumer and environmental concerns in expert committees, and in particular that too many committee members charged with approving GM crops on the government's ACRE committee have close links to the biotech industry which they are supposed to be regulating. 'Industry capture' and 'revolving doors' are not new.

What is imperative is that such accusations should never be made of the new Food Standards Agency, which is slowing inching its way into being. Yet it seems the Whitehall mandarins are finding it hard to shake off their veil of secrecy. As a Select Committee of MPs looking at the Food Standard Agency proposals said last month, 'the openness and transparency of the Agency, which is fundamental to its aim of creating public confidence in itself and thus in it work to ensure standards and safety in the food chain, may not be sufficient.'

Openness and transparency are essential first steps to ensuring greater consumer confidence in food regulation. But they are only the first steps. A change of culture at the heart of the civil service is needed, and a change of approach which puts consumer safety and good health above commercial freedoms and company profit.

At the centre lies the issue of food quality and the need to defend food standards, and not to allow overflowing supermarket shelves and the appearance of choice to deceive us. We don't want a choice between different poor standards. We want to choose the best.

Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein

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Advertising Policy.

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

If you are not a regular subscriber to the *Food Magazine* why not take out your own subscription and help support the Food Commission's work? We 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 18 for subscription details.

FDA plans to remove food irradiation labelling requirements

The US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) is planning to remove all current labelling requirements for irradiated food or to require companies to use euphemisms such as 'cold pasteurization' or 'electronic pasteurisation'. Consumer groups are lobbying to maintain the requirement that irradiated foods clearly say 'treated with radiation' or 'treated by irradiation' alongside the Radura symbol.

The FDA says irradiated food is safe and although 77% of consumers in the USA say they don't want it (according to a CBS poll in 1997) the FDA has approved it for essentially all foods, including fruit and vegetables and meat. In 1997 Bill Clinton signed into law a Congressional bill reducing the size of the irradiation label. Behind the FDA's current proposal is the fear of irradiation's proponents that even the current labelling requirements - a tiny statement no bigger than the ingredients, and no statement at all for irradiated components of mixed food - is an impediment to its widespread use.

The US-based Campaign for Food Safety (formerly the Pure Food

Campaign) which is campaigning to maintain consumers' freedom of choice says 'Irradiation has powerful friends in the food processing and nuclear industries, the medical establishment and the Federal government. For several years they have been engaged in a covert public relations campaign to convince the public that irradiation is the answer to food safety problems, like contaminated Guatemalan raspberries and lunch meat. But these problems are overwhelmingly concentrated in the meat and poultry processing business. Irradiation is really just a quick (and temporary) fix for poor slaughterhouse sanitation, and a way of disposing of nuclear wastes by selling them to private industry and leaving the taxpayers to fund the inevitable clean-up costs.'

The Food Commission has made its own submission to the FDA calling for clear labelling requirements to be maintained using the terms 'treated with radiation' or 'treated by irradiation'. 'As irradiation is a process that can change the texture, taste, storage characteristics and nutrients of a food, the use of the

process should be disclosed so as not to mislead the consumer,' the Food Commission says.

The Food Commission is concerned that US changes to labelling requirements will have a global impact. Codex Alimentarius, the international body which sets food standards, currently requires labelling of irradiated foods. But if the US eliminates this requirement, US food exporters, under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) can say that the Codex requirements are a restraint on trade, effectively preventing other countries

from restricting the import of unlabelled irradiated foods.

■ Submissions to the FDA proposal 'Irradiation in the production, processing and handling of food' (Docket #98N-1038) must be made before May 18. The FDA's proposal is posted at <http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/98fr/021799a.txt>

■ For further information on how to make a submission to this proposal contact The Campaign for Food Safety, Tel: (213) 387 5122 or email doder@hsc.usc.edu. Website: <http://www.purefood.org>

Unlabelled irradiated shellfish

Kent County Council trading standards officers found irradiated shellfish without any labelling, on sale last December. Two out of nine samples of shellfish were found to be irradiated, one of mussels and one of prawns.

Clive Bainbridge, head of KCC trading standards, said 'The shops

involved (one of which was a national supermarket chain) have removed the products from sale, but legal proceedings are being considered against both the retailers and the importers.'

■ For information call 0345 585497

Food Standards Agency inches forward

The recent government debacle over genetically modified food, with government departments split over policy issues clearly illustrated the need for the Food Standards Agency to be up and running, writes Sue Dibb. After a long wait, which raised questions about the government's commitment to the new Agency, the draft Bill to set up the Agency was finally published at the end of January, along with consultation over funding for the new agency.

The draft Bill has been broadly welcomed, particularly by consumer groups, including the Food Commission. Although any serious review of its contents in the media was distracted by 'outrage' over the unfairness of a £90 levy on food businesses, regardless of their size.

What mainly concerns consumer organisations now is that the timeframe to get the Agency up and running is still not clear. Furthermore many of the practical details of the Agency's work, including who will head it and the selection criteria for its 'Commissioners' have yet to be determined.

During February and March a Select Committee of MPs carried out a speedy examination of the Bill and the work of the Agency. Their report raises some concerns and makes a number of recommendations. These include concern that:

- responsibility for an overall, consistent food-related health promotion message is unclear.
- the openness and transparency of the Agency, which is

fundamental to its aim of creating public confidence in itself and thus in its work to ensure standards and safety in the food chain, may not be sufficient.

- the Agency lacks scope to intervene in the pesticides and veterinary medicines regulatory process and has no direct role in monitoring the impact of pesticides and veterinary medicines after their introduction.
- the Agency's research budget of £23 million is insufficient for a national agency that is intended to have national and international scientific authority sufficient for it to hold people's confidence and to influence debate.

The Committee's recommendations include:

- The Agency should be guided by a clear presumption in favour of openness and that the case for non-publication by the Agency on account of commercial confidentiality is one that has to be made strenuously rather than simply accepted.
- the Government should implement a graduated system of levy funding as the Committee believe that the flat rate principle is contrary to natural justice.
- the levy scheme should be extended to encompass a licensing scheme.

Soya linked to dementia says FDA Tox Center

Long-term consumption of soya products may cause dementia says the FDA's National Center for Toxicological Research. The FDA Centre is opposing the agency's proposed health claim linking soya protein consumption to a reduced risk of coronary heart disease on the grounds that research shows some soya isoflavones are toxic. Soya isoflavones may also cause thyroid abnormalities, including goitre and autoimmune thyroiditis says the submission.

■ Food Labeling & Nutrition News, March 10, 1999. Copies of the submission can be ordered by calling 001 202 887 6320 ref: 9FLN 2204).

Recycled packaging contaminating food

A government study has found that foods such as pizza and breakfast cereals are being contaminated by chemicals from recycled cardboard packaging. The chemical, diisopropylphenylthale (DIPN) managed to contaminate foods even when the cardboard was protected by a film wrap. While the study said there was no evidence of a risk to health, it concluded that not enough was known about the effects of DIPN on humans and has demanded further studies over the next three years.

■ MAFF Food Surveillance Information Sheet, No 169, January 1999.

Vegetarian mothers and sons

Research at the Institute of Child Health at Bristol University has found that vegetarian mothers appear more likely to have a baby boy born with a genital defect than meat-eating mothers. In a study of nearly 8,000 mothers, vegetarians were nearly five times more likely to give birth to a boy with a malformed penis, in a condition known as hypospadias where the opening of the penis is on the underside rather than the tip.

The rare condition can be corrected by surgery but more research is needed, say the researchers, to find out why the boys of vegetarian mothers may be at greater risk. They

suggest that crop pesticides or phytoestrogens (found most commonly in soya foods) could be behind hormonal imbalances leading to defects.

■ For more information: Andrea Sherriff 0117 928 5251

Lindane ban demanded

A leaked confidential European Union report recommends that powerful insecticide Lindane be suspended from sale. The report which was submitted by the Austrian Government last December has yet to be acted on by the EU. The Food Commission is supporting the Pesticides Trust, Friends of the Earth, Unison and the Women's Environmental Network in its demand that lindane be withdrawn immediately from sale in the UK.

Lindane is used as a spray on apples, wheat and maize, as well as a timber treatment. The Austrian report lists a number of harmful effects of the chemical including damage to the nervous and immune systems, hormone disruption, birth defects and cancer.

■ For more information: David Buffin, Pesticides Trust 0171-274 8895

Regulatory agencies 'have been manipulated' over BST

Codex Alimentarius, the international body which sets food standards, and its scientific committees have been accused of being manipulated by companies such as Monsanto, over their safety assessment of BST. Writing to the President of the European Commission John Verrall, a retired scientist and observer at Codex meetings, says 'The ways and means by which rbST was re-evaluated last year strengthens our belief that powerful politico-economic interests and multinational companies exercise improper influence and control in the work of Codex Alimentarius and its scientific committees, whose supposed primary task is to protect human health.'

The Genetics Forum and the Soil Association are among organisations that are endorsing Verrall's concerns and supporting calls for the JECFA recommendation that BST be granted approval at the Codex Alimentarius Commission in June this year be declared "invalid", pending a full independent and open investigation into the role of the applicant company, the method of selecting the JECFA scientists which made its review and enough time be allowed for public scrutiny of the data submitted for its re-evaluation.

considered by Codex at its meeting in June 1999.

Verrall accuses JECFA of a 'lack of transparency and secretive operation, allowing the distortion of scientific evidence.' In continuing to claim that BST is safe for humans Verrall accused JECFA of 'totally ignoring' the lack of any long term or chronic safety tests of BST or evidence that IGF-1 is not destroyed by pasteurisation or digestion in the gut and the suggestion that increased levels could lead to cancers.

Of particular concern is the composition of JECFA. Verrall highlights a number of apparent serious conflicts of interests of members of the Committee including that of Dr Margaret Miller, from the Center for Veterinary Medicine at the US Food & Drug Administration, a rapporteur for the committee and a key principal player in the JECFA meeting. She is said to be a former Monsanto BST researcher and as a high-ranking FDA official was responsible for reviewing the human health safety aspects of BST. Miller also is said to have published articles for Monsanto while employed at the FDA. According to the US GAO (General Accounting Office) her participation in BST's application review process 'was a violation of the conflict of interest rules'.

Verrall also cites Michael Taylor who was the FDA's Deputy Commissioner for Policy at the time that Monsanto's BST was approved, as having previously been an attorney for Monsanto. Taylor has now resumed working with Monsanto.

Verrall's report calls for urgent action: 'The significance of the BST saga internationally has demonstrated beyond question that there are inadequate safeguards which allow industry and private interests to dominate governments and international bodies.'

■ **The Manipulation of Codex Alimentarius**, report to Mr J Santer, President of the European Commission, March 1999 by John Verrall, MRPS, DBA
■ John Verrall is a pharmaceutical chemist with 35 years experience in the pharmaceutical industry. He takes a particular interest in the use, misuse and abuse of products in their veterinary and animal health applications.



"I don't mind the mastitis, it's the worries about human health...!"

submissions regarding BST. While its full report is not yet published, its 'Summary and Conclusions' document concluded that approval should be given to BST. This will now be

JECFA (the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives) is the scientific advisory body which considers matters relating to food additives and veterinary drugs in food and sets standards for their use. It makes its recommendations to the Codex Alimentarius Commission of the WHO/FAO. At its 50th meeting in March last year, JECFA considered

BST campaign latest

European regulators are currently deciding the future of the controversial milk boosting hormone, BST (bovine somatotropin). The EU moratorium on its use in Europe runs out at the end of the year and the EU is facing pressure from the US, where BST is permitted, to lift its ban.

Now two new reports from EU scientific committees will add weight to the concerns over animal welfare problems in cows and increase

fears about the safety of milk produced using the hormone.

In March the EU's Scientific Committee on

Animal Health and Animal Welfare (1) concluded that BST increases udder infections (mastitis), foot and leg disorders and reproductive disorders and cows are likely to suffer injection site reactions. These increases in the incidence of diseases is 'likely to increase the usage of veterinary medicines which may lead to resistance to antimicrobials with consequences for the health of humans, cattle and other animals,' the report concludes. The Committee 'is of the opinion that BST should not be used in dairy cows.'

While there is now a substantial body of evidence supporting animal welfare concerns, there is also increasing evidence being raised about the possible human health impact of consuming milk and dairy products produced from BST treated cows. This has now been examined by another EU expert committee and its findings published in March (2).

BST-injected cows have an increased milk yield of around 10-15% but there is also a consequent increase in the growth factor, known as IGF-1, in the milk produced. BST was approved in the US in 1994 on the basis that both BST and IGF-1 were destroyed in the gut. This is now known not to be the case. The EU experts say that in addition to the association between IGF-1 and some

cancers, the Committee noted that 'the possible contribution of life span exposure towards dietary IGF-1 and related proteins...to gut parapsychology particularly of

infants and to gut associated cancers needs to be evaluated'.

Additionally the Committee identifies possible risks to consumers from potential changes in milk protein composition 'which might favour allergic reactions' and an increase risk of antibiotic residues in milk with consequences for antibiotic resistant bacteria.

Both reports will add considerable weight to campaigns urging the EU to strengthen its moratorium on the use of BST in Europe. The original moratorium was introduced on socio-economic grounds that BST could lead to unwanted increases in European milk production and threaten the livelihoods of small farmers. Such grounds for a ban leave Europe open to a challenge from the US that it is restricting trade under World Trade Organisation rules. But a ban based on health risks is permitted if these can be scientifically substantiated.

Euro vets ban milk hormone
EUROPEAN vets have rejected artificial milk boosters because of increased health and welfare problems for cows.

Canada refuses to permit BST

Canada, as a trading partner with the US, has been under pressure from the US to approve BST. According to Canadian press reports several scientists commissioned to review the safety of BST accused their managers of threatening their jobs and pressuring them into approving drugs they consider unsafe, although their complaint was dismissed by a labour board. One of the scientists also told a Senate Committee that Monsanto had offered government scientists a bribe of research money if they

approved the drug, an allegation the company has denied.

But despite these pressures and after eight years in which BST has been under review in Canada, in January this year Health Canada announced that it would not approve the use of BST. Experts appointed by the Canadian Veterinary Medicine Association have concluded that there are legitimate animal welfare concerns associated with the use of the hormone.

Monsanto is reputed to have said that it can live with concerns that BST causes increased animal welfare problems but that it would be concerned if regulatory bodies outside the US link BST to human health concerns. No doubt this would open up the possibility that the FDA might be under pressure to re-evaluate the drug in the light of such evidence.

References:

1. Report on Animal Welfare Aspects of the Use of BST, Report of the EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare, March, 1999.
2. EU Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures Relating to Public Health, Report on Public Health Aspects of the use of Bovine Somatotropin, March 1999.

■ Both reports are available on the internet from DG24 at the Commission: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24>



In Spring 1988 the Food Commission was warning that BST may be linked to health problems.

Cholesterol cutters battle it out

The manufacturers of two new spreads which aim to lower cholesterol are battling with regulators to get their products onto supermarkets shelves. In the UK Benecol, made by the Finnish company Raisio, has had a high profile launch, including TV ads featuring 'brainy' Carole Vorderman but is having problems getting US approval. Meanwhile its rival, Flora pro.activ made by Unilever has foundered, at least temporarily, on the rocks of the European approval process.

Both products go further than any previous 'functional' food in claiming to treat a particular disease risk factor - elevated cholesterol. The 'active' ingredients are 'phytosterols' also known as plant stanols. Those used in Benecol come from wood pulp, while Flora's is from soya. Phytosterols are biologically active compounds which it is claimed can inhibit cholesterol absorption and reduce blood levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol by up to 14%.

In Europe, Benecol has had an easier regulatory ride, in effect side-stepping the EU approval process.

As the product was already on sale in Finland before the EU Novel Food Regulations came into effect in May 1997, it didn't need to go through the



approval procedure that is now holding up the European launch of Flora's pro.activ. Although the Netherlands gave pro.activ an initial approval, Germany and Sweden are now raising concerns about the safety of the product and demanding further tests. The UK's Food Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes both state that products containing phytosterols are 'not nutritionally appropriate for young children and breast-feeding mothers'.

Meanwhile in the US the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has told McNeil Products, the subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson that is distributing Benecol in the US, that it cannot

market the product as a 'dietary supplement' as the company intended to do and so avoid having to seek special approval for the product. The FDA has, understandably, said that Benecol is a food and the company must either have plant stanols approved as a new 'additive' or seek GRAS (Generally Recognised as Safe) status for the ingredient. In December the company confirmed that it would be applying for GRAS status.

The Food Commission is questioning whether it would be more appropriate for products such as Benecol and pro.activ to be sold at pharmacy counters rather than to the general public on supermarket shelves. Many dietitians and health organisations are concerned that the focus on 'quick fix' products will divert attention from ways of reducing cholesterol by eating a healthier diet.

Ironically, those most at risk of heart disease - people on a low income - are least likely to benefit. With Benecol costing five times as much as ordinary spreads few can afford it.

Hey NONI no

A 'health' drink, called NONI Juice, which has been banned in Finland for making outrageous health claims, has been launched in the UK by a company called Resonance. NONI is one of an increasing number of products offering dubious health benefits which are sold via individuals by what is called network marketing - a legal version of pyramid selling.

According to its US manufacturers the juice contains an extract from the Noni fruit from the islands of French Polynesia. In November last year the Finnish authorities banned the 'import, export, trade stocking, offering and all other supplying' of NONI as the sales brochure for the drink claimed the product can relieve HIV, cancer, diabetes, rheumatism, blood pressure, cholesterol, psoriasis, allergies, heart rhythm abnormality, chronic inflammation and aching joints. The brochure even urges people to reduce dosage of prescription medicines.

The Finnish National Food Authority (NFA) says NONI could mislead consumers by giving the impression that the product has medicinal properties. The NFA is also asking whether the ingredient from the plant *Morinda citrifolia* should be regarded as a novel foodstuff and thus require approval under the EU's Novel Foodstuffs Regulation.

Doors open for organic farming

What are the main constituents of a chicken's diet? Not the free-living forest bird in its natural habitat, of course, but the cooped-up egg and meat machines of modern British farming.

They eat, according to the latest report from the SAFE Alliance, a diet of soya and wheat. For battery egg-layers, the diet is 63% wheat, 22% soya and soya oil, 10% limestone and 3% grass.

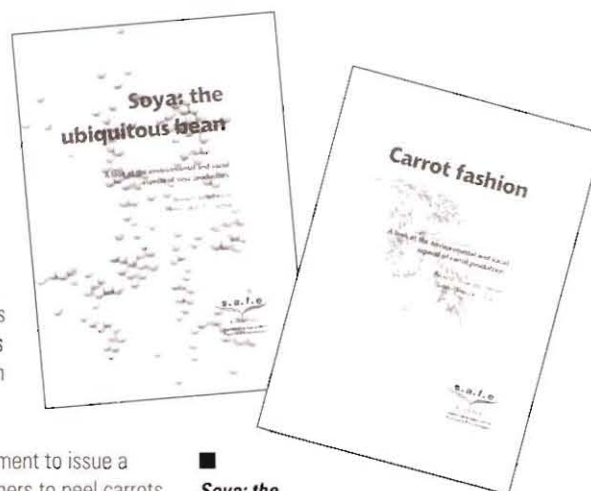
For the broiler bird destined for a Sunday roast, the diet is 66% wheat, 22% soya and soya oil, 5% fats and 4% fishmeal.

Needless to say that for both birds, the chances that some of the soya is genetically modified are high. Fifty percent of the US soya crop was

grown from GM seed last year, and the US is both the world's largest soya producer by far and a significant exporter to Europe. But with rising concern about GM ingredients, suppliers of non-GM soya may corner a growing market, especially as organic livestock farmers are forbidden from using GM feed for their animals.

In a second SAFE Alliance report we learn that carrots remain Britain's second favourite vegetable after potatoes. British farmers have been increasing their production of the vegetable by increasing the amount they can get from every acre of land — the yields are now averaging over eleven pounds of carrots from every square metre.

How do they get so many carrots from the soil? By throwing large quantities of fertilisers and drenching the plants in pesticides to prevent any loss to insect. The high levels of agrochemical use led the UK government to issue a warning to consumers to peel carrots and remove the carrot tops in order to reduce the risk of consuming excess residues. Organically-grown alternatives are recommended.



■ **Soya: the ubiquitous bean and Carrot fashion** are available price £4 each from Sustain (formerly the SAFE Alliance and the National Food Alliance), 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, tel 0171 837 1228, fax 0171

Consumer groups call for greater regulation of 'functional foods'

The Food Commission and leading consumer-advocacy organisations in Japan and the United States are calling on government regulatory authorities to crackdown on the marketing of so-called 'functional foods' made with herbal medicines, amino acids, plant extracts and other unconventional ingredients. The groups urge that authorities ensure that all such ingredients are safe and that label claims are valid.

'Regulatory authorities are failing to protect the public from questionable ingredients and misleading claims,' says Bruce Silverglade of the Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest one of the member organisations of the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO). IACFO's report *'Functional Foods - Public Health Boon or 21st Century Quackery?'* details how companies take advantage of lax regulatory environments to market products of questionable benefit.

Products highlighted in the report include:

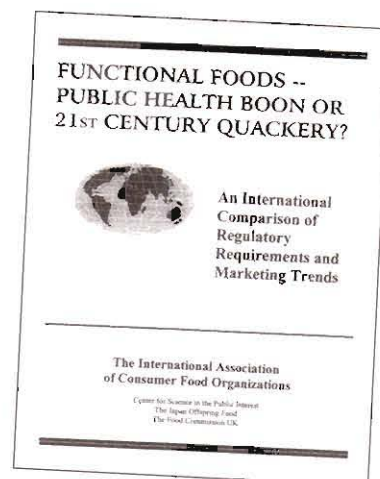
- Hain's Chicken Broth and Noodles with Echinacea, sold in the US, claims on the label that Echinacea helps 'support the immune system'.
- Brain Gum is a chewing gum sold in the US that claims to 'improve

concentration'. It contains phosphatidyl serine, a fat-like substance extracted from soybeans that is also found naturally in brain cells. Both of these products are sold as 'dietary supplements' presumably to avoid government rules regarding food claims.

- VegitaBeta is an orange-coloured soft drink sold in Japan. The label states that the beverage, which is manufactured by Coca-Cola, is a 'health-supporting drink'. The drinks contains small amounts of fruit and vegetable juice but is mainly sugar and water.
- Fibe-Mini is a fibre-fortified beverage and is officially certified by the Japanese government as a Food for Specified Health Use (FOSHU). The manufacturer also sells a similar, but unapproved product, called Fibe-Mini Plus that is fortified with fibre and beta-carotene, typically sold side-by-side in stores making it difficult for shoppers to distinguish the approved from the unapproved.
- Omega sliced white bread is sold in the UK with a label claiming that omega-3 fatty acids in the bread 'may influence the fats in the blood in a way that is healthier for the heart' and is loaded with heart-shaped

symbols. The UK has no official standards stipulating how much scientific evidence must exist before such claims can be made.

■ A summary of IACFO's report, *Functional Foods - Public Health Boon or 21st Century Quackery*, is available on the internet at www.cspinet.org. A full copy can be obtained by contacting Amisha Upadhyaya at +1 202 332 9110 x 362 or by fax on +1 202 265 4954.



We win additives challenge, Roche withdraws Redoxon

Our feature in the last issue of the *Food Magazine* (Remedies with hidden extras) exposed the presence of an illegal food colouring, E127, in the vitamin pills Redoxon Slow Release, made by Roche Consumer Health. After a few days and a consultation with their local trading standards officers, Roche agreed they would not only change their formulations but also take the product off the market, recalling it from thousands of chemists stores around the country.



We win Pact ad challenge, and MD Foods kills Pact

Our seven complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority against MD Foods, makers of the Pact range of nutrient-boosted products for their misleading advertising (see front cover of the *Food Magazine*, issue 43) were all upheld by the ASA in February. By the time their ruling was made public, MD Foods had not only withdrawn the advertisements but had taken all their Pact range of products off the shelves.



Top adverts

Our colleagues at *Marketing Week* have listed the advertising budgets for the UK's top spending companies. Not surprisingly, food companies feature strongly, and also not surprisingly very few adverts appear to promote fresh fruit and vegetables compared with refined and highly processed foods. Here are the top ten food advertisers for 1998:

	Adspend £m
Kellogg	67.1
Mars	54.1
Van den Bergh	49.2
Coca-Cola	44.1
McDonald's	44.0
Sainsbury's	43.5
Kraft Jacobs Suchard	32.7
Bird's Eye Walls	31.8
Nestlé Rowntree	28.4
Asda	26.4

FREEZE Campaign goes from strength to strength

The Five Year Freeze Campaign, which the Food Commission is supporting, is now backed by fifty-five organisations. New supporters include the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Local Government Association. Companies and trade bodies such as the Body Shop, Neal's Yard Remedies, the Fresh Food Company and the Health Food Manufacturers Association have also signed up.

The campaign is encouraging everyone to write to their MP calling for a five year freeze on genetically engineered food and the growing of GE crops. We've included a FREEZE postcard with this magazine. All you have to do is fill in the name of your MP, stick on a stamp and put it in the post box.

■ For extra copies of the postcard contact Sandra Bell at the FREEZE campaign on 0171-837 0642 or email her at <gjc10@dial.pipex.com>.



GM company facts

Du Pont, the world's second largest chemical company and fifth largest agrochemical company, has acquired Pioneer International, the world's largest seed company. Du Pont also has a food processing company, Optimum Grain. Du Pont can now sell you the seed, sell you the chemicals to grow the seed, purchase your harvest, and process the harvest for American breakfasts.

Monsanto is the world's second largest seed company and the third largest agrochemical company, although its herbicide Roundup is the world's top-selling weedkiller. Monsanto also makes the fat-substitute Simplesse and the artificial sweetener aspartame (NutraSweet).

Novartis (formally Sandoz and Ciba-Geigy) is third largest among

world seed companies, and is the world's fourth largest pharmaceutical firm (having recently bought the giant drug company Astra), and is the ninth largest veterinary medicine firm. It makes the nicotine substitute Nicotelle and the bedtime drinks Ovaltine and Options.

Zeneca, formerly a branch of ICI, is the world's fourth largest agrochemical company, and the fifth largest seed company, and is big in pharmaceuticals.

SmithKline Beecham is tenth largest in pharmaceuticals and is expanding in food, especially soft drinks such as Horlicks, Lucozade and Ribena. It is getting into genetic engineering, and has a world patent, number PCT/EP96/04807, on — you guessed it — GM blackcurrants.

"They've got GM soya, they're sugar-free, hydrogenated, and irradiated, so we thought the PM might like to give them to his children!"



Say 'no' to patents

ActionAid are campaigning to protect the livelihoods of farmers in developing countries. The development charity is concerned that multinational companies are claiming the right, through patents,

to plants which people have eaten and used to treat their families' illnesses for generations. By genetically engineering the plant genes they can claim to 'own' these plants and making farmers pay every time they sow the seeds.

ActionAid wants the UK government to join other EU countries in challenging the recently agreed European Union Directive on patents, which for the first time specifically allows patenting of plant life.



Act Now To Protect The Developing World's Right To Food

■ For details contact ActionAid, Chataway House, Leach Road, Chard, Somerset TA20 1FR. Tel: 01460 238000

Will poor farmers have a choice?

Patented seeds will be expensive. If poor families can't afford to buy them, they won't be able to make a living. Damodar Pareek is a farmers' co-operative worker in Rajasthan - he fears for the future: 'Farmers will have to stop growing food crops. Small farmers will be wiped out and only the larger farmers will survive.'

The extravagant claims made for patented seeds will pressurise farmers to stop the traditional practice of saving seed from one harvest to plant at the next. Instead, they will be encouraged to buy so-called 'improved' (genetically engineered) seeds

and the expensive chemicals needed to grow them.

And to make sure of bigger profits from patented seeds, companies are genetically engineering seeds which will be sterile. So farmers will be forced to buy new seeds at every sowing, at a price set by the companies. If the sterility spreads even farmers using traditional varieties may find themselves denied the vital right to save their seeds and re-plant them next year.

■ Taken from: Can you believe what's happening in the developing world? ActionAid.

CHECKOUT

Gene food to go

In this special **Food Commission** feature to launch our new book, **GM FREE, A shoppers guide to genetically modified food** we look at the hidden GM ingredients we are already eating and list your best bets for **GM FREE** shopping.

Tony Blair sought to reassure us all the GM is perfectly safe: 'I eat it myself' he said eerily echoing John Gummer's ill-fated attempts to reassure us that beef was perfectly safe at the height of mad cow disease. Meanwhile supermarkets, many food manufacturers, local authority caterers, fast food restaurants, celebrity chefs have been dumping GM ingredients just as fast as they can – or at least the ones they have to put on labels. They know that the majority of customers are no longer convinced by official reassurances, preferring not to be guinea pigs in the experiment that is GM food.

But for shoppers anxious to avoid GM foods and ingredients, reading labels isn't always enough. Overleaf we look at the huge range of hidden GM ingredients that you won't find identified on food labels.

"We are removing all GM ingredients including derivatives from St Michael food products as quickly as possible"

Marks & Spencers

"United Biscuits adopted a non-GM strategy 18 months ago and we are moving to source non GM lecithin for McVitie's biscuits"

United Biscuits

"Sainsbury's is committed to eliminating GM ingredients from its own brand products"

J Sainsbury's

"We are actively working to remove GM ingredients and GM derivatives"

Burger King

"We have no plans to introduce GM varieties of sugar beet"

British Sugar

"Our policy is not to have GM ingredients in our own-label products from 1 April 1999 and to remove GM derivatives wherever possible"

Waitrose

Is it safe?

'More research needs to be done. We don't have all the answers. Meanwhile we shouldn't reject GM crops and food out of hand.' Sir Robert May, the government's Chief Scientific Adviser, quoted in *Woman's Own*, 8 March 1999.

It is the lack of research, and specifically independent research, which is at the heart of the debate over the safety of GM food. The current approval system is based on the principle of 'substantial equivalence'. Put simply, this means that, if the GM food is more or less the same as its traditional counterpart, then no special safety tests are required.

Critics of the system, which now include Professor Philip James, a key government advisor on food safety and nutrition and the architect of the new Food Standards Agency, say safety testing

should be more stringent. That's because the process of genetic engineering can have effects which are hard to predict and could throw up new toxins or allergens. This was clearly shown to be the case in the research conducted by Dr Arpad Pusztai, the scientist at the centre of the row over the safety of genetically modified potatoes.

Of course, no food, whether natural or genetically modified, can ever be said to be absolutely safe. But whatever the risks, the majority of consumers say they would like the choice to know what the risk are, what they are eating and to avoid GM products if they wish. In one recent NOP survey, more than three-quarters of the public said there should be a ban on producing GM products until more research is done.

"We find it appropriate not to use material from GM crops"

Weetabix

CHECKOUT

GMs in proces

A huge number of processed foods may contain the derivatives of GM crops, and they don't have to declare 'GM' on the label. Here we take a look at some popular products and the ingredients that could be from GM sources.



▲ Mars said it was removing GM ingredients from its products, but could not guarantee that GM derivatives would also be removed, which might include the soya lecithin, glucose syrup and vegetable fat used in their leading products.

New labelling laws require the presence of GM protein to be declared on the label, at least if it comes from the soya and maize crops named in the legislation. Any other derivatives from these crops, and any other GM products do not at present need to be declared. We took a long look at the products on our shelves and found that a large number contained ingredients and additives that could be from GM sources, but wouldn't have to say so. (Note that we are not saying these are definitely from GM sources, only that they might be and the labelling laws don't help you find out.)

As we indicate in our pictures and the box, the possible GM ingredients include a range of common starches and sugar, fats and oil, as well as many additives. An extended list is given in our book *GM Free*, but the most common ingredients which may be GM-derived include:

- anticaking agents (E570-573)
- caramel colouring (E150)
- carbon black (E153)
- corn syrup, glucose syrup, dextrose, fructose
- emulsifiers (E471-479b)
- enzymes (e.g. chymosin for cheese)
- flavour enhancers (E620-625)
- lecithin (E322)
- maltodextrin
- monosodium glutamate (E621)
- starch and modified starch
- tocopherols (E306-309)
- tomato paste and puree
- unspecified vegetable oils and fats, margarine
- unspecified vegetable protein extracts
- vitamin B2, riboflavin (E101, E101a)
- yeasts for brewing and baking
- xanthan gum (E415)

A to Z of GM-free

Our comprehensive guide GM Free lists nearly two thousand products, giving an 'all clear' or a 'watch out' status. We name hundreds of brands and give a list of manufacturers and their phone numbers to help keep you up to date. Here is just a short selection, from A to, well, Y, indicating the typical ingredients that may be derived from GM crops, and the alternatives that guarantee they are GM free.

Watch out for:

American cheese (BST-produced)
 Baby foods (starch, vegetable oil, maltodextrin)
 Cereal bars (vegetable oil, glucose syrup)
 Dips (tomato paste, starch, oil, xanthan gum)
 Fish fingers (Birds Eye)
 Garlic, peeled (vegetable oil)
 Hot drinks (starch, lecithin, glucose syrup)
 Ice Cream (vegetable fat, lecithin)
 Jelly (glucose syrup, maltodextrin)
 Meat (GM animal feed)
 Noodles (Pot Noodles GM soya)
 Peanut butter (emulsifiers, vegetable fat)
 Rice dishes (tomato paste, vegetable oil)
 Salad dressing (vegetable oil, xanthan gum)
 Tortilla snacks (vegetable oil)
 Veggie-burgers (soy, HVP, vegetable fat)
 Waffles (lecithin, oil, glucose syrup)
 Yeast extract (vegetable extract, riboflavin)

Go for:

organic cheeses
 Baby Organix, Hipp
 Jordans, Doves Farm
 Meridian salsa
 Iceland own-label
 Very Lazy chopped garlic
 Green & Black, Prewetts, Barley Cup
 Loseley
 Just Wholefoods jelly powder
 organic products
 Amoy, Sharwoods
 Whole Earth, Meridian, Essential
 Asian Gourmet, Ye Olde Oak
 Whole Earth, Meridian, Bionova
 Apache, TerraSana
 Cauldron, RealEat, Suma
 Traffo organic
 Essential, Community Foods, Meridian

CHECKOUT

sed foods



▶ In Pot Noodles we not only find possible GM-derived ingredients — soya sauce, tomato paste, vegetable oil and maltodextrin — in Pot Noodles, we also see that the label declares GM soya pieces.

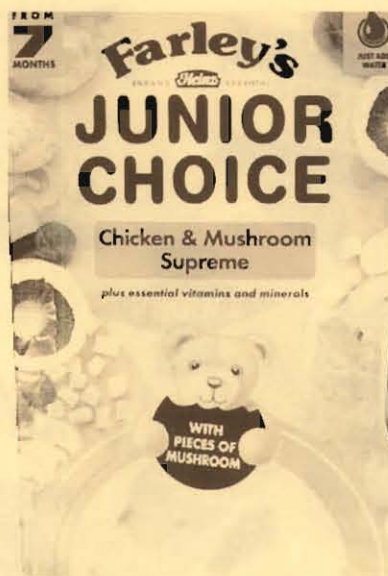
◀ Waitrose has said it is removing all GM ingredients from its own-brand products, including derivatives. That should mean the maize starch, hydrogenated vegetable oil and maltodextrin in this soup is from non-GM sources.



▲ Nestlé (includes Rowntree, Crosse & Blackwell and other companies) said only that they do not sell any products requiring GM labelling under present legislation. They made no comment about GM ingredients and derivatives that don't require labelling, which might include the lecithin and vegetable fat in Kit Kat, and the modified starch and riboflavin in Waistline.



▼ Heinz (which also own Farley's) told us they had no GM ingredients in their products, but could not confirm that derivatives from soya and maize crops such as vegetable oil, maltodextrin and glucose syrup used in their products were also from non-GM sources.



CHECKOUT

Loopy labels

Continuing our look at the loopy world of labels spotted by our sharp-eyed sleuths.



Just kidding

'Just Juice' says this box of tomato juice, and even '100% juice' in smaller print. But the ingredients list admits to 'reconstituted tomato juice, salt, vitamin C'.

You might think that the phrase 'Just Juice' is rather misleading, but before you write to your local Trading Standards office to complain, take another look at the small print. This tells us "Just" is a registered trademark.



Tomato miles

It's Heinz tomato ketchup, and it puts Heinz's address in Hayes, Middlesex. But the ketchup handed out by Burger King is actually made in the USA under a licence, wrapped up in masses of plastic and shipped over to Europe for our delight.

Incidentally, the US version includes fructose, glucose syrup and tomato puree, all of which may be derived from genetically-modified sources — or should that be 'sauces'?

Fat Free Competition

Companies are falling over each other to boast their fat-free worthiness. We've seen bagels that are 98.3% fat free (there is something reassuring about the precise decimal place). We've seen chocolate biscuits that claim to be 85% fat free. And we have eaten crisps that claimed to be 80% fat free.

At 80% fat free we're talking 20% fat, of course, which is equal to one crisp in every five being pure fat. But we are always keen to promote

competition, so in the spirit of competitiveness we are offering a prize to any reader who can come up with the lowest level of 'fat-free' being proclaimed on a food pack. The best we have seen so far is Twiglets Spicy Flavour, which proudly announces that it is '77% fat free.'

Can anyone beat that? 76%? 75%? A copy of our new book *GM Free* to the best entry by July 1st.



Sugar-flavoured

You might choose orange, apple, blackcurrant flavours or cola, but it's not often you get the chance to choose sugar cane flavoured drinks. The ingredients list on this Malaysian product boast 'sugar cane extract and sugar'.

Getting active

Local food initiatives are springing up around the country. They need people, enthusiasm and some good ideas. The first two are up to you, but the third can be helped with a new handbook from the SAFE Alliance.

If you are keen to promote food issues at local level, in communities, local groups or local authorities, or to contribute to local campaigns and to raise awareness of environmental and food issues — then take a look at this toolkit.

Two years ago, Tony Blair told the UN General Assembly for the Environment, that he wanted 'all local authorities in the UK to adopt Local Agenda 21 strategies by the year 2000' and a large part of these strategies involves the development of indicators.

Indicators are simply measures of what is happening. They are used to tell whether any changes are having an impact. They might range from measures of biodiversity in a rural or even an urban setting, or measures of car use for shopping, or measures of village shop accessibility, or rural transport, or incidence of diet-related illness — the list can be long but the decisions about what is useful and relevant are up to the local group.

The toolkit from the SAFE (Sustainable Agriculture, Food and the Environment) Alliance delves into these indicators and how you can develop your own. It helps you to think clearly about how the data can be generated, who will use the results, how relevant they may be to your campaign and how they can be presented and communicated to others.

If, for example, you are interested in organic food, you might want to run a survey of

vegetarian alternatives. Or fair-traded products. Or genetically modified-free products.

The toolkit guides you through the development of indicators, running workshops with facilitators, handling the media, getting information and data, and gives several case studies and a list of useful contacts.

■ Available from the SAFE Alliance (now Sustain) 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, 0171 837 1228, fax 0171 837 1141, e-mail safe@gn.apc.org price £10 institutions, £5 individuals and local groups (multiple copies half price).

Developing the theory...

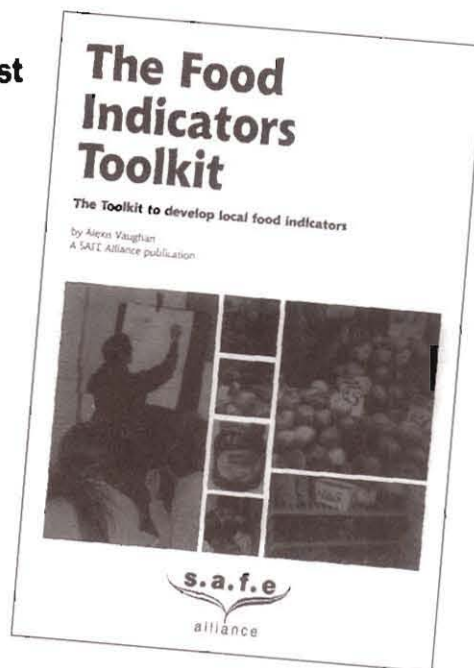


... and getting into action.



- the shelfspace in the supermarkets devoted to top organic products
- the percentage of smaller shops selling organic products
- the availability of alternative schemes such as farmers box schemes for distributing organic food
- the prices of selected items comparing organic and regular versions in different shops
- the use of organic foods by caterers and restaurants in the area
- the use of organic foods by local authority caterers

Or, if you are interested in animal welfare you might ask similar questions about animal-friendly and



Agenda 2000 hits

Environmental groups despaired as the Berlin summit in March threw out the remaining few agri-environment proposals left on the table. Instead the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will carry on with little change, encouraging oversupply of meat and dairy foods and the destruction of fruits and vegetables.

Tim Lobstein reports.

For a few brief hours the reforms agreed in Berlin late last March looked acceptable to observers from wildlife and environmental groups. But as the details became clear it was obvious that the hoped-for improvements in environmental support were not going to happen. An early press release from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) issued as the meeting broke up welcomed the announcements, but later the same day a second RSPB press release condemned the deal with unusual fury. *'The CAP agreement is thus much worse for the environment than thought. Indeed, it is worse than the Commission's original proposals. The Council have fudged the issue of CAP reform.'*

The details of the CAP deal agreed at the Berlin summit show that expenditure on market support schemes will actually rise in the next three years, falling back to present levels by 2006, while funding for rural development (largely regional, structural aid, not agri-environmental schemes) will remain at present levels with no additional funding. The attempt to separate support for farmers from support for the size of their crops has been largely abandoned.

For consumers the deal will mean continued inflated food prices, well above world market levels, and a distortion in the sorts of food produced compared with the food we should be eating more of. Meat will continue to receive

enormous support, both through direct aid and through the aid to cereals, more than half of which are used for animal feed. The dairy industry will continue with their subsidies for full-fat milk and butter. Fruit and vegetables will continue to be withdrawn from the market if prices threaten to fall.

For mainstream European farmers the news was good. According to Franz Fischler, the European Union will remain 'a protected market' and EU farmers will 'continue to have priority access for more than 90% of their production to the most lucrative consumer market in the world'.

The market is being run for producers. The remarkable oversupply of cereals would soon lead to a storage crisis were it not for the ability of farm animals to eat much of the surplus and convert it into meat. In the UK alone we are feeding some 220 million farm animals, converting surplus cereals into smaller quantities of surplus meat and milk. Documents in the 1980s occasionally referred to eggs, poultry-meat and pig-meat as 'processed cereals'.

The latest figures show that Europe produces between 20 and 40 per cent more milk, butter, sugar and beef than we can consume, and can only get rid of this excess by exporting it with huge subsidies to ensure it can compete with US, Canadian and Australian products.

Despite rising interest in fruit consumption, the CAP has (a) paid farmers to remove fruit trees and orchards from production, (b) attempted to cut consumer access by requiring tough standards for the size and appearance of fruit to qualify as edible, and (c) paid large amounts of tax-payers' money to have edible grade fruit withdrawn and destroyed.

EU fruit withdrawals 1996/7

millions of kilograms

Apples	349
Pears	178
Peaches	527
Nectarines	240
Citrus fruit	140

Source: European Commission 1998

Commodity	1999 agreements
Cereals	A cut of 15% in the intervention price by 2002, and maintenance of the 2002 level until 2006. Compensation of at least 50% of the loss of income to be paid. Continued set-aside schemes with compensation payments.
Oilseeds	A cut in direct payments by 30% to 2002, then no cuts to 2006.
Sugar	No changes proposed.
Dairy	No change until 2005, then 15% cuts in butter and milk powder intervention prices and an increase in quotas by 1.5%, phased in by 2008.
Beef	A cut of 20% in the intervention price by 2002. Increases in slaughter premiums (encouraging removal from the market) but also in steer premiums (to stabilise prices) and suckler premiums (to help beef farmers generally).
Fruit and vegetables	No change
Wine	No new vineyard plantings permitted until 2010.

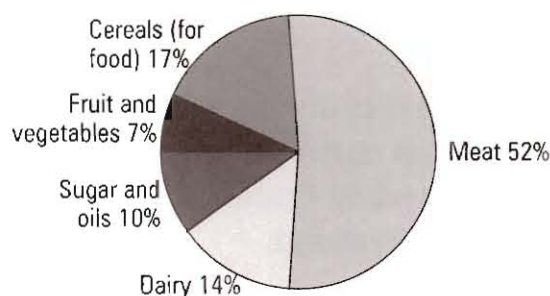
the rocks

Conference call

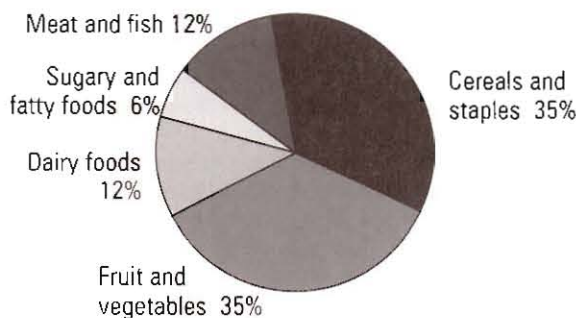
Consumer, environmental, animal rights and health organisations are disappointed at the dealing in Berlin, and now need to collaborate to press for more radical reforms. The European Public Health Alliance is hosting a conference in Brussels in May to look at the environmental, animal welfare, social and health costs of the CAP and the common ground for reform.

■ Details from Jeanette Longfield, Sustain, London (0171 837 1228).

CAP support



Health recommendations



CAP support versus health needs

Expenditure on support for meat and dairy promotes their consumption, while expenditure on fruit and vegetables is used to remove produce from the market. CAP support creates a pattern of production very different to that we should be eating.

Fixing the market

The CAP uses a number of regulatory approaches to influence production. These include the following:

Intervention prices/Withdrawal prices

When the market price falls, farmers and traders have the option to sell to CAP-appointed agencies at a specified intervention price instead. The CAP intervention prices for commodities are set annually. The CAP-purchased products may be destroyed, sold at a loss, given away, exported or kept in intervention stores. Commodities which are destroyed are, in CAP terms, 'withdrawn'.

Storage aid

In addition to intervention purchasing, the EU may allocate payments to farmers and traders to help them put surplus produce into storage through private arrangements.

Import tariffs

If prices on world markets are below those in the EU, imports from outside the EU may face extra payments (tariffs) to ensure they cannot undercut domestic producers.

Export subsidies

These are the inverse of the import tariffs, in which EU producers are paid subsidies on their exports in order to compensate for lower world market prices.

Production aids

Grants may be made to producers of certain commodities as direct payments for their products, or for the size or number of units they own (e.g. olive trees).

Set aside payments

These are payments designed to reduce production, compensating a farmer for the land or production units taken out of use.

Production quotas

Certain commodities which are in chronic oversupply may be restricted using quotas. Milk, for example, is produced to a quota, as is sugar. The quotas themselves have economic value, and farmers may sell, buy or lease them.

Producer levies

These are penalties exacted from producers who exceed their quotas (sometimes called co-responsibility levies).

Slaughter premiums

These are subsidies to meat producers to help meet market fluctuations and help avoid intervention purchasing.

Livestock premiums

These include schemes to encourage hill farmers and extensive cattle breeders by giving extra subsidies. A suckler cow premium is designed to help beef herds without incidentally helping dairy herds.

Orchard grubbing

The CAP offers grants to grub up fruit orchards to reduce fruit production.

Promotional measures

The CAP offers assistance to producers to promote their products and stimulate markets.

Supermarket choices

A recent survey of supermarket shelves revealed some interesting figures.

Tim Lobstein reports.

Supermarkets have excellent public relations and are good at projecting an image of care and concern for their customers. But does that concern extend as far as helping consumers to eat a healthier diet?

Certainly, many stores display healthy eating leaflets. And many chains go so far as to label a selection of their processed foods as being in some way especially good for a healthy diet. But could they go a little further?

The most valuable asset a supermarket has is its shelving. Shelfspace is everything. Food manufacturers will do elaborate deals with supermarkets to ensure their products are given due prominence, even paying cash to obtain the prize positions at the end of each aisle where the trolley has to turn.

Shelf space is selling space. How do the supermarkets use this space? An interesting set of figures compares how different stores use their precious selling space, and in particular how more healthy and less healthy food items are given differing amounts of display space. Take, for example, the display space used for fresh fruit compared with the display space for fruit-flavoured soft drinks. The Food Commission sampled several

types of supermarket and came up with the figures shown in the table.

What should we make of these figures? The shops will tell you that they only use the space to sell what they believe their customers want to buy, and that the differing ratios of fruit to soft drinks shown in the table simply reflect their customers' purchasing habits.

This may be true, but it begs the question of how things will ever change. Spar, for example, by using its selling space to promote soft drinks with virtually no display of fruit, cannot help someone keen to buy a selection of fresh fruits.

It also begs the question of whether supermarkets follow or lead the way towards change. Could they be more proactive in helping their customers shift their diets?

A second set of figures looked at the costs of the cheapest available sliced bread. In every supermarket visited white bread was cheaper than wholemeal, even though we are encouraged to switch our diets more towards wholegrain products.

Thick or thin?

Furthermore, thick-sliced bread was consistently harder to find than medium sliced bread, even though we are encouraged to increase our intake of starchy staple foods. Typically, a thick sliced loaf has 18 slices, a medium sliced loaf 22 slices. Assuming the bread is spread with butter, margarine or some other spread, the ratio of bread to fat is 20% higher in medium sliced bread.

Cheapest loaves available

800g loaves, survey in London January 1999

	Medium sliced	Thick sliced
LIDL		
White	17p	34p
Wholemeal	35p	59
KWIK SAVE		
White	19p	34p
Wholemeal	39p	62p

People shopping for the cheapest loaves will inevitably find they are buying medium sliced white bread, thereby ensuring they have the fattiest diet with the least wholegrain content compared with those people who can afford to pay more.

What does it take to cut a loaf a different thickness? Why should there be such a price premium on thick sliced loaves — nearly 80% at Kwik Save and 100% at Lidl? Can the stores claim that they sell so much more of the medium sliced that they can cut the cost by a half? Or is it that they know that people who want thick sliced will happily pay a bit more for it?

Supermarkets may try to hide behind phrases like 'market forces' and 'we only sell what people want' but nowadays, with just six chains taking over 60% of our weekly shopping budgets, the market is largely controlled by them, and decisions about what people want are largely in their own promotion department's hands.

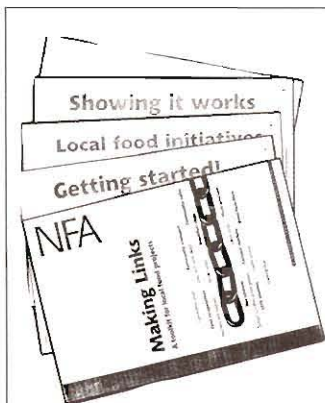
The Office of Fair Trade has referred supermarkets to the Competition Commission (the old Monopolies Commission) as it is worried about the power the companies have. But it isn't just prices we should look at, it is the health implications of supermarket policies, too.

■ Figures from a shopping survey conducted in January 1999, partly reported to the seminar Tackling Inequalities in Health and Diet-Related Disease organised by the National Food Alliance, London, January 1999. For details of the seminar report contact Peta Cottee at Sustain (formerly the National Food Alliance) on 0171 837 1228.

Floor space devoted to fresh fruit compared with soft drinks

(metres of shelving)

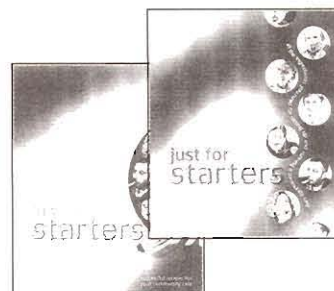
	fruit	soft drinks	ratio
Marks & Spencer	30	14	0.46
Waitrose	70	46	0.66
Sainsbury	96	81	0.84
Safeway	86	106	1.23
Tesco	18	45	2.50
Lidl	26	82	3.15
Kwik Save/Somerfield	5	31	6.20
Spar	4	26	6.50



New NFA projects pack

As other reports on this page show, there is a growing interest in community-based food initiatives. For several years the National Food Alliance has been assisting these initiatives through its Food Poverty Project, building a database of groups around the UK, publishing the newsletter *Let Us Eat Cake* and helping start new initiatives with its 1996 *Food and Low Income* training pack.

Now a new edition of the pack, brought up to date and with much new material, including a printout of the database of projects, has been produced and is available for £20 (or £10 for local groups in the Food Poverty Network). It is available from Sustain (formerly the National Food Alliance), 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, tel 0171 837 1228, fax 0171 837 1141.



Local cafes

A beautifully presented boxed set of two files, one mainly recipes, the other all you need to start up and run a community cafe, including food safety legislation and hygiene, business plans and promotional activities. There's even a floppy disk of software to help you get your business plan sorted out. It is all excellent stuff, but beauty comes at a price. For Scottish community groups you can get the pack for £30, for other Scottish folk it is £45 and for the rest of the UK it is £60. Order from The Publication Dept, Health Education Board for Scotland, Woodburn House, Canaan Lane, Edinburgh EH10 4SG, tel 0131 536 5500.

Which food projects work?

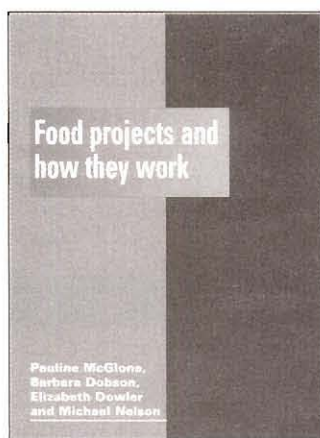
A new publication from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation aims to provide a better understanding of projects that improve access to food for people on low incomes, *reports Jacqui Webster*.

The report looks at how projects function, including why and how they are set up, what they can expect to achieve and how they can help to reduce social and health inequalities. It provides further evidence of the many ways in which food projects can improve people's lives, and it strengthens the argument for longer-term funding and support for such projects.

Drawing on the experiences of 25 projects, including food co-operatives, cook & eat sessions, community cafes, breakfast clubs and homeless projects, the report clearly highlights the many benefits food projects can bring, including:

- improving access to food
- enhancing cooking skills
- increasing confidence
- offering social support and;
- providing common ground for local people and professionals to work together.

The research found that 'there is no single formula which can guarantee the success of a food project or can prescribe which type of project works in a given situation'. Community involvement is identified as an essential ingredient for a project's success, as is secure funding. Current short term funding structures mean that projects struggle to meet on-going running costs. Insecure



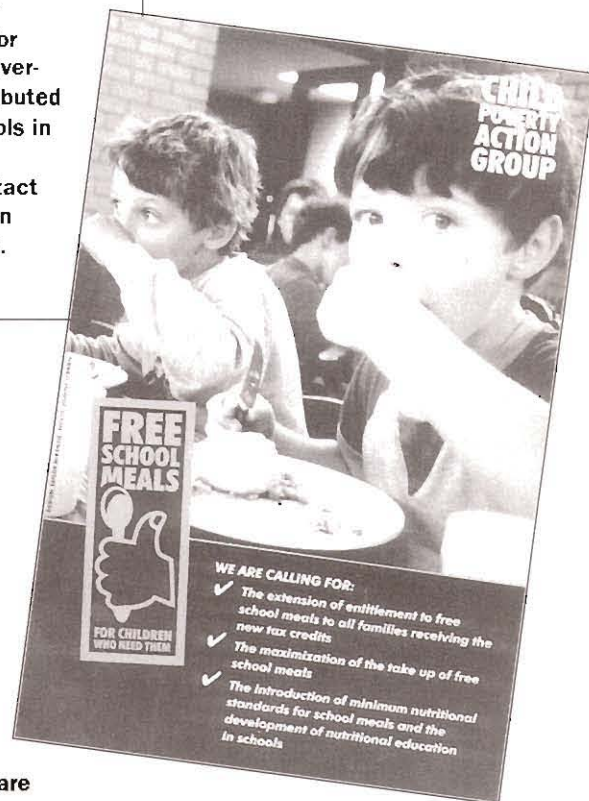
funding results in difficulties in planning and development and often mean a disproportionate amount of time and energy is wasted chasing small sums of money.

The report says that food projects should not have to show that they have produced changes in the nutritional or health status of project users. Short term social benefits — such as increasing skills and confidence to use a wider range of foods, overcoming social isolation and training individuals to be more in control of their own health and welfare — are more realistic and can be more easily measured by community food projects. Both health authorities and local authorities should see food projects in this wider context and accept that the wide-ranging social benefits arising from food projects will, in the long term, have a tangible benefit on people's health.

■ *Food projects and how they work* by P McGlone, B Dobson, E Dowler and M Nelson, £14.95 inc p&p from York Publishing Services Ltd, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York, YO31 7ZQ, tel: 01904 430033, fax: 01904 430868.



Want to start a school Breakfast Club?
Here's a guide for teachers and governors being distributed to primary schools in West London.
For details, contact Ruth Richards on 0181 576 5364.



Nearly three million children live in poverty, yet less than two million of them receive free school dinners.

CPAG are calling for an extension of the right to free food, statutory nutritional standards and a campaign to ensure that there is no stigma attached to eating a free school meal. Details from Child Poverty Action Group, Freepost WC4562, London N1 9BR.

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The Shopper's Guide to Organic Food

Lynda Brown

£8.99 inc p&p

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Mary Whiting and Tim Lobstein

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Mary Whiting and Tim Lobstein

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The Food We Eat

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

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Sue Dibb

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

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Poor Expectations

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

Food Irradiation

Tony Webb and Tim Lang

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

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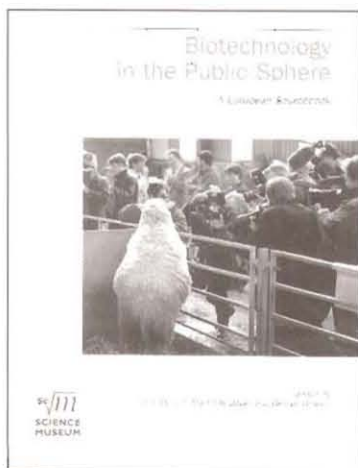
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Biotechnology in the Public Sphere: A European Sourcebook

J Durant, M Bauer and G Gaskell (eds), The Science Museum, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2DD, ISBN 1 900747 09 X, £22.95.

Asked which organisations they most trust to tell the truth about biotechnology, neither trade unions, political parties nor industry can muster more than two percent of consumers' support. Public authorities are trusted by less than eight percent. Environmental and consumer groups are trusted by more than half of people surveyed, according to the Eurobarometer results reported in this volume.

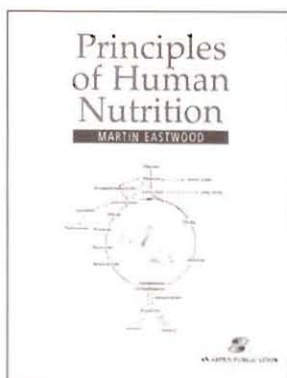
The book purports to be concerned merely with the 'clarification' of 'the historical processes by which industrialised societies deal with the challenges posed by new technologies'. It does this at great turgid length, and the fun is to be found only in the tables at the back, giving the survey results which show both our ignorance about GM technology and our scorn for those that are making money from it.

Community Food Initiatives in Action

A one day seminar about food poverty organised by Sustain: The Alliance for better food and farming
Tuesday 18th May in London
The day will be of interest to anyone interested in improving access to food for people on low incomes.
Tel: 0171 837 1228
Fax: 0171 837 1141

Principles of Human Nutrition

M Eastwood, Aspen Publishers, www.aspenpublishing.com, 1999, ISBN 0-8342-1290-0, unpriced.



Despite publication in the USA, this is a UK text from Martin Eastwood of the University of Edinburgh, and you will find that the word haemoglobin is spelt with an 'a'.

How does one judge a textbook? Perhaps by how recent the scientific references are — but this book has none (although it does have further reading lists). Perhaps by its approach to nutrition policy issues such as food fortification — but the index does not include the word, or the word 'enrichment'. It does, though, include food additives, and here the author allows himself a wry reference to what he calls the 'inevitable tensions between regulations and the need to produce food economically'.

1999 Organic Farm Management Handbook

3rd Edition, edited by Nik Lampkin and Mark measures, University of Wales, Aberystwyth and Elm Farm Research Centre, available from both organisations (tel Aberystwyth 01970 622248, Elm Farm 01488 658279), ISBN 1 872064 29 9, £10.

A neat handbook of value to organic farmers and even more value to anyone thinking of starting as it makes clear that organic farming is a business, not a romantic pastime, but with the right tools it is a business you can succeed in. One of those tools is this handbook.

Is modified starch GM?

Can you please tell me what modified starch is? I am sure I have seen it around for years, so it doesn't mean it is genetically modified, or does it?

Betty England, Rugby

Modified starch is starch derived from any of several sources (potatoes, rice, maize, wheat) and transformed into the desired form by chemical or enzyme treatments. The word modified does not mean genetically modified. On the other hand, the starch could have come from the genetically modified maize crops now permitted in our food supply, but as it doesn't need to be labelled we can't say whether modified starch does or does not come from GM sources.

Truly organic

Our feature in the last issue of the Food Magazine on what people expected by the name 'organic' raised a lot of letters. Here is a selection of extracts.

Gina Purrmann called to say she felt there is nothing wrong with organic 'junk' food. 'Just because we might be vegetarian and buy organic doesn't mean we have to be holier than thou about it.'

Cindy Evans e-mailed us to say she was horrified to see the list of additives and processing aids permitted in organic products. 'I have naively thought for a number of years that organic food would contain nothing but the pure food — obviously allowing for such things as acid rain which is out of the farmer's control. I hope as organic food becomes more popular, standards do not become diluted in order to cope with demand.'

Stephen Niemeyer wanted the organic symbol to reflect the materials in the food, but not the nutritional value. 'I buy organic foods to know they are free from chemical residues, pesticides, fungicides, etc, and are not subject to the addition of artificial colouring and preservatives

nor to irradiation or genetic engineering. The nutritional value is my choice, guided by the labelling.'

Barbara Meredith was 'astonished' to hear of the EU proposals that the organic symbol could be given to animals that simply spent some time on an organic farm. 'That is certainly not what I understand as organic.' She added 'As a consumer, I am looking for products which contain few or no additives. I think there is a real question about the extent to which processed foods remain 'organic'. My main criterion is that I am supporting organic farming methods by buying this product.'

Rounding up the figures

I have seen no discussion at all on how Monsanto's herbicide resistant soya beans will reduce pesticide use. The aim, I read, is to allow farmers to 'drench these crops with herbicides' to give them a head start on surrounding weeds that will succumb to these elevated doses. Do we really want to eat the harvest of a crop that contains very increased levels of herbicides?

Mrs Ray Tantram, Surrey.

We agree that the issue of herbicide residues complex, and any claim that GM crops will inevitably lead to reduced agrochemical use may be too simplistic. Monsanto have, for example, recently confirmed that they want to have higher residue levels of their pesticide Roundup to be accepted as safe than had previously been thought to be the case. Certainly, Roundup is now one of the most popular herbicides in the world, with sales in the USA up 70% and the Roundup Ready soya bean taking 50% of the US soya-growing area.

One complexity is that the weight of herbicide applied to a crop does not necessarily reflect the damage it does to the environment or the potency of the residues left in food. Modern herbicides may need fewer kilograms of active ingredient per hectare, but the effects can be just as powerful. So any simple calculation showing reduced quantity of herbicide may be

Mixing it

Government policies include (i) improve children's health

through the Dept of Health's Healthy Schools Initiative, and (ii) encourage business participation in community activities.

Not surprising then to find a company supporting healthy schools initiatives by offering sports



equipment. But the company is Procter and Gamble, and in return for their charity, the little mites have to collect boxes full of the foil lids from tubes of fat-laden Pringles crisps..

Privatising the public domain

Among the novel 'breakfasts' being sold to the gullible is Wake Up! which tastes like Complan on a bad day. Struggling to think of a catchy hook to sell it on, the advertising department came up with the idea that, as it saves time at breakfast, it must be especially useful when we put the clocks forward. 'We should,' they said, 'declare Wake Up! to be the national sponsor of putting the clock forward. Nobody owns the time change — it's in the public domain.'

It's true. We have their conference notes to prove it. But don't tell Kellogg's or they will want to 'sponsor' the sun rising every day.



Return of the bedroom

If you thought sending your children to their bedrooms was the way to keep them away from advertisers eager to exploit their marketing potential, think again. Advertising and Marketing to Children '99, a Marketing Week conference to be held on 22 April in London will include a session on 'Marketing to kids in the bedroom'. Topics include: the return of the bedroom - why kids are choosing to go to their room; opportunities for reaching children in the confines of their bedroom; exploiting a space where the child is king and The child's bedroom as 'media centre'. It's enough to give any parent sleepless nights.

Sugar, More or Less

We have already described the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) mischievous publications which fudged the distinction between sugars and complex carbohydrates (see issue 36, page 20). Their brochures happily tell us that carbohydrates are necessary in our diet, that we should eat more of them and that carbohydrate-rich foods 'include rice, maize... and many fruits and vegetables as well as sugars'.

This same approach is taken by nutritionists working for the food industry. We saw a stinking letter written by Kellogg's senior nutritionist Dr Kathryn O'Sullivan after the *Sunday Times* criticised hidden sugars. She defended sugar by grouping it with complex carbohydrates and telling us how all forms of carbohydrate cause dental caries, that all forms of carbohydrate can help prevent heart disease, and all forms of carbohydrate can help in 'the battle against obesity'.

A nutritionist speaks

Never read those free magazines in health food stores — not if you want to stay sane. Our sharp-eyed sleuths found this in a copy of *Best of Health*:

What causes illness?

One popular theory suggests that there is not enough oxygen in the air we breathe today. This is mainly due to the amount of pollution and the continuing deforestation around the world. 'We can look at oxygen deficiency as the single greatest cause of all diseases'. Noted Dr Stuart Levine, a respected nutrition researcher.

Then they try to sell you a product, liquid Aerobic Oxygen:

Aerobic Oxygen introduces more oxygen into the body safely, without the use of harmful chemicals... Better than breathing... Additional oxygen in the body is the easiest way to strengthen your immune



system and give you lasting energy with no side effects.

Next to this load of tosh was an advert for the usual sort of food supplement, containing the usual range of nutrients including, of course, a hefty dose of antioxidants. And antioxidants, as most normal nutritionists will tell you, are great at mopping up those terrible free oxygen molecules that can cause degenerative damage, leading to cancers and heart disease...

But when it comes to obesity, her colleagues in the food industry might beg to differ. It all depends on what you are trying to sell, you see. If you happen to be marketing a sugar-free product, you might well take a different line. Take the multinational company Danone. Danone own Jacob's, and Jacob's makes 'no added sugar Cream Crackers'. And, on the side of the pack, we find the following:

'Excess sugar can cause obesity which increases your chance of

getting heart diseases, diabetes, hypertension, back problems and arthritis.' And who are we to argue with that? After all Danone sold nearly £10 billion-worth of food and drink last year, making them the tenth largest food company in the world and a lot bigger than Kellogg's.

