

FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Legal chaos for 'medical foods'

New legislation introducing the concept of 'medical foods' will create huge loopholes in the current laws regulating health claims.

The proposed UK regulation follows an EC Directive, and appears to allow companies to advertise and sell branded food products claiming to treat medical problems, despite current legislation forbidding foods from saying they can cure, treat or prevent a disease. The first range of foods to come on the market under these new regulations will be infant formula products claiming special benefits, such as low allergy formula, colic-treating formula, reflux-treating formula, anti-asthma formula and more. Product leaflets are already being circulated to midwives and health visitors.

The proposed rules say that the foods must be used 'under medical supervision' but there is no requirement to make these foods prescription-only.

A doctor's recommendation or suggestion might be enough. It is also possible that supervision may be delegated to other health workers, including pharmacists with an interest in selling the products.

The proposed legislation makes no restrictions on advertising and promotion of the products. Specialist infant formulas appear to be exempt from the marketing restrictions which currently apply to regular baby milk formulas prohibiting the direct advertising of formulas to mothers and the promotion of formulas at the point of sale. It is already clear that health workers are being targeted with promotional material for the specialist formula products, and there is nothing in the legislation to prevent the advertising of these formula to the general public.

Medical foods are supposed to be limited to products 'intended to meet the particular nutritional requirements of persons affected by a specific disease, disorder or medical condition' but this loose definition opens the door to a large array of functional food products, aimed at any member of the population. According to food consultant Jack Winkler, there is nothing in the proposed regulations to stop TV ads along the lines of 'If you think you suffer from X, why not ask your doctor about Product Y...' Such moves would undermine the legislation controlling

claims which manufacturers can make for their products.

The promotional material being sent to midwives includes blatant attempts to capture large markets for medical foods by implying that most babies are suffering from medical problems. Promotional material for Mead Johnson's Nutrimigen claims that 1 in 8 infants have eczema, while 'up to 50% go on to develop asthma', and that 84% of high risk infants fed a routine formula developed symptoms.

The same company promotes a formula with added thickener, designed to help babies that 'suffer from reflux' (regurgitating some milk). The promotional material says that the condition affects 50% of babies, and that symptoms include excessive crying, irritability, respiratory problems and parental anxiety!

Wyeth's SMA High Energy is designed for babies who are failing to thrive, and their leaflet reminds health workers that 'One third of all babies that fail to thrive may be undetected' implying that it is better to be safe than sorry. A symptom to watch out for, the company says, is a 'child that is lethargic or overactive' or has 'thin wispy hair'.

Meanwhile Nestlé have developed the ultimate means of undermining breast-feeding for anxious mothers. It is FM85, a 'breast milk fortifier' providing extra energy and protein: 'An ideal supplement providing optimal nutrition without compromising the protective properties of milk'. Articles in the medical press have challenged the evidence for this type of product (see e.g. Lucas et al, *A J Clin Nut*, 64, 142-151).

medicinal claims and threaten the attempts being made by the Joint Health Claims Initiative to regulate the

50% of babies suffer from reflux!

Common symptoms of reflux:

Regurgitation, Vomiting, Oesophagitis, Excessive crying, Irritability, Feeding problems (refusal to eat, early satiety), Respiratory problems (frequent cough, wheeze, aspiration), Parental anxiety

Mead Johnson suggests that 50% of babies may need its thickened formula. Meanwhile Nestlé offers breast-fed babies 'an ideal supplement providing optimum nutrition'.

The Food Commission is joining with organisations including Baby Milk Action to urge the government to tighten the proposed legislation and to extend and strengthen the present marketing restrictions on the promotion of infant formula products to include formulas for special medical purposes.

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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From Third Way to Fourth?

Just as colonialism and slavery gave way to capitalism and organised labour, so we are moving into an era of... well what exactly? Globalised commerce and post-communist 'Third Ways', perhaps? Or civil society versus the free trade movement?

The era still needs its defining moments and movements, but the Seattle struggle will go down as a pivotal point at the turn of the century, when environmental groups joined with the labour movement and public interest groups representing food, health and consumers, to express their discontent with unfettered free trade.

Compare the Seattle talks with the previous global trade talks, the Uruguay round in the late 1980s. Then, a few lone voices were raised in protest, and nothing disrupted the talks. Now the talks ended in chaos, and bloody noses for President Clinton and WTO leader, Mike Moore.

But the free-traders are counter-attacking. In mid-December, the Economist furiously accused the street demonstrators of a lack of democratic accountability. The *Financial Times* (1/1/00) ran an editorial saying '...there must be no armistice in the fight to preserve and strengthen the institutions of free trade' and called on national governments (democratically accountable?) to get out of the way of commerce: 'Having ensured that their budgets are prudent, that money is sound and that markets and their laws are efficient, governments should stand clear and let entrepreneurs get on with compounding growth.'

The *FT* (1/1/00) also gave the first indication that the Third Way, i.e. stakeholder capitalism, may soon be history. The Lex column described the new forces driving the growth of capital in Europe, which emphasise the value of shares in companies, thereby 'fuelling the shareholder movement, with its central belief that companies should be run solely for the benefit of their investors. This is driving a stake through the heart of the traditional continental stakeholder capitalism, which attempts to reconcile investors' interests with those of workers, suppliers and the wider community.'

So who is to defend the public good against the private gain? How can civil society find its expression, beyond the streets of Seattle? How is the consumer movement to be involved in national and global bodies?

The UK's Food Standards Agency has yet to determine its consumer involvement and consultation methods. On page 6 we make our recommendations.

And, as we show on page 15, the Food Commission is increasingly being asked to participate in multinational bodies — including Codex and the OECD. We are willing to give it a go but our annual budget hardly allows for a day-return to Paris let alone a fortnight in Tokyo.

New structures are desperately needed to ensure that the civil movement can be an effective force. It needs co-ordinating and it needs funding. We can, perhaps, leave behind the cosy nonsense of the Third Way — but only if we create a Fourth Way to take us forward.

Tim Lobstein and Sue Dibb

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OUR WEB PAGE

The Food Commission can now be visited on the internet at <http://www.foodcomm.org.uk>. Your comments and suggestions are, as always, welcome. Many thanks to Gavin Dupee for helping to create our site.

Advertising Policy. The Food Magazine does not accept commercial advertising.

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

Food Commission takes soya baby milk campaign to the US

At the beginning of November, the Food Commission's Sue Dibb joined campaigners from the US Weston A Price Foundation, a nutrition research organisation, to present our concerns about the safety of soya infant formula to a press conference in Washington. Both organisations were worried that high levels of phytoestrogens in soy-based formulas could adversely affect the hormonal development of infants. They called for soy-based infant formula to be withdrawn from general sale to the public and for better warning information for parents.

Sally Fallon, President of the Weston A Price Foundation, told the meeting that the use of soya-based infant formula has doubled in the US in the past decade with 25% of bottle-fed infants now fed soya rather than cows' milk based formula. (This compares to just 2% in the UK).

Sue Dibb told the meeting that the UK Department of Health had issued advice to parents and health professionals that soya formula should only be given to babies on the advice of a health professional for a medical reason (usually diagnosed cow's milk intolerance). In the US no such warnings have been made. Indeed, both groups have expressed concerns that the high-profile promotion of soya as a health food will lead even more parents in the US to feed soy-based formula to their babies.

The Washington press conference was held to coincide with the Third International Symposium on the Role of Soy in Preventing and Treating Chronic Disease - a soya industry sponsored three-day conference where academics reported their research findings. While the vast majority of research presented was examining the possible positive role that soya may play in the prevention of heart disease, cancers, osteoporosis and the relief of menopausal symptoms, a handful of researchers reported on the potential that soya may have to cause adverse effects. Most notable are concerns over feeding infants high levels of soy

phytoestrogens, but research is also examining the potential for soya to damage thyroid function and affect the onset of dementia in later life. Researchers in these fields told Sue Dibb how difficult it can be to get funding that doesn't support positive research into the health benefits of soya.

Dr Lon White from the Pacific Health Research Institute in Hawaii told the Symposium that regular consumption of tofu over many years in middle life may have an adverse influence on brain ageing, manifest as accelerated atrophy, cognitive decline and a lowering of the threshold for the clinical manifestations of Alzheimer's disease. He believes that phytoestrogens (isoflavones) in the tofu may inhibit tyrosine kinase activity and/or interfere with oestrogen-related mechanisms.

Lon White's research, which is funded by the US National Institute on Aging, is likely to have implications for women who are being encouraged by manufacturers and other advocates of soya to turn to phytoestrogen (isoflavone) supplements and soya foods to relieve menopausal symptoms and prevent bone loss.

Meanwhile new evidence is emerging of the adverse effects components of soya, including phytoestrogens, may have on thyroid function. In a paper to be published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* on 11 February, Dr Mike Fitzpatrick says the groups most at risk are infants fed soy formulas, high soy users and those taking isoflavone supplements.

■ Readers wanting impartial information on soya, including soya infant formula, and phytoestrogens should visit Dr Mike Fitzpatrick's website at www.soyonlineservice.co.nz

■ Sue Dibb has been invited to join the newly-formed Department of Health's Committee on Toxicity Working Party on Phytoestrogens as a consumer representative.

Thanks for the tremendous support!

Hundreds of our readers responded to a circular letter sent to our individual subscribers, asking for help for our Christmas appeal.

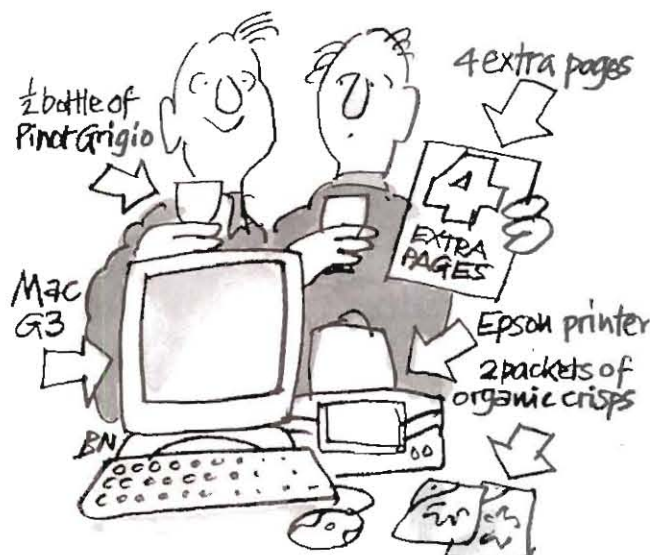
Thanks to your generosity, we can now afford some new office computing equipment, and as a way of saying 'thanks', we have expanded the magazine with four extra pages. Now we can all share the benefits!

For the Food Commission staff, it wasn't just your generosity but your expressions of support for our work that we really appreciated. Here is a selection:

'Your work is so important, to reveal what is truly in food, despite manufacturers' claims...'

'You do a terrific job, the magazine is a vital part in the fight against a multi-national take-over of all our lives...'

'The work you do is terrific and your campaigns against humbug, doublespeak, lies and fraud are a refreshing change from the usual 'official' pussyfooting. More power to your pen...'



Do you think we should tell them about the Bombay Mix?

Donations

The Food Magazine is produced by a committed team of staff and volunteers, but funds are still desperately needed to continue our work. We take no grants from industry or government.

We care about the work we do and ensure that every penny is spent wisely. If you can offer any further support for our work, however small, you can send a donation to the Food Commission, Freepost KE 7564, London N1 9BR, or use the order form enclosed with this magazine.

Sue Dibb, Tim Lobstein and the staff at The Food Commission

Breast pill threat to women's health

Phytoestrogen supplements may endanger women's health. Sue Dibb reports.

If you travel in London, you may have seen the ads for Erdic's Natural Breast Enhancement Programme (and the cleavage) displayed on London tube trains. The company's website (www.erdic.co.uk) says that by popping 15 pills a day women can have much firmer, fuller and larger breasts.

It sounds like a scam, but our concerns were further heightened when we learnt that the pills supposedly contain high levels of phytoestrogens from hops. Research by Dr Stuart Milligan of King's College has found that hops contain 8-prenylnaringenin, a particularly potent phytoestrogen¹. In the days when people, rather than machines, still harvested hops, there were anecdotal reports that female hop pickers often suffered menstrual disturbances. One woman who took the Erdic pills for a *Sunday Times* test (and claimed that her breasts did increase in size) also reported that she had two menstrual cycles in one month.

Whether or not Erdic does increase breast size (and even the company itself says not everyone will benefit) we believe Erdic may pose a serious risk to women. It's a view

shared by Dr Milligan who told the BBC's *Watchdog* programme: 'I don't think that this product should have appeared on the market at all, without proper trials and clinical testing. If it's having effects on the breast, it's likely to have lots of other effects within the body, which we don't know about – particularly potentially harmful effects in terms of possibly stimulating breast cancer, and possibly in women who are unknowingly pregnant. It may be affecting the sexual development of their unborn babies. And, maybe there are other effects on the body which we have no idea at all about.'

Armed with this evidence of a potentially dangerous product being sold to the public, we thought it should be relatively easy to stop Erdic being advertised and sold. How wrong we were. First we thought that the Medicines Act would prevent such a product being marketed. Wrong. Wishing to enlarge one's breast size is not considered a medical condition.

So we then talked to MAFF and the DoH. They too share our concerns about the product and agreed to analyse Erdic to find out exactly what it does contain. They told us, however, that whatever they found,

they were not an enforcement agency. This left us needing to talk to Erdic's local authority – in this case Westminster – as Erdic gives itself a Harley Street address. Westminster tell us they are looking into the case.

In the meantime, the Advertising Standards Authority ruled on 12 January that Erdic should cease making any claims whatsoever for the product as it did not have 'independent clinical trials to demonstrate the efficacy of the product'. At least that was confirmation of the company's scam and should prevent the product being advertised we thought. But no, as the ASA wrote to the Food Commission, 'it is beyond the remit of the ASA to prevent a particular product being advertised'. Furthermore they do not have the legal powers needed to enforce their own rulings – they rely on industry self-regulation. And as we went to press new adverts for Erdic had appeared on the underground, and the company's website was continuing to contravene the ASA's ruling.

Adverts for Erdic have also appeared in the windows of chemist and beauty salon shops. But such ads

do not fall within its remit, the ASA says. Action on these would be down to the local authority in the area where the advert appeared, and hard pressed local authorities may not have the resources to investigate.

This particular case raises a number of serious issues about the regulation of food supplements. Erdic is just the tip of an iceberg of products of dubious health benefit, some of which may also be dangerous and the expansion of the internet will exacerbate the problems that already exist. In the past we have raised concerns about claims made for food supplements, in particular over unsubstantiated claims and the lack of quality control for many products as well as the ASA's lack of enforcement powers. The Food Commission will be approaching the new Food Standards Agency to urge it to look at the loopholes in the law which leave consumers unprotected from unscrupulous marketeers.

¹ Milligan et al, Identification of a potent phytoestrogen in hops (*Humulus lupulus L.*) and beer, *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, Vol 83:6, 2249-2252, 1999.

Novartis tries functional food gambit

With many functional food products finding the market to be a tough one, Swiss life sciences corporation, Novartis, seems brave (or foolhardy) to be launching its new Aviva range of functional foods in the UK.

Novartis is probably better known for its over-the-counter drugs and GM maize resistant to its best-selling weedkiller, Basta, than for its food brands. However the company is placing its faith in a range of biscuits, cereal bars, mueslis and drinks with claimed bone, heart and digestive benefits.

Aviva cereal bars, orange juice and hot chocolate drinks offer to 'help build and maintain strong bones'

includes calcium, magnesium, zinc and vitamin D3. The biscuits, cereal bars and mueslis 'proven to reduce cholesterol' include oat glucans (soluble fibre), soy isoflavones and vitamins A & C, while their biscuits and hot chocolate drink 'proven to help maintain a healthy digestive system' include partially hydrolysed guar gum and fructo-oligosaccharides.

Novartis says that its claims have been clinically proven. The Food Commission has yet to see the full scientific evidence on which the claims are based. What is most likely to influence consumers is the price they are being asked to pay.

With six servings of Aviva muesli costing £2.99, six servings of instant chocolate drink costing £2.39 and a

225 g box of 18 biscuits costing £2.99 these products are likely to appeal only to the well-off neurotic. Maybe Novartis have calculated that enough of us fall into this category to make their investment worthwhile.



Muller faces court challenge

An indication of the commercial wars to come can be seen in Germany, where yogurt-makers Muller face court proceedings from the pharmaceutical industry following Muller's launch of a dairy product containing St John's Wort that claims to have a relaxing effect.

The pharmaceutical industry are angry that the product does not have to face the same extensive clinical trials that drug firms face to make health claims.



GM labelling fiasco

The Environment Committee of the European Parliament has condemned the current approach to GM labelling as 'piecemeal, inconsistent in scope and lacking in vision'. In a resolution agreed in December the Committee called on the European Commission to rethink its strategy and to bring forward proposals for labelling GM animal feed and for a 'GMO-free' label.

As predicted in our last issue (FM47) EU member states had earlier agreed a GM threshold level of 1% in October. The Food Commission was one of a number of organisation urging a lower limit of 0.1% in line with the best industry practice. Although the 1% was supported by the UK government, Food Minister, Baroness Hayman has written to the Food Commission saying that the UK

pressed for this figure to be reviewed within two years. However this proposal was rejected. The Environment Committee, meanwhile, calls for a review within twelve months.

Among the confusion over GM labelling, which the latest decisions have done nothing to clarify, is the question of when foods should be allowed to be described as 'GM free' or 'non-GM'. New proposals which have the backing of the certification body, Genetic ID, would only permit a 'non-GM' claim below 0.1%. While the Food Commission believes that the food industry should operate to this tight standard, we fear that the proliferation of different standards for different labelling requirements is highly confusing.

Parliament to debate organic targets

The Organic Targets Bill campaign has achieved a notable success in getting MP's support for a Second Reading, due on 3 March 2000. The Bill, which sets out minimum targets for converting British agriculture to greater organic production, will be presented by Liberal Democrat MP, Paul Tyler.

An Early Day Motion (No. 51) which indicates the level of support in parliament has received 156 signatures from MPs from all parties.

Having come 16th in the annual ballot for Private Members Bills, Mr Tyler took up the Bill because he believes 'it will help hard-pressed farmers and encourage greater consumer choice at one and the same time'.

The Bill is the third on the agenda on 3 March which means it may not have adequate time for debate. To make sure it

does, please write to your MP asking him/her to:

- Attend the debate on 3 March;
- Do everything possible to encourage other MPs to keep the preceding debates brief;
- Vote to give the Bill a Second Reading, if the opportunity arises;
- Sign up to EDM No. 51 which supports the Bill.

■ To find out the name of your MP, contact the Information Line (Tel: 020 7219 4272) or website <http://www.parliament.uk>.

Send your letter to your MP at **House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA**.

■ For help drafting your letter, and for more information, visit the Organic Targets Bill campaign website at <http://www.sustainweb.org> or send an SAE to Organic Targets Bill, Sustain, 94 White Lion St, N1 9PF (tel 020 7837 1228).

'Of Cabbages and Kings — a cartoon book on genetic engineering' from the wonderfully inventive group **A SEED**

Europe in Amsterdam (tel +31-20-468-2616). They also produce company profiles (latest ones are Pioneer Hi-Bred, DuPont and Aventis) all downloadable from their website <http://www.groundup.org>.

Watch out for their forthcoming week of action, Resistance is Fertile.

GM foods — the next generation

One of the reasons why the public has been so reluctant to accept GM foods is that the first generation of GM crops provides no direct benefits for consumers. Now biotech corporations are putting a positive spin on the next generation of GM crops in the pipeline — those with altered nutritional traits — or GM functional foods.

In early December, Monsanto issued a press release from its St Louis headquarters, announcing that the company has successfully genetically engineered a new variety of rape seed (canola) which will produce beta-carotene enriched oil. The new crop, says Monsanto, is 'expected to help alleviate Vitamin A deficiency, and thus potentially reduce the related disease that affect nearly 800 million people worldwide.'

The Food Commission is currently working with

GeneWatch UK on a report examining the next generation of GM functional foods and asking whether such crops really are the answer to the world's nutritional needs, or, like the claims that GM is essential to feed the world, the reality falls short of the hype. We will report further in the next issue of the *Food Magazine*.



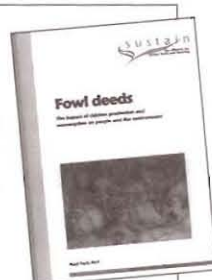
"It's Monsanto's answer to our housing shortage"

Fowl production

A new report on chicken farming summarises the evidence against intensive poultry rearing practices in the UK, and points out that even if we clean up our own production methods, we will still be buying large amounts of chicken meat from overseas sources. The report, from Sustain, calls for more government support for sustainable and welfare-friendly chicken production. *Fowl Deeds — The impact of chicken production and consumption on people and the environment*, Food Facts No 9, price £5.00 from Sustain (tel 020 7837 1228).

In 1981 we imported barely 20m kilograms of chicken meat, but by 1998 the figure had rocketed to over

300m kg, equivalent to two or three chickens per person in the UK.



UK imports of chicken meat 1998

	kg (millions)
Holland	97.0
France	71.0
Thailand	14.0
Denmark	13.0
Brazil	11.0
Germany	10.0
Other EU	30.0
Chile	0.3



The Food Standards Agency and consumers

With less than three months to go before the planned official launch of the new Food Standards Agency, little is known about how it plans to involve consumers. Sue Dibb calls for more open dialogue and for greater consumer participation in policy making.

Consumer organisations, including the Food Commission, have welcomed the setting up of the Food Standards Agency. We have long campaigned for an agency that genuinely puts consumers, rather than the food industry, first. We, and others, have also called for major changes compared to existing arrangements, in the way that the new Agency will work, not just in its structures but in terms of the Agency's overall culture and communications strategy and its relationship with the public and consumer organisations.

Sadly, we do not know what work is already underway in this respect. Those working behind the scenes to put in place the structures and mechanisms of the new Agency have so far failed to seek a full and open dialogue with the wide range of consumer, public interest, health and other non-government organisations that have pushed for its existence. Such dialogue will be necessary to foster greater mutual

understanding and initiate improved communication essential to the future success and acceptance of the Agency. We also believe that the Agency and its staff need to learn a considerable amount about who we are and what we seek to achieve, to appreciate our expertise as well as our limited funds, and find new ways of working together to each other's mutual benefit.

Consumers and consumer organisations currently play a limited role in terms of government food policy decision-making. Individuals and organisations are free to respond to government consultations. They can in theory take up issues via their MPs or directly with Ministers. More formally, consumer 'experts' or lay members may be appointed to the various committees, working parties and advisory groups that exist under the current framework. We do not know the extent to which the current committee structure will remain under the auspices of the Agency but the issue of consumer representation is one that has concerned consumer organisations for some time.

Over eighteen months ago, in June 1998, a large number of consumer representatives and organisations, including many who already sit on committees, met to discuss the future role of consumer representation. Those taking part agreed it was vital for there to be better procedures for representation before the FSA came into being to ensure adequate consumer input throughout the work of the new Agency. It was also

agreed that we need to address the problems which would remain within the rest of MAFF, or its successor body, once the Agency is up and running.

Participants at the workshop confirmed that there were a number of weaknesses with the present system of consumer representation relating to clarity, consistency, co-ordination, transparency, funding and accountability (see box right).

Specifically the participants identified a number of major issues including discussion on the purpose of consumer representation, concerns over methods of appointments and practical resource problems faced by organisations and their representatives. These are summarised below.

Consumer representation is just one of a number of key issues that the Food Standards Agency needs to address. Whether, and how, such questions are discussed will now largely depend upon the approach taken by the new Chair and Chief Executive. But our belief is that the very credibility, and hence the future success, of the Agency will depend upon the policies and practices currently being put in place. Let us hope that there is still time for the Agency to get it right.

■ Sue Dibb is a consumer representative on MAFF's Working Party on Chemical Contaminants in Food and on the Committee on Toxicity's Working Party on Phytoestrogens.

What is representation for?

The following were identified as reasons why consumer representation is needed and the role it plays:

- to balance industry interests in policy-making
- to keep an eye on the process and make sure it is open
- to ask broader questions and improve decision-making
- to limit the potentially damaging impact of proposals on consumers
- to provide credibility to the decision-making process
- to exercise foresight by suggesting items for discussion or new methods of consultation and to ensure that the consumer perspective is always taken into account.

Methods of appointments

The workshop could discern no rhyme or reason in the current selection and appointment procedures. Appointments were being made without nominations being invited from consumer organisations; consumer nominees were being ignored and in some cases individuals were being appointed with no knowledge or experience of the issues.

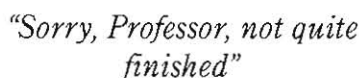
It was considered that the following principles should apply to committee appointments:

- all vacancies should be openly advertised;
- there should be a clearly stated job description and brief which appointees should meet;
- consumer organisations should play a much greater role in selection;
- the appointments process should be made more open and details of appointments publicised;

Resources

Consumer representatives face a number of practical problems:

- **payment** — there are no consistent rates of pay across the different committees. It was considered that levels of pay should reflect the amount of input required and the need to re-imburse people at a realistic level for their time.
- **training** — representatives should have training, and consumer organisations should be involved in the design, content and assessment of such training.
- **support** — a special division to support consumer representatives and to provide a focus of consumer expertise and to which officials are accountable is a possible model. Such a division at the Financial Services Agency has its own budget and staff, can conduct its own research and communications as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the Agency.
- **limited time and people** — this is a problem faced by large and small organisations.
- **funding** — a perennial problem but a vital one to solve to ensure that consumer representation is effective.

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BSE: It's not over yet

With over 2000 reported BSE cases in the UK in 1999, and with the government admitting that several infected carcasses will still enter the human food chain this year, the French may have a point when they refuse to accept UK beef in their shops and burger bars. Tim Lobstein reports.

Few newspapers have put the French side of the beef war, but if you lived in France would you be crying out to buy British beef? Given the UK's continuing (though declining) BSE epidemic, and the admission that an estimated four BSE cases will have entered our food supply in the last 12 months, perhaps not.

The French, at least, are protected by the Date Based Export Scheme, a procedure that is supposed to be doubly safe at ensuring only the cleanest of our beef gets exported (only one abattoir is licensed at present). We in the UK don't have such strict procedures for the beef that is put into our own shops and burgers. For UK consumers, the two main defences are the Over Thirty Months Scheme and the Specified Bovine Offal restrictions.

The latter are supposed to ensure that high risk offal (brain, spinal cord etc) does not get into our food supply — although until 1996 the rules were poorly applied as the BSE Inquiry has repeatedly heard.

Furthermore, it assumes that other parts of the beast are not infectious, yet there is evidence from laboratory animals that blood can carry infectious doses, and that infectious blood can be found before an animal shows clinical signs of having the disease.¹ Not only are we eating cattle blood whenever we eat a beef product, but cattle blood is one of the cattle products that can still be legally fed to other cattle.²

The Over Thirty Months Scheme requires all cattle over thirty months old to be removed from the human food chain. It is based on the assumption that BSE is rarely found at younger ages, and therefore that younger cattle are safe to eat. Yet infectious parts of the animal can be

detected at far younger ages, well before the clinical symptoms show, and the clinical symptoms themselves have been found in cattle as young as 21 months.³

Furthermore, there have been several dozen prosecutions of farmers and meat traders who have falsified the cattle passports and ear tags to allow animals over thirty months old into our food. Local authorities are dealing with over 50 prosecutions at present, while an ex-employee of the UK Intervention Board described cattle passport fraud to be 'systematic' and the government has acknowledged that 90,000 cattle are missing from the cattle tracking scheme.⁴



"They'll be recommending that MAFF is minced up and fed to cattle!"

Safety and independence

Not only are there animal and human health issues to be answered, there are legal ones as well. The French food safety authority, the Agence Française pour la Sécurité Sanitaire et Alimentaire (AFSSA), advised the French government that it could not certify British beef to be safe, and the French government had to choose between a high level of precaution in refusing entry to UK beef, or allowing entry and running the risk of being prosecuted by subsequent victims of CJD for not following its own scientific experts' advice. Whatever the political advantage of protecting French farmers and French markets, the food safety dilemma remains.

The same may yet happen in the UK. Our own Food Safety Agency now has royal assent and is due to be launched in April. Suppose it found an EU-accepted food product to be of doubtful safety? Should we allow our own Agency to be over-ruled

by European Commission scientific advisors (who do not, incidentally, publish their commercial links and interests)? And what, for that matter, would the Tory tabloid newspapers make of such Brussels-centred bodies putting UK citizens at risk?

At the global level, the WTO has already attempted to over-rule the European Commission for the EC's banning of US hormone-reared beef, and it took the EC nearly ten years to find a health justification for the ban. Even that has been challenged by the USA, but it drives home the current legal aspects, namely that strict health-based precautionary justifications are required if a country wants to ban another's products.

So where does that leave the French? Who can over-rule whom? Whose scientific advisors can provide superior advice? Does the WTO have a legal priority over the EC? And the EC over its member states? Under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement of the GATT, individual members can ban imports on the basis of legitimate health concerns, but how robust does the science need to be? How cautious can a precautionary measure be, and still remain legitimate? And who is to judge these matters?

These questions have yet to be tested in the international courts. That is why the EC has taken the French to the European Court of Justice, for failing to lift the ban on UK beef exports agreed by all member states. And that is why the French government is counter-acting against the EC for lifting the ban without satisfactory evidence that UK beef is safe.

Inquiry to report in March

One useful contribution to the debate about the current safety of British beef cannot be made: the BSE Inquiry, which is due to report on its findings in March, is not looking at the safety of beef or the actions of authorities after March 1996. It will, though, have plenty to say about these topics prior to that date, after listening to over 15,000 pages-worth of daily hearings, and having taken 900 statements from nearly 500 contributors, along with over 3000 files of original documents.

Hot topics will include the isolation and arrogance of MAFF officials, the lack of enforcement of the offal bans, the leakage of cattle meat and bone meal back to cattle feed despite the ban, and the role of the Chief Medical Officer when issuing government safety assurances to the public.

The Inquiry may not point a direct finger at a culpable individual, but its findings should help the

Legal, decent, honest and true?

Companies marketing their wares are supposed to ensure that all advertisements are 'legal, decent, honest and truthful'. Not all of them are, as our roundup of recent cases from the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) shows:

X ASDA's national press adverts claimed 'We believe in Permanently Low Prices that stay low...' but the ASA noted that not all prices stayed reduced, and that adverts misleadingly implied that all lines in the promotion stayed at permanently reduced prices.

X Healthspan Direct was challenged by the ASA to produce documentary evidence for the health claims made in their adverts for zinc ('a vital mineral for prostate health') and for antioxidants ('may play a vital part in reducing the risks of heart disease, strokes and cancer as well as slowing the ageing process itself'). The ASA was also concerned that as the adverts mention serious medical conditions they might discourage people from seeking treatment. The ASA reminded advertisers in doubts about their claims to consult the ASA's Copy Advice team.

X Seeds of Change, suppliers of organic foods, ran into trouble with a Radio Times advert which implied that conventionally reared animals are injected with growth hormones and are given antibiotics as a routine precaution. The company admitted it had not meant to give the impression that such animals received these injections routinely.

X Sainsbury's claim to be 'the first major supermarket to start making all own-label foods without genetically modified ingredients' was challenged by, among others, Waitrose and Iceland supermarkets. The ASA considered the claim to be misleading, as many people would consider Iceland and Waitrose to be major supermarkets, and therefore Sainsbury was not the first large retailer to remove GM ingredients from its own products.

X Weight Watchers (UK) had their knuckles rapped over an advert for their Rosemary Conley Diet and Fitness Clubs, which featured an 18 stone woman who lost 7 stone. The advert breached the code requiring any treatment for obesity to be conducted under qualified supervision, and the requirement that specific weight-loss claims should state the period involved.

If you see any non-broadcast adverts or promotional material (including websites) which you believe are making false claims, you can complain to the Advertising Standards Authority (details from them on tel 020 7580 5555, web site <http://www.asa.org.uk>) or send it to us to look at.

For TV ads, turn to the Independent Television Commission (tel 020 7255 3000, <http://www.itc.org.uk>), and alert us, too.

families of victims of BSE-related CJD to seek compensation from the government. There have been 48 deaths in the UK to the end of October, with another 8 to 10 cases being investigated. There have also been two cases in France and at least one in Ireland.⁵

How bad will it be?

No-one is ready to make estimates of the seriousness of the CJD epidemic that may yet emerge. The figures to date suggest no sudden marked increase has yet occurred, but some observers suggest we are seeing only the very early stages of the spread of the disease, as the average incubation may be about 25 years.⁶

The best form of advance warning we will get is from the current research being done on tonsils and appendices extracted over the last few years. Research has been proceeding for eighteen months, during which time over a million operations will have been performed. Surely some preliminary results are due? Even if only one in ten thousand cases has been found to be positive, this would imply over 5,000 cases of CJD in the UK. We need this information if we are to develop health care procedures to cope.

Meanwhile, blood transfusion agencies in the USA, Canada, New Zealand and other countries are introducing restrictions which ban the use of blood from anyone who has visited the UK for a cumulative total of six months during 1980-1996. There appears to be no scientific justification for setting six months as a threshold for picking up BSE in the UK. The reason appears to be commercial: transfusion agencies say that setting a much shorter period would excessively limit the number of blood donors available.

Sources:

¹ P Brown *et al*, *Transfusion*, 39, November 1999; M J Scherr *et al*, *J Chromatogr A*, 20:853, August 1999.

² BSE Enforcement Bulletin 40, MAFF, November 1999.

³ BSE Statistics 1986-1999, MAFF website (August 1999)

<<http://www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/bse/index.html>>

⁴ J Leake and JU Thomas, *The Sunday Times*, December 19 1999.

⁵ CJD Surveillance Centre website (December 1999)

<<http://www.cjd.ed.ac.uk/figures.htm>>

⁶ H Diringer, *The Lancet*, 354, November 20 1999.

Flies transmit prions

Flies which have fed on brain tissue infected with spongiform encephalopathy themselves carry the disease, and may be infectious for as much as two weeks after they have died. Research on flies of the genus *Sarcophaga* showed that they can pick up the disease from infectious material, and will spread the disease when eaten by laboratory animals.

The evidence follows earlier research showing that the cause of the disease, abnormal prion proteins, can be detected in the cells on the surface of infected cattle skin, as well as in cattle blood, and suggests another route of infection for the disease. It has been known for some time that flocks of healthy sheep will develop the disease when put in a field with spongiform-infected sheep, showing that transmission from animal to animal can easily occur in farm conditions.

Sources: K Post *et al*, *The Lancet*, 354, December 4 1999; J Pammer *et al*, *The Lancet*, 354, November 13 1999.

What's cooking?

This new regular page in the *Food Magazine* will alert readers to official documents that are being circulated for comment.

Government departments routinely circulate their proposals for legislative changes to 'interested parties' which typically means other statutory bodies and commercial interests and, increasingly, consumer and public interest groups.

Now, with the assistance of Sustain (whose *Digest* includes similar information) we are pleased to list the recently-received documents which are out for comment.

Although the deadlines for some of these will have passed by the time you get your *Food Magazine*, don't despair. It may still be worth your while to look at the document being circulated, and late comments can still be fed into the next round of discussions, especially if you have an important point to make.

Do note that all comments are made available for everyone to see, at the department which is co-ordinating the consultation. You can go and look at other people's comments, and they can look at yours.

Department of Health

Review of the Welfare Foods Scheme

A sub-group of the DoH advisory body The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) was asked to review the nutritional benefits of the welfare milk and vitamin supplements schemes for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and children under age 5. Proposals include:

- offering other foods besides milk to pregnant women
- offering incentives other than free cows milk to encourage breastfeeding
- reducing the infant formula allowance by 50% after 6 months for bottle fed babies
- extending the period during which infant formula is available to 18 months

■ Comments by 21 January 2000.
Requests for copies of the report, and comments and suggestions on the proposals

to: Margaret Jackson-Roberts, tel 020 7972 5663

Improving Shopping Access for People in Deprived Neighbourhoods

Part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, this is a discussion paper from the DoH's Policy Action Team (PAT) number 13, dealing with the problems of food retailing in low income areas. Various proposals are discussed, including incentives for small retailers, better crime reduction measures and measures for economic regenerations.

■ Comments by 14 January 1999.
Copies of the report from, and comments to, PAT 13 Secretary, Room 634, Wellington House, 135-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG

Joint Food Safety and Standards Group

GM Food Labelling. Consultation on draft legislation

This provides for the enforcement (in England) of European Commission proposals on GM labelling, specifically the 1% threshold for the adventitious contamination of non-GM produce; the extension of requirements to food which is to be delivered as such to mass caterers; and for the labelling of foods containing additives and flavourings that have been produced from genetically modified organisms.

■ Copies of consultation available from: Mr Browne (0171-238 6224) or Mr Spencer (0171-238 6262) or from MAFF's website at <http://maff.gov.uk/food/foodnov.htm>.

■ Comments by: 1 March 2000.
Comments to: Mr M Browne, ANF C, JFSSG, MAFF, Room 239c, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR or email to: a.acnfp@jfssg.maff.gov.uk

Food contact material legislation

A report from the UK delegation at the Brussels meeting of the Commission

Working Group on Foodstuffs

Legislation Sub-Group on materials and articles intended to come into contact with food is available for comment. Topics include packaging, plastics, cheese coatings, silicone, labelling and GM-derived materials.

■ Comments by 31 January 2000.
Contact Stuart Roberts, Food Contact Materials Unit, 020 7238 6528.

Infant formula and follow-on formula (amendment) (England) regulations 2000

Comments are sought on the proposed national measures the UK has developed to implement Directive 91/321/EEC which sets a maximum limit of 0.01mg/kg for individual pesticides in infant formula and follow-on formula.

■ Comments by 28 January 2000.
Contact Jeff Alder on 020 7238 6260.

Processed cereal based foods and baby foods for infants and young children (amendment) (England) regulations 2000

Comments are sought on the proposed national measures the UK has developed to implement Directive 96/5/EC which sets a maximum limit of 0.01mg/kg for individual pesticides in processed cereal based foods and baby foods.

■ Comments by 26 January 2000.
Contact Jeff Alder on 020 7238 6260.

Licensing of butchers' shops in England: Draft central guidance

This draft guidance introduces an annual licensing scheme for retail butchers' shops in England and supports the practical application of the regulations.

■ Comments by 21 January 2000.
Contact John Barnes on 020 7972 5067.

EC Draft Regulation setting maximum levels for certain contaminants

This proposes the permitted levels of contaminants for lead, cadmium and other contaminants.

■ Comments by 26 January 2000.
Contact Doctor Nigel Harrison on 020 7238 6235.

MAFF

Statutory wage and other controls in agriculture

A paper was published in December seeking views on the future rationale for a separate statutory wage and other controls in agriculture. Views are also being sought on how well the agriculture minimum wage and the national minimum wage are operating together.

■ Comments by 31 March 2000.
Contact Geoff Webdale on 020 7238 5755.

The seeds (national lists of varieties) regulations 1999

A number of changes have been made to the above regulations which control how seeds are listed on a national list or EC common catalogue before they can be marketed.

■ Comments are required by 31 January 2000. Contact Kathy Fox on 01223 342386.

Medical food (England) regulations 2000

These regulations define foodstuffs which may be sold for special medical purposes and lay down their compositional requirements, mandatory and other labelling requirements and a notification system to facilitate monitoring of new products.

■ Comments are required by 19 January 2000. Contact Jeff Alder on 020 7238 6281.

Review of Commission regulation 2251/92 of July 1992 on quality inspection of fresh fruit and vegetables

These regulations are under review following changes to the fresh fruit and vegetable regime. Changes are proposed in a number of areas including:

- conformity checks of fruit and vegetable in the Community and those being imported;
- exempted traders;
- inspection of produce for processing;
- public consultation.

■ Comments by 31 December 1999.
Contact Miss Fitton on 020 7238 1050.

MAFF has a consumer helpline on 0345 573012. Phone and ask to be sent the monthly Food Safety Information Bulletin which includes news about various advisory committees as well as listing some of the consultation papers available.

CHECKOUT

Good for sales – bad for babies

Manufacturers are busily creating a new market in baby snack foods, but the Food Commission finds that many products are sweeter than chocolate biscuits and jam doughnuts.

Early in 1999 a new law limiting the amount of sugar permitted in baby foods such as biscuits came into force (see box below). We were worried at the time that the law allowed higher levels of sugar than was good for babies. We hoped that manufacturers would act responsibly and keep the sugar to the lowest level they could, in line with health recommendations.

How wrong we were. Within months several companies had announced the launch of new ranges of snack and biscuit finger foods. Boots,

Milupa and Nestlé, along with smaller companies such as Kallo, Hipp and Baby Organix, have all been marketing new and re-designed products during 1999, and stalwart Farleys (now owned by Heinz) has been extending its range. The result — as we show over the page — gives parents a wide choice of highly sweetened products, and only a small choice of unsweetened ones.

Getting it right

Both the quantity and frequency of sugar consumption are linked to the likelihood of suffering tooth decay (dental caries). No amount of tooth brushing will guarantee protection from the damaging effects of sugar on the surface of the tooth. And even before the baby teeth emerge they will come under attack from the sugary acids that cause decay.

It is not just the amount of sugar eaten but also the frequency with which teeth are exposed to sugar which determines the risk of decay.

Proportion of children aged 18-30 months consuming each item at least once a day

Biscuits.....	45%
Fruit juice.....	21%
Chocolates.....	15%
Sugary sweets.....	14%
Fizzy drinks.....	7%
Ices/lollies.....	6%
Blackcurrant drinks.....	6%
Cakes/pastries.....	4%

Source: Department of Health, 1995.

Low standards in EU Directive

The main piece of legislation controlling the levels of sugar permitted in baby foods is the EU Directive 96/5/EC on processed cereal-based foods and baby foods for babies and young children. It was enacted in UK food regulations in 1997, and came into force in March 1999.

In the small print of the appendix in this legislation was a requirement that baby foods in the form of biscuits should not have more than 1.8 grams of added sugar per 100 kiloJoules. At first glance this may seem small.

But in practice 1.8 grams quickly adds up, as a typical biscuit contains 300-500 kiloJoules, giving one or two heaped teaspoons of sugar per biscuit. More to the point, the law allows

baby biscuits to contain as much as 40% by weight of sugar.

What is worse, the law only restricts the levels of 'added' sugar, which is defined as sucrose, fructose, glucose, glucose syrups and honey. Other ingredients, such as maltose (from malt extract), lactose (from milk sugars) and sugar-rich fruit pastes (e.g. apricot, raisin or banana paste), can be used on top of the added sugar allowance.

The result can be sugar levels exceeding 50% of the weight of the biscuit. This is far more than a

regular jam tart or an ice cream, or even fruit gums. If the law was designed to protect babies from excessive sugar intake then it has clearly failed.

How 100 kJ of biscuit can be 40% sugar

sugar 42%	1.8g	30 kJ
vegetable fat 35%	1.5g	55 kJ
flour 23%	1.0g	15 kJ
total	4.3g	100 kJ

Restricting sugary foods to meal-times can help to limit the damage, while having sweet snacks between meals will increase the risk of decay. Sweet biscuits, confectionery and sweet drinks are particularly likely to be responsible for tooth decay, as they are most likely to be consumed between meals.

Most parents are well aware that sweets are bad for teeth. Soft drinks are still commonly given to children, although so-called low-sugar varieties are becoming more popular. Biscuits, though, may not be recognised by parents as particularly bad for teeth, although their composition of sticky starches and sugars could hardly be better designed to encourage dental caries.

Biscuits are certainly popular. In a Government survey of the dietary habits of young children, biscuits topped the list of sweet foods frequently eaten by children, with nearly half of all toddlers getting biscuits at least once every day.

Overall, only 4% of children in this young age group have dental caries. But looking at the links between food consumption and tooth decay, the survey found that 11% of children who ate biscuits more than once a day were found to have dental caries compared with 1% of children who ate biscuits less than once a day. Of all the food groups studied, biscuits showed the strongest relationship between frequency of consumption and experience of tooth decay.

Public health legislators need to set much tougher limits on the sugar allowed into a child's daily diet. The legislation is there already, it is just the small print that needs amending.

CHECKOUT

Babies beware: watch out

Our survey of twenty one top-selling baby biscuits found many with excessive sugar levels, and only a few which wouldn't be harmful to newly-emerging baby teeth.

Parents expect baby foods to be nutritious and safe for their children. Our survey found the majority of baby biscuits to be dangerous for an infant's newly-emerging teeth. Indeed some products were far sweeter than regular biscuits. We found products marketed by Nestlé (50% sugar) and Boots (37%) with even more sugar than jam tarts (36%) and even the traditional Farley's Rusks (29%) has more sugar than a chocolate digestive biscuit (27%). Worse still, products with the words 'reduced sugar' featured prominently on the label had more sugar than a jam doughnut (19% sugar).

Manufacturers jumping on the baby food bandwagon should ask themselves if they are acting responsibly in selling highly-sugared products, or are they exploiting the small print in the law which allows such hazardous products to be sold as suitable for infants?

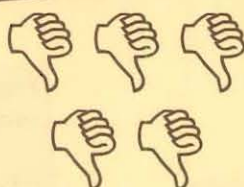
Consumers should look carefully at the small print, and put the highly-sweetened brands back on the shelf.



The worst products get the most 'thumbs down'

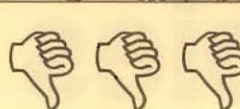
Sugar content is given as a % figure, followed by the sweetening ingredients used. Price is per 100g.

Note: Product formulations and prices may vary.



Nestlé Banana-Apple Stick.

50% sugar (fruit, fruit syrup and sugar) £1.50



Boots Teddy Bear biscuits.

37% sugar (sugar, honey, raisin paste) £1.50



Boots choc and orange animal shapes

35% sugar (sugar, fruit pastes) £1.05



Boots Gingerbread Men

31% sugar (sugar, golden syrup, glucose syrup) £1.05



Farleys Rusks

29% sugar (sugar) 72p



Tesco Tots Tub Shortcake

26% sugar (sugar) 33p



Milupa Biscuits

24% sugar (sugar, dextrose) 75p



Farleys Rusks - Marmite

21% sugar (sugar, dextrose) 75p



Nestlé Milk & Honey biscuits

22% sugar (sugar, honey) 95p

CHECKOUT

for the health hazards!



Farleys "Reduced sugar" Rusks - Banana

21% sugar (sugar, dextrose, banana) 72p



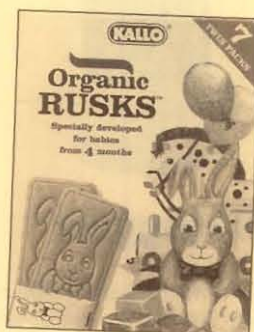
Hipp "reduced sugar" First Bites
21% sugar (sugar) 99p



Boots "lower sugar" Ruskmen - Apricot
17% sugar (sugar, glucose syrup) 56p



Baby Organix Banana Bread
15% sugar (dried fruit) 99p



Kallo Organic Rusks
14% sugar (sugar) 75p



Boots Baby Bagels
6% sugar (sugar, malt) 75p



Boots Baby Breadsticks
5% sugar (malt) 90p



Nestlé Sesame Sticks

1% sugar (malt extract) £1.32
(Our warning: mind the sesame seeds as these are the most common cause of anaphalactic shock after nuts)



Cow & Gate Rice Cakes
1% sugar (none) £1.78



Baby Organix Breadsticks
1% sugar (none) 99p



Boots Organic Rice Cakes
<1% sugar (none) £1.80



Bickiepegs Teething Biscuits
<1% sugar (none) £2.25

CHECKOUT

Loopy labels – Millennium Prize

We went shopping at the turn of the Millennium to see which labels should merit our special Millennium Prize for Loopiest Label.

Here are our front-runners for getting the prize as. Send us your votes — or better still tell us about your own favourite daft product or naff-est label or advert!

Plain speaking (1)

The industry's latest scheme to add 'health' to our diet is to sell us water with added bacteria.

Water will be bottled in Sweden and shipped to the UK with a special cap containing a nozzle loaded with lactic acid bacteria granules. The company BioGaia are saying their patented bacteria, *Lactobacillus Reuteri*, will stay dormant until the nozzle is depressed and the granules dissolve in the water. The bacteria, we are told, has 'antimicrobial properties', and BioGaia has the patent on the entire *Reuteri* species.

We were more impressed, though, with the plain name on the product. Health Water.



Plain speaking (2)

We were very impressed with the honest name of this product. Fluff has a simple ingredient list: sugar, egg white, colourings and flavour — which it admits is artificial flavour. In keeping with its honesty, it should really have left off those strawberries on the front of the pack, though.



Little piggies

Thornton's bar of strawberry flavour chocolate boasts an amusing rhyme on the back:

***You're a muddy chocolate pig
And we're hungry children
If eating you helps us grow big
Well, we probably will then***

Is this a health claim? Or do they mean 'grow fat'?



Down hill all the way

The process of weaning is, we once believed, a matter of helping babies transfer from milk feeds to family food.

With families increasingly depending on convenience foods for their daily meals, it was only a matter of time before the manufacturers of weaning products took the plunge — and openly admitted that their processed baby foods were a staging post for getting infants hooked onto their processed children's food.

The main difference from their regular canned spaghetti appears to be the extra thickened water, which is the problem with many baby foods. In this case, there is so little food in the product that a typical 10-month infant would need to eat nine or ten of these tins to get enough calories for the day.

Food Commission goes global

The Food Commission is taking an increasingly active role in multinational and global bodies responsible for food and health policies. We have been invited to observe meetings of Codex, the world trade regulating body for food, and meetings of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and to participate in the steering group of the European Dietary Guidelines programme.

As we announced in the last *Food Magazine*, we are now members of the International Association of Consumer Food Organisations (IACFO). Other members of IACFO are the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington, USA and Toronto, Canada, and the Japan Offspring Fund, Tokyo, Japan.

Codex

Forthcoming meetings include an Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology, to be held in Chiba, Japan in March. The Food Commission has submitted a brief comment on behalf of IACFO, outlining our call for greater consumer choice through full labelling and complete traceability of GMOs.

We also expressed our concern over safety issues and urged all novel foods to be subject to risk assessment using precautionary principles, and for an end to the concept of substantial equivalence — a term used by biotechnology regulators to deem novel foods as not needing testing if they are 'substantially equivalent' to traditional foods.

As many food legislators fail to see the link between food safety and environmental issues, we also added a note expressing our concern over the spread of genetically engineered material from test crops that had not been approved for food safety into neighbouring crops and into honey, which enter the food chain. We called for rigorous containment of all GE crops that have not been approved for human consumption.

A second Codex meeting is being held in Ottawa, Canada next May, to deal with health claims made on food labels. The Food Commission is supporting an IACFO position paper submitted for that meeting which calls for Codex to abandon the attempt to establish a standard permitting health claims.

IACFO takes this strong position on the grounds that, although health claims might in theory be of benefit to consumers by providing useful nutritional information, in practice it has been difficult for any government to regulate health claims effectively and to prevent misleading claims. The Food Commission has long argued that health messages are put on food products for commercial purposes, not for consumer education, and that such messages often conflict with official advice on healthy eating.



"Food Commission?!? Food Commission?!? This hasn't got anything to do with food, young man!"

The IACFO submission continues by suggesting that if Codex does not accept our proposals and proceeds to set health claims standards, then it should do so consistently and should not — as it presently proposes — set weaker standards for 'enhanced function' claims compared with tougher standards for 'reduction of disease risk' claims.

IACFO also urges Codex to ensure that health claims are pre-approved, that they are supported by a scientific consensus, and that they are not permitted to be made for foods that contain 'significant levels of unhealthful ingredients' including fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, trans fatty acids and added sugars. Furthermore, health claims should only be permitted on foods that are significant sources of protein, dietary fibre, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron, before fortification. Health claims should be stated in a form that emphasises the need to eat a healthy daily diet — such as 'a low fat, low cholesterol diet high in fruits, vegetables and grains that contain soluble fiber may reduce the risk of heart disease.'

OECD

As IACFO members, the Food Commission participated in a meeting of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Working Group on Biotechnology and Food Safety in Paris last autumn. The Working Group is collaborating with a second OECD body, which is working with another OECD body, the Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds, which meets at the start of February and to which we are also invited.

As with the Codex committee, we have submitted a short statement expressing our position and urging the OECD bodies to take environmental aspects of food safety into account.

A second contribution to the OECD has been made in a speech by CSPI's Bruce Silverglade, on behalf of IACFO, to a later OECD meeting. The speech criticised the current approach of trade legislation on safety that gives the benefit of the doubt to trade-promotion interests, and which leads

to downward harmonisation of standards. He called for a review of international food safety agreements that would place consumer protection and commerce on an equal footing.

European Health Eating project

The Food Commission has also been invited to attend the meetings of the steering group of an EC-funded international project on dietary guidelines, as a consumer organisation concerned with food. We are also invited to attend the meetings of the sub-group concerned with setting dietary targets. This group is having immense difficulty reconciling the views of public health experts with those being put to it by food industry bodies such as the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) and the Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries of the EU (CIAA).

The project includes a second sub-group which is charged with showing how the targets can be translated into foods. A third group is looking at how food guidelines can be put into practice in the community and a fourth group is looking at using the guidelines for influencing Europe-wide policies. Although this last group should be the most pertinent for public health, it is likely to be bypassed by the French government, which takes the European Presidency next July, and which is preparing its own food policy papers, due to be published next May or June.

Open letter to EC President

The Food Commission has joined with several other UK organisations to sign an open letter to Roman Prodi, President of the European Commission, urging him to ensure that the proposed European Food Safety Authority reflect consumers' needs. The letter calls to the Authority to

- be seen to put consumer protection as paramount
- be removed from sectorial pressure and vested interests
- be divorced from government pressure
- be accountable to the EC's consumer protection directorate, and be answerable to the European Parliament
- and operate in an open and transparent manner.

Copies of the OECD and Codex calls for submissions on biotechnology and food safety, and of the IACFO responses to these, are available from our office. Please send £4 to cover costs. The food labelling submission (8 pages) is available for further £4. So to is Bruce Silverglade's speech (13 pages) to the OECD. The open letter to Romano Prodi (5 pages) is available for £3.

Diet and children's behaviour

Is there a link between the food that children eat, particularly certain food additives, and their behaviour? Sue Dibb examines the latest US evidence.

For a quarter of a century, the hypothesis that diet can trigger symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other behavioural problems has been a controversial one. Now a new analysis of the research into diet and children's behaviour, by the Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) concludes there is evidence that food colourings and certain foods can adversely affect some children's behaviour. In a review of 23 controlled studies examined by CSPI, seventeen found evidence that some children's behaviour significantly worsens after they consume artificial colours or certain foods such as milk or wheat.

Notwithstanding this evidence, CSPI says that many health organisations and medical experts deny that diet can provoke adverse behaviours and that modified diets may benefit patients. Furthermore the National Institute of Mental Health largely dismisses diet as a treatment approach, and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has co-sponsored with an industry trade association a misleading pamphlet that denies the effect of diet on behaviour.

Ignoring or denying (or exaggerating) the effect of diet on behaviour is not helpful to children and their families, says CSPI. It recommends that government, the food industry, child welfare organisations, health professionals and social workers should recognise that diet can sometimes help children who have behavioural problems. It recommends that parents should consider modifying their children's diet for several weeks to ascertain any benefit (along with behavioural therapy) before resorting to medications. This is particularly the case because the stimulant drugs routinely used to treat ADHD may cause side effects including reduced appetite, stomach aches and insomnia. Even more worrying is that the most commonly used drug, methylphenidate (Ritalin), although highly effective in reducing the symptoms of ADHD, has been found to increase the incidence of liver cancer in a study on mice.

CSPI recognises that modifying a child's diet can be difficult, particularly in a society in which problem foods are ubiquitous. It has published a parents guide* to help those wishing to try dietary change and says that following such a diet should be no more difficult than adhering to a kosher or vegetarian diet.

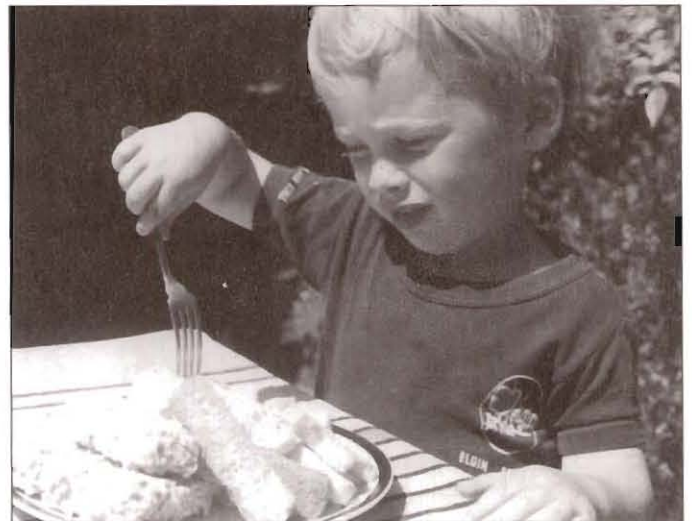
Furthermore the CSPI, together with a number of US child health professionals, are calling on the US health authorities to undertake new research into the link between diet and behaviour and to consider banning synthetic dyes in foods and other products (such as cakes, sweets, sweetened breakfast cereals, vitamin pills, drugs and toothpaste) widely consumed by children.

The Feingold diet

The controversy over diet and behaviour dates back to the mid 1970s, when Dr Benjamin Feingold, a medical allergy specialist from California, maintained that artificial food colourings and flavourings as well as certain natural chemicals known as salicylates (found in apricots, berries, tomatoes and other foods) could trigger ADHD. Feingold found that 30-50 per cent of the hyperactive children he treated benefited from diets free of these substances. He also discovered that when he prescribed his restricted diet for skin rashes, asthma or other allergic reactions, his patients' behavioural problems, if they existed, would also sometimes diminish.

As word of the Feingold diet spread, parents desperate to help their hyperactive children tried the diet. Many reported marked improvements in their children's behaviour and throughout the US, Feingold-diet support groups were set up by parents. In the UK, the Hyperactive Children's Support Group, which also advocates the Feingold diet, was founded in 1977.

But not everyone was convinced that diet might affect children's behaviour, not least the processed food industry. Many child-behaviour experts and



researchers were also sceptical of Feingold's claims and critical of his lack of controlled studies. Until the relationship between diet and behaviour was demonstrated in well-conducted research, they insisted, Feingold's claim should be considered an unproven hypothesis. Slowly university researchers began testing Feingold's claim.

In a 1990 review of diet and behaviour, Dr C Keith Connors at the University of Pittsburgh, who conducted many of the early trials and was initially sceptical that diet affected behaviour, concluded:

I have to admit that I have changed my mind about the Feingold idea since the 1970s...my judgment is that the evidence is strong enough, at least for preschoolers, and especially those with confirmed allergic symptoms, that one should eliminate a broad range of unnecessary and possibly harmful ingredients from these children's diets.... Taken with the caveat that diets do not cure, there seems good reason to try them as part of a total therapeutic effort including medical, educational and behavioural treatments.'

Other researchers have also found that children with behavioural problems who also suffered from asthma, eczema or skin rashes might be particularly helped by dietary changes. In 1982 the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) panel at a 'consensus development' conference concluded that food additives and certain foods affect a small proportion of children with behavioural problems. The panel also agreed there was limited positive evidence that Feingold-type diets did decrease hyperactivity. It noted however, that there were major limitations in the research in that most

School success

One south-London school claims it has improved classroom conduct and the academic performance of its pupils, by banning high-sugar, high-fat snacks and junk foods from its tuck shop.

Wolsey Junior School in New Addington, South London has had a healthy eating policy since its head, Peter Winder took up post in 1996. 'Since then', he has told *Community Practitioner* magazine, 'the difference has been clear to everyone. Our SATs results have improved enormously, and the children are calm, controlled and able to take advantage of the excellent teaching we have here.'

Crucial to the initiative was the school nurse, Paula Charnley, though ironically cutbacks now means her post has been lost. She set up meetings to explain the principles of healthy eating to parents and helped them explore options for a healthy lunch box. The school also removed carbonated drinks and high-sugar, high-fat snacks from its tuck shop. Now fresh fruit and vegetables are on sale. As the head has noted, 'It's not easy to change habits like these. We have to keep revisiting the issue, and reminding parents. We're competing against a lot of powerful advertising directly specifically at children after all.'

Although there is no disputing the school's success - it was the 10th most improved school in

the London area in 1998 and has been lauded in the educational press for its advances - diet alone is unlikely to account for the improved performance in the school. Good headteaching and staff commitment will also have had a big impact.

However there are many sound reasons for schools to take action on nutrition, not least that encouraging good eating habits at an early age will have benefits to overall health in terms of helping to prevent obesity and heart disease. The government's healthy school initiative aims to foster a 'healthier and better educated nation' and the long-awaited minimal nutritional standards for school meals are expected to be introduced in 2002. And there is much scope for individual schools to take the kind of action seen at Wolsey Junior by forming their own school nutrition action group, or SNAG, to improve the opportunities for pupils to learn about and experience good food and nutrition.

¹ Welford, H, Food for thought, *Community Practitioner*, Vol 72:8 August 1999.

■ Parents or schools wishing to find out more about School Nutrition Action Groups can telephone or fax: 01789 773 915.

studies tested only food colours and not flavours and preservatives that also might promote hyperactivity, and recommended further research.

But in the seventeen years since this conference, the NIH has sponsored little of the research recommended by its panel. Nevertheless, CSPI notes that a number of studies have been conducted by researchers in the US, Canada, Europe and Australia, which have provided new evidence that synthetic colours and possibly other additives and foods, such as milk and corn, adversely affect some children with behavioural problems.

While the debate over the role that diet may play in behaviour has continued, the number of children being diagnosed with ADHD has grown considerably. In the US, ADHD has been estimated to affect somewhere between 10-15% of school children — that's 1.8 to 2.7 million children. Even these figures may be an underestimate as many cases are thought to go undiagnosed. Furthermore, medics estimate that the occurrence of ADHD among children in the US is doubling every three to four years. The main symptoms are reduced attentiveness and concentration, excessive levels of activity, distractibility and impulsiveness. ADHD not only affects children but adults too. Adults with ADHD have higher rates of alcoholism, drug use and imprisonment.

The causes of ADHD are not known, but they are thought to be a combination of hereditary predisposition and environmental factors. Research in recent years has focused on prenatal exposures to agents such as lead, cigarette by-

products and alcohol as well as the effects of certain foods, food additives and poor diet. More recently, research has implicated pesticides and exposure to low levels of industrial chemicals that may interfere with hormones, especially thyroid. Obviously, combinations of all these factors could be important.

CSPI recognises that ADHD takes an enormous toll on children and their families and that early diagnosis and treatment is crucial. To help parents and their children, CSPI has produced a *Parent's Guide to Diet, ADHD and Behaviour* (see below). This includes information on ADHD and advice on deciding on a treatment, including modifying diet.

¹ Connors CK, *Feeding the Brain: How Foods Affect Children* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990), pp 184-5.

For further information:

■ *Diet, ADHD & Behaviour* by Michael F Jacobson and David Schardt (a 34 page report) and * *A Parents Guide to Diet, ADHD & Behaviour* are both published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington DC, 1875 Connecticut Ave NW#300, Washington DC20009. Tel: (202) 332 9110. Fax: (202) 265 4954. Email: cspipnet.org. Website: www.cspinet.org

■ *ADHD and Children's Environment*, Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly #678, December 2, 1999. Published by the Environmental Research Foundation, PO Box 5036, Annapolis, MD 21403. Fax (410) 263 8944; E-mail: erf@rachel.org

■ In the UK, the Hyperactive Children's Support Group offers information and support on the Feingold Diet. Send a SAE to HCSG, 71 Whyke Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 2LD. Website: www.hacsg.org.uk



Children's Food: The good the bad and the useless — see our report in the next *Food Magazine*

Farm subsidies — who needs them?

Given £200 what would you spend it on? A holiday, household improvements, nice clothes? Or support for the UK farming industry? Because that is what each of us is paying every year for Europe's agricultural policies. And, writes Vicki Hird, the latest reforms will do little to help.

The Common Agricultural Policy budget exceeded €40bn (£25bn) last year, and is expected to reach €43bn at current prices by 2002. Add to that the other forms of state funding for agriculture and higher food prices (above world market levels), and the figures show each person in the EU is contributing £200 to prop up our agricultural system.¹

Virtually all the CAP subsidies and supports are used to encourage greater intensification of production, although we already produce more than we need of most major commodities.

Over the past two years, Europe has been deciding how it could reallocate the bulk of the farm subsidies (in beef, dairy and arable) and how it will fit its highly protectionist policy into world trade negotiations. Here in the UK, there is universal agreement that the CAP should be reformed. But it has been open season on how, and to what extent, it should be transformed. The

government, farmer representatives, conservation and public health bodies clearly have different ideas of what is needed.

The UK Government approach, as presented by MAFF, has changed little during the 90s whatever the Government colour: the CAP must be reformed to bring prices in line with world prices, to make the sector more competitive and to take advantage of global markets. Ensuring cheap raw materials for the food processing and retailing industry is the top priority, and beating American, Canadian and Australian farmers is the next.

MAFF's seemingly supportive statements on pushing for increasing support in Europe for environmentally based farming and rural development have been highly ambiguous. The rhetoric has not been matched by the reality of national funds, unlike in other countries. The UK is 15th out of 15, bottom of the league in terms of support for green farming and rural schemes, spending just £12 per hectare compared to £40/ha in Portugal and £158/ha in Finland.²

Farming unions (but not necessarily the bulk of their members) have favoured a basically reactive approach, following the MAFF line but opposing anything to do with the allocation of subsidies away from production and into rural development or green farming schemes. They have consistently opposed modulation (a means by which money can be siphoned off the CAP subsidies given to farmers in order to support more environmentally-friendly farming schemes) in deference to their dominant large farmer membership.

Conservation and environment groups have been calling for a major CAP reform for many years. Putting the vast CAP budget to work in protecting and enhancing the rural environment, rather than damaging it, has been the main

European CAP expenditure

(billions of euros, 1999 prices)³

Year	Total CAP budget	For 'green' farming etc
2000	40.9	4.3
2001	42.8	4.3
2002	43.9	4.3
2003	43.8	4.3
2004	42.8	4.4
2005	41.9	4.4
2006	41.6	4.4
Total	297.7	30.4

campaign. More recently there has been greater emphasis on promoting rural development, strengthening the local economy and jobs and enhancing local food production. The links between more environmentally friendly farming, animal welfare and rural development are clear — without a thriving farming and allied industry, the countryside we have come to enjoy and cherish will not be maintained.

Often ignored and little understood is the impact of the CAP on the health of the European citizen. The fact that the vast bulk of subsidies is spent on meat and dairy production, along with substantial protection measures for sugar, wine and tobacco producers, should make anyone concerned with health examine the role of the CAP (see past issues of the *Food Magazine*). Two-thirds of the total support given to farming in 1997/8 went to the livestock sectors. The Food Commission and others have highlighted a paradoxical situation whereby taxpayers and consumers unwittingly support industries which are producing far too much of what is bad for them and damaging the environment and causing animal distress at the same time, while largely failing to support fruit and vegetable producers, and better farming practices such as organic.

CAP-speak

- **Direct payments** — farmers are increasingly receiving support through annual cheques rather than the old system of farmgate prices being maintained.
- **Compliance/conditionality** — used to describe the applications of certain criteria/standards (generally environmental) for farmers to adhere to be eligible for subsidies.
- **Modulation** — the siphoning off (or recycling as MAFF puts it) of money from farmers' production subsidies, in order to help pay for rural development and greener farming.
- **Intervention price** — price at which storage agencies in each member state have an obligation to purchase produce offered to them by producers.
- **Set-aside** — area of cultivated land not used for food production for which the farmer receives direct payments.

The final, flawed agreements

Despite the calls for reform, at an EU level the pressures for maintaining the status quo have proved too strong. A six year plan agreed in June, called Agenda 2000, was a major compromise and a huge disappointment. The level of CAP expenditure has been fixed and should rise less than 10% over 6 years. But how that money is being used reflects the same production-based approach as the old CAP. In short, direct payments to beef and arable farmers are increased while price support is reduced (see box) from 2000 onwards.

The increases in direct subsidies may not be as high as farming organisations wanted but farmers will still benefit from around £40bn a year. And instead of cutting milk quotas (which limit the amount of milk each country can produce), EU quotas will be increased by over 2.8 million tonnes from 2005/6.³ An appalling new scheme, entirely for the benefit of intensive beef producers, was introduced — the slaughter premium — which gives farmers direct payments (around £40) for each animal slaughtered.

On a more positive note, Agenda 2000 contains a new Rural Development Regulation which has been designed to support a sustainable future for rural areas. This means funds will be available for green farming schemes such as organic, for training, improvement of agricultural holdings, marketing and processing facilities, forestry, and to generally help farming and associated business adapt and develop in response to a changing market (see box). The

amounts are small — some 90% of the CAP budget will still go towards production support, with barely 10% being used for rural development.

The CAP changes mean continued heavy support for cereals, beef and dairy farming and no changes to the sugar and sheep, tobacco or wine sectors. Pigs and poultry have little to cheer about as the cheaper feed grains resulting from lower price support will encourage intensive production when what the industry should do is de-intensify. As Sustain's recent report *Fowl Deeds* described, the chicken broiler meat industry has become as far removed from healthy farming as one can get.⁴ The environment and the struggling farming community get a few crumbs but there is nothing to encourage more production of healthy, affordable fruit and vegetables.

The Agenda 2000 money available in the UK for rural development support is particularly low, at some £100m per year, which can be used only if the sum is matched by an equal amount from the UK government's own coffers. As previously noted, MAFF has not been good at allocating money for 'greener' farming and it could use some of the money in unhelpful ways such as enhancing intensive livestock industries. However, MAFF has managed to secure the extra funds from the Treasury to match the EU money, and has made several suggestions that should be followed through. These include more money for countryside stewardship grants (£75m/year) and organic conversion grants (£20m/year), plus support for farm tourism projects, marketing and training schemes.

Under the European rules, MAFF could have also chosen to attach 'green' conditions to all farm subsidies ('conditionality' or 'cross compliance') but has so far declined. It could also have found extra money by siphoning off more from larger farm subsidies (some farmers get over £1.5 million a year) to pay for rural development schemes. Again they have declined, deciding instead to take 2.5% off all farmers' subsidies (even those making under £2,000 a year) meaning all farms suffer and results in fewer funds being available.

On the home front, MAFF's status is rapidly being eroded by both policy changes — the formation of the Food Standards Agency which will take food safety out of MAFF's hands — and by a dwindling ability to cope with European pressures, an increasingly noisy public and a disgruntled farming and rural community. They have won a few good victories such as the improvement of animal welfare in pushing for the end to battery egg farming (though not other intensive poultry farming) and banning pig stall and tethering systems in the UK.

Yet all it takes is a major crisis, as we saw among small farmers last autumn, and MAFF can 'find' £140 million to hand out with no conditions attached as to whether it is used in environment-, animal- and consumer-friendly ways.

You might have chosen to spend your £200 per year on some fruit or a bar of chocolate each day if

Aims of the Rural Development Regulation

- to improve agricultural holdings,
- to guarantee the safety and quality of foodstuffs,
- to ensure fair and stable incomes for farmers,
- to ensure that environmental issues are taken into account,
- to develop complementary and alternative activities that generate employment, with a view to slowing the depopulation of the countryside and strengthening the economic and social fabric of rural areas,
- to improve living and working conditions and equal opportunities

so inclined. But, at least for the duration of Agenda 2000, you will not have the choice.

■ Vicki Hird is Policy Director at Sustain — The alliance for better food and farming, and author of *Perfectly Safe To Eat?* (see page 23). She writes here in a personal capacity.

Notes

¹ In 1998 the CAP and national agricultural policies combined are estimated to have resulted in total UK transfers from consumers and taxpayers to farming and food production of over £11 billion, or between £3-£4 per person per week. (MAFF *Economics and Statistics Group*, Working Paper 2, August 1999)

² CPRE Press release 'Governments Future Vision for farming is a hollow promise', 27th September 1999. CPRE, London

³ CAP reform — a policy for the future, European Commission DGVI Fact Sheet, June 1999

⁴ *Fowl Deeds* — The impact of chicken production and consumption on people and the environment, Food Facts No 9, Sustain, 1999.

⁵ *Agenda 2000 Reform of the common agriculture policy (CAP)* on Agricultural Directorate web page europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/vb/160002.htm.

⁶ MAFF, *Economics and Statistics Group*, August 1999.

⁷ *Opinion by the Consumers Committee of the European Commission on the Reform of the CAP*, Brussels, 14 June 1999.

⁸ Opinion of the European Court of Auditors, Opinion 10/8, *Official Journal OJC* 401, 22 December 1998.

CAP support to UK agriculture by sector 1997/8 £million⁶

(price support and direct aid combined)

Cereals.....	1060
Sugar beet.....	140
Fruit and veg.....	160
Oilseeds.....	165
Proteins.....	70
Linseed.....	35
Set-aside & AAPs.....	145
Beef.....	1240
Sheep.....	525
Dairy.....	1505
Poultry.....	220
Total.....	5265*

price support as % of total.....53%

*Other national and structural spending of £0.61bn means total support received by UK farmers was £5.33bn (32% of gross output)

Food prices favour worse diets

Trends in food prices over the last 15 years show that it is getting harder for low income families to maintain a healthy diet. Healthier foods have been increasing in price more rapidly than less healthy foods. At the same time, changes in family income levels have failed to keep up with general price rises.

These findings are based on the latest Family Expenditure Survey and the National Food Survey, both of which were published at the end of last year, and which the Food Commission has compared with earlier surveys in the last 15 years. These figures, when compared to the rise in prices generally and the rise in food prices particularly, reveal the problems that cash-strapped families face:

- In 1984, 10 per cent of households were receiving less than £42 per person per week, a figure which rose to just under £74 by 1998 — a rise of 77 per cent. In the same period, the official measure of prices of all goods and services rose by 83 per cent. Incomes for the poorest ten per cent of households thus failed to rise in proportion to

general costs. Meanwhile the incomes of those at the highest end of the scale (the richest ten percent) rose from nearly £116 per person to nearly £280, a rise of over 140 per cent. (See table 1)

- Price rises for food have been 56 per cent in the period, which is below that for many other goods and services. But this does not mean that low income families can buy more food, if their other budgetary needs are being squeezed more tightly. Services such as domestic repairs, insurance, travels costs and rent have all risen by more than the average.

- Food prices have not changed uniformly: price increases for sugar, fats and white bread have been low compared with price rises for potatoes, rice, fish and chicken. (See table 2)

The Food Commission is calling for a national basket of goods, such as those considered in the report *Low Cost but Acceptable* (Family Budget Unit 1998), to form the basis for budget standards that in turn will fix the rates for benefit levels and

Table 2
Changes in food prices 1984-1998

	price increase
All foods	56%
fruit (oranges, apples)	64%
veg, (cabbage, frozen peas)	61%
sugar	47%
margarine	19%
vegetable oils	14%
white sliced bread	30%
wholemeal bread	18%
fresh white fish fillet	116%
frozen fish products	69%
broiler chicken	95%
beef sausages	38%
rice	188%
fresh potatoes	120%
frozen chips	26%

Prices fluctuate seasonally and may be influenced by consumer demand, but the overall picture indicates that families on tight budgets may find they can save money by opting for less healthy food items. A diet of fat, sugar and white sliced bread is relatively cheaper than ever before.

national minimum wage levels. The basket would be set to ensure that a wide variety of healthy foods could be purchased by families, taking account of cultural and individual needs and preferences.

Table 1

Rise in incomes (per person) and prices since 1984

	lowest 10% of families	highest 10% of families	retail price index
1984	(below £41.83)	(above £115.63)	—
1989	+26%	+55%	+29%
1994	+53%	+96%	+62%
1998	+77%	+141%	+83%

National surveys reveal continuing food poverty

In two official surveys the plight of low income families continues to be demonstrated, as shown both by the amounts available to spend on food and by the nutrient content of their diets.

The *Family Expenditure Survey*¹ for 1998 shows that the poorest 10% of families are spending about £22 per person per week on all foods and drinks, including those consumed away from the home, compared with £44 per person spent by the richest 10%. For low income families this represented 27% of their total income, while for high income families it represented 18% of total income. Food eaten in the home accounted for over 80% of the food budgets of low income families, but 55% of the food budgets of high income families.

The *National Food Survey*² for 1998 includes data comparing families having weekly household incomes over £640 with families having weekly incomes below £160 (families with one or more earner). Daily intakes of nutrients per person for

these two groups show wide discrepancies, including the following:

	low income families compared with high
NME sugars	+9%
polyunsaturated oils	-10%
fibre	-19%
calcium	-6%
iron	-15%
vitamin A	-22%
thiamin	-13%
folate	-16%
vitamin C	-38%
vitamin E	-11%

Food intakes also showed some marked differences:

	low income families compared with high
whole fat milk	+52%
reduced fat milk	-13%
margarine	+28%
sugar	+149%
fresh green vegetables	-35%
fresh fruit	-48%
white bread	+129%
wholemeal bread	-27%
chicken	-28%
meat products	-4%
fresh fish	-64%
frozen fish products	+34%

¹ *Family Spending: A Report on the 1998-99 Family Expenditure Survey*, Office for National Statistics, The Stationery Office, 1999.

² *The National Food Survey 1998*, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, The Stationery Office, 1999.

Half poor children miss free school meals

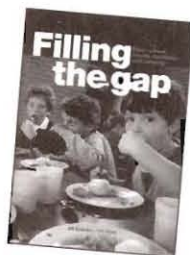
Of the 1.8 million children entitled to free school meals, 300,000 are not taking advantage of the scheme. And a further one million children in low-income families are not permitted to claim the meals.

Now 'Free School Meals for children who need them' — a campaign by the Child Poverty Action Group — is calling for the scheme to be extended to all families on the poverty line (which they estimate to be an annual income below £14,300). They also call for much more work to be done to encourage better take-up of the meals, with a school's take-up levels being used as a performance

indicator and the meals subsidy ring-fenced to prevent it being used for other school activities.

And with responsibility for school meals passing to schools themselves in April 2000, the campaign is urging OFSTED to use good practice criteria for school meals as a measure of the schools' pastoral care.

■ The 48-page campaign booklet *Filling the Gap*, is available price £5 from CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, tel 020 7837 7979.



WHO monitors breastfeeding policies

A report from the World Health Organization highlights the wide discrepancies in breastfeeding rates in different European countries — with Britain coming bottom in proportion of mothers breastfeeding their babies for the first three months.

Of 25 countries (including Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states) reporting breastfeeding prevalence at 3 months, six countries reported that 80% or more of mothers fully or partially breastfed, while five countries reported that 40% or less breastfed. Britain reported breastfeeding rates below 30%.

The report also looks at the proportion of maternity hospitals

that are recognised as 'baby friendly' — a WHO-UNICEF scheme to encourage better breastfeeding promotion — and finds that just 3 of the UK's 202 hospitals with maternity facilities are currently recognised as conforming with the baby friendly criteria.

■ Copies of the report *Comparative Analysis of the Implementation of the Innocenti Declaration in WHO European Member States*, are available from Dr Aileen Robertson, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, tel 00 45 3917 1362.



Breakfast thoughts

A report on the provision of out-of-school food services *Food for Thought: Breakfast Clubs and their Challenges* looks at the development of breakfast clubs in the UK, and discusses their role in improving children's health and education and supporting their families.

■ Available price £12.50 from the New Policy Institute, 1090 Coppergate House, 16 Brune Street, London E1 7NJ, tel 020 7721 8421.

Breastfeeding and obesity

A recent paper in the British Medical Journal reported evidence that breastfeeding helps reduce the risk of obesity and being overweight in children aged 5 and 6.

A sample of nearly 10,000 German pre-school children found the prevalence of obesity to be 4.5% among children never exclusively breastfed, dropping to 3.8% among those exclusively breastfed for 2 months, 2.3% for those breastfed 3-5 months, 1.7% for 6-12 months and

Nestlé boycott gets official approval?

Patti Rundall, Policy Director of the Nestlé boycotting group Baby Milk Action, was awarded an OBE in the New Year honours list. The group has been campaigning for over twenty years against the unethical promotion of commercial baby milks, and was for much of the time based in the kitchen of Patti's home in Cambridge.

The award was made 'for services to infant nutrition'. Patti told the *Food Magazine* that she saw the award as being made to all those who have supported and encouraged the campaign over the years.



Patti Rundall of Baby Milk Action, awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours list.

DoH reviews welfare foods

The Department of Health is reviewing the free vitamins and milk it gives out to pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and infants under 5 in low income families.

A panel of its advisory body, COMA, has come up with suggestions to broaden the scheme so that choices other than cows milk are available to women, and that the vitamin formulations include folic acid but no longer include vitamin A.

An alternative incentive to encourage breastfeeding should be offered, rather than the free cow's milk, while for bottle-fed babies the amount of infant formula allowed should be halved after the first 6 months, with incentives to purchase weaning foods instead. They also suggest extending the infant formula

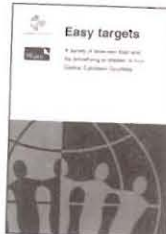
allowance until the child is at least 18 months.

■ The proposals are available for comment from Ms Jackson-Roberts on 020 7972 5663.

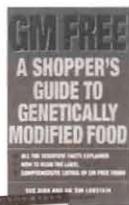
■ A briefing paper on the Welfare Foods Scheme, based on a survey of welfare scheme users, is available for £1.25, from the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations, Unit 4, Pride Court, 80-82 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, tel 020 7833 3319.

■ A Consultative Conference was held by Maternity Alliance in December to discuss the proposals and make further recommendations to the DoH. A copy of the conference report is available from Jenny McLeish at Maternity Alliance, tel 020 7588 8583, ext 127.

With the Swedish European Presidency, due in a year's time, promising to review the legislation on advertising to children, this review of TV promotion of food and toys to children in Central Europe is timely. It complements the earlier publication from Consumers International, *A Spoonful of Sugar* (1996), on advertising within the EU. Both reports are available from CI (tel 020 7226 6663, fax 020 7354 0607).

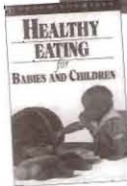


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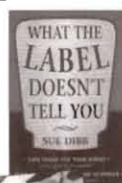
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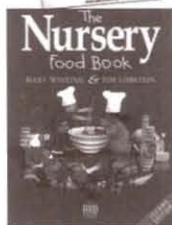
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Perfectly Safe to Eat?

The facts on food.

Vicki Hird, The Women's Press, 34 Great Sutton Street, London EC1V 0LQ. £8.99. ISBN 0 7043 4641 9

Vicki Hird, is policy director of Sustain, the Alliance for Better Food and Farming and has organised successful campaigns to improve policies on food miles, farm subsidies, organic farming and jobs in food production. The publication of this, her first book, is timely. As the UK's new Food Standards Agency is working out its future role, and with food safety issues playing an increasingly important political role in Europe and at an international level, this book lays out the blueprint for a radical change in the food system.



Achieving such objectives will be no mean feat. As Hird writes: 'The greatest challenges facing those who want a better food system are the complexity of the food-chain, the labyrinthine nature of the regulations and rules involved, and the fast-changing nature of the industry and the systems which control it.' This book provides an understanding of the structures of power behind the food industry, it looks at who is in charge, who has the greatest power and how they use it. Hird argues that the key players in the food and agricultural industries, the government and European policy makers have got the recipe for healthy food wrong.

But this isn't just a book about problems. It shows how we all can play our part in helping to shape more sustainable and ethical food production. From vividly showing how the lifestyle and shopping choices we make here can have serious consequences for third world producers and workers to highlighting initiatives closer to home, such as local food links, this is a book to encourage readers rather than to depress them.

International Food Safety Handbook

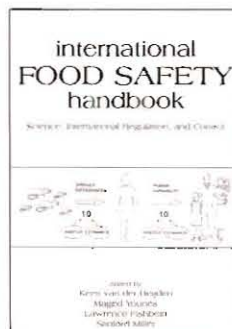
Science, International Regulation and Control

Edited by K van der Heijden et al, Marcel Dekker, 270 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016, 1999, ISBN 0-8247-9354-4, \$195.00.

This is an 800-page book largely comprised of technical chapters by prominent scientists. It is also expensive. And being for the most part written by people with close links to the food industry we might not have reviewed it, but for the fact that the book is redeemed by one chapter — written by The Food Commission!

In our chapter, we try to look beyond technical matters and ask what factors lead to consumers having concerns about food safety, what the interests of the various players are — including technicians, regulators and marketers — and we conclude that consumers are well-advised not to trust the food industry. The industry has different and contradictory interests to those of consumers, and no amount of tinkering with the appearance of food safety can paper over this division.

A copy of the chapter, 'Why consumers have lost confidence in the food industry', can be found on the internet (at <http://www.who.dk/nutrition/loose%5Fconfid.htm>) but is missing the references. For the full 60-page manuscript, send us a £3 cheque payable to 'The Food Commission' to cover our costs.



Letters

Dear Food Magazine

Much as I appreciated your early review of our book: *The New Foods Guide*, I was worried that it was not very accurate.

We most certainly did not and do not predict that 'one day we might see GM organic'. In fact, in my view the decision by the organic movement not to allow GM in organic produce, has been a key factor in its current success. I see no reason for this to change. Choosing organic should always be one way of exercising a 'no' vote for GM.

The review also implies that we structured our book around the Dragon report, *New Foods*. Actually the similar approach taken was purely coincidental. We were very interested that Dragon had come to similar conclusions, when we saw what they had done.

I felt that your view was very 'thin' compared to the content of the book. We do give the pros and cons of GM, organic and functional foods, to allow people to make up their own minds on the issues. But we also give lots of information about different ingredients, which foods are likely to change in what way, how foods might be developed to help different health problems and most importantly give a 10 point Manifesto on where we think the food industry should be heading. We would very much appreciate some support from the Food Commission on this Manifesto, or at least a comment on whether you agree with the points made.

Finally, I should point out that the book retails at £7.99

Julia Hailes
co-author, *New Foods Guide*

Editors note: Sorry, Julia, but space is always at a premium in the Food Magazine and we like to include as many books as possible.

GE: Engineering and You

Moyra Bremner, Harper Collins, 77-85 Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8JB, 1999, ISBN 0-00-653190-3, £6.99.

A bargain, with over 400 pages and each one worth browsing. Ms Bremner is to be applauded for putting so much information and argument into a readable, journalistic format. The style is a little breathless sometimes, with the occasional verb-free sentence, but no matter — it is part of her anger at what big business is doing to our biological inheritance.

The book covers the full spectrum of the genetic engineering debate: plant patenting, subsistence and agribusiness farming, animal engineering, food crops, food labelling, science and regulatory issues, and under it all flows her passionate denunciation of the over-reductionist attempts to capture life in a laboratory flask.

The author has spared no efforts. She tells us she had heard that Mars Ltd was telling people 'None of our products contain genetically modified

material'. She got to work on the company and 'three days, several phone calls and some determined questioning later, Mars' chief press officer eventually told me that they did use lecithin from GM soya.' The company had used the legal definitions — which did not require GM derivatives such as additives to be described as GM — to make a statement 'that was legally correct but potentially misleading. If a company like Mars, which sits on the government's Food Advisory Committee, can apply this law with such curious precision, who else may be doing so?'

A fine campaigning book, with lists of organisations, a glossary, and plenty of references for further reading. Such books are often overtaken by time, even before they are published, but this one is as rich as a Christmas pud and should be good for at least a year or two.





Milking the profits

Breast-feeding mums might tell you that a sleepless night could lead to lower milk supplies — but it doesn't seem to be true for cows.

Farmers desperate to squeeze extra milk from their cows without increasing their herd size or feed costs have come up with a new ploy. Keep the lights on in the cattle shed for 18 hours a day and milk yields can rise as much as 16%, according to researchers at the Farm Energy Centre, Stoneleigh.

There must be no shadowy corners. 'A light level of 200 lux for 16-18 hours a day is required over 90% of the area,' say the researchers.

To make best use of the cheaper electricity periods the Centre suggest putting the cattle to bed around 6.30 pm and waking them up six hours later, just after midnight, with some nice bright lights, and keeping them awake till the following evening.

Ingredient: 100% colouring

If you challenge the world's biggest food manufacturer, Nestlé, about their processed foods, they will tell you all the wonderful news about how nutritious they are. Ask them about additives and again it is all good news.

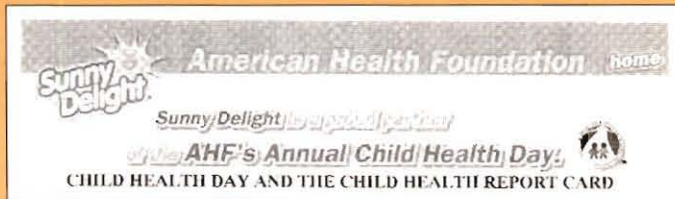
One reader asked about colourings, saying she felt they were unnecessary and added to the chemical burden on children, especially.

Nestlé replied by describing the safety of all their additives, and the company's compliance with the laws and regulations. Adding colour, they said, 'makes an important contribution to the attractiveness of the finished product, and the pleasure people derive from it.'

And, they added, without colouring 'many products would not exist'.

And who would lose from that?

Sunshine and health



The UK's most popular soft drink among children is also going down well in the USA. So much so that it is taking on the role of Proud Partner of Child Health Day.

Child Health Day is run by the American Health Foundation, and was established in 1928 by then US President Calvin Coolidge to develop targeted social, educational and health interventions to improve children's well-being.

The Child Health Day even has its own Pledge, which it promotes to encourage a year-long

commitment to healthy practices, with the message:

- Have a healthy breakfast
- Stop smoking
- Engage in physical activities
- Live and play safely, and
- Take care of your teeth.

With ten teaspoons of sugar in each half-litre bottle, dentists might well wonder exactly how Procter & Gamble's drink helps children get healthy.

Beware the Latin

Allergy sufferers being careful to avoid nuts, milk or eggs must now start learning Latin.

Under new EC regulations the makers of cosmetics and toiletries are required to show their ingredients in Latin, in a move designed to improve product safety for European travellers. Terms such as *arachis hypogaea* and *ovum* will be listed on the labels — but how many allergy sufferers learnt Latin at school, and will know that these terms mean the product contains peanut oil and egg?

FAO cuts the ...

The Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN's bureaucracy for food issues, has been trimming its budget.

It has announced a saving of over \$25m a year. How did they do it? 'By holding fewer and shorter meetings, and printing fewer and shorter documents'.

Easy when you know how!

Contaminated food? Eat Olestra!

Olestra, the synthetic fat substitute from Procter & Gamble (see Sunny Delight), may do more than encourage greasy stools and stained knickers — it might help clear out toxins from your body.

Researchers studying fat-soluble poisons such as dioxin and PCBs found that eating three packs of Olestra-rich crisps every day increased the removal of the toxic chemicals by up to eleven times the normal rate.

Anyone affected by the dioxin-tainted poultry in Belgium earlier this year will need to go to the USA to buy their Olestra snacks as the fat-substitute has not been approved for European sale. But eating Olestra may lead to deficiencies in fat-soluble vitamins, so you will need to take vitamin supplements. But vitamin pills often come with a range of additives: artificial sweeteners, colourings and preservatives.

For every solution you buy, they sell you another problem.



Consultations... or tokenism?

As readers who only get to this page after reading the rest of the magazine will know, we are starting a new section giving details of papers which the government is circulating for comment. But do they really want any replies?

One draft EC Directive we were asked to read had to have comments submitted before a crucial meeting on December 15. A month later, on 10 January, we are sent a photocopied note saying that the meeting did not discuss the Directive.

Another document — a mere 127 pages — arrived on 5 January, with comments required by

21 January, 12 working days. What is more, people wishing to respond were invited to 'take a far-sighted and constructive approach', noting that 'proposals for fundamental change should be supported by well-presented arguments, taking account of factors such as administrative, political and public acceptability, feasibility and cost.'

And a third document arrived in the same post, on 5 January, asking for comments on Codex proposals for regulating GMO labelling etc, with a deadline of 20 December — two weeks earlier!