

# FOOD MAGAZINE

**Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all**

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## Safe beef? FSA says 'Don't ask us'

**Faced with loopholes in the beef regulations, the Food Standards Agency is telling shoppers to look after themselves.**

**A** series of embarrassing loopholes in the UK's beef regulations has exposed the weaknesses of the government's Food Standards Agency.

Despite consumer fears over BSE, the agency has admitting that consumers cannot tell whether beef is from UK or continental cattle, cannot tell what age the beef is, and cannot tell if foods like take-aways and ready meals contain beef. The agency has told consumers there is little it can do to help.

Imported beef from older cattle cannot be sold in the UK as *meat*, but it can be put into burgers, sausages, salami and pies. Furthermore, the UK imports large quantities of processed meat products from countries across Europe (see table), including Germany where it was legal until last October to include cattle brain and spinal cord in some sausage products.

Furthermore, in the UK as well as the rest of Europe, it is still legal to use the brains, eyes and spinal cords of cattle under six months old in our processed meat dishes. The label may not tell you.



*"These are Eurosausages, madam. And trust me, you don't want to know what's in them"*

### **Euromeat: imported burgers, sausages, pâté and pies**

UK imports of processed beef products from countries with BSE, 1999-2000.

	metric tonnes
<b>Irish Republic</b>	17,667
<b>Germany</b>	1,064
<b>Denmark</b>	997
<b>Netherlands</b>	785
<b>Belgium</b>	477
<b>France</b>	84
<b>Spain</b>	7

These are glaring loopholes in the current legislation — legislation which is supposed to ensure that no risky material enters the food chain. But instead of shutting off all possible sources of contamination, the Food Standards Agency has told consumers they are on their own.

In December, despite acknowledging that beef products on sale in the UK may include risky material, the Agency said it was not advising consumers to avoid particular products. Furthermore, in the name of maintaining 'consumer choice', the FSA declined to ban or withdraw any beef products from the market.

The Agency says it believes the level of risk is acceptable. Individuals who want to 'reduce as far as possible any additional risk' should, says the Agency:

- buy their meat from 'reputable sources'
  - choose processed meat 'from a BSE-free country or one where there are tight controls'
  - ask the shop where the meat came from
- In other words, *'Don't ask us. We think there's really no problem. If you feel anxious, talk to the shopkeeper.'*

This is not what we want from the Food Standards Agency. Bland reassurances are not enough. The Food Commission believes we need a stronger commitment to consumer safety with tough legislation and strict enforcement.

See Editorial, page 2



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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## Big fish, little fish

Who should be promoting the consumer's interest in food?

The Food Standards Agency was set up by the incoming Labour Government as an answer to the BSE crisis. The perceived bias in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would be dealt with, said Labour, by creating a separate Agency responsible for food standards — an agency that would put consumers first.

Has it done so?

Take the loopholes in the BSE regulations (see front cover). These were not of the Agency's making. But they are the Agency's responsibility — if the Agency won't deal with them no-one else will. Yet the Agency's response is to tell consumers to look after themselves.

As we go to press, there is new concern over farmed fish. Salmon have been found with high levels of industrial pollutants — dioxins and PCBs — that are highly toxic to humans.

The Agency's response is to say that they already know, that the levels are no higher than are found in wild salmon, and that provided people eat only one portion a week they should be all right.

This is complacent. Oily fish such as salmon are recommended for healthy eating. Yet, rather than taking action to ensure salmon is safe to eat, the Agency is telling us to keep our consumption to low levels. If we eat any more, it's our own fault if we get poisoned.

It appears the government has learned nothing. And perhaps it never will. As we go to press we hear reports that none of the government officials responsible for the BSE crisis will face disciplinary proceedings. Many have already received knighthoods and honours.

But if no-one is accountable, nothing will change.

## The Food Magazine

The Food Magazine is researched and produced by a small team of dedicated staff and volunteers. To ensure our independence we do not accept any advertising in this magazine, nor do we accept grants from the food industry or government.

We depend on the income we receive from subscriptions and donations. If you would like to support our work a donation can be sent to The Food Commission at Freepost KE 7564, London N1 9BR. You can also make a credit card donation by calling our office on 020 7837 2250. We will send a receipt on request. Your support is very much appreciated!

**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.

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### BADvertisements!

This magazine takes no advertising for food products. We believe that food companies already promote their products too much.

But we do like to expose food companies' deceptive descriptions, silly statements and loopy labels.

So watch out for our ANTI-ADVERTISEMENTS scattered through this magazine!



# FSA official linked to cattle hormone débâcle

Dr George Paterson, appointed last year as Chief Executive of the Scottish wing of the Food Standards Agency, has been named as one of the key actors in the suppression of information about the hazards of the milk-boosting hormone, bovine somatotropin (BST).

*Food Magazine* readers may remember the furious struggle in Canada over the licensing of Nutrilac, a genetically-engineered form of BST produced by Monsanto. The controversial hormone has been banned in Europe, is permitted for use in dairy herds in the USA, and had been 'under review' by the Canadian government for over nine years.

Several scientists involved in the Canadian review process had expressed concerns that the cattle hormone may be unsafe, and may lead to high levels of a compound, IGF-1, in milk for human consumption, raising the risk of breast cancer. At one point some of these scientists had gone on television complaining that their worries were being ignored and their supervisors were pressing them to approve the hormone.

As a result of going public, the scientists received written reprimands and were told not to make their dissent public.

The scientists took their case to court. Last September the judge found in their favour, saying that the scientists had a right to speak out over their concerns. A 52-page judgement stated that it was unreasonable for the Canadian health ministry to reprimand the scientists when they were bringing up a legitimate health and safety concern. 'Such a

concern,' wrote the judge, 'outweighs civil servants' obligations to the department.'

The agency responsible for co-ordinating the human safety side of the drug approval process at the time was the Canadian government Food Directorate. And the Director General of the Food Directorate was Dr George Paterson — the man now in charge in Scotland.

Commenting on concerns expressed over the appointment of George Paterson, the Food Standards Agency said that the interviewing panel that gave Dr Paterson the job were 'greatly impressed' by his 'commitment to openness.'

■ **Footnote:** The FSA's chief executive, Geoffrey Podger, stated that Dr Paterson was a man 'committed to consumer involvement in food safety and standards' and that his appointment 'has been fully demonstrated by his subsequent performance in Scotland'.

Dr Paterson's first job in Scotland was to issue a notice telling the people of Scotland about the new laws allowing irradiated food into their shops, and giving guidance to food companies on how to market their irradiated products.

His second job was to issue a press release telling Scottish consumers that GM rapeseed had illegally entered the food chain, but that there was nothing to worry about.

Now his agency is saying that farmed salmon is safe if eaten in small amounts.

Sorry, Dr Paterson, but 'consumer involvement' means doing a lot better than this.

## Politics of food

With an election threatened this spring, we took a look at party political links to food businesses. The Tories have traditionally benefited from business donations, and in the last two years have received:

£2,000	from Seabrook Potato Crisps
£3,500	from Buccleuch Estates farms
£5,000	from Bestway cash and carry
£5,000+	from Weetabix
£10,000	from George Williamson farms and tea estates
£200,000	from Wittington/Associated British Foods

New Labour have been a bit tardy in getting into bed with food companies, as least as far as the records show. They did, though, receive:

£20,000	from Sprintica contract caterers
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Then there are the cosy links to supermarket chain Somerfield, which spent a reported £20,000 on having their name embossed on Labour Party Conference passes, and the conference fringe meeting sponsorship from Aventis, the GM and drugs firm.

Lastly, David Sainsbury, of the supermarket family, has donated at least £4m from his personal fortune, has been made a peer, and appointed (unpaid) onto the government team as science minister — despite his investments in GM technology.

■ Thanks to Labour Research (020 7928 3649, [www.lrd.org.uk](http://www.lrd.org.uk)) for assistance.



*"This is a party political broadcast on behalf of the food industry."*

## BSE - beef in sheep's clothing

As we go to press, there is news of further evidence that sheep may carry the cattle disease BSE.

A government investigation into UK sheep flocks is expected to show that BSE may be present at low levels, possibly masked by a similar, naturally-occurring sheep disease called scrapie. A government spokeswoman told the *Food Magazine* that the evidence was still very weak, and that the testing procedure was probably contaminated, making the findings unreliable.

With scrapie, the infectious agent can be found in many parts of the animal. With BSE in cattle, the agent tends to be limited to specific areas, such as brain, spinal cord and intestines. It is unknown whether BSE in

sheep will be limited as it is in cattle, or spread around the carcass, like the scrapie agent.

The problem with 'unreliable' evidence is that it puts food regulators in a dilemma. If they act on a precautionary basis, and ban the consumption of potentially contaminated sheepmeat, they risk huge compensation payments to sheep farmers and the destruction of the sheep farming industry. If they claim that there is 'insufficient reason' to ban sheepmeat, then they run the risk of another BSE scandal, increasing the risk to consumers and being seen to put the needs of industry ahead of consumers — an unpopular move in a possible pre-election period.



## Food irradiation returns

**Irradiating food to sterilise it was legalised in the UK in 1991, but proved unpopular with consumers. Now the industry is trying again, using deceptive labels.**

**A**lert shoppers may be surprised to see new small print creeping onto their food labels. Examples include 'This product has been electronically pasteurised' or 'Treated by cold pasteurisation', or 'This food has been sterilised with E-beam technology'.

These descriptions are designed to give the impression that food has been processed with clean, precisely controlled technology, claiming to be the solution to bacterial food poisoning. But in fact electronic pasteurisation, cold pasteurisation, E-beam technology, ionising sterilisation and electron beam treatment are all roundabout ways of saying that the food has been irradiated.

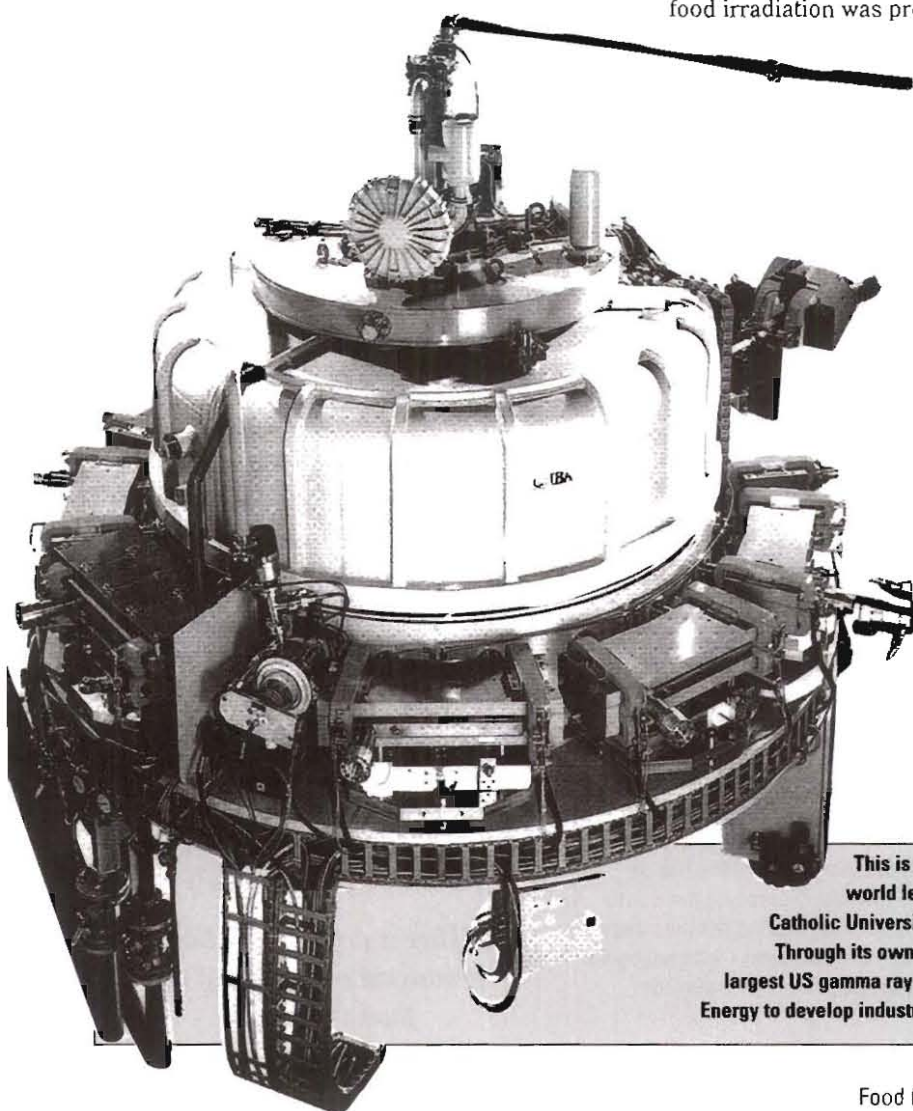
The re-naming of irradiation is being touted as a means of changing the image of a food-processing technology that few consumers like or trust.

During the 1980s and 1990s when food irradiation was promoted

by government and the food industry as a solution to food poisoning, it became clear that the biggest barrier to its implementation was public opinion. In 1989, a survey by the Neilson/Henry Centre for Forecasting showed that 70% of consumers did not want to buy irradiated produce, and a further 20% were uncertain. In the same year, a French supermarket did an experimental promotion of irradiated strawberries highlighting the extended period that the strawberries would stay 'fresh'. From the sales figures, it became clear that 60% of shoppers did not buy the strawberries, and 25% of those who bought them did not return to buy more. Many supermarkets in the UK responded to such public concerns by stating that they would not stock irradiated produce.

Rejection of irradiation was blamed by industry on the 'negative image' of anything to do with the nuclear industry and radioactivity. But consumers also voiced concerns about evidence that irradiation could reduce the nutritional value of food products, and studies showing that chemical changes in some irradiated foods (such as wheat) could cause chromosomal abnormalities in blood or bone marrow cells, and mutations in rats. Reports from America, where food irradiation was already widely in use, told of radioactive material leaking from processing plants, and inadequate protection for plant workers.

Critics also pointed out that irradiation could be used by sloppy manufacturers to cover up bad food processing and monitoring standards. A number of cases in the 1980s and 1990s served to highlight this problem. In August 1989, for instance, a consignment of Indian prawns was rejected by the USA as being contaminated with salmonella. The Sunday Times reported



This is an ion beam accelerator, used to sterilise food, and owned by world leader Ion Beam Applications (IBA) — a spin off company from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.

Through its ownership of US giant Griffith Micro Science, IBA now owns the largest US gamma ray plant. It is also in partnership with the French Agency for Atomic Energy to develop industrial radiation equipment.



## in disguise

that the consignment had been sent to Holland for irradiation, then offered for sale in the UK.

In 1995, Trading Standards officers conducted a survey of foods in supermarkets, health-food shops and small specialist shops. They found that 12% of the tested foods showed evidence of irradiation, including dried herbs, spices, fresh herbs and soft fruit. None of these items had declared the irradiation on the label.

Undeterred by evidence of bad practice and consumer resistance, the food industry has continued to lobby for irradiation to be permitted in the

processing of a wide range of foods.

Some farmers, too, want to see the process introduced. In Autumn 2000, the National Farmers Union encouraged the Food Standards Agency to consider allowing irradiation in meat production.

Food processors and farmers must be hoping that the newly named irradiation will be lost among the medley of processing descriptions that clutter our food labels: homogenised, hydrogenated, modified, flavoured, coloured, standardised... and electronically pasteurised.

### We believe

1. Technical fixes are no substitute for good handling throughout the food supply chain.
2. When food goes off, unpleasant colour and smells warn us that we shouldn't eat the food. Irradiation masks these vital signs.
3. Good food does not need irradiating.

## Irradiation – a potted history

**Spring 1987** – The European Parliament clears irradiation for general use.

**February 1987** – A UK poll shows that only 13% of consumers would choose irradiated food.

**February 1988** – A temporary ban is announced on food irradiation in the UK.

**During 1988** – The European Commission develops a draft directive for all member countries to accept irradiation.

**December 1988** – The International Atomic Energy Agency promotes irradiation to government representatives at an international conference.

**April 1989** – A UK opinion poll shows that only 10% of consumers would choose to buy irradiated food.

**Summer 1989** – British, Dutch and Indian companies are accused in the UK parliament and in the press of illegally trading irradiated food.

**Summer 1989** – Experimental promotions of irradiated fruit in

France show that 60% of shoppers won't buy the produce.

**Autumn 1989** – The government proposes to lift the UK ban on food irradiation.

**Autumn 1989** – Tesco, Marks & Spencer and the Co-op announce they will not stock irradiated produce.

**December 1990** – The Food Safety Act permits the use of irradiation on poultry, fresh fruit and vegetables, fish, shellfish, cereals, herbs and spices.

**December 1990** – A survey of 200 UK food retailers, caterers and manufacturers shows that majority will not handle irradiated food.

**Spring 1992** – Irradiated Belgian egg products are found being imported illegally into Germany.

**Summer 1993** – Concerns are raised by the Australian department of trade that international trade regulations could outlaw national bans on irradiated food.

**Spring 1994** – The Independent Commission for Research and Information on Radioactivity reports that non-labelling of irradiated food is widespread across Europe.

**Spring 1995** – Trading Standards officers find 12% of foods on sale in the UK has been irradiated, including dried herbs and spices, fresh herbs and soft fruit.

**Spring 1999** – The US Food and Drug Administration plans to drop labelling requirements for irradiated food, or to use euphemisms such as 'cold pasteurisation' or 'electronic pasteurisation'.

**September 1999** – Two European Directives are agreed meaning that all member states must permit the trading of foods treated with irradiation (initially only herbs and spices).



*"These glow-in-the-dark prawns are ideal for candle-lit dinners!"*

**Autumn 1989** – The European Parliament rejects the European Commission's directive supporting irradiation, and calls for a general ban.

**Summer 1990** – The Australian government questions the World Health Organisation's claims that irradiation is completely safe.

**January 1991** – The UK ban on irradiated foods is lifted.

**Summer 1991** – A UK company is granted an irradiation license.

**Autumn 1991** – The US Food and Drug Administration rules that irradiated foods cannot be labelled as 'fresh'.



## Claims watchdog is unleashed

The Joint Health Claims Initiative (JHCI) — a voluntary panel representing consumer groups, industry and statutory agencies — was formally launched in December. It is currently preparing a list of 'generic' claims which are claims that can be used by any company without further scrutiny — for example linking fruit and vegetable consumption to a reduction of cancer risk. The panel will also consider 'innovative' claims, i.e. claims being proposed by companies for their specific products. These will be judged on a case-by-case basis.

While welcoming any attempt to control some of the wilder excesses of industry, the Food Commission has long taken the view that health claims should be regulated by law rather than by voluntary code. We believe that claims are made by companies for marketing purposes, not health education purposes, and that it is virtually impossible for a company to give clear statements of fact about the links between diet and health

which do not mislead potential purchasers of their products.

Perhaps the new JHCI would like to look at some of the claims already being made on foods. Take Nestlé's Shredded Wheat, for example. Last year Nestlé was found guilty of

making illegal claims by linking the cereal to statements about maintaining healthy hearts. The magistrate believed that the claims 'invite an irresistible inference that eating Shredded Wheat will reduce the risk of coronary heart disease'. Now we find packets of Shredded Wheat emblazoned with a new slogan — see left — which surely invites the same inference. Inside the pack we find sachets of the cereal are decorated with symbols of hearts and further invitations to infer a heart disease risk reduction.

Meanwhile, Quaker Oats has got into bed with the Family Heart Association. The packs tell us that the oats 'Can help maintain a healthy heart'. Apparently 'Quaker Oats are at the heart of thousands of healthy breakfasts every day.' The Family Heart Association logo endorses the product and the claims.

If this is what large companies think of a magistrate's ruling, what will they think of a voluntary panel's recommendations?



## Novartis removes Aviva range

The remarkable claims being made on products in the Aviva range, from food and agribusiness company Novartis, may have been behind the sudden withdrawal of the products from supermarket shelves in the UK.

The products included muesli claiming 'heart benefits' and 'proven to reduce cholesterol levels' and biscuits claiming 'digestive benefits' and 'proven to maintain a healthy digestive system'.

A company spokesman told the *Food Magazine* that the products had not been dropped, but had been removed while the management team 're-evaluate the positioning of the brand'.



Carapelli has launched a rather ambiguous advertisement for its olive oil and its olive-oil-based spread. Is this the start of honest health claims — that a high fat diet can encourage obesity? We bought a tub of Carapelli spread and were disappointed to find that the boasted 'Extra Virgin Olive Oil' constitutes barely 2% of the product. There's a fair proportion of animal fat present, along with other vegetable oils.

Produced and distributed by St. Ivel Ltd.  
For enquiries please contact Stuart Cronin,  
Convenience Sector Controller on 01793 848444.

**Made with the oil that fuels Italians**



# Challenging the Little Red Tractor



Appearing on food labels over the past few months, the Little Red Tractor is a National Farmers Union logo for their British Farm Standards

scheme. The tractor claims to give consumers an assurance that the food is of the 'highest standard', offering 'total confidence' that the food has been produced to 'exacting food safety, environmental and animal welfare standards', 'always... with the interests of livestock and the environment in mind'.

Last year, the Food Commission challenged these claims in a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority, seeking to clarify exactly on what basis and evidence the claims are made.

The NFU explained that its brochure (the focus of the complaint) did not mean that the British Farm Standard was really the *highest* food and animal welfare standard available, nor that British Farm Standards were the same as, or superior to, other food production standards. Despite this climb-down, the ASA decided that consumers would not be misled by the scheme, and did not uphold the Food Commission's complaints.

So if standards are not superior to other food production standards, what can consumers expect when they buy food displaying the Little Red Tractor logo?

Here's a quick quiz about the British Farm Standards logo. See how well the Little Red Tractor fares.

## ● Are Little Red Tractor foods always British?

No. Foreign products can carry the Tractor logo, providing they meet the same standards.

## ● Can Tractor food be irradiated?

Yes, if the law allows it (see pages 4-5). And the National Farmers Union has recently lobbied the Food Standards Agency to allow meat to be irradiated.

## ● What about Genetically Modified food?

GM is no problem for the Tractor. British Farm Standards make no stipulations about excluding GM foods.

## ● And GM ingredients in animal feed?

Fully permitted. Produce from animals fed GM feed is not excluded by the British Farm Standard.

## ● And growth and milk-boosting hormones?

Most hormones, including BST, are banned at present, but if permitted would be allowed under the scheme. The NFU is generally supportive of intensive farming practices.

## ● Surely farms that follow the British Farm Standard are helping the environment?

Is that a question? The Little Red Tractor sports the claim: 'Helps protect the environment' but a recent recommendation from the Royal Agricultural College in a report published by the government said that strict environmental rules would clutter the farm assurance standards unduly and detract from safety considerations. So it remains unclear how strong the environmental commitment of the Tractor scheme really is.

## ● Put it another way. An environmentally unfriendly farmer – say a farmer who broke the law on UK wildlife protection – would lose their Red Tractor status. Wouldn't they?

Probably not. After the law has punished them, the NFU would be likely to ignore the judgement. The Royal Agricultural College report recommended that assurance standards would be 'diluted' by applying environmental rules too strictly.

## ● So what is the British Farm Standard?

Bog-standard British farming, with a few twiddly bits to sound impressive.

## ● Don't say

Good food doesn't need empty 'assurance' schemes.

## ● Do say

Has the tractor got air conditioning and four-way stereo speakers?

## Claims you can trust?

The supermarket chain Iceland is claiming to have trademarked the phrase 'Food you can trust'. They may have a hard time protecting their claim.

Iceland.co.uk

Food you can trust™

We felt sure we'd seen this somewhere before... Ah, yes. The Soil Association uses it to describe organic food.

Oh, and Friends of the Earth used 'Food you can trust' to define Real Food in a campaign last

summer. And, as this enormous poster displayed in Safeways shows, the new British Farm Standards assurance scheme is also keen

for customers to know that theirs is also 'Food you can trust'.

Who are we to believe? Or is this just another phrase that has become meaningless through overuse.



"I wouldn't even trust the polydiphenyl-ethylene it's written on!"

## RSPB names UK farmers as worst in Europe

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has described British farming practices as likely to be the cause of the largest decline in bird populations of any country in Europe.

Comparing bird populations in 30 different countries, the RSPB study finds that a combination of intensive farming indicators — including cereal crop yields, milk yield, fertiliser use and number of tractors per agricultural worker — are closely linked to the extent to which bird populations have

declined. The UK has the worst figures for falling bird populations.

The populations of 52 farmland birds were examined. The Society predicts that several species — including the corncrake and the great bustard — will be threatened with extinction when the countries of Eastern Europe join the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which encourages intensive farming.

■ RSPB: tel 01767 681577 ([www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)).



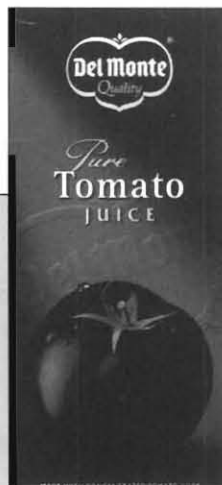
## Fresh? Natural? Pure? Can you be sure?

**35 years ago government advisors expressed concern about the use of words such as 'fresh', 'natural' or 'pure' to describe processed foods. But it still goes on.**

Despite being told in 1966 that the misuse of 'meaningless' phrases was unacceptable, the government took until 1989 to draw up a set of voluntary guidelines for industry. The situation improved, but it's getting worse again.

Although new voluntary codes of practice are to be issued this year, we fear that voluntary codes will be too weak to ensure food companies behave themselves.

You might think that the word 'pure' was guaranteed these days to mean 'there's only one ingredient in this pack'. But it pays to keep on checking the label. 'Pure Tomato Juice' from Del Monte turns out to have added salt. Shloer Red Grape Juice Drink claims to be 'Refreshingly Pure', but the product is mainly carbonated water, with grape juice, glucose, fructose syrup, citric acid and vitamin C. Hardly pure!



These mackerel fillets from Netto will apparently stay 'Ocean fresh' until their Best Before date of 2003.



Jordan's Country Crisp breakfast cereal contains chunks of freeze-dried

strawberries: 'Fresh, natural and delicious'. 'Freeze-dried' might not equate with 'fresh' to you, but Jordans assures us: 'Just add milk and the strawberries will regain their original fresh taste'.

How about these Jungle Fresh dry roasted peanuts? Presumably delivered fresh to your door by a passing monkey... (besides which, these peanuts don't grow in jungles).



### So many ways to say the same thing...

It's amazing how many ways manufacturers can imply that their product is natural or healthy. Here are some descriptions collected in a survey in the 1980s by Trading Standards Officers who questioned the adequacy of the law to deal with such claims without a legal definition of the word 'natural'. They found that 79% of the samples using such terms were unacceptable or misleading (a further 11% being doubtful).

100% natural ingredients  
All natural  
All the natural goodness  
Completely natural  
Deliciously natural  
Fresh and natural  
Finest natural ingredients  
Fresh natural taste  
Full natural taste  
Full of natural goodness  
Full of natural ingredients  
Full of natural properties  
It's a natural  
It's only natural  
Just naturally

Made entirely from natural ingredients  
Natura  
Natural  
Natural alternative  
Natural break  
Natural choice  
Natural concentrated juices  
Natural convenience food  
Natural country goodness  
Natural favourite  
Natural fibre  
Natural flavour  
Natural foods  
Natural goodness



## Government dithers for four decades

### 35 years ago...

1966 – The Food Standards Committee (FSC) of MAFF issues a 'Report on Claims' saying that the adjective 'fresh' 'should be used with a good deal more discretion than at present', and that 'pure' should be 'confined to products which contain no additive of any kind'.

### 28 years ago...

1973 – The FSC expresses concern over misleading use of the word 'natural'.

### 22 years ago...

1979 – The FSC's 'Second Report on Food Labelling' states: 'There are general claims where some of the terms used have become virtually meaningless [...] by application in too widely differing circumstances (e.g. 'fresh').'

### 21 years ago...

1980 – The FSC recommends a voluntary code of practice for industry for use of 'fresh', 'pure' and 'natural'. The report:

- Considered that phrases such as 'farm fresh', 'freshly harvested' and 'ocean fresh' were intended 'to have an emotive effect', but 'they have no real meaning'.
- Recommended that the word 'natural' should only be used for non-synthetic colours and flavours made of biological material, and 'to mean a raw, unmixed unadulterated and unprocessed product with no additions'.
- Recommended that 'pure' should mean 'no additions have been made, whether additives or nutrients... the food is substantially free from contaminants,

anabolic agents, chemical fertilisers and pesticide residues'. It also recommended that 'pure' should not be used for foods that had been cooked, frozen, chilled or dried.

- The report also cautioned against using 'real' and 'genuine' as they were 'advertising hyperbole'.

### 14 years ago...

1987 – Trading Standards officers conduct a survey of the use of the term 'natural' and its derivatives. (See table of findings.)

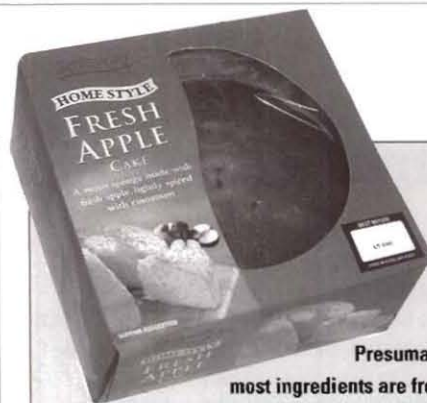
### 12 years ago...

1989 – The Food Advisory Committee (FAC) of MAFF issues voluntary 'Guidelines on the use of the word *natural* and similar terms'. It states: 'We are concerned that the concentration on 'naturalness' is diverting attention from more important nutritional messages'. It says that claims such as 'natural goodness', 'naturally better' or 'nature's way' are largely meaningless and should not be used'.

### Last year...

March 2000 – The FAC (now of the Food Standards Agency) commissions research to determine consumer attitudes towards 'fresh', 'pure', 'natural' and similar terms on food labelling.

October 2000 – The FAC draws up voluntary guidelines on the use of such terms, due to be issued for consultation in March/April 2001.



Presumably, most ingredients are fresh at some point in their life. But how fresh is an apple that has been cut up, cooked and stored for a couple of weeks? And what exactly does 'Home Style' mean? People baking at home don't usually use the emulsifiers, flavourings, preservative and acidity regulators included in this Safeways cake.



And while we're on the subject of 'style', what about these 'Authentic Style' Naan Breads from Iceland. 'Authentic Style' surely means 'Not Authentic'.

Organic Spreadable is, apparently, 'deliciously natural'. What does this mean? And would you associate 'fresh' with fat spreads? Well, Lurpak Spreadable with natural vegetable oil, spread straight from the fridge, is 'at its fresh-tasting best'.



Natural harvest  
Natural health  
Natural home baked taste  
Natural ingredients  
Natural juices  
Natural organic  
Natural product  
Natural pure food  
Natural recipe  
Natural selection  
Natural snack  
Natural source of...  
Natural strength  
Natural style  
Natural sweetness

Natural system  
Natural tasting  
Natural unprocessed  
Natural unrefined  
Natural wholefood  
Natural, no unnecessary additives  
Naturally  
Naturally better  
Naturally brewed  
Naturally delicious  
Naturally flavoured  
Naturally fresh  
Naturally good  
Naturally high in

Naturally invigorating  
Naturally smoked  
Naturally wholesome  
Nature is on our side  
Nature Valley  
Nature wise  
Nature's choice  
Nature's finest  
Nature's natural food  
Nature's store  
Nature's taste  
Nature's way  
No additives  
No additives whatsoever  
No additives... naturally

No artificial additives  
No artificial colourings  
Only natural  
Only natural ingredients  
Only with natural ingredients  
Pure natural  
Pure naturally produced food  
Rich in natural constituents  
Second nature  
Start the day the natural way  
Take a leaf from Nature's book  
The most natural way  
The natural choice  
The natural combination  
The natural way to...



## Turning foods into medicines

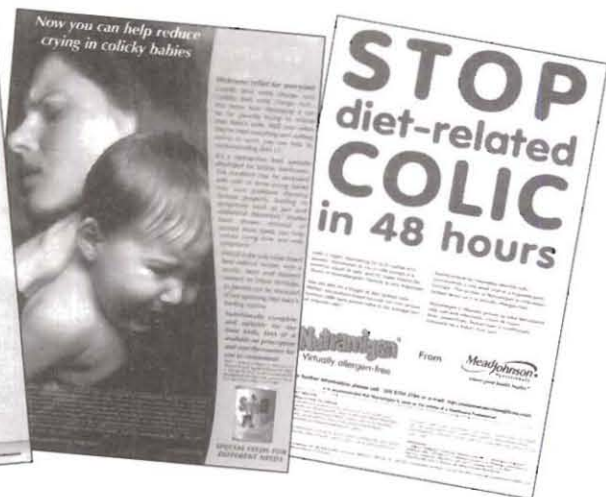
As we predicted a year ago, baby milk companies are taking the lead in marketing foods for special medical purposes (for which medical-type claims can be made) as if they applied to virtually all babies.

Promoting its goods in the nursing press, the makers of Omneo (Cow & Gate) are offering 'proven' formula milks for 'minor feeding problems'.



The makers of SMA claim its product can 'help reduce crying in colicky babies', while Nutramigen (Mead Johnson) will 'Stop diet-related colic'.

The fact that babies are more likely to have feeding problems if they are given formula milk instead of breast milk is not mentioned.



## Web-Watching

The Advertising Standards Authority has been considering the problem of what to do about advertising claims that appear in e-mails and on the internet.

It has decided that its advertising codes of conduct should apply to:

- Online advertisements in 'paid for' space, e.g. banner and pop-up advertisements;
- Advertisements in commercial e-mails;
- Sales promotions wherever they appear online (including in organisations' websites or in e-mails).

This is good news for consumers, especially parents whose children are increasingly exposed to advertising on the web, although such codes may prove a real headache for the ASA to enforce.

## Erdic repeats banned claims

In a remarkable affront to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) the makers of the herbal supplement Erdic are continuing to claim that their pills are able to enhance breast size.

The company's claims were condemned by the ASA a year ago when the authority ruled that Erdic could not demonstrate the efficacy of the product. It stated that Erdic should cease making any claims whatsoever.

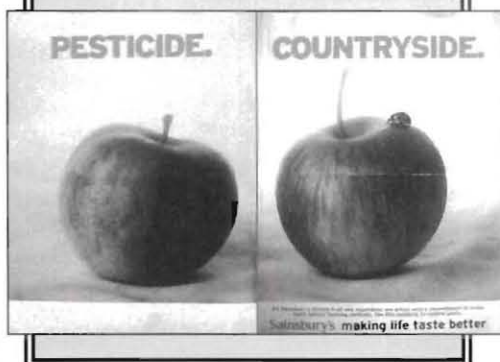
Now a direct mail campaign by Erdic has repeated the statement that the product can enhance breast size. Company brochures showing news clippings from various dates last summer indicate that Erdic has

knowingly continued its advertising campaign after the ruling by the ASA. The case shows the weakness in the law, as the ASA has few enforcement powers.

If you see more adverts for this product, please let us know

## BADvertisement

Take a look at this double-page magazine ad from Sainsbury's. It states: 'All Sainsbury's fruit and vegetables are grown with a commitment to using more natural farming methods, like this ladybird, to control pests.' In October, Friends of the Earth found that 29% of apples sampled at Sainsbury's contained residues of pesticides (including chlorpyrifos, recently the subject of severe restrictions in the US because of possible adverse health effects in children). The advert is currently the subject of a complaint to the ASA. We'll let you know how Sainsbury's gets on.





# CHECKOUT

## Fibre labelling – a bad situation is about to get worse

**M**oves by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to change the definition of dietary fibre will make a confused situation worse for consumers.

At present, nutrition panels on food products are allowed to give values for fibre based on either of two analytical methods – the American 'AOAC' (Association of Official Analytical Chemists) method or the UK 'Englyst-NSP' method.

The methods measure different fractions of food (see box, overleaf). The UK method measures non-starch polysaccharides (NSP) which is the form of fibre recommended by Department of Health guidelines on healthy eating and on preventing cardiovascular and bowel

diseases. The NSP fibre values for food products can be used as guidance when comparing foods and when aiming for the DoH recommended dietary intake of 18 grams of dietary fibre per day.

The AOAC method (used on the cereals pictured below) measures different fractions in the food, and the results should not be used to compare with the Department of Health guidelines.

Now the FSA is proposing, for the sake of harmonisation within the EU, to recommend the American AOAC method of fibre analysis for all food products.

As a result, no food label would be useful for helping consumers achieve their target intake amounts. The amount of fibre stated on the packet will bear no clear

relation to the 18 grams per day target for NSP fibre. The amounts stated on packets may not even help shoppers compare different products: one cereal with a higher AOAC count than another cereal may actually have a lower NSP count.

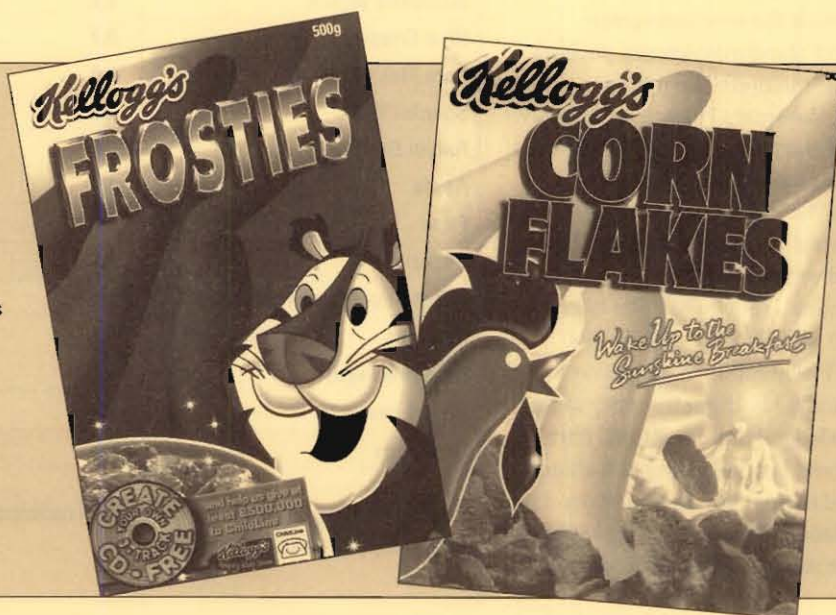
Furthermore, the AOAC method of measurement includes ill-defined compounds whose health effects are not known, and some of which are thought to contribute to health risks. These include compounds that result from browning starchy food – e.g. when frying and grilling (called maillard reaction compounds). Thus a slice of bread would increase its AOAC fibre count just by being toasted.

(continued next page)

### Misleading values?

The Department of Health recommends we eat 18 grams of dietary fibre each day. According to the packet, 100g of Corn Flakes provides 3 grams fibre. But in fact that amount counts as less than 1 gram towards the Department of Health target because Kellogg's uses a different measurement system.

Frosties claims 2 grams, but is worth around half a gram towards the target. Clear? Or misleading?





# Fibre fiddles

**By allowing two fibre measuring systems, the government has undermined consumer confidence for the sake of commercial 'harmony'.**

**T**he government's enthusiasm for the AOAC method of analysing fibre will do consumers a dis-service.

Shoppers will no longer be able to compare the values on food labels with the target values recommended by the Department of Health. The changes will undermine consumer confidence in nutritional labelling, but are being justified in terms of harmonised markets for food companies in Europe. Legally, says the government, the UK is obliged to allow food products which can be sold elsewhere in the EU to be sold in the UK, and as the EU currently recommends AOAC fibre measurement, the UK's hands are tied.

In fact the story is a little more complex. Firstly, the European Commission currently accepts that either the AOAC or Englyst NSP technique may be used for fibre measurement. Moves to harmonise food labelling are still being discussed. Codex, the body responsible for harmonising the food trade globally, will be discussing the issue next July, having acknowledged that there was no consensus.

Why, then, is the new 'consumer-friendly' Food Standards Agency pushing for the AOAC method? The officer responsible, Rosemary Hignett, previously worked on dietary fibre issues in MAFF. In June 1999 she was advising the food industry that 'for claims and nutrition labelling purposes', fibre 'means dietary fibre defined as non starch polysaccharides'. Yet two months later, in August 1999, she circulated proposals noting MAFF's intention to adopt the AOAC methods. Ms Hignett's letter at the time acknowledged that the AOAC fibre measures could be misleading and should not be linked to the DoH 18 grams per day recommendations. However, she proposed that a simple mathematical adjustment –

lifting the recommended daily amount to 24 grams – would be enough to overcome the problem.

Then last summer she abandoned the mathematical adjustment – which had little basis in fact, and which could have made a bad problem even worse – and instead issued a letter to manufacturers stating that they were 'free to make fibre content claims based on either method'. This

advice now prevails, and the packets on shop shelves could be using either fibre measurement method, without telling you which one is being used.

The AOAC method measures different food components and should not be used to provide a target figure for dietary health. Yet companies can gain marketing advantages by being able to show higher fibre values, and linking dietary fibre to

## Selected foods may exaggerate fibre by using new AOAC measuring method

grams fibre per 100 grams of food

	Englyst NSP	AOAC	AOAC increase
White bread	1.5	2.3	53%
Wholemeal bread	5.8	6.9	19%
Oats	7.1	10.6	49%
White rice	0.4	1.3	225%
Pasta	1.2	1.7	42%
Puffed Wheat	5.6	9.4	68%
Frosties	0.6	2.0	233%
Shredded Wheat	9.8	11.5	17%
Rice Krispies	0.7	1.1	57%
Corn Flakes	0.9	2.8	211%
Special K	2.0	3.1	55%
Raisin Bran	10.0	13.4	34%
Apple	1.6	1.9	19%
Pear	2.2	2.4	9%
Banana	1.1	2.4	118%
Green vegetables (average)	25.2	30.2	20%
Potatoes	6.1	7.6	23%
Nuts (average)	6.9	9.2	33%
Baked beans	3.7	6.9?	86%?
Dried figs	7.5	12.2	63%

Sources: Professor John Cummings (personal communication), *McCance and Widdowson*, US Dept of Agriculture and manufacturer's data.



# CHECKOUT

## Confusing claims?

Cereal manufacturers claim their products are good for health because of the fibre in the cereal. But the measure of fibre they use includes forms of fibre that may not be good for you at all.

health benefits. The main products that would gain by using the AOAC methods instead of the NSP measure are those with low levels of NSP dietary fibre but which have high AOAC values.

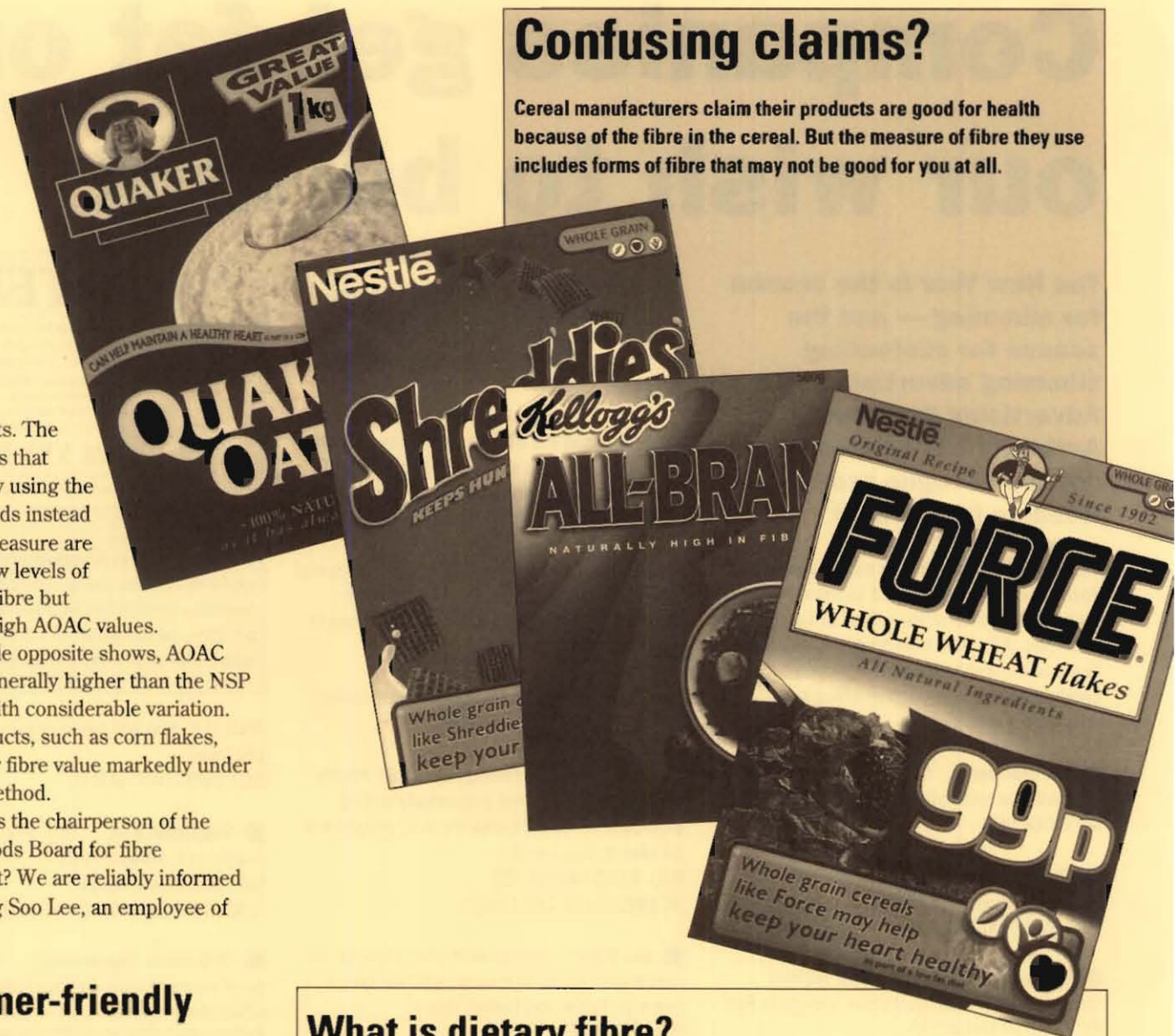
As the table opposite shows, AOAC values are generally higher than the NSP values, but with considerable variation. Certain products, such as corn flakes, improve their fibre value markedly under the AOAC method.

And who is the chairperson of the AOAC Methods Board for fibre measurement? We are reliably informed that it is Sung Soo Lee, an employee of Kellogg's.

## Consumer-friendly figures

Faced with possible confusion, the UK may propose removing all fibre statements from food products. This may be administratively convenient, but it would deny consumers potentially valuable information, and reduces a shopper's ability to choose healthier foods.

What is needed is a review by the UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (now replacing COMA) of the nature of all carbohydrates, assessing the benefits to health of the different types, and formulating a sensible way of expressing their presence in foods. Working alongside the EU and Codex, which are currently trying to find a coherent solution to the problem, the FSA may then be able to propose a genuinely consumer-friendly solution.



## What is dietary fibre?

Dietary fibre covers a range of compounds found in plants which are not easily absorbed in the digestive tract. The various types of carbohydrate and other material are shown in the table below. According to the method of measurement, the value for 'dietary fibre' will differ.

	included in AOAC	Included in Englyst NSP
Some fructose	No	No
Some lactose	No	No
Most sugar alcohols	No	No
Non-digestible oligosaccharides	Partly	No
Inaccessible starch	No	No
Resistant starch granules	No	No
Retrograded starch	Yes	No
Non-starch polysaccharides	Yes	Yes
Maillard reaction products	Partly	No
Lignins	Partly	No
Unidentified material	Yes	No

Source: Englyst and Hudson, position paper submitted to FSA 12/2000



# CHECKOUT

## Companies get fat on our wish to be thin

**The New Year is the season for slimming — and the season for misleading slimming advertising. The Advertising Standards Authority has condemned dozens of rogue products. Readers be warned!**

The following are selected morsels from the dozens of claims examined by the Advertising Standards Authority. Its rulings are given after each one. All of the advertisers were either found to be breaking the ASA's codes of conduct, or to be using misleading or unsubstantiated claims.

● **Fat Blocker:** '... has the ability to hold and bind with fat molecules in the food you eat'.  
NO EVIDENCE

● **Fat Magnets capsules:** '...the fat absorbing food supplement'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **Chito-Slimmer Fat Absorber tablets:** 'Absorbs up to 12 times its own weight in Fat!'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **Chroma Slim supplement:** 'Just lose it! ... will help you lose weight while promoting a trimmer, firmer, leaner body'.  
STUDIES NOT RIGOROUS

● **Fat Terminator:** '...the miracle fat binding fibre ... with special dietary enzymes which will bind all the fat you eat ... your body will not absorb the fat content of your meals'.  
NO EVIDENCE

● **Mega Fast Fat Blocker capsules:** '...users ate chocolate, crisps, chips in fact whatever they liked and still lost weight'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **Lipolean & Lip-Ade:** 'Stops bad (saturated) fats being absorbed during food digestion. Leaves the valuable (unsaturated) fats intact'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **DHEA tablets:** '...fat loss without dieting'.  
NO DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

● **Nor-Slim:** 'An exciting new triple-action slimming pill has been extensively tested ... expected to revolutionise the way people will be able to lose weight'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED  
IN BREACH OF THE CODES

● **Bio-Slim:** '...works with your body as you reach your goals, to lose weight and gain a trimmer, firmer and leaner figure'.  
NO EVIDENCE

● **Super Fat Binder:** '...will help cut down fats and cholesterol'.  
NOT SHOWN TO HELP WEIGHT LOSS

● **HCA Slim Express:** 'Guaranteed! Yes, you will lose up to 13 pounds in 8 days!'

**We couldn't resist this extraordinary advert for Bonsal Fat Fighter.**

The text opens with the challenge: 'Have you ever wondered why sea animals never get fat?', and goes on to tell us that a revolutionary slimming substance has been discovered and put in a pill.

Most sea creatures spend their entire lives moving around, some of them covering enormous distances. The few creatures that have an opportunity to sit down, like seals and walrus, are well-known for their thick layers of, er ... body fat!



**The new Fat-Fighter**

Have you ever wondered why sea animals never get fat? Now this new revolutionary slimming substance has finally been discovered and developed into a remarkable diet pill.

Dr. Carl Mayer from the University of Zurich (Switzerland) dedicated 15 years of research to come up with a high-powered diet pill with no side effects. Now he discovered the special ingredient that millions of women and men have always dreamed of: Bonsal. The idea is as brilliant as it is simple. Have you ever seen an overweight fish? Or an oyster with a few pounds too many? Everyone knows that sea animals never get fat. That's because their bodies contain Bonsal, which is now available as a diet-pill at your pharmacy for everybody who wants to lose unwanted fat.

**New in your pharmacy!**

**BONSAL**

### "WANTED!"

PEOPLE SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN LOSING WEIGHT  
LOSE UP TO 7-19lbs IN THE FIRST MONTH  
Effective weight loss programmes

- \* Safe, natural products - NO DRUGS \*
- \* No calorie counting \*
- \* Feel fitter and more energetic in days \*
- \* 30 Day Money back guarantee \*

**Call: Sandra XXX XXXX**

Introduce a friend and receive a FREE gift from our personal care range  
www.herbalife4us.com

#### Not wanted:

The British Code of Advertising (para 51.10) explicitly bans the use of claims that precise amounts of weight can be lost within a stated period — yet this advert for a herbal product states 'Lose up to 7-19lbs in the FIRST MONTH'.

AND YES! You will never regain the weight you lose!  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **Supergold Pill:** '...98% effective on 284 people in burning off fat!'  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED  
FLAGRANT BREACH OF ADVERTISING CODES

● **Dr Daniels Supplement:** '...reawaken your body's own calorie burning mechanisms which have lain dormant for years'.  
DISREGARD FOR ADVERTISING CODES

● **Chitosan Fat Eating capsules:** '... takes the fat out of your natural daily meals'.  
NO RIGOROUS CLINICAL EVIDENCE

● **Fat Fighter:** '...functions like a sponge'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **Sensational Fatburner:** 'Almost immediate shedding of pounds and instant results'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **X-fat:** '...made from crushed sea shells that act as magnets to fat'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED

● **AppleSlim:** 'A capsule a day keeps the lbs at bay'.  
MISLEADING

● **NHO Diet Plan:** '...prevents and gets rid of unwanted fat'.  
NOT SUBSTANTIATED  
DISREGARD FOR THE CODES



# Brussels spouts

After the breakdown of trade talks in Seattle last year, and the mass resignation of EU Commissioners, EC officials are desperate to 'dialogue' with consumer groups. But, asks Patti Rundall, what does it all mean?



**F**or the last year, my organisation – along with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – have been invited to dozens of meetings in Brussels.

For years we've been saying that the European Commission should listen to NGOs and make sure that European policies are more sensitive to their impact on health, so the opportunities seemed too good to miss.

But I've been on my guard against being drawn into a Brussels 'process' in which we are listened to but not taken seriously. We might appear to be 'working together' with industry in a collaborative spirit – one big happy family – but this impression would be far from the truth.

The notion that partnerships between consumers, government bodies and industry can provide a solution to world problems is something I don't accept. The possibility that the world's largest corporations will wake up one day, see the light and voluntarily behave ethically – well, I simply don't believe it. Companies have a legal duty to maximise profits for their shareholders, and many companies are adept at covering their bad behaviour with humanitarian gestures and 'cause-related marketing'. We have to recognise this fact and do something about controlling them.

At the meeting on public services I sit next to a man who says he is from the European Social Committee but seems to be putting forward industry arguments. Another man says he is from the European Services Forum. I'm even more confused and ask what ESF is. Someone hands me a paper listing 76 member companies – practically every service you can think of: Barclays Bank, France Telecom, Daimler Chrysler, European Broadcasting Union, DHL.

I ask about sponsorship of services. Who is taking account of the influence already occurring in state-owned health and education services through industry sponsorship? If you pay for a teacher or a health worker, you affect and to some extent control that service. (In the 1970s companies dressed sales reps as 'milk nurses' to advise

mothers on infant feeding and still do.) What can the Commission do to stop companies demanding marketing rights in schools and hospitals? For example an EU-wide ban of marketing through schools? The Commission official asks the man from ESF if he agrees with my suggestion.

He gives a refreshingly straightforward answer: No. There is no way industry wants rules that are so strict. At the end of the day they must make a profit, he says.

But at what cost, I wonder.

We have one meeting with EU trade Commissioner Lamy. I say I am worried our participation could be used to legitimise the Commission's position on trade and the WTO negotiations. He denies this, says he does care, is listening and is moving. But he would not expect civil society participants in dialogues to agree with his positions, 'nor would he necessarily agree with theirs'.

A day earlier, the EU Parliament held hearings on Nestlé and Adidas labour and marketing practices. Both companies failed to attend. We raised this incident, and asked Lamy how the EC will ensure that companies are monitored and EC rules enforced when operating in developing countries.

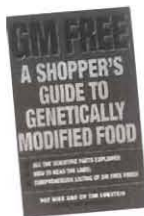
His response was disappointing but illuminating. He referred to OECD guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and said that these took precedence over the Code of Conduct Paper proposed by the European Parliament.

The OECD guidelines lay down minimum principles and standards of behaviour that 'invite' and 'expect' companies to conform. The guidelines are voluntary. Given the choice, which company in its right mind would choose to face elected MEPs and their Code rather than this?

Clearly, our presence in these discussions provides the industry with intelligence about us. At one meeting an industry spokesperson admitted this openly. It remains to be seen whether, by participating, we gain more than we lose.

■ Patti Rundall is Policy Director of Baby Milk Action: [www.babymilkaction.org](http://www.babymilkaction.org). Tel: 01223 464420, e-mail: [prundall@babymilkaction.org](mailto:prundall@babymilkaction.org)





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Back issues cost £3.50 or £30.00 for a full set of available issues (approx. 21 issues). Send for index of major news stories and features in past issues. Stocks are limited and many issues are already out-of-stock.



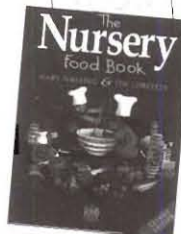
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This is an excellent guide to the planning and promotion of healthy eating in schools. The book is full of nitty-gritty practical guidance, such as how to gain the enthusiasm and support of teachers, parents, health professionals and, most importantly, pupils. £15.00 inc p&p.



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



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Packed with essential information to help you and your family eat healthy, safe food these posters explain the problems with GM technology; give useful tips on getting children to eat a healthy diet; explain how to understand and use nutrition labelling; and help you see through deceptive packaging and marketing claims. Each poster costs £2.50 inc p&p.

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## Chips go down

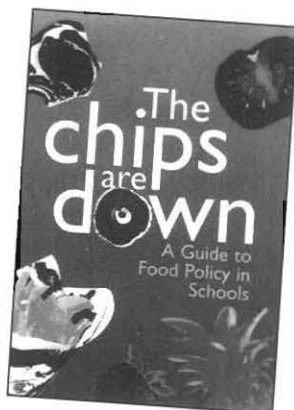
The Health Education Trust has launched a new book full of practical guidance on children and food. It gives advice on how to gain the support of teachers, parents, health professionals and, most importantly, pupils, and guidance on setting up a school nutrition action group including:

- which key people should get involved;
- what each representative should expect to offer;
- suggested items for the agenda for the first meeting;
- which organisations can offer support, information and resources.

The strength of this book is that it is grounded in real-life studies of nutrition policies in action. Drawing from these experiences, the book offers a fast-track to success, with examples of marketing school food services, good ways to address poor take-up of free school meals, and suggestions on improving the eating environment.

To make this a really useful reference document, a copy of the government's new nutritional standards for school lunches is included. Better still, these standards are also summarised in a concise style, showing what is expected for nursery, primary and secondary schools.

*'The Chips are Down: A Guide to Food Policy in Schools'* is published by the Health Education Trust and The Dimension Educational Trust. Priced at £15 (inclusive of p&p) PO Box 132, Stockport SK1 3YW. Or order from the Food Commission — see opposite.



## An action plan for children's nutrition

The Food Commission has launched a research project looking at initiatives that promote better nutrition for children.

Government departments and charities are undertaking work around the UK on a variety of themes, including childhood obesity, dental health, breastfeeding, state benefits, education, school meals, advertising to children and inequalities caused by poverty.

The Food Commission aims to identify the various initiatives, assess their effectiveness, and gather together policy proposals for future work. The project will culminate in a round-table meeting to lay down the foundations of a Children's Food and Nutrition Action Plan.

Look out for a fuller report in the next issue of the *Food Magazine*.

## Calling all parents!

Getting children and teenagers to eat a healthy diet can be a real challenge. We're examining the policy initiatives, but the nutrition message promoted by health professionals, charities and schools is also backed up by what goes on at home. Every day, parents and carers look for new and creative ways of persuading children to taste and enjoy fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods.

The Food Commission would like to gather together the very best ideas, and compile a booklet and/or poster to share with other parents and carers.

Maybe you smother your child with praise whenever they eat up their broccoli. Maybe you let them be head chef in your kitchen. Maybe you choose books with positive food messages, talk to your child about food issues, prepare specially shaped foods, or run a prize or reward system. But how do you cope with pester power? How do you handle the sweets at the checkout?

Do tell us what tricks you use, and what works and what fails. What would be your message of encouragement to a parent whose child will only eat junk food? Let us know what age the child is, and how they responded to your efforts.

Whatever your technique, if you'd like to share your ideas and help empower others, we'd like to hear from you.

■ Write to: Top Tips for Healthy Eating, The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF or email [foodcomm@compuserve.com](mailto:foodcomm@compuserve.com).

## Corporate education

Fighting back against the corporate takeover of school classrooms, this new teacher's pack 'Seeing through the spin' helps children see through the glossy images and decipher the reality of business interests and intentions. Produced by Baby Milk Action (part of the Nestlé boycott campaign) and the Reading International Solidarity Centre, the pack has over 170 pages filled with detailed information and ideas.

■ Details from Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX, tel 01223-464420.





# Folate – mass fortification for all?

Government advisors want all food companies to add folic acid to wheat flour to help prevent Neural Tube Defects. Sue Dibb of the National Consumer Council examines why the proposal is causing controversy.

**L**ast summer the UK Health Departments and the Food Standards Agency asked for comments on a proposal for universal fortification of flour with folic acid (folate) to help prevent Neural Tube Defects (NTDs), such as spina bifida in babies.<sup>1</sup>

The proposal is based on a recommendation by the (now defunct) Department of Health's Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) that universal fortification with folic acid at a level of 240 micrograms (ug) per 100g would have a significant effect in preventing NTD-affected births and pregnancies, without resulting in unacceptably high folate intake in any section of the population.<sup>2</sup>

The consultation has not sparked much of a public debate, yet this seemingly uncontroversial proposal is, in fact, unprecedented and raises significant issues that go beyond the medical and public health considerations of COMA's remit. These include consumer choice and the management of health risks, as well as a number of practical and technical considerations, all of which the consultation document acknowledges need to be considered.

So what are the issues? Fortification is not new. We are all familiar with foods, including many breakfast cereals that are 'fortified with vitamins and minerals'. Yet current requirements for fortification are limited to 'restoration' (i.e. iron and calcium and B vitamins added to white flour to restore that lost during

processing) or 'substitution' (vitamins A & D added to margarines and spreads as a substitute for those in butter). Other fortification is voluntary, often done by manufacturers, not as a public health measure, but for marketing purposes.

Any decision to go ahead with mandatory fortification of wheat flour with folic acid – in amounts far greater than naturally found in wheat – would thus be unprecedented in the UK and therefore deserves attention. Not least because mandatory fortification would in effect be a form of 'mass medication' which would eliminate consumer choice – parallels with fluoridation of water come to mind.

The government accepts that 'it would be difficult for consumers who, for some reason, wished to avoid the vitamin (e.g. older people at risk of pernicious anaemia, vegans, or those wishing to exercise consumer choice) to do so'.

## *Men, children and older people may be exposed to risks...*

What are the potential benefits and are there potential risks? COMA reports that the total number of pregnancies affected by NTDs is not known, but is roughly estimated to be 600-1,200 per year in the UK. A number of these abort spontaneously and a further proportion is terminated at around 20 weeks of gestation. There are around 90 births each year of infants affected by NTD in England and Wales and around 70 in Scotland and 15 in Northern Ireland.

The basis for the current proposal (fortification at 240ug/100g flour) estimates that only a proportion of these (around two-thirds) would be preventable. This is partly because not all NTDs are preventable and partly because not all women would achieve the desirable levels of folate intake (600ug/day) if fortification at this level were introduced. Thus,

fortification would not eliminate the need to continue to advise all women who could become pregnant to take a supplement of 400ug/folic acid daily.

Benefits need to be weighed against any possible risks. COMA acknowledges there may be risks for some older people, as folic acid can mask vitamin B12 deficiency arising from pernicious anaemia. Undiagnosed vitamin B12 deficiency can cause damage to the nerves and the spinal cord, leading to severe disability. COMA is unable to put figures on the numbers of people who may be affected but 'it is generally acknowledged that it can remain undiagnosed in a substantial number of older people'.

The risk analysis for the level of fortification proposed predicts that 0.6% of people over 50 (that's over 110,000 in the UK) would be likely to exceed 1mg/day folic acid. Such high levels of intake might lead to neurological damage in people whose deficiency of vitamin B12 has not been recognised. Longer term exposure at lower levels may have a similar effect.

My organisation, the government-funded National Consumer Council (NCC), believes that an increase in folic acid intake should be accompanied by heightened clinical vigilance for B12 deficiency, especially in older people, and that a strategy for the management and communication of the risks needs to be determined before any decision to go ahead is made.

NCC is also concerned that there appears to be no data on the risk for children or men. Some nutrients that are beneficial at lower doses pose risks at higher doses. Young children, because of their low body weight, are likely to be at increased risk of consuming relatively higher levels.

Given the unprecedented nature of the proposal and the consequent loss of consumer choice, the NCC considers far greater emphasis should be given to alternative means of achieving the same public health objectives. There has been



## Class lessons

Differences in the dietary intake of various nutrients between families on different levels of income are shown in the latest government survey of food purchasing habits.

There are differences between rich and poor households in terms of the amount of food eaten out and the amount eaten at home — see details on spending patterns below. When food eaten at home and food eaten out are combined, the figures show that for some nutrients there is remarkably little difference in the amounts being eaten in rich and poor households. Very similar amounts of fat, saturated fat and sugar is eaten in both rich and poor families, and some micro-nutrients show little difference.

Wider differences are found in some nutrients, especially vitamin C. A comparison of the sorts of food being purchased shows why this may be so: one of the largest differences between rich and poor families is in the amounts of fruit and vegetables consumed on a daily basis (vegetables excludes potatoes).

### Nutrients eaten in rich and poor families

Nutrients per person per day

	households over £655/week	households under £165/ week (unearned)
<b>Total fat (g)</b>	83	86
<b>Saturated fat (g)</b>	33.4	32.1
<b>Non-milk sugars (g)</b>	56	55
<b>Iron (mg)</b>	11.6	10.4
<b>Zinc (mg)</b>	8.7	8.2
<b>Vitamin C (mg)</b>	90	56
<b>Folate (ug)</b>	282	258
<b>Fruit (g)</b>	1576	785
<b>Vegetables (not potatoes) (g)</b>	336	160

■ *National Food Survey 1999, The Stationery Office, 2000.*

## Family spending

The latest annual survey of how families spend their money was published in December. It shows that low income households continue to spend a higher proportion of their weekly budget on food than higher income households, even though the total amount they actually spend is significantly less than that spent by higher income families.

Expenditure on food has declined over the last 20 years compared with expenditure on other household items.

### Weekly budget per person, by income level

	food and non-alcoholic drinks at home	cafes and restaurants	food as % of all income
<b>poorest</b>	£17.38	£2.00	21
<b>average</b>	£20.65	£5.26	17
<b>richest</b>	£24.35	£10.19	14

■ *Family Spending A report on the 1999-2000 Family Expenditure Survey, The Stationery Office, 2000.*

an ongoing public awareness campaign on the role of folic acid targeted at women of child bearing age. Surprisingly little assessment of its effectiveness has been included in the current consultation. Has the incidence of NTDs fallen since the awareness campaign and voluntary fortification with folic acid? Are there population groups who find it more difficult to follow the advice on folic acid? Have these groups been identified, what are the barriers they face and what would help them better to follow the health education advice? Could it be that public health education carries ongoing costs while mandatory measures, by passing on costs to industry and consumers, is a cheaper option for government?

There are several other considerations to the proposal. For example, what nutritional and health claims should be permitted and how would these claims be regulated? Would imported foods or

ingredients (e.g. some French bread or Italian pasta) be required to meet UK specifications for fortification? And at a time when the European Union is seeking to harmonise the differing regulations among member countries, would the proposals be considered legal?

Whether voluntary or mandatory, the NCC believes there should be agreed minimum and maximum levels of folic acid fortification, and a positive list of foods to which it can be added. We would strongly oppose the addition of folic acid to 'unhealthy' foods (known in the US as the 'jelly bean rule') which could encourage the greater consumption of diets which run counter to good nutrition advice, particularly for those women planning pregnancies.

The government says it will be announcing its decision early in the New Year, although with over two hundred responses to its consultation this may be delayed. While supporting measures to

reduce the incidence of NTDs, the NCC strongly believes it would be premature to make any decision. There needs to be much more information available to inform decision-making and a much fuller debate of the issues raised, particularly more in-depth consultation with those groups most likely to be affected. The current consultation should only be seen as a first step in that process.

■ Sue Dibb is Senior Policy Officer with the National Consumer Council (s.dibb@ncc.org.uk). The NCC's website is [www.ncc.org.uk](http://www.ncc.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Consultation by the UK Health Departments and the Food Standards Agency on the report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy on Folic Acid and the Prevention of Disease, July 2000 ([www.doh.gov.uk/folicacid](http://www.doh.gov.uk/folicacid))

<sup>2</sup> Folic acid and the prevention of disease, Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy, January 2000.





## Snail Eggs and Samphire

Derek Cooper, Macmillan, 25 Ecclestone Place, London SW1W 9NF, [www.macmillan.com](http://www.macmillan.com), 2000, ISBN 0-333-78306-9, 420pp, rrp£16.99(hb).

If only this issue of the *Food Magazine* came out before Xmas, we could have warmly recommended this beautiful selection of Derek's 'Dispatches from the food front' as a book to give to friends. There are 110 dispatches, and each rings with that familiar gravelly voice from Radio 4's Food programme.

And there are such lovely sentences. Try this: 'Were your ears attuned to the wavelength of oak, you would hear the table groan under the weight of a Yorkshire tea...'

Or this, when filming in Israel: 'I am reminded of Malaya during the Emergency. Everything is very normal except, suddenly, you may be killed.'

Or this, of Caroline Walker: '...she waged war on the profit-hungry manufacturers and the politicians who defended what she saw as the unacceptable face of food processing'.

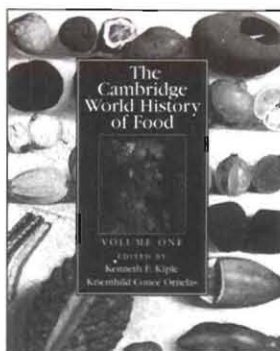
And then there is the hilarious event in the East End of London, when Derek was filming a piece on the value of local communities, the sense of tradition and local feeling, the quaint old jellied eel shop, the home smoked haddock stall... and Harry's pie and mash shop where, as the cameras and sound equipment are being set up, a fight breaks out. Community spirit consists of smashing the producer's spectacles, along with a leg of the camera tripod.

There are so many gems, like an Aladdin treasure chest. Derek, once mistakenly listed as the *Observer's* food and war correspondent, admits that perhaps the war analogy is correct — the fight for good food continues. Certainly he should accept that he is one of our generals, leading from the front.

A gift of a book at any time of year

## The Cambridge World History of Food

K F Kiple & K C Ornelas (eds), Cambridge University Press, 2000, ISBN 0-521-40214-X, 2 vol 2152pp, £95 (introductory offer).



This work could hardly be more different from Alan Davidson's *Oxford Companion to Food*, in which the author was responsible for 80 % of the text. Davidson's work was meant to be read at a leisurely pace by readers primarily interested in food's history, culture and flavour. The Cambridge History, on the other hand, assembles a College of Cardinals who speak *ex cathedra* on an enormous range of scientific and factual topics. It tells you what purports to be currently accepted by the professional community.

The introduction gets off to a promising start, acknowledging that 'We teeter on the edge of matters that are as much cultural, social, economic and political in nature as they are ecological and biological.' A brilliant contribution from Colin Spencer includes an encapsulated analysis of the collapse of British dietary health resulting from the Enclosures (18th – early 19thC): 'Rural life was radically altered and partially destroyed and whole villages were abandoned. Within a generation, cooking skills and traditional recipes were lost forever, as the creative interrelationship between soil and table (the source of all good cuisine) had been severed.'

But there are curious omissions. A lengthy section on 'Important Foods from Animal Sources' includes chapters on such exotic species as camels, caribou, llamas and yaks, but omits deer, which have been an important food for many centuries and are still one of the best sources of lean healthy meat.

When we get into such contentious and rapidly changing areas as genetic engineering, the time lag between writing and publication becomes painfully evident. Marion Nestle (no relation) of New York University attempts neutrality, but asides such as

'Biotechnology is not inherently dangerous' reveal a faith in scientific omniscience and integrity which is not borne out by events.

There are indeed treasures to be mined from this extraordinary site, but the lease is formidable. Perhaps your local library will be prepared to sacrifice a dozen duplicate copies of the latest Stephen King in order to acquire it. (Or you can wait for it to come out on CD-ROM, like the Encyclopaedia Britannica, at a fraction of the hard copy price.)

## Meat Cuts and Muscle Food —

### An international glossary

H J Swatland, Nottingham University Press, Manor Farm, Thrumpton, Nottingham NG11 0AX, 2000, ISBN 1-897676-30-1, 245pp, rrp£40.00

For students of meat and butchery, here's a textbook guiding them towards the names of muscles, how to cut carcasses and even the types of squid available — squid, fish and shellfish being included as a 'muscle meat'. There's no index, but topics are listed alphabetically. Look up Sri Lanka and you will have a page of diagrams on cutting beef, lamb and pork into culturally appropriate pieces. A library resource.

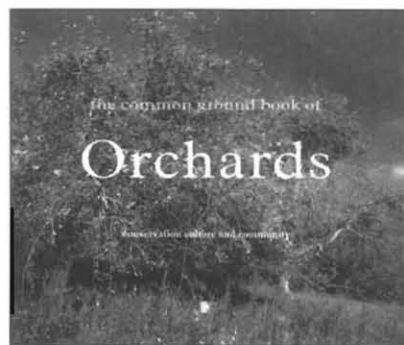
## The Common Ground Book of Orchards

D Keech *et al*, Common Ground, P O Box 25309, London NW5 1ZA, [www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk), 2000, ISBN 1-870364-21-X, 222pp, rrp£18.95.

A gorgeous, sumptuous book celebrating, well, orchards in their seasonal glories. For anyone wanting to get more involved in saving, planting or visiting orchards, this book will provide barrow-fuls of helpful information.

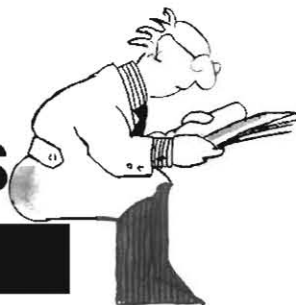
What the book doesn't say, except perhaps between the lines, is how much orchards are under threat, especially small orchards of unusual fruit varieties. European Union subsidies for growers are under threat, and what little had been given was spent largely on destroying fruit to keep market prices high, and destroying orchards to keep supplies down. At a time when we are being urged to eat more fruit, EU policy seems bent on encouraging farmers to produce more meat and cereals.

The book is beautifully produced and if its tone is sometimes rather romantic — e.g. a chapter entitled 'Sharing with Nature' — well, sometimes that's just what we need.





## What the doctor reads



The latest research from the medical journals

### Wine is best for health

Drinking alcohol in moderation can have a beneficial effect on health. The question, though, is whether some drinks are better than others.

A study in Denmark of nearly 25,000 men and women aged 20 to 98 years old found the expected link between moderate alcohol consumption and a reduced risk of early death (a 'J' shaped curve, showing higher risk for zero alcohol consumption, and higher risk for consumption levels above moderate). In addition, there appeared to be a beneficial effect from drinking alcohol in the form of wines, rather than beers or spirits.

Looking at the cause of death, wine drinkers had the lowest death rates from heart disease and from cancer, compared with drinkers of other forms of alcohol.

■ *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 133, pp411-419, 2000.

### The cost of good health

A research paper on the costs of maintaining a healthy lifestyle found that a man aged 18 to 30 needs at least £106 per week. This includes £3 to run a bicycle or buy trainers for jogging, and a diet including two portions of oily fish each week and five portions of fresh fruit or vegetables every day.

The current government-set basic minimum wage just covers the costs for a single person, but current benefit levels for unemployed people do not.

■ *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 54, pp885-889, 2000.

### Pesticides and Parkinsons

In the last *Food Magazine* we reported on the links between pesticides used by farmers and gardeners, and mild cognitive dysfunction such as memory loss. Now further evidence has emerged of a link between pesticide use and the risk of developing Parkinson's disease, a degeneration of brain neurones.

In particular, an agricultural spray called rotenone, which inhibits enzymes in neural cells, appears linked to the disease.

When rotenone was injected into laboratory animals the major features of Parkinson's disease were reproduced.

Rotenone is an insecticide derived from plant extracts. It is the active ingredient in Derris Dust, a type of insecticide permitted for use for some organic farming purposes. It is already recognised as toxic to pigs and fish and is a suspected carcinogen.

■ *Nature Neuroscience*, 3, pp1302-1306, 2000.

### High death rates in poor areas

With a general election looming, it is salutary to look at death rates in different parliamentary constituencies. A review of inequalities in Britain shows that, of the eight constituencies with the highest rate of early death, Glasgow accounted for six, and Manchester and Liverpool the other two. In contrast, the leafy suburbs and Home Counties accounted for the constituencies with the lowest rates of early death: Avon, Hampshire, Berkshire, Cambridge, Suffolk and Sheffield Hallam. The difference amounts to tens of thousands of deaths, attributable to differences in wealth.

Inequalities in wealth have increased in the last two decades, with 9% of households living below the poverty line in the early 1980s, rising to 25% by the 1990s.

■ *Inequalities in Life and Death*, Marston Books for Joseph Rowntree ([www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)), 2000.

### Meat and rheumatoid arthritis

Links between animal foods and rheumatoid arthritis (RA) have been suggested in previous medical reviews. A further analysis has now suggested that the link is more directly to meat and offal, rather than to animal fats.

Fats may contribute to the inflammation, but the lack of a link between dairy fats and RA suggest that it is some other component in meat and offal that is contributing to the disease. Suggested components include nitrite, especially in processed meat products

such as bacon and sausage, or the high levels of iron found in meat and offal.

■ *British Journal of Nutrition*, 84, pp589-595, 2000.

### Olive oil questioned

An examination of the effects of different components of the Mediterranean diet on heart and artery functioning has found that olive oil may *not* be one of the key features which reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Looking at the flow of blood through arteries after different types of meal, the researchers found that olive oil tended to slow down blood flow — a bad sign — but that this effect was reduced if plenty of salad vegetables had been eaten. Fish, especially oily fish, also helped reduce the loss of blood flow. Fruit, vegetables, fish and other vegetable oils, such as rapeseed oil, all appear beneficial, but olive oil appears to act like a high fat food, and so should be used sparingly.

■ *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 36, pp1455-1460, 2000.

### Cutting salt lowers blood pressure

Reducing salt (sodium) intake can reduce blood pressure. Combining a reduced-salt diet with an increase in fruit and vegetables has an additional effect. Such changes in diet would have a major effect in reducing the risk of strokes, heart attacks and heart failure.

These are the conclusions of a study in which over 400 people were put onto special diets with different salt levels, and monitored for a month. The results showed significant beneficial effects for people without high blood pressure and even greater beneficial effects for people with high blood pressure.

Over 30% of adults in Britain have high blood pressure, with about one in five receiving medical treatment.

■ *New England Journal of Medicine*, 344, pp3-10, 2001.



## Stout question

While attending a blood donors session, chatting as you do, the officer at the desk told me that there was no iron in Guinness — and that doctors are now recommending cornflakes for iron deficiency.

Why have I been deluding myself for all these years that Guinness is good for me?

**C Shornley**  
Hockley, Essex

*The chap was right. Although we can't speak for the brand name, the drink is a form of stout, and stout generally has less than 0.4 mg iron in a pint of the brew. Red wine is a better bet, with 2.0 mg iron in a glass, and white wine is only a little less rich in iron. Cornflakes have added iron, and are easy for a doctor to remember, but you might have trouble asking for a bowl of cereal at your local!*

*As for the reasons why you have been deluding yourself... you aren't alone. The NHS used to serve up Guinness, and the company used to boast 'Guinness — him strong'!*

## Real meat

Why is it that you class the real food of mankind as 'junk'?

Humans and our ancestors have been eating red meat and animal fat for millions of years. Indeed animal fat has been a highly prized source of energy throughout man's pre-history and history.

Could it be that carbohydrates and sugars, which we have only eaten in the vast quantities we eat nowadays for the past 150 years be the cause of so much illness?

**M Waters**  
Carnforth, Lancs

*Certainly we agree that refined carbohydrates, sugars especially, should bear their burden of responsibility — for dental disease if nothing else.*

*But we also should remember that the animal fats we eat these days are very different from those eaten thousands of years ago, especially the relative amounts of saturated fats. Wild animals have a much greater ratio of polyunsaturated to saturated fatty acids in the fat that they bear, whereas modern farm livestock have more fat, and much of that is saturated. We hope to look more closely at this topic in a forthcoming issue of the Food Magazine.*

## Local and cheaper

In issue 50 (*Food Magazine*, July 2000) Sara Spain complains that organic produce is so expensive. Could I modify that remark by pointing out that it is 'so expensive' in supermarkets.

Contrary to what many people believe, supermarkets are not the only source. Most areas now have farmers markets — well worth trying — and there are many local small producers who have been growing organically for years and whose prices are very reasonable.

**A McGrath**  
Wellington, Somerset

## Market hazard

Further to the public health dangers of British beef, may I direct your attention to the farmers markets?

A recent news broadcast stated that rogue producers and slaughtermen manage to get over-thirty-month-old cattle meat sold to the public through farmers markets, by-passing the FSA inspectorate.

**J C Hayes**  
Lands End, Cornwall

## Milk myopia

Milk is not the benign calcium-giving, osteoporosis preventing liquid that the dairy industry would have us believe. It's a highly complex secretion tailored to the needs of calves that require rapid growth, and when

they are large enough they no longer need it nor drink it.

Two studies have shown high bone breakages among people who commonly drink milk compared with those that rarely do. Please don't fall into the trap that milk is an ideal source of calcium.

**N Bedrock**,  
Croydon Vegans, London SW16

## Farmed tuna

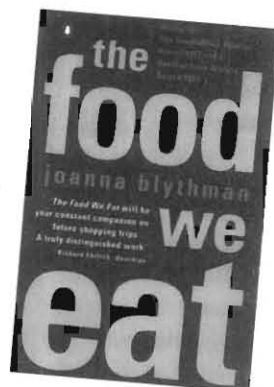
I have recently returned from Malta, where I was told that it was possible to see fish pens from the shore, in which tuna and bream were being farmed.

How extensive has this become? Presumably the fish are overcrowded and stressed, requiring antibiotics, growth promoters etc, much like farmed salmon. Is this fish imported to the UK and if so is it labelled?

**M Rochester**  
Benington, Herts

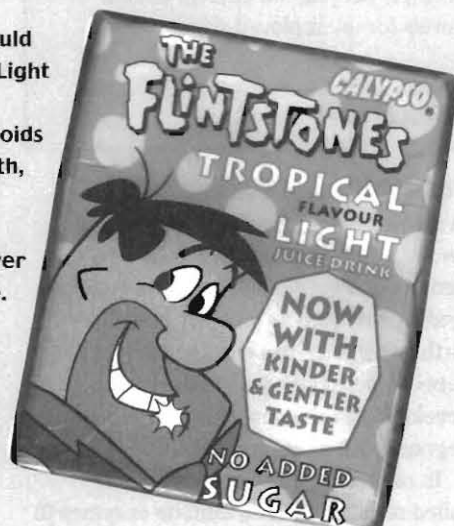
*We are aware of bream (and sea bass) being farmed on the coasts of Greece and Turkey, but tuna farming is new to us. Have other readers further information?*

*There is an excellent chapter on fish farming in Joanna Blythman's book *The Food We Eat* (available from *The Food Commission*, see page 16).*



## BADvertisement

The sparkle in Fred Flintstone's smile would seem to imply that this Tropical Flavour Light Juice Drink will be good for your child's teeth. But the manufacturer, Calypso, avoids a direct claim of benefits for dental health, with the phrase 'Now with kinder and gentler taste'. On the back of the box, Calypso explains that the drink has a lower fruit acid content than a previous recipe. With nearly 90% water and only 10% apple juice, it's no surprise that there is less fruit acid. So where does the kind, gentle taste come from? From, of course, flavourings and artificial sweeteners. Naturally!







Keep on writing but please keep your letters short! You can fax us on 020 7837 1141

## Regulators abolish 'brown' bread

I recently bought a loaf of Vogel's Soya and Linseed Brown Bread. I looked on the ingredients list and found that white flour is the second ingredient (after water), and that there isn't any actual brown or wholemeal flour in it at all. I wonder whether you could tell me if it's therefore allowed, technically, to be called 'Brown Bread'. In fact, what exactly do all the bread names mean? I've seen 'brown', 'white', 'wholemeal', 'granary'...

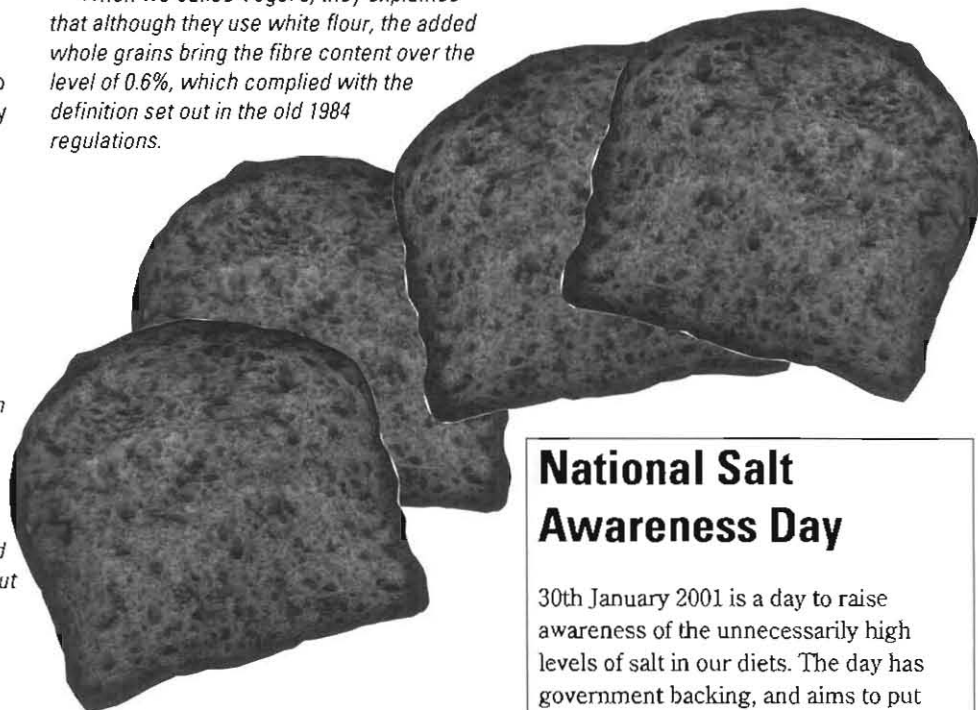
Miss Ruby Churchill, North London

*Ed: Your observation is very interesting, and set us on the trail of a recent change in the law. We called the Federation of Bakers, the Flour Advisory Bureau and the Food Standards Agency and asked them to explain what all the bread descriptions mean.*

*It seems that under current legislation, the only names that are legally defined are 'wholemeal' and 'wheatgerm'. The terms 'brown', 'white' and 'soda' used to be defined in the Bread and Flour Regulations of 1984, but were taken out when the regulations were amended in 1998. So, legally speaking, the word 'brown' when applied to bread doesn't mean much. According to the Federation of Bakers, most bread described as brown*

*usually has a higher fibre content than white bread, but since 1998 this is not a legal requirement.*

*When we called Vogel's, they explained that although they use white flour, the added whole grains bring the fibre content over the level of 0.6%, which complied with the definition set out in the old 1984 regulations.*



## National Salt Awareness Day

30th January 2001 is a day to raise awareness of the unnecessarily high levels of salt in our diets. The day has government backing, and aims to put pressure on food manufacturers to reduce the salt they add to processed foods — which accounts for at least three-quarters of the nation's salt consumption.

■ Contact the salt-reduction campaign CASH (Consensus Action on Salt and Hypertension) on 020 8725 2409

## Legal descriptions

**'Wholemeal'** means that the bread must contain, by law, 100% of the wheat (or other cereal) — the whole grain, with all of its bran.

**'Wheatgerm'** bread must contain, by law, not less than 10% added wheatgerm. This can be fibre added to a loaf made with brown or white flour.

## Unregulated descriptions

According to the Federation of Bakers, all other descriptions of bread are a result of traditional custom and practice, or the result of manufacturers and supermarkets inventing new products for their customers. The following terms are not regulated.

**'Granary'** is not a legally defined term, so there are no regulations about what 'Granary Bread' should contain. 'Granary' is a trade name of Rank-Hovis-MacDougal. It has become a term that most people think means 'bread with bits in', but the grain and fibre content of 'Granary Bread' is not defined or controlled by flour regulations.

**'Malted wheatgrain'** bread is made with brown or wholemeal flour, and usually has added malted grain.

**'Softgrain'** bread is made with white flour, and has softened rye or wheat added. It usually has about 30% more fibre than white bread.

**White bread** is made with flour that has had most of its bran and wheatgerm removed. White bread contains about 2% fibre.

Other breads can also be labelled with phrases such as **'five grains'** or **'multigrain'**. These are usually loaves made with white flour, with whole grains or kibbled grains added back in. Examples of grains used include linseed and rye. Kibbled soya beans are also often added to this type of bread.

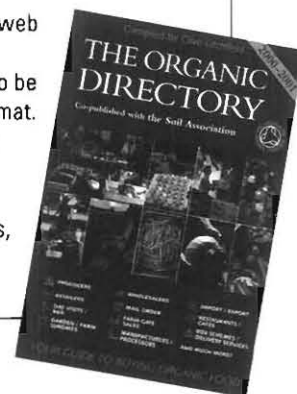
**Brown bread** The Federation of Bakers says that brown bread ought to be made with brown flour — containing about 85% of the whole grain, and giving about 8-9% fibre in the finished product. But as we've said above, this is not legally binding. According to the Food Standards Agency, 'brown bread is not [necessarily] nutritionally superior to white bread'.

■ Source: Federation of Bakers; Flour Advisory Bureau; Food Legislation of the UK (1993); Bread and Flour Regulations (1994 and 1998); Food Standards Agency.

## Organic Directory on the web

The Organic Directory is now available online on the Soil Association website - [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org). The online directory lists products, shops, box schemes and other outlets specialising in organic goods. This new web version has the benefit of simple search facilities so that you can sort the entries by name, category, county or postcode.

For those without web access, the Organic Directory continues to be published in book format. Available from Green Books, it costs £7.95. ISBN 1 870098 84 6. Contact: Green Books, Foxhole, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6EB.







## Top dog

Our knuckles have been sharply rapped following our piece in the last issue on the top men at the Food Standards Agency. We suggested that the chairman of the Agency, Sir John Krebs, might be making unpopular statements that were being fed to him by his civil servants.

We have been roundly assured by his office that he stands by every word he says, and he is no-one else's fall guy.

In which case we urge him to exercise a little more care in his choices of words. For example, his claims that organic food was no better than orthodox food begs a lot of questions. And his recent remarks on the precautionary principle ('...come to mean

*all things to all lobbyists' ... 'should be proportionate to the risk')* may not please consumer groups.

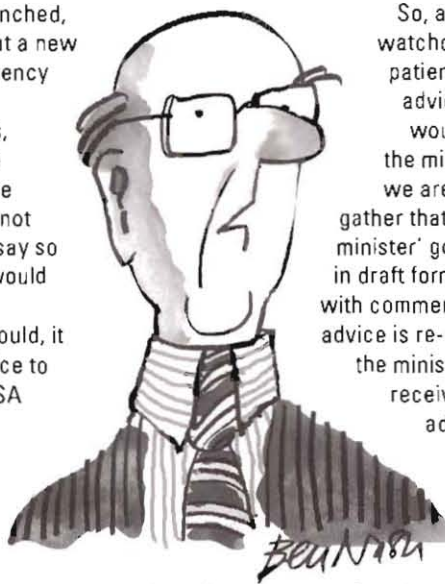
And on GM food, Sir John has a long history of support for the new technology. The day he was appointed he told Jeremy Paxman that GM crops were 'as safe as their non-GM counterparts'. A year earlier he was reportedly quoted in a book from the right wing Institute of Economic Affairs as denouncing 'the recent shrill, often ill-informed and dogma-driven objections to GM foods'.

Don't jeopardise the good will, Sir John.

## Yes, minister

Meanwhile, here's an awkward question for the folk at the FSA:

When the FSA was launched, amidst much fanfare about a new era of openness, transparency and fearless defence of consumers' best interests, one of the promises made was a guarantee that if the FSA found anything it did not like, it would say so, and say so publicly. In particular, it would be open about its recommendations, and would, it promised, publish its advice to ministers. Although the FSA itself could not make new legislation, it could press ministers to do so. Being free of direct government strings — it is an agency not a department — it could be independent



*"We are fearless in our publication of anodyne material..."*

and frank and would speak plainly when it wanted something done.

So, as a good consumer watchdog, we waited patiently for the fearless advice that the FSA would be passing to the minister. Fools that we are. For now we gather that 'advice to the minister' goes to ministers first in draft form! It comes back with comments attached. The advice is re-drafted and, when the minister is happy to receive it, er... the advice can be published!

We do hope that this information is as unreliable as some of the other leaks we receive...

## Doctor's message

Barnardo's, the children's organisation, launched an impressive document in December, focusing on the causes of inequality in health. It included the declaration: 'A good diet for the mother and a well fed infancy and childhood are vital, and children ... have a right to a decent diet'.

Inequalities in health are well exemplified in childhood with several diseases, high among them being tooth decay. A pity that Barnardo's has seen fit to endorse packets of white sugar with the enigmatic message 'Giving children back their future'.



## TV diets

People burn fewer calories while watching television than they do during any other activity, including sleeping.

So encouraging people to switch off their TVs and get some exercise, along with cutting back on fats and sugars in their diet, is the goal of many public health messages.



However a company called Beacon appear to take a different approach, believing, it seems, that public health is best served by killing off TV watchers as quickly as possible. Their wonderful TV Bar, launched internationally, contains a massive 250 calories in each bar. And 70% of those calories comes from pure sugar and fat.

## All at sea

Readers may remember our feature in the last issue on putting the Mediterranean diet into a pill. But food supplement companies aren't the only people jumping onto the Mediterranean bandwagon. A meat industry leaflet going out to schools happily informs children that British meat is, after all, a mainstay of Mediterranean diets...

- Meat provides one of the major sources of monounsaturated fat in the British diet (this fat is common in the healthy "Mediterranean type diet").

