

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Soy sauce contaminant is common in UK food

Soy sauce got the blame, but bread and biscuits carry greater contamination

The finding of high levels of a carcinogenic contaminant – known as 3-MCPD – in several brands of soy sauce hit national headlines in June. Yet, the figures show that over twice as much of this chemical is in UK-produced food than in anything we import from the Orient.

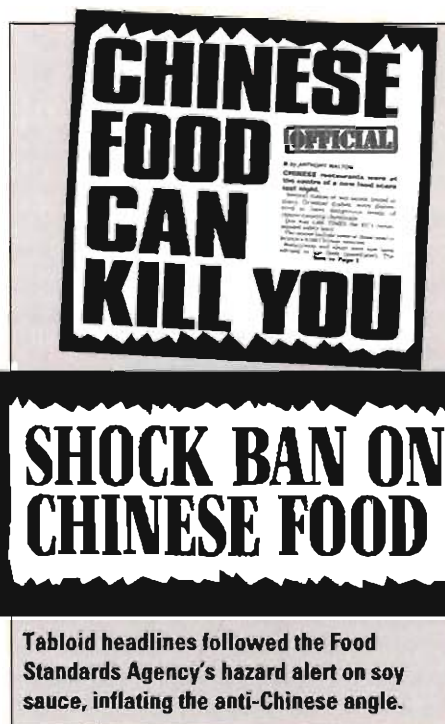
The soy sauce survey was released at a time when China is greatly increasing its food exports to Europe, potentially undercutting local suppliers. It also comes as an EU inspection team which visited China this spring is preparing a report on Chinese food manufacturing.

Concerned that China was being picked on unfairly, we looked at other surveys of 3-MCPD in our food, and found that soy sauce is not the only problem.

Although some soy sauce products had levels of 3-MCPD hundreds of times higher than any other food (a specific hazard to people who eat soy sauce frequently) the levels of 3-MCPD in common products like bread, savoury biscuits and beef burgers were also significantly above recommended maximum levels.

For a list of typical products and levels found, see page 3.

Because these common foods are produced and eaten in large quantities, the total exposure of the population is going to be greater from UK-made products than it is from soy sauce.



3-MCPD in the food supply First order estimate of quantities of 3-MCPD entering the food chain (micrograms)

soy sauce	21 bn
bread	35 bn
savoury biscuits	10 bn
beef burgers	2 bn*

* this figure excludes take-away burgers, which are also known sources of 3-MCPD

One law for us...

While the European Commission has set a legal limit of 20 mcg of 3-MCPD per litre of soy sauce and per kilogram of hydrolysed vegetable

protein (HVP), it has not set a limit for the presence of 3-MCPD in any other foods.

EC advisors on the Scientific Committee for Food are expected to recommend that levels of 3-MCPD in other foods should be reduced only to 'the lowest technologically achievable'.

As a result, one law will apply to oriental soy sauce, and another to most European products.

The assumption is made that contamination is entering the soy sauce by the use of HVP as a flavour booster. But a careful look at the survey shows that, of the nine products stating that they contain HVP, four were not contaminated with 3-MCPD.

Furthermore, of the 30 products labelled as 'traditionally brewed' or 'naturally brewed' (which should mean uncontaminated) six were contaminated with 3-MCPD.

With no clear source of contamination, perhaps soy sauce should be regulated to European standards, i.e. with 3-MCPD reduced to 'technologically achievable' levels.

Or, better still, UK-made products should be regulated as strongly as imported soy sauce.

■ Brand name lists – see page 3

Also in *The Food Magazine*

Guerilla Marketing



How food companies are by-passing parents and advertising directly to children.

Get the facts with the Food Magazine

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

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

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

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Dawn of an era?

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is dead.

No ceremonies. No public debates. Above all no media spin sessions when, the weekend after the General Election, the government announced the first big re-shuffle of ministry responsibility for farming and food since the Ministry of Food closed after World War II.

Farming no longer has its own ministry. From the ashes arises DEFRA (Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). But is it just a token name change? The staff of MAFF remain in post. The Permanent Secretary at MAFF remains as Permanent Secretary at DEFRA. Responsibility for negotiating the Common Agriculture Policy and attending EU Agriculture Councils remain as DEFRA's responsibility. But there are signs of change.

Excluding the word Agriculture from the ministry's title sends a clear signal of intent. MAFF was often accused of listening too closely to the concerns of industrial farming, at the expense of human health, wildlife and the environment.

Secondly, the choice of Margaret Beckett. Her predecessor at MAFF, Nick Brown, was the acceptable face of Labour among the farming community. He was polite and friendly and terribly sorry about the mess that farming was in. Margaret Beckett will be less of a toy poodle for the civil servants in MAFF and less worried about upsetting the industrial agriculture lobby, using her other responsibilities – for rural development and the environment – as her cover.

Thirdly, the press statements from her office have, so far, given the right signals and used the right words. The need to reform the CAP, the need to promote sustainable agriculture, the need 'to meet the needs of consumers', the need to develop 'joined-up policies' on rural issues – these could be extracts from old Food Magazine editorials!

Of course no-one admits to unsustainable farming, and everyone wants to be joined up in their thinking, and support consumers and reform CAP, so we must wait to see what it really means. Will Britain throw its weight behind Germany and Sweden and really push for environmentally-oriented CAP policies? Where will Britain go in the debates on hormone beef production, food irradiation and the big one: genetically modified food?

Which brings us to the last good sign. For three years Michael Meacher has been making himself unpopular in government by standing up for consumer rights on GMOs. While Blair flirted with Clinton and Monsanto, Meacher fought a lonely battle against the hasty acceptance of biotech crops.

Post election, we assumed Meacher would be dropped from office, or at least taken off the issue. But no. He's still there, and still responsible for the same concerns.

MAFF is dead. Let's hope it is 'Long live DEFRA'!

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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.

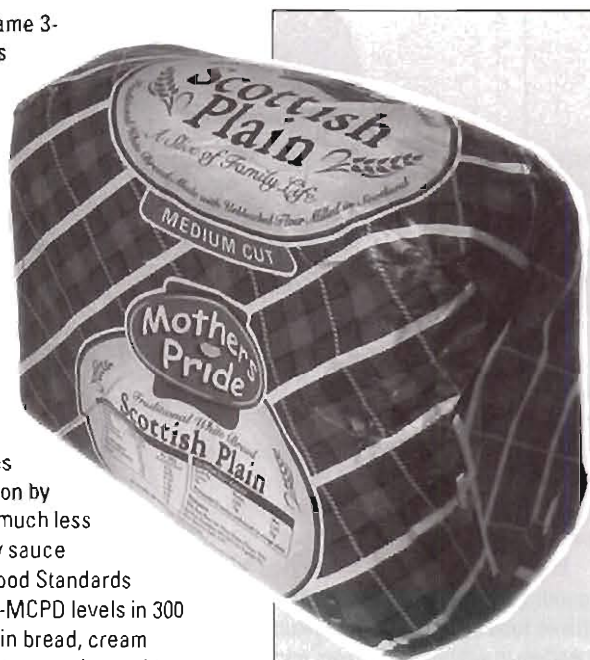
So watch out for our ANTI-ADVERTISEMENTS scattered through this magazine!

3-MCPD in everyday food

The contaminant 3-MCPD – full name 3-monochloropropane-1,2-diol – has been shown to be both mutagenic and carcinogenic in tests on living cells, although only the carcinogenicity has been confirmed in animal experiments. As we report on the front cover, a survey of soy sauce contamination led to tabloid headlines condemning Chinese food. The contaminant, 3-MCPD, had been found at high levels in some soy sauce brands.

However, soy sauce contributes only a part of the total contamination by 3-MCPD of our food supply. With much less publicity than was given to the soy sauce survey, in February this year the Food Standards Agency released a survey of the 3-MCPD levels in 300 retail foods, which found 3-MCPD in bread, cream crackers, anchovy fillets and beef burgers (see table, right).

Asked why this is happening, the Food Standards Agency's Dr Karen Goonan admitted that there appeared to be no obvious explanation. 'We don't know why or how 3-MCPD is produced in these foods,' she told *The Food Magazine*. The contamination levels are not even consistent from one batch to the next.'



Common food products like these savoury biscuits and white bread can contain levels of 3-MCPD that are illegal in soy sauce.



Anti-Chinese whispers

The attack on soy sauce comes when the Chinese are expanding their exports to Europe, and a European inspection team is preparing a report on Chinese food production.

When the EU's inspection team publishes its report on its visit to China this autumn we shall be watching. If it gives China a favourable judgement then perhaps the tabloid press should apologise.

If, though, it finds evidence for bad practices then what will the inspectors tell China to do about it – and what are they telling our own food companies?

Indeed, we hope the report will compare their findings in China with their findings from equivalent inspections in Europe.

And when the report is published, will the FSA remind us of the soy sauce contamination, and potentially stir up more anti-Chinese jingoism?

Or will they remember that, of the 32 soy sauces with 3-MCPD that created the anti-Chinese headlines, only 10 said 'Made in China'? The majority were imported from Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea and Malaysia.

3-MCPD in non-oriental foods

The threshold limit for detection of 3-MCPD is 10 micrograms per kilogram (mcg/kg) of food (equivalent to 10 parts per billion). The European Commission has set a maximum limit of 20 mcg/kg for HVP and soy sauce, to become law next year. Legal limits have not been set for other foods.

A UK government survey of 300 general grocery items found that 89 contained traces of 3-MCPD. The highest levels (over 30 mcg/kg) were as follows:

	3-MCPD mcg/kg
Mother's Pride Scottish medium white sliced bread	49
Mother's Pride Scottish Traditional white bread	35
Jacob's Original Twiglets	34
Jacob's Cream Crackers	40
McVitie's Krackawheat	87
Sainsbury's Cream Crackers	46
Asda 50% less fat Cream Crackers	116
Asda digestive biscuits	32
Safeway Cream Crackers	41
Tesco 50% lower fat Cream Crackers	107
Safeway half-fat Cream Crackers	40
Tesco Melba Toast	30
Jacob's Continental Pecan Toast	88
Jacob's Continental Raisin Toast	60
Pains Jacquet Toast Français	75
Asda French Toast	32
Asda Melba Toast	50
Morrison's Original Crispbread	37
Kraft Dairyalea thick cheese slices	31
Sainsbury's Singles cheese	31
Tesco 1/4lb Chargrilled Beefburgers	31
Sainsbury's Chargrilled Beefburgers	71
Sainsbury's Hot 'n Spicy Chicken Drumsticks	42
John West Flat Fillets of Anchovies in olive oil	81
Landwirt Nolke German mini salami	69
Sainsbury's Strafino salami	46

Note: Soy sauces tested had contamination levels ranging from 'undetected' to several hundred times the levels reported for the foods listed above.

Source: FSA Food Surveillance Sheet 12/01, February 2001.

Should the meat industry regulate itself?

With a new government committed to attracting private money into everything from school meals and management to hospital building and rail safety, the issue of privatisation has once again become a hot topic, writes Kath Dalmeny.

The privatisation of the meat inspection service, proposed by the UK government and the European Commission, and endorsed in 1999 by the then Agriculture Minister Nick Brown in a move to cut down on red tape for the industry, is a matter of pressing concern not only for meat eaters, but also for those whose job it is to protect public health.

Privatisation of meat inspection will require no parliamentary debate because it is a proposal coming from the EC. It is likely to be implemented with little fanfare or public attention.

At present, meat inspection is a government-run service, and meat inspectors are financially independent of the abattoirs and meat-cutting plants that they regulate. The proposal is for responsibility for meat

inspection to be handed over to the meat industry. Coupled with the widespread introduction of new risk-assessment and management systems called HACCP (Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points), in which the meat industry draws up its own safety plans, meat inspectors say that they will soon lack the power to tackle safety and hygiene problems and regulatory abuses in the meat industry.

In principle, HACCP (pronounced 'hassup') sounds reassuring. Developed by NASA to ensure food safety for its astronauts, HACCP is a system in which the workers and managers involved in a manufacturing process (such as a meat-cutting plant) get together, draw flow charts of their work, and identify the key points in the process at which health and safety problems are likely to occur. These are the 'critical control points'. In an abattoir, one critical control point will be the time at which a carcass is cut up, when fecal material can get

onto the meat – risking the spread of pathogenic bacteria such as E.coli.

The workers and managers then develop strategies for focusing extra attention on the Critical Control Points, to reduce the likelihood of such hazards occurring. Great emphasis is placed on documenting and standardising the HACCP procedures.

The process is designed to be methodical, lends itself well to being recorded and filed (so that a company can claim due diligence if a problem occurs) and provides a standard system throughout the industry, as a uniform basis for national and international trading. HACCP is therefore attractive to governments that wish to increase exports and minimise the conflicts that can occur when safety procedures differ between trading partners. It is also advocated by bodies such as the World Trade Organization, keen to facilitate the trade of meat across national boundaries.

Whilst supporting the modernisation of meat inspection, the public-sector union UNISON and the Association of British Meat Inspectors (ABMI) are campaigning to stop the privatisation of this crucial service. They also argue that, although HACCP can increase food safety, evidence from America and Australia shows that HACCP undermines the ability of regulatory bodies to intervene when safety problems occur.

UNISON and the ABMI are calling for a proper assessment of HACCP, and for it to be implemented only under the auspices of an independent meat inspection system free of commercial interests.

■ For details of UNISON's campaign against the privatisation of meat inspection contact: Ben Priestley, National Officer, UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ. Tel: 020 7551 1272 or visit their website at www.unison.org. For ABMI details see page 5.



"In this company, Babcock, one man's meat is another man's pension!"

UNISON's ten-point plan for a modernised meat inspection system

The public-service union UNISON is calling for:

- Meat inspection to remain independent
- Meat inspection modernisation to be the subject of parliamentary and public debate
- Consumer interests to drive policy-making, with business interests coming second
- Criteria for an effective inspection regime to be scientifically assessed
- Meat inspection to be broadened, to ensure products are microbiologically safe, free from artificial end-process treatments (including irradiation), free from lesions and parasites, and produced under humane conditions
- Animal welfare to be paramount
- Enhanced training to be given to meat inspectors
- Meat inspection to move 'upstream' to include animal health on the farm
- The Food Standards Agency to set up a whistle-blowing system to protect inspectors and company employees
- Consideration to be given to the support of smaller abattoirs.

Keep meat inspectors independent

Pierce Furlong, General Secretary of the Association of British Meat Inspectors, speaks out on why privatised meat inspection poses a threat to public health

Dealing in unfit meat is certainly not a new phenomenon. In the Middle Ages

unscrupulous traders salted or brined poor quality meat and sold it to sea captains who were looking for the cheapest possible form of food for their crews. It was this sort of activity that first led to the licensing of butchers and meat suppliers.

My family have been butchers, slaughtermen and cattle dealers since the time of Cromwell, so it was a trade that I naturally followed, serving an apprenticeship in Manchester, then managing some of the largest retail units in the north west. I had my own meat business for 11 years, then moved into local government to become a meat inspector, where I investigated the illegal trade in meat unfit for human consumption.

My experience has taught me that it is greed, and greed alone, that drives the trade in unfit meat. Put simply, unfit red meat used for pet food is worth between 5p and 10p per pound. Moved into the food trade it will be worth approximately £1 per pound – between ten and twenty times more in value. Until greed is abolished, independent meat inspectors will always be needed, to protect public health from unscrupulous traders.

One of the first investigations I worked on was a knacker yard which was sending meat to London and failing to stain it to show that it was unfit for human consumption. 30,000 lbs of unfit meat were removed and destroyed and the perpetrators were fined £5,000 (a lot for the time, but small beer when you consider the profit which could be made from such trade).



Another case involved 46 hind quarters of meat with a market value somewhere in the region of £10,000 to £15,000. On a routine inspection in a boning plant where meat was cut up, we noticed several lesions that should have been picked up at an earlier stage. We traced the stamps on the carcasses to a plant in Northern Ireland, which informed us that no meat had been sent to the mainland for over three months.

We became concerned that the meat may have been fraudulently stamped after questioning the owner of the plant about how the meat had come into his possession. He said he didn't know the supplier's name and he didn't have an address or telephone number. We detained the meat for 48 hours, at the end of which the owner of the boning plant still maintained that nobody had contacted him about this £10,000 worth of meat. We sought a magistrate's warrant to seize and destroy the meat, and prosecuted the owner of the boning plant for having in his possession meat which had not been properly inspected. He was fined £5,000 for his trouble.

As long as there are people prepared to cut corners, then there must be controls over the meat industry. When business applies pressure to cut costs (for instance in the recent poultry case, where the large poultry houses complained they didn't want to dye the unfit poultry meat because of the additional cost) then this will also provide an opportunity for unscrupulous meat traders. Without stringent precautions, public health will be put at risk.

These stringent precautions are now under threat from plans by the UK Government and the European Commission to privatise meat inspection. They want to do away with independent government meat inspectors and hand over inspection to the meat industry.

I used to work at an abattoir where I had good working relationships with both the managers and the managing director, but

even given those good relationships there were times when I had to make a decision to dispose of a whole carcass of beef, worth approximately £500 – £700. There were occasions, even with the good relationships, that the management was clearly extremely unhappy that they would be losing a product of such a high value.

Occasionally, this reached a point where we almost had to bring in the legal system, with the meat inspector seizing the carcass, and asking a magistrate to order its destruction. These situations tend to become extremely confrontational. In such instances, the only protection for the inspector is that he works for and is supported by an outside agency.

Imagine the scenario if an abattoir or meat processing plant had one of its own employees inspecting the meat. That inspector (wearing his public health hat) detects a problem and says that the meat must be removed from the human food chain and condemned. But his own employer is the one that stands to lose, and the cost of stopping a production line can run into many hundreds of pounds. A confrontation develops. When an inspector is independent and employed by the state, not by the industry, then he is free to make an independent decision. In a privatised inspection system, the inspector could well be offered the choice between passing the meat as fit for human consumption... or finding a new job. Ask yourself: will an inspector paid by the meat industry always go with his conscience, or will he bow to the pressures?

I am now working with the Association of Meat Inspectors in their campaign against the privatisation of meat inspection. When it comes to the protection of public health, meat inspection must remain a function which is independent of the industry. Meat inspectors must retain their ability to take difficult decisions without compromise.

■ **Pierce Furlong is heading up the campaign against the privatisation of meat inspection for the Association of British Meat Inspectors. The campaign can be contacted at: The Association of British Meat Inspectors, 9 Southfield Close, Woolavington, Bridgewater, Somerset TA7 8HJ.**

Big boys take over organics

Small organic enterprises, supporting local economies and the environment, are being gobbled up by big food corporations, writes Kath Dalmeny.

As the organic sector has blossomed, big food companies are taking a keen interest in the profit potential of organic food. Some, like Heinz, have now added organic varieties to their normal ranges, with organic baked beans, organic tomato sauce and organic baby food. They run the risk of shoppers thinking, 'So if these are more pure, what's lurking in the regular varieties?'

Some companies have a brand image that jars with organic principles. Can you imagine, for instance, an organic Mars Bar? Probably not. Mars isn't exactly famous for 'seed heritage, natural ingredient expertise and 100% organic recipes'. But this is the description of the 'brand values' espoused by a new range of organic food from Mars, marketed under the name Seeds of Change.

All backed up by the kind of advertising budget to make a small-scale producer weep – Mars will be spending £2m on marketing its new organic breakfast cereals alone this summer.

It's called 'guerilla marketing'. This description is used by Ian Hills, the Marketing Manager for the Enjoy Organic Company, whose career includes time at Ben & Jerry's (now owned by Unilever) and Britvic. Like Mars' Seeds of Change, Enjoy is another organic company that disguises the fact that it is backed by a mega-corporation. In this case, Rank Hovis MacDougal (RHM).

Meanwhile, small-scale organic producers are being bought out by big companies keen to purchase not only a factory or two and a distribution network, but also the 'feel-good factor' that comes with the brand name of a small or family business. Most recently, Rachel's Organic Dairy in Wales, with its familiar black and white packaging, was bought out by one of the biggest organic dairy companies in America – Horizon.

So if you thought that buying organic food meant avoiding the transnational corporation-dominated food market... think again.

'Nothing to Declare' says the label – except that the Enjoy range is owned by corporate giant Rank Hovis MacDougal.



Organic food miles

Concerned that up to 70% of organic food bought in the UK is currently imported, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, has launched a research project looking into organic food miles. Called the Food and Fuel Project, data is being collected on transport-related greenhouse gas emissions associated with UK imports and exports of both conventionally produced and organic food. The environmental performance of organic and intensive food production will be compared, and a report is due out later this summer.

■ Contact Andy Jones at Sustain on 020 7837 1228, or email andy@sustainweb.org.

Companies hijack fruit appeal

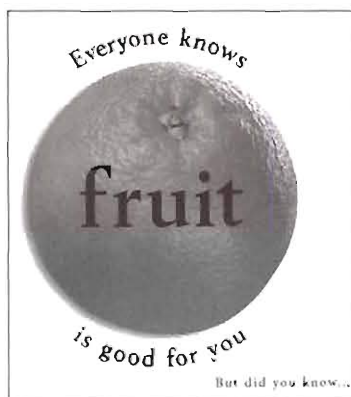
Everyone knows fruit is good for you. No argument about that, we thought, as we opened this leaflet (right) sent by reader Richard of Chingford.

But did you know... that this huge picture of an orange is the latest marketing ploy for latest tea bags!

According to Tetley, tea is rich in

antioxidants 'just like fruit'. Now, we do know of studies showing that black tea and green tea have beneficial health effects. But is Tetley so sure that tea with milk (which they show) and one or two spoons of sugar (with which people often sweeten their cuppa) is really so beneficial it can 'help maintain a healthy heart' (as the leaflet claims)?

Increasingly, fruit is used by advertisers of non-fruit products to give these products a healthy spin. Advertisers are unfairly exploiting healthy eating messages that



encourage people to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

Take a look at the cornucopia of fruit and veg in the advert (right) – tomatoes, carrots, radishes, celery, cabbage, melon, kiwi fruit, bananas, strawberries, oranges, lemons, limes, mangoes, apples, grapes and a pineapple. According to Moducare, all of this fresh produce is equal to just three

of their 'plant sterol and sterolin capsules'! Amazing that Moducare can pack all that fluid, all those micronutrients, all that dietary fibre and all the wonderful flavours into just three little capsules. Amazing? Or unbelievable.

The very best (or worst) example we've found of this marketing trick is on the Cocoapro website, run by Mars. Cocoapro was set up to extol the health-giving benefits of chocolate with scientific research to prove that chocolate is good for your heart and that chocolate 'may help to maintain the body's



The power of fruit! Moducare use images of fruit and veg to sell their 'plant sterol and sterolin' capsules to an adult market. Meanwhile in the children's market, Basset's Justfruit Chews may be breaking the law by using images of oranges, lemons, raspberries and strawberries on a packet of sweets that contain none of these fruit – only a tiny smattering of apple juice. The rest is mainly sugar and hydrogenated fat.

natural defences'. This Mars puts down to the polyphenols in chocolate which, it claims, are found at levels four times those found in tea.

So add together the claims made for Tetley tea bags and claims on the Mars website, and you'll find that eating a Mars Bar is four times better for you than eating an orange! Amazing.

A promotional picture on the website show Mars chocolate displayed amidst an array of colourful... you've guessed it... fruit.

Food Commission launches irradiation campaign

● food ● irradiation ● campaign

good food doesn't need irradiating ●



As recent issues of *The Food Magazine* have highlighted, food irradiation is re-emerging as a serious cause for concern for British and European consumers. Irradiation is touted by some leading scientists as a means for killing harmful micro-organisms which can contaminate food and cause food poisoning. It can, they say, serve consumers by extending the shelf life of foods through preventing spoilage, sprouting and insect infestation.

The Food Commission has re-launched its Food Irradiation Campaign, presently planned to run for one year.

In May, Merav Shub (pictured above) was appointed as the Food Irradiation Campaign Network Co-ordinator. Her work involves maintaining an international information network on food irradiation, keeping abreast of developments and ensuring that interested organisations and individuals in the UK and abroad are kept well-informed, particularly on developments in Europe.

However, concerns over the long-term health impacts of eating irradiated foods have not yet been resolved. Irradiation can result in loss of nutrients as well as the creation within the food of toxins, some of which are suspected or known to have carcinogenic and mutagenic effects.

The pressure to increase the use of food irradiation across the globe comes largely from industry interests who are set to profit from its use. Benefits to consumers are far less certain. Food irradiation will allow food production to be shifted increasingly to the developing world, as

extended storage times and delayed ripening and decay will allow foods to be transported further, from wherever it is cheapest, benefiting multinational food production and shipping companies.

The Food Irradiation Campaign aims to help ensure that, whilst safety concerns remain unresolved, irradiated foods stay off the shelves.

■ Details of the Food Irradiation Campaign from Merav Shub, tel 020 7837 9229, email irradiation@foodcomm.org.uk.

Prawn clarification

In Issue 53 of *The Food Magazine* we stated 'irradiated prawns are not permitted to be sold in the UK even if they are clearly labelled as such.' Clearly labelled irradiated prawns are in fact permitted for sale in the UK (see table), provided they have been irradiated at an EC approved facility. The irradiated prawns discovered by Suffolk Trading Standards last year, to which our article referred, were unlabelled and the irradiation plant and country in which they had been treated were also unknown. For these reasons their sale was illegal in the UK.



"Waiter, please ask the chef to irradiate this again."

With thanks to Mike Twomey, Washington Post Writers Group & Consumers United for Food Safety, USA

Irradiated foods permitted for sale in the UK

To be sold in the UK, irradiated foods must have been irradiated at an EC-approved facility. To date, the only approved facilities are within the EU, so food irradiated in China or the USA is not permitted to be sold in EU member states.

	Maximum radiation dose allowed (kGy)
Herbs, spices, seasonings, condiments	10.0
Potatoes	0.2
Yams	0.2
Onions	0.2
Garlic	0.2
Shallots	0.2
Vegetables and pulses	1.0
Fruit (including fungi, tomato, rhubarb)	2.0
Cereals	1.0
Poultry (domestic fowl, ducks, geese, Guinea fowl, pigeons, quail, turkeys)	7.0
Fish and shellfish (including eels, crustaceans, molluscs)	3.0

Full and frank disclosure?

The companies that bend the law to increase their sales

A law requiring food companies to make it clear that their products contained artificial sweeteners was introduced six years ago.

With increasing use of these chemicals in every-day as well as special low-calorie foods, the European Parliament had pushed for much clearer warnings of their presence in foods to be included on the food labels. The European Commission then drafted a Directive, stating that 'with a view to providing adequate consumer information, the labelling of foodstuffs which contain sweeteners must

bear details to that effect' and specifying that the words 'with sweeteners' should be written next to the name of the food on the label.

This Directive was put into UK law under the Food Labelling Regulations, but the guidance to manufacturers contained an extra spin, added by officials in the old MAFF department responsible for food labelling laws. MAFF told food companies that, under the UK wording of the new regulation (drafted by these same officials) 'there is no requirement for this declaration to be on the

front or main label, or that the lettering should be of any particular size'.

Many companies jumped at the opportunity to bury the declaration in small print on the back of the label. In our view this defeats the purpose of the legislation – which is to give hurried shoppers a clear choice between products with sweeteners and products free of them – without having to find their spectacles and hunt for the declaration in the small print.

Some companies, presumably wary that their use of artificial sweeteners may put

Unfriendly labelling of sweeteners

These products had no 'with sweeteners' declarations on the front label, despite the presence of artificial sweeteners. Bold print is for products which do not even *hint* there might be sweeteners, e.g. by saying 'diet', 'sugar-free' or 'light' on the front of the pack.

Brand	sweeteners
Ben Shaws grapefruit crush	Aspartame Acesulfame
Calypso Nickleodeon/Rugrats	Aspartame Acesulfame Saccharin
Calypso Flintstones	Saccharin
Calypso sugar free Safari cups	Aspartame Acesulfame Saccharin
C-Vit no added sugar	Aspartame Acesulfame
Dr Peppers diet	Aspartame Acesulfame
Fanta diet orange	Aspartame Saccharin Acesulfame
Fanta orange	Aspartame Saccharin
Freeway orangeade	Aspartame Saccharin
Freeway Traditional Style lemonade	Aspartame Acesulfame
Iceland orange squash	Aspartame Saccharin
Im-Bru	Aspartame Acesulfame
Jordan Formula EJ-10	Aspartame
Orangina Light	Aspartame Acesulfame
Panda Pops lemonade	Aspartame Acesulfame
Pepsi Max	Aspartame Acesulfame
Perfectly Clear flavoured sparkling water	Aspartame
Ribena Light	Aspartame Acesulfame
Robinson's Fruit Shoot no added sugar	Aspartame Acesulfame
Robinson's Special R no added sugar	Aspartame Saccharin
Robinsons Original Orange	Aspartame Saccharin
Robinsons Orange Barley Water	Saccharin
Safeway Select diet lemonade, cola	Aspartame
Safeway 'sugar free' appleade, cherryade	Aspartame Acesulfame Saccharin
Safeway Traditional Style lemonade	Aspartame Acesulfame
Sainsbury lemonade	Aspartame Acesulfame
Sainsbury Cool orange crush	Saccharin
Sainsbury diet fruit crush	Aspartame Acesulfame
Seven Up light	Aspartame Acesulfame
SoBe Lean sugar free	Aspartame Acesulfame
Soda Stream concentrates	Aspartame Acesulfame Cyclamate
Sprite diet	Aspartame
Strathmore Clear flavoured spring water	Aspartame Acesulfame
Tango	Aspartame Saccharin
Tango diet	Aspartame Acesulfame
Tesco apple and blackcurrant no added sugar	Aspartame Acesulfame
Tesco 'spring water drink'	Aspartame Acesulfame
Tizer diet	Aspartame Acesulfame
Toppers diet cola, diet lemonade	Aspartame Saccharin
Waitrose lemonade	Acesulfame
Waitrose low-calorie lemonade	Aspartame Acesulfame
Wild Thing 'designer soft drinks'	Aspartame Acesulfame

breaking the rules



people off their products, now make the required declaration next to the ingredients list and in writing as small as the ingredients list. The declaration becomes a pointless exercise, as the sweeteners are already listed among the other ingredients.

Our table shows the brands of soft drinks that hide the declaration on the back of the container. We emphasise in bold lettering the brands that don't even give a clue – like 'diet', 'sugar-free' or 'light' on the front of the pack – to indicate that artificial sweeteners might be present. Some actually claim to be 'traditional' despite their use of modern sweeteners.

■ Research: Sophia Thompson

Tesco has put the customer first by clearly declaring the presence of sweeteners on the front of this bottle of Hi Juice Orange Squash.

However Robinsons has placed the declaration 'with sweetener' on the side of the bottle, in green ink on a green background.

Tooth-friendly claims are back

Compare these two phrases:

'Ribena ToothKind does not encourage tooth decay and has been scientifically proven to minimise tooth erosion.'

'Tests show that Ribena ToothKind possesses negligible risk of tooth decay and tooth erosion.'

The difference? Well, the first was approved by the British Dental Association, but was banned by the Advertising Standards Authority as misleadingly implying that Ribena ToothKind 'actively benefits oral health'.

The second is the re-write that Ribena manufacturer Glaxo SmithKline Beecham (GSK) will be using in a new ad campaign to be launched this summer. During 2001, GSK will be spending £4m to encourage two- to ten-year-old children and mums to choose Ribena ToothKind for the benefit of children's teeth. Once again, the British Dental Association has kindly endorsed the new marketing phrase.

Action and Information on Sugars (AIS), the campaign group that brought the misleading claims for Ribena to the attention of the ASA, has said that the company 'seems pathologically addicted to misrepresentation'. AIS also notes that Ribena ToothKind sales have fallen by 15% (worth almost £3 million). The brand is now worth £14.8 million in sales.

Which only goes to show, says AIS, that 'honesty is the best commercial policy'.

Pills and potions sold as medicines

In order to protect consumers from misleading health claims the law makes a careful distinction between medicines and food supplements. But some retailers flout this distinction in the way they display products such as caffeine pills, cod-liver oil capsules and slimming aids.

Medicines must undergo rigorous scientific testing to ensure that they are safe and effective in curing diseases or alleviating the symptoms of medical conditions. This makes the products eligible to claim healing properties. It also means the manufacturers must abide by rules to protect consumers, such as a requirement to list possible side effects.

Legally, food supplements are defined as foodstuffs, and are regulated by food law. That means these products do not have to be tested for efficacy, so they cannot carry claims that they can cure or treat serious medical conditions.

Walk into Safeways, however, and you'll find that medicines and food supplements (including garlic pills, olive oil capsules, and Slim Fast slimming drink powder) are all sold under the banner of medicines, giving the impression a medicinal status that they do not necessarily deserve.

In Sainsbury's the display uses the more general heading 'health', but again, medicinal and non-medicinal products share the same shelves. And again, no distinction is made to help the customer understand that the products are substantially different.

In Boots, the healthy sounding word 'vitamins' is used above products such as caffeine pills and St John's Wort capsules which, while they have physiological effects, aren't vitamins, and aren't essential for health.

Retailers need to be more careful about displays to avoid misleading their customers.

In Safeways we found that food supplements (including garlic pills, olive oil capsules, and Slim Fast slimming drink powder) are misleadingly displayed as 'medicines'



Legal, decent, honest and true?

Recent decisions by the Advertising Standards Authority have challenged food companies' misleading statements.

X The National Dairy Council objected to a promotion for Danone Activ's bottled water with added calcium. Headlined 'Liquid Assets', the advert claimed that 'In one litre of Danone Activ there is as much calcium as in two glasses of milk (250 ml)...'. The ASA considered that Danone had miscalculated because 125 ml was not a common glass size and readers could be confused about the relative calcium content of Danone Activ and milk. It asked the advertisers to use a more commonly accepted glass size in future. The ASA did not uphold a further complaint that consumers might be misled over the comparative nutritional value of water and milk.



X A leaflet from Friends of the Earth claiming that 'today's food is laced with dangerous ingredients,' (including endocrine-disrupting chemicals) was criticised by the ASA as implying that all food contained dangerous hidden ingredients. The ASA asked Friends of the Earth to re-phrase the claim accordingly.

X A direct mailing for a book called *Eat and Heal* was criticised by the ASA for exploiting and frightening vulnerable recipients. The ASA said that the mailing exaggerated risks to recipients from 'mutant microbes,' 'carcinogenic vegetables,' 'fragile teeth,' 'cold extremities,' and 'painful sexual relations.' The book claimed to contain advice for curing

diabetes, reducing the risk of heart attack by 94% and protecting readers from 'terrifying viral epidemics' through miraculous dietary advice. The advertisers, Bristol Group Ltd, were told to seek advice before advertising again.

Complaints were also upheld against the Bristol Group for claims that its slimming tablets can 'Reduce Fat Fast'. The company claimed the tablets work 'by telling your body to get its energy from fat stored in your body'. The ASA found that the Bristol Group's claims were unsubstantiated, and warned the company to seek advice before preparing future adverts.

X Complaints were upheld against the supplement manufacturer Rodale Health for their promotion of a health book on Healing with Vitamins, which offered advice on how to avoid cataracts, 'slash your risk of cancer by up to 80%', 'dissolve arthritis pain,' prevent diabetes, 'dramatically sharpen your brainpower,' and 'drop pounds of fat faster than you'll ever believe possible'. Evidence submitted by Rodale Health on the benefits of vitamins and minerals was criticised by the ASA as inconclusive, unscientific and misleading in its claims to help solve serious medical conditions. The company was told to withdraw the mailing immediately.

■ For details of the ASA's rulings on Erdic 'breast-enhancing' pills and on Benecol and Flora pro.activ 'cholesterol-reducing' margarines, see page 14.

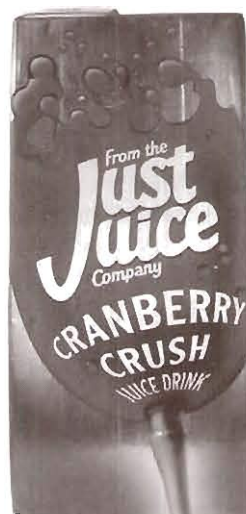
N.B. Danone's dodgy arithmetic is also the subject of a current complaint to the ASA from the Food Commission. As we reported in the previous *Food Magazine*, Danone claims that its 'Touch of Fruit' flavoured water has 15% fewer calories than an apple. But our calculations show that the product contains 45% more calories than an average apple. We'll let you know what the ASA says.

X A complaint was upheld against a Tesco leaflet for Organic Food which said: 'Q. What does organic mean? A. Organic agriculture is a method of farming that avoids the use of artificial pesticides and fertilisers for growing crops...' The ASA pointed out that EU Regulation 2092/91 allows some man-made substances to be used in organic food production and concluded that the claim was misleading. The ASA suggested that Tesco should consult them before making future claims about the advantages of organic farming or organic food.

BADvertisement

Nothing but the juice?

The Just Juice company is aptly named. Their boxed and bottled drinks are 100% fruit juice with no added sugar... unless, of course, you choose to buy this Cranberry Crush juice drink. The label proclaims 'Just Juice' in big letters, but take a look at



the ingredients and you'll find only 11.7% cranberry juice - the rest being water, sugar, citric acid, colouring and flavouring. We suggest that 'Some Juice' might be nearer the mark.

CHECKOUT

Children are being bombarded with junk food ads at school, through email, the internet, TV ads and now even mobile phones...

Guerilla marketing

Criticise the marketing of fatty and sugary snacks and drinks to children in the presence of an advertiser, and you're likely to get the response, 'It's not our fault if children eat unhealthily. It's up to the parents'. We disagree.

Control over our children's eating habits is in greater danger than ever of slipping into the hands of the junk-food marketers. Covering their packaging in cartoons is no longer enough to attract media-savvy kids, so food companies have shifted their focus to new ways to grab children's attention.

Our research shows that food companies are now writing and sponsoring educational materials and sports equipment for schools. And they have been quick to exploit opportunities to capture the attention of children when they're using computers and when they're with their friends – through the internet and mobile phones.

These are just the places where parents won't be around to counter the junk-food messages. Take a look at the host of examples we have uncovered in our research.

Schools – a captive audience

Cash-strapped schools are targeted by companies giving away free exercise books... plastered in marketing messages for products. One scheme, run by the marketing company JazzyMedia Ltd, promotes an astonishing array of processed foods, including sweets, chocolate, fruit chews and soft drinks like Pepsi and Vimto.

The illustrations shown on this page are for exercise books designed specifically for nursery school books. They are covered in adverts and games promoting McCain's Smiles – batter covered potato shapes. They even come with a '30p off your next purchase' coupon for tots to give to their mums to encourage them to buy the McCain's product.

JazzyMedia's advertising exercise books are officially supported by the National Association of Head Teachers, the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations and the National Primary Headteachers' Association.

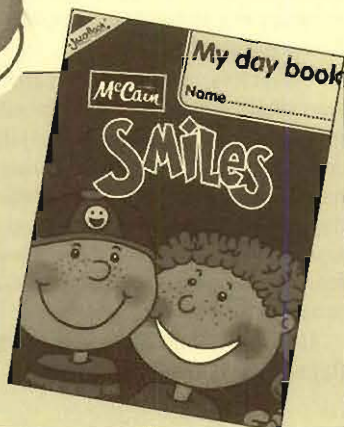
In Scottish schools, a recent initiative called 'The Balance: Get it Right' promoted the importance of children eating a nutritious breakfast – 'the absolute key element to a balanced diet'. The programme highlighted breakfast as 'essential for academic performance as well as physical stimulation'.

The sponsors? Kellogg's. The free gift given out to every child participating in the programme? A Coco Pops chocolate-flavoured cereal and milk bar, containing 16% fat (12% of which is saturated fat) and 50% sugar. These are given directly to children, under the auspices of a healthy eating initiative.



Can you count how many 'Smiles' there are on this plate?

The image is taken from an exercise book which has been sponsored by McCain, who use it to advertise Smiles (a potato snack) to nursery and pre-school children aged four years old and upwards.



CHECKOUT



These Jazzy Books are aimed at school children and advertise chocolate dips, Pepsi and the soft drink Vimto. Although junk food and soft drinks prevail, Jazzy Books have also produced at least one exercise book which advertises oranges and clementines.

The programme targeted 400,000 children in 1,800 primary schools, and was endorsed by the Scottish Executive and Scotland's health minister.

Meanwhile, the British Meat Education Service, sponsored by the meat industry, ensures that the 'eat red meat' message doesn't slip out of children's minds by reiterating it in nutrition videos and classroom packs entitled 'The Children who Live on Planet Food'.

By-passing mums and dads

Marketing to children has taken on a new twist with the insidious use of internet and mobile phone technologies to build a direct relationship with children, avoiding the profit-dampening possibility of adult interference.

Real Fruit Winders are sweets manufactured by Kellogg's – strips of fruit-

flavoured jelly rolled up on a strip of greaseproof paper. They are 47% sugar. The fruity image, Kellogg's says, is to get 'mum's approval'. Ironically, the UK Sales Director for Winders is called Stephen Twaddell.

Twenty seven million of these sweets have been sold since their launch in January without any TV or print advertising. How? As the trade magazine *The Grocer* puts it, by 'creating a buzz in the playground'. Kellogg's marketing for Winders centred on www.chewchat.com – a website for children with animations, its own secret language and cartoon characters designed to start a new collecting craze. Kellogg's has developed its marketing strategy with Cake, the PR agency that handles Pokemon.

The Winders website has games, jokes and stories. It also encourages children to email their friends with secret-language symbols – word-of-mouth publicity that is known in the advertising trade as 'viral

marketing'. Kellogg's aim is to start a 'behavioural epidemic', described by the PR agency Isis that specialises in such work as a process 'to

allow a brand to create a wave of self-sustaining behaviour'. In other words, get the kids hooked and make sure they do your publicity work for you.

'One to one' advertising

Even if parents manage to be around to watch what their child is downloading from the internet, they cannot keep an eye on their child's mobile phone. But mobile phones are soon to become another channel for viral marketing. A conference for advertisers held this year, called *Teen Power*, saw delegates sharing their ideas on how to phrase and send text advertising directly to teenagers on their phones. Another advertising conference, scheduled for September, will look at marketing via mobile phones to 'Tweens'. Tweens are pre-teenagers, an increasingly prosperous market.

The message to parents is: food marketers are gearing up to get to your children, in ways that will exclude you from having your say.



The Tween Power Conference explains that tweens are 'kids (who) are trapped between childhood and adolescence' and aims to 'penetrate the psychology of this age group' enabling companies to profit from 'this increasingly lucrative market'.

Learning from America...

In America Coca Cola has started to backtrack on its school vending machines programme after increased public and government pressure to restrict the marketing of unhealthy products to children. Coca Cola has 100,000 vending machines in US schools, and signs up whole school districts to exclusive contracts.

Coca Cola says it won't be withdrawing its vending machines, but will start including 'healthier' products, such as fruit drinks or milk smoothies. It remains to be seen whether Coke will be able to live up to its 'healthier' claim, especially after its announcement in March that it is teaming up with Procter and Gamble in a mass

marketing venture. What do Procter and Gamble make? Pringles crisps (one variety contains 39% fat) and our old favourite, Sunny Delight.

Earlier this year, the US Department of Agriculture criticised schools for raising money by selling fizzy drinks and fatty and sugary snacks, saying this undermined health messages about good nutrition. The department asked the US Congress for the legal authority to set nutritional standards for foods and drinks sold in US schools outside school meal times.

UK Food Standards Agency and the Department of Health, take note!



47% sugar, plus starch and hydrogenated fats – with a fruit image 'to get mum's approval'.

50% sugar, 12% saturated fat – and free to children as a 'key element of a balanced diet' says Kellogg's.



CHECKOUT

The junk pushers

Charlie Powell of Sustain argues that it is time to introduce legislation which protects children from the damaging effects of commercial exploitation

There is a campaign promoting junk food. It is one of the most sophisticated and best-funded campaigns anywhere. It is bank-rolled by the food industry and masterminded by the advertising industry. And it targets one of the most vulnerable groups in society: children.

The food industry spends millions of pounds each year promoting processed foods with high levels of fat and/or sugar and/or salt – including confectionery, crisps and savoury snacks, soft drinks and other convenience foods. In the year ending April 2000, £47m was spent on advertising the ten top-selling confectionery lines. £71m was expended on advertising the ten top-selling soft drinks, and the advertising spend for the top ten crisps and snack products was £21m. More money is spent promoting these three types of food than is spent on running the UK Food Standards Agency.

Over the past decade, Sustain (formerly the National Food Alliance) has studied the nature and extent of food advertising to children. Sustain's latest report, *TV Dinners – what's being served up by the advertisers?*, confirms that advertising during children's TV programmes continues to present a grossly unbalanced nutritional message, creating a conflict between the types of food promoted and national dietary recommendations.

Between 95% and 99% of the food and drink products advertised during children's TV viewing times are high in fat and/or sugar and/or salt. Adverts for unhealthy foods are shown with much greater frequency during children's television compared to adult viewing periods.

The National Diet and Nutrition survey shows that children are eating far too much saturated fat, sugar and salt. Children have little concept that the adults responsible for marketing foods view them solely as a source of sales and profit. In addition children are also unlikely to be aware of the long-term health consequences of their food choices. Which child really understands what it means



to develop heart disease, diabetes or obesity in later life?

Industry's long-running campaign for 'junk' food has gone too far. Acknowledging widespread public concern, the Food Standards Agency says it will encourage a voluntary code of practice on the promotion of foods to children. But the introduction of

legislation which protects children from excessive and unfair advertising, marketing and promotional activities is urgently required.

■ Charlie Powell is Food Labelling and Marketing Project Officer at Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming. Email: charlie@sustainweb.org; website: www.sustainweb.org.

TV Dinners presents national and international perspectives on advertising to children, a commentary on industry arguments and recommendations to reduce negative effects of advertising on children's diets.

For more details or to purchase a copy contact Sustain on: 020 7837 1228. *TV Dinners* costs £25.00 (£7.50 to individuals and non-profit organisations).



BADvertisement

Marshmallow sandwiches

Occasionally, we wish we had the luxury of full-colour printing to show you the true horror of products targeted at children. This is a marshmallow sandwich produced by a company that has chosen to remain nameless. Packaged in a plastic sandwich box, it has pink marshmallow 'bread', coated on the edges with pink, white, yellow and green sugar 'seeds'. The

filling is marshmallow 'vegetables' in the pinks and greens usually only seen as highlighter pens. And the ingredients (mainly sugar, of course) display a grand total of nine E-number colourings. Perfect for school lunchboxes, no doubt. This one, however, will take pride of place in our food museum, to be brought

out next time someone says, 'There's no such thing as a bad food, just a bad diet'.



CHECKOUT

Erdic ignores complaints

Erdic – promoters of ‘breast-enhancing’ supplements – continue to defy the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). Readers of *The Food Magazine* may remember our complaints in 1999 to the ASA against Erdic, who make pills containing plant-derived chemicals called phytoestrogens.

Our complaint, that their claims were unfounded, was upheld in a ruling by the ASA in January 2000. The ASA told Erdic not to repeat its claims.

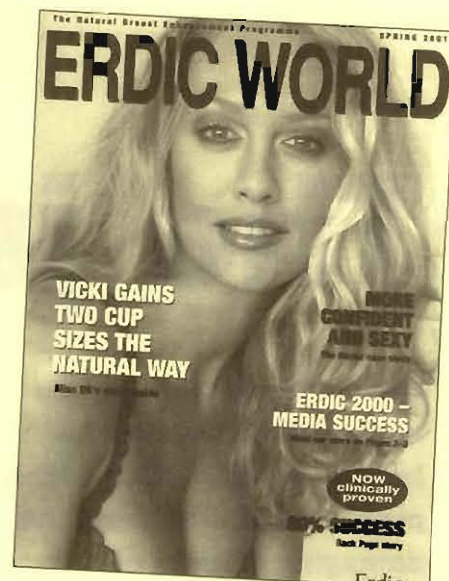
In November 2000 we sent the ASA evidence from *Food Magazine* readers that Erdic were continuing to make claims for its products in direct mail shots to the public. The ASA told us (29/12/00) that they, too, were concerned and said they had ‘been working closely with the advertisers to ensure compliance with our requirements’. Two weeks later the ASA sent us a further letter (11/1/01) saying the ASA ‘had obtained the advertiser’s assurance that such mailings would no longer be distributed’.

The same month, the ASA published its adjudication on another complaint against Erdic, in which the ASA repeated its finding

that Erdic’s adverts were misleadingly implying that their products could enhance female breasts.

Then in May our faithful readers noticed a new mail shot from Erdic, dated Spring 2001, repeating the breast enhancement claims. We sent a copy to the ASA asking what they were going to do about this flagrant breach of their previous findings. Their answer is given here:

‘As you are aware we share your concerns about the claims made in the advertiser’s promotional material. CAP, the Committee on Advertising Practice’s compliance team (an ASA team) have been involved in lengthy discussions with the advertiser to ensure the compliance in all future advertisements. The compliance team, through continuous monitoring, are fully aware that these mailings are being distributed to people requesting information about the advertiser’s product; and since December 2000 they have been working to obtain an absolute guarantee from the advertiser that such mailings will no longer be distributed. Please be assured that we will continue to monitor the advertiser’s mailings to ensure that they are in compliance



Erdic continues to dupe vulnerable women (at nearly £200 a time) despite our complaints to the Advertising Standards Association, who told Erdic not to repeat its misleading claims. The ASA tell us that they are currently ‘monitoring’ the situation.

with the ASA’s adjudication. Should the advertiser continue to use these claims the ASA will have no choice in the matter but to request that CAP refer the complaint to the Office of Fair Trading.’ (7/6/01).

We think the ASA should have got tougher at least a year ago.

Fatty spat

A feud is brewing in the world of functional spreads. In July, Benecol and Flora pro.activ (both marketed as cholesterol-lowering margarine) were criticised by the Advertising Standards Authority for using misleading health claims.

Van den Bergh Foods (makers of Flora pro.activ) complained about McNeil Consumer Nutritionals (makers of Benecol).

McNeil Consumer Nutritionals, in turn, complained about Van den Bergh Foods.

In trying to get one up on each other, the two margarine companies have done themselves few favours. Between them, they have brought consumer attention to the exaggerated claims made for ‘functional’ products.

The ASA criticised Benecol adverts for giving the impression that eating 24 to 36g of Benecol per day could mean a 14% reduction in LDL cholesterol. The ASA said that the ads did not make it clear that this reduction was only possible if Benecol was eaten as part of a healthy diet, with some of the reduction being attributable to an increase in intake of healthier foods.

The ASA questioned the assumption that people would eat enough of the spread daily



Adverts for Flora pro.activ and Benecol – both functional spreads – have been criticised by the ASA.



to achieve the full 14% reduction, and said that in addition, trials to prove the efficacy of Benecol were insufficient to show benefits across a range of age groups.

Meanwhile... the complaint against Flora pro.activ was also upheld, with the ASA pointing out that ads for Flora pro.activ implied that consumers already following a healthy diet and lifestyle could achieve a claimed 10-15 per cent reduction in LDL cholesterol.

And abroad...

In Australia and New Zealand, the food authorities have ruled that margarine like Benecol and Flora pro.activ containing cholesterol-lowering ingredients will

have to carry a warning that they are unsuitable for infants, children, pregnant or breast-feeding women, and people on cholesterol-reducing medication. ANZFA, the equivalent of the UK’s Food Standards Agency, made the decision after reviewing evidence that consumption of large quantities of phytosterol esters could reduce the body’s levels of beneficial substances known as carotenoids and antioxidants. ANZFA has banned the use of phytosterol esters in all foods except margarine.

■ See also ‘AHA warning on stanols’ page 21.

Mary Daly's *talkshop*

When it comes to nutrition, NHS health visitors rely on food companies for information.

At any one time, the UK's 15,000 or so health visitors are responsible for up to three million children. Each week we see hundreds of thousands of children with their parents. The commonest request is for help with feeding and nutrition.

Parents trust health visitors as the experts in the field of normal infant and childhood nutrition. What a shock, then, to discover that health visitors receive no training in infant or childhood nutrition in their training.

Health visitors have struggled for years to hang on to their unique way of working with clients. They seem to be fighting a losing battle. Last year saw their course slashed from 51 to 32 weeks. This April the government proposed to replace the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act with the Nursing and Midwifery Order, marginalising health visitors.

But while the government undervalues the health promoting role of health visitors, there are others who greatly appreciate just how successful health visitors can be in communicating messages. I am speaking about the food industry. Masters of marketing, the food industry know that if they can get health visitors to pass on their sales messages to our clients we will inflate their profits.

They are aided and abetted in this task by professional associations representing health visiting. Visit the exhibition which always accompanies the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA) Annual Conference. It is dominated by infant food industry trade stands, displaying the benefits of their foods.

The professional journal of the CPHVA is crammed with advertising for infant milks. The June 2001 edition tells me that according to SMA, 'Only our high energy formula has built-in nucleotides for healthier growth and development.' Hipp Organic tells me that their milk is obtained from farms on the foothills of the Austrian Alps, and that 'it is carefully formulated to be as nutritionally close to breast milk as possible'. Mead Johnsons, Enfamil AR proclaims it has found the simple solution to infant reflux — they thicken the milk with rice starch. Milupa tell me that that Aptamil contains two LCPs 'in a quantity and balance closer to breast milk'. Not only that, they claim it prevents constipation.

But the food industry is not just reaching me through my professional association.

There are also the direct mailings which fill my in-tray each week.

In one, Cow & Gate say that they are interested in improving my skills as a parenting educator. Mead Johnson want to educate me on diet and eczema. Milupa invite me to enter a competition as a way of ensuring I read about their two LCPs. I find that the most insulting of the lot.

Then there are the conferences and symposia, where important people on platforms tell me about scientific-sounding subjects such as iron-fortified milks, nucleotides and LCPs. There is an uncanny resemblance between the platform presentations and the marketing messages of the baby food companies... perhaps because the companies sponsor the conferences.

SMA Nutrition want me to attend a Building Blocks of Nutrition Symposium. There are six speakers, all doctors (and, incidentally, all men). Milupa invite me to a study evening to discuss 'Research and development in nutrition'.

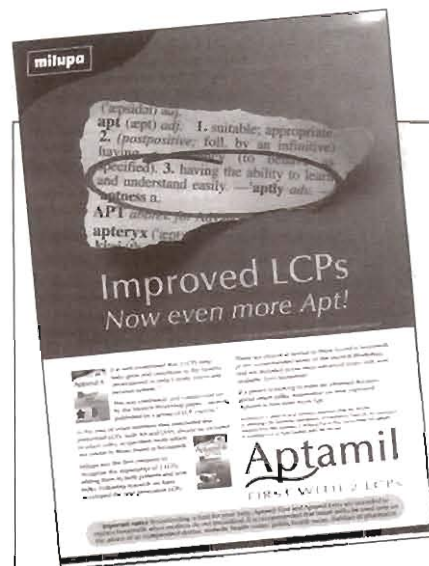
I asked some colleagues recently about the inappropriateness of representatives of infant-formula companies providing us with training on infant feeding. They saw no problem, and suggested my views were extreme.

Health visitors are passionate advocates of our clients. We are rewarded for that by unprecedented trust from those clients. We know that what families need is to be given the confidence and the skills to cook for their babies and young children and to sit down and enjoy eating the food with them free from the anxiety and stress which so often accompany family mealtimes.

Those who claim to protect the public interest are failing to provide proper courses of education for health visitors. They are unleashing on some of the most vulnerable in our society, infants and young children, not only poorly trained professionals but some who are unable to distinguish marketing propaganda from real research.

Perhaps in our rush to accept private sector interests in the health services we forget what the private sector gets in return.

■ **Mary Daly is a practising health visitor and veteran campaigner.**



Even the professional association for health visitors has succumbed to the lure of baby milk money. Adverts like these litter their monthly journal.





Alex asks... about his food

Alex loves his food. But what he reads in the papers and hears on the radio makes his head spin.

Mad cows. Tomatoes with fish genes. Artificial additives. Cows injected with hormones. Pigs crammed into concrete sheds. Fields sprayed with poison and spread with abattoir waste and sewage ..

'This can't be right,' thought Alex. 'I'd better ask my teacher. He's a very wise man.'

The teacher said, 'These things are dealt with by Government. They make the laws. Margaret Beckett is in charge - you should go and see her. Do you know how to get to London?'



Margaret Beckett was pleased to meet a young man so interested in his food. 'My officials work night and day to keep farm animals happy,' she said, 'and to check that pesticides don't make people sick.'

'What you must understand is that our farmers are very good at growing lots of food,' she said. 'We sell food to people overseas, and we get a lot in return. You like peaches and oranges and grapes, don't you, Alex?'

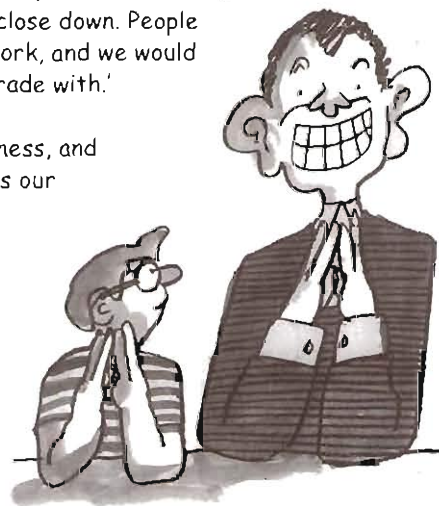
'I can't make new rules without other countries agreeing, because they trade their food with us. On international trade, the Prime Minister's your man. You should talk to him. Do you know how to get to Downing Street?'



Call me Tony, said the Prime Minister, with a winning smile. 'What you must understand is that if you make too many regulations, then farms can't compete and will close down. People would be out of work, and we would have nothing to trade with.'

'Farming is a business, and business increases our prosperity.'

'You want to be rich, don't you, Alex?' said Tony, with a wink. 'I think that answers all your questions.'



'Anyway, Alex, rules are decided in Europe. You must meet Mr Prodi, the head of the European Commission. Do you know how to get to Brussels?'

Mr Prodi did not ask Alex to call him Romano, but listened as Alex explained about the cows, weedkiller, rat genes and abattoir waste.

'Yes, Alex,' he said, 'rules are very important to keep our food healthy. Our scientists say that the food is usually very safe. We must not make laws unless we can prove that something is dangerous.'

'When there is a risk, we will explain it to you. You want to be able to make your own decisions, don't you, Alex?'

'If you're really interested, ask the World Health Organization, or the Food and Agriculture Organization - they are part of the United Nations where the world's rule-makers meet,' suggested Mr Prodi. 'Talk to Kofi Annan - he's in charge. Do you know how to get to New York?'





Kofi Annan listened to Alex's worries about the cows, the injections, the weedkiller and the sewage.

Mr Annan explained, 'The rich countries want free international trade, without barriers. So we can't make regulations they wouldn't like. The UN depends on the rich countries for the money to do its work.' Mr. Annan looked sad and very tired.

'Prosperity will bring World Peace. You want World Peace don't you, Alex?'

'You should talk to the big companies who do the trading. Perhaps they will be interested in your ideas. Do you know how to find the Transnational Corporations?'

Alex found his way to McSanto Inc, the biggest trans-continental, trillion-dollar global food company in the world.

'Listen, kid,' said Mr McSanto, before Alex had started to speak. 'We make a billion a day. How? Just one reason: WCW - What Consumers Want. You got an idea, let's hear it.'

Alex started to talk about cows, sewage and additives... 'No go, kid. There's no market in that stuff. What Consumers Want is what we're doing now: cheap, safe, convenient, predictable, long-lasting food - just look at our sales figures.'

'You want cheap food, don't you, kid?'

He gave Alex a free McSanto Funpack. 'You know how to find the door, don't you, kid?' said Mr McSanto.



As Alex sat on the plane home, he thought, 'People might buy McSanto food, but does that prove they really want it?'

'None of the people I've spoken to wants to change things. I can't trust the politicians, the bureaucrats, or the diplomats and certainly not that Mr McSanto.'

Suddenly, Alex felt he was alone against a world that was only interested in his money.

'That's it!' he said. 'They want my money. And my friends' money. But we can decide to buy only the things we think are right!'

'Perhaps we can get together and tell everyone what's going on. Maybe we can visit friendly farmers and buy our food from them. We can grow our own food, too.'

'And we can start a newsletter at school, and a website. And we can join campaigns and organisations and help make them stronger.'

Full of ideas, Alex suddenly felt a lot better. He couldn't wait to get back home and get started...



■ 'Alex' was inspired by 'Per's Story' published by the Swedish National Food Administration, to which we owe enormous thanks.

■ Cartoons by Ben Nash.

These two pages may be photocopied and distributed for non-commercial purposes.

Local Food for Local People

If you're looking for ways to support your local food economy, this CD-Rom may be of help. Produced by Somerset Food Links, it gives 26 case studies of enterprises supplying local food to local people, ranging from a 25-customer vegetable box scheme, to a dairy making cheddar cheese from milk produced by 100 local farms, for local and national sale.

Other case studies include farm-gate sales and farm shops, internet marketing, consumers co-ops, co-operative processing, food tourism initiatives, and initiatives in France, Italy and Spain.

Developed from detailed interviews with producers, the case studies give information on the history, current operation, economics and ethos of each business. There is also an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each approach.

Designed for food producers and teachers, and for use in rural and community development, the CD Rom includes links to websites and other information resources on local food.



■ 'Local Food for Local People' is available for £30 (including VAT and p&p) from: Somerset Food Links, Old Kelways, Somerton Road, Langport, Somerset TA10 9YE. Tel: 01458 257439.

Parliament will end food poverty

A parliamentary bill has been drawn up to tackle food poverty at the policy level, promoted by a coalition of campaign groups. These include Child Poverty Action Group, the UK Public Health Association, Friends of the Earth, UNISON, Church Action on Poverty, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, and the Food Commission.

If it becomes law, the bill would make it a legal duty for government to eradicate food poverty within 15 years. The coalition campaign suggests that action can be taken by charities, local community food initiatives and supermarkets. But it spotlights the role of government in ensuring that benefit levels, planning policy and competition regulations tackle the structural causes of food poverty.

Four million people in the UK do not have access to a healthy diet, according to a report

from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (published last year). The report points out that the problem is caused by a number of factors. These include obvious barriers such as lack of money to buy healthy food. However, there are also structural problems such as the lack of shops selling healthy food in poor areas, and loss of cooking skills. The system militates against poor people having access to the right food in the right way.

At present, the bill is in the first stages of the lengthy parliamentary procedure. Before the General Election, 170 MPs signed up in support of Early Day Motion 408 – a pledge of support for the campaign. For more information, contact Ron Bailey on 020 8698 3682 or email: ron@camhosts.net.

Launch of Children's Nutrition Action Plan

The Food Commission is pleased to announce the publication of its Children's Nutrition Action Plan.

The Action Plan is the result of a research project and a subsequent round-table policy meeting to discuss practical and policy measures to improve children's nutrition over the next five years.

The action plan gives details of what UK children are eating, and the health problems that are likely to arise as a result in childhood and in later life. The document

draws on research, reports and campaign documents from governmental and non-governmental organisations. It maps the measures advocated by these organisations to bring about change, and highlights key policies that could make a real difference to children's health and well-being.

Over the coming months, the Food Commission will be developing projects and campaign work in support of the Children's Nutrition Action Plan. As a result of the round-table meeting, we are already in discussion with the Maternity Alliance about reviewing the status of nutrition in pregnancy for women on a low income.

We have also joined the campaign for a parliamentary bill to tackle food poverty (see article below).

And we have plans to launch a new awards scheme to highlight good and bad practice in the manufacturing and marketing of food for children.

■ The Children's Nutrition Action Plan costs £10 (includes p&p).

To be put on a mailing list to receive details of the Food Commission's developing children's nutrition projects, write to: Children's Nutrition Action Plan, The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

BADvertisement

The healthier alternative..?

Just how far can the word 'healthy' be stretched in the push by manufacturers to sell their foods and drinks? We found the phrase

'carefully formulated by Tesco to offer you a healthier alternative' on a two-litre bottle of sugar-free cola. While the sugar level is



virtually zero, this product is absolutely choc-full of additives – artificial sweeteners (aspartame and saccharin), colouring,

preservative, and flavouring – and all topped off with caffeine. This may be Tesco's definition of 'healthier' but it's not ours!



NEW BOOK – The Food Our Children Eat

How can you bring up children to chomp on clementines rather than cola chews? Award-winning author Joanna Blythman's book is an inspiring guide for parents. From weaning a baby to influencing a teenager, she explains how to bring children up to share the same healthy and wide-ranging food tastes as you. No more tantrums, fights and refusals: her strategies are relaxed, low-effort – and they work. This 2nd edition is available for £8.99 inc p&p.

Fast Food Nation

A bestseller from the US, Fast Food Nation exposes the realities behind the fast food culture which permeates western society. Amusing, scary, fascinating and essential reading.

Available for just £9.99 (p&p is free).



GM Free – A shopper's guide to genetically modified food

What we know, what we don't know – this clearly written book explains the potential benefits and risks of GM food and will help you to make the right choice for you and your family. £5.70 inc p&p



The Food We Eat – 2nd edition

The award-winning author Joanna Blythman's examination of the best and worst in British food today. *'A ruthlessly honest assessment of the way in which far too much of our food is produced,*

processed and marketed says Derek

Cooper. It's also a great read! £7.99 inc p&p.



Back issues of The Food Magazine

Back issues usually cost £3.50 each but we're selling a full set of available issues (approx. fifteen issues from 1995 to 2001) for £30.00. Send for index of major news stories and features in past issues. Stocks are limited and many issues are already out-of-stock.



The Chips are Down

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.



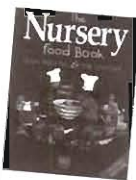
The Shopper's Guide to Organic Food

Lynda Brown's great new book explains all that you need to know on organic food and farming, with an A-Z guide to organic foods. £8.99 inc p&p



The Nursery Food Book – 2nd edition

A lively and practical book exploring all issues relating to food, nutrition, hygiene and multicultural needs, with tips, recipes and sample menus along with cooking, gardening and educational activities involving food. Excellent handbook for nursery nurses and anyone caring for young children. £13.99 including p&p.



Biotech – The next generation

Published by The Food Commission and Genewatch UK this report examines the 'second generation' of genetically modified crops – those with 'enhanced nutrition'. The report surveys the GM products under development, evaluates their claimed benefits and considers the safety, regulatory and trade issues which such developments raise. First published in 2000. £10.00 including p&p.



Poor Expectations

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



Posters: Our guides to Genetically Modified Foods, Children's Food and Food Labelling

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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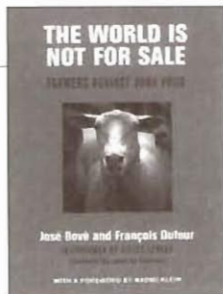
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Farmers against junk food

J Bove and F Dufour, Verso, 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG, 2001, ISBN 1859846149, £16.

In August 1999, a group of French farmers and their families dismantled a McDonald's burger restaurant, put the pieces in the back of a truck and drove them to the local council offices. There they told officials to send the pieces back to McDonald's, as they weren't wanted in that area.

The farmers were protesting about the burgerisation of French culture, and in particular about American trade sanctions imposed by the WTO because the EU had banned US hormone-treated beef.

Imprisoned for the damage to private property, the leaders of the group soon became internationally famous, including José Bové, one of the authors of this book. Soon, messages of support were pouring in from individuals and from food and farming organisations around the world. The farmers' symbolic action against world trade rules and a multinational junk-food seller had struck a chord.

This engrossing little book charts the lives, campaigns and motivation of two of the French farmers - José Bové and François Dufour - who became central figures in local actions that fuelled the mass protest at the WTO negotiations in Seattle in November 1999.

'The World is Not for Sale' is written in colloquial interview style, with accounts from Bové and Dufour of the philosophy and activities that lay behind their protests. They describe the depth of thinking and feeling that led to the demonstrations in Seattle - a more thought-provoking and personal history of the time than any press-cuttings can offer.

This is an inspiring little tome to dip into when you're feeling blue about the state of the world - a call to action, and a timely reminder of the principle: 'Think globally, act locally'.

books



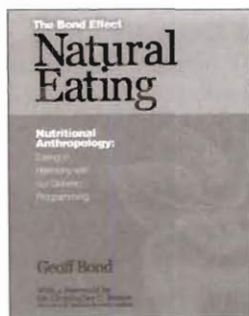
Eat, Drink and be Merry!

Tuula E Tuomaa, 36 Castle Street, Nether Stowey, Bridgewater, Somerset, TA5 1LW, 2001, ISBN 1-898941-52-1, £9.95.

Like *Natural Eating* (see this page), this is a personal book. It started when the author discovered the value of healthy eating to cure her own feelings of exhaustion and anxiety. After years of misdiagnoses, the discovery that diet rather than pills could make a major difference to her life led Ms Tuomaa to study nutritional medicine and clinical ecology.

The result is a mixture of science and assertion, covering the areas of mental ill health and its links to nutrition and pollution, pesticides and their potential impact on health, the pharmaceutical industry and its investment in illness, and a call for a holistic and planet-friendly approach to food and health.

For traditional nutritionists this may prove a challenging document. For alternative practitioners it will be more an affirmation of their beliefs.



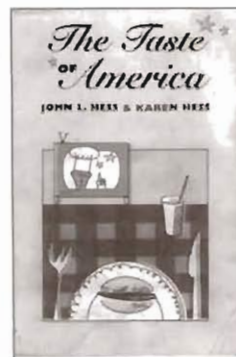
Natural Eating

Geoff Bond, Griffin Publishing (www.thebondeffect.com and www.naturaleater.com), 2000, ISBN 1-58000-054-1, £14.95.

'Nutritional anthropologist' Geoff Bond offers us the Pleistocene diet for the modern age. His sub-title - *Eating in Harmony with our Genetic Programming* - gives the gist of the book, and the style is distinctly 'you can do it' American.

Bond's prescription is a diet with abundant fruit and vegetables - 5lbs weight per day - and smallish amounts of dairy, meat, fish, nuts and pulses. Cereal foods, especially sugars and refined starches are 'bad' or 'borderline' foods.

It is well intentional but in the end the book gets overly prescriptive. For example, it categorises fats and oils into good, acceptable and bad, and tells us that goose and duck fat are acceptable while sunflower, peanut and safflower oils are bad, alongside cream and lard. The theory of following an ancestral diet is compelling, but Bond doesn't tell us where to find insect larvae, snakes and lizards, or how much of each we should eat.



The Taste of America

John Hess and Karen Hess, University of Illinois Press (www.press.illinois.edu), 2000, ISBN 0-252-06875-0.

Despite the title, this is not a cookbook but a highly-educated and elegantly written attack on the poverty of American food, and its cultural imperialistic tendencies, from the pens of two veteran food campaigners.

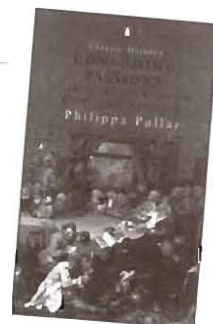
The book is a paperback version of earlier editions and something of a precursor to *Fast Food Nation* (see last issue). It kicks off with a furious attack on the decline of good food ('The Rape of the Palate') and marches through a series of essays until it reaches the Green Revolution and its neo-colonial effect.

Having depressed us it raises our hopes again by reminding us that there are still people who care what they eat, even farmers who care what they grow. A thought-provoking and immensely readable book.

Consuming Passions: A History of English Food and Appetite

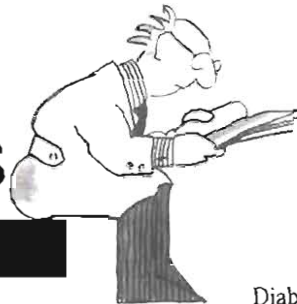
Philippa Pullar, Penguin Books, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, 2001, ISBN 0-14-139066-2, £4.99.

This is Ms Pullar's 1970 book with additional material from Paul Levy, bringing it up to the end of the millennium. If you missed it the first time, then get it now. Nowhere else will you be able to follow from Roman religious orgies (cakes shaped as phalli) through Chaucerian feasts (cherry beer) and the life of Mrs Pepys ('an erratic housekeeper') to the demise of mutton (mention it to a butcher and he will react 'as though you had removed your knickers in his shop'). A hoot.



What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals



Trans fats are bad for the heart

Confirmation that *trans* fatty acids are as bad for the heart as saturated fatty acids has been shown in a study of nearly 70 older men in Holland.

Trans fats are a form of fat synthesised from oils in order to give products a longer shelf-life. They are found in nature in small amounts, e.g. in cow's milk, but are mostly in the human diet in products such as margarine and baked goods. The study showed that men eating around 10 grams of *trans* fats per day were around 30% more likely to suffer coronary heart disease than those eating less than 5g per day.

Recent moves by manufacturers to reduce the use of *trans* fats should, says the research paper, have a significant impact on heart disease, as the average person's daily intake has reduced (in Holland) by about 5 g.

CM Oomen *et al*, *Lancet*, 357, 10/3/01.

AHA warning on stanols

The addition of stanols into food products such as Benecol and Flora Pro-activ has been reviewed by the American Heart Association (AHA).

The products are marketed as capable of reducing blood cholesterol, with TV advertisements starring Carol Vorderman telling viewers that it really works. The statement from the AHA acknowledges the efficacy of stanols taken in food products but is concerned that there is insufficient evidence about the potential adverse effects

of stanols on the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins and other nutrients such as beta carotene and lycopene.

As a result, the AHA has stated that, until long-term studies are performed to ensure the absence of adverse effects in all individuals, the products *'should be reserved for adults requiring lowering of total and LDL cholesterol levels because of hypercholesterolaemia or the need for secondary prevention after an atherosclerotic event'*.

Although the foods may promise general benefits, *'more information is required before their routine ingestion is recommended in the general population'*.

Leichtenstein & Deckelbaum, *Circulation*, 103, 27/2/01.

Fruit and veg and diabetes

Increased consumption of fruit and vegetables is thought to have a protective role against cancer and cardiovascular disease, and now new evidence suggests it may help prevent diabetes, too.

A study of 6,000 middle aged, non-diabetic adults (aged 45-64, the age group most at risk of developing diabetes) in Norfolk found that those who reported that they never or seldom ate fruit and green leafy vegetables had a higher level of glycosylated haemoglobin than those who ate these regularly. Glycosylated haemoglobin indicates glucose metabolism, and higher levels suggest that glucose is failing to be fully metabolised, a characteristic of adult-onset diabetes.

Diabetes has already been

linked to fatty diets and overweight, but the present study found that fruit and veg intake had an effect independent of total energy intake, saturated fat intake, dietary fibre, vitamin C, age, weight, smoking, exercise and educational level.

LA Sargeant *et al*, *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 55, May 2001.

Fruit and veg and lung cancer

A comparison between nearly 1,000 adults with lung cancer and over 1,000 matched controls found significant differences in several linked dietary factors.

Consumption of butter, eggs, liver and milk (whole, not skimmed) was positively associated with an increased likelihood of having lung cancer. All these foods have pre-formed vitamin A (retinol).

Consumption of carrots, margarine and tomato sauce was associated with reduced lung cancer risk. These foods are rich in beta-carotene, the precursor to vitamin A. Taking fish oil supplements also appeared to protect against lung cancer.

It is already known that health conscious people are likely to consume fewer animal products, more vegetable food, and to have a healthier lifestyle in terms of low rates of smoking, lower obesity levels and so forth. However, the present survey found that the dietary factors remained significantly linked to lung cancer risk even after controlling for smoking and other known factors.

S Darby *et al*, *British Journal of Cancer*, 84, May 2001.

BADvertisement

Saturated fat – Nestlé's secret ingredient for a Good Life



Eat a standard 60g Drifter Bar, and you will consume nearly 30g of sugar, and a massive 13g of fat (of which nearly 8g is saturated).

Not surprising, really, since this is just a chocolate bar. What did surprise us was the updated Nestlé logo to market this snack, which shows a mother bird feeding her babies, and the phrase 'Good Food, Good Life'. A short life, we fear.



Low B vitamins in Alzheimer's

Low levels of the vitamins B12 and folate may increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease, according to researchers in Sweden.

Nearly 400 non-demented people aged 75 years and older were monitored for three years. Seventy developed various forms of dementia, and 64 developed Alzheimer's. Low levels of vitamins B12 and folate were linked to a higher risk of developing the disease. Vitamin levels were determined by blood analysis, and no dietary factors were reported.

HX Wang, *et al*, *Neurology*, 56, May 2001.



Keep on writing
but please keep
your letters

short! You can fax us on 020 7837 1141

feedback

letters from our readers

More potassium

I greatly enjoyed the feature on potassium and magnesium (FM53) by Margaret and Arthur Wynn. But surely wholemeal bread (or fortified bread) aren't the only sources of these minerals?

L Parsons

Potassium: Most foods contain potassium. Fruit and vegetables, including the humble potato, are excellent sources. Boiling vegetables will dissolve some of the potassium (and other nutrients) into the water – so steam, bake or microwave, or re-use the water.

Magnesium: Most foods also contain magnesium, but especially good sources are wholegrain cereals (particularly the bran and the germ), pulses, nuts, fish and green vegetables (magnesium forms part of the green chlorophyll). Again, the mineral can be dissolved from a vegetable into surrounding water during cooking.

The point about bread is that we eat large amounts, and wholemeal bread contains three or four times the mineral content compared with white. Calcium and iron are required to be added back into white flour, but not magnesium or potassium.

Arthur Wynn adds: *Potassium is the principle mineral within living cells: nearly all unprocessed natural foods contain a greater weight of potassium than of any other mineral or vitamin, with the exceptions of some seafoods. Grains are particularly rich in potassium, but processed foods, especially some processed grains, are deficient.*

The Food Labelling Regulations (1996) list 12 vitamins and 6 minerals 'in respect of which claims may be made', but this list curiously excludes potassium. As a consequence the mineral is perhaps less well-known as an important nutrient than others of possibly less importance.

A nutrient which may not be printed on the label may be omitted from the food. A law which prevents the use of the word 'potassium' being used on labels impedes the dissemination of useful, health-promoting knowledge and should be revoked.

As we go to press we hear that Arthur Wynn is unwell. We send both Arthur and Margaret our very best wishes.

Yes, minister

The Food Standards Agency's Geoffrey Podger would wobble off his pedestal if he protested any more energetically about the independence of his Agency (see letters, FM 53).

It is not 'wholly untrue' that the FSA sends its draft advice to ministers for approval. I have in front of me a series of documents provided by an anonymous mole which shows

that this is precisely what happened over the ban on pithing animals at slaughter. (Note: pithing uses a rod to penetrate the brain so a stunned animal will not kick or struggle)

It wasn't simply a question of refining the FSA wording but the transformation of the FSA's opposition into support! The final draft had every word of the FSA's bitter criticism of pithing removed.

T Wardle, Viva! Communications Director, Brighton.

Used scientists

I can add to your remarks about scientific committees (Backbites, FM53). I have been corresponding with the Committee on Toxicity in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) because they advise the government on chemical sensitivity, or multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), a condition which challenges the adequacy of permitted levels of toxic chemicals in food etc.

The chemical industry is anxious that chemical sensitivity should not be seen as a serious problem. The 17 members of the COT have between them about 50 declared interests in the industry. In the past two years COT has rubbished two sets of recommendations from outside bodies for research into MCS. The COT failed to consider over 600 published papers on the matter, although it did consider two unpublished documents – a statement from a US Federal Working Party on MCS and a paper from a toxicologist working for the chemical industry,

Your questions answered

What is modified starch?

First off, modified starch is not necessarily a genetically modified product. It could have come from a GM crop, or a regular crop. The modified refers only to the fact that it has been changed, by physical treatment (e.g. heating), treatment with chemicals (e.g. acids) or treatment with enzymes (which may or may not themselves be derived from GM sources).

The original starch comes from a variety of sources available on world commodity markets – corn, wheat, tapioca, potato, rice, etc, whatever is most economic and fits the purpose. You take the crude starch, say cornflour, and treat it to enhance the characteristics that manufacturers want – water retention, viscosity, gelling temperature, dispersion, setting stability,

waxiness, creaminess, stability over time and so on.

Its main uses in food products are to provide a cheap and reliable thickening agent – used in instant soups, sauces, babyfoods, instant desserts and the like. In soups, for example, manufacturers want a starch that easily combines with boiling water but does not set solid like thick custard. Instant whip needs a starch to thicken in cold milk temperature, and set semi-solid. In sauces a clear starch may be wanted, e.g. for ketchup, or a cloudy one, e.g. for salad cream. Sometimes gums may be used instead.

The presence of starches in babyfoods has been the subject of controversy, as the starches combine with water to provide a lot of bulk, replacing the more nutritious ingredients that shoppers think they are getting. There is some evidence that modified starches are especially likely to ferment in a

baby's stomach, possibly leading to indigestion and wind.

Modified starches are also used to help retain water in baked goods, giving the impression that the goods are fresher than they might really be (see picture).

This trade magazine features the advantages to be had by using modified starch in commercial cake recipes.

The caption to the photograph reads: 'Cakes can be given moisture-capturing properties thanks to modified starches. And that means longer shelf-lives, since consumers will feel they've got a fresher product.'



feedback

letters from our readers

which called for a redefinition of MCS as 'Idiopathic Environmental Intolerances'. The idea that advice to ministers is purely scientific is a trap for the unwary when the science is not well developed and the scientists hand picked.
Dr CE Mellish, Conwy.

Belgian fudge

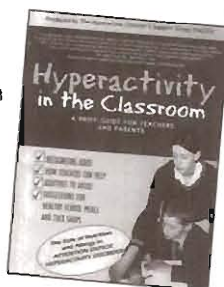
About two years ago there was a terrible scandal in Belgium, about contamination of animal feed with material containing dioxins. The dioxin then got into animal products, and we were warned to avoid various pâtés, etc. The Belgian government was accused of hushing up the scandal – but what happened after that? Were any politicians prosecuted?
R Clarkeson, Broadstairs, Kent

The European Commission (based in Brussels) prepared a legal case against the Belgian government (based in Brussels) on the grounds that the government had failed in its duty to notify the EC immediately it was aware of the dioxin problem. However, the Commission announced earlier this summer that it was dropping the case, saying that the Belgian authorities had done everything necessary to prevent a repeat of the problem and there was little more to be gained.

If it's any consolation, there happened to be a general election in Belgium a few months after the scandal, and the governing party was kicked out of power.

Don't bring an apple for the teacher..! Eat it yourself!

Teachers may be interested in a colourful new resource pack produced by The Hyperactive Children's Support Group (HACSG). The pack examines the impact that food consumed at school can have on learning, behaviour, health and mood. The pack contains a brochure/poster, booklet, students' leaflets and bookmarks. For more details write to HACSG at 71 Whyke Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 2LD.



Joined up Eating

Conference – Bristol. Oct 31st 2001.

Integrated policies on local food. Details tel: 0845 458 9525 or visit www.localfood.org.uk

Thank you, dear readers!

A big thank you to all of the readers who responded to our recent appeal!

Hundreds of supporters sent in donations ranging from £1 to £500 – every one of which was greatly appreciated. And it was also lovely to get so many messages of support!

Getting heard

New readers of *The Food Magazine* often ask us why they've not heard of our work before, but as we show in the box (right), it's not easy to get publicity when you're working with a tiny advertising budget and may get stamped on by the bully boys of the food industry.

An almost unique feature of *The Food Magazine* is that we don't make money by filling our pages with advertising and advertorials (advertising disguised as unbiased editorial content) and rely instead on subscriptions and the generous donations of our supporters. Whilst this ensures that our work is trustworthy and independent, it also means that we must spend every pound wisely and can't afford to publicise our work as much as we would like to.

Thankfully other journalists know that they come to us for sensible advice and information on food and health, so our influence is much greater than many people realise. And by informing other journalists we make sure that our campaign for safer, healthier food reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Don't worry if you didn't receive one of our appeal letters. As you can see below, your support is very important and further donations to our work are always welcome. If you would like to make an extra contribution please use the form on page 19 of this magazine, where you can also order books and back issues of the magazine.

Gagged by the MLC

A few months ago *The Food Magazine* had a valuable opportunity to place a free, full-page advert into a newsletter about healthy eating that is distributed to 50,000 schools. We jumped at the chance to let children and staff know about our work, but several weeks later the editor phoned us and after much apologising he explained that he couldn't run our advert after all.

It turns out that the newsletter is sponsored by The Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC), the agency funded by government grants to encourage people to eat more meat. Apparently the MLC didn't like the advert we designed, which criticised the sugar content of Sunny Delight and the water content of a Mr Men meal.

We're not sure why the MLC is sticking up for junk food but we think it's a terrible shame that they're using tax payers' money to hinder children's access to independent, non-commercial information.

BADvertisement

The snack that lacks...

We were tempted by the addition of sun-dried tomato to these Jacob's cream crackers – a pleasant change from plain old cheese biscuits.

However, that sneaky word 'flavour' caught us out, because although the label is kind enough to warn us that this product 'May contain traces of

sesame seeds', it doesn't say 'May not contain sun-dried tomatoes'.

The packaging sports

photographs of plump, shiny tomatoes but the flavouring for these biscuits is made up of a variety of real and synthetic ingredients – the only tomatoey bit being a disappointing 'tomato powder'.





Foot and mouth rumours

A lot has already been said about the causes of the foot and mouth epidemic, and what the government should have done about it. But one story that has now involved the police is the criminal practice of deliberately spreading F&M to areas where it hasn't (yet) been found. We don't mean the army trucks or the smoking pyres, but mystery phone calls to sheep farmers being offered the disease so that they can claim compensation. For a one-off £4,000 or £5,000, you can have your livestock infected, according to reports from farmers in Kent who have been the targets of these calls.

Meanwhile a scam of a different sort has emerged in Ireland. Culls of sheep to prevent the spread of F&M found fewer sheep than

expected. Under European Union agricultural support measures, farmers can claim £19 per animal (the ewe premium) for each beast they own. A group of some 50 farmers on the Cooley peninsula were claiming payments for 37,000 sheep. When it came to the cull only 30,000 could be found.



And if you like plots and rumours, you will adore a website devoted to telling us why the government has got it completely wrong over foot and mouth. It contains scurrilous rumours about vaccine trials just before the outbreak, and talks of a free-

masonry of ex-Oxford professors (Robert May, Roy Anderson, John Krebs, David King) now blocking any criticisms of government policy. See for yourself on www.warmwell.com (and sub pages, e.g. /andersongroup.html).

Royle junk

The TV sitcom, *The Royle Family* has been re-written for an American audience. The scriptwriter called in to make the changes, Maya Forbes, said she had been told by CBS to get rid of all the swear words and to allow smoking only if one of the characters lighting up made a comment about how bad it was.

But apparently there's no problem about the Royles' diet. 'Effectively, the only vice allowed for the family was junk food,' she said.

Fishy business

One way of keeping old MAFF departments going even after they have been privatised is to give them some cushy contracts. Take ADAS, the agriculture advisory quango. MAFF gave them a nice project worth £14,500, to have someone sit in a library and answer a fairly odd question: How easy would it be to get cows to produce milk containing fish oil?

The answer, perhaps not surprisingly, was: A bit tricky.

A lot of tinkering with the cow's biochemistry would be needed, to influence the chance of getting the fishy stuff through the mammary glands and into the milk.

And that pre-supposes you are feeding a hefty wallop of fish oil to the cows in the first place. In which case, why make the cow eat fish oil if the intention is for us humans to be eating more of it? ADAS didn't raise that question.

En suite battery cages

A press release headlined 'Launch of New Poultry Hospitality Industry Awards' gave us new hope in the promotion of animal welfare.

'Poultry hospitality' is such a wonderful idea. Can you believe that a whole industry is dedicated to providing it? And that now there are awards to encourage the best of them. Bliss!

'Receptions for roosters!' 'Good food for Guinea fowls!' 'Ducks at the Dorchester!' To say nothing of cocktails, game shows and... (That's enough, ed).

Sadly, predictably, poultry hospitality means using poultry to provide the hospitality – in the form of quail egg canapés and drumsticks with frilly paper rings.

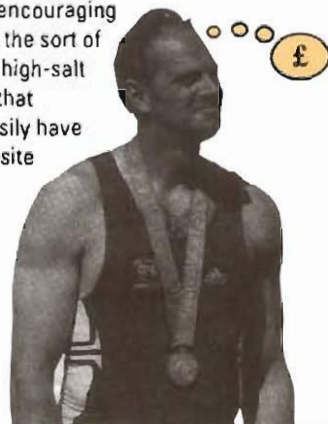


"some hospitality..!"

Margarine wouldn't melt in his mouth

Having urged us to dig deep into our pockets to buy Flora pro.activ and reduce our cholesterol levels, Sir Steve Redgrave will shortly be encouraging us to eat the sort of fat-rich diet that causes high cholesterol in the first place. Sir Steve has been teamed up with Gary Lineker to push Walker's new Heinz Tomato Ketchup crisps. If they're anything like normal Walker's crisps they'll pack a whopping 34g of fat (16g of which is saturated fat) into every 100g of crisps.

Nice one, Steve – first you sold us an expensive and questionable remedy for reducing high cholesterol, and now you're actively encouraging us to eat the sort of high-fat, high-salt product that might easily have the opposite effect.



Parrot blues

Sainsbury's launch of their Blue Parrot children's food range was somewhat marred by bad publicity, most notably a piece in the *Observer* entitled 'Sainsbury's is rapped over its child food range'.

According to the piece, 'an investigation by the campaign group Focus on Food' found that the products compared poorly on fat content and on price with their standard equivalents.

The Food Commission was also asked to comment, but we withheld criticism as we hadn't yet seen the range of products on offer.

So who is 'Focus on Food' – a 'campaign group' with an inside knowledge of Sainsbury's marketing ploys and able to jump in so fast against the supermarket giant?

It's sponsored by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 'in association with Waitrose@school' with a website address of www.waitrose.co.uk.

Surely a coincidence?