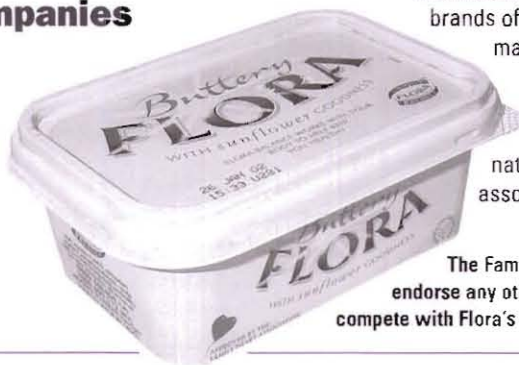


Health charities boost food company profits

Food products with charity link-ups may make thousands of pounds for the charities – but they are making millions for the food companies



Health charities and medical associations are allowing their logos to appear on food products in order to raise money and promote healthy eating. But according to new research from the Food Commission, the logo schemes could be doing more for company profits than for public health.

Logos or endorsements from health charities and medical associations appear on brands of fruit juice, tomatoes, cooking oil, margarine, porridge oats, milk, yogurt and even tea bags.

We examined 20 products that carried the name or logo of a national health charity or medical association, in ways that consumers

The Family Heart Association promises not to endorse any other spread or margarine that might compete with Flora's sales

could reasonably assume to be an endorsement of the food type or food brand.

Our survey found that health charities and medical associations had usually entered into marketing partnerships with national brands.

Products carrying the logos of health charities and medical associations usually cost significantly more – sometimes ten times more – than other food products with similar or the same nutritional value.

Also, in almost every case, the health charity or medical association was failing to use its influence either to promote healthier, affordable foods or to use the opportunity to improve public education and public health.

Karyatis Olive Oil carries the Cancer Research Campaign logo and dietary advice. It costs three times as much as other olive oils. Does the charity endorse such a price premium?



Children's food on trial...

Hundreds of parents have contacted the Food Commission to support our demands for better food for children.

Mums and dads are signing up to join the new Parents Jury – a chance to make their voices heard and to improve the health of children throughout the UK.

In the first few weeks since the launch of the Jury, parents have sent in examples of

children's foods that are particularly unhealthy, or which are advertised in especially manipulative or annoying ways. They have also been suggesting foods and advertising practices that deserve praise. Awards will be made to the best and worst examples.



See page 20 for details of the new Parents Jury

Turn to page 12 for results of the survey

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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Help from the opposition

You can often tell that you are doing the right thing by the sort of opposition you meet.

Our new campaign on children's food – see front cover and page 20 – is designed to get manufacturers and caterers to provide healthier foods for children. The 'Parents Jury' will pass judgement on what is right and wrong with children's food, and we will do our best to publicise their findings.

The Parents Jury was first announced in a leaflet circulated in the previous issue of the *Food Magazine* under the title: 'Wanted: 12 Angry Parents'.

Within days, we received replies from several dozen angry parents – and a very, very angry advertiser. And not just any advertiser. In a steaming letter to the Food Commission, Andrew Brown, the Director-General of the Advertising Association, said our new project was 'a disgrace' and should be 'condemned outright'. He said we were setting up a 'kangaroo court', a 'flagrant example of the end justifying the means' whose recommendations should be dismissed. The Advertising Association represents the £20bn advertising and marketing industry.

In the heat of the moment, Mr Brown sent copies of the letter to:

- Sir John Krebs, Chair of the Food Standards Agency
- Melanie Johnson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Competition, Consumers and Markets at the Department of Trade and Industry
- Dr Kim Howells, Minister for Corporate Affairs at the Department of Trade and Industry
- Sarah Thane, Director of Programmes for The Independent Television Commission
- Christopher Graham, Director General of the Advertising Standards Authority
- Tony Stoller, Chief Executive of the Radio Authority

We were obviously onto something! We know parents feel strongly about children's food and food advertising. They call us and write to us all the time, telling us that food advertising and marketing is 'a disgrace'. If food advertisers were so upset at the mention of just twelve parents expressing their views, what would happen if hundreds were involved?

So we have changed the name of the project from '12 Angry Parents' to 'The Parents Jury', and are now seeking even more parents who have strong views on children's food and food marketing to children. In this new format, we've already had hundreds of enquiries and applications, and look forward to an exciting and influential project.

So here's a big 'thank you' to Mr Brown for showing us how important this work is, and for copying his letter to such influential people. What a wonderful advertisement for our campaign, Mr Brown!

Advertising Policy. The *Food Magazine* does not accept commercial advertising. Loose inserts are accepted subject to approval – please contact Ian Tokelove at The Food Commission for details. Call 020 7837 2250 or email ian@foodcomm.org.uk

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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!

Cereal killers or national heroes?

Cereal manufacturers are keen to draw attention to the wonderful fibre content of their products. 'Good for our hearts!' they say. But what do they say about the salt content? A high salt diet is linked to high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease, as well as osteoporosis and gastric cancer.

In a press release issued earlier this year Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH) produced a list of the salt content of branded cereals. As a result, CASH was visited by a Kellogg's 'consultant' who spent several hours trying to convince the co-ordinator of CASH to stop attacking cereals. The consultant claimed to be speaking personally, but said that if Kellogg's decided to sue for libel they would undoubtedly win because of the high calibre of the lawyers they could afford.

Furthermore, the CASH co-ordinator would be held individually liable. She was told that she was probably becoming unemployable, at least in much of

the food industry. And, said the Kellogg's consultant, there is little evidence that salt is a major public health issue, while there is good evidence that if people did not eat breakfast cereals they would turn to something much worse for their health.

Lastly, there was a frank admission that if salt levels were significantly reduced, then cereal sales might fall 'similar to what happened with Heinz baked beans'. Heinz have not, we believe, admitted publicly that their salt-reduction measures were damaging to sales, but then perhaps they wouldn't want to.

Kellogg's are not alone in producing salty cereals. We scoured the supermarket shelves to examine the nutritional details on branded cereals – 57 products from the likes of Kellogg's, Nestlé, Quaker, Jordans and Weetabix. The saltiest ones are listed in the table on the right.

■ Visit www.hyp.ac.uk/cash/ for more information on salt and health



Quaker Oat Krunchies – rich in fibre but also the saltiest cereal in our survey

Salty cereals

	% salt	grams of salt per 500g box or bag
Quaker Oat Krunchies	3.00	15.00
Kellogg's Corn Flakes	2.50	12.50
Kellogg's All Bran	2.12	10.50
Kellogg's Special K	2.12	10.50
Nestlé Cheerios	2.00	10.00
Weetabix Advantage	2.00	10.00
Kellogg's Special K Red Berries	2.00	10.00
Kellogg's Crispix	1.87	9.35
Kellogg's Bran Flakes	1.87	9.35
Kellogg's Bart Simpson's No Problemos	1.75	8.75
Nestlé Cinnamon Grahams	1.75	8.75
Nestlé Honey Nut Cheerios	1.75	8.75
Nestlé Force Wholewheat Flakes	1.75	8.75
Whole Earth Organic Maple Frosted Flakes	1.75	8.75

What's a lot of salt?

Too much salt in our diet can lead to both strokes and heart attacks – the most common cause of death and disability in the UK. The Government has laid down clear guidelines to help consumers choose low salt foods and protect their health. All of the above cereals would be considered high salt products.

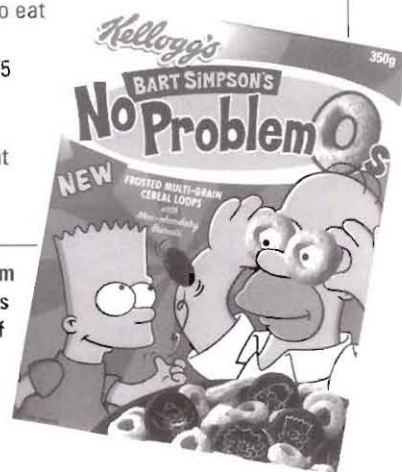
To see if a product is high in salt, compare the amount per 100g (or per serving if larger than 100g) with the following guidelines:

salt	more than 1.25g is a lot	less than 0.25 is a little
sodium*	more than 0.5 g is a lot	less than 0.1 is a little

Women and children should aim to eat less than 5 grams of salt a day.
Men should aim to eat less than 6.5 grams a day.

* One gram of sodium is equivalent to 2.5 grams of salt

New on the shelves from Kellogg's – No Problemos pack a double whammy of 1.75% salt and 29% sugar



GM prosecution

East End Foods, a Midlands-based food manufacturer, has been fined £4,000 and ordered to pay costs of £12,000 for failing to label its products as genetically modified. The company's soya mince was found to be over 50% GM when tested by Warwickshire Trading Standards (WTS). It is the first successful prosecution for non-labelling of GM ingredients in the UK.

■ Details from WTS: 01926 414039.

EC funds orchard destruction

The European Commission has authorised France to fund the grubbing up of apple, peach and nectarine plantations over the next four years. Under the Common Agricultural Policy, France sought permission to give grants worth £45.5 million to French producers to 'enhance the quality of French products' (maintain high prices and focus on just a few exportable varieties) and 'cut total fruit production' (chop down trees). About 6,000 hectares of apple-producing land and 2,500 hectares of peaches and nectarines will be affected. Aid worth £3,260 will be granted for every hectare grubbed up.

■ Source: <http://europa.eu.int>; scheme reference number N 8/2001.

When meat means madness

Producing too much food has led to a meat-mad culture, subsidised by taxpayers. Tim Lobstein reports.

You may find discussions on agricultural policy a complete turn-off, but consider this:

- 70% of European farmland is used for livestock production.
- For every kilogram of cereals grown for humans to eat, 2.6 kilograms goes to feed animals.
- £15 billion was spent under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) last year supporting livestock production.
- That's around £200 for every household in the EU.
- Oh yes, and the CAP is still giving grants to help farmers destroy orchards.

The great post-war project to rebuild agriculture in Europe aimed to help the battered rural economy recover and to beat off the American, Canadian and Australian

food producers who had survived the war unscathed. Thanks largely to the German treasury, the project was hugely successful.

Cereal yields rocketed – but what happens when you grow more than is needed? Some can be stored, of course, but the rest... why – feed it to animals! Converting cereals into meat is a wonderful way of burning off a surplus while creating new markets.

By the 1980s, though, even that trick was failing and real surpluses were building up, of meat and milk as well as cereals, sugar and wine. Measures to try and curb production were dreamt up, including set-aside payments, subsidising exports and giving away beef to old folk. The destruction of several million cattle in the UK, and now in the rest of the EU, as a result of BSE and foot and mouth disease has also helped prevent a collapse in the market in the face of excessive

over-production.

But the pressure will continue. Marketing schemes are paid for from CAP funds to try and get us to eat more meat. Low meat-eating countries, such as those with a 'Mediterranean diet' are urged to raise their consumption – a trend that has been under way for several decades but still has room for further gains.

It is a policy written by economists, who see no problem in the environmental damage nor the excessive use of non-replaceable fuel. It is a policy benefiting the banks, as farmers are induced to mortgage their farms to invest in yet higher yields and must pay back their loans from their CAP-sponsored incomes.

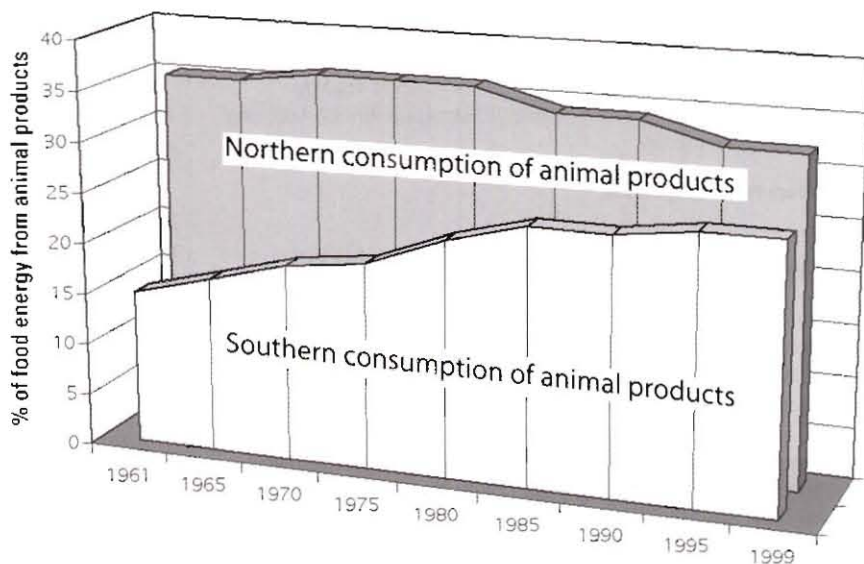
The health consequences hardly need mentioning – as virtually every EU country acknowledges the damage caused by excessive animal-fat consumption, and poor levels of fruit, vegetable and cereal consumption.

Meat is where the money is, in the world's most affluent food market. There's little to be made from beans or broccoli

Agricultural land in the EU (millions of hectares)

	Total	Estimate of use for livestock
Cereals	33.5	20
Pulses	1.5	1
Oilseed and other crops	5.6	2
Fodder crops	12.9	12.9
Unspecified and fallow	13.8	5
Pastureland and grassland	42.2	42
Permanent crops and vines	9.9	1
TOTAL	119.7	84 (70%)

Southern Europe is adopting a northern love of animal products



Under the Amsterdam Treaty, the European Commission is charged with looking at all its policies and ensuring they are consistent with maintaining and protecting human health. The largest policy by far, in terms of budget and Commission staff, is the agricultural policy and it is riddled with health contradictions.

While ministries of health are usually the Cinderella departments of government, having little clout in cabinet, the Amsterdam Treaty gives them a licence to gain far more influence over other sectors of the economy. But health ministries will only dare to do so if they feel they have public backing.

Such public support is easily obtained. They only have to ask.



Cattle botulism from chicken waste reveals flaw in feed regulations

In Northern Ireland, between 200 and 300 cattle have been affected by botulinum poisoning over the last three years, revealing a fatal flaw in the animal feed regulations. Botulism has affected 90 farms. The latest case was in County Lurgan where ten cattle have died from the disease and a further ten are suspected to be suffering from it.

The source is widely believed to be from chicken shed waste, spread on grazing land as a fertiliser. The shed waste includes chicken manure, feathers and dead chicks. An alternative possible source of the infection is rodent infestation of cattle feed silos, with dead rats and mice becoming incorporated into feedstuffs.

In either case, the current animal feed regulations which prohibit the use of processed animal proteins in cattle feed as a result of the BSE outbreak, are being inadvertently circumvented. Carcasses are entering cattle feed through poor practices – either poor storage of feed or through a failure to ensure chicken waste is free of potential contamination.

Although the strain of the botulinum bacteria, type C, is not one that is thought to affect humans, meat and milk from the affected farms is nevertheless not being allowed into the food chain until 14 days after the disease has been eliminated.

■ Source: Farming Today 15.3.02

Cereal usage in the EU (millions of tonnes)

	Animal feed	Human food
Wheat	39.1	36.7
Rice	0.2	1.8
Barley (excluding beer)	30.5	0.2
Maize	29.5	2.2
Rye	2.2	1.5
Oats	4.7	0.6
Other	5.6	0.1
TOTAL	111.7	43.1

Productivity from a hectare of land (early 1990s yields)

	kilocalories (millions)	People supported for a year (at 3000 kcal per day)
Potatoes	24.4	23
Rice	21.0	19
Wheat	16.6	15
Beans or peas	10.1	9
Pork	3.5	3
Lamb	1.8	2
Chicken	1.7	2
Beef	1.1	1

Self-regulation causes more dirty poultry

Attempts by the US Dept of Agriculture to hand over meat inspection tasks to the meat companies, allowing them to monitor their own hygiene practices, have suffered a setback.

The US General Accounting Office, equivalent to the UK Audit Office, has published a damning evaluation of eleven chicken processing plants that formed a pilot test of the de-regulation measures. In all eleven premises, the number of reports of faecally-contaminated poultry rose significantly, in some cases more than ten-fold.

The measures were introduced to cut down on the number of federal inspectors, and to increase the responsibility of producer companies for providing safe meat. Inspectors were removed from a series of fixed locations along the processing line and replaced with one 'oversight' and one 'verification' inspector.

Meanwhile the inspectors' trade union has filed a suit against the US government on the grounds that the law required inspectors, not company employees, to determine when a product was contaminated. The hearings continue.

■ GAO-02-59 (www.gao.gov) Dec 2001.

Animal fat is 'cheap fuel'

The University of Georgia, USA, is reported to have turned to chicken fat as a source of heating fuel for its campus. Coal boilers have been converted to burn animal fats to produce hot water and central heating.

Believe it or not, their next research project is reported to be a car that runs on lard.

■ S Leith, D Tel, 9/2/02

How green is your canteen?



Sustain's Vicki Hird calls for caterers to order organic...

There are probably few of us who have not been subject to an institutional cooking nightmare at some point in our lives. Scary school canteens, horrible hospital meals and ghastly government grub are the stuff of legend.

Yet aside from the jokes, there are real and harmful problems associated with bad public catering. Patients in hospital can actually become malnourished whilst in care. Children lose interest in good food once they enter 'the system'.

Largely, the problems are simply financial. Public institutions find the 'best value' contractors to provide the food, with few quality criteria in the contract. As a result, caterers source their supplies from the cheapest producers – and green criteria do not get a look-in, least of all any concern about the 'food miles' the supplies have travelled.

But, as many have said, it does not need to be like this. The food (all or some ingredients) could be freshly sourced, locally grown or bred, to high environmental and quality (not cosmetic) standards. Menus could reflect the diversity of farming and products available, reflecting cultural links with producers here, or with Fair Trade producers overseas.

Missed opportunities abound in terms of benefits for health, education, the environment and the local economy. As the Policy Commission of the Future of Farming

and Food said in their report, there are 'many potential benefits, both to the purchasing body, the end consumers and to the local economy ... if the food is locally produced.'

By buying local or regional foods, we can strengthen the local food economy, stabilising existing enterprises and jobs in the food chain and creating new ones. By buying local produce certified to high standards such as organic, we could ensure that the food chain becomes more environment and animal friendly, involves fewer food miles and ensures protection of natural resources such as soil, nutrients, and water. Paying now for more sustainable supplies is also cheaper than the costs of addressing climate change, pesticide clean up and food related diseases later on.

By concentrating on a healthier, fresher food supply, we could reduce the need for processing and the risks of nutrient loss and contamination associated with mass catering and far-flung food. Much public catering is for vulnerable groups – children, the elderly or sick – who need, and deserve, the highest quality food, but who tend to get the worst because of financial constraints and lack of standards.

By using its large purchasing power, the government could both stimulate demand and development and create a public interest in responsible purchasing.

Yet few civil servants have the capacity or desire to complicate their work by looking into alternative sourcing. I would be brim-full of lycopene if I had a fresh tomato for every time I've been told it's against EU regulations for contracts to specify the locality of suppliers. The 'single market' means our peas and mash must come from the best source – and by 'best' read 'cheapest'. This is an easy opt out but it is not the real situation. Projects in the UK as well as in France and Italy demonstrate already what can be done to provide both nutritious, often organic, school meals, from a local supply and do it within the rules.

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is making some attempt to look at its purchasing with a view to making



'The good news is that you've got food from five continents and your temperature is due to global warming'

it greener and has set up an internal working group. Yet there is a danger they will find these food issues too difficult to look at, for it will lead them the complexities posed by CAP reform, planning policy, education budgets, and so on.

Let us hope they can grasp the real benefits of getting all the parts of government machinery working so that there can be better canteen cuisine. Sustain² and others are working hard to demonstrate how it can be done and to provide assistance to those with a budget to spend and meals to provide but also an eye on a sustainable, healthy future.

■ Vicki Hird, Sustain Policy Director,
email: vh@sustainweb.org. Tel: 020 7837 1228

References:

1. See *Eating Oil: Food Supply in a Changing Climate*, Sustain, 2001
2. *The Food Chain Briefing Paper 3*, Sustain, 2002

London Food Link

Sustain has launched a new campaign called London Food Links which will work to facilitate a more sustainable food system for London. A launch meeting was held in March attended by community growers, farmers, food campaigners, local authority officers and retailers to discuss a shared vision for the future.

The campaign will be co-ordinated by Dan Keech, formerly of the Countryside Agency and Common Ground. Contact 020 7837 1228; email: dan@sustainweb.org.

Objectors block softening of irradiation rules

Plans to weaken international food irradiation controls have been stalled following strong objections from consumer groups.

This March, Codex – the international food standards-setting body – met to discuss a contentious proposal to remove the current upper dose limit for irradiation of 10 kGy (roughly equivalent to 100 million hospital chest X-rays). Vociferous disagreement between delegates meant that the decision was postponed until objections have been considered.

Forty-eight national governments from every continent were represented at the meeting, as well as an equal number of non-governmental bodies acting as observers. The Food Commission was represented by Food Irradiation campaigner Merav Shub.

Some of the delegations, including the Philippines, the USA, Australia and the World Health Organisation (WHO) argued that, since bodies such as the WHO have declared irradiated food to be safe and nutritionally adequate after exposure to any dose deemed necessary, the current limit of 10 kGy is now redundant.

However, the delegation from Spain, speaking on behalf of the European Commission, and supported by Germany, Poland, Sweden, Consumers International and

the Food Irradiation Campaign, argued that the limit should not be removed. Preliminary findings of a study carried out in Germany suggest that chemicals formed in food by irradiation, called cyclobutanones, could be toxic enough to cause significant DNA damage, potentially leading to carcinogenic or mutagenic effects in those eating irradiated food. These chemicals have yet to be found in any non-irradiated foods. It was argued that considerable further study was needed into the safety of cyclobutanones. The WHO delegate stated that the WHO is prepared to take into account any safety risks revealed and wishes to see details of the study as soon as possible.

Sweden highlighted the lack of evidence of actual need to irradiate foods at doses higher than 10 kGy. For many foods high-dose irradiation causes damage to qualities such as texture and smell. In addition, irradiation reduces the nutritional quality of foods. The Australian delegation stated that New Zealand had recently approved the irradiation of herbs and spices at 20 kGy.

No other delegation offered a similar example.

Consumer and industry groups remain concerned that pressure to relax the standards, and mounting efforts to promote the technology across the globe, would

undermine efforts to improve basic hygiene standards in food production. Such improvements, by reducing the incidence of food contamination and food poisoning at source, render irradiation for food safety largely unnecessary. But as an end-of-line 'quick fix' treatment, the potential for misuse to cover up bacterial contamination and to sell food that has already gone off is very serious. These concerns received little consideration at the meeting.

Legitimate concerns about worker safety, storage and transportation of radioactive materials, and the potential for environmental damage were not considered because these are largely outside the remit of this Codex committee.

For the Food Irradiation Campaign, attending the Codex meeting proved a very useful opportunity to ensure that consumer voices are heard, and to meet representatives from other European and international consumer groups. Several ideas for collaborative projects were discussed, which will be reported in future editions of the *Food Magazine*.

News from Denmark

Following a series of tests, the Danish Active Consumers group revealed that food containing irradiated ingredients was on sale illegally in Denmark. Active Consumers invited the Food Irradiation Campaign to speak at a press conference in Copenhagen in March, where representatives from the Danish media, national consumer and environmental organisations, and food manufacturers showed a keen interest in the issue. Two national daily newspapers carried articles on the issue, and the irradiation testing was reported by the only Danish consumer magazine, *Tænk + Test*. Danish food companies were quick to announce that they will not knowingly use irradiated foods. Further information can be found at: www.aktivforbrug.dk.



The Food Commission has forged strong links with several overseas consumer organisations. Merav, our irradiation campaigner, is pictured here (right) with Kaori Takise from the Japanese Offspring Fund at the March meeting of Codex.

Low-calorie

Eating Oil, the recent report on energy costs in modern food and farming, called for action to make our food supplies more sustainable. Farmer and writer Robin Jenkins takes up the challenge.

Food can be sustainably produced only by methods that are energy efficient. *Eating Oil*¹ states that there has been a substantial increase in the quantity of fossil fuel consumed in the production of food. Over the past 20 years the tonnage of food shifted by truck within the UK has increased by 16%, but the distance it is transported has increased by 52%. Worse, the tonnage of fruit and vegetables flown into the UK has increased by over 300%.

In short, the way we produce food is less and less sustainable and more and more damaging to the environment, and that includes much of the imported organic food available in the supermarkets. So what is to be done?

There are some useful lessons to be learned from the origins of the organic movement. The founding farmers made no appeals to government or the food industry. They simply formed a voluntary organisation that laid down a set of standards.

Some practices were deemed acceptable, others unacceptable and some were actively debated. Consumers were encouraged to put

their faith in the organisation and join in – and it worked, albeit as a part of a marginal, alternative movement. Only during the last fifteen years has the organic movement become institutionalised, its standards now enshrined in a set of European Union Directives.

Maybe now is the time to repeat what the Soil Association did all those years ago, but this time with a wider remit that lays down some operational standards for a sustainable food system, one that producers and consumers can understand, follow and support.

Fossil foods

Most food production in the world still takes place with practically no fossil fuel input. In Europe less than 50 years ago the commonest form of traction in farming was the horse, the mule or the donkey.

Just thirty years ago the majority of fruit and vegetables for London were produced within a 50 mile radius of Piccadilly. The greenhouses in the Lea Valley were an early victim of EU membership, demolished with grants from Brussels. Debate about the use of energy to produce food has a surprisingly long history. Quesnay and the French physiocrats² believed that

agriculture was the only truly productive activity, because no other human activity produced a physical surplus.

The physiocrats have been mocked by Classical, Neo-Classical and Marxist³ economists but they might still have

the last laugh. Conventional economic activity is dependent on fossil fuels. Biosphere activities like subsistence agriculture, that do not rely on fossil fuels, lie largely outside conventional economic analysis. Subsistence farming can, though, be analysed in terms of energy use³.

Efficient peasants

In the 19th century, a Russian emigré named Podolinsky made an energy analysis of French agriculture⁴ and sent it to Karl Marx's sponsor Friedrich Engels for comment. Unfortunately Engels was not impressed and advised Marx accordingly. One can but speculate as to what might have happened to peasant agriculture in Russia, China, Cuba, Mozambique and Nicaragua had Podolinsky been taken seriously.

Agriculture can be permanently sustainable because of the constant and, in practical terms, infinite input of solar energy. The association between green plants and the sun is so beneficial that it is easy for a person to produce 50 calories of food energy with one calorie of labour input. It has been thoroughly demonstrated in many publications that appearances are deceptive – the most energy-efficient food production uses the simplest methods^{3,5,6,7}.

The first oil crisis in 1973 spawned a host of studies on energy and agriculture. The American Association for the Advancement of Science published a paper⁸ demonstrating that in 1910 the US food system from field to farm gate used one calorie of energy input to produce a calorie of food, but by 1970 it was taking over nine calories of inputs to produce a single calorie of food. Smil⁹ uses UN statistics to show that there has been an eighty fold increase in energy inputs to agriculture worldwide during the 20th century.

Energy in, energy out

The most efficient system, both in terms of the energy input/output ratio and in terms of the calories of food produced per square metre of soil (which is therefore the system that can feed the most people on the planet), is an unmechanised, self-sufficient vegan community. Infinite sustainability can also be



'How many carrots do you get to the gallon?'

farming



achieved by using working animals, and can include the consumption of small quantities of meat, but the total human population that can be sustained on the planet in this way is lower.

We each require roughly a million kilocalories (kcal) of food per year, some 11% as protein, 25% as fat and 64% as carbohydrate. Our bodies are about 20% efficient at converting food into muscular energy or work. If we were each to grow this million kcal of food with our own hands we would need to devote some physical activity to the task – but only about 10% of that recommended to stay fit and healthy. It would be a more useful way of getting exercise than paying to use a gym or a swimming pool.

This is the human side of permaculture, and the more people who do it the better for people and the planet. Typically, a person can produce at least 25 times as much energy in the form of food as they use when working to produce the food, giving a positive ratio of 1:25. In contrast, a typical UK city resident is getting their million kcal by lethargic (though stressful) shopping, while energy-wasteful food producers burn 25 million kcal to provide this food, giving a ratio of 25:1

Food efficiency from A to K

Suppose we could present the energy efficiency of food in terms of a scale from A to Z. People are already used to this sort of thing with washing machines and fridges. If grade A were the grade for food that is produced at a ratio of 1:25 or better, then grade B could be used for food produced with ratios between 1:20 and 1:25, and so on, right the way through to grade K, which is the efficiency grade achieved by most processed supermarket food.

The advantage of such a scale is that there is a real practical possibility of improving on the score, both as a consumer and as a player in the food industry.

On the down side, the current lack of precision on energy inputs in food processing could result in some fairly arbitrary and therefore contentious classifications. The only way to arrive at a workable scale would be to try doing it and see how it comes out with a range of food products. In practice there might be some products that score well despite some particularly polluting production process, simply because the process happens to consume little energy. However, the nature of industrial processes ensures that such anomalies will be few and far between.

Grade support

Once a scale has been constructed, preferably involving as many concerned Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) as possible, the question is how it could best be made to work. The NGOs best placed to apply an energy efficiency test and to grade food accordingly would be those in the organic movement. These organisations would gain most from such a scheme, and could gain good publicity from being seen to initiate such a scheme.

Once launched, it would be up to the food industry to ask for its products to be evaluated. There should be quite a few farmers in the organic sector selling food locally who could get a grade B or C. There might even be some organic box schemes that warrant a grade A.

The scheme could be pushed along rather nicely by introducing an involuntary energy efficiency test for the key products of some of the worst food companies – with the proviso,

perhaps, that they would heed advice on how to improve their grades.

Please contact me if you think it would be worthwhile developing such a proposal, at concentropie@wanadoo.fr.

■ Robin Jenkins founded the Food Commission in 1985. He is now an organic farmer in SE France, seeking to maximise the biodiversity of the crops while increasing the energy efficiency of crop production, harvesting and processing, and developing a local network of consumers. For further information about the farm, including a weekly diary, visit <http://paulianne.free.fr>.

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- * For more information on the physiocrats see <http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/schools/physioc.htm>

The crispy taste of nature (and only 24% fat)!

Bite into a crisp, fresh apple and what will you taste? The crunchy sweetness of natural fruit? Well, no, apparently you've been misled

all these years. The natural crispy taste of apples should actually come from fat and glucose syrup, according to crisp manufacturer Gaston's. Despite the

claim 'the crispy taste of nature' on these Apple Crisps, they are 24% fat, with added glucose syrup and not-so-natural flavouring.

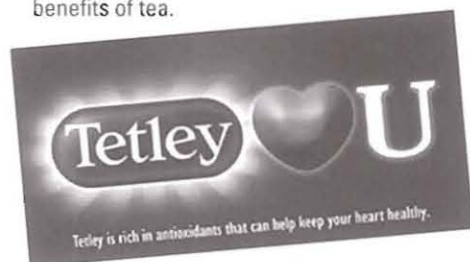


Legal, decent, honest and true?

Over the past few months, successful complaints have been made against a number of food and drinks manufacturers. We report on cases that set important precedents for other manufacturers and advertisers.

X Is that cuppa healthy?

Twining Tea objected to a magazine advert for Dilmah tea that stated: 'Tea comes with mega health benefits. Each mug contains a cocktail of vitamins, folic acid and zinc. And new research shows that selecting fresh tea leaves could boost the health benefits even more.' The Advertising Standards Association (ASA) upheld the complaint saying that despite evidence submitted from the industry's Tea Council, 'many of the studies had found no increased health benefits from the consumption of tea'; that 'several of those studies reporting positive effects from drinking tea emphasised the need for more research before a firm conclusion on the subject could be reached'; and that 'the health benefits of drinking tea had not been proven'. In addition, many of the nutrients that Dilmah boasted of for its tea actually came from added milk. The ASA ruled that Dilmah had exaggerated the health benefits of tea.



In the light of this ruling, The Food Commission has submitted complaints to the ASA and the Independent Television Commission about the recent nationwide campaign by Tetley. We have objected to Tetley's statement (reinforced by heart symbols and even, on some roadside hoardings, a six-foot-high plastic light-up heart) 'Tetley is rich in antioxidants that can help keep your heart healthy'. We think this is an overstated, unsubstantiated and misleading claim. We'll let you know if the ASA agrees.

X Pasteurised and rehydrated, naturally

A complaint was upheld against Libby's organic fruit juices for their claims 'the taste nature intended' and 'just like nature intended', appearing on juices rehydrated from concentrate and pasteurised. The ASA considered that because a statement about the product's taste preceded the words 'nature intended', the claim would be interpreted to mean that the juice tasted how nature intended. The advertisers admitted that there is a difference in taste between concentrated and squeezed juices, and that pasteurisation also altered the taste of the product. The ASA ruled that the marketing descriptions were misleading.

X Slimming claims slammed

Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming, submitted over 70 separate complaints against advertisements for slimming products. The first ASA ruling on these complaints has been published, relating to a leaflet, for Chinese medicine, that claimed 'Kui Ke is the nutrition extract that can significantly reduce body fat. In some cases, one week's supply could reduce around seven pounds within one week. Diet Tea can reduce weight and cleans the system. It's also beneficial for curing constipation and reducing cholesterol. It is good for cancer, hypertension, bronchitis...' The ASA considered that the efficacy of the product had not been substantiated and told the advertisers not to repeat the claims. Sustain's complaints are part of a project to highlight the weakness of advertising self-regulation, especially for slimming products. See: www.sustainweb.org, or call 020 7837 1228.

Burn off £££s with quick-slim products

In the previous issue of the *Food Magazine*, we highlighted the problems of ridiculous (sometimes dangerous) claims for slimming products proliferating in magazine adverts, direct mailings and on the internet. Our findings were reported in many national women's magazines, and concerned readers have called us with examples of adverts that they think are exaggerated, misleading or manipulative.

One reader from Leeds sent in a direct mailing for 'Elderberry Slim-Système Detox' which guaranteed to 'burn off fat by at least 3 pounds in the first day, 10 pounds in the first 7 days and 28 pounds in the first month'. The ASA explicitly rules against 'general claims that precise amounts of weight can be lost within a stated period'.

The mailing claimed that the product 'Does not affect breast tissue ...so you keep your shapely breasts ...but targets fat cell build-ups on thighs, legs, hips, stomachs, arms, shins and bottoms.' The ASA says that products should not claim 'that weight can be lost from specific parts of the body'.

Another caller commented, 'They're taking money off people who are so desperate to solve their weight problems, they would believe anything, and will be conned by all this fake science. I'm glad to help you try to put a stop to them.'

Send us mailings and adverts for slimming products, and if we think they break the advertising codes, we'll complain on your behalf and keep you informed of the results.

X Scotch beef... from England

The ASA upheld a complaint against Quality Meat Scotland for an advert headed 'Fancy a bit of Scotch Beef?' The advert described the meat as: 'Raised the way you want it. Specially Selected Scotch Beef.' The ASA found that the beef was from cattle born and raised in England. The cattle had earned the title 'Scotch' by living in Scotland for only a few months for fattening and finishing, complying with an EC regulation for meat descriptions. The ASA acknowledged that the advert did not say that all Scotch beef was from cattle born in Scotland. It considered, however, that readers were unlikely to know the details of EC regulations and that therefore the advert was misleading. The advertisers were told to seek advice from the ASA's Copy Advice team.

If you receive mailings, see adverts or get sent marketing leaflets that you want to complain about, send them to the Advertising Standards Authority. Enclose a short letter explaining why you find the material either offensive, exaggerated, inaccurate or misleading. Write to: The Advertising Standards Authority, 2 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HW, tel: 020 7580 5555; email: inquiries@asa.org.uk. If possible, please send a copy to us at Bad Ads, The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

CHECKOUT

Special report on the food companies that benefit by associating themselves with charitable or medical causes...

Cause or compromise?

Health claims on food products may make you feel sceptical. But add the trusted logo of a health charity or medical association and you may be more likely to buy the product. The Food Commission's latest research shows that your trust might be misplaced.

Browse the shelves of any supermarket and you'll find healthy sounding claims attached to almost every type of food. Health-related descriptions appear on a diverse selection of products, from tinned spaghetti, margarine, cereals, jelly sweets, tinned fish and fruit, to squash, bread, tea bags, processed cheese and chocolate.

Some descriptions boast of the presence of a particular nutrient, such as calcium; some products proclaim added vitamins; others claim benefits for particular organs of the human body, or a reduced risk of disease by eating the food regularly. Some of these claims are backed up by scientific evidence. Others are not, and contribute to much confusion over food and health.

In order to stand out amid this clamour of claims, endorsements (or apparent endorsements) are often used by food marketers to add weight and authority to their claim, and to make one brand seem superior to others. Currently, heart-health

claims on Nestlé Cheerios cereal are reinforced by BBC TV science reporter Judith Hann; the bone-health benefits of Osteocare calcium supplements are promoted in association with the English National Ballet; and Olympic rower Steve Redgrave tells of his remarkable recovery from high cholesterol levels in order to help sell Flora Pro.Active margarine.

Over the past year, the Food Commission has been monitoring new endorsement-style marketing techniques popular with food manufacturers. These are in the form of marketing partnerships between food companies and health charities or medical associations.

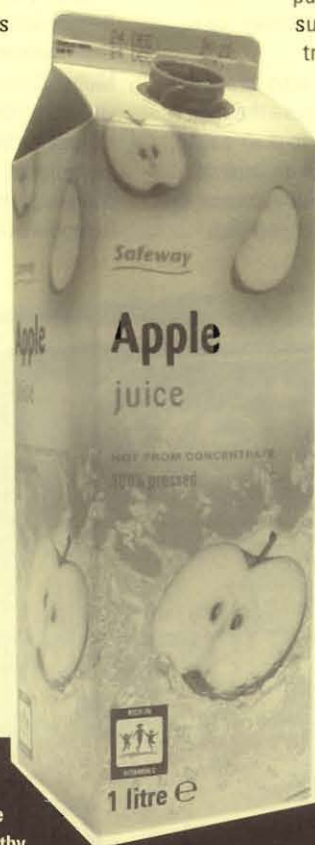
A charity such as the British Heart Foundation, or a medical association such as the National Osteoporosis Society, enters into partnership with food companies and allows the organisation's logo to appear on food products. Sometimes these marketing partnerships take the form of simple donation schemes. Here, the food company donates money to a health charity or cause in return for using the organisation's logo on food packaging to announce its public good will. In other schemes, the link-up between the two organisations is used

to make, imply or reinforce a claim for the health benefits of consuming the food.

The common and critical factor is that any marketing claims for the health benefits of the food product are strengthened by the trust that people have in these health charities for offering impartial advice on health matters.

Yet, as not-for-profit organisations enter into commercial relationships with food companies, questions start to arise. Are the claims supported by these marketing

partnerships scientifically substantiated? Are they trustworthy? Who is making the health statements – the company or the health charity or medical association? If a logo appears on the food packaging, what exactly does it represent? Did a fee change hands, and if so, did this compromise the accuracy of the claims? Does the food carrying the logo offer the best health benefits available? And, crucially, will following the advice help people stay healthy?



The British Dietetic Association helps to promote pressed fruit juices in Safeway and Marks & Spencer that cost between 1.5 and 5.4 times as much as other pure fruit juices. Whilst the BDA does good work, the unintended implication here is that we should spend more to stay healthy.

CHECKOUT

Charity logos for sale

A Food Commission study of food products displaying the names or logos of health charities and medical associations has found considerable cause for concern.

Some charities let their logos appear on foods of doubtful nutritional benefit, yet give the impression that the foods are protective against cancer or heart disease. The British Heart Foundation logo appears on Tetley tea bags alongside claims for the heart-health benefits of drinking Tetley tea. Yet the links between tea and heart health have not yet been scientifically proven, and the scientific evidence that does exist points to antioxidant benefits from *green* tea. The British Heart Foundation says that although its name and logo appear on tea, this should not be taken as a health endorsement, and the charity does not recommend drinking tea to improve heart health. Yet the combination of heart logos, heart-health claims and the charity's logo gives a strong impression that Tetley tea is beneficial for the heart.

Some charities allow their logo to appear on a food product simply because the food company has donated money to their cause, yet the logos are used to make an implicit health claim for the product. For instance, the World Heart Federation's name and logo

appears prominently on Kellogg's Bran Flakes and Fruit'n Fibre. Yet there is no statement to tell customers that the relationship between the company and the charity is purely financial. The impression is that the World Heart Federation is encouraging people to eat Kellogg's Bran Flakes, for the good of their hearts. Although the World Heart Federation recommends eating increased amounts of fruit and vegetables, and some wholegrain cereals, it doesn't recommend Bran Flakes or Fruit'n Fibre or any bran-enriched foods. The World Heart Federation says that this logo scheme is not a product endorsement.

In almost every case, the health charities and medical associations fail to use their influence to promote foods that would offer greater health benefits to consumers. The British Dental Association, for instance, helps to promote Ribena ToothKind but not milk or water. The carton even carries the statement 'The only drink accredited by the British Dental Association'. The National Osteoporosis Society's logo appears on Müller Crunch Corner yogurts. Calcium-rich yogurt is only a part of this product which also includes a big helping of sugars and other ingredients. Yet less sugary fruit yogurts and plain yogurts do not carry the National Osteoporosis Society logo. Are these medical associations doing the very best job they can to promote better health? We think not.

We found that health charities and medical associations frequently help food companies to make *exclusive* claims about the health benefits of branded products, even though equivalent (usually cheaper)

products are available. The Family Heart Association logo, for instance, appears on packets of Quaker Oats alongside heart-health claims for the product. The packets do not carry any indication that the relationship between the charity and the company is an exclusive contract that restricts the Family Heart Association from promoting other oat products. What should a consumer understand? That other, less expensive, oats aren't as good for their heart as Quaker oats?

Slipping between the regulatory cracks

Two national reviews of food labelling and logo schemes are underway, organised by the Food Standards Agency as part of its Labelling Action Plan. One looks at farming assurance schemes (e.g. Freedom Foods and the Little Red Tractor logo). The other examines voluntary labelling schemes in supermarkets (e.g. terms such as 'suitable for vegetarians' and 'fair trade'). Logos and endorsements by health charities and medical associations are generally understood to fall under the remit of the Joint Health Claims Initiative – a body set up by the consumer group Sustain in partnership with the industry's Food and Drink Federation and the Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards. However, our enquiries show that neither the FSA nor the JHCI are assessing logos of health charities and medical associations when they appear on food products. These logo schemes have slipped between the regulatory cracks, despite the strong and sometimes misleading health claims that they are associated with.



The British Heart Foundation logo appears on Tetley tea bags alongside claims for the heart-health benefits of drinking Tetley tea. Tetley claim that their tea is a 'rich source of antioxidants' which form 'an important part of a healthy diet'. A better source of antioxidants might be fresh fruit and veg, but with the help of the BHF logo Tetley seems to imply that a cup of tea will do instead.

Although they have allowed the use of their logo, the BHF does *not* recommend drinking tea to improve heart health.

CHECKOUT

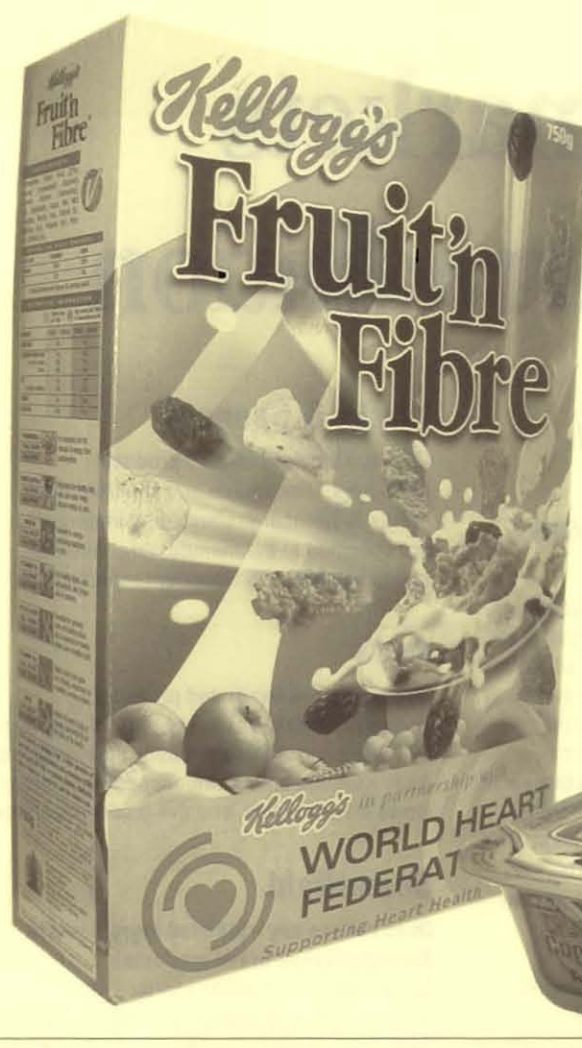
Most charities know that people on a low-income are most likely to suffer from serious diet-related diseases, and would benefit most from healthy-eating advice. However, in almost every case we examined, the logos of health charities and medical associations appear on food or drink products that are significantly more expensive than equivalent food or drink products available in the same shops. Pressed fruit juices, which the British Dietetic Association helps to promote in Safeway and Marks & Spencer, cost between 1.5 and 5.4 times as much as other pure fruit juices (note: the BDA receives no fee for this logo use).

A premium extra virgin olive oil from the manufacturer Karyatis carries the Cancer Research Campaign logo and dietary advice, and costs nearly ten times as much as other olive and sunflower oils available in the same shop (Waitrose). Do these organisations really mean to give the impression that healthy eating costs up to five or ten times as much? Is this the best use of their good names?

■ To purchase a copy of the full survey – 'Cause or Compromise? Do marketing partnerships compromise public health?' – please send payment of £75.00 to the Food Commission at 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

Donations 'with strings attached'

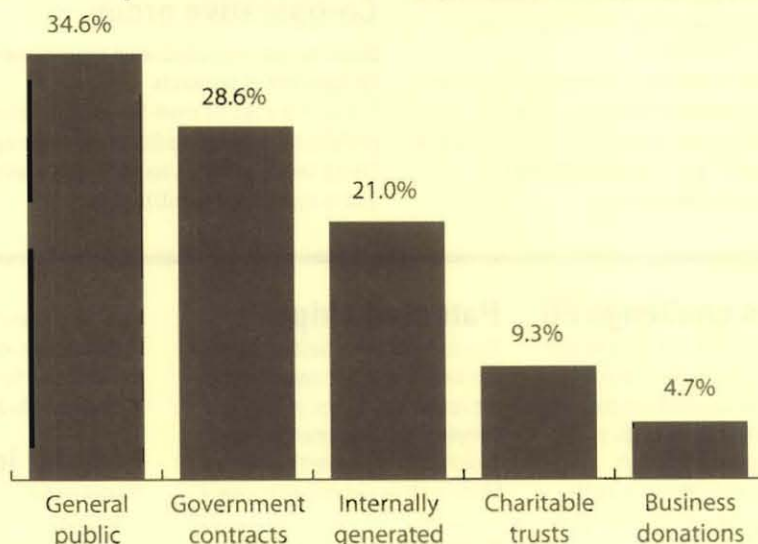
Numerous marketing benefits can accrue to a company that enters into a marketing partnership with a health charity or medical association. These include enhanced brand image, improved customer loyalty and the opportunity to charge extra for the product. Associations with good causes can also shield companies from adverse criticism. Marketing partnerships between food companies and health charities or medical associations constitute charitable giving 'with strings attached'. The company expects to see tangible marketing benefits in return for their charitable 'investment'.



The World Heart Federation says its logo is not a product endorsement. Some might beg to differ.

This Müller Crunchy Corner yogurt carries the logo of The National Osteoporosis Society and claims that it is 'bone friendly'. All yogurts are calcium-rich – so why choose to endorse a product that is an estimated 18% sugar?

Principle sources of donated income for the UK voluntary sector in 1999-2000 (total: £14.55 billion)



Companies in the UK have a poor record of giving money to charity. As the chart shows, only 4.7% of charitable income is from business donations. The UK's National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has called for the government to set a target for companies to give 1% of their profits to charities and other not-for-profit organisations – equivalent to the average level achieved in the US, and worth £1.25 billion a year. Currently, the average company donation in the UK is just 0.2% of profits. This is one reason why health charities and medical associations turn to marketing partnerships to boost their flagging incomes.

■ Source: The Guardian 2001 and the Directory for Social Change

Supermarkets reject irradiation

Public pressure is keeping irradiated foods off the supermarket shelves

While doubts remain about the safety of, and need for, irradiated food, consumers continue to send the clear signal to food manufacturers and retailers that they don't like the technology and they won't buy food treated with irradiation. Supermarkets know that the market for irradiated food is almost non-existent.

Those in the food industry who want to irradiate food are trying to get the rules on irradiation labelling abolished, or to get the process re-named as 'electronic pasteurisation' (see FM52). One way consumers can ensure that these sneaky methods don't succeed is to call on supermarkets to publish their policies on food irradiation. Supermarkets know that if they let irradiated foods sneak onto their shelves, they would lose customers. After all, supermarkets sell more than two thirds of all food that is consumed in the UK.

The Food Irradiation Campaign asked the major supermarkets for their policies on irradiated food and asked how they check that their standards are being maintained.

This is what they told us:

Marks & Spencer

Does not stock irradiated products

M&S says: 'The source and standard of all Marks & Spencer products and ingredients are specified to the manufacturer and are audited by Marks & Spencer technologists.'

Asda

Does not stock irradiated products

Asda says it makes its policy clear to suppliers, and relies on suppliers to check their products. Asda said that it was influenced by customer views on irradiation, and this guided its policy.

Somerfield

Does not use any irradiated ingredients in Somerfield own-brand products

Somerfield says it sends samples for laboratory testing and carries out surveys on 'high risk' own-label products, and has made suppliers aware of its policy.

Co-operative group

Does not use any irradiated ingredients in Co-op own-brand products

The Co-op says its own-brand specifications prohibit the use of irradiated ingredients. The Co-op sends samples for laboratory testing and is committed to full labelling.

Iceland

Does not stock irradiated products

Iceland says that all suppliers for Iceland own-label products go through a stringent approval and monitoring procedure.

Safeway

Does not stock irradiated products

Safeway says that it sends samples for laboratory testing, and stated that it was in favour of labelling any irradiated products.

Sainsbury's

Does not stock irradiated products

Sainsbury's says: 'We don't sell irradiated products – our customers don't want them.'

Tesco

Does not stock irradiated products

Tesco says it does not stock irradiated foods in response to 'customer demand'.

Waitrose

Does not use irradiated ingredients in Waitrose own-brand products

Waitrose says: 'Suppliers ensure that a suitable traceability system is in place to ensure that any Waitrose product is not irradiated.'

■ For details of the Food Irradiation Campaign, contact Merav Shub at the Food Commission on 020 7837 9229; email: irradiation@foodcomm.org.uk.

Swedes challenge EU

In Sweden, consistent government action over 15 years has shown that pesticide use and residues can be cut significantly through a stringent regulatory system, government and industry targets, and cross-sectoral commitment to environmental and health improvements.

Sweden has launched a challenge to the EU chemicals policy by declaring it will use any means possible to block marketing on its territory of EU-approved pesticides that are currently banned under Swedish law.

■ Source: *Environment Daily*

Patented chips

The development charity ActionAid has lodged a patent application for the ready-salted chip, as part of a campaign to draw attention to 'biopiracy' – the patenting of staple foods such as basmati rice, wheat and soya.

■ Visit: www.actionaid.org.uk

Legal challenge

The government is to be challenged in court over its decision not to hold a full public inquiry into the outbreak and handling of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in a Judicial Review action backed by *The Ecologist* magazine. *The Ecologist* speculates

that the government's failure to act could be seen as a deliberate attempt to undermine family farms.

■ Source: *The Ecologist*

Low-fat lorry drivers

Haulier Eddie Stobart has employed a nutritionist to tell his 1,200 drivers how to improve their diets and to stay away from unhealthy fry-ups after he discovered that his own cholesterol level was too high.

■ Source: *EHN News*

Fizzing sausages

The Food Standards Agency has for the first time used its statutory powers to enter food premises to obtain

information and inspect company records, in relation to a recall of canned hot-dog sausage imported by Ye Olde Oak Foods Ltd. Products had been described as 'fizzing, exploding and foul smelling' on opening.

■ Source: Food Standards Agency

Multiple residues

A report on the potential dangers of foods containing cocktails of pesticide residues has been released by the government's Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (known as CoT).

■ Details from Keith Butler, Food Standards Agency, 020 7276 8507.

Safer food for those who can afford it

Recent publicity by the government's Food Standards Agency shows the ease with which diners in restaurants can be served contaminated food, due to poor hygiene practices in the kitchen.

The hazards were compounded by the customers' own lack of hygiene, which could be reduced significantly if they washed their hands before eating.

Under public health regulations, all sit-down restaurants should provide washing facilities, but fast food outlets, sandwich shops and other shops serving ready-to-eat food need not. Yet it is just these shops that expect customers to eat their food with their hands.

Even in some sit-down cafés, including some branches of

McDonalds and Burger King, access to the toilets may be restricted – for example you may have to ask for a key. Presumably this is designed to deter non-customers from using the store as a public convenience, but it poses a nasty dilemma for genuine customers. If they have to show they are customers by buying some food, do they leave their purchases on the table unattended while they wash their hands? Or do they take the food with them into the toilet?

Despite trawling the literature, we could find nothing that assessed the levels of risk of eating a hand-held meal in contrast to eating in a sit-down restaurant or to domestic meals. Is the FSA taking a lead on this?

And what is the solution – should every sandwich shop, fried chicken take-away, chip shop and seller of crisps have a sink and soap by the counter? Or

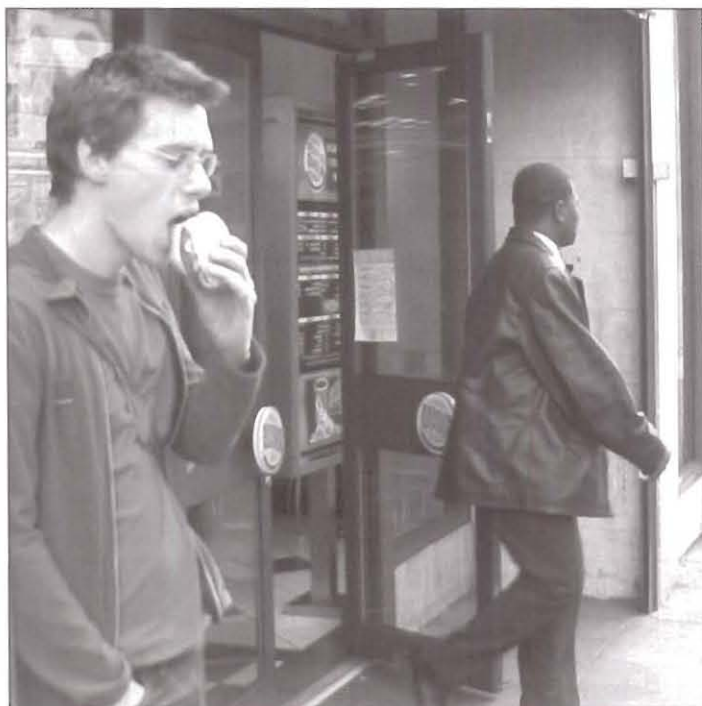
at least offer airline-style handwipes?

Or do real men eat dirt!

Inequalities in food safety

Little attention has been paid to the unequal distribution of food safety risks across socio-economic groups. However there are several reasons to expect that food hygiene hazards may affect low income groups more than they affect better off groups:

- Food of **poor quality**, or handled by **untrained staff**, is more likely to be on sale at a lower price, attracting consumers with tight budgets.
- Families without easy **access to transport** may be unable to keep food chilled until they get it home.
- Some **low-income families** may not be able to afford **hygiene aids** such as a fridge, freezer, insect-proof and rodent-proof storage containers, hot water or even freely available clean water.
- Families on **lower incomes** may be more inclined to save left-over food for later consumption, or to use food beyond its recommended consumption date, increasing the risk of food-borne disease.
- An inability to read and understand **food label information**, such as storage or cooking instructions, or consume-before dates, may raise the risk of exposure to food-borne pathogens.
- People with reduced access to general information on **hygiene and food handling** may inadvertently take risks, increasing their exposure to infection and increasing the opportunity for infection to spread to members of the household or community.
- The poorer nutritional status of people in lower-income families may increase their **risk of infection**, including food-borne infection. This in turn may raise the risks for other members of the household, and possibly for other households in areas of high housing density.
- Low **breast-feeding rates** (more common among low income families) reduces the immunity-boosting benefits of breast-milk while also increasing the risk of infection from substitute feeds or poorly-cleaned bottles and teats.





The Food Our Children Eat – 2nd edition

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. £8.99 inc p&p.

Fast Food Nation – special price – £2 off!

A bestseller from the US, this myth-shattering book tells the story of fast food, from its origins in 1950s southern California to the global triumph of a handful of burger and fried chicken chains. In a meticulously researched and powerfully argued account, Eric Schlosser discovers how scientists re-create the smells and tastes of cooked meat and fresh strawberries; talks to workers at abattoirs; explains where the meat comes from; and how the fast food industry is transforming not only our diet but our landscape, economy, workforce and culture. Often amusing, sometimes scary, and always fascinating reading. £9.99 £7.99 inc 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. £10.00 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. eighteen issues from 1996 to 2002) 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, 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.



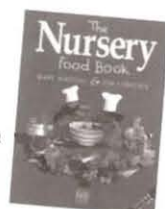
The NEW Shopper's Guide to Organic Food

Is organic food worth the extra expense? Is it all it's cracked up to be? How does it compare with non-organic food? Lynda Brown answers all these questions and more in her NEW Shopper's Guide to Organic Foods. Food writer Nigel Slater describes it as 'Essential reading for anyone who cares about what they put in their and their children's mouths'. £9.99 inc p&p.



The Nursery Food Book – 2nd edition

A lively and practical book exploring food issues such as 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 inc p&p.



Poor Expectations

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.



Children's Nutrition Action Plan

The Food Commission's action plan details what UK children are eating and the health problems that are likely to arise as a result of their diet. The action plan maps the measures advocated by governmental and non-governmental organisations to bring about change, and highlights key policies that could make a real difference to children's health and well-being. £10.00 inc p&p.

Posters: Genetically Modified Foods, Children's Food, Food Labelling and Food Additives

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 nutrition labelling; help you see through deceptive packaging and marketing claims and examine the contentious issue of food additives. Each poster is A2 in size and costs £2.50 inc p&p.

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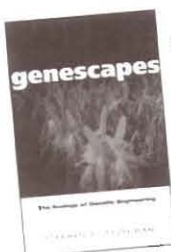
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Genescapes: The ecology of genetic engineering



S Nottingham, Zed Books, www.zedbooks.demon.co.uk 2002, ISBN 1 84277 037 3, £14.95.

Genetic engineering has received much academic and literary attention, reflecting the many aspects of this new technology that pose challenges to people and the planet. This book does an excellent job of drawing together the many threads and arguments and setting genetic engineering in its ecological context.

The author, a biologist with a doctorate in agricultural entomology, insists that we cannot make decisions about the risks and benefits of genetically engineered crops until we recognise the interconnections of the living system of our planet, and the impact human activities and technologies can have upon that system. Sometimes the book frustratingly avoids making value judgements in its attempt to put forward balanced arguments – for instance, it states that earthworms were left out of the UK studies on farm-scale evaluations of GM crops, but does not comment on how vital earthworms are to human existence.

But this is a quibble in comparison to the book's valuable and hugely informative systemic analysis of the ecology of genetic engineering. Whether the GM organisms affect nitrogen fixation, toxins in the soil, tree sterility, or the dispersal of pollen, Nottingham deftly illustrates the complexity of the decisions that face us all, and the need to let science, not marketing needs, inform our decisions on the way forward.

Nitrate and Man: Toxic, harmless or beneficial?

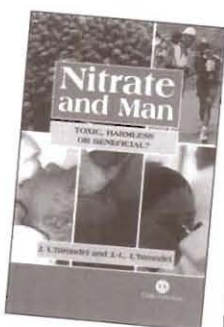
J. L'Hirondel and J. L. L'Hirondel, CABI Publishing, Wallingford, Oxon OX10 8DE, 2002. ISBN 0 85199 566 7, £35.

Written before the recent reports from university research in Glasgow that nitrates may be implicated in cancers (especially of the digestive system), this highly technical scientific review of nitrates in the human diet is useful but limited contribution on the effects of agricultural and manufacturing practices for human health.

The book is published by CABI, 'an international not-for-profit publisher in applied life sciences', and it explains that although

nitrate is a naturally occurring chemical, levels in food and water have risen dramatically through the use of nitrate as a fertiliser, and through its use as a curing agent in products such as meat (e.g. bacon) and preserved fish.

Following detailed analysis of the current scientific evidence, the current global regulatory system, and comparisons of studies of the effects of nitrate consumption on human health, the authors



Good Fish Guide: The ultimate consumer guide to eating 'eco-friendly' fish.

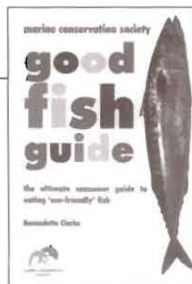
Bernadette Clarke, Marine Conservation Society, 9 Gloucester Road, Ross-on-Wye HR9 5BU [www.mcsuk.org], 2002, ISBN 0 94815 0319, £9.50.

Most of us know that eating fish can be beneficial for health, but how many of us understand the environmental impact of modern fishing? Backed by fascinating statistics and evidence, the Marine Conservation Society explains in its *Good Fish Guide* that many fish stocks are in rapid decline and that unless we take more care over our fish choices, we may soon see the end of old favourites such as cod, haddock, Atlantic salmon, sea bass, monkfish and tuna.

The book draws on scientific research into fish life cycles, breeding patterns, species distribution and ecosystems, and offers advice on species to avoid, and methods of capture that cause the least and most

environmental damage. This analysis is translated into simple advice for shoppers, such as 'choose whole fish', (helping to ensure that only fish above the minimum allowable size are caught), and 'look for the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) approval logo' (ensuring manufacturers comply with strict production guidelines), through to detailed information on supporting small-scale and sustainable fisheries.

The MCS is calling for fish suppliers, supermarkets and restaurants to avoid selling the 20 species most at risk. The *Good Fish Guide* concludes with brief comments on issues such as fair trade and food miles, which both have a bearing on environmentally sustainable fish supplies. A timely and thought-provoking reminder of how our choices affect wildlife and sustainable food supplies.



conclude that 'the issue of nitrate and health is now closed', and that 'theory implicates nitrate intake with cancer through increased formation of carcinogenic N-nitroso compounds. However, epidemiology does not confirm such an association and even

points towards a possible protective effect'.

The book recommends that in the light of this review, national and international regulations should be reviewed, and 'old assumptions' about nitrates be put aside.

Vital Signs: The trends that are shaping our future, 2001/2002

WorldWatch Institute, Earthscan Books, www.earthscan.co.uk, 2002, ISBN 1 85383 832 2, £12.95.

In this tenth-anniversary edition of the annual publication *Vital Signs*, the WorldWatch Institute of Washington has teamed up for the first time with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide a wealth of data and analysis on trends in population, food and agriculture, global warming, atmospheric composition, the economy, transportation, health and

society, and the military, which all adds up to a mind-blowing account of the scale of the problems we face at the start of the 21st century. The trouble with global statistics is that the title '*Vital Signs*' becomes something of a bad joke, and '*Mortal Signs*' might be more accurate. However, WorldWatch does include information on some of the organisations and movements working for more sustainable production and consumption, including trends in

socially responsible investment and religious environmentalism.

Whilst not a barrel of laughs, this book is an eye-opening account that should admirably achieve its aim 'to provide decision-makers and the public with the latest and most complete picture of the health of the planet and its people'.



Alex asks... about choice



Alex listened to the radio while he ate his breakfast. The man from the government food department was telling listeners how hard his department was working to guarantee consumer choice. 'That's good,' he thought. 'I wonder what they're doing.'

Later, Alex was out walking, and stopped to watch a farmer spray a field of strawberries. As he finished a row near Alex he stopped his tractor to take a swig from a thermos and eat a sandwich. Alex couldn't resist. 'Do you really have to spray those strawberries?' he asked. 'Of course,' replied the farmer. 'Some are nearly ripe, and I can't have them rotting in the fields while the others are finishing off. They've all got to be ready at the end of the month. I've got a contract with the jam people, Hartfords, and if any are rotten, I'll lose the contract. So I haven't got a choice. I've got to spray 'em.'

'He hasn't got a choice,' thought Alex. 'If he hasn't, then who has...'

He came back at the end of the month, to see the truck driver for Hartfords collect the strawberries. Alex didn't want to seem nosey, so he just asked the driver if he could take a lift into town. While



they drove, the driver offered Alex a handful of the strawberries, and Alex couldn't stop himself saying: 'Did you know those strawberries were sprayed with chemicals to stop the rotting?' 'Course they are,' said the driver. 'You don't want bad berries or the whole batch is ruined. Anyway, small amount of chemicals, well that won't hurt yer, eh? Got to keep the price down, see, or we'd be out of business. No choice. Wanna see the factory?'

As the driver unloaded the strawberries, Alex went inside to



watch the great vats of berries being cooked for jam. The sugary, sticky goo was getting thick and

brown-coloured. Then suddenly a whoosh of red liquid squirted out of a nozzle.

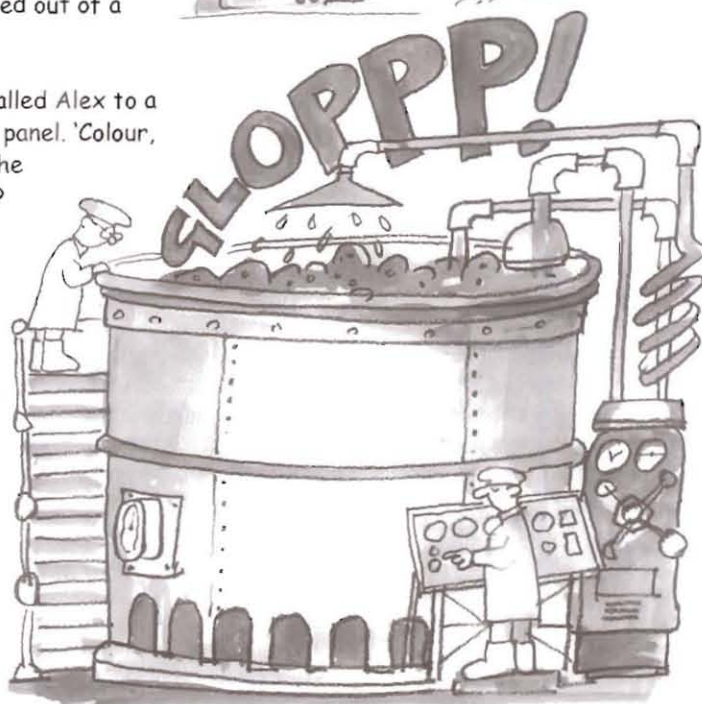
'What's that?' called Alex to a man at the control panel. 'Colour, sonny. Can't have the jam brown, can we? Safelands supermarket won't take this order if it all looked brown. They want it red, so red it has to be. Got no choice, mate.'

On Saturday Alex went shopping at Safelands. He knocked on the manager's door. 'You again, eh, young Alex. What can I do for you this time? Need a Saturday job?'

'Thank you. I just wanted to know why the strawberry jam has to have fungicides in it, and why it has to have these colourings.'

'Ah. Well I don't know anything about the fungicides. That's for the lab boys to check. As for the colour, well, people expect red jam, not brown jam. If you don't use colouring then you have to make the jam more carefully, to stop the fruit browning. And care costs money, which people don't want to spend. If we only put expensive jam on the shelves people would shop

elsewhere, wouldn't they? And I'll be out of a job. So I haven't much choice, lad.'



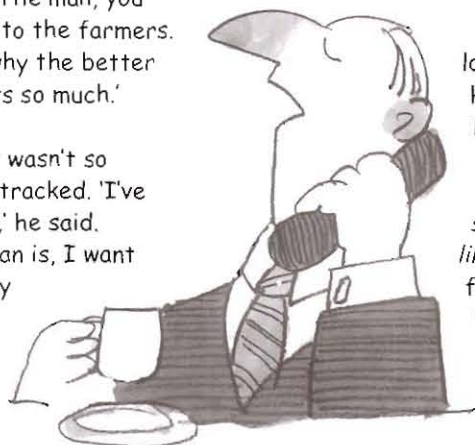


Alex looked at the jam on the shelves. 60p own-brand, 65p Hartford's, or £1.80 organic. That wasn't much choice, he thought.

He rang the government food agency. 'I can't find any jam without pesticides or colourings, except if I pay three times as much. Is that what you mean by consumer choice?'

'Now young man, the price is something the supermarket decides, based on what the suppliers offer. And the suppliers have to follow the markets, which depends on what farmers are growing and selling to them. So, little man, you should talk to the farmers. Ask them why the better quality costs so much.'

But Alex wasn't so easily side-tracked. 'I've been there,' he said. 'What I mean is, I want you to really help



consumers, by stopping these pesticides and the colourings going into our food. If you do that for all the jam-making companies, then it's fair, isn't it? And you are helping consumers.'

'Oh dear young boy, you have so much to learn! Consumer choice means allowing products onto the market, and letting you choose. If we ban something, then we are preventing you from choosing it. Regulations prevent choice. In fact we are thinking of abolishing the regulations about how much fruit needs to go into jam - then you can choose low-fruit versions. It will increase your choice, my boy.'

Alex couldn't answer. The logic sounded so convincing. He put the phone down, but kept saying to himself: 'Companies must be free to produce whatever they like, so that I can buy whatever I like. That's free choice. A free market, for free choice. But I can't have what I want - pure strawberry jam at a reasonable price. Hmm

...produce whatever they like, so I can buy whatever I like...'

'But they don't know what I like, or if they do, they aren't offering it to me.'

'Safelands isn't telling Hartfords what I want,' thought Alex. 'Only what they think they can sell a lot of. And Hartfords isn't telling the farmer what I want, only what Hartfords needs, to sell to Safelands. And the farmer won't listen to me, 'cos I haven't got a contract with him. He only listens to Hartfords.'

'So either I make my own jam, or I get Safelands to listen to me properly. I guess it's back to Safelands.'

Next issue: Time to target the supermarkets

■ This cartoon strip may be photocopied and distributed for non-commercial purposes.

■ Cartoons by Ben Nash.

BADvertisement

Health warnings for *NEW* Sunny Delight

After a storm of protest over the high sugar and low fruit juice content of Sunny Delight, Procter & Gamble saw sales of its best-selling drink crash by over a third last year. Now Sunny Delight has been relaunched in new 'no added sugar' format, presumably to squash criticisms from parents and nutritionists. P&G boasts that the fruit juice has been trebled, although multiplying a paltry 5% juice content by three times still only gives 15% juice. We were amused to read that in its efforts to gain a bright consumer halo, P&G had taken the trouble to give two health warnings on the new-format pack. Not only are we told that small children could choke on the plastic cap, P&G also

point out that 'Like all soft drinks, Sunny Delight should be consumed in moderation.' Now, is this a recommendation that children need to drink this thickened, preserved, flavoured and artificially sweetened drink, or should we read this as a warning to reach for other drinks with healthier ingredients instead?



We wanted 12 angry parents – we got hundreds!



When we launched the Parents Jury, we called it '12 Angry Parents', but we had seriously underestimated how strongly so many parents feel about children's food and food advertising.

After just a few calls to organisations whose members include parents and child carers, to spread the word about what we imagined would be a small-scale project, the calls and letters were soon flooding in. And from what they said, we found out that parents are delighted that at last they have some way to make their voices heard.

Together, the Parents Jury, will decide what kinds of foods and drinks should be sold as suitable for children... and what foods and drinks should be kicked off the shelves. Members of the Parents Jury will be asked for nominations of products, projects and advertising practices that are particularly awful, and those that deserve praise.

We'll assemble the nominations and circulate them to the Parents Jury, who will vote (by post or email) for the very best and very worst examples of foods for children. They will also get a chance to vote on food advertising and marketing that promotes healthy or junk foods.

We'd like to hear from all parents who feel strongly about the foods on offer for children, whether it's in the school canteen, in the supermarket, in vending machines or in cafés and restaurants.

We've already heard, for instance, from parents whose children attend schools where the only snacks on sale are chocolate, coke and crisps, even though the health lessons talk about a balanced diet. Does this make any sense for children? Parents don't think so.

We've also heard from parents saying that they're sick of toddlers nagging them for sweets displayed at the supermarket

checkout. Of course, parents can say no, but why should they have to play the role of big bad mum or dad? The sweets shouldn't be there in the first place!

Parents have told us about the lack of choice for children in motorway service stations. Try spending a long afternoon in a car with a child hyped up on fizzy drinks and additive-laden foods. No fun at all.

And parents have told us about adverts on TV and in child's comics promoting junky foods in a 'cool' way that encourages children to think they'll be left out if their mum or dad doesn't buy it for them.

If you recognise any of these scenarios, or if you have stories of your own to tell us about children's food or children's food advertising, we want to hear from you. Together, we can tell food manufacturers, regulators and advertisers what parents feel and ensure that we get better food and a healthier future for all our children.

BADvertisement

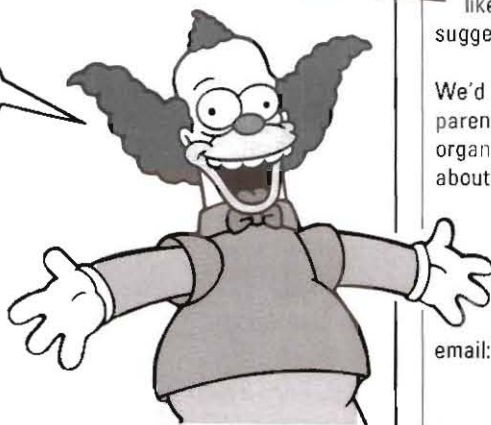
Mmm, not quite so fruity...

We all know eating fruit is good for kids, right? So if there's a product that says it's made with twice its weight in fruit that must be doubly good for them, right? Well, we'd like to question that assumption.

These rolls of fruit jelly are made with fruit juice, but we challenge the manufacturer, Fruit Bowl, to tell us exactly how much of the natural vitamins, dietary fibre and valuable antioxidants remain in these sweets by the time the fruit has been boiled, congealed, rolled, stored for months and then sold

as 'suitable for lunchboxes'. Would you trust Crusty the Clown to give you nutritional advice? Trust your instincts!

Hey, hey kids!
I ate some kinda
fruit once - it ain't
so bad!



Get in touch!

If you have a child or children between the ages of two and 16 and would like to take part in the Parents Jury, get in touch and we'll send you a short questionnaire and a call for nominations for the first round of awards.

We know that parents' time is precious, and the Jury is designed so that you can spend as much or as little time as you like giving us your comments and suggestions.

We'd also be very pleased to hear from parents' groups, schools or other organisations who can circulate information about the Parents Jury.

Send your name and address to: The Parents Jury, c/o The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF. Tel: 020 7837 2250; email: parentsjury@foodcomm.org.uk

What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals



Herbal tea attacks teeth

Herbal tea, that innocuous brew beloved of delicate palates, has been damned as a destroyer of dental health. Using teeth extracted for other purposes, researchers at Manchester Dental School found that immersing teeth in a blackcurrant, ginseng and vanilla flavoured tea (with 12 ingredients) for two weeks caused significantly greater erosion of dental enamel (0.05mm) than a regular black tea (0.01mm).

The acidity of the teas was such as to corrode the enamel. The citrus-derived constituents of the herbal tea may have increased the damage, while the fluoride in regular tea may have helped protect the teeth. The researchers acknowledge that, in real life, teeth will not be exposed to tea continuously, and that saliva will also reduce the impact on teeth.

Brunton and Hussain, 2002, *Journal of Dentistry*, 29, 517-520.

Oats not linked to coeliac disease

Sufferers of coeliac disease, a digestive tract intolerance to gluten (a protein found in cereal grains), can eat oats with impunity. Advice to coeliac disease sufferers has been to avoid wheat, rye and oats, and eat corn and rice in preference. That advice is now challenged. In a series of studies of coeliac patients conducted in Finland, no harm appears to result from eating oats as reflected in symptoms, nutritional status or digestive tract function.

One report shows results apply over the longer term, with no harmful effects reported in a five-year follow-up of coeliac patients eating oats and oat products. The authors recommend changing standard advice to coeliac sufferers, and instead allowing them to consume oats whenever they wish, provided the oat products are free of wheat or rye gluten. Janatuinen *et al*, 2002, *Gut*, 50, 332-335.

Genetic sheep-dip problem

Genetic tests show that some people have increased vulnerability to the ill-health caused by sheep dips. An examination of 175 farmers who attributed their ill-health to sheep dip, compared to 234 sheep farmers who reported no ill-health effects, showed several differences in their genetic make-up. The gene sequences were ones associated with enzymes that metabolise diazinon, an organophosphate used in sheep dips. Those

farmers who said they were affected by sheep dip had lower levels of activity of this enzyme.



The authors suggest that this finding provides supportive evidence for farmers' claims that they are affected by chronic exposure to organophosphates, and helps explain why some farmers are more vulnerable than others.

Cherry *et al*, 2002, *The Lancet*, 359, 763-764.

Western diet raises diabetes risk

The strong links between obesity and diabetes, and the beneficial effects of physical activity in reducing diabetes risk, have made it difficult to specify whether any particular aspect of diet may be independently linked to the disease.

A 12-year study of over 42,000 healthy middle-aged men has been able to identify the dietary patterns most associated with a raised risk of developing diabetes. No single food was strongly linked to the disease, but two patterns of food consumption were discernible. One pattern was associated with a small reduction in average risk: this was characterised by higher levels of fruit, vegetables, fish, poultry and whole grains.

The other pattern, dubbed a 'Western diet', was associated with a considerably raised risk: this was characterised by high levels of fatty dairy products, red meat, processed meat products, fried potatoes, refined grains, sweets and desserts.

Consuming a Western diet raised the risk of developing diabetes by 140% compared with the average. If physical exercise was also low, then the risk rose to 196%. Obesity on its own raised the risk by 575%, while obesity combined with the Western diet led to a very high risk, at 1,120% of the average.

Van Dam *et al*, 2002, *Annals Int Med*, 136, 201-209.

Premature birth link to lack of fish

In a Danish study of nearly 9,000 pregnant women, the consumption of seafood during the early part of pregnancy was linked to a lower risk of premature delivery. Similarly, fish consumption lowered the chances of a low birthweight baby.

The main effects were shown in those mothers that ate little or no fish (up to 5 grams per day, on average) with no significant difference between mothers eating 15, 20 or 40 grams of fish/day.

A low level of fish consumption co-varied with other factors such as smoking, single-parent status, lower educational level, and low maternal weight and height. Adjusting for these factors reduced the strength of the link between birth outcome and fish consumption, but did not entirely remove it.

Olsen and Secher, 2002, *British Medical Journal*, 324, 447-450.



We welcome letters from all of our readers but we do sometimes have to shorten them so that we can include as many as possible (our apologies to the authors). You can fax your letters to us on 020 7837 1141 or email to letters@foodcomm.org.uk

feedback

letters from our readers

Consumer power

Well done *Food Magazine* for helping to put pressure on the food industry. In the last decades consumers have really put pressure on food companies to be more cautious about the ingredients and additives they put into foods. Don't believe me? I recently found a 30-year-old container that once held Californian frozen 'Orange Breakfast Beverage', which listed the following ingredients:

Water, concentrated juice, sugar syrup, orange pulp, citric acid, tripotassium phosphate, cottonseed oil, modified food starch, potassium citrate, ascorbic acid, tricalcium phosphate,

natural and artificial flavours, sodium carboxymethylcellulose, magnesium oxide, xanthan gum, artificial colour, copper gluconate, butylated hydroxytoluene and six added vitamins. Contains 30% orange juice

I don't think anyone would dare sell us something like this now.

Louise Ardors, Grimsby

Have you looked at *Sunny Delight* and its imitators? They have a similarly startling range of added ingredients – and even less juice!

New Sunny Delight – not so new after all!



Toothy tip

While having my teeth examined recently, my dentist said that I shouldn't rinse after brushing my teeth. He said that in order to get the full benefit of brushing with fluoride toothpaste, I should just spit out the excess toothpaste and leave the rest undisturbed for up to half an hour.

What do you think?

Sareema Kushlay, Bedford

Many people are unhappy about the potential hazards of fluoride consumption while others are convinced that the addition of fluoride to toothpaste and water supplies has saved millions of teeth in the last few decades.

We view it as a third-best method of preventing damage, the first being healthier diets and the second being regular cleaning. If you choose to use a fluoride toothpaste then the dentist is right: the main benefit of fluoride comes through contact with the surface of a tooth, where the fluoride helps to re-mineralise the enamel and repair damage. By the way, tea is a rich source of naturally-occurring fluoride.

Oils for fish-avoiders

I was interested to read your article on macular degeneration and omega-3 fatty acids (FM 56).

It seems to me that many dietary experts are now recommending plenty of these important food ingredients in our diets, and I was pleased to see your table of levels in various kinds of fish. However, I have heard that plant sources can also be helpful and I wonder if you have come across any information on these. I have heard that walnuts and hemp seeds are good sources.

Such sources must be vital for vegetarians and those who may want to keep their fish consumption to a minimum because of fears over dioxin and PCB contamination.

P Lightowlers
London EC1

Omega-3 (or n-3) and omega-6 (or n-6) are the two main families of polyunsaturated fatty acids, and both are known as 'essential' because the human body is unable to make them for itself. Omega-3s are necessary for

normal growth and development, especially brain development and eyesight, and reduce the risk of heart disease and improve inflammatory conditions. They may also reduce the severity of some mental illnesses, including schizophrenia and depression.

In order to provide these health benefits, omega-3s must be present in our body in 'long-chain' form, which can be found in fish and seafood, birds' eggs and some sea vegetables. Plant sources of omega-3s are in short chain form, but the human body is capable of converting short-chain into long-chain form. This conversion process is slow, and is disrupted when the omega-6s are present.

Dietitians recommend not consuming more than two or three times as much omega-6 compared with omega-3, in order that the conversion of omega-3s will not be overwhelmed. In most Western diets, this ratio has reached 8:1 or even 12:1. (The rising levels of heart disease seen in the UK during the 1950s-1970s might be linked to a switch from animal fats to vegetable oils rich in omega-6s, at a time when people also ate less fish.)

To conclude: it is important to reduce intake of omega-6 polyunsaturates while increasing intake of omega-3s. Eggs, green leaves, seeds and beans can all help. See the table on the left.

Polyunsaturated fats per 100g of food

	omega-6	omega-3	ratio
Chicken eggs	1.2	0.3	4:1
Canola, Rapeseed oil	20	9	2.2:1
Flax, Linseed oil	13	54	0.2:1
Soy oil	51	7	7.5:1
Sunflower oil	40	0.2	199:1
Corn oil	58	0.7	83:1
Grapeseed oil	70	0.1	696:1
Olive oil	7.9	0.6	13:1
Walnuts	32	6.8	4.8:1
Peanuts	32	0	1000:1
Beans	0.2-0.5	0.2-0.6	0.5-2.5:1
Spinach	0.2	0.9	0.2:1
Broccoli	0.04	0.1	0.3:1
Cauliflower	0.2	0.8	0.3:1

Source: US Dept Agriculture

feedback

letters from our readers



Products such as vegetable margarine, plain biscuits, soups and sauces can contain milk derivatives, making it very difficult for vegans or those with milk allergies to choose suitable foods

Milk in disguise

I think my child may be allergic to milk but I am not sure what ingredients are made from milk. Can you help?

Sarah Furlong, email

Labels are often a nightmare for allergy-sufferers. Words like 'non-dairy' can be misleading if a milk-derived additive has been put in the food. Even a word like 'spices' can hide a wheat, nut or milk-derivative in the

spice mix. You need to read the label carefully, and you need to know what you're looking for. To avoid milk derivatives, watch out for casein, caseinate (various forms), whey, curds, lactose, rennet, lactalbumin and lactoglobulin, as well as milk, cream, butter, cheese, yogurt, etc. Watch out also for phrases like 'protein enriched' which may mean milk proteins have been added. A useful website is run by the Canadian Calgary Allergy Network: www.calgaryallergy.ca.

Supplementary additives

As an osteoporosis sufferer I was interested to see your table of good sources of calcium (FM 56) though it would have helped to have the amounts per 100g.

I thought you might be interested in the ingredients in my prescription calcium supplement, made by Proctor & Gamble.

The labels says that besides calcium carbonate the tablets contain citric acid, saccharin (artificial sweetener), cyclamate (artificial sweetener), E110 (sunset yellow colouring) and orange flavouring (not specified). The complete list is not declared – but there is no vitamin D which is necessary to activate the calcium.

I would never dream of buying a food with such an ingredient list. Why ever are such unnecessary things put into prescriptions? The taste, incidentally, is atrocious, so I am ditching this supplement and buying one not laden with additives.

Larry Scott, Lincoln

We agree, it is a scandal. It is only in the last few years that companies have started declaring even this amount of information – and even then they may not give the details on the packet but on a separate leaflet that you find after you have opened it.

Who's fattest of them all?

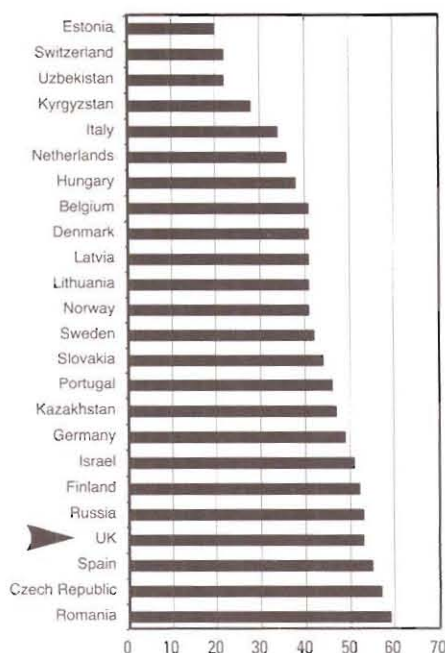
Last spring the government Audit Commission told us that overweight and obesity is becoming a major cause of ill health in Britain.

But are we the worst? I'm sure I have seen fatter people in Germany and Italy. How do we compare with other Europeans?

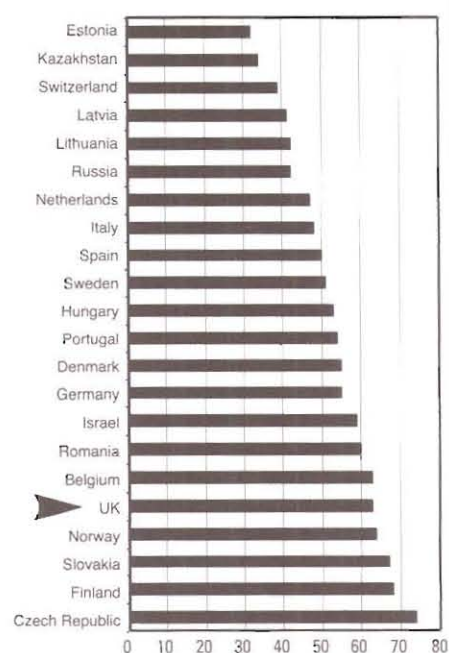
D Parsons, Birmingham

World Health Organisation data show us to have the fourth worst rates of overweight men, at 63% overweight, and the fifth worst rates of overweight women, at 53%, in the European Region. Only the Czech Republic beats us on both male and female counts, at 74% and 57% respectively.

% of women who are overweight



% of men who are overweight





Row brews over children's adverts

There was much irritation among the members of the European Consumer Committee, and celebrations in the advertising industry, as a long-awaited report on children's exposure to junk food ads was dropped from the Committee's agenda.

The report calls for legislation, with enforcement to back up the industry's self-regulatory initiatives and codes. It particularly wants controls over:

- advertising within schools
- internet marketing techniques
- collection of personal data from children
- sponsorship methods
- messages that undermine healthy eating

The Consumer Committee has no executive power. However, its recommendations must be considered by the European Commission – presuming it makes recommendations. It can do nothing if the topic has been taken off the agenda.

Why was it removed? Such information is not made public, sadly, but there are some clues around for the sharp-sighted.

On the website of the UK's Advertising Association (AA), a members' bulletin noted that the document had been prepared and that it 'proposes wide-scale bans on

advertising to children. The claims made in the paper are not backed up with any research or evidence. [The European Commission] has indicated that it has no intention to pursue the Consumer Committee's wish list.'

Interesting that the AA should be so well-informed. The AA is also behind a project called 'The Children's Programme' in conjunction with food businesses and GMTV, designed to help primary school children 'understand and interpret advertising effectively from an early age'.

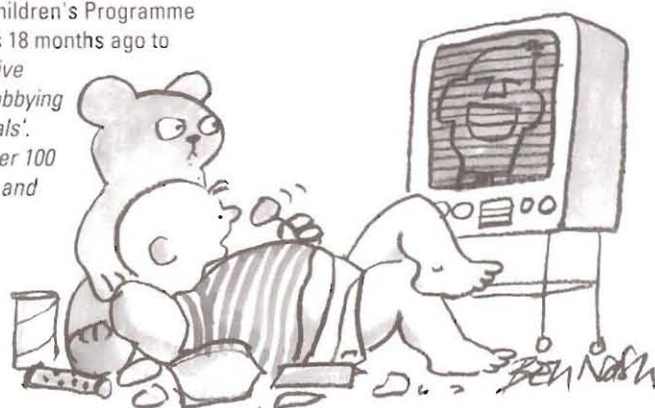
An exhibition of the Children's Programme was mounted in Brussels 18 months ago to coincide with 'an extensive programme of targeted lobbying of MEPs, EC and EP officials'. The industry boasted 'over 100 industry representatives and lobbyists' attended the European Parliament during the week, and 'direct contact was made with over 250 MEPs on the subject of children's advertising.'

The AA wrote a cross letter to Commissioner Byrne, responsible for any proposed

legislation, to warn him that the report would 'generate a massive negative response from the marketing, advertising, promotional and market research industries'.

Meanwhile, UK MPs tabled an Early Day Motion proposing a ban on advertising to children under five. It collected 118 supporters before the Easter recess.

The Food Commission has also received a cross letter from the AA. See Editorial, p.2.



'They should do something about the long bits in between'

Cosy links

The British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) is a charity that receives its core funding from the food industry. And, thanks to several grants from MAFF during the 1990s, the BNF has produced hundreds of thousands of educational packs for schools (which rarely criticise food products).

As if this cosy relationship between industry, government and our educational system were not enough, the internet has given a new opportunity. If you want advice on diet you might think that our national health services could help. So you surf the web to the NHS site (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and browse through to their 'Eating for Health' pages.

There you will find some basic information, but if you want to explore the issue further you are offered two further sites. One is the BNF, described as a foundation which 'works to improve the nutrition of people in Britain'.

The other is MAFF. Yes, the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Not only is MAFF now DEFRA, but nutrition is now largely the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency and the Department of Health – the very department responsible for funding the NHS and its website.

An OECD-style welcome

What is the best tactic to use when you have to invite someone to a meeting, but you don't want them there?

Since the Seattle and Geneva skirmishes, governments are cautious about their exposure to 'civil society' when they gather for their summit meetings around the world.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), due to hold a ministerial conference later this year has hit on a strategy for being 'inclusive' while keeping the unwashed masses at bay. The OECD is to hold a pre-Ministerial Forum in May where they hope all the dissent will be aired and disposed of. Its location? The aptly-named La Defense in Paris.

That's not all. In order to keep dissent to a minimum they have packed the agenda with speakers from government, trade and the media – at least ten hours' worth in the two day event (See www.oecd.org/Forum2002/).

And in order to ensure that only the nicest class of civil society attends, they have set a fee of £400 for attendance (excluding travel and accommodation). If that is too much, then why not make use of the recommended 'partnership opportunity' by getting sponsorship from a corporation? The conference itself is sponsored by, among others, the disgraced accountancy firm Andersen.

Mad for Marmite?

While one Early Day Motion is calling for an end to inappropriate advertising (see top) another – launched by Tony Banks and signed by 31 MPs – consists of nothing but an advertisement. With pompous patriotic prose thrown in:

'That this house notes that 2002 marks the 100th anniversary of the creation of Marmite;

takes an intense satisfaction in the essential Britishness of the product and its lack of appeal for the majority of the world's population; and looks forward to another century of the wonderful savoury being spread over soldiers and crumpets.'

And the loss of another essentially British institution – a Parliament worthy of respect?