

# The FOOD MAGAZINE

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

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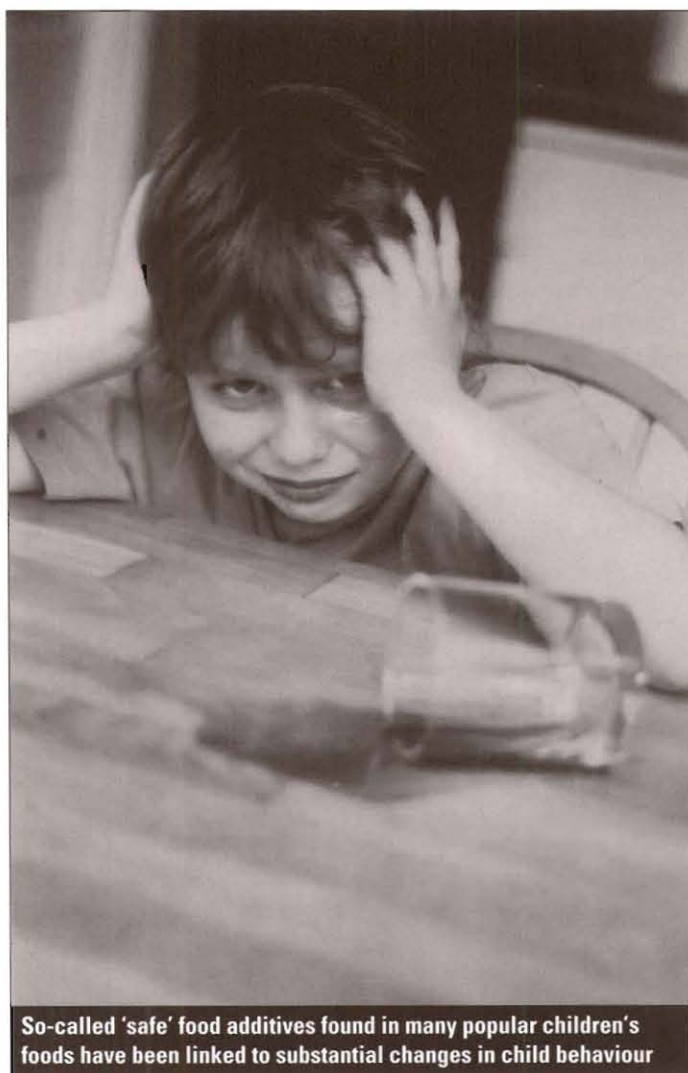
## Additives do cause temper tantrums

**Parents have long suspected that artificial food colourings can affect their child's mood and behaviour. Now a government-funded study shows that parents were right all along.**

**F**ood additives can cause behaviour changes in toddlers, even in those who have no history of hyperactivity. A new government-funded study by the UK's Asthma & Allergy Research Centre concluded that *all* children could benefit from the removal of specified artificial food colourings from their diet.

This is the first time that a UK government-sponsored scientific study has corroborated the link between food colourings and preservatives and changes in children's mood and behaviour. For decades, concerns expressed by parents have often been dismissed by food manufacturers and government as anecdotal and lacking in scientific evidence, even though serious behavioural changes can cause much distress in families until they are able to identify the cause of the trouble and eliminate additive-laden foods from their children's diets.

This new study could have profound implications for the government's food and nutrition policy. As the researchers point out, *'the potential long-term public health benefit that might arise is indicated by the follow-up studies that have shown that the young hyperactive child is at risk of continuing behavioural*



So-called 'safe' food additives found in many popular children's foods have been linked to substantial changes in child behaviour

*difficulties including the transition to conduct disorder and educational difficulties'.*

A group of 277 three-year-olds from the Isle of Wight took part in the research, which lasted one month. For two weeks, the children drank fruit juice dosed with 20mg in total of artificial colourings (E102, E110, E122, E124), and 45mg of preservative (E211). For the other two weeks, children drank a placebo fruit juice, identical in appearance, but without the additives. Parents then filled reports assessing behaviour such as 'interrupting', 'fiddling with objects', 'disturbing others', 'difficulty settling down to sleep', 'concentration' and 'temper tantrums'.

Analysis of the results showed that 'the impact of artificial food colourings and sodium benzoate preservative on three-year-old children's hyperactive behaviour indicate substantial effects detectable by parents'.

The researchers went further, stating that 'significant changes in children's hyperactive behaviour could be produced by the removal of colourings and additives from their diet. The findings of the present study suggest that benefit would accrue for all children from such a change and not just for those already showing hyperactive behaviour or who are at risk of allergic reactions'.

**Continued on page 3**



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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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## Accolades for the Food Commission

**W**e are a modest organisation. We don't boast of our successes because – among other natural reasons – we are never quite sure whether we have had any actual effect upon the world.

Sure, we get publicity in terms of newspaper headlines, TV and radio appearances and even the occasional mention in the parliamentary magazine *Hansard*. But so do countless others who claim nothing more than that they entertain the public.

Then just occasionally someone calls us to say 'well done'. At the start of October this happened twice within a week.

The first call came from the prestigious Caroline Walker Trust, a charitable body named after the public health nutritionist who helped to push a reluctant British government into adopting dietary recommendations for the population, and in whose name a series of books has been published making dietary recommendations for infants, schoolchildren and older people. 'Our judges have short-listed your Parents Jury Campaign,' said the organiser. 'Congratulations, and please come and hear the results in November.'

Just as we were cracking open the Cava, we took a second phone call, this time from the BBC. 'Not another journalist, wanting us to download our filing cabinets,' we groaned.

But no. It was a lovely person from the BBC Radio 4 Food & Farming Awards. 'We wanted you to know that you have been short-listed for an award, to be presented at the BBC Good Food Awards in November,' she said. 'You are nominated as Best Food Campaigner / Educator.'

Much as we might feel pleased with ourselves, we know that the real credit goes to you, our readers. Even if we have not changed the world – or at least not changed it as much as it needs to be changed – we could not do what we do alone.

Whether or not we win the prizes, we already have the prize we want: your continuing support for our work.

For this, many, many thanks.



Tim and Kath (back row) and Ian and Annie in The Food Commission office: our thanks to you, our readers and supporters.

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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!



## Additives give poor food cosmetic appeal

Families of children with hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder will be relieved to hear that a link has been confirmed between food additives and behaviour changes in toddlers (see front page).

The new research by the UK's Asthma & Allergy Research Centre on the Isle of Wight will strengthen parents' calls for the removal of problem additives from children's foods and drinks. We understand that the colourings tested in this research have been restricted in other countries, such as the US, Norway and Denmark, in order to protect children.

We believe these additives should be banned world-wide.

Meanwhile, products containing the problem additives are available in the UK. So how can parents avoid them?

### Avoid the suspect additives

The suspect additives tested in the Food Standards Agency study may be described on food labels either by their technical name, or by their 'E' number. These are the names and 'E' numbers to watch out for.

#### Colours

Tartrazine .....E102  
Sunset Yellow .....E110  
Carmoisine .....E122  
Ponceau 4R .....E124

#### Preservative

Sodium Benzoate .....E211.

Many children's foods and drinks contain additives. They are the colourings and flavourings that make these products especially attractive to children. A Food Commission survey showed that 38% of

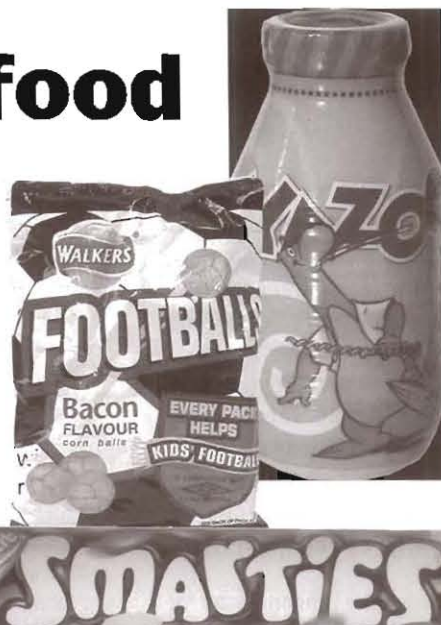
children's food contained additives, in products that were likely to form a large part of children's diets. The survey did not even include soft drinks, confectionery and chocolate, birthday cakes and crisps.

The Food Commission has long maintained that not only may these additives affect children's behaviour, they are often used to give cosmetic appeal to poor ingredients – depriving children of valuable nutrients. The Food Commission research found that additives in children's food, especially colourings and flavourings, are frequently used in products that are high in fat, salt and/or sugar, and low in nutritious ingredients. The survey found 41% of the children's food products were nutritionally very poor, but contained added colour.

Research published this year by the food firm Organix found colourings were used in:

- 78% of children's desserts;
- 42% of children's milkshakes;
- 93% of children's sweets;
- 18% of cereal bars;
- 24% of children's cheeses;
- 23% of children's cereals;
- 14% of dried fruit packs;
- 41% of children's drinks;
- 32% of crisps and savoury snacks;
- 15% of children's frozen burgers.

A common defence for the use of colourings and other additives in children's food is that they have been shown to be toxicologically safe, so there is considered to be no problem. But behaviour change in children isn't one of the things toxicologists test for. A Food Standards Agency survey of colours used in sweets, published in April, looked only for



Kids' drink Yazoo boasts 'NO artificial sweeteners, NO preservatives' but doesn't shout so loud about the colouring E124 which has been added to give an impression of strawberry colour. Walkers use Tartrazine to colour their Footballs snack and Smarties contain both Ponceau 4R and Sunset Yellow.

evidence that companies were using colourings at their correct strength, and that they had complied with labelling regulations. However, our own analysis of the FSA survey results shows that over half (55 per cent) of the sweets tested contained the colourings shown by the present research to provoke behaviour change in toddlers.

The Food Commission has written to the FSA asking what action it will take to protect children from the problem additives, and whether guidance will be issued to food companies to remove these additives from children's food.

■ For more information, please visit our website at [www.foodcomm.org.uk](http://www.foodcomm.org.uk)

### Useful resources

■ Do food additives cause hyperactivity and behaviour problems in a geographically defined population of 3-year-olds? (Project: T07004) from The Food Standards Agency Library. Tel: 020 7276 8060.

■ The Food Commission Guide to Food Additives summarises the problems in poster format and lists the suspect additives. Cost £2.50 incl. p&p. The Food Commission's report 'Children's Food Examined: An analysis of 358 products targeted at children' [2000] costs £20 incl. p&p. Tel: 020 7837 2250.

■ The Hyperactive Children's Support Group has for many years considered that colours and preservatives can lead to behavioural changes in children.

For further information, send a stamped addressed envelope to: The Hyperactive Children's Support Group (HACSG), 71 Whyke Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 7PD. The HACSG runs workshops at its London centre for professionals dealing with children suffering from hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder. Tel. 020 8946 4444. Web: [www.hacsg.org.uk](http://www.hacsg.org.uk).



*It's not fair!!! Why can't I drink the placebo?!*



## School vending machines pose a dietary dilemma

Parents and teachers know only too well the changes in behaviour caused when children eat sugary snacks laden with additives. Which is why, argues Nick Giovanelli of the Hyperactive Support Group, schools with vending machines should examine whether they are putting fundraising before children's health.

I manage the London Centre for the Hyperactive Children's Support group where we hold workshops on Diet & Nutritional Management.

The many parents and professionals attending these workshops have found that the children in their charge can at times be over-stimulated by the intake of too many fizzy drinks and sweets, especially those laden with artificial chemicals.

This is most likely to happen at school breaktime, when our children are confronted by a

whole host of vending machines, offering just such a selection of drinks and sweets.

So when *The Green Machine* approached our organisation seeking guidance on healthier eating options, for the vending machines that they supply to schools, we were delighted.

Considering the guidelines coming down from the Department of Health, as well as the many Healthier Schools Initiatives in progress at this time, we thought that at last our children would now have a healthier eating option.

We were therefore very surprised to hear that one or two of the schools that had *Green Machines* installed had asked for them to be removed, as the sales from their other vending machines, which paid higher commissions, had dropped.

We asked *The Green Machine* if they could match the higher commissions being paid, and were told that if they were to do that, then the price of the snacks

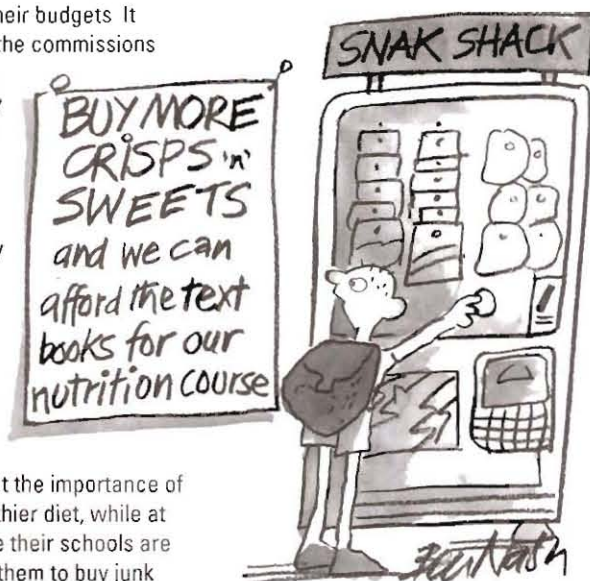
being offered would have to be increased, which would be in direct conflict with their policy of offering healthier eating options at affordable prices.

When we asked the schools concerned to reconsider, we were told that they relied on the income from confectionery-stocked machines to fund the shortfalls in their budgets. It appears that the commissions paid by these confectionery companies to keep their machines in place is of higher priority than our children's health! What a dilemma!

Here we all are trying to teach our children about the importance of eating a healthier diet, while at the same time their schools are encouraging them to buy junk

food and drink, to fulfil shortfalls in their budgets. Talk about mixed messages!

■ Nick Giovanelli, Hyperactive Children's Support Group London Centre, 28 Worple Road, London SW19 4EE. Tel: 020 8946 4444 Fax: 020 8946 8444



## Parents reject sponsorship

Parents have taken a stand against the promotion of confectionery in a North London primary school.

A parent from the school told us that a hand-writing copy book was sent home with her six-year-old daughter, sponsored by Milky Way chocolate bars. Angry that chocolate bars were being promoted to children by their teachers, she asked other parents what they thought. The unanimous response was that the school should withdraw from the sponsorship deal.



School exercise books sponsored by Pepsi

The commercially sponsored exercise books form part of a promotion by Jazzy Media. The company provides free exercise books for schools paid for by advertisements for organisations and products – frequently food and drink products such as Pepsi, Vimto and chocolate bars.

The scheme has been praised by the government, and the sponsored exercise books carry an endorsement from the National Association of Head Teachers, the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations and the National Primary Headteachers' Association.

Following the complaint from parents, the head teacher of the Islington primary school has agreed to withdraw from the sponsorship deal.

## Send us your sponsorship stories

From around the country, reports come to us about commercial promotions of food in schools. Most recently, we were told by a health-promotion worker about the sabotage of a milk vending machine in a school in the north of England. The man employed to run the adjacent coke machine was so cross that his profits were being compromised by the popular and profitable milk machine, he took to unplugging the refrigerated milk vending unit. Presumably, he hoped that the milk would go off and the school would ditch the idea of selling healthier drinks.

Other school nutrition horror stories include sugar-laden Kellogg's Cocopops cereal bars given free to schoolchildren taking part in a 'healthy breakfast' campaign in Scotland. From Northern Ireland, we heard about sweets and chocolates handed out as prizes to toddlers

performing well in tests. Meanwhile, McDonald's has taken to sponsoring children's football teams, presumably to give the impression that physical activity is the only answer to obesity, and has nothing to do with reducing fat or sugar consumption.

The Food Commission believes that the principles of good nutrition taught in schools should not be undermined by promotion of fast food, confectionery and sugared drinks by those schools. If you have a story to share about a mismatch between good nutrition and sponsorship from food companies, especially schemes taking place in schools, we would very much like to hear from you.

Send your stories to: Commercial Activities in Schools, The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, or email: schoolfood@foodcomm.org.uk



# Rogue pet food imports may explain new BSE cases

Imports of meat and bone derived from cattle and intended for pet food may be responsible for the cases of BSE being discovered in animals born several years after the imposition of strict cattlefeed regulations in August 1996.

Twenty-four cases of cattle born after that date have come down with BSE. According to Professor John Wilesmith, of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, these animals are unlikely to be acquiring the disease from their dams (mother), as none of the dams nor any of the infected cow's siblings have developed the disease.

And, says Wilesmith, there is no evidence that the cases have eaten cattlefeed made before 1996 – especially as the cases are not occurring in areas where cattlefeed was used

most intensively, or from areas where cattle and pigs are reared together and feed may have been mixed. Similarly, the new cases do not seem to be caused by residual contamination in grazing land.

Professor Wilesmith says that the evidence points to cross contamination of UK cattlefeed with mammalian meat and bone meal (MMBM) being transported around Europe – it was not banned in mainland Europe until January 2001 – or the importation of MMBM as petfood which was then illegally diverted to cattlefeed.

Pet food manufacturers reportedly deny that they use imported MMBM, but there is evidence that such material is coming into the UK. European Commission inspectors visiting Britain in May noted a number of failures in

the UK's BSE control measures, including the importation of material to 'intermediate consignees other than stated on the import permits issued by DEFRA. This has been observed in one consignment of MMBM from New Zealand, originally destined for a pet food manufacturer.\*

Not only is it extraordinary that meat and bone meal is shipped around the globe for pet food (see 'Alex Asks...' page 15), but that it should be diverted into cattlefeed is both criminal and – if coming from a BSE infested part of the world, such as much of Europe – dangerous for the cattle and a threat to our food supply.

\* DG SANCO 8570/2002, Brussels, 02/09/02, page 24.

## BSE in Britain: still 20 cases per week

Despite predictions made a year ago by the Veterinary Laboratory Agency that there would be fewer than 200 BSE cases this year. Over 300 animals have come down with the disease in the first nine months of the year. Also, nearly 400 more have been found in surveys of animals at risk.

The UK incidence is around 20 cases every week. Second-ranking after the UK is Ireland, with around seven cases per week, followed by France with around six.

### Predicted and actual BSE cases

	Predicted number*	Actual number	BSE cases among 'at risk' animals
2001	504	781	332
2002	183	314	362
2003	57		

\* DEFRA BSE Enforcement Bulletin, 62, September 2001.

## British Beef: one rule for exports; another for home markets

UK consumers are still being sold beef that is considered unsafe for export. As many as two in every five cattle going into the UK food supply would fail the stringent rules that control the quality and safety of meat eligible for export.

Meat for export must come from animals that conform to the following rules:

- they are over 6 months old
- they were born and reared entirely within the UK
- their date of birth is known
- all movements have been recorded on a passport or computerised tracing scheme
- the identity of their dam (mother) is known
- the dams must live for at least six months after the animal's birth
- the dam must not be diagnosed with BSE or be suspected of having BSE
- the animal must be slaughtered in an abattoir approved for export-quality meat
- the abattoir must be under permanent supervision by a designated veterinary surgeon
- the abattoir must not process non-exportable meat on the same production line on the same day, and all non-

exportable meat must be locked away into an officially-sealed refrigeration unit before exportable animals are slaughtered.

Following concern over poor record keeping, European Commission veterinary inspectors have told the UK that meat cannot be exported if the animal comes from a herd where more than 20% of cattle have faulty or missing records, or that records show that:

- the animal was born after the death of its dam
- the dam was under 20 months old at the time of delivery
- the dam was in a different herd at the time of delivery
- the 'dam' is later declared to be male
- the dam is recorded as having given birth to another calf within 10 months either side of the birth of the animal considered for export.

Checks on the records of 50,000 animals examined during Jan-Nov 2000 found that typically 40% of animals would fail to be eligible for export. Most of these animals could, though, go into British butchers' shops and supermarkets.





# GM crops in Britain – no thank you!

**Over the coming year, the government will decide whether to allow the commercialisation of genetically modified (GM) crops in the UK.**

**C**onsumer and industry groups are gearing up for what is widely recognised as a critical period of activity. By next summer, results from the hugely controversial farm-scale trials will be published. Before this, the government aims to hold a 'public debate'. Note that they are not calling this a 'consultation', as this would commit them to taking the public's views into account when the decisions are made.

Additional factors will prove critical in the government's decision. The experience of commercialisation in other countries, for instance, is of central concern. A new report from the Soil Association, *Seeds of Doubt*, describes the impact of the commercialisation of GM crops in North America. Drawing largely on the experiences of North American farmers, the study states that:

- The profitability of growing GM herbicide-tolerant soya and insect resistant Bt maize is less than non-GM crops, due to the extra cost of GM seed and lower market prices for GM crops
- The claims of increased yields have not been realised overall except for a small increase in Bt maize yields. The main GM variety (Roundup Ready soya) yields 6–11% less than non-GM varieties.
- GM herbicide-tolerant crops have made farmers more reliant on herbicides and new weed problems have emerged.
- Farmers are applying herbicides several times, contrary to the claim that only one application would be needed.
- Farmers have suffered a severe reduction in choice about how they farm as a result of the introduction of GM crops.
- Many organic farmers have been unable to sell produce due to GM contamination.

The report estimates that in total, GM crops may have cost the US economy at least \$12 billion net from 1999 to 2001.

At the same time as the Soil Association's report was released, a joint campaign launched by 200 farming organisations in the USA announced that they are seeking a legal injunction against the release of GM wheat, hoping to prevent the same problems with wheat that have been experienced with GM maize and soya.

Meanwhile, the UK's Five Year Freeze (GM moratorium) campaign – with a membership of

120 national organisations including the Food Commission, National Federation of Women's Institutes, UNISON and the Council for the Protection of Rural England, along with 500 local councils and over 1,000 shops and food companies – is calling upon all of its members to ensure that their voices are heard. Contact the Five Year Freeze (address below) for



details of organisations working to influence the government's decision.

The Five Year Freeze is one of the organisations on the steering group for the proposed public debate. Open meetings are scheduled for 7th and 20th November and 6th December 2002. The Freeze will also co-host a national conference in London in January, in partnership with *The Guardian* newspaper.

The message is clear: Get involved! Whatever your views on GM crops and food, this is the time to express them, through any of the events and organisations focusing on this issue over the coming months. The urgency of the situation is aptly summed up in the slogan of Friends of the Earth's new campaign, 'GM-Free Britain: Now or Never'.

- **Five Year Freeze campaign**  
Tel: 020 7837 0642; Fax: 020 7837 1141;  
Email: [enquiry@fiveyearfreeze.org](mailto:enquiry@fiveyearfreeze.org);  
web: [www.fiveyearfreeze.org](http://www.fiveyearfreeze.org).
- **Friends of the Earth**  
Tel: 020 7490 1555; Fax: 020 7490 0881;  
email: [info@foe.co.uk](mailto:info@foe.co.uk);  
web: [www.GMFreeBritain.com](http://www.GMFreeBritain.com).
- **Soil Association**  
Tel: 0117 929 0661; Fax: 0117 925 2504;  
email: [info@soilassociation.org](mailto:info@soilassociation.org);  
web: [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org).
- **GM 'public debate' website**  
[www.gmpublicdebate.org.uk](http://www.gmpublicdebate.org.uk).

## Feeding or Fooling the World: Can GM food really feed the hungry?

It is often claimed that GM crops have the potential to 'feed the world', and that by opposing their acceptance, UK citizens are holding up research that could benefit the hungry in other parts of the world. A new briefing from the Five Year Freeze coalition takes a critical look at the arguments put forward by the biotechnology industry, which is spending millions on persuading policy makers in the northern hemisphere of the benefits of GM technology. The report:

- Challenges assumptions on which claims are based that GM crops can 'feed the world';
- Raises questions about the way patenting and corporate control over agriculture

negatively affects farmers' livelihoods and food security worldwide;

- Explores the reason why high-profile GM technologies such as 'Golden Rice' only address part of the complex problem of dietary deficiencies;
  - Shows effective solutions to hunger must address poverty, exclusion and inequality;
  - Highlights affordable, sustainable, non-GM approaches.
- The report costs £5 (incl p&p) to UK addresses and a downloadable PDF version is available at [www.fiveyearfreeze.org](http://www.fiveyearfreeze.org). Tel: 020 7837 0642; email: [rachel@fiveyearfreeze.org](mailto:rachel@fiveyearfreeze.org).



## Diners can choose safe restaurants

**Want to know if a café or supermarket has a good hygiene record? Go to Denmark, where caterers and retailers display their recent inspection results. Jeppe Juul reports.**

**J**ust as in the UK, reducing the incidence of food poisoning is a national priority for the Danish food authorities. Yet over the years, local hygiene enforcement officers have frequently reported that they find it difficult to convince restaurants and retailers to clean up their act.

The threat of a fine is sometimes not enough to ensure that a proprietor takes prompt action on infringements of hygiene rules, even though minor changes, such as the replacement of a faulty fridge or the clearing of food debris can make the difference between customers enjoying a meal with friends, and having their enjoyment spoiled by suffering the effects of food poisoning from contaminated or badly-cooked food.

What was lacking in the enforcement system was the opportunity to let consumers know, in a consistent and fair way, which restaurants deserved their custom, and which should be avoided as bad hygiene managers.

After all, the relationship between a restaurant or retailer and a customer is one of trust. The customer places their trust in the proprietor to provide wholesome and safe food. Until recently, a customer might have no idea whether or not a restaurant or retailer applied hygiene rules consistently, whether staff had been trained properly, and whether dirty food preparation areas had been cleaned promptly and thoroughly. Such information might well affect the customer's enjoyment of their food.

If you heard that cockroaches had been found behind a supermarket meat counter three times in the past year, would you choose to return to that shop, or would you choose to reserve your custom until such time as the authorities had given the all clear, and the proprietor had maintained regular hygiene checks to stop this happening again?

In a nation-wide scheme launched by the Danish government, hygiene inspection information is now available to all Danish consumers, and the scheme has been a tremendous success.

Every food outlet is now obliged to display an inspection report beside its main door. From next month, the paper will be bright yellow to attract consumers' attention. Grocery stores, vegetable shops, restaurants and even McDonald's (actually, they've complied pretty well with the scheme) are all included. A chart contains information on the most recent hygiene inspections to take place at that establishment, and records the results. If a restaurant has been warned that there are hygiene problems in its kitchen, the proprietor is given a set time in which to clear it up. As an incentive to comply, the problem is recorded on the sheet by their front door, for all the world to see.

Hygiene enforcement officers report that the threat of 'going public' often does the trick, and clear-ups now happen more quickly and efficiently. After four months of operation, 75 per cent of Danes knew about the scheme, and 88% thought it was a good idea.

An additional aspect to the report display is a detail which I think has clinched the success of the scheme. Beside the written description of the inspection results (good or bad) appears a cartoon face (smiley or frowning) that summarises the results. The use of 'smileys' has helped people to use, enjoy and properly understand the official notices, that might otherwise appear difficult to interpret. Using the smileys also signals

**Tilsynsrapport**

Virksomhed: *Slagter G. Riis*

Adresse: *K. T. Leths Vej 104*

Postnr./By: *6666 Sværløse*

Resultat	Kategori	Betyder
1	😊	ingen anmærkninger
2	🙂	Indskærpelse
3	😐	Påbud eller forbud
4	😞	Bedeforlæg, politianmeldelse eller godkendelse inddraget

Resultatet af dette tilsyn ses som tal til venstre. Højeste tal er kategorien.

A happy smiley face indicates a good hygiene report. A sad face indicates that hygiene standards may not be up to your expectations.

that this is a scheme for the consumer, not a marketing gimmick by the food outlet.

Soon, an official website will also record the inspection results, making them easily accessible to consumers, enforcement authorities and campaign groups. Problems will be quickly spotted, and people will be able to make informed decisions about their food purchases. This proposed website has been welcomed by the retail sector keen to show how well they fare in hygiene inspections.

Customers are finally engaged in the process of holding restaurants, retailers and food outlets to account for their food hygiene. Now that the scheme is well established in Denmark, it is hard to remember how we chose where to buy our food without this reassurance. Our government has produced a report on the success of the scheme, which I would urge consumer groups, governments and enforcement authorities to read and consider. This is surely an excellent model for improving food hygiene throughout Europe.

■ Jeppe Juul is co-director of the not-for-profit Active Consumers Denmark.

■ For details of the Danish scheme, see [www.vfd.dk/english/files/smiley2.htm](http://www.vfd.dk/english/files/smiley2.htm)

■ New York City also publishes restaurant health inspection reports. See [www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/rii/index.html](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/rii/index.html)



## Food irradiation: scientists say SCF is ignoring risks

**S**cientists investigating the toxicity of chemicals in irradiated food (especially fatty food) have challenged Europe's most prestigious advisory committee – the Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) – after the committee decided to ignore the researchers' latest findings. The research revealed new evidence of cancer-promoting chemicals in irradiated foods.

The committee considered the new research and then dismissed it, saying that the safety of irradiated fat-containing foods could be assumed from earlier studies.

Subsequently, an extraordinary letter was issued by the authors of the research, a team of French and German scientists working under an EU-financed research project. They re-iterated their concerns about the safety of irradiated food and accused the SCF of ignoring the risk to humans, and circulated their letter to European bodies, the World Health Organization, various non-governmental bodies and US groups.

The research team's original study contained important new evidence of the genotoxicity and cytotoxicity of

cyclobutanones – chemicals found only in irradiated foods.

Irradiation of fat-containing food generates a family of molecules, namely 2-alkylcyclobutanones (2-ACBs), that result from the radiation-induced breakage of triglycerides (a component of fats). These molecules have been found exclusively in irradiated fat-containing food, and are considered unique markers for food irradiation.

The researchers' summary states that: *'Toxicological studies reveal that the 2-ACBs have cytotoxic properties under certain experimental conditions, both in bacteria and cultures of human cells... Genotoxic activity has been demonstrated by the induction of oxidative damage in DNA [in human cell lines]... 2-ACBs, when tested at a high concentration, potentiate the effect of an inducing carcinogen on the longer term [in rats]. This was revealed by the increase in colonic pre-neoplastic lesions and the development of a higher number of colon tumours with larger size, as compared to animal controls which were not exposed to 2-ACBs.'*

*'The experiments demonstrate that pure compounds, known to be exclusively formed upon irradiation of fat-containing food, exhibit some toxic effects including promotion of colon carcinogenesis in rats.... Whether these findings are relevant to the human exposure situation needs to be analysed. In our opinion further investigations, including confirmation of our results by other laboratories, will help to elucidate a possible risk associated with the consumption of irradiated fat-containing foods.'*<sup>1</sup>

Despite this evidence, the 3 July 2002 meeting of the SCF concluded that the research was not adequate to make statements about the real risk to human health. They declared *'In summary, as the adverse effects noted refer almost entirely to in vitro studies, it is not appropriate, on the basis of these results, to make a risk assessment for human health associated with the consumption of 2-ACBs present in irradiated fat-containing foods.'*<sup>2</sup>

The SCF dismissed the rat study for not using standard measurements of genotoxicity, and because there were no data by which the SCF could set a safe dosage of 2-ACBs.

The SCF's decision was important because the discussion of irradiation at Codex, the international food standards-setting body, was delayed in March pending the opinion of

the SCF on the results of the new 2-ACB study. If the SCF gives 2-ACBs the all-clear then Codex will probably follow suit.

It is in this context that the scientists fired off their remarkable open letter. The authors repeated their main concerns and emphasised the possible dangers inherent in irradiating fatty foods:

*'2-ACBs, as pure compounds, present cytotoxic and genotoxic effects in cultured human cells, promote colon carcinogenesis in rats and accumulate in adipose tissues of rats fed with these compounds.'*

Although not specifically accusing the SCF of misrepresenting the seriousness of their findings, the researchers emphasise that their *'new data, which will be published in peer-reviewed journals, raise some doubts or at least suggest that caution should be exercised before any risk to consumers by exposure to these compounds is denied'*.

Why, then, did the SCF throw caution to the winds and deny the possible risk?

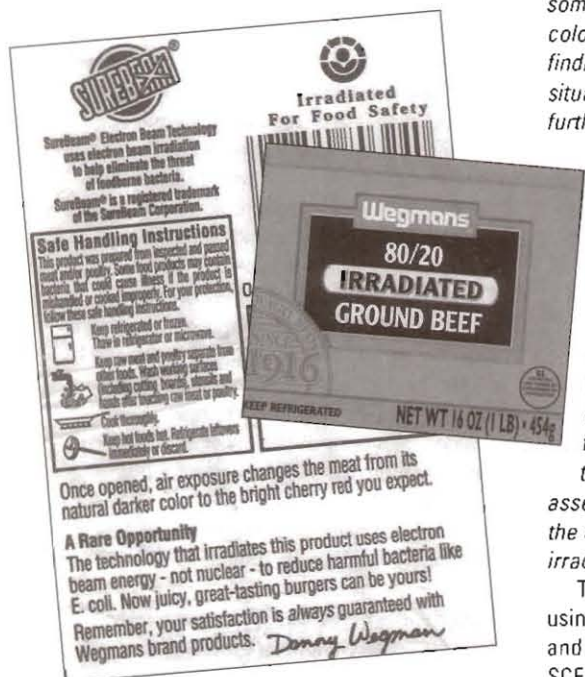
- 1) See [www.iaea.org/programmes/rifa/icgfi/documents/summary-press.pdf](http://www.iaea.org/programmes/rifa/icgfi/documents/summary-press.pdf)
- 2) Scientific Committee on Food, SCF/CS/NF/IRR/26 ADD 3 Final, 3 July 2002. See [http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scf/out135\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scf/out135_en.pdf)

### W.H.O. questioned

A new report published by Public Citizen, a US consumer organisation campaigning against food irradiation, raises serious questions over the reliability of the WHO's often-quoted assertion that irradiated foods are completely safe and wholesome.

Coming at a time when the European Parliament is debating whether to add more foods to the list permitted for irradiation in the EU; and when Codex, the international food standards-setting body, is debating removal of the maximum dose limit permitted for irradiation treatment of all foods, this report is a stark reminder that caution should be the guiding principle when dealing with food irradiation

■ To view the report go to [www.citizen.org/documents/BadTaste.pdf](http://www.citizen.org/documents/BadTaste.pdf)



**American buy:** Meat companies are flooding US supermarkets with irradiated mince in an attempt to get consumer acceptance of the technology.



# Irradiation: We urge MEPs to say 'No'

The Food Commission's Food Irradiation Campaign is urging the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy Committee to say 'No' to any extension of the list of foods allowed to be irradiated in Europe.

The Committee was discussing a report, part-drafted in consultation with the Food Irradiation Campaign, which recommends:

- no more foods to be added to the Community list of foods authorised for irradiation in the EU;
- better controls on irradiated foods, including annual testing by European member states and prosecution of companies selling illegal, unlabelled irradiated foods;
- more research and development of alternative approaches and technologies for food preservation;
- more research into long-term health effects of eating a diet of irradiated foods, especially for children, to be carried out before any more foods are added to the list.

Representatives of the Food Irradiation Campaign attended this debate, during which a wide variety of comments were made by MEPs. The Environment Committee will vote on the report in November.

Illegally irradiated foods found on sale in the UK and Denmark during 2001 and 2002 (see FM 58, 57, 55) were displayed for MEPs at a meeting held at the European Parliament, co-hosted by:

- The Food Irradiation Campaign
- Hiltrud Breyer MEP (German Green)
- Association of European Consumers (AEC)
- Active Consumers Denmark

Merav Shub of the Food Commission and Klaus Melvin Jensen of Active Consumers Denmark gave talks on the situation in the UK and Denmark, and on implications for consumers in other European member states.

The Food Irradiation Campaign also sent a letter to every MEP on the Environment Committee and to senior figures at the European Commission, explaining why certain recommendations within the European Parliament report should be supported. The letter was co-signed by Euro Co-op, Friends of

the Earth, the Biodynamic Agricultural Association, the Centre for Food Policy of Thames Valley University, Elm Farm Research Centre, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Soil Association, the Trade and General Workers Union, and the Women's Environmental Network.

The Food Irradiation Campaign has published a leaflet explaining the issues of concern (see box below) and delivered one to each MEP at the European Parliament.

■ **Urgent!** To get involved in the lobby of the European Parliament during November and December contact Merav Shub at the Food Irradiation Campaign on 020 7837 9229 or email [irradiation@foodcomm.org.uk](mailto:irradiation@foodcomm.org.uk).

*Attitudes to food irradiation in Europe* is a four-page leaflet produced by the Food Irradiation Campaign and circulated to all MEPs at the European Parliament. If you would like a copy, please send an A4 SAE to the Food Irradiation Campaign, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF. Email: [irradiation@foodcomm.org.uk](mailto:irradiation@foodcomm.org.uk) The leaflet can also be downloaded in pdf format from the irradiation website which is part of The Food Commission site at [www.foodcomm.org.uk](http://www.foodcomm.org.uk)



## Hunger from within

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming has published a report and toolkit on food poverty and community mapping (the process of working with communities to identify local problems and find solutions). The report gives a unique insight into community involvement in tackling food poverty.

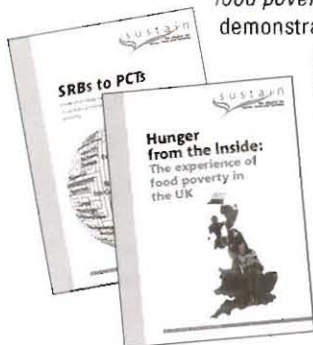
*Hunger from the inside: The experience of food poverty in the UK*

demonstrates the benefits of putting communities at the heart of initiatives to tackle food poverty and social exclusion. Through the words of participants who took part in Sustain's community

mapping project, the report reveals how the wealth and breadth of people's experiences can provoke positive action and policy development. The report highlights the disparities between what is being done and what should be done at local, regional and national levels.

*SRBs to PCTs: Understanding local structures and area-based initiatives to tackle food poverty* is a toolkit aimed at those whose work involves improving diet and health by increasing access to food at a local level. It is an easy-to-follow reference guide to relevant policy, agencies, funds and schemes that might provide support for local food poverty work.

■ *SRBs to PCTs* (£25); *Hunger from the inside* (£20), available from Sustain: Tel. 020 7837 1228 web: [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org).



## BADvertisement

### McPetrol for breakfast?

Despite a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority, McDonald's Restaurants is allowed to claim that its Big Breakfast Bun is '5-star fuel' that could help you 'Fill up properly in the morning'. This is a newspaper advert that appeared in the national press. We're not surprised by McDonald's using a petrol analogy to describe its burgers – after all, the Big Breakfast Bun contains as much oily fat as protein.





## Legal, decent, honest and true?

The Advertising Standards Association (ASA) receives numerous complaints against food and drink manufacturers every year. Here we report on just a few of the cases that have caught our eye over the last few months.

### X Quorn isn't a mushroom

The meat-substitute Quorn came under criticism from the Mushroom Bureau and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (USA), for its claim to be a 'natural mushroom protein'. The complainants pointed out that although Quorn was fungal in origin, it was not derived from mushrooms. The complaints were upheld, and the manufacturer, Marlow Foods, was asked to delete the claim from adverts or to give, in the same font size, a statement that this product is made from mycoprotein or fungus.

### X Make your heart go Pop!

The campaign group Viva! was criticised by the ASA for a leaflet showing a sausage on a fork with the caption 'The Great British Banger ... makes your heart go Pop! One in three men and one in four women will die of heart disease. The British sausage is perfectly designed to help them on their way.' The text also claimed that 'Eating animals is one of the main reasons why heart disease, clogged arteries, high blood pressure and

strokes are at epidemic proportions. High fat, high cholesterol, high animal protein foods such as sausages carry much of the blame.' The ASA accepted that scientific evidence linked an 'affluent diet' with an increased rate of chronic diseases, but concluded that the unsubstantiated claims were 'unduly alarmist'.

### X You're not dreaming!

As part of its commitment to 'Take a Stand Against Slimming Fraud' (see FM 58), the Food Commission submitted a complaint against Equiba Institute's direct mailing for slimming tablets. The leaflet claimed that the University of Firenze in Tuscany had endorsed the product and stated, 'You're not dreaming! One tablet every five days and you lose 6 lbs every time. Equiba allows you to completely banish all unwanted fat. Without dieting. Without medical products. Without any effort or fatigue. It's proven.' The ASA found that it was not proven, and that claims that 6 lbs could be lost in five days were 'irresponsible and contrary to good medical advice'. The advertiser agreed to withdraw the mailing.

### X Tetley Tea and heart health: Not proven

Earlier this year, road-side advertising hoardings around the country proclaimed: 'Go on, live a lot - Tetley is rich in antioxidants that can help keep your heart healthy'. One even

carried a 10-foot-high flashing plastic heart. The campaign took place at the same time as Tetley Tea packets displayed the logo of the British Heart

Foundation, with numerous claims about drinking tea and heart health. Heart-health advice usually focuses on decreasing fat levels in the diet and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, so we challenged Tetley, via a complaint to the ASA, to

substantiate these strong claims. The ASA has upheld our complaint, criticising Tetley for misleading advertising, and saying that 'the health benefits of drinking Tetley Tea had not been proven'. The ASA also asked Tetley to withdraw the phrase 'Go on, live a lot', saying that readers were likely to believe, mistakenly, that 'drinking tea

would help prevent heart disease and prolong life'.

Tetley made similar claims in a TV advert, about which we also complained, to the Independent Television Commission (ITC). The ITC has yet to rule on the complaint.



### X Disease claims rejected

Complaints were upheld by the ASA against claims for the dietary supplement 'Breakthrough'. Be Well Nutritional Products Ltd claimed that the supplement could prevent diet-related illnesses including ME, Autoimmune Haemolytic Anaemia, Multiple Sclerosis and Ankylosing Spondylitis. The manufacturer failed to submit evidence that these diseases were diet-related, failed to submit evidence of efficacy, and breached the advertising code of practice by referring to serious medical conditions. The ASA told the manufacturer not to use the claims again.

### X Yoghurt causes offence

A magazine advert for Yoplait Dairy Crest drinking yogurt was the subject of a volley of complaints. It showed the rear of a parked motorcycle with an open white box, marked 'Urgent Human Organ for Transplant'. A courier was sitting beside the motorcycle, preparing to eat one of the human organs from the box. The advertisers said they had specifically targeted the campaign at 16- to 24-year-old men and had intended the ads to point out the bad eating habits of young men, not portray real-life situations. However, the ASA ruled that the ad was likely to cause distress or serious offence to some readers.

### For bugs and beasties, don't drink yoghurt



Danone, manufacturer of pro-biotic yoghurt drink Actimel, has withdrawn a French TV advert after complaints from the French national association of consumers (CLCV).

The TV advert featured a mother and her young son playing in a sandpit. The little boy picks up a piece of cake from the sand, covered in bacteria, with the implication that Actimel's pro-biotic bacteria could 'strengthen the body's natural defences' to defend him against infection. CLCV argued the yoghurt was unlikely to protect against many infectious agents found in soil.

After the challenge, Danone and CLCV issued a joint press release to warn consumers to take hygiene precautions when children are playing in sand and soil rather than rely on drinking yoghurt.



# CHECKOUT

**Companies have jumped on the fruit and vegetable bandwagon – only to sell over-priced, processed foods**

## Getting your greens?

**'Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day' say nutritionists. However, when those portions come processed with added fat, sugar or salt, are they really as 'healthy'?**

**T**he consensus of medical opinion is that eating fruits and vegetables helps us to maintain good health and to reduce the risk of serious conditions, such as heart disease and diet-related cancers.

Over many years, and after much debate, this advice has been honed by health professionals into a simple message: 'Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.'

In practice, following this advice can be harder than it sounds. What counts as a portion? Are canned vegetables as valid as fresh ones? Is drinking five glasses of fruit juice per day OK? Is variety or quantity more important? Are some vegetables better than others? Why don't potatoes count towards the 'five a day'?

The key to success for any health advice targeted at the whole population is that it must be easily understood and readily achievable, underpinned by consistent education and information. This information can be provided by government, health advisors, medical professionals, teachers and the media. Food manufacturers and retailers can also play a role, providing 'five a day' advice at the point of sale – on food labels and in food stores.

However, over the past year, the Food Commission has become increasingly concerned that some 'five a day' messages communicated by food manufacturers and retailers are either inaccurate, give only

partially useful information, are carried on nutritionally questionable foods, or are associated with a price premium, giving the impression that healthy eating is expensive eating. We believe that these factors may undermine the success of the 'five a day' message.

The Food Commission became especially concerned when the 'five a day' advice started to be used on composite foods that may contain fruit or vegetables as an ingredient, but that also contain high levels of fat, salt and/or sugar. Can it be right that these products are promoted as suitable for consumption on a regular basis, as if they are essential components of a healthy diet?

Some of these products are examined on the following pages.

Our investigations revealed that retailers and manufacturers placing 'five a day' messages on composite foods have chosen to race ahead of consensus medical opinion. An expert working group set up by the

Department of Health (DoH) to decide 'What Counts?' as a portion of fruit and vegetables has reached only the stage of debating the definition of a 'portion'.

The thorny question of 'what counts?' when it comes to composite foods will be debated, we are told, in the coming months. It is not yet clear when, or indeed whether, a consensus will be reached.

Similar discussions in other countries, and even at UN level, have failed to reach agreement on whether it is helpful to public health to promote composite manufactured foods using the 'five a day' message.

Yet products ranging from pizzas to chilli beans, and from spaghetti hoops to vegetable soup, are already available in UK supermarkets prompting consumers to eat these products as part of their health-promoting 'five a day'.

On the following pages, we assess some of the products currently available, and the claims made by manufacturers and retailers.

### The sauce of it!

The question of what can count towards your 'five a day' hit the national headlines earlier this year when processed food manufacturer Heinz announced 'five-a-day' labelling for products such as spaghetti hoops and baked beans. Heinz canned products carry a diagram of a pie chart claiming that a small can, or half of a large can, is equal to a portion of fruit or vegetables.



The scheme attracted widespread criticism because, whilst Heinz justified the claim on the basis of the tomato content of the sauce, some of the products also contain relatively high levels of added salt, and some added sugar. Heinz Spaghetti and Sausages (illustrated) and Heinz Baked Beans, provide the entire daily recommended maximum intake of salt for a woman in just two 'five-a-day' portions.

Health watchdogs such as the Food Commission and Consensus Action on Salt and Health were concerned that allowing a 'healthy eating' logo on processed foods of questionable nutritional merit could distort health advice. Given the link between salt consumption and heart disease, we believe that the 'five a day' advice should be used to help maintain heart health, not to maintain high levels of salty processed foods in people's diets.



# CHECKOUT

## The advice is '5 a day'

**P**reparing food from raw ingredients would make the advice 'eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day' relatively simple to follow. However, most people will eat many meals outside the home, or on the move, or will choose ready-prepared foods for themselves and their families. How can they ensure that they are still following the healthy 'five a day' advice? Can they rely on what they read on the label?

Examining the products we have found on sale in UK supermarkets, it seems that while some manufacturers are using the 'five-a-day' message carefully and responsibly, others are stretching the 'five-a-day' message too far, to claim undue health benefits for their products. Others may be portraying only part of the broad health message – usually the part that benefits their product. On very few foods carrying the 'five a day' message is it mentioned that eating a variety of fruit and vegetables is a crucial aspect of truly healthy eating.

### Why is the food industry involved?

The Department of Health (DH) has set up an expert working group to decide what counts as a portion of fruit or vegetables, what composite foods can be included in the advice, and whether a unified 'five-a-day' logo scheme could be a useful way forward.

The DH proposals raise many questions. For a start, the expert group represents all 'stakeholders', which means a mixture of independent public-health representatives and food industry representatives.

Why is industry involved in deciding what can count as a portion of fruit or vegetables? Surely this is a matter for independent decision-making, involving consultation with independent scientists and independent health experts who have nothing to gain financially from their decisions?

The conclusions that a Department of Health working group reaches will have implications not only for UK health policy, but for health policy across the world. Their advice will be adopted and disseminated by doctors, teachers, health visitors and nutritionists – to name but a few.

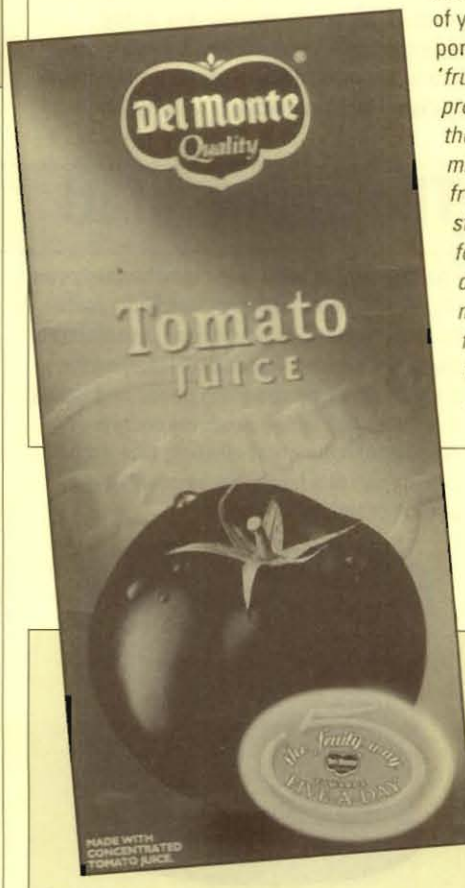


If fruit juice can be counted as only one of your five a day, then why can a carton of Knorr soup be allowed to count as two or three portions? Well, we're not certain that it can, because as Department of Health advisors say, 'some processed foods are unlikely to contain sufficient fruit or vegetable ingredients – for example ketchup, processed vegetable soups, fruit cakes and yoghurts.' Is Knorr really sure that the beneficial vitamins, minerals, other phytonutrients and fibre are preserved in these processed products, especially in products that have a shelf life of nearly a year?

The claim on this Sainsbury's fruit smoothie may overstep the mark on how many portions this product contributes to your 'five a day'. The label declares 'This bottle contains three of your five recommended daily portions of fruit and vegetables'. However, the Department of Health's 'five-a-day' advice says that fruit juice can

count as only one of your five portions because: 'fruit juice can provide most of the vitamins and minerals of fresh fruit, but the structure of the food is disrupted and most of the

fibre is lost. Most of the intrinsic fruit sugars in the fruit will have become extrinsic during extraction and more cariogenic [damaging to teeth]'.

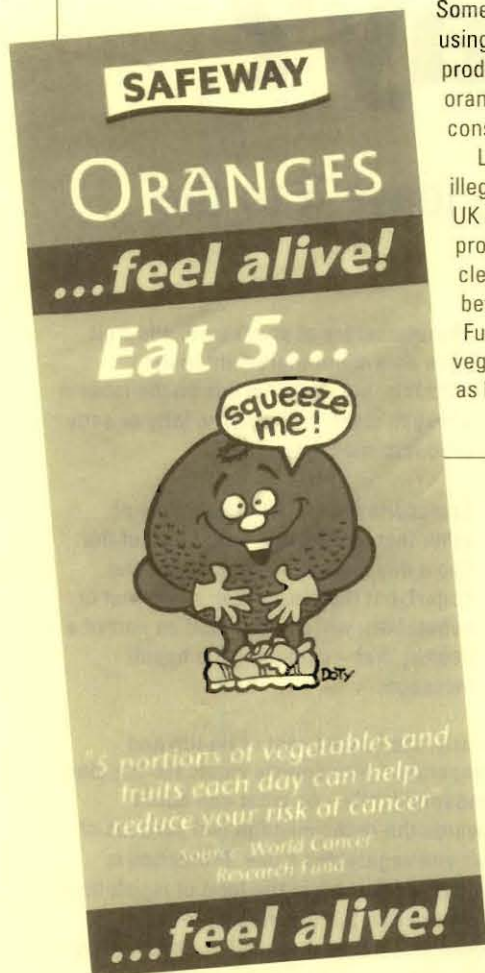


Fruit juice such as this tomato juice can, as Del Monte claims, count as one of your five a day, but *only* one. Del Monte is pleased to display the 'five a day' claim. However, the carton fails to mention that the juice can count as only one of this five. Who benefits from the fact that this information is missing? The consumer, or Del Monte?



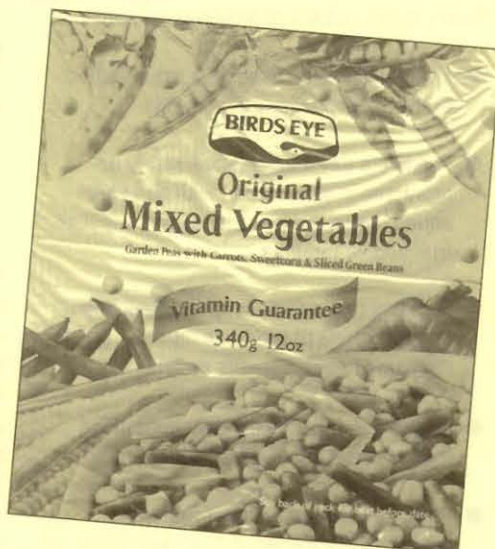
# CHECKOUT

## but who's counting?



Some supermarkets have promoted fruit and vegetables using 'five-a-day' banners and shelf tags in the fresh produce aisles. This label (left) appeared on Safeway oranges, stating the link between fruit and vegetable consumption and reducing the risk of cancer.

Leaving aside the fact that this claim is probably illegal (disease risk reduction claims are banned under UK and EU law), this is one of the few fresh fruit products that we have found declaring health benefits clearly on the label. It is part of a partnership project between Safeway and the World Cancer Research Fund in which own-brand bagged fresh fruit and vegetables will also be promoted with free gifts such as bookmarks and stickers.



On some products, the 'five a day' message is presented with additional information, consistent with nationally agreed healthy eating guidelines.

This packet of Birds Eye frozen mixed vegetables helpfully portrays a diagram of what constitutes a healthy balance on the back of the packet, showing how the particular product can fit into the whole diet.

For Birds Eye, this is a win-win situation, since most health professionals agree that frozen vegetables are an acceptable contribution to the 'five a day'. In this circumstance, portraying complete advice can benefit everyone – consumers and manufacturer alike.



### An apple a day keeps the dentist in pay?

With so much effort and money going into promoting the 'five a day' message, it's hardly surprising that some manufacturers would like to claim their share of the marketing opportunity this presents. Many confectionery products now carry prominent fruity pictures, or use healthy-sounding descriptions to improve their brand image. Is it just a coincidence that this packet of chewy sweets associates their fruitiness with the phrase 'Take 5'? Meanwhile, '76% real fruit!' proclaims Kellogg's Real Fruit Winders. Yet can a jelly sweet, containing fruit syrup and added sugar, offer any of the health benefits of eating fresh fruit?

### What is a portion?

The message 'eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day' emerged from scientific advice tempered with pragmatism based on what was thought to be realistic for people to achieve. Some countries advise eating up to 10 portions a day as an ideal. In the UK, 'five a day' is the most widely accepted advice. Five portions is equivalent to about 400g (14oz) of fresh fruit and vegetables. So each portion is about 80g (3oz). Sometimes a 'portion' is expressed as 'about a handful'. Terms such as 'portion' or 'handful' are useful when translating the five-a-day advice into children's diets, since children will eat relatively smaller portions (and have relatively smaller handfuls) according to their age.





# CHECKOUT

## Five a day – the expensive way?

**W**hen Sainsbury's launched its 'Way to Five' range earlier this year, their publicity said the products would 'make eating five-a-day a doddle, taking the guesswork away and boosting your intake in a tasty way'. What Sainsbury's didn't mention was that their 'Way to Five' products are sometimes more expensive than own-brand products that offer similar levels of fruit and vegetable content. In a selection of canned products, the 'Way to Five' items were between 10% and 20% more expensive. One canned product (apricots) was more than twice as expensive! The five-a-day advice did not appear on any of the cheaper products.



Sainsbury's Way to Five Mango & Cranberry [dried] fruit mix – £1.79 for 250g

Sainsbury's Own Brand Ready to Eat Exotic dried fruit mix – £1.59 for 250g

### What will happen if we leave it to the food industry?

Based on the examples we've seen so far (some of which are illustrated on pages 11 to 14), The Food Commission predicts that if it's left to the food industry on their own to decide how to promote the five a day message on composite foods, then a number of problems may emerge:

- Five a day will be used as a value-added brand, on premium-priced foods.
- The five a day message will rarely be promoted in association with non value-added foods, such as loose, unprocessed fruit and vegetables.
- Fruit imagery and descriptions will appear on food labels of products that do not offer the same health benefits as real fruit.
- Health benefits of a product containing fruit or vegetables will be exaggerated.
- Phrases and product descriptions incorporating the word 'five' will start to be used on all sorts of food products, hijacking the health message.

- Manufacturers of snacks will add fruit juice as a minor ingredient to their products, but describe this on the label in a way to make their sugary, fatty or salty products seem healthier.
- Composite foods that contain lots of other ingredients that aren't part of the five a day message (e.g. fat, salt and sugar), but that do contain some fruit or vegetables, will be promoted as part of a healthy diet – confusing the health message.

Clearly, the Department of Health and independent nutritionists must take the lead – independently – on what can count towards the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Protection is needed, preferably in the form of legislation, to ensure that the crucial five-a-day message is not sidetracked or obscured by misleading marketing and labelling, or by price hikes that turn a simple message for everyone into a lifestyle choice for the better off.

Sainsbury's Way to Five Mixed Beans in a chilli sauce – 59p for 420g

Sainsbury's Own Brand Red Kidney Beans in a chilli sauce – 49p for 420g.



Sainsbury's Way to Five Mixed Bean Salad – 65p for 410g

Sainsbury's Own Brand Mixed Pulses – 59p for 410g



Sainsbury's Way to Five Breakfast Apricots (in apple juice) – 89p for 300g

Sainsbury's Own Brand Apricot Halves (in grape juice) – 59p for 411g (equivalent to 43p for 300g)





# Alex asks... about pet food



That's amazing! Alex remembered his teacher telling him how far his own food had travelled, and how many planes and trucks and how much petrol it took to deliver all the ingredients of his lunch.

'I suppose it doesn't matter, because Turbo doesn't eat very much,' said Alex. 'She can't have much effect on the planet.'

'Look what else my information sheet says,' said Philipa. 'It gives a list of all the pets in Britain.'

**OUR PETS**  
6.1 million dogs  
7.5 million cats  
750,000 budgies  
1.1 million rabbits  
24.7 million fish  
730,000 guinea pigs  
260,000 canaries

Alex could tell from the way his cat Turbo was meowing that she was getting hungry. He went to the fridge and took out a can of Meow Munch cat food. While Turbo chomped, Alex studied the label. 'It says meat and cereals,' he said. 'With added vitamins for a healthy coat and shiny eyes. Sounds great! I wonder where the meat comes from. Turbo seems to like it. I wonder if it's mouse!'

'You could fit a lot of mice into this can,' said Alex. 'But how do they catch them?' He washed out the tin and took it to the pet shop. Turbo followed him inside, running straight over to gaze at the hamsters running round on their wheels. Her tail twitched dangerously.

'How can I tell what Turbo is eating?' asked Alex. 'The tin just says meat.'

'That's a very interesting question,' said the pet-shop owner, who was called Philipa Furball. 'This information sheet from my supplier says that most manufacturers use meat from beef, lamb, poultry, pork, fish, shellfish, rabbit or game, although some manufacturers might use meat from horses, ponies, goats and kangaroos.'

'Kangaroos?' said Alex. 'That must have come all the way from Australia. Those other meats might have come from all over the world too.'



'And 800,000 hamsters,' said Philipa. Turbo pricked up her ears and licked her lips.

Philipa took out her calculator and started to tap in some numbers. 'Let's see,' she said. 'If each cat eats about 200g of cat food a day...' Together, Philipa and Alex worked out that:

200g x 365 days =  
73kg, and 73kg x 7.5million cats =  
547,500,000kg

'Which is over half a million tonnes!' said Alex. 'What a lot of meat and cereals to carry across the world and pack into cans. And that's just for the cats - what about all those dogs and hamsters?'

Turbo looked like she would be happy to eat fresh local hamsters.

Philipa moved the hamster cage to a higher shelf before she said, 'If you and Turbo are interested in being more environmental, perhaps you should write to the people who make the pet food and ask them where they get their meat and cereals.'

'It would help if they said on the label where their meat comes from, just like on human food,' said Alex. 'I'll ask them to do that.'

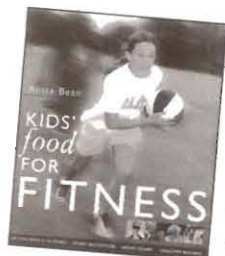
'We could also start a campaign called Furry Friends of the Planet,' said Alex. 'Turbo, you could invite all your pals who hang out on the garden fence.' Turbo and Alex set off home, full of ideas for saving the planet.



■ Cartoons by Ben Nash.  
This cartoon strip may be  
photocopied and distributed for  
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# marketplace



**Kids' Food for Fitness** You don't have to be the parent of an aspiring athlete to benefit from Anita Bean's excellent book. It's full of great everyday advice, including: The latest nutritional guidelines for active children aged 5-16; Clear practical advice on nutrition and exercise; Tips on eating and drinking for sporty kids; Smart advice for overweight children; Healthy menu plans, tasty recipes and snack ideas. Special offer - £12.99 (p&p is free).

## 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 - now in paperback

Eric Schlosser's bestseller lifts the lid on the fast food industry. He explains how fake smells and tastes are created, talks to workers at abattoirs and explains how the fast food industry is transforming not only our diet but our landscape, economy, work-force and culture. Essential reading. £7.99 inc p&p.



## Biotech - The next generation

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.



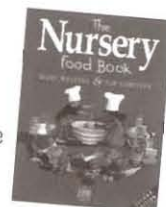
## The NEW Shopper's Guide to Organic Food

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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# books

## Food Politics: How the food industry influences nutrition and health

Marion Nestle 2002, ISBN 0-520-22465-5, £19.95. University of California Press, Ltd. London, England.

When Marion Nestle's parents sailed into New York as immigrants, the first sign they saw in the harbour was for the food company, Nestlé. They took it as their new name. It's almost too

ironic for words that decades later their daughter has taken Nestlé and the rest of the food industry to task over their unethical practices.

The book gives a detailed insight into the powerful influence the industry exerts over American food policy. It looks at how industry has undermined dietary advice through lobbying, sponsoring education and research, and co-opting nutritionists, to get them on-side.

Professor Nestle's argument is that the massive oversupply of food in the US compels the food industry to promote an 'eat more' message to drive its need for profit. As well as lobbying government behind the scenes it uses aggressive marketing techniques and pushes bigger portions. It targets young consumers with the foods that sell the easiest, those high in fat, salt and/or sugar. It's no coincidence that these foods provide the biggest profit margin; there isn't much added-value in fruit and vegetables, unless you process them beyond recognition.

*'The US food supply... provides a daily average of 3,800 calories per capita. This level is nearly twice the amount needed to meet the energy requirements of most women, one third more than that*

*needed by men and much higher than that needed by babies, young children and the elderly.'*

With the alarming rise in obesity, heart disease and diabetes, health advisers and nutritionists try to promote the 'eat less' message. The US spends \$2 million dollars a year promoting fruit and vegetables, compared to the \$10 billion spent by the food industry annually in advertising. It is easy to see how the call for healthier eating gets drowned out.

The 'Exploiting Kids, Corrupting Schools' section of the book looks at how the free market has done just that. One PepsiCo official quoted in the book says that 'marketing to the 8 to 12 year old set is a priority'. Schools can obtain contracts for soft drinks, called 'pouring rights', through consultants, one of which is quoted in the book: *'If you have no advertising in schools at all, it doesn't give our young people an accurate picture of our society.'*

*Food Politics* has been favourably reviewed both here and in the States. But not everyone is pleased with its contents: the Sugar Association of America has threatened a law suit against the author; the Hudson Institute's Center for Global Food, which represents big business interests has labelled Marion Nestle a 'food Taliban'; and the Center for Consumer Choice, another representative of industry, whose website looks uncannily like an independent organisation has also tried to discredit her.

Whilst food politics in the UK and Europe are similar to that of the US, they are not identical. We badly need a Marion Nestle to document our own food scandal.

■ Marion Nestle tells us that her original manuscript was too long and her book was split into two. The second volume, *Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology and Bioterrorism*, is due to be published in Spring 2003.

■ For more comments, reviews and copies of letters threatening legal action against Marion Nestle, visit the book's own website at [www.foodpolitics.com](http://www.foodpolitics.com).

## Kids' Food for Fitness

Anita Bean, 2002, ISBN 0-7136-6095-3, £12.99. Published by A & C Black, [www.acblack.com](http://www.acblack.com).

When Anita Bean joined the Food Commission's Parents Jury, we were delighted to welcome not only a parent, but a sports nutritionist who takes a keen interest in helping children to eat well.

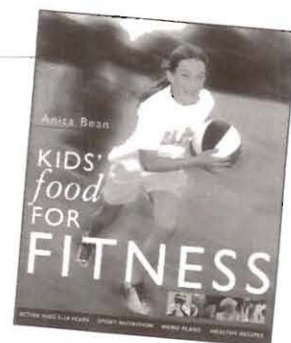
In her new book Anita has set out, clearly and engagingly, the problems of children's nutrition, and possible solutions to help parents improve their children's diets.

Alongside advice on preparing tasty and nutritious meals, and balancing children's intakes of fruit, vegetables, fat and sugar, Anita Bean also deals with some of the lifestyle factors that affect children's fitness. And, we are very pleased to see, she discusses many aspects of children's food advertising and promotion that have concerned the Food Commission for many years. She does not shy away from dealing with some of the most challenging aspects of parenthood, such as how to drag children away from the television.

Each chapter explains the basic science behind the advice in an accessible style, demonstrating the importance of good nutrition for children's growth and health. Pull-out boxes help the reader to navigate around the book, with titles such as "12 lunchbox ideas" and "10 easy ways to reduce fat".

There is also advice for parents of aspiring athletes. What should children eat in the days before running a mini-marathon? How important is drinking fluid before and during exercise? Which drinks are suitable, and which should be avoided? The advice is always straightforward, practical and backed up by the experience of a professional, since Anita Bean was a sportsperson herself before becoming an author on nutrition.

The book includes menu plans and recipes, ideas for vegetarians and non-vegetarians, and advice for parents of children with allergies or food intolerances. It is



a thorough and sensible guide for parents wanting to do the best for their children's health.

■ Order a copy now! See page 16 opposite or call us on 020 7837 2250 to make a credit card purchase.

## Holding Their Ground

Alain Durand-Lasserve and Lauren Royston (eds) 2002, ISBN 1-85383-891-8, £17.95. Earthscan, [www.earthscan.co.uk](http://www.earthscan.co.uk).

This is a solid and wide-ranging review of the need for land security among the urban poor in the world – now the majority of the poor in most developing countries.

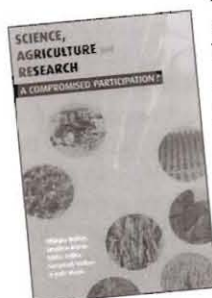


## Science, Agriculture and Research

W Buhler *et al* (eds) 2002, ISBN 1-85383-691-5, £17.95. Earthscan, [www.earthscan.co.uk](http://www.earthscan.co.uk).

Scientists rarely speak clearly about the commercial influences on their work, but this book makes a good job of doing just that. The authors say *'The present situation is one where industrialised agriculture and corporate power hold sway... If there were to be a shift in emphasis resulting in alternative forms of agricultural production then research would drive and be driven by this.'*

The pros and cons of the political economy of science are discussed in refreshingly radical language.





# Do adverts make kids fat?

**‘W**atching ads does not make you fat’ claims a spokeswoman for the Advertising Association, the defenders of the UK’s food marketers.

‘A ban on advertising therefore makes not a jot of difference to your child’s weight problem,’ she helpfully adds, pouring scorn on the government’s long-promised (and now abandoned – see box below) attempt to control food advertising to children.

That’s the food industry off the hook, then. Nothing to do with them if Britain’s children are overweight, with record levels of obesity and rising numbers of children suffering type 2 diabetes, a disease once found only among older adults.

The same could be said about tobacco. Watching adverts does not cause lung cancer – of course – so a ban on advertising will make not a jot of difference to disease rates, will it? In fact the links between the tobacco companies’ arguments and the food industry’s arguments go deeper than just a surface resemblance, with remarkable parallels in the strategies, methods and the key players involved (see box, next page).

But food differs from tobacco in one key respect: we all need it. We must eat to survive and we can only choose what we eat from what is available. Inevitably our choices will be open to persuasion.

To deal with the complexity of the multiple influences on our food choices, we need a better language. The simple ‘scientific’ method for identifying cause and effect – adverts do/do not cause weight gain – is not adequate for dealing with the subtlety of the environmental and social influences under which dietary decisions are made. It is virtually impossible for controlled experiments to isolate specific causes, to find specific currents in a rushing river. The science of randomised control experiments is simply not up to it.

Interventions have suffered the same problem. Attempts to change family behaviour have generally had only limited effects. School food policies have shown that change is possible, but that continual action is needed to maintain the change. The two together, backed up by a team of teachers, psychologists, doctors and social workers have had more impact, although the longer term changes still tend to be small.

All this points to the problem of trying to change locally and in a limited fashion what is a widespread, pervasive problem deeply ingrained in our culture. The problem lies not only in advertising but in the full range of

**We need a language to describe how society shapes our dietary behaviour. Tim Lobstein makes some suggestions.**

marketing methods used by producers of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods. Label design, free gifts, toys, TV cartoon tie-ins and sports star endorsements are obvious examples. Companies also use food additives – colours, flavours, emulsifiers and texturisers – to enhance the attractiveness of processed foods. Small corner shops attract children’s pocket money, but the food they sell typically encourages poor diets: sweets and chocolates, ice creams, snack foods and soft drinks (to say nothing of tobacco and advert-stuffed newspapers). Portion sizing and pricing also encourage extra consumption.

Meanwhile, getting exercise is also made as hard as possible. The streets are dominated by cars, with poor policing and poor lighting and few bicycle routes, along with a decline in school games periods and a loss of school playing fields.

To expect children to be able to lose weight against these cultural influences is like asking them to swim up a waterfall.

## Toxic or ‘Obesogenic’ environments

In order to get a grip on these factors we need a vocabulary that takes this complexity into account. Professor Marion Nestle has done much to raise general awareness of how the industry encourages over-consumption (see book reviews, page 17). Professor Boyd Swinburn, in Sydney, has developed a framework for categorising some of the more pronounced influences, and has suggested

the word ‘obesogenic’ to describe the social and physical environment which encourages weight gain.

So, although advertising may not be a direct cause of obesity, advertising is certainly a part of the obesogenic environment. Food adverts serve to increase the social acceptability and attractiveness of consuming obesity-encouraging foods, just as cigarette advertising increased the social acceptability and attractiveness of smoking.

## Transmission of chronic disease

When speaking of infectious disease we say how a disease is transmitted from community to community. When speaking of chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease or diabetes, we might also say that these diseases are transmitted, through social and environmental policies and commercial and cultural practices from one generation to the next, from one country to another, from a food producer to a consumer. We should openly discuss the ‘transmission’ of chronic diseases

## Communicable NCDs

Chronic diseases are often referred to as non-communicable diseases: indeed the World Health Organization has a dedicated section devoted to ‘NCDs’ such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity. But to say that such diseases are not *communicated* is to deny the process of transmission. Obesity and heart disease are ‘communicated’, not directly through a bacterium, but through the physical and cultural norms of society.

## Food chain contamination

We can go further, and speak of infectious agents, the vectors through which disease is transmitted. With obesity or heart disease, the infectious agents are the fats and sugars. The vectors that carry these ingredients are, for example, snack foods and soft drinks, and which are spread widely through society, their consumption encouraged with multi-billion dollar marketing budgets.

## Hazard analyses

By adopting words from the language of food safety we can more readily adopt a precautionary approach, rather than wait for science to prove direct causality. Food safety depends on analysing the food chain and

### FSA abandons move to control children’s ads

In an extraordinary admission by the UK Food Standards Agency, a long-awaited draft of proposals for a Code of Practice on children’s food advertising on television has been abandoned, due, the Food Commission has been told, ‘to a lack of industry support’.



identifying the points where infection can enter and contaminate the food supply. This is the core of HACCP – the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point analysis – which underlies food safety control. The HACCP process does not wait for an outbreak of food poisoning, but prevents such poisoning by identifying potential sources of contamination before they can infect the food supply, and then acts to remove them, using the law when necessary.

We might apply a similar process to the identification of critical points in the food chain where obesity is likely to result. The use of additives to promote snack foods and soft drinks is one example. The promotion on TV of low-nutrient high-energy foods is another, and so are the public subsidies paid to encourage sugar production and butter consumption under the Common Agricultural Programme. All these can be described as points where 'obesogenic contamination' might affect the food chain.

## Rights to health

We can also talk in terms of children's rights, or even human rights, including the right to an environment free of undue pressures to consume inappropriate diets, and the right to have access to safe streets and leisure facilities.

'Health rights' is a term used by medical services to mean the right to treatment when we are sick, the right to have access to hospitals, drugs, nursing care or medical technology. But health rights apply to healthy people, too. Public health, like other areas of public activity, is starved of money, while public health delivery, through services such as clean air, open spaces, safe environments,

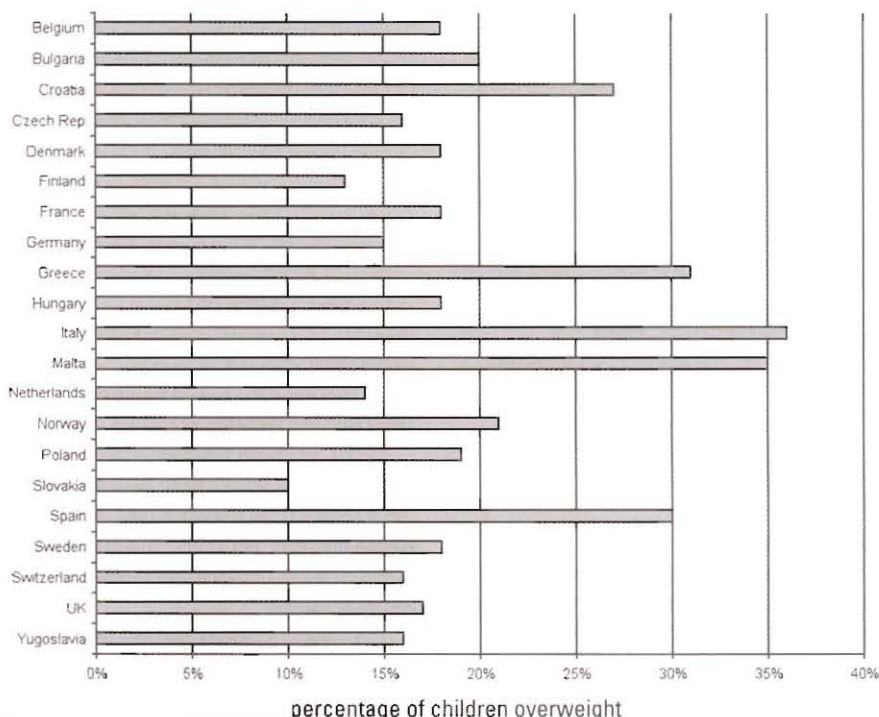
clean water, secure housing and health-enhancing food supplies, is constantly undermined by commercial interests. Health messages themselves are undermined by commercial messages on food labels, in classroom materials and in TV adverts.

The right to public health services needs defending through political action, and this

can be well expressed through a defence of the rights of the child. The image of an innocent child is an excellent metaphor for showing how elements in society act to undermine health. But a child is also a reality, and we are all responsible for our children. How we influence them is up to us.

## Europe: Up to one third of children are now overweight.

Proportion of children aged around 10 with body mass index above the equivalent of adult BMI 25.  
Source: IOTF 2002 ([www.ietf.org](http://www.ietf.org))



## Food and tobacco interests join to undermine health

Internal documents released by tobacco companies under litigation in the USA have shown close links to food company bodies and collaboration over attacks on bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) to challenge public health measures.

A WHO document, *Tobacco Company Strategies to Undermine Tobacco Control Activities at the WHO*, (WHO 2000) shows how the companies exerted undue influence to block the WHO's Tobacco Control Initiative.

Evidence was also found that similar mischief was practised against Codex (the joint FAO-WHO international food standards-setting body) in respect of certain aspects of Codex food policy, and undermining UN food and nutrition policies.

Three of the four largest tobacco companies (Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds, Japan Tobacco) have owned or were owned by substantial international food businesses.

Furthermore, food and tobacco producers share an interest in the exploitation of pesticides, biotechnology, chemical flavourings, product labelling and advertising.

The tobacco documents – some 40 million pages – reveal a wealth of information on the methods of the companies and their lawyers and public-relations spokespeople to hide evidence, subvert truth, manipulate the media and use ostensibly independent consultants and scientists to further their case.

Common cause is made between the two sectors in several areas. They both show a remarkable interest in promoting 'sound science', a movement which has been criticised for having less to do with improving the quality of scientific discourse and more to do with public-relations campaigns to 'manipulate the standards of scientific proof to serve corporate interests'.

Both sectors appeal to libertarian arguments in which the freedom of the

individual to indulge themselves is pitted against 'food police ideologues' who undermine democracy and the American way of life. Both sectors benefit from private intelligence organisations set up to monitor the work of activists in public health.

And both sectors have set up independent-sounding bodies to promote their interests. In the food sector the most famous is ILSI, the International Life Sciences Institute, sponsored by Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, Heinz, Kellogg's, Nestlé, Kraft and Procter & Gamble, but with additional support from many other corporations including ones owned by tobacco companies. ILSI has enjoyed 'special consultative status' with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and claims to be 'affiliated' with the WHO, although we understand that these claims are now being reviewed.



# Does the Atkins diet work?

Dear Food Magazine

I have been reading Dr Atkins' books that say that I can lose weight by cutting out carbohydrates from my diet.

This flies against the recommendations for healthy eating, which says we should get more than half our food energy from carbohydrates. What do you think?

Marie King, Chesterfield

Dear Mrs King,

We can't give you a simple answer to this, as the jury does still appear to be out on whether Atkins-style low-carbohydrate diets are successful and healthy.

At a recent international conference on obesity, held in Brazil in August, the prevailing view was that a very low-carbohydrate diet, such as the one recommended by Atkins, may help some people, at least, to shed the kilograms. This could be because of the particular physiology that kicks in when carbohydrates are not available to be metabolised, or it could be because any restricted food diet can help lose weight.

An interesting example of the latter is an experiment by Summerbell *et al* (1) who found that people successfully lost weight if told they must only consume milk and nothing else. Dieters were not so successful if allowed to consume a second, self-selected food with the milk. The researchers believed that dieters will stick to a simple, new diet more easily than if they are permitted to make choices which tempt them back to their normal behaviour.

In research funded by the Atkins Centre, a careful analysis was made of 51 overweight adult volunteers following the Atkins diet for 6 months (Westman *et al*, 2). Ten dropped out of the study, but the remaining subjects successfully lost weight.

The researchers found that although most subjects showed improvements in their blood cholesterol measures, some did not. Previous low-carbohydrate diet trials have found variable effects on blood cholesterol. At the conference in Brazil, the view was taken that such diets may be used to reduce weight, but should not be used for long-term weight maintenance, especially if blood cholesterol levels are not improved. The Atkins diet encourages the consumption of foods rich in saturated fat (meat, eggs, cheese etc) which can lead to a rise in LDL (bad) cholesterol. The diet also restricts the amount of fruit and vegetables allowed. In both respects the diet might increase the risk of heart disease, reversing the benefits of weight loss.

Lastly, although not discussed in the Westman *et al* report, their figures show that the average daily energy intake during the Atkins diet was 1447 kcal. This is very low – about 65% of the estimated requirements for average adults.

The figures suggest that the loss of weight is not due to some special physiological effect of an Atkins diet, but simply the lower energy intake. Some researchers have suggested that the protein content encourages dieters to feel full and so consume less food overall.

In summary, it appears that the Atkins regime does make energy-restricted diets easier to follow. This has been found in a separate trial of the Atkins diet (Foster *et al*, 3), in which 30% of subjects dropped out of a

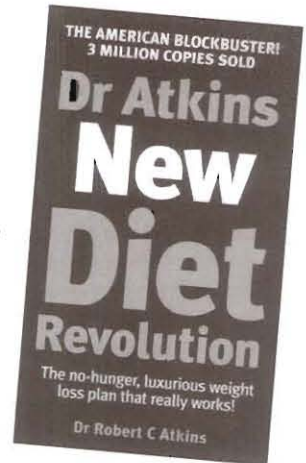
conventional weight-loss regime (low in calories and fat, high in carbohydrates) while only 10% dropped out of an Atkins regime.

However, care should be taken to allow adequate fruit and vegetables in the diet, and perhaps to reintroduce whole-grain carbohydrate foods when a lower weight has been reached.

Nearly all nutritionists are agreed that healthy people do not need the more refined carbohydrates – sugars and refined starches. Cutting those from the diet will do little harm to anyone.

So, Mrs K, if you are going to try this diet, we recommend a modified version. Allow yourself plenty of salad and other vegetables except root vegetables, plenty of fruit except bananas, and some whole-grain foods. Go for fish and lean meats rather than fatty meats and dairy foods. And tell us how you get on.

1. Summerbell *et al*, *British Medical Journal*, 317, 1487-1489, 1998.
2. Westman *et al*, *American Journal of Medicine*, 113, 30-36, 2002.
3. Foster *et al*, *Obesity Research*, 9, 85S, 2001.

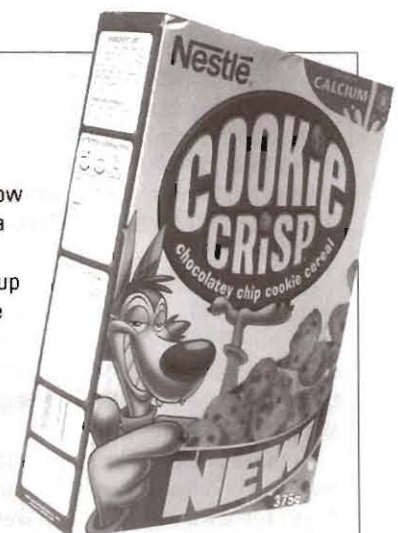


## Cereal: the next sugary instalment

In the previous issue of the Food Magazine, we showed how a single portion of some luxury breakfast cereals contain a similar amount of fat and sugar to five chocolate-chip cookies or a slice of chocolate cake. With sugar levels of up to 30%, fat levels up to 20% (saturates up to 12%) and fibre falling below 5%, these products do not deserve the healthy image usually associated with cereals.

Just one week after publication of this information, Nestlé launched this new cereal that finally acknowledges that the boundary between cereals and biscuits has been crossed with this 'chocolatey chip cookie cereal' that is 40% sugar.

Biscuits for breakfast, anyone?





## What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals



### Whole-grain cereals prevent diabetes

The risk of developing type 2 diabetes, with its attendant problems of kidney failure and blindness, is reduced by nearly a half by eating a diet rich in whole-grain cereal foods. A follow-up study of 42,000 men in America found the effect was maintained regardless of bodyweight (a strong predictor of the risk of diabetes). Refined starches were not linked to the risk of diabetes.

■ Fung et al, *Am J Clinical Nutrition*, 76, 535-540, 2002.

### Vitamin pills fail to prolong life

A study of 20,000 UK adults aged 40-80 who received either a range of antioxidant vitamins or a placebo pill over a five-year period failed to show any improvement in terms of overall death rates, or deaths from specific diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.

■ Heart Protection Study Group, *The Lancet*, 360, 23-33, 2002.

### Vitamin pills don't prevent coughs

Daily multivitamin pills have no effect on the frequency or severity of acute respiratory tract infections, according to a study of 600 people aged over 60 in the Netherlands.

■ Graat et al, *Journal of the AMA*, 288, 715-721, 2002.

### Flavonoids reduce chronic diseases

A study of 10,000 Finnish adults found that their food intake of flavonoids – a range of plant-based antioxidants – was linked to a lower risk of several chronic diseases. Those eating the highest levels of flavonoids were 20% less likely to die of heart disease during a 28-year follow-up period. Rates of stroke were also about 20% lower, and men had over 50% lower lung cancer rates. Asthma was 25-30% lower and diabetes was 15-20% lower. Rich sources were vegetables, fruit, berries and tea.

■ Knekt et al, *Am J Clinical Nutrition*, 76, 560-568, 2002.

### Ginkgo has no effect on memory

A six-week double-blind, placebo-controlled study of the effects of ginkgo supplements failed to find any enhancement of memory, attention, learning, concentration, naming or verbal fluency in a group of over 200 older men and women (over 60 years old) who were in good mental health at the start of the trial. Those taking ginkgo did not report feelings of improved mental functioning, and the observations of spouses, relatives and friends revealed no significant effect.

■ Solomon et al, *Journal of the AMA*, 288, 835-840, 2002.

### CLA promises not upheld

Laboratory tests on cell cultures and on animals suggest that conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) – present in milk products and ruminant meat products – can protect against the development of breast cancer. But a study of 62,000 post-menopausal women in the Netherlands, of whom nearly 1000 developed breast cancer in a six-year period, found that there was no evidence that consumption of CLA was linked to a lower risk of the disease. If anything there was a slightly raised risk in those consuming the most CLA.

■ Voorrips et al, *Am J Clinical Nutrition*, 76, 873-882, 2002.

### Organic food tastes better?

Two years ago the Advertising Standards Authority ruled that an advert by Tesco claiming that organic food tasted better could not be supported by scientific evidence. Although the sense of taste differs markedly from person to person, the standard method for measuring taste preferences is to use a 'blind' tasting panel. A study by Leatherhead Research Association has now been published showing that their taste panel rated organic orange juice consistently superior to several non-organic brands. However, when it came to organic milk the Leatherhead panel could not distinguish it from conventional milk.

■ Fillion and Arazi, *Nutrition and Food Sciences*, 32, 153-157, 2002.

### Obesity, colon cancer and menopause

Several large studies of obesity and colorectal cancer have failed to find a clear link between the two, but this may have been because they failed to identify the effects of the menopause. A study of 89,000 Canadian women aged 40-60 years which divided those before and after the menopause, found a strong link between bodyweight and raised risk of colorectal cancer among pre-menopausal women, but no link in postmenopausal women.

■ Terry et al, *Gut*, 51, 191-194, 2002.

### Dietary antioxidants help prevent Alzheimer's

A Dutch study of over 5000 older people followed over 10 years has found that those consuming higher levels of beta carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E and flavonoids had a lower-than-average risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. The link held true after adjusting for age, sex, weight, initial mental state, alcohol intake, educational status, smoking habits, or use of antioxidant food supplements. The effect was most pronounced for smokers: smoking itself is a risk factor for Alzheimer's and antioxidant-rich diets appear to be doubly beneficial for this group.

■ Engelhart et al, *Journal of the AMA*, 287, 3223-3229, 2002.

### Obesity and blood pressure: the white coat effect

Being overweight and elderly is likely to mean a raised risk of high blood pressure. However, when measuring blood pressure some people suffer a 'white coat' effect – with their blood pressure rising only while they are being tested, presumably caused by nervousness in the presence of health professionals. An analysis of the blood pressure during testing and during normal daily life using ambulatory monitoring showed that in people aged 70 those with sustained high blood pressure tended to be overweight, while those with high blood pressure in response to testing were leaner and ate a healthier diet.

■ Bjorklund et al, *Circulation*, 106, 63-68, 2002.





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](mailto:letters@foodcomm.org.uk)

# feedback

letters from our readers

## Kids ads are sinister!

I want to register my utter disgust at the recent campaign for Frosted Shreddies cereal, with the tagline 'too tasty for geeks'.

The adverts, targeted clearly at boys, feature one 'cool' sibling and one 'geeky' one (decked out in glasses and red hair, of course, clutching a maths textbook), who tries a spoonful of the 'delicious' cereal and is blown into the stratosphere.

The implication is not only that it is uncool to be interested in science, but that if you consume this sugary snack it confirms that you are not such an uncool person.

It seems very sad that in these days, especially among boys, results in science and maths are so poor and yet adverts like this can persist in the myth that science is only for the uncool – and in the meantime, continue to promote high-sugar foods.

Meanwhile, the McDonald's adverts aimed at very young children, featuring Ronald McDonald singing songs to the theme of 'We do, Ron, Ron' is very sinister. Without mentioning hamburgers or food specifically, they seek to associate the McDonald's brand with positive emotions like loving your mother and having fun, and with 'public safety' messages about being safe at home. How they got away with such a blatant piece of psychological manipulation is a mystery and a horror to me.

Michael Cipper, parent, received by email

## Fighting the fruity fibs

I feel very strongly about child nutrition. Just reading about your Parents Jury Children's Food Awards in the newspaper was useful. I showed the article to my three children on the basis of 'if it's in the paper, it must be true,' in response to repeated requests to buy them 'Real Fruit Winders' as consumed by ALL their friends. After reading the packaging, I resisted their nagging: "But, Mummy, it's only a fruit snack." Your awards were very useful. Thank you.

**Mrs S Chen Cooper**  
Mother of three, London  
Member of the Parents Jury

## Brush up on your tooth advice

I am a new reader to your magazine and would like to say how impressed I am with it. However I disagree with your reply to Sareema Kushlay regarding rinsing after brushing (FM58).

There is clear evidence that rinsing with large amounts of water after brushing reduces the beneficial effects of the fluoride in toothpaste. People who do this have higher levels of decay than those who simply spit out after brushing.

There is also evidence to show that brushing without fluoride toothpaste has no beneficial effect in controlling decay. It is therefore incorrect to advise good brushing as a method of decay control. Fluoride is the ingredient that does the trick.

In most studies of health promotion programmes with varying groups of people, any attempts to reduce sugar consumption have failed to achieve a reduction in dental decay. Many people just find it too difficult to make the necessary changes to their dietary habits. In contrast, programmes which seek to encourage more frequent use of fluoride toothpaste (particularly family toothpaste) are successful at reducing decay levels.

**Gill Davies**  
Senior Dental Officer for Oral Health  
Promotion, Manchester

## 'Mum's checklist' leaves out the sugar

I have in my hand a Tweenies magazine for which the subtitle is 'Let's be healthy'. There are puzzles and rhymes about exercise, eating fruit, cleaning your teeth. How wonderful to be encouraging toddlers to drink milk and eat fruit!

But, yes you've guessed it. The back page sports a full-page ad for Tweenies cereal letters, a delicious, 'choc and honey flavoured cereal'. I visited the manufacturer's website ([www.thebigcerealco.com](http://www.thebigcerealco.com)) to seek out the nutritional content. All I got was a patronising 'Mum's checklist' telling me that it's low in fat, has natural flavours and added calcium, and giving links to other delightful products such as 'Funky Girl shaped cereal – strawberry and vanilla flavoured hearts and flowers'. The website fails to mention that Tweenies cereal is 27% sugar and Funky Girl cereal is 34% sugar!

What do BBC worldwide think they're up to? With the BBC assurance, people will spoon this rubbish into their children thinking it's a 'good start to the day'.

**Rachel Dyke**, Mother of one, London  
Member of the Parents Jury

## You're not alone

I would like to join the Parents Jury. How wonderful that people care enough to do something like this – I feel like I'm fighting a losing battle at the moment!

**Mrs A Balmer**, Penrith



## BADvertisement

### Not so fresh or juicy

Sold in the chiller cabinet next to the freshly squeezed and pure fruit juices, this 'Simply Orange Juice' claims to be 100% juice.

The ingredients list, however, shows two preservatives, including sodium benzoate (see page 3). By definition, the presence of added ingredients means that this product can't be 100% juice. To cap it all, Asri Fruit Juices Ltd. says that the preservative in this 'Long Life' product is added 'to keep the freshness'. With a sell-by date of at least six months from the purchase date, and a transparent bottle that allows light in that could deteriorate the vitamin C, it's hard to see how Asri Fruit Juices can back up either the freshness claim, or their claim that 'a 200ml serving provides 67% of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C'. Is that at the time of squeezing? Or when the product has sat on a shop shelf for six months?

■ **Stop-press:** Following a Food Commission complaint to Trading Standards Officers, Asri Fruit Juices have now agreed to change the labelling of this preserved juice drink.



## Is slurry a permissible pig food?

I was recently travelling in South America where I came across some agricultural practices that I would like further information about, in relation to importing foodstuffs from abroad in the UK and the high animal welfare/safety standards that UK farmers are subject to.

The system involves a pig farm that was cleaning out the undigested particles of food from raw pig slurry (ie up to 20% of foodstuffs fed to pigs are not digested and are therefore excreted) and re-feeding it to cattle in order to fatten and slaughter.

I am sure that this practice does not exist in the UK, but I am also sure that given the highly competitive nature of global agriculture, farmers are not going pass this one over where costs can be reduced by 20% and therefore become more competitive.

Is it against EU/WTD rules and regulations to import this type of food stuff in to the UK and in the case of it being yes (i.e. it is illegal) what checks are made to ensure that it is enforced?

Michael Barker, received by email

## Let's cook up some life skills!

I read with avid interest a newspaper article regarding a sponsorship linkup between UNICEF and McDonald's, and your criticisms of this.

I work for a unique registered charity in West London called the Kids' Cookery School (KCS). We are more than aware of the fact that children consume too much salt and fat in their diets, and work to steer them away from convenience foods.

We target children most in need and are now operating into our second year, having taught over 3,500 children. Of these over 50% of our places are awarded on an assisted basis, with over 25% of our children having special needs. Over 27% of our students represent ethnic minorities, and we work with children from as young as three years old.

Cookery is a vital life skill. All children should have the equal opportunity to learn hands-on in cookery workshops, to help them understand the importance of a well-balanced and healthy diet.

Nicola Morgan, Kids' Cookery School,  
West London. Tel: 020 8992 8882;  
[www.thekidscookeryschool.co.uk](http://www.thekidscookeryschool.co.uk)

## Sainsbury's bites back

I was surprised to read your BackBite 'Fruit: Fine for some' [FM58] and the suggestions that there was some mystery about me. I am a public-health nutritionist with over 20 years experience, including the last seven years as company nutritionist for Sainsbury's. The 'Five a Day' technical group was convened by the Department of Health, to develop the technical basis of their 5-a-day programme. It consists of a group of individuals from different sectors including the British Dietetic Association, the British Nutrition Foundation, plus many retailers and manufacturers. I was pleased when the Department of Health invited me to be a member of the group as Sainsbury's has a long history of supporting healthy eating and of promoting the 5-a-day message.

Sainsbury's started work on the 'Way to Five' range in May 2001, several months before the Department of Health technical group was convened. Sainsbury's has not 'followed Heinz', nor 'jumped on the bandwagon'. The 'Way to Five' range was in response to customer demand for easier and more exciting ways to eat fruit and vegetables. There are currently around 80 'Way to Five' products in the range.

Sainsbury's 'Way to Five' products have been developed to contain increased amounts of fruit and vegetables – several of them contain one portion (a portion of fruit and vegetables being equivalent to 80g raw, edible fruit or veg) but the majority of products in the range contain two or more portions in each serving. 'Way to Five' is a unique and innovative range that goes across all product categories – not just canned, so there is a wide choice of products including ready-prepared salads, sauces, juices, to help make healthy eating easier and enjoyable for our customers.

Sainsbury's certainly do not claim that sponge pudding (or indeed any of our products) helps to protect against heart disease. The only mystery that remains is why the Food Commission did not contact me to check their facts before writing the article and why they have chosen to take such a negative stance on the Department of Health's cross-functional approach to developing and promoting a common understanding of the 5-a-day message.

Gill Fine, Company Nutritionist,  
Sainsbury's

Editor: *The Food Commission remains concerned that processed food products may not be the best means of achieving healthy diets – see our feature on 'five a day' on pages 11 – 14.*

## Help kids become more savvy

I am writing in reply to Mrs S Bartlett's letter (FM58, July/Sept 2002). I am also a teacher of food technology, I graduated with a first-class honours degree in the subject.

Education is about preparation for life. In teaching about commercial food production, use of additives, GM food and high-risk foods we are giving the pupils the knowledge and understanding that they require to make sensible and informed choices about food. Surely if they do not understand what goes into a mass-produced chicken nugget, for example, they will continue to consume them in ignorance? My pupils cook once a week using fresh ingredients as well as food components. We evaluate ingredients and chemicals used in mass-produced foodstuffs as well as production and advertising methods. I run an after-school cooking club where pupils extend their practical skills with foods.

Mrs Bartlett's comment 'I feel like a walking advertiser for all food companies' is ludicrous. The onus is on the professionalism and dedication of the individual teacher to ensure that his or her teaching incorporates how food companies and manufacturers try to exploit consumer trends and technological development.

Joanne Spurgeon, Norfolk

### BADvertisement

## Spot the organic chicken!

The word 'organic' is often seen as a guarantee of food authenticity and quality ingredients. You might expect, then, for a

chicken and mushroom  
flavour

'Organic  
Snack Meal'  
to contain  
chicken

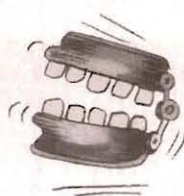
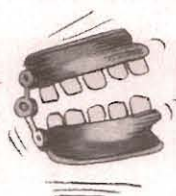
raised to high  
animal welfare

standards. However, this product is actually vegetarian, because there's no chicken in it at all! It's replaced by flavouring, maltodextrin, soya and yeast extract, in a product approved by the Organic Food Federation.

We think this product stretches the notion of organic authenticity a bit far!







## Advice comes with a sugar-coated smile

Who would want us to start feeding babies sugary foods, squash and sweets? Not the *Community Practitioner* and *Health Visitors Journal* who distributed this leaflet, surely?! The leaflet states that it's easy to protect your baby's teeth. The most important thing, apparently, is to brush them with fluoride toothpaste. The only advice on diet is that sweets, sweet foods, soft drinks, squash or juice should be restricted to feed times. Squash and sweets for babies? That doesn't sound like advice from a health visitor!

Readers may not be surprised to learn that the leaflet was sponsored by the industry's Sugar Bureau, with support from British Sugar, Irish Sugar and Tate & Lyle.

Incidentally, who do you think introduced themselves at the Organex organic food show with the words 'As a leading player in the organic industry,...'?

Yes, you've guessed. British Sugar plc.



Organex organic food show with the words 'As a leading player in the organic industry,...'?

## Agency capture?

The Competition Commission, known once as the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, appears to be developing a monopoly of its own.

In 2000, the Commission dared to offend supermarkets by giving them a gentle ticking off for their failure to 'fully expose their products to competitive pressure' and for collaborating uncompetitively to squeeze food suppliers.

Now the Commission has appointed David Roberts to be its new business adviser. Who is he? Why, director of strategic management at Sainsbury's.

If you think that this may muffle further criticism of supermarkets from the Commission then you should complain. Start with the Commission's responsible ministry, the Department of Trade and Industry. Indeed, start with the DTI's junior minister. His name? Lord Sainsbury, for six years the chairman of the supermarket chain.

Not that it is a closed shop for Sainsbury's. Tesco's Chief Executive, Sir Terry Leahy, knighted this year, is well in on the act. He sits on the government's Competitiveness Advisory Group, and on the DTI's Competitiveness Working Party on Making the Most of the Information Age.

Looks like a closed shop to us!

## Confectioners have a change of heart

In the snacking market, chocolate and sweets are losing the battle for market share. According to the research group, Leatherhead Food, health-conscious consumers are seeking out snacks made from cereal, meat, dairy and fruit, which can offer more than just a quick hit of fat and sugar.

How is the confectionery sector responding? Not by reducing the fat and sugar in their products, says Leatherhead, but by adding 'functional' ingredients to chocolate bars and sweets, such as added vitamins and minerals or 'heart healthy' polyphenols. No doubt they hope that adding a healthy-sounding spin to their products will persuade consumers to ignore all that fat, saturated fat and sugar.

## The taste of things to come

A round-up of the latest food products being promoted around the globe has identified nine brand leaders. Among the items a couple caught our eye:

**Duerr's Squeezers** assorted jam sticks – 'jam in handy sticks are ideal for every occasion' and **Snickers Spread** – a Snickers bar in a jar. Can the Mars Bar Spread be far behind?



As if these were not enough in our attempts to give the world our junk diets, we find that 'Global demand for additives is increasing in line with the trend towards more highly processed foods, which continues to grow in most parts of the world – particularly in emerging markets where the processed foods market is relatively immature and showing above-average growth.' For 'emerging markets' read countries that don't yet eat a junk-food diet.

■ From the Leatherhead Food Research Association's *Key Players in the Global Additives Industry*, 2002. Products from *Food Processing* August 2002.

## Public cash for formula milks

Breast feeding has been shown to confer a long-term preventative effect against obesity risk in later life. So begins a glossy promotion leaflet describing a new European Union Childhood Obesity Programme.

The leaflet goes on to describe a 3-5 year research programme costing over 2 million Euros, to be 80% funded by public funds. Will this be used to

promote breast feeding in areas where the rates are currently low? Will it be used to improve the facilities for breast feeding mothers – e.g. in the workplace or in public buildings?

Or will it be used to help manufacturers fight back against the natural advantages of mothers' milk and develop a low-obesity-causing formula feed?

Yes, you guessed correctly. The brochure admits that the expected use of the results of the research is primarily 'the potential for the development of new infant foods (formula and complementary foods)'.



## Mars not fattening?

A marvellous leaflet from Mars Ltd, telling us of the health benefits of chocolate. We particularly liked the part that says:

'Chocolate is a highly palatable food and in the context of obesity it is often seen in a bad light because of its fat and sugar content. However, there are no data indicating an increased preference for chocolate, or a higher intake of it, in obese compared with non-obese subjects.

There is also no apparent relationship between chocolate confectionery consumption and weight [...] Overall there is no support for the theory that chocolate consumption is a causative factor in obesity.'

