

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Low benefit levels threaten babies' health



"Sometimes I miss meals because I'm not hungry, but most of the time it's because I just don't have the money."

pregnant 17 year old, staying in B&B

Most pregnant teenagers are not eating a healthy diet during their pregnancy, with many reporting that they cannot afford to do so, according to a new survey published by the Food Commission and the Maternity Alliance.

For the survey, 46 pregnant teenagers were interviewed and their diets were analysed for nutritional content. Interviews with the young women revealed that pregnant teenagers, particularly those living away from their parents, face huge obstacles to eating an adequate diet, including a lack of cash to spend on healthy food.

Pregnant teenagers are penalised under the state welfare benefits system as they receive much lower payments than older pregnant women. Two thirds of the teenagers taking part in the survey said that they found it a struggle to get by. The majority of teenagers living away from home said that they had less than £20.25 to spend on food each week – the bare minimum required for a 'modest but adequate' diet. Many reported that when money was tight, they filled up with cheap fatty or sugary calories such as chips, biscuits and sweet breakfast cereals.

Babies born to teenagers tend to have lower birthweights, with increased risk of infant mortality and an increased risk of health problems in childhood and later life. The Food Commission and the Maternity Alliance are calling on

the government to ensure that pregnant teenagers receive better support. Women of all ages should have the right to eat healthily during pregnancy, for the good of their health and for the good of their unborn babies.

See more details of the survey on pages 4 to 5.

Is this enough to feed a mother and her growing baby?

| Meal | Food |
|-----------|---|
| Breakfast | Crunchy nut cornflakes with whole milk Milky tea with two sugars Glass of whole milk |
| Lunch | Packet of crisps 4 gingernut biscuits 2 chocolate digestives Milky tea with two sugars |
| Supper | 2 sausages (fried), chips, peas and gravy Ice-cream |
| Snack | Smoky bacon flavour crisps Milky tea with two sugars |

Typical daily diet of reported by a pregnant teenager containing eleven portions of fatty, salty and/or sugary foods, no fruit, and only one portion of vegetables.

Get the facts with the Food Magazine

The *Food Magazine* is published quarterly by The Food Commission, a national non-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food. We rely entirely on our supporters, allowing us to be completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising. We aim to provide independently researched information on the food we eat to ensure good quality food for all.

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

Director: Tim Lobstein
Campaigns & Research Officers:
Kath Dalmeny, Annie Seeley
Office & Subscriptions Manager:
Ian Tokelove
Food Irradiation Campaign Network
Co-ordinator: Merav Shub
Administrative Officer: Graham Hood
Information Officer: Mary Whiting
Assistant Research Officers:
Elizabeth Hanna, Frances Ward,
Rachel Ebner

Cartoons: Ben Nash

Trustees and Advisors:
Joanna Blythman, Dr Eric Brunner
Tracey Clunies-Ross, Prof Michael
Crawford, Derek Cooper, Sue Dibb, Martine
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Charlotte Mitchell, Dr Mike Nelson, Dr Mike
Rayner, Prof Aubrey Sheiham, Colin Tudge,
Hugh Warwick, Simon Wright

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The Food Commission (UK) Ltd
94 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF
Telephone: 020 7837 2250
Fax: 020 7837 1141
email: enquiries@foodcomm.org.uk
websites: www.foodcomm.org.uk
www.parentsjury.org.uk

Moving targets

While we at the *Food Magazine* celebrate 15 years of publication – our first *Food Magazine* came out in spring 1988 – the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has also celebrated a birthday.

The FSA is 3 years old this April, and although it is still a comparable infant, it can still be held accountable for its work.

The FSA's annual budget of some £100m (excluding the Meat Hygiene Service) is spent roughly in the proportions 40% food safety, 28% BSE-related issues, 12% 'consumer confidence', information and food labelling, 10% nutrition and diet, and the remainder on its own housekeeping.

The miserly amount to be spent on nutrition is out of all proportion to the costs of poor nutrition, which amounts to billions every year. Adult obesity alone costs some £3bn annually (National Audit Office) and premature heart disease, diet-related cancers, diabetes and dental caries add tens of billions more to that figure.

Food safety costs are largely borne by industry, and rightly so as producers must be responsible for the safety of the food they produce. And food safety inspection is covered locally, apart from meat inspection which comes under the Meat Hygiene Service, which has its own £20m budget.

So the FSA consciously took the view that food safety was more important than nutrition. In 2001, the FSA declared that 'within five years' it would reduce food-borne disease by 20% and 'over the next four years' cut the incidence of salmonella contamination of retail chicken by 50%. The FSA issued no numerical targets for the improvement of nutrition.

Food-borne disease rates were falling before the FSA came into being – down from around 94,000 notifications in 1998 to 85,000 in 2001. The target may be easily met by 2006.

In the summer of 2001, a sample of retail chicken showed salmonella infection in fewer than 6% of samples. This was lower than the FSA expected from previous surveys (some of which had found salmonella in 30% or more of samples). Again, the FSA may be pushing at an open door.

What a pity the FSA avoided targets for nutrition. Obesity rates are shooting up. Heart disease deaths are falling, but heart disease events are falling less slowly, indicating that we are better at keeping patients alive rather than preventing the disease. Cancer rates are rising. Non-insulin-dependent diabetes – once found only in older adults – is now being found in young adults and teenagers.

Nutrition strategies, however, require co-operation between the FSA and the Department of Health, both of which have developed their own policy documents. The impression they give is of two competitive bodies working despite each other rather than with each other. Perhaps the FSA's reluctance to set targets stems from a fear that if the targets were met then the DoH would grab the credit.

A lack of coordinated strategy, linking food to diet and health, is a loss to us all. It is all too familiar from the days of MAFF and its friends in the industry.

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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!

At last! EC allows adverts for low-fat milk

European Union subsidies for the marketing of agricultural products have started to take nutritional concerns into account, in a Regulation passed by the European Commission in 2002.

For years the Food Commission and other health campaigners have criticised European subsidies for supporting the marketing of agricultural products with little regard for their health effects. Millions of euros of EC taxpayers' money supports the marketing of liquid milk, but until this new regulation, 'any programme designed to promote semi-skimmed milk or skimmed milk' was 'excluded from Community funding' – a typical case of ministers paying higher regard to economic interests than health.

Now, six million euros have been allocated in a three-year

programme to promote milk to children, adolescents, young women and mothers, without this 'only whole milk' restriction. This is good news for public health, since it could mean a reduction in dairy fat consumption.

Of course, the Common Agricultural Policy will still pay to ensure that the fat skimmed off the milk is put back into the food chain. It amounted to over 350,000 tonnes in 2001.

Despite an EU-wide drop in sales of butter (evidence that people are trying to eat more healthily), butter gets back into food through subsidised supplies to caterers working in schools, hospitals, social service care and accommodation for the homeless, adding an estimated 44g of saturated fat to people's diets daily – twice the maximum recommended amount for healthy living.

SCF in U-turn over safety of irradiated food

Europe's most prestigious food advisory committee – the Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) – has reversed its position over the safety of eating irradiated foods.

Back in July 2002 the SCF concluded that there was not enough evidence of hazard from eating irradiated food, and that such foods could therefore be considered safe. This statement was challenged in a remarkable open letter by EU-funded research scientists who had presented evidence of toxic compounds in irradiated fat-containing foods.

The SCF has now announced (March 2003) that it cannot endorse moves to allow the irradiation of all foods above the current maximum irradiation dose limit of 10kGy (kilogray – equivalent to about 100 million X-rays). Taking a precautionary approach, the SCF said that not enough research has been done to assess the safety of eating foods irradiated at doses above this level.

It appears that the SCF has learnt its lesson and is now acting

on a precautionary principle, rather than assuming safety until a hazard is proven.

In a separate move, the international food-standards setting body, Codex, agreed in March on an ill-advised compromise in finalising the international food irradiation standard.

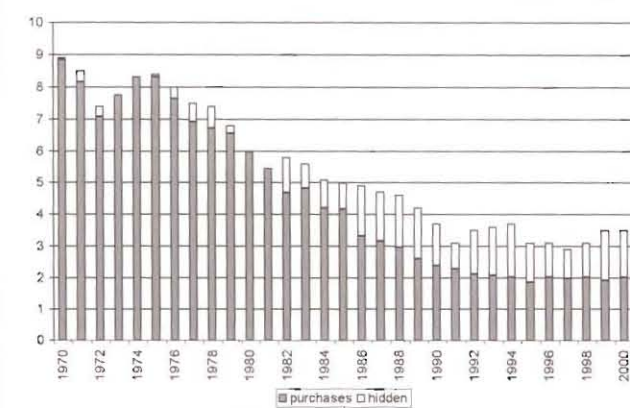
The Codex committee decided to maintain the maximum irradiation dose limit of 10kGy, but then added a sentence permitting any foods to be irradiated above this limit 'where necessary to achieve a legitimate technological purpose' – a vague and, in our view, unenforceable constraint.

We are now awaiting a date to be set for the European Council of Ministers to discuss whether they think that more foods should be permitted for irradiation in Europe. The European Parliament has voted to allow the irradiation of only herbs, spices and vegetable seasonings.

■ Contact Merav Shub, co-ordinator of the Food Irradiation Campaign on 020 7837 9229.

Cutting back on butter?

People are buying less butter but EC subsidies ensure that butter gets put into our food in other forms – cakes, pastries, confectionery and ice cream. Butter subsidies will remain for the time being.



Parents Jury scores on salt reduction

The Food Commission's Parents Jury has been credited with achieving a reduction in the salt content of the best-selling children's snack, Kraft Dairy Lea Lunchables. In the 2002 Children's Food Awards, the Parents Jury gave Lunchables the *Not in my Lunchbox!* award, sparking national newspaper headlines such as *Lunchbox from Hell*.

Eating one Lunchable would take a six-year-old child over their maximum recommended daily intake of salt in just one serving. Following this adverse press coverage, Dairy Lea has said that it is planning to cut the salt content by 25% this year.

■ For the results of this year's Parents Jury Children's Food Awards, see page 8.

Food Commission says 'no to fortified junk!'

In evidence to the European Commission, the Food Commission has warned of the dangers of allowing junk food to carry added nutrients.

The EC has launched a consultation and is currently re-examining European rules on fortification – the addition of vitamins and minerals to food. Countries that do not allow fortification, such as Denmark, are under pressure to accept the kinds of products prevalent in the UK, especially fortified children's foods. As the Food Commission has shown, fortified children's foods tend to be high in fat, sugar and/or salt, low in healthy ingredients. Added vitamins and minerals used as a marketing

technique to make junky products more 'mum friendly'.

The Food Commission's report *Fortification Examined: Health claims and the need for regulation* calls for strict nutritional criteria for foods that can be fortified, and for fortification to be allowed only where it can be shown to address proven nutritional deficiencies in the target population.

An EC consultation on proposals for regulating health claims is also underway.

■ For a copy of the report *Fortification Examined* (£25), or for the Food Commission's consultation submission (free of charge, in pdf format), write to: enquiries@foodcomm.org.uk.

Babies' health put at risk by low benefit levels

Most pregnant teenagers are not eating an adequate diet, putting the babies' health at risk, according to a survey conducted by the Food Commission and the Maternity Alliance. Many pregnant teenagers report they cannot afford healthy foods needed for themselves and their growing babies.

The UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. In the year 2000, 23,000 babies were born to women under the age of 18.¹

The diets eaten by teenagers are among the worst recorded in national surveys of the British population's nutritional status. Teenage girls in lower income groups are prone to skip meals and to deprive themselves of food to prevent weight gain. Their diets are typically deficient in essential minerals such as iron, calcium, zinc and magnesium, and vitamin A and folic acid.

Partly as a result of this unhealthy pattern of food consumption, babies born to teenagers tend to have lower birthweights, increased risk of infant mortality and an increased risk of health problems in childhood and later life.

When a teenager becomes pregnant she needs all the help and support she can find. An adequate income is essential if she is to eat properly for herself and the growing foetus. It is estimated that the minimum amount a pregnant woman needs to spend on food is just over £20 per week, assuming she has local access to a wide range of foods at current average prices, and that she knows what she should buy to obtain a nutrient-rich diet. In such circumstances, an estimated £20.25 would be just enough to buy a 'modest but adequate' diet.

To find out what foods pregnant teenagers are eating, how they make food choices and what factors influence their eating behaviours the Food Commission, in partnership with the Maternity Alliance, undertook a survey of 46 pregnant women aged under 18. We wanted to find out if pregnant teenagers were eating healthily, or whether their diets were cause for concern.

"I normally just fill myself up on bread or crisps and chocolate because it's cheap."
pregnant 16 year old, living with partner

The research found that most teenagers who shopped and cooked for themselves are not able to afford even the modest amount of money needed to buy an adequate diet.

Benefits for 16-17 year olds are complex and depend on the young woman's circumstances. For a pregnant 16-17 year old in full time education living at home, her parents can claim £38.50. If she is eligible to claim benefit in her own right she can get £32.90 a week, or in some circumstances, including where she can show she is estranged from her parents, £43.25. Some young women of 16 and 17 may not be eligible for any benefit, even if they are pregnant and living independently. The benefit rate for a

woman aged 18-24 is £43.25, and for a woman aged 25 or over, £54.65. For most pregnant teenagers, this money is only available after the 29th week of pregnancy, beyond the time when her growing foetus has the maximum need for essential nutrients. The payments are meant to cover all costs except housing.

If these young women are failing to eat healthily, both they and their growing fetuses are at risk of malnourishment. Inadequate nutrition during pregnancy will affect the mother's long-term health, as the growing foetus draws on her nutrient reserves, and it will affect the foetus which, deprived of an adequate range of nutrients, will be at risk of stunting and early symptoms of heart disease and diabetes.

Of the 46 young women interviewed, dietary patterns were characterised by:

- many portions of fatty foods
- many portions of foods with high levels of saturated fats
- many portions of foods high in salt
- many portions of sugar-rich foods and beverages
- few portions of fruit or vegetables
- low levels of dietary fibre
- deficiency in vitamin A and folic acid
- deficiency in the minerals zinc, iron and calcium
- missed meals every day or two.

The young women were generally aware of what a healthy diet should be and knew that they should be improving their diet during pregnancy. Nonetheless, it was not easy for them to eat well. The majority of those who had to buy their own food did not have enough money to ensure their diet was adequate.

"I've been trying to eat more healthily but it's not that easy... Basically because meat and stuff like that is really expensive and they do that really cheap mince but it just tastes so disgusting, I can't eat it."

pregnant 16 year old, living with partner

Over half of the 46 women surveyed said they had made some healthy changes to their diet since finding out they were pregnant, such as drinking milk or eating vegetables. They could all recall at least one person who had given them dietary advice during their pregnancy.

Money and diet

A wealth of evidence shows that when money is tight, one of the easiest items to cut is food, as it is one of the few areas of people's budgets that is not fixed (unlike fuel bills and rent, for example). The easiest ways to reduce food costs are to buy cheaper foods and to eat less. The research found evidence that many pregnant teenagers did both. Previous research by the Food Commission also shows that healthier options tend to cost more than their less healthy alternatives (e.g. wholemeal bread compared to white). The differences are shown below.

Additional costs of healthier food options

| | Regular basket | Healthier basket | Average extra cost of healthier foods |
|------|----------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1988 | £9.78 | £11.56 | 18% |
| 1995 | £11.04 | £15.11 | 37% |
| 2001 | £12.72 | £19.19 | 51% |

Frequency of foods eaten by pregnant teenagers during the previous day

| Type of food | Number eating this food out of 46 women | Average number of portions |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| Milk | 40 | 2-3 |
| Bread/toast/rolls | 35 | 3-4 |
| Squashes and soft drinks | 34 | 2-3 |
| Crisps/bagged snacks/pot snacks | 31 | 2 |
| Breakfast cereals | 29 | 1 |
| Low sugar breakfast cereals | 13 | 1 |
| High sugar breakfast cereals | 16 | 1 |
| Vegetable/salad (excluding potatoes) | 27 | 1-2 |
| Processed meat products | 26 | 1-2 |
| Confectionery | 25 | 1-2 |
| Sweet tea/coffee | 18 | 2-3 |
| Chips/French fries | 18 | 1-2 |
| Fresh/lean meat | 18 | 1 |
| Fruit and fruit juice | 17 | 1 |
| Biscuit/cake/dessert | 16 | 4-5 |
| Cheese | 15 | 1-2 |
| Potatoes (not chips/crisps) | 12 | 1 |
| Pastry | 9 | 1-2 |
| Pasta/rice | 7 | 1 |
| Eggs | 6 | 1 |
| White fish and processed fish products | 7 | 1 |
| Seeds/nuts/pulses | 3 | 1 |
| Yoghurt | 3 | 1 |
| Alcohol | 2 | 1-2 |
| Oily fish | 0 | 0 |

Number of portions of high salt, high sugar and high fat foods consumed by pregnant teenagers

| | Number eating food out of 46 women | Average portions eaten in a day |
|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Foods high in salt (over 0.5g of sodium per 100g or serving*) | 44 | 4-5 |
| Foods high in sugar (over 10g of sugar per 100g or serving*) | 43 | 3-4 |
| Foods high in fat (over 20g of total fat per 100g or serving*) | 45 | 4-5 |

* Definition of the term 'high' taken from the Healthy Eating series of leaflets published by the Food Standards Agency (2002) on salt, fat and sugar.

food to keep you going two days for less than £5.

The dilemma between not enough healthy food and too many fatty, sugary calories cannot be resolved on a low income. For teenage women living alone, especially for those with no support from parents, partner or friends, the risk of a seriously inadequate diet is high. In the present survey, a detailed analysis of the diets of six young pregnant

quate' diet should be undertaken routinely, with allowances made for specific dietary requirements and local price variations. Benefit levels then need to be upgraded to cover this minimum entitlement, and the benefit made available automatically to all pregnant women from the moment the pregnancy is confirmed.

"I've got a baby coming, I've got to try and fit my money for things like food, bills, baby clothes... Food always seems to be bottom of the list."

pregnant 16 year old

Additional measures should also be considered to improve the health status of teenagers so that pre- and post-conceptual periods are not nutritionally jeopardised. This requires better school-based food policies and closer attention being paid to the food culture and food marketing environments which surround children and teenagers in modern society. Previous research has shown that nutrition education programs are not always effective at improving pregnant teenagers' diets. More research is needed to understand the factors affecting these women's food choices and to identify what works to help improve their diet.

■ This survey was conducted by Helen Burchett and Annie Seeley and funded by the kind donations of friends and colleagues of the nutrition campaigner Arthur Wynne, who passed away in 2002.

■ The survey report, *Good enough to eat: The diet of pregnant teenagers*, is available on the Food Commission website and Maternity Alliance websites, free of charge. See: www.foodcomm.org.uk or www.maternityalliance.org.uk

and most had tried to follow this advice. Almost all of those who were not able to follow the advice said this was because it was too expensive. Three quarters said that if they had an extra £5 a week to spend on food they would buy fruit and/or vegetables.

Without sufficient cash, any amount of nutrition information and knowledge, and any amount of skill in food preparation, will be wasted. With less than £5 per day to pay for all their needs, it is not surprising that typically less than £3 could be afforded for food. To eat healthily on less than £3 is virtually impossible: a bag of salad leaves at Sainsbury's might be £1.49, three tomatoes 35p, a tin of sardines at Tesco 49p and a small wholemeal loaf at the corner shop 65p. That's it. The money is spent and you have not bought enough to survive on (see box: Money and diet). Cheaper ways to fill up can be easily managed: a packet of custard creams is 39p, a big bag of chips 70p, sausages, sweet tea, white bread, margarine and jam – you can buy enough calorie-dense

women found that four had diets that were seriously deficient in calories (less than 1,700 per day) yet all six were eating more than the recommended maximum amount of saturated fat, and five were eating more than the recommended maximum amount of sugar. None were eating the recommended minimum five portions of fruit and vegetables per day – indeed none had eaten more than two portions on the day surveyed.

Most of the 46 young women surveyed survived by depending heavily on their parents, their partners or partners' parents, or their friends. This puts a strain on relationships at an age when these women are least able to cope, adding to their difficulties and the likelihood of ill health. To exhort them to improve their diets without offering them the means to do so is worse than futile, for it encourages resentment and distrust.

The solution lies in providing the means for these women to obtain the diets they need, and which they are well aware that they need. Assessment of the costs of a 'modest but ade-

Princes reveals truth about health claims – but not to the public!

Last year, the *Food Magazine* highlighted the problem of health claims being made or implied through marketing partnerships between health charities and food companies – usually in the form of a charity logo appearing on food labels. Some charities and companies responded saying that there was never any intention of assisting a health claim for the food brands – the partnerships were purely for fundraising purposes.

We have often found that tracking stories in the trade press is very enlightening. What companies say to other companies is different from what they say to the public. Princes canned fish products, for instance, currently carry the British Heart Foundation logo, helping to raise money for the health charity.

The British Heart Foundation says that it does not endorse products. Yet an advert from Princes, published in *The Grocer* trade magazine, describes the logo as: 'An exclusive link with the British Heart Foundation to position canned fish as a healthy choice,' and 'The health message is a perfect opportunity to attract younger customers and we are delighted to feature the BHF logo on pack.' Clearly, Princes thinks that the use of the BHF logo is a health claim, even if BHF does not.

In the case of promotion of fish, this may not be a problem, since BHF does say that eating oily fish can help your heart health. But it raises another big question mark above other BHF marketing partnerships with food companies. Did BHF intend to help Tetley Tea make a heart health claim for drinking tea? And does BHF think that eating Shredded Wheat will keep your heart healthy? Maybe, but probably not.

Last month, the Food Commission attended a round-table meeting at the Food Standards Agency (FSA), with several national health charities who have engaged in marketing partnerships with food manufacturers to help raise money for the charities and boost product sales for the companies.

The meeting was prompted by publication of the Food Commission's 2002 report, *Cause or Compromise: Do marketing partnerships between food companies and voluntary organisations compromise healthy eating advice?*

At the meeting, the National Osteoporosis Society said that they had stopped offering

exclusive contracts to clients – one of our main criticisms of their 'bone-friendly' logo. We argued in our report that exclusive marketing partnerships (where charities agree, for a fee, not to let their logo appear on similar food products) was inherently misleading – implying that one branded product (often more expensive) offered more health benefit than another.



The British Heart Foundation says it doesn't endorse products, yet Princes regards the BHF logo as a 'health message' and 'a perfect opportunity to attract younger customers...'

Ribena Toothkind carries the phrase 'The only drink accredited by the British Dental Association,' and was chastised by the Advertising Standards Authority for advertisements claiming that the drink was absolutely safe for teeth. At the FSA meeting, the British Dental Association (BDA) admitted that problems can occur in 'the clash between science and marketing'. The BDA says that it is changing how it works with companies, and will now seek out innovative products that offer benefits to teeth and which might not otherwise receive widespread promotion.

The Cancer Research Campaign reported that it was focusing in the coming year on generic promotions of fruits and vegetables, for which good scientific evidence exists for health benefits of increased consumption.

■ The 98-page report *Cause or Compromise?* is available from the Food Commission for £75 (£25 to individuals and non-profit organisations). Call 020 7837 2250 or email: enquiries@foodcomm.org.uk

'Five a rough

The Department of Health's long-awaited 'five a day' logo, meant to promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables, has been rejected by retailers even before it appeared on supermarket shelves.



It has also met with immediate competition from a similar logo scheme launched by none other than the Department of Health's NHS!

Luckily, a last-minute change to the 'five-a-day' logo saved the Department of Health (DoH) from further egg on its face, when they realised that the logo was incomprehensible. Five green boxes and the phrase 'Just eat more' failed to mention what people should eat more of. With the addition of the phrase '(fruit & veg)', the logo was hastily amended.

Sainsbury's rejected the logo scheme, and Tesco failed to sign up for the launch of the logo – the two biggest retailers in the UK. Meanwhile, the growing number of companies using five-a-day claims to promote their processed products continued to display



Five a day in a box?

Why eat a healthy balanced diet when you can just heat up a carton of soup instead? This Campbell's soup claims to provide four of your five recommended daily portions of fruit and veg, and the carton of Knor Vie soup claims to contain three of your five portions. Such claims would not be permitted under the Department of Health's current 'Five a day' guidelines.

'5 a day' logo gets a ride

Trust the Captain?

The box claims that a serving of Birds Eye Captain's Vegetable Burgers 'contributes to your 5 a day target', but nowhere does it explain how much. We calculate that each burger contains *less than a quarter* of one recommended daily portion of fruit and veg.



their message on the supermarket shelves, despite the fact that most would not qualify to carry the advice under the Department of Health's nutritional criteria.

Sainsbury's would not be able to market its 'Way to Five' range under the Department of Health's current rules. Some of the Sainsbury's products contain added fats, salt and/or sugar, and the DoH has not yet decided if foods containing these ingredients should be allowed to carry a 'just eat more' message, especially as most people already eat too much fat, salt and sugar. Campbell's and Knorr carton soups – claiming to contain between two and four portions of vegetables in a single carton – are also questionable because of high levels of added salt. Similarly, can Solero ice cream really be allowed to claim that it provides half a portion of healthy fruit per serving, with its high

fruit smoothie drinks. Many manufacturers already claim these premium-priced products contain two or three portions of fruit, but the Department of Health criteria explicitly restrict them to one portion, since the processed fruit sugars in juices and smoothies is more damaging to teeth than the sugars in unprocessed fruit.

Whilst the official 'five a day' logo struggled to make its message known, the NHS logo slipped onto the market on fresh fruit and vegetables in a series of promotions in supermarkets, giving advice on how to prepare and serve the produce. Customers reported that the familiar NHS logo helped them make the link between fruit and vegetable consumption and health.

We have contacted the Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency, the Independent Television Commission, the Advertising Standards Authority and several regional trading standards departments, to ask them to take action against any companies promoting products with the 'five a day' message that contain either high levels of fat, salt or sugar, very low levels of fruit or vegetables (not enough to achieve even a single portion), or making claims that single products can contribute several portions when the best advice is to aim for variety.

Both the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency have been reluctant to criticise individual companies, but trading standards officers (who deal with companies at a local level) have said that they would welcome official guidance from the enforcement branch of the Food Standards Agency about how to protect the 'five a day' advice. This page shows some of the products, and the problems they cause through the unregulated use of the 'five a day' message (see also FM60).

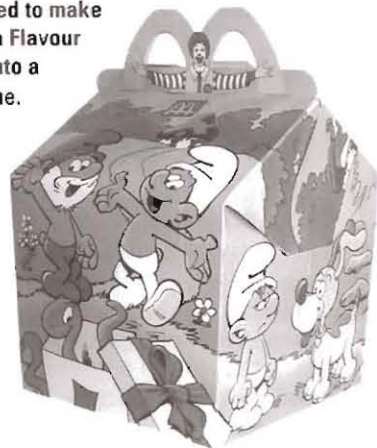
The Food Commission continues to believe that the 'five a day' advice is a public health message, and should be used only where it supports improvements in public health, for example to reduce cancer and heart disease in the population. Without controls, we are likely to see industry coming up with further questionable products, logos and pseudo health messages, as has happened in the US.

There, the dairy industry has launched a 3-a-day campaign for cheese, milk and yoghurt that failed to include advice on restricting fat intake.



Mc five a day?

According to *Marketing* magazine McDonald's is considering applying to use the Department of Health's '5 a day' logo on Happy Meals that include a portion of fruit instead of the usual fries. But don't expect to see the logo on many of their other products – they've even managed to make their Banana Flavour milkshake into a fruit-free zone.



levels of added sugar?

A particular bone of contention between manufacturers and the Department of Health has been the advice that can appear on

The smooth sell

The carton says 'a 250ml serving of smoothiepack = 2 of your '5 a day' portions of fruit or vegetables, as recommended by nutrition and health experts', yet Department of Health nutrition and health experts would say it can count as only one portion.

Lineker lets children down but Jamie's a star, say parents

The Food Commission's Parents Jury is going from strength to strength, with a membership of over 1,300 parents. In February, the Jury reached its verdict on the second round of Children's Food Awards – shaming marketing techniques that encourage children to eat unhealthy foods, and praising people, manufacturers and marketing techniques that promote healthier alternatives. Here are the awards:

The Food Hero and Greedy Star awards

The Parents Jury felt that very few famous people help to make healthy food attractive and 'cool' to children. However, **Jamie Oliver** came out as the clear winner of the Food Hero award, for showing children that cooking can be great fun. As for the Greedy Star award, parents criticised pop stars and sports stars who have sold out by using their star status to promote fatty, sugary or salty foods to children. **Gary Lineker** won the award for his high-profile TV advertising of fatty, salty Walkers Crisps.

"Jamie Oliver makes cooking 'cool' for young boys - my 8-year-old is hooked!"
mother of two, from Reading

"Footballers are in an ideal position to educate children about the dangers of eating unhealthy food. It's a shame he is pushing high-fat, high-salt snacks."
mother of one, from Hastings

There is lots more nutritional information and there are plenty of quotes from parents at www.parentsjury.org

We're still pleased to hear more parents' views about children's food. If you'd like to join the Parents Jury (membership is totally free, and involvement is not time-consuming) then email: parentsjury@foodcomm.org.uk, call 020 7837 2250, or write to: Parents Jury, 2nd Floor, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF

The Friendly Food Facts and Food Label Fibs awards

Easy-to-follow advice about how to feed children healthily can be hard to find, and parents reported that they often used recipe books and TV cookery shows to look for ideas.

For useful advice given during the all-important first years of life, **Health Visitors** were given the Friendly Food Facts award.

Sadly, misinformation is also a problem for parents – especially on food labels. Most parents understand it is good to encourage children to enjoy fruit and real fruit juices. But, as we have highlighted in previous

editions, even if a product has large pictures of fruit on the front, the level of added juice is often so low that children won't get much health benefit from the claimed 'fruitiness' of these products. That is why the phrase 'juice drink' won the Food Label Fibs award, since juice drinks can contain as little as 5% real juice.

"Health visitors should get the Friendly Food Facts award for advising mums generally to keep to basic home-made foods."
mother of two, from Nuneaton



mother of one, from Petersfield

The Better Breakfast and Breakfast Battles awards

Breakfast cereals are of special concern to the Parents Jury. A common complaint is that nearly all of children's breakfast cereals are coated in gooey sugar, and most are the subject of high-pressure marketing to children, with relentless advertising, movie link-ups and the use of cartoon characters.

Coco Pops won the Breakfast Battles award for its high level of sugar (39% sugar) and because it's a breakfast cereal that children want to eat, but which parents would prefer that they didn't.

The Better Breakfast award was given to **Weetabix** and **porridge oats** as healthier alternatives that parents are pleased to see their children enjoy.

"Packaging is the main attraction for Coco Pops, reinforced by high levels of promotion. My children don't actually like the taste!"

mother of four, from East Sussex



"Porridge is great and easy to make and seems to go down in bucket loads!"

mother of one, from Milton Keynes



"Weetabix is a great cereal - low in sugar, high in fibre and popular with children."
mother of one, from London

Nestlé makes ridiculous salt claim

This remarkable advert from Nestlé tells readers that the company thinks adding salt to breakfast cereal is ridiculous. 'You'd never add salt. Neither would we,' says Nestlé.

Er... Wouldn't they? Whilst Shredded Wheat may indeed contain no added salt, most of the company's other cereals do – especially those aimed at children. Golden Nuggets, Clusters, Shreddies, Cookie Crisp, Cheerios, Monsters

Inc and Golden Grahams (all Nestlé cereal brands) contain between 1.25 and 2.5g of salt per 100g – the level considered to be 'a lot'.

The lesson? In this instance, the pun has never been more applicable: Take Nestlé's marketing claims with a pinch of salt.



Cheerios, Golden Grahams and Cookie Crisp. Just some of the children's cereals with high levels of added salt from Nestlé.

| Nestlé cereal | Sodium per 100g | Salt equivalent per 100g | Is this high or low salt?* |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Golden Nuggets | 0.5g | 1.25g | High |
| Clusters | 0.5g | 1.25g | High |
| Shreddies | 0.5g | 1.25g | High |
| Cookie Crisp | 0.6g | 1.5g | High |
| Cinnamon Grahams | 0.7g | 1.75g | High |
| Cheerios | 0.8g | 2g | High |
| Monsters Inc | 0.8g | 2g | High |
| Golden Grahams | 1.0g | 2.5g | High |

* According to Food Standards Agency criteria – see page 12.

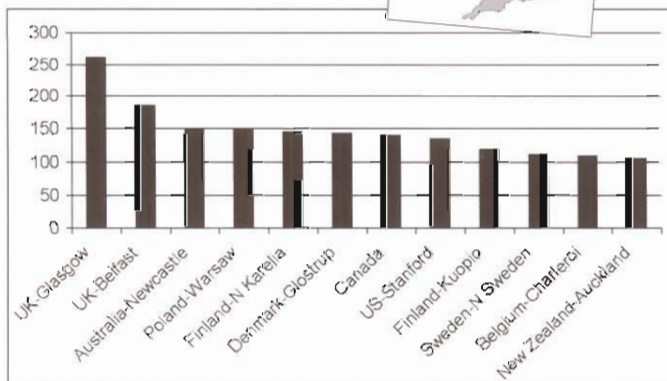
Not so healthy hearts in the UK

Women in the UK have the highest rates of heart disease in the world according to figures from the World Health Organization's MONICA study, published by the British Heart Foundation (BHF). Covering more than thirty regions in developed countries around the globe, the study shows adult women under the age of 65 to be at highest risk in metropolitan Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The BHF also reports that most women see cancer as a greater threat, believing that they are more likely to die from breast cancer than a heart attack – despite figures showing the reverse to be true.

Not that men get off the hook. The rates of heart disease for men under age 65 are three to four times those found for women. Taken over a ten year period, about one in twelve men aged under 65 will suffer a heart condition.

Not nice reading, but necessary. For more details, check the British Heart Foundation's latest report *Coronary Heart Disease Statistics*, ISBN 1 899088 21 0 from www.bhf.org.uk. Copies are free although a donation of £10 is suggested.



The worst hospital food in England

A large-scale survey of hospitals was undertaken last year looking at how patients rate the services in hospitals, including the food available, the variety, the time of arrival, its temperature and appearance and the size of the portions. In the interests of better practice we herewith name and shame the 14 worst:

London

Royal Free Hospital
Royal National Throat, Nose & Ear Hospital
Middlesex Hospital
Sally Sherman Nursing Home
Whipps Cross Hospital
Hammersmith Hospital
King's College Hospital
Queen Mary's Hospital
Kingston Hospital
St George's Hospital

SE and Mid-England

Good Hope Hospital
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre
Battle Hospital, Berks

SW England

North Hampshire Hospital

Legal, decent, honest and true?

The activities of the advertising industry raise many important questions for nutrition and health. Here we report on complaints against food and drink companies adjudicated by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in recent months.

X Misleading beer mats

Complaints were upheld against a beer mat printed with the claim: *'Beer is an all round food containing a balanced package of nutrients and minerals and can be considered to make a positive contribution to a healthy diet.'* On the reverse of the beer mat it stated *'VITAMIN Beer ... I'll drink to that.'* The ASA noted that drinking alcohol inhibits the uptake of several vitamins and minerals, and ruled that The Hampshire Brewery had not proven that beer had the nutritional benefits claimed in the advertisement, the beer mat was misleading.

X Organic claims: exaggerated

Claims for organic foods have come under ASA scrutiny over the past few months. SimplyOrganic Food Co got into trouble for claiming that the animals providing its organic meat were 'fed on vegetarian organic feed', and that 'all growth promoters, hormones and artificial chemicals are banned'. Because some animals produced by organic methods may have eaten fish by-products, and because some artificial chemicals may be used medicinally on organic animals, the advertisers were asked to modify their catalogue claims.

Similarly, complaints were upheld against a leaflet for Tesco organic foods claiming 'benefits for the environment and health. The ASA ruled that there was good evidence that organic production benefited the environment, because 'organic farming encouraged biodiversity, increased the biological activity and organic matter content of soil, was usually more energy efficient and, measured per area of land, caused less nitrate leaching and lower emissions of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane'. However, the ASA ruled that Tesco had not provided evidence that organic production benefited human health.

If you see food and drink adverts that you think are misleading or contentious, send us a copy. If we think it is a good case, we will be pleased to submit a complaint on your behalf.

X Slim hope of losing weight

Slimming products are an area in which exaggerated and misleading claims are the norm rather than the exception. Several complaints have been upheld over recent weeks, illustrating that unscrupulous slimming companies continue to pay little heed to the voluntary codes of advertising practice.

A company styling itself 'Medical Publishing' failed to respond to an ASA challenge to its claim: 'Achieve your ideal weight in record time' for Via-Slim. The ASA advised the company not to make unsubstantiated claims.

The 'new clinically proven' Metasys, claiming to 'reduce the absorption of fats and increase the metabolic rate', was found by the ASA to be clinically unproven. The advertisers, Forever Young International, were told not to repeat the advertisement.

The ASA criticised Pro-Medicus for claiming that consuming its grapefruit extract,

Citristat, 'prevents fat from being deposited, whether the original source is rich, fatty foods, carbohydrates, protein or any type of food ...' The advertisers did not provide any evidence to support the claims.

Complaints were also upheld against a product called Olio 3, described as 'a capsule that sucks fat out of everything you eat. [It] won't make you lose energy, but will make you as strong as a bear.' The advertisers, SwissTrade Mail, apologised for breaching the codes of advertising practice.

X Institute of Oversold Nutrition

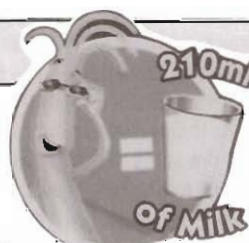
Complaints against a leaflet for health books were upheld for being exaggerated and misleading, for claiming, 'ALL of today's major health problems have already been solved. There's no mystery behind cancer, heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's, the major killer diseases. These are ALL preventable and, in almost all cases, reversible'. The books, by Patrick Holford – founder of the Institute of Optimum Nutrition – claimed to contain advice on how to: 'Eradicate your risk of heart disease', and 'prevent Alzheimer's'.

The ASA noted that whilst Patrick Holford's book showed a link between diet, lifestyle, nutrition and health, it did not provide evidence that heart disease could be eradicated, that cancer, diabetes and Alzheimer's could be prevented or that most major health problems had already been solved. The ASA asked the advertisers, Holford & Associates, not to repeat the claims unless they could be substantiated.

Badvertisement

Salt attack!

It is all very well to say that some fatty, sugary and salty foods can be enjoyed by children as a 'treat', but it is quite another to give them a healthy spin by implying that they are highly nutritious or a good source of calcium. This popular kids' snack declares that it is equal to a 210ml glass of milk. Of course milk does contain some natural salt, but the



amount is very small. In contrast, one Golden Vale Cheestrings 'Attack-a-Snak' contains 4.5g of salt, and has the gall to advise that it is 'suitable for children over four years old', and

'younger children may need supervision when eating'. 4.5g of salt is over twice the recommended daily salt intake for children under the age of seven – in just one snack!

CHECKOUT

Is there really no such thing as an 'unhealthy' food?

What is junk?

'There is no such thing as good or bad food,' says the food industry, 'only good or bad diets'. And so they justify marketing unhealthy products. In this four-page special we challenge the industry view, and reveal its own contradictions.

Many people working in or connected with the food industry say that there is no such thing as a good food or a bad food – only good and bad diets. It is an argument that appears neat, conclusive and unarguable. Hence, it has become the mantra of any manufacturer, food trade association or food advertiser challenged for marketing foods and drinks that contribute large amounts of fat, salt and/or sugar to the nation's diet, and little in the way of useful nutrition.

Several examples of this argument are listed in the box below.

"There is no such thing as a bad food, but there is such a thing as a bad diet."

Marketing Director for Cadbury's

"There is no such thing as a bad food, only bad diets."

Coca Cola

"There is no such thing as a bad food, only a bad diet."

The Salt Manufacturers' Association

"It is overall diet which is important, not individual food or drinks."

British Soft Drinks Association

"There is no such thing as an unhealthy food, only unhealthy diets... The truth is that all food advertised on UK television can be a part of a balanced and therefore healthy diet."

The Advertising Association

It is revealing to note the type of products represented by each organisation. We have even heard the argument used by government representatives.

The trouble is that in discussions about healthy and unhealthy diets, the argument 'there is no such thing as a bad food' tends to stop the conversation dead in its tracks. Without conceptual labels for the kinds of foods that nutritionists know people should be eating less of, and foods that nutritionists know people should be eating more of, it is difficult to frame a useful debate on how our nation can improve its diet. And even harder to formulate advice to individuals that they can follow when confronted by a range of real products from which to make their choice.

The descriptions 'good' and 'bad' are extremely subjective. For some, they may describe the freshness or safety of a food. Bad food can mean that a food has gone off and is a safety hazard. The phrase 'good food' is often used by restaurant reviewers to denote satisfying, tasty, home-cooked fare. For others, the words good and bad may have an almost religious connotation, associating foods with desire, pleasure, indulgence, naughtiness and even sin.

For health campaigners, these are merely amusing diversions from the task of finding ways to relate healthy eating advice to real foods and drinks.

In the end, it is all very well saying we should be eating more fruit and vegetables if we are unable to point at recipes and products and say, 'this is a healthy food; this



"Mum! What balances six bags of crisps and a large chocolate banoffee pie??"

Cartoon by Ben Nash, taken from Dump the Junk – see page 26

is a healthy recipe – this is a good choice'. And it is all very well saying we should be eating less fat if we are unable to point to products that contribute a large amount of fat to the diet and say, 'this is where fat lurks, and this is what to look out for on the label. Cut back on this type of food.'

For this reason, it is often useful to be able to describe foods as 'healthy' (e.g. fruit and vegetables – we should eat lots) and 'unhealthy' (e.g. butter – we should eat it sparingly).

Oddly enough, whilst the food industry maintains that it is not possible to describe a food as 'unhealthy', it is all too eager to promote many products with descriptions such as 'healthy', 'nutritious' and 'good for you'. Several of these are illustrated on the following pages. But, we ask, if there's no such thing as a 'bad' or 'unhealthy' food, surely there can be no such thing as a healthy food either – only a healthy diet?

Sorry, food industry, you can't have it both ways.

See overleaf for the tricks of the trade

CHECKOUT

Who says your food is healthy?

The Food Standards Agency's recently-issued guidance on interpreting food labels (see table below) gives us a good starting point for developing a definition of what counts as a healthy or an unhealthy food, based on the level of sugars, fat, saturated fat, fibre and sodium (salt) per 100g. On this foundation, it is possible to build detailed healthy eating advice in a way that most people can apply in their everyday lives. It could also help manufacturers formulate genuinely healthy foods, especially for children.

Developing definitions

The Food Standards Agency has defined what 'a lot' of fat, sugar and salt (sodium) means, and this can form the basis for defining healthy and unhealthy foods.

For 100g of food:

| | A lot | A little |
|---------------|-------|----------|
| Sugars | 10g | 2g |
| Total fat | 20g | 3g |
| Saturated fat | 5g | 1g |
| Fibre | 3g | 0.5g |
| Sodium | 0.5g | 0.1g |

Guideline from the 'healthy eating' series published by the Food Standards Agency, London, 2002.

Using the Food Standards Agency's guidance, we do not need to get muddled with subjective

arguments about whether foods and drinks measured against these criteria are 'good' or 'bad'. The FSA's criteria help us to describe certain foods as falling into generally 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' categories. Using these workable criteria alongside evidence of dietary excesses and dietary deficiencies (revealed by national diet and nutrition surveys), we can draw up reasonable healthy eating advice based on 'eat more of these types of foods' and 'eat less of these types of foods'.

Marketing products with a healthy spin

Many leading supermarkets use successful healthy living schemes to promote foods that have restricted levels of ingredients such as fat, salt and sugar, and restricted calories (although we have yet to see any published criteria for what counts as 'healthy' food under these schemes!)

Manufacturers promoting their products with 'five a day' messages (see page 9) must surely believe that their products make a healthy contribution to people's diets and health.

Furthermore, the food industry seems quite happy to use the terms 'health food' (as in health food shop) and 'functional' food (as in cholesterol-lowering Flora Pro.Active and Benecol margarines) all of which require us to believe that these are

healthy choices, in comparison to less healthy alternatives.

These descriptions, in conjunction with healthy living advice, encourage consumption. So why can't we describe foods as 'unhealthy' to identify sources of fat, sugar and salt, and to discourage consumption?

■ Research by Kath Dalmeny. Additional research by Dr Mike Rayner of the British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group at Oxford University.

The Food Standard Agency (FSA) has published new leaflets explaining salt, sugar, fats, labelling claims and labels. To order copies of these contact the FSA on 0845 606 0667 or email foodstandards@eclogistics.co.uk



When would definitions of healthy and unhealthy be useful?

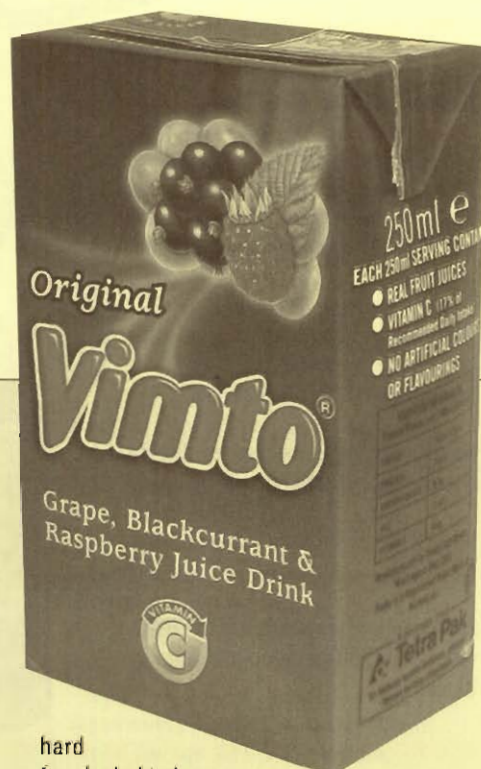
At present, the European Union is discussing what kinds of foods can be fortified with added vitamins and minerals, and which foods can carry health claims. On the principle that health claims and fortification of foods are intended to encourage consumption of those foods, nutritional criteria are essential to ensure that only genuinely healthy foods can be promoted in this way.

This could stop vitamins being used as a marketing technique to boost foods and

drinks that do not deserve a 'healthy' spin. This **Vimto juice drink** contains a measly 3% real juice, yet boasts of its added vitamin C. If it was excluded, because of its low juice content, from pretending to be healthy, then genuinely healthy products might get a better look-in in children's diets.

Alcoholic drinks might also be excluded from fortification and health claims, on the basis that governments do not want to see alcohol promoted as a healthy drink. However, the alcohol industry is lobbying

hard for alcohol to be allowed to be included, presumably on the argument 'There's no such thing as an unhealthy drink...'



Going 'glocal'



Global food companies are now extending their markets by focusing on local niches, writes Corinna Hawkes.

Coca-Cola and McDonald's are two of the world's most powerful food companies. They are also companies that quite openly adopted a strategy of entering markets with 'untapped volume' in the 1990s. The aim was to create demand and incorporate branded, western foods into eating and drinking cultures the world over.

It has worked. From 28 countries in 1930, Coca-Cola is now sold in over 200 countries. Some 70% of volume sales are now outside North America.

It is a similar story for McDonald's. In 1991, fewer than 30% of their 12,418 outlets were outside the U.S. Now the figure stands at nearly 55 percent (of 30,093 outlets).

What has made these companies so successful? Many factors make a product popular, but one strategy has been a passport to success: marketing. As Coca-Cola has said: 'Marketing creates consumer demand'.

The importance of marketing to the success of Coca-Cola and McDonald's cannot be understated. The companies know that global marketing is not the same as local marketing. It involves an understanding of the local eco-

nomic, technical, political and socio-cultural environment that determines why a marketing strategy will be successful in one country but not another.

Opening up new markets to western foods is not just about advertising. In less developed countries, large sections of the population have little access to media. Marketing is about building up distribution networks, pricing the product within reach of local populations, and promoting it in a way sensitive to local needs.

It is a strategy known as 'glocalisation'.

Here's how they do it:

Ensure that the product is available to the target population. In China, Coke is now available to 80 percent of the population. The company gives free refrigeration equipment to thousands of retail outlets, in some cases installing electricity for the purpose.

Create availability in unexpected places to drive 'impulse purchases'. In Columbia, Coca Cola fitted refrigerators in taxis. In Pakistan, Coke is the exclusive supplier for Pakistan Railways. And in many countries the company markets their products directly in schools.

Price foods attractively. When McDonald's entered Brazil in 1979, the company convinced a better-off clientele that burgers and fries were aspirational. Then they lowered prices to attract a broader population, with an increase in customers by 70%. In India, Coke introduced a small, cheap bottle for poorer rural populations resulting in a surge in the popularity of Coke. In a country like Mexico, long exposed to Coke, enlargement of bottle size in the early 1990s was credited with shifting the per capita consumption rate ahead of the U.S.

Introduce new products that cater to local tastes. Coke has now developed over 230 brands, many of which are country specific. In Hong Kong and Thailand, McDonald's sells rice dishes to compete with street vendors. In India, 75% of menu items (such as the McAloo Tikki Burger and the

Chicken Maharaja Mac) have been customised for local tastes, a tactic that helped McDonald's break even in 2002, the first time since market entry in 1996.

Develop brand loyalty. In Vietnam, where traditions are upheld by the younger generation, Coke ads depict cultural events. In North African countries, where Islam is a strong cultural influence, ads depict Coke as a drink to end the fast of Ramadan.

Invest in point-of-sale promotions. The McDonald's Happy Meal is a worldwide phenomenon, as are its birthday parties. The announcement of new Snoopy, Pooh Bear and Hello Kitty toys caused near riots in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia as people rushed to buy limited-edition toys. Coca-Cola offers prizes for collecting (a lot of) bottle caps or ring pulls. In Algeria, when the company gave away 5,000 mountain bikes, families complained that kids became addicted to soda.

Sponsor culture. Coca-Cola sponsors 35 national football teams, from Palestine to Russia.

Contribute to local charities. Coke contributes to HIV/AIDS charities in Africa and education in Latin America; McDonald's focuses on kids with its World Children's Day.

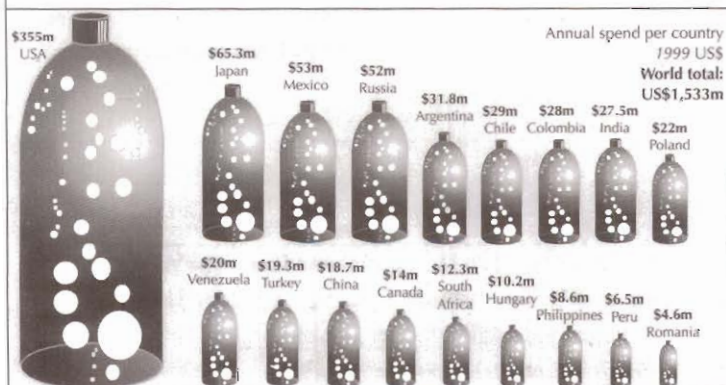
This year, the World Health Organization (WHO) develops its Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. Here is a chance to slow the rising tide of obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes in the developing world. The WHO needs to look closely at marketing, especially marketing to children. With Coca-Cola and McDonald's each spending over £1bn a year on advertising, the companies know that marketing works. And with that much money, we shouldn't place unrealistic demands on people's power to resist. Smart thinking is needed to develop a strategy that will help people lead healthier lives.

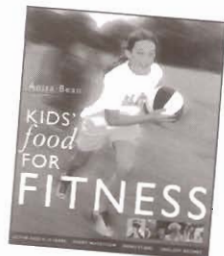
Corinna Hawkes is a freelance consultant on food, nutrition and farming policy. Email: corinna-hawkes@earthlink.net Her report for the WHO on the marketing activities of global food companies can be accessed at: www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/globalization.diet.and.ncds.pdf

The Food Commission is drafting a report on global marketing to children. More details in the next issue of the *Food Magazine*.

Coca-Cola's global advertising spend

Graphic from *The Atlas of Food: Who eats what, where and why* published by Earthscan (www.earthscan.co.uk)





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).

Dump the Junk! – new book

Containing over 300 expert tips for how to encourage children to eat healthy food and dump the junk, and with lots of tasty recipes, this is an essential guide for parents. Illustrated with entertaining cartoons by the *Food Magazine's* Ben Nash. £7.99 (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 explores 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.



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.

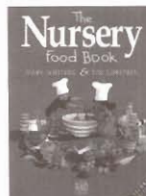
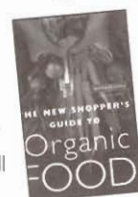
The Chips are Down

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.

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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Food for oil

The first human agricultural settlements were in the lands of Mesopotamia, which we know today as Iraq. But now, writes Tim Lobstein, food must be bought from abroad traded for irreplaceable oil under a so-called aid scheme.

The alluvial plains of Mesopotamia once fed 25-30 million people, but now it can feed less than 10 million. Of the 22 million people in Iraq, 60% have come to depend on imported food handed out through the food-for-oil programme. Where the ancient irrigation channels once brought the waters to Babylon, only dusty trucks carrying food imports now provide sustenance.

The fertile land around the rivers Tigris and Euphrates produced the first wheat and early forms of barley. The irregular floods and dry periods meant building canals and protecting the soil and for thousands of years the Sumerians and their successors produced abundant crops. It is here that man made his first steps into modernity, with the invention of the wheel, the building of cities and the development of writing and mathematics.

But all was not well, even in ancient times. Deforestation of the upper regions, for fuel and for animal grazing, led to frequent silting up of the irrigation channels. Deforestation of the lower regions increased the surface evaporation of floodwater, raising the salt levels in the soil.

Such longterm problems could be solved, even now, with the appropriate investment. But with the sanctions imposed on Iraq since 1991 the population has experienced desperate shortages of food. Faced with starvation the government reluctantly accepted a UN-sponsored scheme to allow its oil to be sold for food supplies from the World Food Programme. This came into effect in 1996 and continued until the start of March 2003. It has been renewed from the start of April, for a provisional 45-day period.

The food-for-oil scheme has been bitterly criticised. Whereas most countries experiencing near-starvation would be eligible for free food for relief purposes, Iraq was kept in deliberate poverty through trade sanctions, and investment in its infrastructure remained low. Its oil could be used to purchase only UN-approved imports.

And even then Iraq got poor value for money. A portion of the oil revenues – an estimated 25% – was diverted into the coffers of the UN Compensation Commission, a body

dealing with claims being made by corporations for damage suffered as a result of the 1991 Iraq conflict. Thus the country's oil has been paying for claims filed by Gulf businesses for 'lost profits', and claims filed by governments for evacuating its citizens or repairing its diplomatic residences. Much of the lost contract work was claimed by American companies, so Iraq's oil has effectively been used to pay the USA for the damage done by the USA to Iraq in 1991. Up to the beginning of 2003, some \$40bn had been paid out of these funds (they are administered by a UN committee dominated by US members). A further \$172bn remains to be paid – plus any further claims from this year's conflict.

Under the food-for-oil programme of the late 1990s, Iraq released oil worth some \$50m every day. This revenue had to be spent by Iraq on the open market, buying the aid it needed wherever it could, subject to approval of each deal by the UN. Even at its best, the food-for-oil programme was failing miserably, supplying barely two-thirds of the estimated needs, and leaving a quarter of children malnourished and stunted.

By the late 1990s an estimated 60% of the population were dependent on the food provided under the food-for-oil scheme. Ration packs, each capable of providing a

month's supply of food were distributed jointly by the Iraqi government and the World Food Programme.

The ration packs were sold locally at a reported price of 12 cents each. Given that Iraq had already paid well over the odds for the food in oil, it appears strange that any further charge should be made for the food. The figure could perhaps be justified if it ensured that local farmers could compete against the food on price, and hence continue to sell their products in local markets. But at 12 cents for a month's food supply, based on over 2000 kcals per day including protein and oil rations, the farmers could not compete. No one wanted to buy their more expensive produce. Effectively the food aid undercut farmers and put them out of business. The land deteriorated further.

At the height of the conflict in March 2003, the US government announced a grant of \$20m for the World Food Programme, along with the 'release' of 200,000 tonnes of wheat for food aid, with a further 400,000 tonnes to be made available 'as needed'.

The food would be delivered by the US Agency for International Development. It was not explicitly stated that this food would have to be paid for with oil, but nor was it denied.

The US would surprise nobody if they seized Iraq's oil under the food-for-oil programme while claiming to be the country's salvation by sending Iraq ship-fuls of surplus US grain.

Oil for food

Why does the world need Iraq's oil? Where is it being used?

Ironically, much of the oil being taken from Iraq each day goes to providing our food. As this magazine has reported before, the rise in 'food miles' has outpaced the rise in all other transport uses, with road and air transport of food one of the largest categories of transport.

European Commission figures show road transport of goods to have increased rapidly, from 420 billion tonne-kilometres in 1970 to 1318 billion tonne-kilometres in 1999. Of this, transport of food, animal feed and live animals accounted for about a third of international road transport. Worldwide, the international trade in agricultural goods is worth an estimated \$544 billion (1999 figures

from WTO), and accounts for virtually half (48.4%) of the total world trade in primary products.

Add to these transport costs the fuel used for modern farming and agro-chemical inputs, food processing and packaging, and the car-miles used to collect food from supermarkets, and it would be reasonable to suggest that a third of the world's oil is being used to globalise our food supply.



A sensible use of oil? These Sainsbury onions were grown in Tasmania. If they'd come any further they'd be from off-world!

Cadbury's wants children to eat

The government has endorsed a commercial scheme to promote fatty, sugary snacks to primary and secondary school children. The Food Commission investigates.

In May 2003, Cadbury's is set to launch a major marketing drive, to get children to exchange chocolate wrappers for school sports equipment. The initiative will be called *Get Active!* and will be in partnership with the Youth Sports Trust, a registered charity which aims to increase children's participation in sport. To save up for the top item on offer – a set of volleyball net posts – a school will need to encourage pupils to spend over £2,000 on chocolate, consuming nearly one-and-a-quarter million chocolatey calories!

If British school children purchase all of the 160 million tokens that Cadbury's plan to issue, they would have to purchase nearly two million kilograms of fat.

The scheme has received official government support, with sports minister

Richard Caborn expressing his endorsement of the scheme in a Cadbury's press release. However, the scheme has already prompted criticism from the National Union of Teachers and many health experts.

With growing concerns about children's health, and major efforts underway to help children learn to enjoy healthier food, the government's sports ministry has failed to make the link between good diet, good health and sporting achievement. Instead, in the near-obsessional quest to attract private finance into the education system, they have fallen into the trap of believing that any source of funding for school equipment is acceptable – whatever the health outcome.

In the Cadbury's press release, sports minister Richard Caborn is quoted as saying: "I am delighted that Cadbury is prepared to support this drive to get more young people active by providing equipment and resources for schools. In partnership we could make a real difference to the quality of young people's lives."

Did the Minister know...

...how much chocolate school children would need to buy?

Maybe the sports minister didn't bother to work this out, or didn't think to ask. We found that Cadbury's intend to issue at least 160 million bars of chocolate publicising this promotion. To see what this means nutritionally, see the table on the facing page.

...how much exercise it takes to burn off the calories?

Calorie-use and calorie-needs vary according to the size, weight and metabolism of the child. However, even a conservative estimate shows that a ten-year-old child consuming enough chocolate to earn a basketball through the Cadbury's scheme would need to play basketball for 900 hours to burn off the calories; a junior basketball team would have to play for 180 hours (270 full length games).

...how the scheme will affect schools?

Not only are there the potential health problems for children, there are costs to staff. A survey of school librarians participating in the Walkers Crisps Books for School token scheme (1999) showed that a great deal of staff time was spent collecting and counting thousands of food wrappers. As one Sheffield librarian commented: "I don't ever want to see a crisp packet again in my life!"

...how chocolate fits into healthy school policies?

It doesn't. There are plenty of opportunities for children to eat these foods outside school if they and their parents wish – school is no place for such promotions. Endorsing a scheme that exhorts primary and secondary school children to collect millions of chocolate bar wrappers contravenes the spirit and purpose of whole-school food policies. Such policies ensure that consistent health and nutrition messages are used throughout the school – whether in the canteen, in menu preparation, in the curriculum or in choosing which companies to work with.

...how the scheme reveals joined-up thinking in government?

It doesn't. Government departments of health and education have been working on ways to protect children's health through initiatives such as nutrition guidelines for school meals,

Badvertisement

Additives? Smashing!

Some manufacturers choose highly appropriate names for their products. The Silver Spring Mineral Water company, for instance, makes a range of drinks loaded with the very colourings and preservative shown by a recent study to cause behaviour problems in toddlers. How apt, then, that the product describes what some toddlers may become after consumption: Little Smashers!



Sacking up the profits: We estimate that Cadbury's hopes to sell over £67 million worth of confectionery to school children through the *Get Active!* sports campaign.

two million kg of fat – to get fit

increased sports activities in the curriculum, and the Healthy Schools Standard. Perhaps the Minister should pick up the phone and chat to his colleagues at the Department of Health and the Department of Education about the concept of contradictory policies.

Without proper consultation between government departments and a genuine commitment to putting public money into school health initiatives we are likely to see more of the same.

Snickers-sponsored health advice to budding footballers? McDonald's-sponsored sports fields? Nestlé-sponsored sports colleges? Pepsi using the England football squad and the FA Cup in its marketing campaigns until the summer of 2006, and sponsoring the FA Youth Cup and the FA County Youth Cup? All of these schemes are already underway or in the pipeline.

Calculating the cost to children

We took the average fat content, the average calorie content and the average price of the chocolate bars from which children will need to save tokens in order to 'earn' their sports equipment under the Cadbury's scheme. The

bars on which tokens will appear are: Cadbury's Crunchie, Fruit & Nut, Flake, Double Decker, Snow Flake, Dairy Milk, Caramel, TimeOut, Dream, Whole Nut, Wispa and Buttons (single and multi-packs).

The average calorie content of each bar is 226.25; the average fat content is 12.3g and from several sample purchases, we estimate the average cost of a chocolate bar to be about 42p.

Note that we are unable to say how much sugar children would consume when participating in Cadbury's marketing scheme. Cadbury's choose not to reveal the sugar content of their products on its labels, but describe it, along with any starch content, as healthy sounding 'carbohydrate'.

Using these figures, we calculated that to earn a single netball, worth about £5, primary school children would need to spend just under £40 on chocolate, consume over a kilogram of fat, and over 20,000 calories.

To earn the most expensive item Cadbury's has to offer (a set of posts for a volleyball net) secondary school children would need to eat 5,440 chocolate bars containing over 33kg of fat and nearly one-and-a-quarter million calories. That's over 900 chocolate bars for each member of the volleyball team!

Cadbury's marketing scheme includes dozens of different sports items that can be earned for a school by collecting tokens from chocolate wrappers. We selected some of the branded items which represented a range of goods available for different numbers of tokens. The table below shows the results.

Slip-up reveals Cadbury's thinking

Cadbury's press release for the launch of the marketing scheme included the statement 'Chocolate is there to be enjoyed and it can form the basis of a balanced diet.' The *basis* of a balanced diet? Or an *addition* to a balanced diet? When challenged, Cadbury's said that they had meant to state: 'Chocolate is there to be enjoyed in moderation as part of a balanced diet'.

Such slip-ups can sometimes reveal how far a company would like to be able to push its product – not only as a treat food, but as a regular part of children's diets. What better way than to get schools to encourage children to collect millions of tokens from millions of chocolate bars?

The hidden costs of Cadbury's *Get Active!* campaign

| | Examples of equipment on offer | Number of tokens (chocolate bars consumed) | Total number of calories consumed (average 226.5 calories per bar) | Total amount of fat consumed ⁺ (average fat 12.3g per bar) | Amount of money spent on chocolate (based on an average of 42p per bar) | Value of equipment* |
|------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|---------------------|
| Primary schools | 1 netball (brand: Firsttouch) | 90 | 20,363 kcal | 1,107g (about 1kg) | £38 | £5 |
| | 1 basketball (brand: Firsttouch) | 170 | 38,463 kcal | 2,091g (about 2kg) | £71 | £10 |
| | 1 volleyball (brand: Molten) | 320 | 72,400 kcal | 3,936g (nearly 4kg) | £134 | £18 |
| Secondary schools | 1 cricket set (brand: Inter) | 2,730 | 617,663kcal (over half a million) | 33,579g (over 33kg) ⁺ | £1,147 | £150 |
| | 1 set of posts for volleyball net (brand: Wheelaway) | 5,440 | 1,230,800 kcal (over a million and a quarter) | 66,912g (nearly 67 kg) | £2,285 | £350 |
| Total promotion | | 160 million | 36,200,000,000 (over 36 billion) | 1,968,000kg | £67,200,000 | |

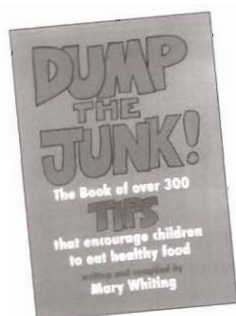
⁺ Note: to help you visualise these amounts of fat, 33kg of fat weighs approximately the same as a healthy 10-year-old child.

* Prices are from the online sports equipment store www.newitts.com.



Dump The Junk!

Mary Whiting, Moonscape
[www.moonscapebooks.com]
2003, ISBN 0-9544324-0-1, £7.99.



For any parent in need of inspiration and a friendly voice to help them encourage their children to

eat more healthily, this collection of seasoned advice will prove invaluable. There are chapters on such thorny issues as how to get children to enjoy fruit, vegetables and fish; how to deal with pester power when shopping; and how to whip up a tasty and wholesome packed lunch. With 40 additional pages of choice recipes, and a helpful guide to further resources, the aim is to empower parents to take a stand against the prevailing junk food culture.

What makes the book especially appealing is the generous spattering of cartoons, which ensures that the 140-odd pages of helpful tips maintain an engaging and lively feel.

You can order your copy of *Dump the Junk!* from the Food Commission, on the page opposite, with no charge for postage.



Bringing the Food Economy Home: Local alternatives to global business

Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield, Steven Gorelick, Zed Books 2002, ISBN 1-84277-233-3, Contact publisher for price (tel: 020 7837 4014).

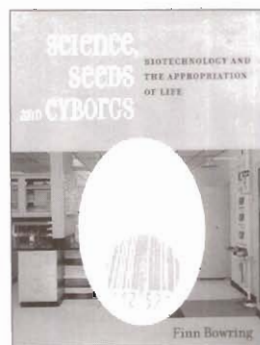
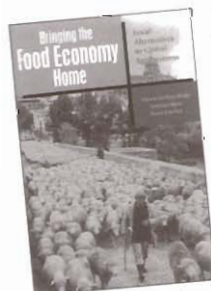
Helena Norberg-Hodge is a long-time campaigner for preservation of indigenous cultures and skills, through her work at the International Society for Ecology and Culture. Coming from her pen, one can expect a good, broad perspective on the major problems of the day, and one is not disappointed. The book summarises several decades of thinking on the globalisation of food supplies, the urbanisation of communities and the industrialisation of the economy – and the destruction this brings in its wake.

Whether the authors are correct to blame 'America's economically ruined rural heartland' for the 'increasing incidence of violence, played out in places like Ruby Ridge, Waco and Oklahoma City' is debatable, but the evidence of stress experienced by the rural ecology and those who live in it cannot be denied.

The solution developed in this book is evident from the subtitle: localisation of production of food and the rediscovery of rural community.

Throughout, there are shades of an anti-technology view, but the book is not a romantic retreat to the past – it offers a vision of a localised future that could be made to work if the political will could be mustered.

But, as the authors warn, 'the time to start is now'.



Science, Seeds and Cyborgs: Biotechnology and the appropriation of life

Finn Bowring, Verso
[www.versobooks.com], 2003, ISBN 1-85984-687-4, £19 (hardback).

The details and the arguments surrounding genetic engineering can confuse our thinking on the subject, and it takes a clear-sighted author such as Bowring (lecturer in Social Sciences at Cardiff University) to help us clear away the fuddlement and see the light of day.

The central theme is that genetic engineering, even that devoted to medical advances, is based on a view of science which needs to be challenged: science is being used, says Bowring, to turn living organisms and even people and their medical needs into manipulatable objects, and treating these objects as adaptable and disposable. The ultimate creation is superman – a human with genes spliced from other species – the enhanced eyesight of a hawk, the sensitive ears of a bat...

The danger, Bowring emphasises, is that we may lose our essence as a thinking and feeling human, in favour of creating a scientific beast. Furthermore, we may mistake our analysis of how the world works for the world itself. Science, he argues, must continually be checked and held accountable – our ability to adapt inhuman objects to human needs may be overtaken by our adaptation of humans to an inhuman world.

This book makes a valuable and thoughtful contribution to the continuing debate about the future of genetic engineering.

Safe Food: Bacteria, biotechnology and bioterrorism

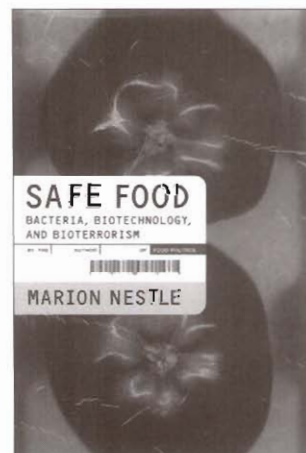
Marion Nestle, University of California Press
[www.ucpress.edu] 2003, ISBN 0-520-23292-5, £19.95 (hardback).

A nice alliterative subtitle, and a very nice side-swipe at the nature of modern food production and the hazards it creates.

If you ever wondered why the food industry happily spends millions of pounds on Food Safety Week when they tell us how important it is to wash our hands before eating, scrub our fruit and vegetables, cook food properly and keep our fridges at the correct temperature, this book gives the answer. By providing all this advice, the food industry can then tell us that if we get a dose of food poisoning then it must be our own fault!

Nestle shows how the food industry fights against regulation and takes shortcuts and cuts corners whenever it can. Billions of pounds are at stake. Accountability and food traceability are a hugely expensive and, in the industry's eyes, completely unnecessary extravagance. Sure, we get dioxin scares, and genetically modified StarLink corn where it shouldn't be... but no-one died of that, did they?

A well written and well-argued book that moves the debate on another mile or more. Once again, good work, Marion!



What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals



Salt substitutes – take with care

Dutch researchers have warned that some individuals may be at risk of hyperkalaemia (excessive potassium in the blood) if they swap sodium-based salt for potassium-based substitutes. Although an aid to reducing blood pressure, patients with faulty kidney functions – including some diabetes sufferers – and patients taking certain medications may develop hyperkalaemia which can lead to heart failure.

Manufacturers of potassium-based salt substitutes are urged to carry clear warnings that the product is not suitable for people following a salt-restricted diet.

■ Doorenbos and Vermeij, *BMJ*, 326, 2003.

Fish good for the heart – official

The prestigious American Heart Association has published a *Scientific Statement* confirming its belief that the consumption of omega-3 fatty acids, derived from fish and plant sources, significantly reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease.

The long-chain omega-3 oils found in oily fish reduce blood triglyceride levels, reduce clotting, improve arterial health and lower blood pressure.

The effects are greatest in people at highest risk, i.e., those with high blood pressure or raised triglyceride levels.

■ Kris-Etherton et al, *Circulation*, 106, 2002.

Dairy foods linked to Parkinsonism

A study of over 130,000 middle-aged men and women, tracked for a period of 10-15 years, has shown that those people developing Parkinson's Disease were more likely to have had a high intake of dairy foods than those who did not. The association was limited to men and was not found among women. No other food products showed a link to the disease, although previous studies have suggested that a link may exist with high caffeine intake (again, among men only).

■ Chen et al, *Annals of Neurology*, 52, 2002.

Agent Orange connected to leukaemia

Several herbicides including the notorious Agent Orange, used in huge quantities by the US military to defoliate the forests of Vietnam during the Vietnam War, 1962-1971, have been confirmed as being the probable cause of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

A committee of the US Institute of Medicine based their findings on six studies of the links between herbicides and the development of cancers in agricultural workers exposed to the chemicals.

A previous report from the committee had shown a link between these defoliants and increased risk of both Hodgkin's disease and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Agent Orange (named after the colour of the drums in which it was stored) contained two herbicides (2,4-D and 2,4,5-T) and was contaminated with a form of dioxin (TCDD). The US Veterans Administration has acknowledged that they are receiving compensation claims from ex-combatants affected with leukaemia at the rate of about 500 new cases per year.

■ Marwick (news item), *BMJ*, 326, 2003.

Eating disorders benefit from psychotherapy

A review of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and 'atypical' eating disorders has suggested that the most effective treatments are through various forms of psychological intervention.

Family-based therapy has been found to be the most suitable for adolescents with anorexia, while cognitive behaviour therapy has been found to be most appropriate for those suffering bulimia – possibly in combination with antidepressants during acute episodes. Other forms of intervention have shown only 'modest' or little benefit.

Although researchers say that there is a strong genetic component to these disorders, (for example it is found far more commonly in the twin sibling of identical twins than in non-identical twins) other factors also increase the risk of the disease. These include being female, living in Western societies, being adolescent (or young adult), having a family member (or members) with depression, alcoholism or obesity, along with poor parenting, sexual abuse and low self-esteem.

■ Fairburn and Harrison, *The Lancet*, 361, 2003.

Breastfeeding raises pain threshold

Examination of babies that were having samples of blood taken has shown that those being breastfed at the time were less likely to exhibit pain responses than those being fed with water, sugar solution, or just being held in their mother's arms. Breastfeeding is recommended for babies undergoing such procedures.

■ Carbajal et al, *BMJ*, 326, 2003.

Genetics and obesity

Analysis of the genetic structure of children with severe, early-onset obesity has shown that some (about 6%) have a genetic mutation linked to high levels of insulin in the blood. Earlier studies have shown that other genetic disorders are linked to raised risk of obesity in childhood.

The findings may be relevant to the medical treatment of severely obese children, but it has little relevance to the prevention of obesity. Studies of twins have shown that an estimated 40-70% of propensity to gain weight is due to genetic factors, i.e. most people will gain weight in an environment which encourages it. The remarkable fact is perhaps the reverse: that as many as 30-60% of people may be able to resist weight gain in an environment that encourages it.

■ Farooqi et al, *New Eng J Med*, 348, 2003.

Breastmilk cuts pre-term babies' diabetes risk

A reduced risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes has been found among adolescents who were breastfed after being born prematurely. Compared with pre-term infants that were fed with regular formula or a specialised pre-term formula, breastfed babies showed lower body mass index, reduced skin-fold thickness and lower levels of markers for insulin resistance when tested at age 13-16 years. Raised body weight, skinfold and insulin resistance are all risk factors for possible diabetes and cardiovascular disease in adulthood.

■ Singhal et al, *The Lancet*, 361, 2003.



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

feedback

letters from our readers

GM public debate

The UK's Public Debate on GM is finally taking shape. With the aim of taking the public's view on GM into account, the plans are now set for holding regional meetings. York (date unknown), Birmingham 22nd May, Taunton 24th May, Swansea 3rd June, Glasgow 5th June and Belfast 9th June. If you wish to participate, call the Central Office for Information (COI) on 020 7261 8528 for details of venues and times. It's also hoped that smaller local meetings will run this summer from May to July. If you wish to take the bull by the horns and arrange a public debate meeting, call Lee Hancock at the COI on 020 7261 8528.

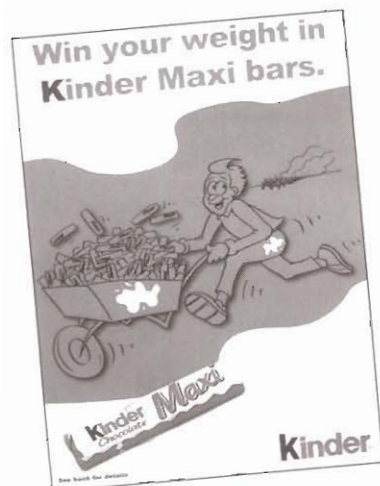
**Rachel Sutton, Campaign Co-ordinator
Five Year Freeze Campaign**

Unkind kinder

I was absolutely appalled to find a leaflet in my child's comic recently which promoted the Kinder chocolate bars.

They say that a child can 'win its own weight' in the product, which must be the most irresponsible dietary message I have ever seen. How can food manufacturers consider themselves to be concerned for their customers' welfare if they put out messages like these? Do they really expect a child to eat that amount of confectionery?

Mrs Talbot, Barnsley, S Yorks



What about children's medicines?

Your quarterly magazine is the best thing that drops through our letterbox. There is one issue on which I would value your viewpoint. Whilst artificial sweeteners are banned from baby foods, why is it that standard baby medications are packed with them (maltitol, sorbitol, saccharin, etc.) as are baby toothpastes? I don't understand how it can be disallowed in foodstuffs but not these other items which are ingested by babies.

Sue Warner, Essex

Many parents have written to us expressing concern about the use of colourings and

artificial sweeteners in children's medicines and toothpastes, and the difficulty of finding out what is in a product before purchasing it. We are planning to do a survey of these products. Can you help? Next time you are passing a pharmacist, pop in and ask if you can find out what colourings and sweeteners are used in children's medicines and toothpaste. Whatever the answer, let us know. Did the staff know? Were they able to help you? Was it easy to find out what was in a product from the label? Send your experiences to: additives@foodcomm.org.uk or write to: The Food Commission (additives survey), 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

What should I eat to save the planet?

Vegetarians often claim that their diets are better for the environment. I'd guess that this is difficult to prove, although I have read various convincing arguments about the environmental damage caused by meat production. Do you know of any information about the relative merits of choosing different types of food, relating those choices to environmental effects?

J Short, Loughborough University

This is an area where environmentalists and health campaigners could be working

together towards the same goal - sustainable agriculture involves greater use of plant-based foods in human diets, with benefits for both the environment and human health. The Swedish Environment Protection Agency recently came up with a table combining goals for a healthy diet with goals for sustainable food production in Sweden (see below).

Whilst Swedish diets differ from those in the UK, this table at least gives some indication of how we might address both environmental and nutritional 'balance' in our diets.

Table: Agreement between goals for a healthy diet and for sustainable food production in Sweden

| Food | Consumption (g/day) Actual level | Recommended level for reduced ecological impact |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Margarine, butter, oil | 50 | 50 |
| Milk products | 400 | 300 |
| Cheese | 45 | 20 |
| Meat, poultry, sausage | 145 | 35 |
| Fish | 30 | 30 |
| Egg | 25 | 10 |
| Bread | 100 | 200 |
| Cereal | 15 | 45 |
| Potatoes | 140 | 270 |
| Vegetables | 150 | 190 |
| Root vegetables | 25 | 100 |
| Fruit | 150 | 175 |
| Dried legumes | 5 | 50 |
| Snacks/sweets | 200 | 140 |
| Soft drinks | 150 | 80 |

Adapted from: 'A sustainable food supply chain'. Stockholm, Swedish Environment Protection Agency, 2001 (report 4966).

Snacks are not as salty as you say

I feel compelled to write regarding the highly misleading claims made in the Food Commission's report on salt levels in potato crisps (FM 60, January 2003).

Your report draws comparisons between current sodium levels in savoury snacks with sodium levels in potato crisps in 1978, stating that they have 'doubled'.

In 1978, the market was dominated by potato crisps in a limited range of flavours. Over the next decade the market saw intense new product development and the growth of savoury snacks made from corn, wheat, rice, etc. The range of flavours available also increased very significantly. During this period it is true to say that the sodium level in savoury snacks increased, peaking around the early '80s, and has steadily declined since. Since the mid 1980s the savoury snack industry has made vigorous efforts to reduce sodium levels in their products by using innovative means and taking advantage of new technology and ingredients as they have become available.

Apart from providing a very wide range of product choice, the savoury snack industry was one of the first sectors to introduce full nutrition information on pack labels listing the Big Eight (energy, fat, protein, carbohydrate, sodium, saturates, dietary fibre and sugar). As a responsible industry, we advocate giving the consumer honest, comprehensive and transparent information so that they are able to make informed decisions on a healthy, balanced diet.

S G Chandler, Director General, SNACMA
(the Snack Nut and Crisp Manufacturers' Association)

Thank you S G Chandler, but what will you do about the salt levels in these products? Our survey found some products – such as Hula Hoops (Salt & Vinegar) and Skips – to contain 1500mg sodium per 100g. Averaging across nine different sorts of crisps gave a figure of 1050 mg/100g. By comparison, a 1976 survey of 26 different types of plain and flavoured crisps gave an average figure of 550 mg/100g.

Parents say 'ditch the additives'!

In October last year, we reported on research showing that food additives can cause behaviour changes in toddlers. We asked members of the Parents Jury if they had noticed, or suspected such effects with their own children. We received dozens of replies, some of which are summarised here (we have left out names to respect parents' anonymity). For more comments from parents on this issue, see the Parents Jury website: www.parentsjury.org.uk

"As a parent who has recently suffered I would like to lock food manufacturers in a room full of dye-affected children for an hour. I nearly had a nervous breakdown over food dyes affecting my children."

"My son reacted to a food colouring – anthocyanin – present in virtually all brands of red fruit squashes. He had a pin spot rash over most of his body, arms and all down his legs. Also, it is virtually impossible to buy infant paracetamol that is not loaded with artificial sweeteners and colourants."

"The first time my child reacted to Tartrazine, he was shaking and banging his head against the wall – he was unable to stop moving, but was also completely aware of what was happening to him and frightened by it, but unable to stop his body movements. It was terrifying both for him and people watching."

"My four-year-old daughter is already highly active and becomes hyperactive and aggressive after only a few coloured sweets or one drink. It can take 24 hours to wear off. The effect is immediate and very noticeable. Her behaviour becomes almost manic."

The Food Commission has submitted these and other Parents Jury experiences to the new Food Standards Agency expert working group, which has been convened to design an experimental study to look into the effects of additives on children's mood and behaviour. We believe it is time someone listened to parents and removed the problem additives from children's food without waiting for further tests. For the parents, these experiences are not merely 'anecdotal'.

■ If you are a parent, with a child or children between the ages of 2 and 16, we would like to hear from you. To join the Parents Jury, contact 020 7837 2250; email: parentsjury@foodcomm.org.uk

Badvertisement

Pigs in straw

Packaged in an 'aseptic' pack, and made from 'heat treated' yogurt, you might expect this 'virtually fat free' drink to be virtually bacteria-free as well.

And you would be right. It says probiotic on the front of the pack, but the probiotic claims are derived from the contents of the attached straw!

Packed with 99 million *Lactobacillus reuteri*, you could use the straw on any drink and get your dose of bacteria.

We wondered how this straw merits an organic certification... until we removed the straw from the side of the pack and found underneath the warning that the bacteria were not organically produced.

We also wondered where we had heard about *Lactobacillus reuteri* before. Ah yes! The probiotic makes an excellent feed supplement for piglets to encourage early weaning and rapid weight gain. Especially when mixed in their water (see <http://www.biogal.se/report6.pdf>).





backbites



Junk will make us healthy?

Consuming soft drinks and chocolate will help us get fit, says the food industry.

How? By buying the products and getting discounted sports gear, that's how.

Cadbury's launches its school sports tokens this spring – with the extraordinary backing of a government sports minister (see pages 18-19 in this magazine). Terry's Chocolate Orange bars carry a £5 voucher for sports gear.



And Lucozade says it is launching a Sports Science Academy, in the hopes of trouncing its rivals Pepsi and Coca-Cola (running similar schemes). The 'academy' consists of a website, a high-tech gym at the company HQ and the distribution of 'sports nutrition toolkits' to gym instructors telling them how to use Lucozade products.

Meanwhile, US researchers suspect that one of the most likely causes of childhood obesity is snacks and soft drinks eaten in addition to regular meals.

Quis custodiet...?

Who guards the guardians? The Department of Trade and Industry regulates advertising, largely through industry self-control exercised through the British Code of Advertising and Sales Promotion, administered by the quango, the Advertising Standards Association.

Last year a company called Standards for Promotions Inspectorate set itself up as 'a self-regulatory industry-led body' which will 'uphold standards and promote best practice in self-regulation'. It then set about advertising its services '...promoting the first internationally recognised Code of Practice...' and soliciting generous fees from advertising companies to become 'founder members'. The Code, which has not been published, was priced at £350 per copy. Membership cost ad companies a hefty subscription.

Alas it has all turned to dust. The SPI's unlikely-named chief Salvador Priori appears to have disappeared. The company is listed as having lost 26 directors in the space of a year. It has been disowned by the ASA and other industry bodies, and the DTI has moved to close the firm down at a court hearing due in May.

The amount of money it took from the advertising trade has not been disclosed. And no-one will ever know if SPI's own sales promotions broke SPI's own Code.



Are fish and chips the healthiest meal?

Even in the greasy world of fish-and-chip shops, health claims are catching on. These days, the paper bag containing fried potatoes and your battered and deep-fried haddock is likely to come with the following message: 'Fish & Chips: The healthiest meal for all the family.' This logo was on a paper bag wrapped around a large portion of deep-fried chips purchased in central London (food campaigners do sometimes have a night off...). As this is such a contentious subject (see pages 11-14 of this issue), it would be most enlightening to see their criterion for 'healthy'!

Not just puppy fat

According to the worthy Chartered Society for Physiotherapy, obesity is now the most serious disorder affecting the health of... dogs.

It exceeds the dangers from road traffic and far outweighs the third biggest problem, slipped discs. Dogs are defined as obese if they weigh 15-20% more than they should. The main cause is over-feeding and lack of exercise. 'We overfeed at mealtimes and give tibbits through the day as treats for our furry friends,' said animal physiotherapist Charlotte Baldwin. As a result the animals are at risk of cardiovascular, respiratory and skeletal problems.

American Pie

At a time when an outsider's view of America shows the country to be riddled with contradictions, it's interesting to find a new survey of American opinion about their food supplies which indicates a 'healthy' lack of complacency.

According to a team of researchers from 11 major US universities, Americans would rather have food grown locally than shipped in (71% in favour) and only a quarter (26%) were happy to eat genetically modified plants. A whopping 92% wanted GM foods fully labelled as such. Nearly three quarters

The wrong can

A cricket spectator at the World Cup match between Australia and India is to sue the International Cricket Council for assault after being thrown out of the grandstands – for drinking Coca-Cola! The match was being sponsored by Pepsi.

It is all part of the marketing war between the soft drink giants. At the FIFA football world cup in Korea last year, spectators were prohibited from taking cans of Pepsi into the matches as Coca-Cola was an official sponsor. And Coke put David Beckham on promotional packaging as part of its FIFA-linked marketing campaign, despite Pepsi's contract with Beckham and the Manchester United team.

Obesity and the law

State legislators in Maine, USA, are drafting a bill to discourage obesity. It will require improved nutrition labelling especially at fast food outlets, bans on soft drinks and junk food in schools, plus transport polices to encourage walking.

The bill is being bitterly opposed by the Center for Consumer Freedom, a pro-food industry group which accuses Maine legislators of wanting a nanny state and of setting up 'a forbidden fruit syndrome'.

Meanwhile Republican representatives in Washington want to prevent obese people from suing food companies. Their bill aims to prevent 'frivolous' claims and to protect food sellers from being held liable for the effects of their products unless the plaintiff proves the products were 'not in compliance with applicable statutory and regulatory requirements'.

This bill in turn is being opposed by lawyers who are enjoying the spate of class action suits. They argue that judges already have the right to throw out frivolous cases and to penalise lawyers who bring them.

of respondents (71%) were willing to pay more for food produced in ways that protected the environment, and a majority would pay more to ensure family farming, rather than corporate farming, was supported.

These contradictions to the orthodox impression of America's love-affair with agri-business were revealed in a survey of some 4,000 questionnaires sent to a stratified representative population based on the US census (see <http://sasw.chass.ncsu.edu/global-food>).