

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

Published by The Food Commission

Issue 63 ♦ October/December 2003 ♦ £4.95

Salt: FSA launches food-by-food strategy

In a remarkable challenge to the food industry, the government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) has told manufacturers it wants to see 50% of the salt cut from bacon and ham, 60% cut from sauces and 80% cut from canned vegetables.

A total of 48 food categories are given target reduction levels in the FSA proposal, with an average salt reduction target of 32%. It is the first time any government agency in the world has specified the compositional standards for the salt content of such a broad range of processed foods, and represents the first major step by the FSA towards becoming a serious player in public health nutrition policy.

The salt composition proposals come in a mildly-worded consultation letter sent to some 35 industry and non-governmental bodies, which asks that the proposals be seen only as a modelling exercise showing the amounts of salt that would need to be removed if the average diet were to meet the recommended target of just 6 grams of salt per day (adults). But the document follows a stakeholder meeting which urged the FSA to consider setting compositional criteria for processed foods – and added that these could be set by voluntary agreement or by statutory regulation.

The threat of statutory regulation is a clear indication to food companies that they must start becoming part of the solution, not part of

the problem. The proposals cover most food sectors, including take-away foods, ready meals, bread, pizza, snack foods, commercial soups, baked beans and burgers, although certain categories are given zero reduction targets because they contain little or no added salt.

The targets would be tougher still if industry were made to take full responsibility for ensuring that the population target salt consumption levels are met. In fact, the FSA model assumes that individuals will reduce the salt they add voluntarily by 40%.

■ Further details of the proposed salt reduction targets are given on page 7.

Chuck Snacks off the Checkout!

The Food Commission has launched a new campaign calling on supermarkets, grocery stores and pharmacies to Chuck Snacks off the Checkout! It will be collecting statements and experiences from people from across the country to submit to retailers, in an effort to control this manipulative marketing practice.

The move follows complaints from members of the Parents Jury that snacks placed near the shop tills cause conflict between parents and children, with children pestering for the products they see displayed there. Many adults also report that they end up consuming extra chocolate bars, sweets, crisps and soft drinks that they would not otherwise have chosen, simply because the products are displayed where they have to queue up.

A survey of major supermarkets has shown that while many claim to have policies to keep checkouts, or a proportion of checkouts, free from fatty and sugary snacks, many still place displays at or near the tills,

often at pushchair height, to put temptation within easy reach.

In a league table shown on page 14, we found that Waitrose was found had the most family-friendly checkouts, with no snacks displayed. However, Asda was found to be

the worst offender, with many confectionery products displayed in easy reach of children.

One major confectionery manufacturer, Nestlé, estimates that if supermarkets went back to displaying confectionery routinely in this way, an extra 15 million chocolate bars could be sold each year, adding thousands of kilograms of fat and sugar to the nation's diet.

■ To find out more about this new campaign, see pages 11 to 14.



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
Policy Officer: Kath Dalmeny
Campaigns & Research Officers:
Annie Seeley, Merav Shub
Office & Subscriptions Manager:
Ian Tokelove
Administrative Officer: Graham Hood
Information Officer: Mary Whiting
Assistant Research Officer:
Marjon Willers

Cartoons: Ben Nash

Trustees and Advisors:
Joanna Blythman, Dr Eric Brunner
Tracey Clunies-Ross, Peta Cottee, Prof
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Martine Drake, Alan Gear, Vicki Hird, Dr
Mike Joffe, Robin Jenkins, Prof Tim Lang,
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Longfield, Diane McCrae, Dr Erik Millstone,
Dr Melanie Miller, Charlotte Mitchell, Dr
Mike Nelson, Dr Mike Rayner, Prof Aubrey
Sheiham, Colin Tudge, Hugh Warwick,
Simon Wright.

■ Issue 63 of the *Food Magazine* Oct–
Dec 2003. ISSN 0953-5047.
■ Typesetting and design by Ian Tokelove
of the Food Commission.
■ Printed on recycled paper by Rap/Spider
Web, Oldham OL9 7LY.
■ Retail distribution by Central Books, 99
Wallis Road, London E9 5LN.
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Commission

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

Time to kick ass!

The Arnie Schwarzenegger effect appears to be firing the blood of our pals at the Food Standards Agency. Not the Terminator aspect, with several thousand Californian employees being laid off to cut the budget, but the blunt acting method – actions, not words.

After promising that it would turn its attention to nutrition, the FSA remained silent for several months. Then, quietly, it issued a gentle proposal to set targets for the food industry on the amount of salt they should be putting in processed food. The targets appear to be dramatic: 60% reduction in some products, even 80% in others.

No official body has ever been so specific in setting public health nutritional policy for such a wide range of processed foods. Let the food companies be served notice: these targets are now a yardstick to measure the industry's action.

And the press release for a recent FSA survey of sausages featured two damning criticisms – the rising fat and salt levels in certain types of sausage – much to the annoyance of the food industry.

So perhaps this new, muscular FSA will be equally active on advertising to children. It farked the issue last year, and instead called for a review of the academic evidence. Now it has received the evidence (see www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/foodpromotiontochildren1.pdf) and splashed the results all over its own publications, highlighting the five key conclusions:

- there is a lot of food advertising to children
- the advertised diet is less healthy than the recommended one
- children enjoy and engage with food promotion
- food promotion has an effect on children's food preferences, purchasing behaviour and consumption
- this effect is independent of other factors and operates at both a brand and category level

It couldn't be clearer. As several newspapers headlined: TV ads are making children fat.



The industry is furious – not just the food industry but the advertising agencies and the media that publishes the advertising. As we suggest in Backbites (p24) this may prove impossible to overcome under the present Labour government with its close commercial ties.

The struggle will make for interesting viewing. It could even be a script for a movie. We will keep you updated.

Or as the big man says, *Hasta la Vista, Baby!*

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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!

Hidden ads slammed in US

The US campaign group Commercial Alert has formally complained to the government's Federal Communication Commission against the failure by major TV companies to comply with sponsorship identification requirements by hiding advertising in TV programmes.

ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC and Disney are among the companies accused of inserting branded products directly into programmes in return for fees, a practice known as product placement. Yet the programme makers fail to declare the sponsorship to viewers, which in Commercial Alert's view contradicts Section 317 of the US Communication Act. The Act specifies that sponsorship should be announced to viewers at the time the hidden advertisement is broadcast.

Advertisers are keen to develop product placement, as viewers tend to avoid watching ad breaks, using the time to put the kettle on or go to the toilet. Although product placement in programmes has been used in a small way in the past, Commercial Alert reports that the level has risen markedly in recent years. In one episode of the US equivalent of *Pop Idol*, on the Fox network, the three judges had Coca-Cola branded cups in front of each of them, the green room was renamed the Coca-Cola Red Room, and just

before breaking for adverts one of the hosts said, 'But first I want to get a quick Coke'.

Commercial Alert claims that embedded, undeclared advertising fails to inform viewers of the paid nature of product placements. The campaign group is calling for stronger sponsorship identification rules.

In the meantime, US TV companies may be moving to eliminate completely all delineated advertising breaks. Commercial Alert reports a recent deal between Warner Brothers Network and Pepsi Cola to launch a programme tentatively titled *Live From Right Now* that will have no advertisements – none that are recognisable as such, at least.

■ More details from www.commercialalert.org/ftc.pdf and www.commercialalert.org/fcc.pdf



Michael Shaw, 2003, with apologies

Pester power advert defended as 'humorous'

An advert that encourages children to lie to their parents in order to persuade them to buy Cheestrings has been defended by regulators as 'comedy'. This is despite advertising rules that ban adverts from encouraging children to ask their parents to buy a product.

The TV and cinema advert shows a young boy pretending to have calcium deficiency in order to persuade his mother to run out to the shops and buy the cheese product. The advertiser, Golden Vale Cheese Co., boasts on its children's website that the advertising campaign 'shows a clever way to get your parents to buy loads of Cheestrings!'

The Food Commission submitted a complaint about the advert to the Independent Television Commission. We pointed out that the ITC's own rules explicitly state that 'Advertisements must not directly advise or ask children to buy or to ask their parents or others to make enquiries or purchases.' We also told the ITC that Cheestrings is a high fat and high salt product, containing 2.5g of salt (more than the recommended daily amount for a small child in a single serving). This was not mentioned in the advertisement.

The ITC defended the advert as 'comedy' and said, 'The wider debate around encouraging lower fat / health foods is an issue for the Department of Health and parental responsibility. As long as products are legally available, and the advertising doesn't break our codes, we cannot dictate which aspects of the product commercials emphasise.'

BBC back-tracks on fast food but makes no promises

The BBC's commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, has declared that it has 'no further plans' to use its cartoon characters such as the Teletubbies and Tweenies to promote fast food, and that it will be reviewing its nutrition policy.

The announcement follows complaints from the Food Commission and members of the Parents Jury. Whilst the announcement is cautiously welcomed, careful reading of BBC Worldwide's statement shows that it does not explicitly rule out future promotions.

A recent Food Commission survey found that all foods that carry the Tweenies characters were either high in salt, sugar, fat and/or saturated fat. While the BBC argued that some of these foods were 'treat' foods, many are everyday meal products such as yoghurt or tinned pasta shapes in tomato sauce. And with so many core children's foods being salty, sugary and/or fatty it is difficult for parents to differentiate between 'treat foods' and 'everyday' foods.

Responding to parents' concerns, the BBC stated that promotions of healthier foods 'like fruit, vegetables, bread, rice and fish have historically proved harder to adapt to character use'. However, the Food Commission has investigated several examples of companies using cartoon characters to promote healthier food to children, including the Food Dudes (www.fooddudes.com), Winnie-the-Pooh stickers on fruit in Waitrose, Noddy milk, and new salt-free toddler products from Buxton Foods using Peter Rabbit imagery. These demonstrate that such techniques can indeed be a viable business option.

After receiving critical press coverage, BBC Worldwide contacted the Food Commission to arrange a meeting.

Kath and Annie from the Food Commission and Parents Jury, together with representatives from Buxton Foods (makers of salt-free



The Food Dudes show that cartoon characters can successfully promote healthier foods.

toddler food) and Mums4 (makers of sugar-free yoghurts for children), both of which successfully sell their products in mainstream supermarkets, attended the meeting in September. It seemed very positive and productive. Further discussions will take place in November.

The Food Commission and Parents Jury are hoping to see the BBC lead the way in promoting healthier food to children, using influential characters such as the Fimbles, Teletubbies and Tweenies. We have our fingers crossed!

Premium sausages fattier than ever

A new survey of sausages finds that the highest quality 'premium' lines have risen in fat content from 15% to 21% since a previous survey in 1991. Salt levels in standard products have also increased.

Just as the barbecue season came to an end, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) published the details of its year-long survey of sausages*, showing that manufacturers seem determined to increase our fat and salt consumption.

Premium quality sausages, with over 70% meat content, were typically over 20% fat. Among the fattiest were:

Fattiest premium sausages	fat content
Asda Aberdeen Angus Beef	33%
Co-op Butchers 8 Select Pork	30%
Marks & Spencer Premium Pork	28%
Safeway Olde English Style Pork	26%

Such fatty sausages would provide between a quarter and a third of an adult's entire maximum recommended fat intake for the day in just one portion. The FSA defines a portion as two regular sausages, around 115g raw or 80g after cooking.

If you want to cut the fat, choose products that specifically claim to be low in fat. The lowest levels were in sausages claiming that they had less than 5% fat, including products from Asda, Tesco, Safeway and Bowyers.

Salt levels increased in standard sausages, from 2.2g per portion in 1991 to 2.4g this year. However the low-fat sausages were also lower in salt, typically under 1.8g per portion.

Worst offenders	salt content
Richmond Irish Recipe	2.8%
Walls Thick Pork	2.3%
Sainsbury's Pork	2.3%
Tesco Pork and Beef	2.2%
Iceland Pork and Beef	2.2%
Tesco Vegetarian Lincolnshire	2.2%
Linda McCartney vegetarian	2.1%

*** FSA Programme of mini-surveys: sausages survey (41/03) September 2003.**

Cooking the figures

Companies that only give post-cooking figures gain an advantage over those that give figures for raw sausages, as some of the fat is lost in cooking.

	Average fat content
Raw	23.2%
Baked	19.9%
Barbecued	18.1%
Fried	20.8%
Grilled	19.9%
Pricked and grilled	18.9%



Label chaos

The label on these Sainsbury's Organic Pork Sausages gives no fat content for the raw product, but says the sausages are 26% fat when 'cooked as instructed'. The instructions offer two cooking methods (grilling 12-15 mins, baking 30-40 mins). The pack claims 95% meat, which implies that a generous level of fat can be described as 'meat'.

The search for a healthy sausage

The Food Commission went searching for a healthy, low fat sausage, but found that manufacturers are unable to agree on how to describe the fat content of their sausages.

It should be easy enough: how much fat does this sausage contain? But if you asked the same question of Sainsbury, Iceland or Walls you would get a different answer – even if the product was identical.

Some producers tell you the fat per 100g as sold raw. Others don't give the raw value, but give the amount of fat left in a sausage that has been grilled, or fried, or 'shallow fried' or even 'cooked as instructed'.

And some give the amount per sausage, but the sausage size can vary from a chipolata at around 30g up to 100g 'jumbo'.

If the manufacturers wanted to make it hard to compare products, they could hardly do better. It would be much easier for customers if a standard method were used.

Confused? Perhaps that's what they want!

Manufacturers fail to give comparable values for fat content, making it impossible for consumers to work out which are the healthier sausages:

	fat content is given for
Belchers	raw
Bernard Matthews per 100g	raw
Bernard Matthews per sausage	cooked
Bowyers	raw
Holland & Barrett meat-free	raw
Iceland fresh	grilled
Iceland frozen 1	shallow fried
Iceland frozen 2	fried
Iceland frozen 3	cooked
Iceland frozen 4	grilled
Marks & Spencer	raw
Quorn meat-free	raw
Richmond Irish Recipe	raw
Sainsbury most sorts	grilled
Sainsbury Organic	cooked
Tesco	raw
Walls	raw

FDA requires trans-fat labelling

The American Food and Drug Administration has told food companies that from January 2006 they must declare on the label the amount of trans-fat in their products. But UK consumers will still be denied this information.

Following nearly a decade of campaigning and petitioning by our American cousins at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, and following a recent legal case brought against Kraft Foods for failing to warn purchasers of Oreo biscuits of the trans-fat content, the US becomes the first country in the world to bring in a new labelling rule requiring declaration of the trans-fat in foods.

Trans-fats are found naturally in some dairy and animal products but are also created when vegetable or marine oils are hydrogenated, a process which solidifies the oil and reduces its liability to become rancid, extending its shelf life. Hydrogenated oils are produced in block or pellet form, and are waxy to touch but combine with flour to make products such as biscuits and pastries that can stay fresh-tasting for months. Hydrogenated oils are also popular with fast food sellers for deep-fat frying.

A series of reports from the US Institute of Medicine, the US National Academy of Sciences and other expert committees have

upheld the view that trans-fats should be considered as risky as saturated fats in their

propensity to raise blood cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the American government's food legislation body, estimates that the new regulation will cost industry a one-off figure of \$140-\$250 million for analysis, labelling and reformulation. Against this the FDA estimates that labelling could prevent 600-1,200 heart attacks annually, saving 250-500 lives, with an annual saving of \$0.9-\$1.8 billion in medical costs, lost productivity and pain and suffering.

Although a welcome move to provide more consumer information, the new rules will not require declarations of less than 0.5 grams of trans-fat in a serving, and there is no change to the exemption for certain foods – notably fast food, restaurant meals, and food sold loose – from bearing any nutrition labelling. This is a major loophole, as US food composition tables show the largest quantities of trans-fats are found in portions of deep-fried potatoes and doughnuts, neither of which need to bear nutrition labels.

...And in the UK?

UK consumption of trans-fats is a shade lower than that in the US. Average daily intake in the UK was 4g (women) and 5.6g (men) in the late 1980s compared with an average of 5.8g for American adults in the 1990s. UK data for 2001 suggest there has been a fall in trans-fat consumption as manufacturers have started to find alternative ingredients.

The UK's Food Standard Agency says bluntly *'Trans-fats have no known nutritional benefits and because of the effect they have on blood cholesterol, they increase the risk of coronary heart disease. Evidence suggests the effects of trans-fats are worse than saturated fats.'*



A King-Size dose – we estimate some 5% of pure trans-fat (over 4g) in this Twix pack.

US portions of trans-fat

	Trans-fat in a portion	Trans-fat as % total fat
French fries	7.8g	29%
Doughnut	5.0g	27%
Cake	4.3g	26%
Potato chips (crisps)	3.2g	29%
Cream biscuits	1.9g	31%
Cooking fat	4.2g	32%
Hard margarine	2.8g	25%
Soft margarine	0.6g	9%

Source: FDA website www.csfan.fda.gov

The UK Food Standards Agency gives little help on how to avoid eating trans-fats, except to note that the ingredients list should mention 'hydrogenated vegetable fat' (or oil) or 'partially hydrogenated vegetable fat'. But in the UK, like the USA, there are no labels or ingredients lists put on deep-fried fast foods, canteen pastry-based foods or loose-sold cakes, pies and doughnuts, yet these are likely to be major sources of trans-fats in the diet.

Labelling trans-fat – if such labelling ever arrives in Europe – would be only part of the answer. From a public-health perspective, the sooner industry ceases to use these artificial fats the sooner our health will improve.

Although no figures have been estimated for UK heart disease caused by trans-fats, one Dutch study has suggested that elimination of most of the hydrogenated oils from the food supply would cut deaths from heart disease by over 20%.

In the UK that could prevent over 12,000 premature deaths a year just by removing this one ingredient from our diets.

Indigestive biscuits? Around 80 grams of 'partially hydrogenated vegetable oil' in this pack of biscuits – but exactly how much of that is trans-fat?



No cheers here. Most cereals don't have added fat, but Nestlé puts nearly 3% hydrogenated vegetable fat in every bowlful of Cheerios.

Krispy Kremes 'do nought' for health

America's latest export to Britain contains up to a quarter of your day's maximum fat intake in every portion. Annie Seeley joined the queue in Harrods for the UK launch of Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

Harrods at 9.00am was teeming with PR people, film crews and photographers, all ready to witness the UK launch of Krispy Kremes.

Dubbed by the media 'the heart attack with a hole', the first UK customer (who had queued for nearly 12 hours) won a year's supply of Krispy Kreme doughnuts – that's 24 doughnuts every week for a year.

Taking nutrition information from the company's US website, this will provide nearly 400,000 kcalories, over 28 kgs of sugar and 20 kg of fat, one quarter of which is saturated fat.

According to the company, the doughnuts are not a fast food because they are not a meal replacement. But as a snack they are likely to be eaten in addition to meals, adding extra calories, fat and sugar to daily diets and replacing healthier foods.

As part of its marketing drive, the company is planning 'fundraising breakfasts' for

community groups, in which doughnuts will be available at half price for resale, with the profits kept by the fundraisers. By its nature, this marketing is likely to appeal to schools and communities that are strapped for cash and whose Parent-Teacher Associations are desperately seeking ways to pay for school equipment and educational materials. However, the typical schoolchild already eats unhealthy levels of sugar and fat, and low-income communities often suffer the highest incidence of obesity, heart disease and diabetes, in large part due to unhealthy diets.

The US website for Krispy Kreme says its strategy provides a 'sweet profit for your school or organisation' and boasts of the computers, books, trips, uniforms and much more bought with the 'dough' that schools can raise by selling Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

That's just the start. In the US the company's Sweet Reward programme provides teachers with a doughnut poster and 'success sprinkles' for students to decorate the poster as they reach their goals.

Teachers can then trade the completed poster at their local participating Krispy Kreme store for 24 doughnuts, and reward their class for 'Sticking With It!'

Alternatively, teachers can opt for the Good Grades Programme where primary pupils receive a free doughnut for each 'A' on their report card, up to six per grading period.

But that's in America. It couldn't happen here... could it?

There is another way...

Schools and communities can find healthier ways to raise money. Schemes like Abel & Cole's Farmers Choice vegetable and fruit box schemes can provide money for schools in exchange for using the school as a collection point for boxes of locally grown organic produce.



Under the Abel & Cole scheme 25% of the price of the box goes to the school – it suggests a school can raise £150 for a one-hour weekly operation handing out 50 boxes. The scheme is run on a not-for-profit basis.

■ Contact Abel & Cole, tel 020 7737 5217, gary.congress@abel-cole.co.uk

Krispy Kremes have awarded one 'lucky' customer 24 free doughnuts a week for a year. This is the equivalent of an extra half kilo of sugar and 400g of fat every week. Annie, our resident nutritionist, makes the point in her stylish new Krispy Kremes t-shirt and hat.



Industry told: cut salt by a third

The government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) has challenged the food industry to remove the salt it adds to processed foods by an average of 32%, and in some products by as much as 80%.

In the first-ever proposals for setting official compositional standards for the salt content of a wide range of processed foods, the FSA has drawn up a model of what we are currently eating, including the salt in each category of food, the target levels of salt we should eat, and hence the amount of salt that should be cut from each category to achieve improvements in public health.

In its covering notes, the FSA reassures manufacturers that these figures represent average levels, not maximum levels, and that they represent only one way to meet the target and so are not a fixed proposal. However, the implication is clear: this is the road down which the FSA intends to travel and companies would do well to show a willingness to participate.

The FSA has suggested that its next piece of work will be to specify maximum levels for each food category, a move which would provide the stepping stone towards statutory controls and the identification of products that exceed the maximum levels.

The Food Commission welcomes these proposals but urges the FSA to consider making the targets even steeper so that less of the burden for making cuts falls on individual consumers adding salt at the table. At present the industry is expected to cut their use by 32% and consumers to cut the amount added at table by 40%. We would like to see the industry held liable for a far greater proportion of the total cut required.

It will also be interesting to see if the FSA will consider extending such an approach to cover other damaging ingredients in processed foods, such as saturated fat and sugar.

The FSA's main targets

This table shows the food groups identified in the FSA model as needing to reduce the most salt if the target adult intake of 6 grams per day is to be achieved.

	Salt to go
Pizza	30%
White bread	26%
Wholemeal bread	28%
Crumpets, muffins, granary	42%
Bought sandwiches	30%
Breakfast cereals	36%
Buns, pastries, cakes	30%
Cheese	29%
Egg dishes	31%
Fat spreads	45%
Bacon and ham	50%
Burgers and kebabs	40%
Sausages	43%
Meat pies	35%
Fish products	33%
Canned vegetables	81%
Baked beans	36%
Crisps and snacks	40%
Hot chocolate, Horlicks	68%
Soup	55%
Cook-in and pasta sauces	60%
Table sauces	34%
Meat ready meals	38%
Fish ready meals	33%
Take-away dishes (meat)	33%
Take away dishes (veg)	42%

Nestlé Salt Awareness Campaign shifts responsibility to consumers

Nestlé has launched a new 'Salt Awareness Campaign' in conjunction with the British Heart Foundation (BHF).

Packets of Shredded Wheat prominently display the BHF logo and repeat some standard health advice on salt, including the warning that 'It can be difficult to work out where the salt is in your diet – it's often in foods which you would not expect to contain a lot of salt'.

Perhaps Nestlé is referring to the high levels of salt it adds to almost every other cereal brand it sells? (see table below)

With an annual turnover of £1.8 billion in the UK alone, Nestlé could make a real contribution to public health if it reduced the salt levels in its cereal brands. But it seems that Nestlé refuse to accept responsibility for the salt which it adds to breakfast cereals. This new 'Salt Awareness Campaign' effectively passes the buck to the consumer, who must search the small-print for sodium levels if they wish to reduce their salt intake.

Unsurprisingly, Nestlé's high salt cereal brands carry no details of the campaign and no health warning about excessive salt consumption.



Nestlé's Salt Awareness Campaign fails to highlight its high salt cereals

Nestlé cereal	Sodium per 100g	Is this high or low salt?*
Golden Nuggets	0.5g	High
Clusters	0.5g	High
Shreddies	0.5g	High
Cookie Crisp	0.6g	High
Cinnamon Grahams	0.7g	High
Cheerios	0.8g	High
Monsters Inc	0.8g	High
Golden Grahams	1.0g	High

* According to Food Standards Agency criteria: 0.5g or more of sodium per 100g is 'a lot'

Badvertisement

Sugar good for the teeth?

This new product from Nestlé claims that 'Nesquik Fresh is a great way to get kids to drink more fresh milk... Calcium for strong teeth and bones.' However, this product is not as fresh as Nestlé likes to make out. It is made with 'high-temperature pasteurised' milk, which gives this 'fresh' product a 21 day shelf life. And what about the claim that it is good 'for strong teeth'? We estimate this

product is 6% sugar, and note that the cartoon on the label encourages children to consume this drink three times a day.



Problems with patents

Tom MacMillan of the Food Ethics Council examines intellectual property rights, patents and food production.

Most of us are branded by the food we eat. We trust certain brands to provide healthy, tasty food, although there may be others we avoid, perhaps because we regard them as unethical or unhealthy. Brands are big business, supported by massive advertising spends and protected by trademarks.

A trademark is a legal device that gives the holder ownership of a marketing idea that anyone could otherwise copy. It is probably the most obvious form of 'intellectual property' (IP) protection to affect food. Others include copyrights (on a cookery book, for example) and geographical indications (such as Parma ham), intended to protect regional specialities.

Yet there are also forms of IP that we do not see in the shops, which affect how food is produced and, hence, what we can eat. Patents are the most important of these hidden ingredients. In principle, patents privatise knowledge that would otherwise be free, thus providing an incentive for invention, benefiting the public in the long run. For a fixed time, normally 20 years, a patent-holder can charge royalties to anyone who uses their invention. Patents are a kind of social bargain. Although people sometimes talk about patent 'rights', they are actually a privilege that can be withdrawn if it is not in the public interest.

Until recently, patents were not a big deal in food production. You could not patent the bare necessities of production, like cows or potatoes, even though you could patent the plough and the peeler. One of the reasons animals and plants did not count as inventions was that, unlike tractors or pesticides, they could reproduce themselves on the farm, without scientists or factories. But that also made strong IP protection even more valuable to people in the business of breeding and selling animals and, even more so, plants.

Patents would mean that farmers had to pay for seeds each time they used them – the same as for other farm inputs – not just once.

Although industrialised countries already had some IP protection for plant breeders, the situation changed markedly with the arrival of genetic engineering in the 1980s. Judges and policy-makers decided that the processes and products of modern biotechnology counted as inventions. Smelling huge profits, private investors stampeded into agricultural biotechnology.

The countries and companies that stand to gain most from biotechnology are now pressing for all governments to allow bio-patenting. The pressure is mainly being applied through the World Trade Organization (WTO). Its Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) sets minimum levels of IP protection, including for plants and animals, that can be enforced through sanctions. As a result, many poor countries are strengthening protection for plants or introducing it for the first time.

This may not be in their or in our best interests. Bio-patenting has led to a surge in patent applications. Because researchers need permission from the holder of each patent they use, many scientists are worried that the sheer number of patents on basic biological processes grid-locks real invention in agriculture. Since owners charge royalties, it also makes research more expensive – too expensive, often, for the public sector.

As for whether the patented inventions are useful, that rather depends who you are. If you are a farmer, argues the biotech industry, then you would only pay for patent inputs each year if they were worth the money. Hence, they say, the fact that many US farmers are using patented GM crops is proof in itself that the inventions are worth it. But in practice, farmers may buy the new technology because they have no real choice – just ten firms supply a third of the world's seed market. Patented GM seed may also be offered at a similar or even cheaper price than regular seed – to ensure that the market is rapidly expanded.

If the new patented inputs are good for the farmers who can afford them, then they may be bad for the ones who cannot. If farmers in the US and other rich countries become more

productive, then competitors in poor countries, many already teetering on the edge of survival, may lose out. Research into technologies that poor farmers really need, which they can use and exchange for free, is diminishing. The rise of bio-patenting, combined with funding cut-backs for the public sector, is leaving little room for research with free, public benefits.

The advantages of bio-patents to non-farmers are also questionable. Even when patenting works, it can only encourage inventions that sell. Those are not always the same as the things people feel they need even though, like the farmers, they may end up buying them. The widespread opposition to GM crops in the UK and internationally shows how far patenting and the pursuit of profit can diverge from the public interest, as the public perceive it.

For the IP bargain to work out in the public's favour, serious changes are needed to international rules. Most importantly, the process of making the rules should be fairer, more open, and include smallholder farmers and poor communities. Knowing the difference between the hidden IP ingredients in food production, understanding their implications for firms, farmers and other players, is a crucial part of opening up this 'social bargain' to include all of society.

■ **The Food Ethics Council report *TRIPS with everything? Intellectual property and the farming world* can be downloaded at:**

[www.foodethics-](http://www.foodethics-council.org)

[council.org](http://www.foodethics-council.org)

Engineering Nutrition, the latest report from The Food Ethics Council, can also be downloaded from their website.



Public say 'not yet' to GM crops

The nationwide debate on genetically modified (GM) crops has found that most people are 'cautious, suspicious or outright hostile about GM crops'. The debate, coordinated by the Agricultural, Environment and Biotechnology Commission (AEBEC), found:

- People in the UK are generally uneasy about GM;
- The more people find out about GM issues, the more intense their concerns;
- There is little support for early commercialisation of GM crops;
- There is widespread public mistrust of government and of multinational companies involved in GM;
- People generally want to know more and want more research to be done.

The debate also found that most people wished there was an independent agency, free from outside influence, to provide trustworthy information and advice.

The biotechnology industry reacted vehemently to the findings. The Agricultural Biotechnology Council (ABC, not to be confused with the independent AEBEC), stated that 'of the 37,000 feedback forms received, up to 79% of them [were] orchestrated by campaign groups'. The ABC is a front organisation for the biotechnology companies BASF, Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont and Monsanto.

One of the organisations accused of such 'orchestration' was the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), which responded: 'Even if they had wished to do so, WI members could not have hijacked public debate

meetings. GM Nation was launched on 3 June, with a deadline for submissions of 18 July – a woefully inadequate time period for our members to find out about and attend debate meetings, let alone organise their own local events. Through our website, we encouraged our members to participate in the public debate – whatever their individual views on the merits or otherwise of GM crops. If a public debate required the engagement of the public, why is a membership organisation that encourages its members to take part accused of 'hijacking'?

In releasing their report of public opinion, the AEBEC and the government's Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) were fully aware that the findings would be contentious. A note from the press officer makes entertaining reading. Among plans for the press launch, one paragraph stands out: 'I'll be inviting all our regular correspondents from the broadcast media, the nationals and the magazines. I won't be inviting representatives from the NGOs* etc but we'll let them in – as last time – on the understanding that they sit at the back and keep quiet.'

However, in the event, it was the industry bodies that caused the trouble with their accusations of vote-rigging.

** Non-Governmental Organisation, usually a not-for-profit group working on public-interest issues such as health or the environment.*

■ For more information about the public debate, see: www.gmpublicdebate.org

Campaigners aim to shock

If you find this image of a genetically modified woman shocking, that is because the New Zealand campaign group that designed it is aiming to re-awaken the public to the nature of genetic-engineering. MAdGE (Mothers Against Genetic Engineering in Food & the Environment) launched this controversial billboard advertising campaign in October 'to provoke public debate about the ethics of genetic engineering in New Zealand'.



The ads depict a naked, genetically engineered woman with four breasts being milked by a milking machine, with 'GE' branded on her rear.

MAdGE reports that New Zealand's largest science company, AgResearch, is currently splicing human genes into cows in the hope of creating new designer milks, but that 'the ethics of such experiments have not even been discussed by the wider public'. A moratorium on genetic-engineering has also been lifted.

Fonterra, New Zealand's largest milk company Fonterra recently purchased patent rights to large amounts of human DNA from an Australian genetics company. MAdGE is calling for reassurance from Fonterra that they will never use human genes in cows to boost milk production.

■ For more details, see: www.madge.net.nz

Government ministers undermine 'GM free' status

Environment Secretary Margaret Beckett has expressed support for new European rules that would end the right of local councils and districts to opt for 'GM-free' status.

In a series of letters reported in the *Sunday Times*, she summarised proposed rules, drafted by the European Commission (EC), as stating that 'no form of agriculture (conventional, organic, GM) should be excluded from the EU'. She went on to comment, 'Our interests are best served by giving broad support to the Commission guidelines. They also reflect the general principles that I envisage we will want to apply – i.e., that any co-existence measures should be evidence-based, practical and proportionate,

and should seek to balance the interests of all farmers.'

The letter specifically referred to the EU's proposal to stop governments imposing GM-free areas. Several County Councils in the UK have already voted for 'GM-free' status, including Cornwall, Devon and counties in Wales. In September, Brighton joined the growing number of local authorities taking a similar stance.

However, the EC appears set on removing this opportunity. In a landmark case which indicates its attitude to regional decision-making on GM, it has refused a plea by the Upper Austria region to outlaw GM crops for three years. The regional government had

argued for the ban to protect organic agriculture, as well as safeguard plant and animal genetic resources from contamination by GM material.

UK ministerial support for such measures can perhaps be explained, in the current global-political climate, by a revealing comment from Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt. In a written reply to Margaret Beckett, she stated: 'I agree that our interests are best served by giving broad support to the Commission guidelines. We must also bear in mind the potential impact [on] EU-US relations.'

■ For more information about 'GM-free' status, see: www.gmfreebritain.com

Misleading labels? Go to jail!

A civil lawsuit, primarily aimed at reducing obesity, has resulted in a 15-month prison sentence for a US food manufacturer found guilty of making false claims about the fat content of his doughnuts, biscuits and rolls.

The manufacturer declared that the doughnuts contained 3g of fat and 135 calories each, but tests revealed that they contained 18g of fat and 530 calories. The ruling has been hailed as a landmark by American public-health lawyers exploring ways to exert pressure on manufacturers as part of efforts to reduce the US epidemic of obesity.

The American legal system allows 'class actions', in which a group of individuals can sue a company for damages, with the ruling applying to future litigants who can prove they were affected by the same malpractice. So rulings have greater significance to companies than in the UK, where rulings apply only to the individuals (or group) who bring the case.

Rulings also send clear signals to other food manufacturers to provide healthy options and to shape up on marketing and food labelling.

Earlier this year, the threat of a US class-action lawsuit led multinational food manufacturer Kraft to agree to remove trans-fat from its popular Oreo cookies. And another public-interest lawsuit has been credited for prompting a decision to remove sugar-sweetened soft drinks from all schools in New York City.

In earlier US legal cases, McDonald's paid over \$12 million to settle a civil lawsuit for failing to disclose the beef fat in its chips, and the company Robert's American Gourmet paid \$3 million after being found guilty of under-

stating the fat and calorie content of a 'Pirate's Booty' snack. Similar lawsuits are still pending against Smucker's, a US jam and snack manufacturer, and the fast food chain Pizza Hut.

'This new movement will use a wide variety of legal actions – including individual and class-action lawsuits, criminal complaints, and regulatory approaches – to fight against obesity, just as we were so successful in using many legal approaches against the problem of smoking,' says John Banzhaf, a law professor from George Washington University Law School who was one of the driving forces behind litigation against tobacco companies. He has now turned his attention to food. He explains, *'Legislation is better than litigation, but lawyers will continue to litigate for change in the food industry until legislators do what they should be doing about obesity.'*

Banzhaf reports that virtually every major fast-food company has now announced changes that may reduce their legal liability, by providing warnings, more information on labels, and menus with improved nutritional profiles or added healthy options.

Similar legal approaches have already been explored in the UK. In the 1980s, several parents investigated the possibility of suing Ribena for the effect of the drink on their children's teeth. The campaign group Action & Information on Sugars reported that the case had the potential to be successful, but was dropped only when it was found that individual damages payments would be insufficient to warrant Legal Aid. Whilst the children received

no damages payments, Ribena bottles now give guidance to parents on how to use Ribena to minimise damage to children's teeth.

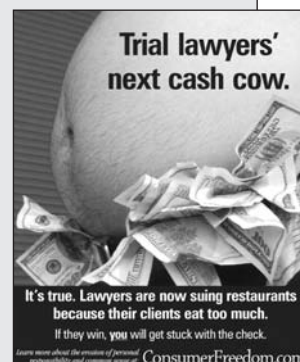
Whether or not public-interest lawyers in the UK follow a similar legal approach to the US, British children (and adults) are likely to benefit from the effects of successful lawsuits in the US. Ruffled by the litigative mood in the US, many manufacturers are already exploring ways to reduce damaging ingredients such as trans-fats and salt in their foods, especially those aimed at children. Kraft has also announced that it will stop marketing in schools and control portion sizes of its processed foods. Many of these and other reformulated products are also sold in the UK.

Legal cases may provide the impetus to change which neither 'industry guidelines' nor 'voluntary codes of practice' have achieved.

■ For full details of the US lawsuits, see: <http://banzhaf.net/obesitylinks>

Fast food fights back

The US food industry has reacted to lawsuits by funding a campaign group that feigns as a consumer watchdog. Paid for by American fast food restaurants, 'Consumer Freedom' places adverts in the national press and on TV, telling people that health campaigners are interfering with freedom by daring to suggest that most fast food contains too much fat, sugar and salt.



Coca-Cola under fire for misleading marketing

Coca-Cola has agreed to pay \$21 million (around £13 million) to Burger King after it was discovered that the soft-drinks giant had reportedly rigged test-marketing to make its product appear to be popular with the public.

The test-marketing took place in Virginia, USA, in March 2000, with Burger King giving away coupons with its meals for a free drink called Frozen Coke. Executives from Coca-Cola allegedly paid a consultant to buy thousands of Burger King meals in order to make the marketing experiment look successful.

The pay-out was revealed in a document made public by Burger King. A federal investigation into the matter is now underway.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, Coca-Cola is set to face a legal suit filed under Brazilian

consumer health protection laws. In July 2003, a Brazilian Public Attorney called João Lopes Guimarães filed public-interest lawsuits against Coca-Cola and a second soft drink company Ambev-Pepsi – which together account for 66% of Brazil's soft-drink sales. The suit aims to compel these companies to stop marketing aimed at children and to warn consumers of the risks of excessive sugar consumption.

The lawsuits are based in Federal Brazilian consumer protection law, under which manufacturers are obliged to warn consumers of potential damage caused by goods, and may not induce consumers to adopt a behaviour that may damage health.

Curiously, under EU law (Regulation EC No. 178/2002), which is fully applicable in the UK, it

is specified that 'food shall not be placed on the market if it is unsafe', and 'food shall be deemed to be unsafe if it is considered to be injurious to health' (Article 14). It continues *'In determining whether any food is unsafe, regard shall be had... to the information provided to the consumer, including information on the label, or other information generally available to the consumer concerning the avoidance of specific adverse health effects from a particular food or category of foods.'*

This is ambiguous when it comes to children, who might not reasonably understand a nutritional panel or ingredients list. It does at least imply a need for health warnings on soft drinks. Anyone got a few thousand pounds for us to take out a test case?

CHECKOUT

A new Food Commission campaign will call for supermarkets, grocery stores and pharmacies to stop displaying snacks at the checkouts, and to put such products out of temptation's reach.

Chuck Snacks off the Checkout!

At the end of a shopping trip, children often nag their parents for the sweets, chocolates, crisps and soft drinks displayed at the checkout. Such tempting displays are deliberately placed where customers are a 'captive market' as they queue up to pay, activating pester power and increasing sales of snack products.

Such displays may also tempt adults to buy and eat snacks that they would not normally choose, adding a hefty dose of calories, fat and/or sugar to their diet. Retailers and grocery stores recognise that most confectionery purchases are made 'on impulse' and therefore ensure that products are placed exactly where that impulse can best be triggered. One major chocolate manufacturer, Nestlé, estimates that if every supermarket displayed chocolate at their checkouts, total chocolate sales would increase by 15 million bars per year in the UK.

Following numerous complaints from members of the Food Commission's Parents Jury, the Food Commission has launched a new campaign to Chuck Snacks off the Checkout! Ten years ago, a similar campaign was run by community dietitian Iona Lidington, focusing on the damage caused to teeth by frequent consumption of sugary confectionery. During that campaign, Tesco, Sainsbury and Safeway all agreed to stop displaying sweets at their checkouts. But since that time, new types of store have opened, new products have been launched, marketing has become ever more sophisticated, and

many stores are now displaying soft drinks and crisps as well as chocolate and confectionery at or near the checkouts. In a new development, such products are now also displayed in pharmacies, where families also regularly shop.

One extra bar of chocolate picked up at the checkout can provide around 280 kcalories, 40g of sugar and 6g of saturated fat. For an adult woman such a 'treat' would provide 15% of her recommended maximum intake of calories. For a 10-year-old boy it would provide nearly three quarters of his maximum recommended intake of sugar and about a third of his maximum daily recommended intake of saturated fat.* Not only do our teeth suffer, but unhealthy doses of calories, fat and sugar are also showing up around our waistlines.

Removing calorie-dense, sugary, fatty and salty snacks from checkouts is just one small measure that retailers to take to help address these public health problems.

If you have trouble finding a checkout in Marks & Spencer just look for the confectionery – you'll usually find a cashier behind it!



'Safeway has recently re-introduced chocolates and sweets at the checkout. It's hard work saying no at end of a shopping trip'

Mother of two, from Limpsfield in Surrey

'Sweets at supermarket checkouts often leads to rows, disappointed children and guilty mums'

Mother of two, from Cambridge

'Chocolate is always next to the till which only upsets kids when we have to say no'

Mother of two, from Cumbria

'I hate how supermarkets display sweets at toddler level at checkouts'

Mother of one, from Essex

Chuck snacks off the checkout!



What supermarkets say and

Recognising that family conflict is often caused by snacks displayed at the checkout, some supermarkets keep their checkouts snack-free as a matter of policy. However, many supermarkets continue to display snacks at their checkouts, on aisle-ends near where people queue, in dump-bins beside the tills, or even in specially designed mini-fridges.

The Food Commission wrote to the major supermarkets, requesting details of their policy about stocking snacks at the checkout. Here are some of the responses we received:

■ **More supermarket checkout policies are available on the Parents Jury website: www.parentsjury.org.uk.**



Booths Supermarkets

Booths Supermarkets stated that 'we are not one of those supermarkets who specifically stock products low down, within children's reach.' It also stated that, 'Where possible, we would rather sell magazines than sweets. In our Ulverston store, for example, every other checkout is sweet free.'

Marks & Spencer

Marks & Spencer said that as part of its 'major Customer Care Initiative all M&S stores have a minimum of 20% till points with non-confectionery items ... These till points are clearly signposted to assist customer choice.'

The retailer also stated that because it is committed to the High Street, 'shelf space is always at a premium' so 'confectionery fits well in the slip units alongside the till points. This allows more room elsewhere to show more bulky ranges such as produce and bread.'

Morrisons

Morrisons told us that it offers 'a range of products from our checkouts, based on customer demand and convenience. We take a responsible approach and where sweets and snacks are available it will be a very small selection only, merchandised in specific area and does not include soft drinks.'

ASDA

ASDA, the worst offender in our survey of supermarkets stocking snacks at the checkout (see page 14) has so far made 'no comment'.

Safeway

Safeway responded to say that, 'Our policy is that generally we do not stock snacks and sweets at the checkout. The main exception to this policy is that at certain times of the year (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day), one in four of our checkouts may stock products, including snacks and sweets, that relate to that promotion.' Safeway stressed that 'only one in four of our checkouts would stock these products giving parents the opportunity to choose one of the many other checkouts that stock other items such as magazines, films or batteries.'

Waitrose

Waitrose has a commendable checkout policy: 'We do not merchandise items which could be considered an impulse purchase such as sweets and chocolates at our checkouts. As well as providing an uncluttered environment for shoppers, we believe customers appreciate the fact we do not distract their children at checkouts, which could lead to so-called pester power.'

Co-op

The Co-op told us that it 'prohibits the display of child-targeted products which are high in fat, sugar or salt at our traditional-style supermarket checkouts where children may exert 'pester power' whilst waiting for parents to queue and pay for grocery.' However, the final paragraph of their letter stated that they had 'recently acquired a large number of stores and that operationally, conformance with all our policies in these stores may take some time to achieve.'

ff the checkout!

nd what manufacturers say.

The food industry often argues that food marketing is only carried out to encourage brand switching rather than increasing category sales (and therefore the amount eaten). A similar argument was used by tobacco manufacturers for years to defend their freedom to advertise. The quotes below show that the way food is marketed and displayed in shops are acknowledged by the industry as important ways to encourage us to buy more sugary and fatty products by increasing total category sales.

Kraft Foods

Kraft Foods, makers of such delights as Dairylea Lunchables, says that it '...believes that promotions are key to driving confectionery sales as they entice consumers to try a product, which is either new to them, or one which they may not have tasted recently,' and that 'Retailers can benefit from secondary siting to catch the shopper's attention. Gondola ends, dump-bins and counter placements all drive incremental sales.'

Nestlé Rowntree

Nestlé Rowntree recently stated that 'with 70% of confectionery bought on impulse retailers should aim to put temptation directly within the shopper's reach.' This advert appeared in 2003 in the industry magazine, The Grocer. In a special marketing feature, Nestlé's Sales Communications Manager explained that the company's sales promotions, such as displaying chocolate bars right next to popular magazines at the checkout, 'aim to unlock an extra £1 million of profit for retailers, by tempting 25% of women to purchase confectionery with a copy of Take a Break. This would mean an extra 15m chocolate bars sold across the year.'



Cadbury

Cadbury has also stated, in a brochure advising retailers how to position products to maximise sales, 'Key brands should occupy key positions: the availability of heavily-advertised lines will trigger extra sales.'

Masterfoods (Mars)

Masterfoods (Mars) warned retailers in 1995 that removal of sweets on the checkout would lead to a 30% fall in confectionery sales. In 2002, the company stated that it had created promotions specifically designed to increase the amount of money a customer spends in a shop, including advising retailers that, 'By organising the layout so that consumer favourites are sited in the 'hot sport' sales areas, regardless of manufacturer, retailers could take their share of a potential increase in £210m extra confectionery sales.'

Masterfoods' Trader Relations Manager boasted that the confectionery market is worth a huge £5.8bn a year, which equates to every adult eating confectionery every working day of the week and amazingly, over the past ten years it has grown 66%. Apparently just seeing and stopping at a confectionery display will encourage 80% of shoppers to make a purchase.

Ferrero

Ferrero, which manufactures Kinder Bueno chocolate and Kinder Eggs, reported that confectionery sales dipped in 2002 (probably due to a surge in popularity of mobile phones among young people) and said that it would respond with 'heavyweight marketing support, including regular TV exposure, to all our confectionery brands to ensure that they are constantly top of consumers' minds.' In addition, it advised retailers to 'Stock best sellers; stock heavily advertised products; and stock and create impactful displays.'

Haribo

Haribo is the best-selling confectioner that specialises in bagged sweets for children. Haribo's director has commented that 'We believe strongly in the value of promotions in driving sales. We operate in what essentially is an impulse-driven market, so obviously the more ways we have of getting consumers to notice our products the better.'

Wrigley

Whilst many Wrigley's chewing gum products do not contain sugar, this cartoon advertisement from a trade magazine illustrates how displays can be used to maximise profit. Many of the sugary gums and bubble gums, those most attractive to younger children, are placed low down in the display, and the packets are arranged in boxes displayed to make it easy to pick up the attractively packaged gum. The advertisement states that 20% of confectionery profit can be generated by a Wrigley display such as this.



The supermarket checkout survey

The Food Commission has carried out surveys of several London supermarkets. We found that ASDA is the worst offender, with an average of 2.4 separate displays per till. Displays included specially designed fridges with sugary soft drinks, displays of Pringles crisps and promotional displays of KitKat Kubes together with a plethora of other confectionery, stocked close to the ground where children could easily reach them.

At the other end of the scale, Waitrose was a good example of better practice, with no snacks or soft drinks displayed at its checkouts.

Ten years ago, Tesco and Sainsbury were declared sweet-free. However, in 2003 they seem to have different policies depending on the type of store. Tesco had 68% snack-free

checkouts in its larger stores, compared to only 23% in its smaller Tesco Metro Stores. Sainsbury had 58% snack-free checkouts in its larger stores, compared to no snack-free checkouts at all in its Sainsbury Local convenience stores.

Marks & Spencer confectionery displays specifically target children with products stocked at children's eye level, many having popular cartoon characters such as the Fimbles or Tweenies on the packaging. Many parents have complained to us that this causes conflict between themselves and their children.

How you can help

It is very important that supermarkets and pharmacies hear what people think about the

display of snacks and soft drinks at the checkout. Enclosed with this issue of the Food Magazine is a double-sided sheet. One side shows a cartoon where you can tell retailers know what you think – just write your comments in the speech bubble. Every opinion counts!

We will collect the comments together and send them to all of the supermarkets – to show companies such as Waitrose that their good efforts are appreciated, and to tell companies like Safeway that they should stop exploiting their customers.

We will not tell the supermarkets your name or address, but it would be helpful if you could send this to us with your comments so that we can keep you updated on the progress of the campaign.

On the other side of the sheet is a Survey

Score sheet. The Checkout League Table shown above gives a good indication of the pattern of snack-free checkouts and the average number of displays per checkout, but it is not comprehensive. We would like to get a national picture of the situation. Next time you go shopping, could you spare a few minutes to carry out a supermarket or pharmacy survey? Perhaps you can tell us about a retailer that we have missed?

Send your comments and/or survey to the FREEPOST address below (no need for a stamp).

■ **More details of the campaign are on our Parents Jury website: www.parentsjury.org.uk.**

If you are a member of an organisation and would like to become a campaign supporter or are able to publicise the campaign by distributing leaflets or including an article in a newsletter or on a website, please contact Annie Seeley on: chucksnacks@foodcomm.org.uk, by fax 020 7837 1141, by telephone 020 7837 2250, or write to: Food Commission, Freepost 7564, London N1 9BR.

The best and the worst of supermarket checkouts

The checkouts at Waitrose are snack free, putting the supermarket well ahead of the rest of the field. ASDA brings up the rear with a wide range of unhealthy snacks, soft drinks and sweets placed within easy reach of children at the checkouts.

	Confectionery %	Crisps and bagged snacks %	Soft drinks %	Stocked within children's reach %	% of snack free checkouts	Average number of displays per till
1) Waitrose	0	0	0	0	100	0
2) Tesco	18	14	0	100	68	0.3
3) Lidl	40	0	0	50	60	0.4
4) Sainsbury	19	0	32	60	58	0.4
5) Tesco Metro	77	0	0	100	23	0.8
6) Iceland	20	20	0	100	40	1.3
7) Co-op	71	0	0	100	29	1.4
8) Budgens	67	58	8	100	25	1.5
9) Fresh & Wild	100	0	0	0	0	1
10) Sainsbury Local	100	0	0	100	0	1
11) Europa	100	0	0	100	0	1
12) Marks & Spencer	100	0	0	100	0	1
13) Morrisons	100	0	0	100	0	1.3
14) Somerfield	100	33	67	100	0	2.3
15) Safeway	100	24	64	100	0	2.3
16) ASDA	70	36	36	100	30	2.4

Publishers target the tiniest tastebuds

Sugary foods are being used in books to teach children to read and to count in a move that crosses the line between education and advertising.

The board books shown below are designed for toddlers. They integrate branded sweets, chocolates and sugared breakfast cereals into simple reading and counting exercises. The *M&M's Counting Board Book* invites children to place the contents of a packet of M&M's onto the page: 'Pour out your candies, get ready, get set. This counting book is the tastiest yet!' with spaces for 55 chocolates. The *Cheerios Animal Play Book* has specially indented places on each picture for a child to place their cereal pieces and then eat them from the page. As the authors point out: 'Pages are recessed to help children successfully place the cereal pieces in the scenes'.

Books for older children are produced by companies such as Hershey's, showing how to work out fractions using chunks of the branded chocolate (see box, right).

Whilst these examples are from the US (purchased in the UK via a website), the appeal of such books is spreading. The UK Nestlé brand Smarties has, for instance, teamed up with

Robinson Children's Books to produce at least 21 books of general knowledge for children, all carrying the confectionery branding.

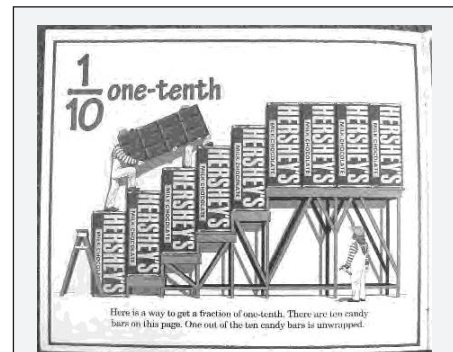
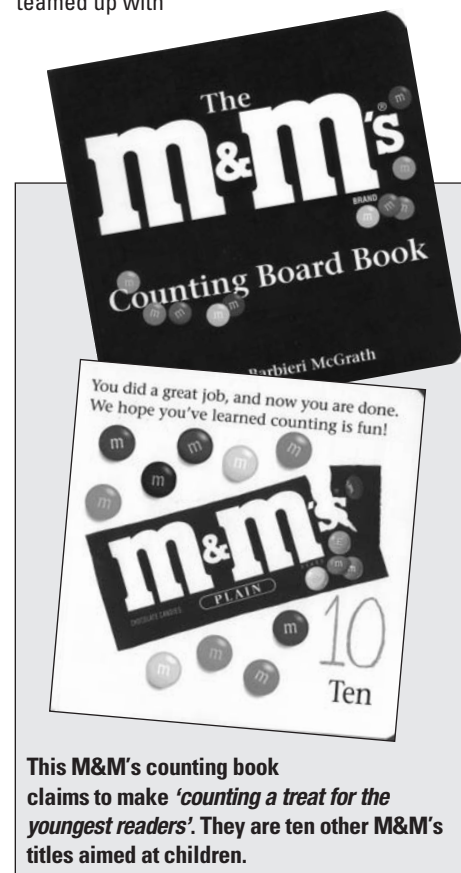
Playhouse Publishing, which has patented the concept of including branded snack foods in children's books (US Patent RE37,362M) estimates that 10 million food-branded play books have already been sold worldwide. Playhouse has already sued publishers Simon & Schuster, Charlesbridge and HarperCollins for patent infringement for producing similar books.

Such remarkable sales figures are a big attraction for food companies, as well as publishers. Fostering brand loyalty starts at an early age, and has been a key tool of food marketers for many years. As early as 1995, we reported on Barbie dolls being used to promote McDonald's brand imagery and a fast-food lifestyle (an ironic image, since most young American girls are highly likely to end up working for McDonald's at some point in their life!)

Researchers undertaking a major review of the effects of food promotion to children (on behalf of the Food Standards Agency, report published in September 2003 – see Editorial, page 2) found that 'Companies targeting children are keen to create, foster and develop brand loyalty among young people to encourage continued, regular consumption'.

Marketing manuals also talk about 'building relationships with brands' and associating food products with fun, play and nostalgia. They know that not only will children ask their parents for the advertised products and buy them with their own pocket money, but that those choices are likely to persist into adulthood. The principle is: Catch them young.

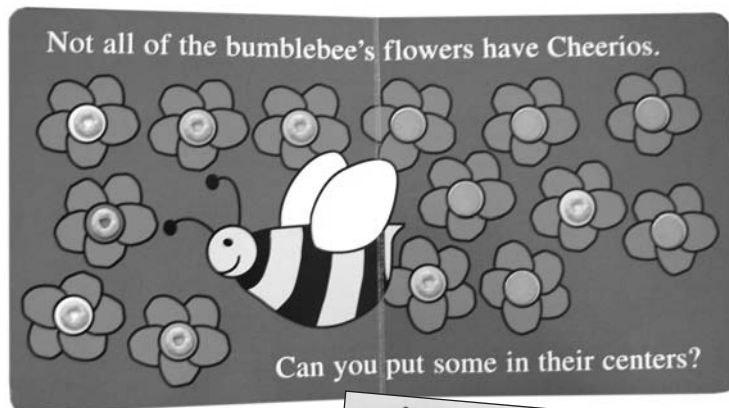
Unfortunately, this marketing principle seems to have become: Catch them younger and younger.



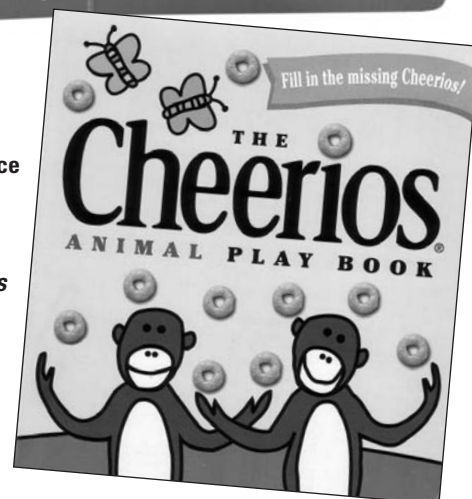
Hershey's clearly thinks it is important to teach American children how to consume, and to introduce them to essential skills such as how to recognise brand names.

It has met the challenge in true marketing style. *Hershey's Kisses: Counting Board Book*; *The Hershey's Kisses Addition Book*, and *The Hershey's Kisses Subtraction Book* will teach a child the basics of maths, as well as a preference for the delicious high-fat and high-sugar Hershey's Kisses (twists of chocolate sold as a 'treat' product in the US). Once the toddlers have learned all that, they can move on to Hershey's chocolate bars and more advanced maths with *The Hershey's Milk Chocolate Multiplication Book* the *Hershey's Weights and Measures* and *The Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar Fractions Book* (an extract is reproduced above).

Curiously, even though it is a fractions book, it fails to mention that a Hershey's milk chocolate bar is roughly 1/3 fat (1/2 of which is saturated) and more than 1/2 sugar.



The *Cheerios Animal Play Book* describes itself as 'tasty interactive fun that toddlers will love!' And once they've finished this book they can move on to *The Cheerios Counting Book*, then play with *The Cheerios Play Book* and celebrate holidays with *Cheerios Halloween Play Book* and *Cheerios Christmas Play Book*!



Lessons from the 1950s

Children put into a 1950s environment lost weight. Perhaps we need to go back to the future, argues one-time teacher Dr Laurel Edmunds.

For those of us interested in children's weight, the final episode of Channel 4's programme *That'll teach 'em* was a revelation.

That'll teach 'em was a short series shown this summer where 30 children were sent to a 1950s-style boarding school for a month. They had to live the lives of children in that period – from O-Levels in the classroom to a lack of deodorants and unflattering school uniforms.

Their diet was simple, not particularly appetising and included post-war specialities such as spam fritters. The food was certainly not low in fat, but children were only allowed to eat at meal times. All their snacks and treats were confiscated on arrival (apart from a few hidden under floorboards or in linen cupboards), as were their cosmetics, personal hygiene and hair products.

In keeping with 1950s educational practices, all children had to take part in one hour of formal games and PE each school day, and had to amuse themselves with their own playground games in breaks and free time after they had finished their homework.

The makers of the programme (Twenty Twenty) had the foresight to weigh the children at the beginning and end of their stay. The more overweight children lost over a stone. What a difference a dearth of snack foods and increased opportunities for safe play can make!

As it stands, this programme is an interesting comment on children's lifestyles of today and how much more it now promotes weight gain. The marketing of foods, soft drinks, computer games, mobile phones, etc, and the loss of safe play areas are modern phenomena. By reversing some of these trends the children lost weight – the series was like an uncontrolled experiment on the effects of changing a child's environment.

Children do not necessarily want to be sedentary, or to be subjected to advertising or pressured into eating or drinking what their peers judge to be 'cool'.

I am not, in any way, advocating a return to the educational practices of the '50s, yet the fact that some of the children lost a stone in only four weeks is impressive, particularly as it was incidental to everything else that was happening. In this respect, it was healthier psychologically than focusing on weight loss.

Two thoughts occurred to me after watching the series. Firstly the makers of the programme managed to achieve what much of the rest of the world is seeking and failing to do. Secondly we, collectively as a society, need to take more responsibility for the world in which our children are growing up.

■ **Dr Edmunds is Research Fellow at Bristol University's Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children. She writes here in a personal capacity.**

Milk... or sweets?

Manufacturers of fatty, high sugar confectionery are always looking for ways to claim that chocolate is a healthy food.

Mars tried the scientific approach and funded research to show that chocolate was high in beneficial antioxidants. After lots of favourable publicity an independent study revealed that the antioxidant properties of milk chocolate were negligible, probably because the antioxidants were rendered inactive by the milk content.

Kinder has taken a different route, and boasts that its chocolate 'combines milk's high nutritional elements with the delicious taste of chocolate'. With a picture of milk, plus a milky background, and a healthy looking youngster with perfect, calcium-white teeth (see picture) shoppers are led to believe that Kinder Chocolate has a similar nutritional value to milk.

Cadbury has also used the perceived healthiness of milk to sell chocolate. Its packaging depicts two glasses of milk being poured into a piece of chocolate. We have been sent an example of Cadbury chocolate (pictured below), sold in Ireland, which claims to contribute 50% of a person's Recommended Daily Amount (RDA) of calcium.

Kinder proudly states that 100g of its chocolate contains 'all the most important nutritional values (proteins, calcium and mineral salts) of 250 ml of milk'. It fails to

mention that it also contains more than three times the calories of whole milk and nearly five times the amount of sugar (as do most other brands of milk chocolate).

These products are not low in fat either, with over three times the fat of whole milk.

Cadbury and Kinder use the healthy image of milk to appeal to mothers of young children. And at 72-75p per 100g these chocolates cost four times as much as a glass of whole milk.

Prompted by a complaint from a member of the Parents Jury, we challenged another snack product, Cheestrings, on its claim that 'one Cheestring = 210ml of milk'. We argued that the product's high salt content meant that it was not equivalent to milk. The manufacturer, Golden Vale Cheese Co., has agreed to remove the claim.

In Ireland, Cadbury even goes so far as to say that its MagiMilk chocolate can provide 50% of the Recommended Daily Amount of calcium.



Products such as these chocolate bars do contain milk. But since they also contain high levels of added fat and sugar, should they imply that they offer equivalent nutritional benefits to milk?



Are children getting less active?

The food industry argues that children are getting fatter because they are taking less exercise, not because of the food they eat. But, asks Tim Lobstein, do the figures add up?

In the previous issue of the *Food Magazine* we noted that UK dietary surveys appeared to show a downward trend in the amount of food people were eating.

The industry has pounced on the survey data to show that it must be lack of exercise, not excess food consumption, that has led to the rise in obesity seen in adults and children during the 1990s.

Evidence suggests that under-reporting was wide-spread in the dietary surveys, giving false figures about the amounts being consumed. Children's diets, in particular, may be prone to poor reporting, especially their consumption of snack foods, confectionery and soft drinks. The figures for food production, imports and UK food sales showed increasing quantities of food being purchased in Britain.

But what about the other side of the equation? Is it true that the average child is getting less exercise now than in the past?

School sport has been squeezed in the timetable, and school playing fields sold off to developers. The amount of Physical Education (PE) and sports offered in the timetable is up to schools, and the pressure to fulfil core curriculum teaching has led to a decline in lesson-time available for physical activity.

Equally, travel to and from school has become more car-dependent. Only 9% of 7-8 year olds were walking or cycling to school by 1990 compared to 80% in 1971. This has corresponded with a rise in the numbers of children being driven to school by car – four times as many 7-11 year olds were chauffeured in 1990 as in 1971.

But hard evidence on the amount of exercise children are actually getting is difficult to come by. A recent report in the *British Medical Journal* suggests that the amount of exercise taken at school is not indicative of the total amount of exercise

children get. By measuring children's actual activity using an accelerometer, the evidence shows that children will voluntarily get more physical activity out of school hours to compensate if the school does not offer much physical activity in lesson time (see page 19 for details).

Looking at trends, there is some data available for children in Wales, a relatively stable population, which shows that, if anything, children are getting more exercise out of school than they were in the 1980s. The proportion of children getting at least four hours exercise a week out of school hours has been steadily rising (Figure 1).

Figures from Sport England show a similar story (Figure 2). Sport England gives statistics comparing 1994 data with its latest survey in 1999 showing that the percentage of children taking part in sporting activities outside school hours has increased from 37% to 45% in the

five-year period. The increase is found among both boys and girls and among primary and secondary school children.

No-one doubts that children would benefit from plenty of exercise, and there is good reason to encourage them to take more physical activity whenever they can.

But we should not be assuming that children are lazier now than ever before, and that it is inactivity alone which has led to the increase in child obesity levels. Changes in diets are also to blame.

1. *Young People in Wales: findings from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study 1986-2000, Welsh Assembly Government Technical Report No 1, 2002.*

2. *Young People and Sport, National Survey 1999, Sport England Research, February 2000.*

Figure 1: Children aged 11-16 are getting more exercise outside of school.¹

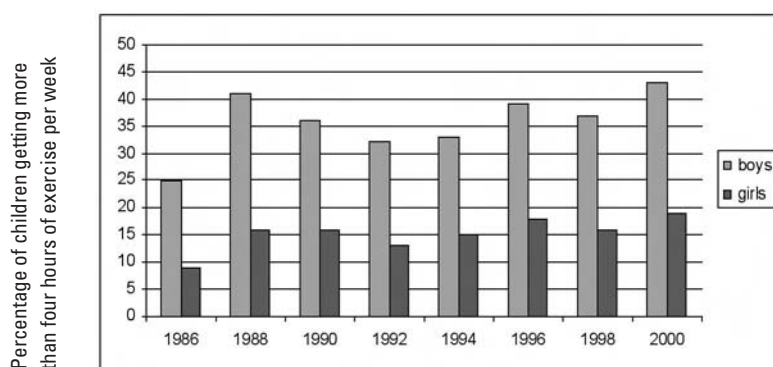
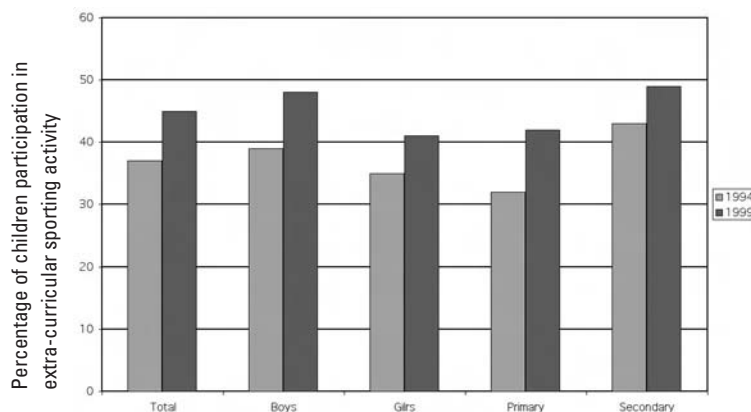


Figure 2: Proportion of children's participation in extra-curricular sporting activity.²



Trade talks: all heat and no light

Recent international trade talks in Cancun, Mexico, were heated and long, and ended with no agreed position. But, writes Sustain's Vicki Hird, it is hardly surprising that while the value of farm produce continues to slide, that the billions of dollars spent by the US and European Union (EU) and Japan on farm subsidies were very much a cause for concern.

Developing countries see these subsidies as unfair and discriminatory. Consumer groups want an end to these farm subsidies and the higher domestic prices that go with them.

It is well documented that these subsidies cause farmers to produce too much (for example, sugar and milk), so destabilising markets. Export subsidies then allow this produce to be 'dumped' on world markets at prices below the cost of production. This undermines poorer country farmers' ability to develop and access their own markets.

It is a scandal that Europe and the US pressed in Cancun for completely open southern markets while protecting their own production with subsidies. Development groups like Oxfam and ActionAid were present at Cancun, aiding poorer country delegations. The groups are now being partly blamed for the spectacular failure of the negotiations,

which collapsed on the fifth day, with no agreements made.

A positive aspect of the failure was that the poorer countries were able to show a stronger hand in negotiations. The 'medieval' procedures of the WTO are at last being forced open by those who need most to have their say. Yet the talks failed and no new trade agreement was drawn up after five hard days.

Many delegates left Cancun believing that a bad agreement would have been worse than no agreement. Now, however, the poorer countries will have to work hard to maintain their unity and push for fairer rules and more support. For the EU, the failure of the talks was a severe let down as the recent agriculture policy (CAP) reforms were meant, but failed, to ease negotiations.

That food safety, environmental and sustainable development, animal welfare and quality issues did not get a mention during the discussions should give food campaigners pause for thought. When it comes to the major decisions, we are not having enough impact and need to become more noisy, focussed and demanding.

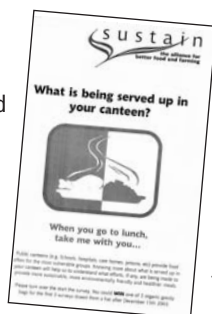
■ **Contact Vicki Hird at Sustain on:**
vh@sustainweb.org

When you go to lunch, take me with you!

School and hospital food has attracted considerable attention of late for being poor quality or procured from the cheapest, least nutritious sources. As these publicly run canteens often provide food for the most vulnerable groups, it is vital that they serve the best food and maximise the opportunity for public gains using public money.

Can you help? We need to find out more about what is served up in canteens around the country. This will help us to understand what efforts, if any, are being made to provide more sustainable, more environmentally friendly and healthier meals.

A survey card has been enclosed with this edition of the *Food Magazine*. If you use a canteen, or have a connection with somebody who does, please fill it in.



Surveys of any publicly run canteen such as a nursery, hospital, school or care home will be helpful. Feel free to make photocopies or contact Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, for more survey cards.

Just by asking questions, you will be showing that there is interest in these issues. Also, by filling in this questionnaire and sending it back via email, fax or post, you can help us work out how best to support the kind of food people want in public canteens.

■ **A web version of this survey is available at: www.sustainweb.org Contact Vicki Hird at: vh@sustainweb.org or tel: 020 7837 1228. Send completed survey cards to: Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.**



Soil Association urges better school meals

The organic standards organisation, the Soil Association, has added its weight to the growing movement calling for better school meals, calling on the government and local education authorities to ensure that children get 'healthy, local, organic' school meals.

Its report emphasises the tight budgets for feeding children, in some places as little as 31p per meal, compared with an average of 60p for meals in HM prisons. *'As a result, low quality processed food - such as breaded fish or chicken shapes - dominates school meals which are often high in fat, sugar and salt.'*

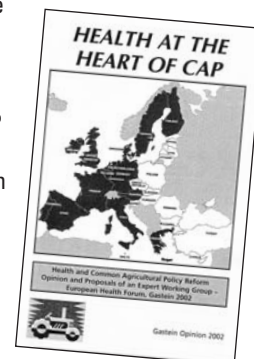
Peter Melchett, the Soil Association's policy director said, *'All too often, children at primary school are fed muck off a truck. The Government acknowledges there are problems and must, as a first step, bring back quantified nutritional standards for school meals. Then parents, schools, local authorities, food suppliers, farmers and the Government need to work together to ensure school lunches are made from unprocessed, local and organic food.'*

■ **Fit for Life costs £12 from the Soil Association, tel: 0117 929 0661. Details on www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/librarytitles/NT00019062.html**

Health at the heart of CAP

The need to put health issues into the Common Agricultural Policy is highlighted in a new document from a group of experts attending the European Health Forum at Gastein, Austria.

Noting that the Articles of the Amsterdam Treaty require that 'a high level of health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Community policies and activities', the report argues that the CAP support for tobacco, milk, sugar and meat, along with payments for the destruction of fruit and vegetables, grossly distorts the market and undermines public health.



■ **www.capreform.com/documents/HealthattheCap_000.pdf**



What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals

Fruit and veg help with breathing

Children who eat little or no fruit and vegetables are more likely to have deficient respiratory functioning, according to Californian researchers. Low intakes of orange and other fruit juices, and of the antioxidant vitamins C and A commonly found in fruit and vegetables, were associated with poor respiration, and were particularly noticeable in children with asthma, and may contribute to a risk of lung disease in adulthood.

■ F D Gilliland *et al*, *Am J Epidemiol*, 158, 2003.

Does coffee protect the liver?

Reports in the medical press a few years ago suggested that coffee – but not other caffeine-containing beverages such as cola drinks – may help protect the liver from both alcohol-induced and non-alcohol cirrhosis. The studies were based on analysis of the diets of patients with cirrhosis, and indicated that these people had a low level of coffee drinking. Now a new study from Norway has confirmed the link. Based on following over 50,000 adults for 17 years, the research shows

that people who drink two cups of coffee a day are 40% less likely to develop cirrhosis.

■ A Tverdal & S Skurtveit, *Ann Epidemiol*, 13, 2003.

Vegetables give two years of life

A study of 1,500 men in two Italian towns over a 30-year period has shown that those eating at least 60 grams of vegetables a day, compared with those eating less than 20 grams, lived at least two years longer on average. Approximately a year of life was added for every 20 grams of vegetables consumed above the minimum levels. The relationship was even stronger among smokers than non-smokers, although smokers had a shorter life expectancy than non-smokers at all levels of vegetable consumption.

■ F Seccareccia *et al*, *Ann Epidemiol*, 13, 2003.

Beta-carotene risk declines over four years

The use of anti-oxidant vitamin supplements containing beta carotene and alpha tocopherol for cancer prevention was tested in the early 1990s. The trials were suspended

when the incidence of cancer cases rose among the supplement-taking group compared to the controls. In a six-year follow-up study, the incidence of cancer among the trial participants has been monitored, and the results show that after four years there is no evidence of a raised risk of cancer among the group that had taken supplements. The message remains the same however: these isolated supplements were not effective and that smokers especially should avoid beta-carotene supplements.

■ ATBC Study Group, *J Am Med Ass*, 290, 2003.

Diet can equal statins in cholesterol control

Adherence to a cholesterol-lowering diet can be as good at reducing blood cholesterol levels as the use of statins, the current medical treatment of choice. A randomised control trial compared statin treatment with a diet very low in saturated fat, rich in whole grains and soya, and especially sources of soluble fibre, plant sterols and almonds. The results showed that both statins and the fibre-rich diet achieved cholesterol reductions of around 30%. A semi-control group put on a low saturated fat, whole-grain diet with no focus on soluble fibres or sterols achieved a 10% reduction in blood cholesterol levels.

■ DJA Jenkins *et al*, *J Am Med Ass*, 290, 2003.

Badvertisement

Outspan: Only goodness?

stretch the use of the word 'healthy'. These Chocolate flavour coated muesli bars with 'real orange' are apparently a 'healthy anytime snack'. They certainly look healthy, with images of fresh orange slices, dried fruit and oats. But, as we've so often found, it pays to read the small print.



At 24% fat, this high fat snack is hardly a healthy option. Saturated fat makes up a staggering 21.5% of this product (a figure of 5% saturated fat would be considered high, and this is four times higher than that). And with 32% sugar, this product is nearly twice as sugary as

Despite the fat and sugar, the packaging tells us that this is a 'real orange' snack – so it must be healthy – mustn't it? Well the Sweetened Orange Concentrate which makes up 5.6% of the whole product contains: Orangetruit, Sucrose, Fructose, Glucose, Gelling Agent (E406), Citric Acid (E330), Malic Acid (E296) and Natural Colour (E160b).

This Outspan product isn't healthy for the environment either. Is it really necessary to ship unhealthy cereal bars all the way from South Africa when we have plenty on our supermarket shelves already?

School PE reduces non-school exercise

A three-school comparison of children's activity levels has shown that getting children to take more PE classes may lead to them doing less exercise out of school, with no net gain overall. Measurements using accelerometers (devices that are used to measure movements), taken from children in a primary school with a curriculum requiring nine hours of PE per week, showed that their total activity was no greater than that recorded for children in two schools offering 1.8 and 2.2 hours of PE in the curriculum. The authors show that out-of-class exercise is much higher for those children in the latter two schools, and that children compensate for different school-based activity levels with their out-of-school behaviour.

■ KM Mallam *et al*, *BMJ*, 327, 13 Sept 2003.

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

Dump the Junk!

Containing over 300 expert tips for how to encourage your 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

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

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, workforce and culture. Essential reading. £7.99

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 2003) 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

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

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

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

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books

Feeding Desire: Fatness, Beauty and Sexuality Among a Saharan People

R Popenoe, Routledge, 2004, ISBN 0-415-28096-6, £16.99.

Avoidance of obesity is not universal. While many in Europe and America regard fatness as a worse evil than thinness, the same view is not held by many cultures, including those of the Caribbean and North Africa.

Indeed, the author of *Feeding Desire* suggests that 80% of the world's societies prefer plump women. The anthropological context of this preference is explored in Popenoe's study of extreme fatness among women of the semi-nomadic Moors of the Saharan desert. Here, voluptuous immobility is encouraged among girls, who are fed milk and porridge through years of childhood, hastening the onset of puberty and 'ripening them for marriage'.

Ideal body images, says Popenoe, are a result of cultural values and social structures shared by women and men alike, and fatness shares a cultural domain occupied by practices such as altering body parts, tattooing, piercing and hair styling – all part of a very human concern to modify nature and present oneself among one's peers.

The author eschews suggestions that ideal female body images are set by men and that they serve to oppress women. She suggests instead that the Western body image ideal for women has followed women's increasing adoption of male roles in society, with a body image expressing action – lean and trim.

In contrast, among the desert Moors, women are viewed as very different to men, with a body as unlike a man's as possible.

For the men in this Saharan society, the female form needs to be fat not only to be beautiful but to be different from themselves. 'What would be the point if a woman felt like a man?' asks one.

But a woman's fatness, suggests Popenoe, is much more than the fulfilment of a man's needs. In the context, her fatness represents the culmination of her culture: a body fit for sex and childrearing but not physical labour. She is immobile while men are mobile, she creates sensuality and beauty while men act to provide the food that feeds her.

Popenoe does an excellent job in making us think carefully about why Northern Europeans want women to be shaped like men.

Fat Land: How Americans became the fattest people in the world.

G Critser, 2003, Allen Lane Books, ISBN 0 713 997 397, £9.99.

For such a heavyweight (groan!) subject, this is a wonderfully light read, stuffed with fascinating facts and anecdotes and persuasive arguments showing, step by step, the construction of a social and economic environment that virtually guarantees weight gain, especially for the poorest groups in America. Greg Critser is refreshingly clear that fat is a class issue and notes how a good deal of political time and energy has been dissipated by focusing on eating disorders (which, though serious, are a very minor public health problem experienced mainly by the middle class) instead of on overweight and obesity.

Black and Hispanic Americans suffer higher rates of obesity and related medical conditions such as diabetes than white Americans. However, a combination of bad science and a willing culture led to the widespread acceptance of the idea that black people's fat was more beautiful (and less health-damaging) than white people's fat. A similar combination of poor science and wishful

Vital Signs: The trends that are shaping our future, 2003-2004

Worldwatch Institute, 2003, Earthscan (www.earthscan.co.uk) ISBN 1-84407-021-2, £14.95

Once again, the US Worldwatch Institute has delivered its telling account of the state of the world's health - economic, environmental and physical. Its themes in this edition are the growing economic divide between the world's rich and poor nations, and the patterns of consumption and disease that are already shaping the future of the 21st century.

thinking also, for a while, allowed the notion that it was okay for a person to gain weight as they grow older, and that less and less physical activity was necessary to maintain good health. All this at the time that portion sizes were growing ever larger.

Alongside these sociological observations is some interesting science. For example, high fructose corn syrup (one of the main ingredients in non-diet soft drinks) appears to skew the metabolism to store more fat than ordinary sugar. Also, a 'thrifty' gene might make recent poor migrants to rich countries more prone to obesity.

The main thrust of the book seems to be, though, that the relentless removal of boundaries at all levels – personal, family, religious, economic and political – is at the root of the problem. Disappointingly, Critser stops short of recommending that some boundaries – such as a ban on promoting junk food to children – be established.

■ Review by Jeanette Longfield



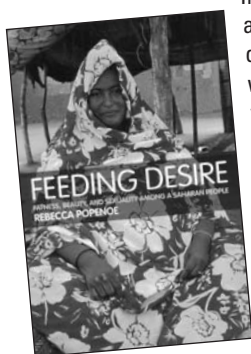
Written under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, these global statistics sometimes makes chilling reading.

A chapter on food production shows that, in 2002, the global grain crop declined for the third time in four years, attributed mainly to drought in Australia and North America. The grain harvest has slipped below demand, pushing down stocks of grain held in private and government stores, with world cereal stocks falling sharply by 20% in just one year (2002), to the lowest level in 40 years of record-keeping. With a changing climate, and with 2002 setting 'numerous local and regional records for windstorms, rain intensities, floods, droughts and temperatures', are these warnings of tough times ahead?

Meanwhile, meat production and consumption in 2002 represented an increase of 2.5% on 2001 levels, with a meat eater's diet requiring two to four times more land than a vegetarian's.

There are few surprises in the section on consumption and its relationship to mortality, but the statistics are startling nonetheless. At one end of the scale, 6.2 million deaths in a single year were attributed to dietary deficiencies. At the other end of the scale, 7.6 million deaths were caused by the diseases of over-consumption, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, being overweight and eating too few fruits and vegetables. Even more alarming is that these disease patterns of affluent countries are spreading to the global south: 'More people die from overconsumption in developing countries (up to 14.3 million) than in industrial ones.'

This book is not a happy read, but it is a useful one. If you can keep your spirits up through chapters with such cheering titles as 'corruption thwarts development', 'birds in decline', and 'severe weather events on the rise', then you will have learned a great deal about the state of our world.





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 write to The Editor, The Food Magazine, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF or email to letters@foodcomm.org.uk

feedback

letters from our readers

To wash or not to wash?

With hygiene improving all the time and tighter restrictions on pesticide residues, should we really still be washing fruit and vegetables? It seems like a waste of water.

Rachel Marsh, Kent

This summer, a government survey showed pesticide residues in 40 per cent of fruit and vegetables tested. However, only a small percentage had concentrations at levels that could be a risk to health. For instance, one UK lettuce samples and one Spanish spinach sample contained more than the limit considered safe for consumption by toddlers. Washing may reduce the problem, although it can't get rid of all residues.

However, food-poisoning can occur from unwashed produce, especially where that produce is not cooked before consumption. In 2002, 17 cases of hepatitis-A were traced back to blueberries picked in a New Zealand orchard. It was found that the only toilet facilities available for fruit pickers were pit latrines without running water, soap or towels. There was no system for removal of rubbish such as disposable nappies left by the pickers, and several young children were present on site during picking – including one 9-year-old who went on to develop hepatitis-A.

The conclusion? Carry on washing those fruit and veg!

Adverts should be more accessible

In my experience, it is impossible to obtain from advertisers and their agents copies of material that are on prominent public display but inaccessible as a source of evidence. This hinders appraisal of the content, and construction of a well-supported complaint. We think the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) should insist that all advertisers or their agents should maintain collections of originals of all their advertisements over the last, say, two years from which copies could be made for enquirers. Organisations such as ours are consulted by various authorities on grounds of the claims made by advertisers.

**Dr Alan Long, Research Adviser,
Vegetarian Economy & Green Agriculture**

We agree that it would be very useful for copies of advertising materials to be more easily available, especially where ad campaigns 'fly under the radar' of proper scrutiny – by being regional campaigns, delivered through direct mail, or targeted at particular age groups. In the case of misleading advertising campaigns, the recipients may not be aware that they are being misled or misinformed, and therefore may not be in a position to make a complaint. That's if they are even aware that a complaints procedure exists.

Like VEGA, the Food Commission receives many letters from people who have seen or heard advertising and wish to make a complaint. We try wherever possible to take the case to the appropriate complaints body. But like you, we find it is a time-consuming challenge to get hold of a copy of the advert in order to frame a reasonable argument. We will also write to the Advertising Standards Authority to support your suggestions.

The icing on the cake!

I bought a Sainsbury's own-brand Christmas cake described as a 'rich, moist, all-butter fruit cake'. I understood the description 'all butter' to mean that all the fat in the cake was butter. However, on reading the small print when I got home, I discovered that the cake also contained vegetable shortening, palm oil, hydrogenated palm oil, rapeseed oil, hydrogenated rapeseed oil, mono- and diglycerides of fatty acids and hydrogenated palm kernel oil. I believe that the descriptions 'luxury' and 'all butter' are misleading. On complaining to my local trading standards officer, I was told that because these ingredients are constituents of the icing, the cake could legally be called 'all butter'. I am astonished that the term 'cake' in a description of the item does not apparently include the icing!

Fiona Monroe, southwest London

We're QUIDs in!

Your recent edition of the *Food Magazine* criticised packaging of Grove Fresh Organic Apple and Mango Juice for carrying no Quantitative Ingredient Declaration (QUID). A sample of the current packaging is enclosed for your information, showing that we fully comply with the QUID regulations. The packaging you featured was superseded following introduction of the new regulations.

**Andrew Shupick, Managing Director,
Grove Fresh**

Thank you for the sample carton. We are delighted that your products fully comply with the QUID regulations.

Calculating Body Mass Index

Several readers, including Rosemary Kinsell from Chard in Somerset, and Paul Appleby from Wantage, pointed out that we made a mistake when explaining how to calculate Body Mass Index (BMI) in the previous *Food Magazine*. The BMI measurement is used by health professionals to judge whether someone is a healthy or an unhealthy weight.

We should have said that BMI is bodyweight in kilos divided by the square of height in metres, $BMI = W/(H^2)$.

The way we explained it in the last issue could have misled a person with a BMI of 25 into believing they had a BMI of nearly 2,000!

Fooled by the fruit

I hate being fooled by food labelling. That's why I'm sending you this Muller fromage frais, so that other parents might not fall for the same thing. The packaging has lovely pictures of a raspberry, a peach and strawberries, and I checked on the ingredients and saw that fruit was the second ingredient at 15%, after fromage frais. And 'sugar' was right down near the bottom of the ingredients. That looked better than most of the so-called 'fruity' fromage frais products. So I bought them for my little boy.

Only when I tried it, and thought it tasted very sugary, did I realise that in fact the 15% is 'strawberry sauce' or 'peach sauce'. The sauce does add up to 15%, but the real fruit content is only 1% of that 15%, and the rest of it is sugary fructose. No wonder the checklist on the label says 'no fruit bits'!

Melanie Leicester, Beckenham



feedback

letters from our readers

Investigate the VAT

I try to drink a lot of vegetable juices such as 'V-8'. But why did they accept the ludicrous VAT addition to what is a drink required by all healthy people? I read that Demos [the think-tank] has proposed a 'fat tax' on unhealthy foods. Perhaps you could investigate the crazy bureaucrats who insist on making me pay extra for my daily drink containing some of the '5 portions of fruit and vegetables'. I have often written to Government questioning this anti-health (therefore long-term expensive) egregious 'tax'. Maybe you can bang a few political heads together and do the population, the NHS and the government a lot of good.

Nicholas Cummins, London SW

There are several anomalies in the VAT rules that show they were drawn up when nutrition was not high in government priorities. The regulations are at: www.hmce.gov.uk, where we discovered some strange facts. For instance, you do not have to pay VAT on 'marshmallow teacakes (with a crumb, biscuit or cake base topped with a dome of marshmallow coated in either chocolate sugar strands or coconut)', whilst 'Snowballs without such a base are classed as confectionery' and you pay VAT at the standard rate.

Another well-known example is that Jaffa Cakes are zero-rated because they are deemed to be 'cakes' rather than 'biscuits' and can therefore be sold at a cheaper and therefore more tempting product. Thank you for raising this issue – we will look into it further and report back.

Dangerous gifts

Three deaths have been recorded in the last few years, the result of children choking on the capsule or parts of the toy enclosed in chocolate eggs. Isn't it crazy that a chocolate treat must only be consumed under adult supervision?

Sure, all children put things in their mouths. But why deliberately produce a product, aimed at children, that is another hazard? Why not make the 'surprise' a one-piece toy?

Manufacturers deny any migration of chocolate or its smell to the capsule, but too many parents, safety specialists and even MPs have found otherwise for this to be credible.

The Consumers Association, over 70 MPs, over 100 A&E consultants, the Academy of Royal Medical Colleges, all support our concerns. I ask the Food Commission and members of the Parents Jury: should these products be banned, or redesigned? Is the safety information on the label adequate?

Jean Roe at jeanroe@tiscali.co.uk

Five-a-day – the wrong way

Food Magazine readers have spotted five-a-day claims appearing on ridiculously inappropriate food products. Here are three of the most misleading.

Five-a-day... the Blue Parrot way

First in the dock is Sainsbury's blackcurrant flavoured sparkling water drink. It is part of the supermarket's Blue Parrot Café range, sold as 'healthier foods for kids' that have been 'specially developed to deliver great taste with improved nutritional quality'.

You might expect, then, that this product, with its luscious pictures of blackcurrant fruit, would contain enough blackcurrant juice to warrant Sainsbury's on-pack advice: 'A glass of fruit juice (150ml) counts towards your 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day'.

No such luck. There is so little blackcurrant juice in this product, that a

percentage is not even given, which according to food labelling law indicates that there is so little blackcurrant juice in this bottle that it is simply there as a flavouring. And whilst the product contains some apple juice, sugar is the top ingredient after water.



Five-a-day... the Heinz way

We have featured Heinz Teletubbies pasta shapes with mini sausages before, because this product contains more salt (2.5g) in a single portion than the recommended daily amount for a young child.

Knowing this, and even after official advice on children's salt intakes was published earlier this year, Heinz chose this summer to add a five-a-day claim to this highly salty product aimed at toddlers.

We complained to Heinz's local trading standards officer and to the BBC, who wrote to us to say 'We have discussed these issues with Heinz and they have told us that this logo should not have appeared on this particular product and they have already removed the 5-a-day logo on this product for all new production.' Well, we're pleased to hear it. But when it realised its mistake, did Heinz withdraw the products to be relabelled? Evidently not, since they are still available in several national supermarkets.



The Food Standards Agency recently set maximum recommended intakes for salt for children. A can like this should ideally provide no more than a third of a young child's daily intake, which is 0.66g of salt. But a single can provides nearly four times that amount!

Five-a-day... the ReBar way

This American product, ReBar, is available in health food stores in the UK. It claims to contain two cups of fruit and two cups of

vegetables, equivalent to an amazing 2lbs or 900g of fruit and vegetables – twice the amount recommended to achieve the five-a-day.



But can this small bar really offer the same health benefits as eating around ten portions of fresh, whole fruit and vegetables?

We very much doubt it.



Falling prey to temptation

Be warned! Giving in to the temptations of an in-store promotion can add a serious dose of junk to your daily diet.

Buy **ANY** daily paper and 500ml Coke or 500ml Vittel water and get a **FREE** Toblerone

We found this offer in newsagent WH Smiths, at our local railway station. A quick treat to go with your daily newspaper – assaulting stomach and mind together.

If you took up the offer and consumed the 500ml Coke and the Toblerone, you would have consumed 725 kcalories and over 70g (14 teaspoons) of sugar. That's at least a third of your total calories and more than your entire recommended sugar intake for the whole day!

Marketers know that Brits love a bargain, and that additional sales can be prompted by offering crisps, coke and chocolate as part of 'meal deals' or special offers such as these. But if you fall prey to temptation, you will end up consuming much more than you bargained for.

Bun-fights avoided

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) got into a tangle over the launch of its review on the effects of food advertising to children (see Editorial, page 2).

Hoping to hear first-hand what the researchers had to say, the Food Commission asked for a ticket to the press launch. We were told only national media could attend and that the *Food Magazine* does not count as national media, which may come as a surprise to our readers in Glasgow, Cardiff, Belfast ...

What we subsequently heard was that the FSA wanted to avoid a bun-fight between campaigners and the advertising industry, so groups such as the Advertising Association and industry-funded Food Advertising Unit were also excluded. Fair enough, we thought.

However, the FSA press office had its eye off the ball. The British Nutrition Foundation was allowed to attend – despite a membership list including some of the worst advertisers, such as Cadbury, Coca-Cola, Kellogg's, Mars, McDonald's, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble and United Biscuits.

Only at the last minute did the FSA realise their gaff, pick up the phone and tell the BNF to stay away.

Positively oversold!

When *The Times* ran a column deciphering food labelling, it hired the Institute of Food Research (IFR) to comment on the science behind labelling claims. However, when the column unpicked the claims on the Positively Healthy Cocoa Drink, it soon incurred the wrath of its manufacturer, Mars, which claimed that the drink contains the same antioxidant power as about a pound of blueberries or red grapes.

For *The Times* article, the IFR said that it did not think the evidence was strong enough to support the claims. The Head of Scientific and Regulatory Affairs for Mars reacted with a flurry of legal and scientific letters aimed at persuading the IFR to modify its views. After reviewing

the new evidence, the IFR said it had not changed its opinion, but that the Institute was suddenly no longer prepared to comment to the media on individual branded products. Sadly, the IFR (logo: 'Science you can trust') is not quite as independent as we might like, with a 'revenue-generating' wing that provides consultancies and support for 'wealth creation' in the food industry.

Antioxidant claims remain, but the cocoa is no longer 'Positively Healthy'. Its new name is 'Cocoa Shot'.



Why Blair won't regulate food advertising

Of the many reasons why Blair will not regulate the media, some are well-known – such as his closeness to media emperor Rupert Murdoch – and some less so. For example, Blair's long-term confidant and head of his No 10 staff is Jonathan Powell, whose brother Chris Powell is chairman of advertising agency BMP DDB. For two decades and four elections, Chris has been New Labour's advertising adviser, and is still close to the cabinet, having just been handed a cosy job as chair of an endowment body, NESTA, by culture secretary Tessa Jowell.

His company, BMP DDB is among the top prize winning ad agencies in the UK with several big food companies among its past and present clients, including promiscuous advertisers to children Pepsi and Walkers, along with Marmite, Cadbury, Lurpak, Kia Ora and motor manufacturers Volkswagen (oh, yes, and the Food Standards Agency).

Chris Powell also chairs the Labour 'centre-left' think-tank, the Institute of Public Policy Research. Not much chance of their support in a move against advertising to children.

And then there is the Berlusconi connection. The Italian premier, friend to the Blairs and owner

of Europe's second largest media empire, has a subsidiary called Pubitalia, an advertising agency he has nurtured since the 1970s and which by 1990 was responsible for some 70% of Italy's TV advertising revenue. He also

owns the majority of TV companies on which Pubitalia's adverts are shown. For 20 years the mastermind behind Berlusconi's financial affairs has been a British accountant, David Mills. His links to the government, especially the department responsible for media and advertising regulation, could not be closer: he is husband to Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Readers with intact memories may recall that David Mills was involved in the Bernie Ecclestone affair, in which the Formula One boss donated £1m to the Labour Party at the same time as benefiting from the government's exemption of Formula One from a proposed Europe-wide ban on tobacco advertising. David Mills was at the time a director of one of Ecclestone's companies. His wife Tessa Jowell was then the hapless minister for Public Health – simultaneously responsible for pushing through the tobacco ad ban while also proposing a permanent exemption from that ban for friend Bernie.

Jowell's predecessor in the Media department was Chris Smith. He did little to tackle advertising, and now sits on New Labour's back benches. But that's not all. He also has a nice little earner (around £30k pa) as a consultant to Disney, a company estimated to be the world's fifteenth biggest advertiser and the largest specialising in products for children – and now branching into food.



From New Labour guru Chris Powell (left) to ex-Secretary of State for the media Chris Smith the advertising industry is well protected.