

# The FOOD MAGAZINE

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

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## 20 years, and the fight rages on!

**This year marks the 20th anniversary of the launch of the Food Commission – then the London Food Commission – to ‘meet the needs of consumers and food workers’.**

This spring we celebrate 20 years of the London Food Commission and 15 years of its successor the UK-wide Food Commission, publisher of the *Food Magazine*.

Launched with a five-year grant from the Greater London Council (GLC), the London Food Commission was one of the few GLC-sponsored organisations to survive Margaret Thatcher’s demolition of the GLC in 1986. The Commission’s torrent of well-

researched reports, books, campaigns, media stories, training programmes and conferences ensured that food was at the heart of public health, and that health stood at the heart of the resistance to unfettered commercialism and irresponsible marketing by the food industry during the 1980s and 1990s.

■ **Special feature pages 5-9**

## Organic certifier faces nutrition challenge

**T**he Food Commission has urged the UK’s biggest organic certification body, the Soil Association, to consider nutritional quality when it issues technical guidelines to its organic food processors. Organic processed food has come under fire in recent months, with several national newspapers highlighting the high fat, high sugar or high salt content of some organically certified food products. Yet surveys show that for most consumers, health is the key concern when they choose to buy organic food.

There is increasing evidence to show that many types of fresh, unprocessed organic food have higher levels of beneficial nutrients than their non-organic counterparts – for instance, more antioxidants in fresh organic fruits and vegetables, and more essential fatty acids in organic milk. These are largely due to the efforts organic farmers put in to improving the plant nutrition in the soil, resulting in the overall health and wellbeing of their crops and farm animals that eat them.

But when fresh organic ingredients are turned into processed foods, salt and sugar may be added to at least the same high levels seen in many conventional foods, which makes it harder to

defend the generic ‘better for you’ claims often made for organic products.

In its role as the consumer representative to the Processing Standards Committee of the Soil Association, the Food Commission has urged the organic certifier to consider nutritional guidelines for organically certified processed foods, taking into account salt, saturated fat and sugar, and encouraging the use of healthy ingredients such as vegetables.

At the Soil Association annual conference in Newcastle, held at the beginning of January, Kath Dalmeny of the Food Commission took part in a lively debate with

Craig Sams, board member of the Soil Association and former head of Whole Earth Foods, before an audience of organic growers and processors. They considered what role, if any, organic certifiers should play in promoting improved human nutrition.

**Consumers believe organic food is healthier, so should organic certifiers ask producers to cut sugar, fat and salt? These Sainsbury’s Organic sausages have a third more fat than the company’s non-organic ‘Butcher’s Choice’ brand. And this Simply Delicious Horseradish sauce has five times the fat and twice the salt of the non-organic brand leader Colman’s.**



Continued on page 4

**Get the facts with the Food Magazine**

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

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

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## A new year's revolution?

**2**005 kicked off with the familiar round of people committing themselves to New Year's Resolutions – aspirational aims such as eating less, eating more healthily or going to the gym. Each person hopes to address the very problem that has dogged them for the previous 12 months, and to change bad behaviour for the better.

Do food companies and marketers also suffer the same bouts of New Year soul-searching? At first glance, a small flurry of positive announcements from industry might have made you feel that food marketers really do want to change for the better...

In January, the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) announced that its agenda for the coming months will focus on 'Morality in Marketing'. CIM says that it will help its 55,000 members to explore *'why morality is becoming a business issue that marketers increasingly have to deal with, and looks at how marketers can help their organisations respond'*.

Within a few days, the fast-food chain McDonald's stated that it would cease advertising in primary schools. The magazine *Marketing* reported that McDonald's 'will provide curriculum support and material

only to children over the age of 13'. And just a few days later, food manufacturer Kraft announced that it would no longer advertise fatty, sugary and salty foods to children under the age of 12.

For companies 'advertising to children' has a more restricted and technical meaning than in common parlance. These companies are not saying that they will stop promoting their

**Kraft vows to halt targeting junk food at children**

fatty, salty and sugary foods to children altogether, merely that adverts for these products will cease to be distributed in very specific places. For Kraft, this is in advertising slots between TV shows where the majority of viewers are under 12. For McDonald's this is in 'curriculum materials' distributed by the company to primary schools.

We fear that without a more profound commitment to children's health, advertising budgets will slip sideways into other

forms of marketing in school, token-collecting schemes, competitions, branded children's clothes, on-pack competitions, collectable toys, character licensing, sponsorship of children's TV programmes... All of these techniques are not called 'advertising' by the companies, but nonetheless, they are highly effective ways of promoting junky foods to children.

When the Department of Health comes to review the marketing behaviour of food companies, as promised for 2007 (see page 9), how will they measure progress? Let's hope they use a common sense definition of food promotions in its broadest meaning. The balance of diets must be allowed to swing back towards good health, without having to compete with the clamour of junk food promotions that shake our resolution to help children towards better health.

**McDonald's to pull out of UK primary schools**

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## Can the Food Commission help you?

- Are you planning non-commercial research that needs expert input on food and health?
- Do you need nutritional or product survey work to be undertaken?

The Food Commission may be able to help you. Contact Kath or Ian on 020 7837 2250.

## US pesticide poisoners held responsible for medical costs

A new US law will make people who spray pesticides responsible for medical costs incurred by bystanders affected by toxic spray drift. This has been hailed by environmental campaigners as a victory for American communities and migrant farm workers who have suffered often terrible consequences of inadvertently coming into contact with agricultural poisons.

Further proposals were defeated after lobbying by the agrochemical industry. They successfully resisted online disclosure of the planned use of especially hazardous pesticides. Campaigners hoped such information would have allowed the emergency services to assess the risks and prepare for an appropriate response to drift incidents.

Even with this caveat, Pesticides Action Network (PAN) says that the new Pesticide Drift Exposure Response Act, which came into force at the end of 2004, is a great step forward and 'represents the culmination of many hard battles between industry lobbyists and environmental health advocates'.

However, PAN also warns that people affected by toxic spray drift in the UK cannot expect similar legal support. PAN UK has

coordinated a major campaign on the 'bystander' issue for over two years and is especially concerned about long-term low-dose exposure, which it says is common next to sprayed fields.

Currently, UK citizens have no legal right to know what pesticides are being sprayed nearby. Under the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974), the farmer is obliged to tell the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), but the HSE has to get the farmer's written permission to pass the information on to enquirers. The government has said that it plans to introduce new regulations giving the public access to this information, but only via a third party, for instance a GP.

The issue is now being considered by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, due to publish a report in summer 2005.

PAN UK is also planning a campaign calling for pesticides used in food production to be declared on the label.

■ **Contact: Pesticide Action Network UK, Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4JX; web: [www.pan-uk.org](http://www.pan-uk.org)**

## Veggies fix the 'fish-conceptions'

The Vegetarian Society is pursuing an action against Somerfield in relation to a tuna niçoise salad labelled as suitable for vegetarians.

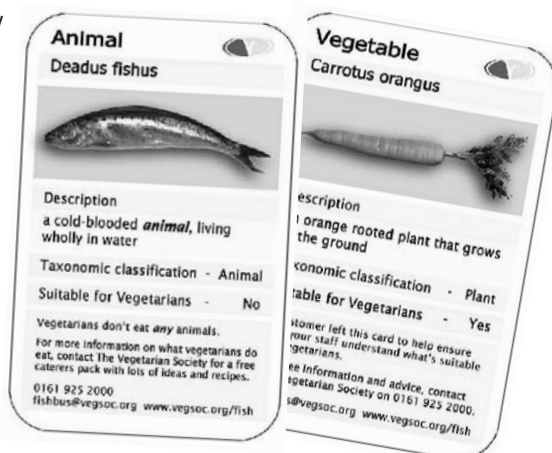
The society has long been concerned about the lack of a single statutory definition for the term vegetarian, meaning that individual manufacturers and retailers are free to invent their own arbitrary criteria. A Somerfield in-store magazine published in April 2004 promoted the new Tuna Niçoise Salad with the supermarket chain's own vegetarian (green 'v') logo.

However, the Vegetarian Society states that: 'A vegetarian is someone living on a diet of grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits with or without the use of dairy products and eggs. A vegetarian does not eat any meat, poultry, fish, shellfish or crustacea, or slaughter by-products.'

Meanwhile, the Society is continuing its campaign to inform caterers and restaurants that most vegetarians do not take

kindly to being offered fish as a 'vegetarian option'. Humorous cards produced by the Society can be handed to restaurant staff, explaining the difference between a carrot (*Carrotus orangus*) and a mackerel (*Deadus fishus*), debunking the popular 'fish-conception' that vegetarians eat fish.

■ **See: <http://www.vegsoc.org/fish/fish.htm>  
The Vegetarian Society, Parkdale, Dunham Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4QG; tel: 0161 925 2000**



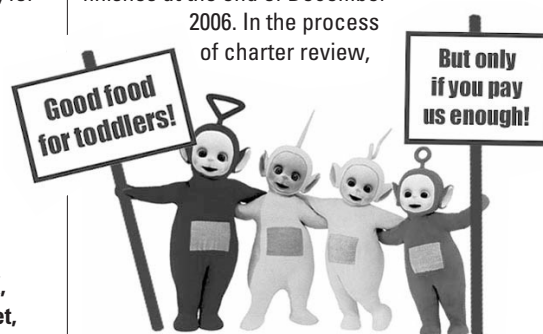
## BBC Worldwide told to hike profits

BBC Worldwide, the commercial arm of the BBC, has been told by the broadcaster's chief operating officer that it must double its profits within two years.

BBC Worldwide sells magazines, books and merchandise relating to BBC programmes. It also raises money by charging licensing fees to allow BBC children's characters such as the Teletubbies and Tweenies to appear on a range of toys and food products. In 2004, after a campaign by the Food Commission's Parents Jury, BBC Worldwide agreed to restrict the use of its pre-school characters to foods nutritionally suitable for toddlers.

However, the BBC's current charter

finishes at the end of December 2006. In the process of charter review,



the BBC's commercial activities are under intense scrutiny, and the broadcaster is under pressure to ensure that BBC Worldwide maximises its value, possibly for sell-off in the next few years.

The Food Commission is increasingly concerned by reports in the marketing press that nutritional and other restrictions may undermine BBC Worldwide's perceived commercial value, putting ethical considerations under threat. We will continue to monitor the situation, and remind the BBC's governors that commercial needs must not undermine toddlers' health.

## Children's Food Bill targets Ofcom

Sustain's Children's Food Bill is seeking to stop the advertising of junk foods to children and to introduce a range of other positive measures to improve children's food and their current and future health. Supported by 120 national organisations and 248 MPs the campaign is now targeting the broadcast regulator Ofcom, which has been asked by government to review the codes on television advertising and the promotion of food and drink to children. Thousands of pre-printed postcards will be sent to Lord Currie, Chairman of Ofcom.

■ **More info at [www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk) or call 020 7837 1228**



Continued from front page

## Organic nutrition standards

Organic certification bodies have previously been resistant to considering nutritional criteria either in guidelines or formal standards, arguing that organic rules relate only to the agricultural origins of food.

In response to a Soil Association survey, several organic food processors stated that they felt that discussing salt and sugar levels went beyond the remit of an agricultural organisation. As one large processor stated, *'It deals with recipes, formulation and market appeal... I think this is a commercial decision.'*

However, recognising that human health is an integral part of the organic agenda, the Soil Association bans nutritionally damaging ingredients such as hydrogenated fat and suspect additives. Fortification of organic food with added vitamins and minerals is also restricted only to foods where there is a legal requirement to fortify. This restriction was introduced following concerns that fortification can be used to give a healthy spin to nutritionally questionable foods.

At the January conference, whilst some audience members were resistant to formal standards dictating the precise amount of salt or sugar suitable in food products, there was a common recognition that high-sugar and high-salt organic processed foods could undermine the healthy reputation of organic food.

As one large organic and whole-food wholesaler noted, *'Organic foods are perceived as a healthy option by most consumers, however... the high salt content in processed foods does not do our industry any favours.'*

Craig Sams presented statistics showing that organic consumers tend to eat an overall healthier diet than non-organic consumers – high in wholegrain cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables, and moderate amounts of eggs,

meat and dairy products. He argued that the Soil Association should focus on the causes of health rather than the causes of disease, promoting a wholesome fresh diet that leaves no place for junk food of uncertain or dubious origin. This is the message that the Soil Association also promotes in its *Food for Life* programme in schools, including a call for restrictions on saturated fat, sugar and salt in school meals, and the promotion of healthy fresh foods, locally produced to help the environment and the local economy.

The case for providing schoolchildren with food of high nutritional quality is unarguable. Some organic food processors have already responded to health concerns by producing new children's foods marketed as salt-free, reduced salt or full of vegetables. Yet when it comes to other organic pre-packaged foods, the picture is not always so rosy. As one respondent to a Soil Association survey explains, *'I cannot justify giving [my children] organic foods if they have a high salt content – I have to choose a non-organic version lower in salt. Something I don't really want to do.'*

There are now several options to explore. Labelling improvements can be easily achieved. But in the long term, organic certifiers need to decide where they stand in the nutrition debate. They may decide simply to encourage their industry clients to think about improving the nutritional quality of their food. Or they may take a more proactive role in promoting healthier ingredients, just as the Swiss organic certification body already does.

At present, organic food is vulnerable to another round of organic-bashing media attention for endorsing salty and sugary foods. Ignoring the problem is no longer an option.

## Chickens fed formaldehyde

The European Food Safety Authority has recommended that the generally toxic chemical formaldehyde can be safely fed to chickens as a growth promoter, as long as dosage limits are controlled.

The Scientific Panel on Additives and Products or Substances used in Animal Feed said that chickens were healthy when fed formaldehyde at up to 660 mg per kg of feed. However, there 'was little margin for error before adverse effects were apparent'.

## Anchor guilty of false ads

The manufacturer of Anchor butter has been found guilty of implying that its spreadable product is pure butter, when in fact it contains added vegetable oil.

In November, Arla Foods was fined £3,000 at Shrewsbury Magistrates' Court and ordered to pay costs of £2,630.87, after a successful prosecution by Shropshire local authority trading standards department.

The company admitted to applying a false trade description to Anchor Spreadable in a TV advertisement that ran on ITV from October 2002 to July 2003.

The ad showed cartoon characters on a tour of the Anchor factory – a field full of cows. The tour guide stated *'These, gentlemen, are our free range cows... and this is what they eat [referring to grass] which is why Anchor Spreadable is the taste you can trust... It's Anchored in nature, don't you know.'*

Arla Foods accepted that the ad gave the impression that the product contained only butter, in spreadable form. The company said that a disclaimer stating that the product contained of a blend of butter and vegetable oil had been omitted by mistake.

## Department of Health says 'eat less'

Promoting the 5-a-day message is a cornerstone of the Department of Health's (DoH) anti-obesity strategy. The Food Commission has become increasingly concerned that the 5-a-day promotional materials always

emphasise the idea of eating more food – the catchphrase of the campaign is 'Just Eat More'. A balanced message would surely be that people need to eat MORE fruit and veg, but LESS unhealthy fatty and sugary foods.

However, government shies away from negative food messages, aware no doubt of the furore it might cause in the food industry.

Until now. A 5-a-day guide from the DoH finally comes clean. 'Just Eat More' says the strapline. But if you feel like a snack? The leaflet advises: 'Reach for an apple instead of chocolate.' The phrase 'instead of' is a first for the 5-a-day campaign, and we welcome it.

## Animal feed puts liver off menu

A draft report from the Scientific Committee on Nutrition has warned consumers not to eat liver more than once a week and regular liver-eaters should not take vitamin A supplements. The committee fears that high doses of vitamin A may put consumers' bone health at risk. When it came to analysing the main sources of vitamin A in the diet, the committee found that the practice of using vitamin A in milk substitutes for calves and as growth promoters in poultry and other livestock led to high levels in meat products – but concluded that it was beyond their remit to call for reduction in the use of vitamin A on farms.

■ [www.sacn.gov.uk](http://www.sacn.gov.uk)



**Just Eat More**

Feel like a snack?  
Reach for an  
apple instead  
of chocolate.

**Remember to eat a wide variety  
of fruit and vegetables...**

and aim for at least 5 A DAY

# The twenty year battle for better food!

## We mark the Food Commissions 20th anniversary.

**T**his spring marks 20 years since the launch of the London Food Commission and its successor, the UK Food Commission. On the next five pages we look at the Commission's roots in the political culture of the early 1980s, at some of the campaigns we have run in the last 20 years, and we look at the likely issues that will be keeping us busy over the next twenty years.

## Roots in socialism, trade unions and public health

While much political struggle in the 1970s was focused on trade union resistance to cuts in services and protection of jobs and safe working conditions, groups of union activists were developing more radical, forward-looking analyses. When Lucas Aerospace announced cuts in its labour force, a group of its workers developed a series of socially useful products which they believed the company should be making as an alternative to armaments and automotive parts. In the health services, trade unions fought against government cuts in hospital services, but groups of health workers also developed a critique of the doctor-centred, drug-industry dominated 'National Ill-health Service' and called for public health

health services that prevented disease, not treated it. These radical movements grew

in the context of increased awareness among scientists and professionals of the political 'spin' attached to their work. The British Society for Social Responsibility in Science brought together a wide range of researchers and educators in various disciplines concerned with a common thread: how was their work being used – or rather misused – to assist in repression, colonialism or exploitation? Analyses were made of the role of researchers in developing the technology of repression in Northern Ireland, the misuse of science in the exploitation of third world markets to dump dodgy pharmaceuticals or expand the sales of pesticides, the role of doctors in evaluating nuclear weapons tests, the role of statisticians in massaging government statistics, or the role of psychologists in developing the techniques of marketing, espionage and torture.

Groups such as the Agricapital Group revealed the inner workings of the bread industry, from its ownership of wheat patents, its exploitation of low paid workers in flour mills and bread-factories, to the use of additives to extend shelf life – all in the name of company profits. The Politics of Health's Food Group showed how the mass production of foods was detrimental to consumers' health as well as the health of industry workers, catering and shop staff – many of whom were women and/or from ethnic minorities.

## Nutrition at the heart of health

By the early 1980s the public health aspects of poor diets hit the headlines when the government refused to receive a report that made recommendations for healthy eating for the whole population. Known as the NACNE report, it specified nutritional targets and challenged the prevailing assumption – still rife today – that diet was simply a matter of personal choice, and that interventions were needed only for high risk individuals. The report was finally published, unofficially, in 1983, but by then the government's resistance to its message, using the same arguments as

the food industry and industry-funded scientists, made nutrition a political issue and the topic has rarely been out of the headlines since.

To this heady mix, the GLC added a further dimension: the need to fight unemployment and protect jobs from leaking out of London. As the GLC's report 'Food for a Great City', written by Robin Jenkins, argued, if the food industry, caterers and retailers, are providing the sorts of foods we really need, then jobs will be safe. For example, nutritious school meals, freshly prepared, require local food supplies and plentiful kitchen staff. The same applies in the private sector. In both catering and retailing, as well as food manufacturing, the need to improve dietary health is linked to economic security in food supplies.

The Greater London Council's politicians were convinced, and agreed to a five year grant to launch the London Food Commission 1985-1990. And at the end of those five years the UK Food Commission was launched to put the campaign on to a national footing.

With no GLC to fund it, the UK Food Commission has depended on supporters and subscribers to the *Food Magazine* for its survival. But thanks to such support, the Commission has survived, and so the campaigns have continued.



Three seminal reports that led to the creation of the London Food Commission: *Our Daily Bread* from the Agricapital group, 1978, *Food and Profit* from the Politics of Health Group, 1979, and *Food for a Great City* from the GLC in 1984.

Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister (1979-1990), was busy attacking the unions and the GLC at the time the London Food Commission was born.

In the 1950s she was a food scientist specialising in 'fat extension' pumping air into ice cream and cake fillings to make saturated fat more palatable. McDonald's UK built its headquarters in her constituency when she was MP for Finchley, North London.



# Highlights of the first

**T**wenty years and we are still going strong! Thanks to the support and affection shown by our readers and admirers, we have kept up a constant flow of outspoken and influential material and we have a lot to be proud of. We have had successes and setbacks, and further successes again. And every time we have learnt something new.

A campaign on one issue is inevitably a campaign on several linked themes simultaneously. If you want to campaign on children's health you might start with school meals. This in turn raises issues of employment in catering, and adequate training, as well as healthy food products served on the menu. Food product recipes raise concerns over nutrition and adulteration, additives and labelling. Products using mechanically recovered meat, for example, raise issues of hygiene and sloppy abattoir practices as well as problems of species identification. Abattoirs lead to animal transport, animal welfare, farming priorities and farming economics...

Every one of our campaigns can tell a detailed story of the networks we forge, the friends we make and the enemies, too. We cannot claim credit for any success single-handedly, but we take opportunities and push at the boundaries, we feed stories to the media and keep up a stream of reports and innovative campaigns.

## Adulteration

Adulteration has been a concern for centuries, yet the food industry still adds excess water, unwanted processing residues, cosmetic additives and cheap substitute ingredients. The Food Commission continues to reveal the tricks and dodgy practices of the trade.

Our 1988 book on adulteration raised the alarm over excess water, pesticide residues and other contaminants in food. Food labels, we pointed out, tell us nothing about these unwanted ingredients. The problem of water in chicken remains a problem today.

## Additives

A long-term concern of the Food Commission, additives remain a 'legalised fraud' that can make nutritionally poor food products look and taste more attractive. Over the years, we have provided independent information to parents and in 2002 we exposed an unpublished government report showing the adverse effects of certain colouring additives on toddlers' behaviour.



In 1986 our Additives Broadsheet sold in thousands. New research, exclusively revealed in the *Food Magazine*, proved that children suffer while companies continue to dress up poor foods with cheap colours and flavours.

## BST

The combination of GM technology, animal welfare and tampering with the nation's milk supply made the GM milk-boosting cattle hormone Bovine Somatotrophin unpopular in the UK and eventually in Europe.



Our campaign in 1988 alerted the nation to the potential problems of BST. The experimental trials of the drug were held on secret farms, but the milk from those trials went into our food supply.

## Food Irradiation

The slogan *Good food doesn't need irradiating* concisely expressed the doubts that irradiation would be used to enhance mass production, reduce food security and encourage fraud. Working throughout the '80s and '90s, the Food Commission coordinated a pan-European campaign against food irradiation, ensuring that consumer views were heard by policy makers.

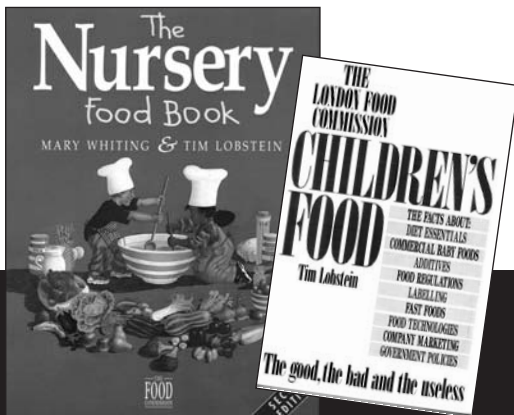
Our best-selling book on irradiation forced the government to require full labelling declarations. Even so, food companies have broken the regulations, as our exclusive surveys have revealed.



## Children's food

The food industry is particularly wary of parent pressure and our highly successful campaigns and research into children's nutritional issues are widely respected.

Book after book from the Food Commission have highlighted the need to protect our children's health and defend them from the poor quality food targeted at them.





# twenty years



## School food

School food has been a battleground since Margaret Thatcher attacked free school milk in the 1970s and removed school meals standards in the early 1980s, followed by her requirement that meals services be put out to private tender. The battles continue today, with a growing number of organisations recognising that poor school food is no longer acceptable.



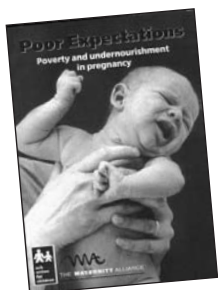
**School meals was one of our first concerns, and led**

**to a joint campaign with Thames Television in 1986. We are still concerned: our latest research for Barnardos was published in late 2004.**

## Food poverty

Food poverty has been a core concern of the Food Commission, often in partnership with groups such as Shelter, NCH Action For Children and the Maternity Alliance. Returning to our roots in the old GLC, we are now working with London government to research what local authorities could do to curb food poverty (see report, page 18).

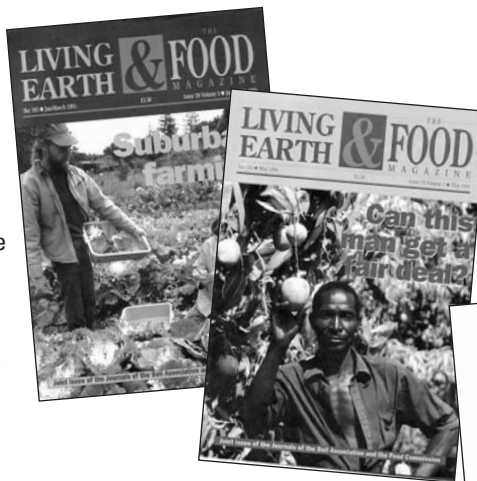
**Our surveys of food inequalities have contributed to a range of reports with partner organisations concerned with poverty.**



## Sustainable farming

We support sustainable farming methods and for two years published the *Food Magazine* jointly with the Soil Association's *Living Earth*. We are still involved as advisors to the Soil Association and as members of Sustain's Food Miles campaigns.

**We have always believed that food means more than eating. We linked our magazine to the Soil Association's for a two-year partnership in the early 1990s. Our environmental campaigns and support for sustainable farming is part of the battle to ensure healthy food supplies are available for generations to come.**



## Fast food

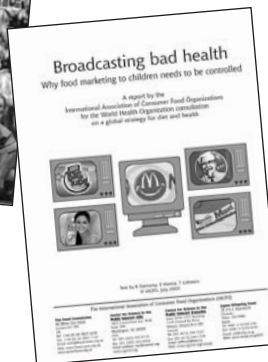
Our concerns with diet, food production, catering and food employment come together in fast food. We helped in the legal defence of the McLibel two, scoring points on nutrition and food marketing which were noted in the judge's report.

## FAST FOOD FACTS

**In 1988 our survey of fast food practices brought the burger bars and chicken shops to account. We continue to keep these companies under the spotlight and push for better working practices, better menu choices and less exploitation of children.**

## Advertising

The role of advertising has never been higher on the political agenda. We reported on international aspects of food marketing to the World Health Organization (see [www.food-comm.org.uk/Broadcasting\\_Bad\\_Health.pdf](http://www.food-comm.org.uk/Broadcasting_Bad_Health.pdf)), helped to ensure that food promotion is of central concern to the Food Standards Agency, and gave evidence to 2004's Health Select Committee inquiry into obesity.



**We have been surveying TV advertising since the mid-1980s, and backed these with reports on marketing in schools, product placement strategies, internet marketing and recent moves by food companies to send messages directly to children's mobile phones.**



**The launch of the London Food Commission in spring 1985. Cutting the cake is Mike Ward, Chair of the Greater London Council Industry and Employment Committee which funded the first five years, and beside him is Robin Jenkins, the GLC officer who conceived the London Food Commission and saw it into being. Seated are Caroline Walker, one of the founding trustees, and the Commission's first director Tim Lang.**

# The next twenty years – what will we face?

**Looking to the future, what issues may confront us in the years to come? Tim Lobstein and Kath Dalmeny report.**

**W**hile problems such as poverty and food inequalities, food miles and global warming, animal welfare, sustainable local production and the protection of nutrients throughout the food chain remain, new challenges await us. With twenty years of campaigning experience behind us, the Food Commission is ready to face the challenges of the decades to come.

## Genetic dietetics

The next paradigm shift in nutrition may be linked to the unique DNA characteristics of every individual and the assumption that each of us therefore needs slightly different nutrient intakes to provide our optimum genetic expression and prevent chronic disease.

The 1980s and 1990s were characterised by an increasing understanding of the need for public health approaches to combat chronic disease, and hence the need for population-based improvements in diet and food supplies. Strategy documents from the World Health Organization, respected cancer and heart disease organizations and other health agencies have all called for national and international action to raise the quality of food supplies and reduce inequalities in access to optimum nutrition.

But these views are being challenged by scientists who are seizing on the opportunities created when the complete sequencing of the human genome was finished in 2001. This event began what its promoters are calling 'the postgenomic era' in which, they claim, a 'widening understanding of the complex interactions among genotype, diet, lifestyle, and environment has evoked a change in clinical medical practice, where the evidence and population-based protocol is evolving into a more personalized system that includes the analysis of individual genotype and phenotype. The implications of this evolution are considerable, because genomic medicine has the potential to give rise to personalized nutrition recommendations and specialized medical treatment.\*'

We fear that science will be used to obfuscate the social causes of disease and

the most efficient prevention, create further divisions between those who can afford access to high tech solutions and those who cannot, and create a lucrative market in gene-specific products to be sold as your private health solution.

\* Quote from Diet and Cancer Prevention: Evidence-based Medicine to Genomic Medicine by Go VL, Wong DA *et al*, of the UCLA School of Medicine, in the *Journal of Nutrition*, December 2004.

## Nanotechnology

Food technologists have clearly learned a thing or two from the backlash caused by the over-hasty introduction of GM food and crops without proper consultation and without clear evidence of health or environmental benefits.

Supporters of nanotechnology therefore focus on the medical miracles they say will be delivered by manufacturing processes that work with chemicals at an atomic scale.

But lurking in the wings there are also many food and agricultural companies that will utilise nanotechnology techniques. Some products are already on the market, such as micro-capsules (created in nano-manufacturing by rearranging individual atoms) containing fish oils. Added to products such as Australian Tip Top bread, omega 3 oils are delivered in miniature packets directly into the stomach, thus avoiding a fishy taste.

Similar micro-capsules are planned for the delivery of pesticides onto crops and vaccines into livestock – designed to deliver their toxic load when triggered by an external signal, such as a change in temperature or light, or the spraying of a chemical catalyst.

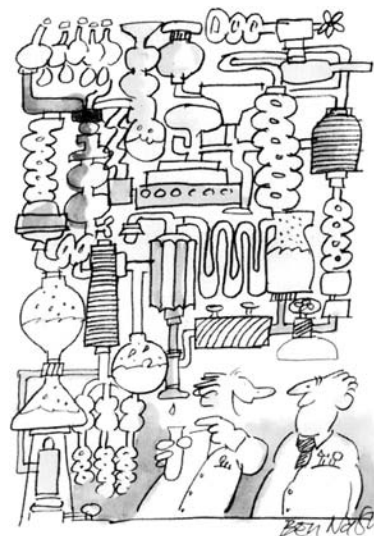
But are these nano-capsules and their contents safe to ingest or work with? Your guess is as good as ours. It seems that our food regulators are running to catch up with this fast-developing technology. Specialist groups are already springing up to gather evidence and voice concerns about the lack of research into risks, in the face of a frantic rush to market new products.

Even the conservative Royal Society has acknowledged legitimate environmental concerns and said that the release of nanoparticles could create new hazardous waste streams. They expressed concern about the inadequacies of regulatory procedures when faced with the products of nanotechnology. Several instances of highly toxic nano-substances have already been recorded, showing radically new properties that could not have been predicted from looking at the 'same' substances in their natural state. People familiar with the GM story will no doubt hear the distant sound of alarm bells...

## Sneaky marketing methods

Despite protestations of commercial doom in the face of possible advertising restrictions on junk foods, the UK advertising industry is optimistic and buoyant. In November, the UK's Advertising Association issued its *Long Term Advertising Expenditure Forecast*, giving both high and low estimates of advertising trends up to the year 2014. The high option shows that advertising spend could be set to rise as much as 33%, and even the low option shows a healthy 25% rise.

Healthy, that is, in the advertisers' own terms. To defend such growth in profits, we can expect to see a fierce defence of junk food advertising over the coming years, with lobbyists becoming ever more canny, and new industry alliances springing up to field



*These nanoparticles can put an advertising message into every brain cell!*



consumer and government concerns. Whilst good progress has been made to push nutrition up the political agenda, nationally and internationally, the big money is still firmly behind unhealthy sugary and fatty foods and sugary soft drinks. Cheap ingredients means plenty of spare cash to invest in marketing.

The coming decades will see the growing use of new technologies. Familiar tools such as text messaging and interactive websites are only the tip of the iceberg for high-tech marketing designed to reach young people in social settings, create a buzz and link in to popular culture.

In the food arena, forward-thinking companies will also invest in good PR, hiring lobbying specialists to represent them in Brussels and at the UN, to ensure favourable policies. The '90s saw a growing number of pseudo-scientific organisations, funded by trade associations, designed to dominate the nutrition information presented to policy-makers and in the media. If the experience of our campaigning colleagues in the US is anything to go by, we can expect to see many more working to gain official advisory status with governments, issuing authoritative statements, and publishing 'educational' materials for schools showing their funders' products in the best possible light.

## Urbanisation and Colonisation

The world's population in 2025 is predicted to be a further 1.3bn greater than the present 6.5bn people. Virtually all of this increase will be in urban areas, with a 50% rise in urbanisation from the current 3.2bn to 4.6bn.

If current trends continue, this huge urban population will be fed the output of mass food production based on the lowest cost commodity supplies from the great fertile plains of North America, Latin America, the Steppes, Australia, China, India and Europe. The human propensity to like the tastes of sugar and fat, and to prefer meats to cereals and vegetables, will be fed by the giant corporations that already dominate the world's food trade: the grain traders, meat transporters and local packagers of snacks and bottlers of soft drinks.

But crises in food production may occur, caused by global warming, natural disasters, conflict or new forms of disease. And the urban population's reliance on the corporate suppliers leaves it vulnerable. Food supply failures may become more common as the food chain lengthens and consumers come to rely on foods from long distances, determined by a few large corporations. Suppliers may be able to hold the urban population to greater ransom as control of supplies rests in their hands, with little democratic accountability.

Sustainable food supplies means more than ensuring that agricultural practices do no harm to the environment. Sustainability means that the food supply can resist potential hazards, be they environmental – such as global warming – or economic – such as rising concentration of corporate power. This means improving the diversity of supply and increasing the localisation of key crops near to, and even within, urban populations.

Equally, it can mean the wider distribution of populations, so that households are spread more diffusely across the countryside. De-urbanisation was a theme a century ago, with the creation of suburban communities and garden cities. Its time may come again.

## Functional and novel foods

The great hope for the food industry in the 1990s, a new generation of 'functional foods' or 'nutri-ceuticals' was predicted to overwhelm our supermarket shelves. But after several dozen were launched and flopped, only a trickle of products remain – largely in the form of yogurts enriched with intestinal bacteria or fatty spreads enriched with anti-cholesterol wood pulp. The white bread with added fish oil

has gone, and its sister fruit cake (also with fish oil) went with it. Gaio soya yogurt has gone and so has the same company's Pact margarine – whose hearty-healthy claims infuriated the Advertising Standards Authority. The Columbus egg has had a hard time but maintains a niche in the market.

Nor was Europe particularly taken with some of America's novel ideas. We never got serious about the fat-free fat Olestra with its stories of anal leakage, nor the rival products from Oatrim and Simplese. We may however be seduced by the sugar-replacer Sucralose, coming onto the market in a range of sweet-tasting foods following EU approval in 2004.

But the industry will never stop trying to sell low quality food by adding better-sounding ingredients. Nor will they stop their confusing messages, in which fatty, salty and sugary products are sold as weight reducing or heart-healthy or good for bones, teeth, eyes or brain. Legislation to control health claims may reduce the worst offences, but products don't have to make health claims to imply that they give a benefit. And – as we know from cigarette marketing – there are plenty of ways to make products attractive whatever their health effects.

## Badvertisement

### The 'no-risk' sugar sweets!

Here's a classic piece of health spin: 'Fat Free' marshmallows. Whilst technically correct, this claim might act as an incentive to people seeking a more healthy or calorie-controlled diet. But the marshmallows are over three-quarters sugar (77%), the remainder being a gooey mixture of water, gelatine, starch and additives – including two colourings suspected of triggering hyperactive reactions in toddlers.

We took a look on the Haribo website ([www.haribo.com](http://www.haribo.com)) to see if the manufacturer makes any further healthy-sounding claims for its confectionery. On pages entitled 'consumer information', the company states: 'Sugar doesn't just make you happy,' and goes on to explain that sugar has a beneficial role in the diet when it is used to

sweeten nutritious foods (e.g. milk), to make them more palatable for children. Sounds reasonable until you consider that most of the Haribo products for children are made almost entirely of sugar, delivered in a format that contains little or no

nutritional benefit other than calories, and eaten as snacks between meals – the behaviour most damaging to teeth.

But the claim that will set dentists really champing at the bit is: 'There is no risk involved in eating sugar and foods containing sugar. Sugar, in the quantities in which it

appears on the table nowadays, is a safe food giving no cause for concern.' How convenient that they then give a link to the sugar industry funded Sugar Bureau, who will confirm this biased view.



# Privatising public health



**The government's White Paper *Choosing Health* puts too much emphasis on individual choice and not enough on public responsibility, argues Sustain co-ordinator Jeanette Longfield.**

**T**he long-awaited White Paper on public health runs to 207 pages, during which the words 'choice(s)' and 'choose(ing)' are mentioned 181 times (I confess I may have missed one or two as the document is stupefyingly dull and repetitive, and depressingly badly written\*). This number doesn't include repeated mentions of the title of the consultation documents or the title of the White Paper itself.

Blair's four paragraph foreword clocks up an impressive six mentions. John Reid gets in 15 mentions in two and a half pages of preface.

The language of choice is very evidently an attempt to avoid being accused of nanny-ism, for it makes no sense in the context of health and disease. The document is called 'Choosing Health' yet it is inconceivable that anyone would consciously choose to be ill. Would we choose unsafe drugs over safe ones, contaminated vaccines over pure ones, a diabetic kidney failure over a healthy kidney? But the language of choice serves two important tasks for a government reluctant to legislate for the public good: it fits nicely with the ideology of a free market and it passes responsibility for health onto the individual.

## Private partnerships

A further feature of the White Paper is a repeated emphasis on 'partnerships', which are clearly intended to include the private sector. For example, some health promotion campaigns will be 'jointly funded by

government and industry' (p23), and specifically may include the food industry (p31 and 36). Binge drinking will be tackled with the Portman Group, funded by the alcohol industry. Increasingly, health promotion will no longer be a public good but a private commodity to be marketed like lipstick.

## Banning adverts?

The pre-publication spin indicated that junk food promotions to children would be restricted. This is misleading. The paper acknowledges 'overwhelming support for some restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy food and drinks to children' (p33) – almost certainly an understatement given the Children's Food Bill currently has 123 supporting national organisations – and all that is promised is yet another consultation with the broadcast regulator Ofcom. Ofcom's regulation of alcohol advertising is offered as a good example, with no indication of its effectiveness. For non-broadcast adverts, a forum will be set up to strengthen voluntary codes (p36).

The junk food promoters have until 'early 2007' to 'produce a change in the nature and balance of food promotion'. The details of what they should do are not specified. If the voluntary approach fails the government will 'take action through existing powers or new legislation to implement a clearly defined framework for regulating the promotion of food to children'. This falls far short of promising a ban on promoting junk food to children.

## School food

Schools are asked to balance the 'benefits' of food promotional activity in their schools with the ethos of a healthy school (p36). Schools need to provide good food, which can be achieved using 'a little creativity and enterprise' (p57). Government 'wants to see' schools provide food education and skills, promote healthy food, and restrict other options, but gives no indication of what – if anything – will happen if schools don't do this. There is a promise to 'invest over the next three years' in improving school meals but no sums are stated. Schools will be asked to consider 'whether' (not how) to include more locally produced food in meals. Nutrition-based standards will only be 'strongly considered' (p58).

This vague approach to school food contrasts sharply with the approach to sport, where 'an unprecedented amount' of money is promised (p61) and there are tough targets (by 2006 100% of state-maintained schools must be in a school sports partnership, and there will be 400 colleges running sports courses).

However, one new and positive element is that 'Ofsted inspectors will be looking at healthy eating in schools, and will take account of any school meals provided in doing so' (p58) which may come as news to Ofsted which is currently facing a reported 500 job losses.

## The public health approach

Some sections of the document did manage to slip past the free market ideologues, allowing some genuine elements of public health thinking to be expressed. A commitment to reducing health inequalities is stated repeatedly throughout, as is the importance of shifting the focus of the NHS, and government policy, to preventing rather than simply treating disease. How the NHS is to do this is not clear: the document is very weak about what health professionals – particularly clinicians – will be asked to do, apart from 'consider' integrating health promotion into initial and in-service training and qualifications.

On inequalities, the Department of Health says it will fund community food initiatives in deprived communities (p81), though this falls

short of a proper strategy to tackle food poverty. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and local authorities will, at some stage, have to conduct 'a health and well-being equity audit' (p123) and there will be a national Health Poverty Index (p192).

Local authorities will be given extra money (though it's not clear how much) if they achieve 'more ambitious local targets, such as those on tackling health inequalities' (p180). And from 2005, promoting health and reducing inequalities will be included in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment used by the Audit Commission to assess local authorities.

## Other proposals include:

- A National Strategic Partnership Forum, linked with the umbrella group NGO PHorum, to encourage links between the NHS and voluntary sector to promote health.
- A 'national partnership for obesity' to promote action to prevent and manage obesity and collect evidence of effective action.
- A National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence merging the functions of NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) and the Health Development Agency. This may (or may not) be the same independent body that the Department of Health is appointing to promote healthy choices.
- Additional public health research funding of up to £10m by 2007/8.
- Extra cash for Public Health Observatories to collect and monitor health data.
- An Innovations Fund (£30m in 2006/7) to test new ways of working and develop 'real time' evaluation methods.
- Extra cash for Directors of Public Health in Strategic Health Authorities to develop their health improvement workforce plans.

It is not clear which, if any, of these funds are to pay for the training and accreditation of a small army of 'health trainers' that the White Paper proposes. It is generally assumed this new tier of health workers will be provided from the NGO sector, possibly assisted with money from PCTs, though heaven forbid they may yet be known as Ronald McDonald health trainers. Just so long as nobody can call them 'State Nannies'!

**\* Here is an example of text from the White Paper:** 'This will encompass integrated strategy to develop a joint planning and commissioning strategy; integrated processes to involve health practitioners in utilising the common assessment framework and information sharing; and integrated front-line service delivery through multi-disciplinary teams and increasing co-location of health and other services.' (p199)

# Checkouts still failing the junk test

A survey of supermarkets has found Morrisons to be the worst chain for promoting junk food at the checkouts, knocking ASDA out of its long held first place in our league table. The supermarket failed to provide any snack-free checkouts for their customers.

The surveys were carried out by supporters of the Parents Jury's *Chuck Snacks off the Checkout!* campaign. In total over 3,500 checkouts were surveyed in more than 300 stores over the last year. The campaign has also received hundreds of messages of support and calls for supermarkets to chuck snacks off the checkout.

Campaign supporters include Primary Care Trusts, Oral Health Promoters, nursery schools and the British Dental Association.

The campaign's objectives were also backed by the Food Standards Agency in 2004 who said they will encourage retailers to: 'remove snack products from checkouts and, where ever practicable, replace them with healthier options such as fruit.'

Following the campaign launch in autumn 2003, ASDA announced that it would trial checkouts with healthier snacks, or snack free checkouts, in four of its stores. In 2004 a trade magazine reported that 'Asda has yet to find a workable formula for merchandising fruit and healthy snacks at its checkouts... the biggest problem in the four-store trial was keeping the fresh fruit replenished.'

When the Food Commission contacted ASDA to check on the situation (as the need to replenish might indicate that the fresh fruit was very popular) we were told only that they had decided not to go ahead with apples or grapes for food safety reasons.

ASDA were still trialing displays of bananas but were worried about bruising, and were trialing cherry tomatoes, tangerines, bags of dried fruit and carrots.

Somerfield have also announced that in response to a Chuck Snacks campaign on the Isle of Wight that they too be 'trialing' snack free checkouts in their larger stores.

Sainsbury's have also recently initiated a policy 'to remove sweets from checkouts'.

Marks and Spencer are currently languishing 4th from bottom in the league table. They told the Food Commission that they 'ran a pilot offering fruit at the checkout in five stores and sales had been very disappointing in January 2004'.

Many campaign supporters cited Marks & Spencer as one of the worse offenders because many of the sweets and chocolates on sale at their checkouts use cartoon

characters to grab the attention of young children.

The data from our checkout survey has also helped to inform recent research conducted by the Food Commission on behalf of the National Consumer Council. This research led to a final report *Rating Retailers for Health: How supermarkets can affect your chances of a healthy diet*, which scored the retailers against a new Health Responsibility Index.

Overall, more 'up-market' supermarkets gained a higher Health Responsibility Index rating while those with a greater proportion of lower-income shoppers scored less well.

The Co-op remained an exception – with a higher rating than its customer demographic profile would predict.

From these findings, the National Consumer Council suggests that retailers' practices may be contributing to or exacerbating the inequalities that exist between the diet and health of more affluent and less affluent consumers.

■ **The Rating Retailers report is available free of charge at:**  
[www.ncc.org.uk/food/rating\\_retailers.pdf](http://www.ncc.org.uk/food/rating_retailers.pdf)  
or call: 020 7730 3469.

■ **If you would like to support the campaign to stop promotion of junk food to children, please sign up to the Children's Food Bill. Visit [www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk)**

## Snack free checkout league table

	Supermarket	% of snack free checkouts
1	Waitrose	96%
2	Tesco	79%
3	Sainsbury	44%
4	Co-op	28%
5	Iceland	25%
6	Somerfield	18%
7	Marks and Spencer	14%
8	Safeway	9%
9	ASDA	7%
10	Morrisons	0%



# Plants lose their

**Continuing our look at the impact of modern farming on diet, Tim Lobstein examines the loss of nutrients in plant foods.**

**T**his series of articles looks at changes in the way our food is supplied and asks how this may be affecting the nutritional content. We have shown that chicken meat has become fatter and contains less polyunsaturated fat and more saturated fat (see issue 66). Farmed fish are likely to have a poorer ratio of omega 3 fatty acids to omega 6 fatty acids compared with wild fish, especially if the fish feed is based on soya (issue 67).

In this issue we look at fruit and vegetable crops and ask what impact modern farming techniques could be having on their nutrient content.

There are few studies which compare the nutritional values of uncultivated, wild plant foods with their agricultural cousins grown as commercial crops. However, a study of edible vegetables eaten in Crete found that wild, green-leafed plants used in traditional cuisine were rich in phytonutrients, such as antioxidant flavonols and flavones (1). The authors noted that over 150 varieties of edible wild greens are believed to be consumed in Greece, often in the form of traditional 'green pies' made with virgin olive oil. Analyses of these pies showed that levels of antioxidants were considerably higher than in well-

recognised rich sources of such biochemicals, such as red wine.

In most cases, the size and quality of a plant crop is determined largely by the species, variety and cultivar of the plant, and the conditions in which it is grown such as the nutrient and moisture levels in the soil, along with post-harvest treatments. Soil fertility has long been recognised as an important influence on crop production. But the practice of leaving fields fallow for one season in every three or four to allow some natural regeneration in their fertility has been abandoned by many farmers seeking to maximise the use of their land to grow crops. And the payments made to farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy to set land aside as a means of cutting total production levels – which might have been used to encourage fallow periods – has instead led to the neglect of poorer quality land and even greater exploitation of the land remaining in production.

Arable land may be routinely used for two crops per year. The rotation of crops to encourage maximum fertility, for example, alternating nitrogen-fixing crops with nitrogen-depleting crops, has given way to the replacement of soil nitrogen by applying nitrogen-rich fertiliser. The drive to increase animal and dairy production has also led to the increasing use of fertilisers to promote the growth of selected fast-growing grasses on pastureland, in place of traditional multi-species meadows.

The potential danger from this intensive use of land with minimum replenishment of micronutrients is that the crops produced are

themselves lacking in nutrients. There appear to be no systematic studies of the effects on the nutritional content of plant crops when trace elements in the soil are not replenished.

It may be argued that, at least in some areas, there are sufficient quantities of trace elements in the soil to ensure high levels in plants and hence in our nutrition. But this cannot be taken for granted, and indeed there are occasions when a lack of trace elements makes itself known. For example, a suspected lack of iodine in the diets of people in a region of China was rectified by adding iodine to the irrigation water during one planting season: this led to a five-fold increase in the iodine levels in locally-grown cereal crops, vegetables and meat for the following three years, and resulted in fewer infant deaths and stillbirths (2).

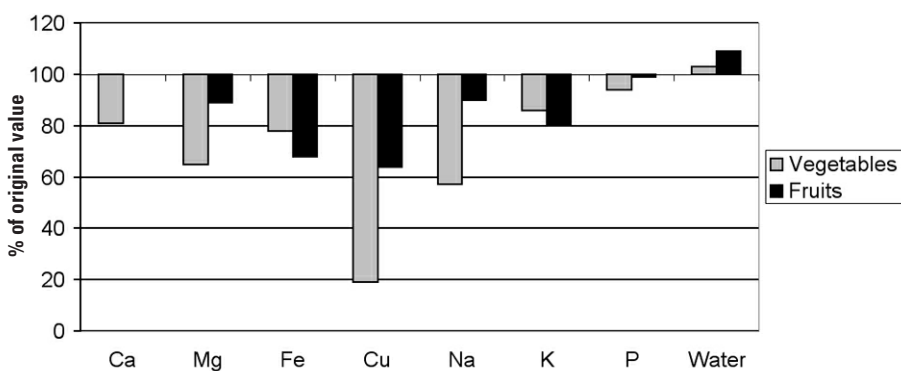
There is evidence that the quantity of essential minerals in commonly grown crops in the UK has declined significantly in the last 50 years. In a comparison of the mineral composition of twenty types of fruits and vegetables analysed in the 1930s with those grown in the 1980s, the levels of calcium, magnesium, sodium and copper in vegetables, and potassium, iron, magnesium and copper in fruit were found to have declined significantly (see graph). Phosphorous showed no change and water content increased. Other minerals could not be compared across the surveys.

Care must be taken interpreting these changes in plant mineral content: they can be influenced by changes in analytical techniques as well as in the sources of fruit and vegetables and their particular varieties.

The issue of species and varieties is itself of concern. Different apple varieties have significantly different vitamin C levels. Some types have three or even five times more of this vitamin than others, although the heaviest cropping varieties (Golden Delicious especially) have amongst the lowest levels (see table).

There is increasing evidence that various plant chemicals, such as phenols and flavonoids, have a role to play as protective agents against degenerative diseases. Few studies of the effects of agricultural systems on these plant chemicals have been undertaken. Researchers at the University of Copenhagen have suggested that plants will produce some of these compounds as a defence mechanism against attack from pests, and that these defence mechanisms are weakened by high levels of fertiliser use,

**Figure: Changing amounts of minerals and water in vegetables and fruits analysed in the 1980s compared with the 1930s (1930s = 100)**



Source: A-M Mayer (3)

# value

necessitating in turn greater use of pesticide compounds to protect the crops (5).

Flavonoid levels in plants can be affected by sunlight and UV light. Reducing sunlight can dramatically reduce the amounts of quercetin, naringenin and caffeic acid in tomatoes. For example, Maianii and co-workers report a 50% decrease in phenol levels in cherry tomatoes when sunlight is

reduced by 60%, and a similar decrease when UV-B light is reduced (6).

These findings have implications for the growing of crops under glass or plastic sheeting. Covered production of fruit and vegetables has increased dramatically in recent years. The findings also have implications for moves in agriculture to grow early-maturing crops. Flavonoids and anthocyanins are reported to be several hundred per cent higher in red onions harvested in July compared with those harvested in April. (6)

Further losses occur with processing techniques and long storage times. Improvements in storage techniques have allowed perishable crops to be preserved for increasingly long periods without noticeable deterioration in their appearance. But there may be deterioration and loss of some of the more volatile compounds, such as the antioxidant phenols coumaric acid, quercetin and lutein. These levels can drop almost as quickly in a low-oxygen, high nitrogen atmosphere (as used in salad bags) as they can in normal air. A test of onions stored in air and in a low-oxygen atmosphere showed the levels of these antioxidants to decline by 60% in both atmospheres over a week. In lettuce stored for one week, the quercetin levels fell by 18% in air, but by nearly 40% in the modified atmosphere (6).

Profound changes in our agricultural systems, markets and processing technologies have occurred in recent years. It would not be surprising if these changes did not alter the intrinsic nature of the foods

produced, and the evidence suggests that this is the case.

The exhortation to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day are based on studies of countries where such consumption levels are commonplace – mainly around the Mediterranean – and their link to a long life expectancy. But that region's traditional diets were based on the consumption of fruits and vegetables grown, stored and processed in ways that have been changing, and the modern food supply – even in that region – may no longer contain the rich assortment of nutrients it once did.

If we are to rely on modern production methods, then five-a-day may need to be raised to a higher target.

## Some apple varieties score poorly on vitamin C

Variety	Vitamin C (per 100g)
Sturmer	20mg
Discovery	16mg
Cox's Orange	9mg
Russet	8mg
Worcester	5mg
Golden Delicious	4mg
Granny Smith	4mg
Red dessert	3mg

Source: J Blythman (4)

1. A Trichopoulou *et al*, Nutritional composition and flavonoid content of edible wild greens and green pies: a potential rich source of antioxidant nutrients in the Mediterranean diet. *Food Chemistry*, 703:319-323, 2000.

2. DeLong *et al*, Effect on infant mortality of iodination of irrigation water in a severely iodine-deficient area of China. *Lancet*, 350:771-773, 1997.

3. A-M Mayer, Historical changes in the mineral content of fruits and vegetables. *British Food Journal*, 99:207-211, 1997.

4. Blythman J, *The food we eat*. London: Michael Joseph, 1996.

5. Andersen JO, Farming, plant nutrition and food quality. University of Copenhagen, 1999.

6. Maiani G *et al*, Factors of change, technological progress and the uncertain future of the Mediterranean diet. *Public Health Nutrition*, 4(2a):415, 2000.

## European Commission urged to curb corporate lobby

Over 270 European consumer, health and environmental organisations have written to the President of the European Commission demanding that he takes action to 'curb the excessive influence of corporate lobby groups over EU policy-making'.

The letter states that 'over 15,000 full-time lobbyists now operate in Brussels, a large majority representing business interests', working to postpone, weaken or block EU social, environmental and consumer-protection legislation. The letter was coordinated by Corporate Europe Observatory, a not-for-profit campaign group that tracks and exposes the economic and political influence of corporations and their lobby groups.

According to a report issued by the European Parliament (2003), 70% of lobbyists in Brussels work for corporate interests, while only 20% represent non-government organisations (NGOs), including trade unions, health organisations and environmental

groups. The remaining 10% work on behalf of regions, cities and international institutions.

Corporate Europe reports that typical lobbying strategies of the PR firms based in Brussels include threats of business relocation if policy proposals are not dropped, and good-cop/bad-cop routines – where one lobby group takes a hard-line position, allowing another to present what seems like a moderate compromise.

Because much of our food, agricultural, environmental and health policy is no longer decided at national level, companies dealing in food, chemicals and pharmaceuticals have shifted their policy specialists and PR activities to Brussels, far away from the eye of consumers and democratic control.

■ Corporate Europe has published a map showing how major industry groups have clustered in offices in the EU Quarter – the four square kilometres around the European Parliament, conveniently close for lobbying. The map is at: [www.corporateeurope.org/docs/lobbycracy/lobbyplanet.pdf](http://www.corporateeurope.org/docs/lobbycracy/lobbyplanet.pdf)



# Scrambled labels

**Despite a tightening of the labelling rules last year, the labels on egg boxes can still leave consumers befuddled. We went shopping and found half-a-dozen, er... egg samples.**

## Woodland Organic

Nice-looking eggs if you want to pay a premium price. But wait a minute. How big are they?

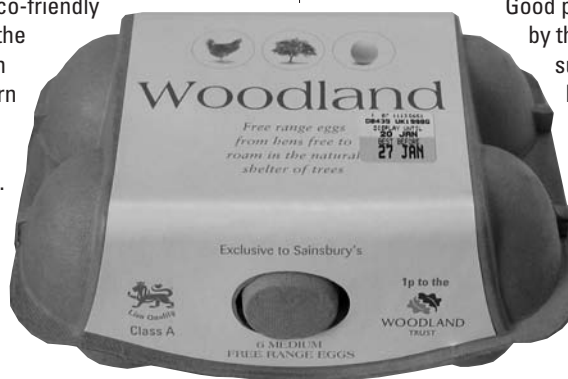
There is no size mark on this pack, only tiny print saying that the minimum weight is 328g. Got a calculator with you? Then you can work out that the egg size averages a minimum of 54.7g. Got your reference table for egg sizes with you? Then you can see at a glance that this is at the smaller end of the 'Medium' category. Eggs-asperating!



## Woodland Free Range

Woodland again, and nothing specifically misleading about the packaging, except that the brand name Woodland could imply a small independent producer dedicated to free range and organic eggs reared in pretty forests. In fact Woodland is a brand of Deans Farms, once owned by the multinational Dalgety but now a dedicated egg production company. It is the largest egg producer in Britain, with interests in feed milling, distribution and 'hen processing'.

The Woodland brand is part of a deal between Deans and the Woodland Trust. Deans gets the eco-friendly brand name and the charity link-up on the pack in return for 1p given to the Trust for each box sold. Cheep cheep at the price!



## Shelling out

By law, all EU produced eggs should be stamped on their shells with a code to indicate their provenance. Apart from other codes and logos, there must be a string of numbers and letters that look something like this:

**3UK123c**

The first number indicates the stocking conditions, based on the code shown below. In this example these would be eggs from caged hens.

- 0 = organic
- 1 = free range
- 2 = barn eggs
- 3 = cage eggs

This initial code is followed by the country, such as UK, and the farm's identity number (in this example a fictitious 123c).

## Getting fresh

Dates on egg boxes should tell you how old the eggs are. The maximum 'best before' date is 28 days after laying. Eggs must be sold ('delivered to the consumer') no more than 21 days after laying.

Good practice – operated by the better supermarkets – cuts both these dates by a week so that the best before date is 21 days after laying, and the 'sell by' or 'display until' date is 14 days after laying.



## Old Cotswold Legbar

Like the Woodland Organic eggs, there is no size marking on this pack. The tiny print, at the back of the box (so you have already taken it off the shelf, see) says 300g minimum. That's 50g per egg minimum, or Small.

The box also boasts that the hens are 'fed on a natural vegetarian cereal diet'. Well, actually guys, hens are not by nature vegetarian. Originating from Red Jungle Fowl, they love to munch on grubs, worms and insects to supplement a diet of seeds, berries and grit. They need animal-based foods to get the full range of nutrients, so an all-vegetarian cereal diet may not give them what they need.





## 18 eggs from Iceland

Again the problem of no size indication. We get told that the 18 eggs will weigh an average of 964g, which means of course that these eggs are ...er...

The answer is that these eggs are a mix of smallish medium and mediumish small eggs which the company can't be bothered to sort.

Oh – but where on the pack does it say how the eggs were produced? It doesn't. But if you look on the eggs themselves it says code 3. Which, as an egg-head might be able to tell you, means battery cages.



## Lion quality?

The Lion Quality mark can be found on the priciest organic eggs as well as the cheapest eggs produced by intensively farmed, battery caged hens.

As such, the Lion Quality mark gives little indication of welfare issues, although it does indicate that the laying hens have been vaccinated against Salmonella Enteritidis and should guarantee that the eggs are traceable back to the farm at which they were produced.

A best before date should also be stamped on every egg bearing the Lion Quality mark, although these dates are not always easy to read.

Eggs which do not carry the Lion Quality mark may have been imported from countries which do not meet basic UK and EU health and safety legislation. Such eggs tend to be used in commercial outlets such as restaurants and canteens, rather than sold directly to consumers.

## Scrambled sizes

Until the late 1990s, eggs were marketed in sizes graded from 7, the smallest, to 0 the largest. These were then changed to more descriptive labels, based on the following conversions:

New Size	Old Size	Weight
Small	5-7	Less than 53g
Medium	3-5	53-63g
Large	3-1	63-73g
Very large	1-0	Over 73g

And don't be fooled by the prominent sign on the label saying 'Class A'. All eggs for sale direct to consumers should be class A, which means they are clean, fresh and show no visible cracks. And eggs have to be clean without being washed – washing of eggs is not permitted (as it spreads disease from dirty eggs to clean ones, and the bacteria can penetrate the shell).

## 10 Very Large Fresh Eggs

The word 'Fresh' is a complete red herring as all eggs should be fresh if they are to be fit for sale. The best before date is just the same as the other eggs on display.

And notice that you are not getting 12 eggs but ten, in a box that could easily look like a regular one-dozen pack.

These were produced by Bird Bros at the delightfully named Sunny Farm. The box gives no indication of how the eggs were produced, so it's a fair bet that the hens which laid these eggs didn't see much sunshine down at Sunny Farm.



## Columbus eggs

We will not grouse (oops) about the health claims, although one of these eggs would provide little more omega-3 than would the vegetable oil you might fry it in. But we will grouse about the lack of pack labelling telling us about the size and the production methods.

The size isn't given, only (once again) the minimum pack weight (328g this time). So calculators out and ... the eggs are at the small end of Medium.

The production method? Nothing at all. But take out an egg, read the encoded stamp, and it turns out that these eggs are from common-but-certainly-not-garden battery-kept birds.

## Duck Eggs

Fancy a change of taste with these duck eggs? The pack tells us they are free range, which is nice. But the pack says nothing about size nor about weight.

So we open up the pack to see what it says stamped on the eggs and the answer is... nothing at all. No codes, no little lions, nothing. And no provenance either. On the pack we are only given the helpful information that they were produced for ...guess who? Yes, Deans, the country's largest egg company.

Down-right quackery?

## Class A, class B and industrial eggs

When buying eggs as a consumer you should only ever come across Class A eggs, which must be naturally clean, fresh eggs with intact shells and an air sac not exceeding 6mm in depth. The yolk must not move away from the centre of the egg on rotation. Such eggs are usually sorted by machine, and those that fail to make the grade are designated as Grade B eggs which are 'broken out' and pasteurised for use by the food industry.

In addition, there is another class of eggs called industrial eggs which are for non-food use only. These are largely used in cosmetic products such as shampoo and soap.



# When will WHO make a move on Codex?

**A leaked report puts the World Health Organization's strategic plans on the spot. Tim Lobstein reports.**

**T**he global struggle between the defenders of public health and the promoters of free markets and unfettered commercial trade is regularly enacted in the meetings of Codex Alimentarius, a quaintly-named body jointly run by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization. This is the agency which sets standards for the huge international trade in foods, and its remit covers raw commodities, processed foods, food contaminants, residues, additives, labelling and health claims. It also includes nutrition.

The need to protect food safety, prevent adulteration and ensure accurate and informative labelling keeps dozens of civil

servants in employment and fills conference centres with Codex committee meetings held routinely around the world. In these meetings, formally attended by government delegations but also frequently attended by commercially interested bodies and less often by one of the few consumer organisations acknowledged by Codex as having observer status, any attempt made to promote consumers' needs is challenged and often overruled by the defenders of free trade. Consumer protection, they say, is just a cover for protectionism, and is a barrier to the free movement of goods and services.

A new dimension has now been injected into these arguments by the World Health Organization's acceptance at their 2004

annual assembly of a *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health* which commits WHO to work with its member states and international partners to fulfil the strategic goals. Particularly targeted are 'energy-dense, micronutrient-poor' foods and foods with high levels of saturated and trans fats and foods with high levels of salt. The *Global Strategy* points to the need to set high standards for the nutritional quality of foods, and the need to assist consumer choice through food labelling, and controls on marketing. And, it implies, this is where Codex should play a role.

In pursuit of this strategy, WHO commissioned a report on what it could legitimately and reasonably expect to implement through Codex. This report was completed last summer<sup>1</sup> but has not been published by WHO – leading to speculation that the contents would embarrass WHO or would set it at odds with the giant food corporations. The Food Commission has

## What Codex could do for our health

According to the leaked WHO report, there are several significant moves that could be made within Codex to help *'the consumer to make prudent choices, to make the healthy choice the easy choice and to prevent unsuitable or misleading information through labelling, presentation and advertising'*. These moves are, says the report, well within the competence of Codex and the agency should develop 'guidelines and codes of practice to reach that objective'.

Codex does not have its own legal authority, as member states retain their own, national sovereignty. But its recommendations carry significant weight and may be used by the World Trade Organization when deciding if trade disputes are based on fair and appropriate standards.

The report recommends:

**1** A new Codex Task Force for Nutrition and Good Nutrition Practices. This should have a 3-year life to review current Codex standards, propose new ones and provide draft codes of practice concerning the nutritional and health aspects of food marketing, advertising, retailing and catering.

It can also advise on the development of foods with favourable nutrition profiles.

**2** Codex food standards should encourage the production of foods with low energy density and high nutrient density, saturated fat replaced with unsaturated fats, limit trans fats to a maximum of 1% of a product, reduce sugars content and have maximum limits set for salt content.

**3** Nutrition labels should be clearer and more consumer friendly, focussing on energy, fats, sugars and fibre. The information should be prominently displayed.

**4** Nutrition and health claims should be restricted, and should only be permitted on foods which have a positive nutritional profile. Controls on claims should be extended to include advertising as well as labelling and presentation of the food. Children should not be the targets of nutrition and health claims, apart from permitted exceptions. All advertising and food promotion must avoid undermining national dietary guidelines and the promotion of healthy, balanced diets and active lifestyles.

**5** Codex should develop a Code of Practice regarding promotion of foods in schools. This should discourage producers from using schools as marketing opportunities and should abide by quality criteria for vending machine products.

**6** Codex should develop a Code of Practice for the presentation of foods targeted at children up to 12 years old. This should restrict advertising during children's TV, restrict the use of celebrities and sports personalities for promoting products with low nutrition profiles, and prohibit the distribution of such products as presents or prizes in schools, supermarkets or fast food stores.

**7** Codex should develop Codes of Practice for Good Nutrition Practice for Retailers and for Caterers. These should include recommendations regarding information displays, food promotion to children, portion sizes, the availability of healthier options, and the availability of nutritional information and educational material.

obtained a copy and finds that indeed the report recommends curbs on advertising to children, restrictions on marketing in schools, a ban on the use of sports personalities and celebrities to promote food to children, as well as tough limits on salt and saturated fat permitted in foods (see box).

Releasing the report might well put WHO on the spot. With recommendations as strong as these the WHO will either have to find excuses for not implementing them or else go ahead and push them forward. One possible route that WHO might have taken would be to say that the proposals lie outside the scope of Codex, but the report pre-empts this excuse by showing that Codex has already made policies relating to nutritional standards, labelling, health claims and even advertising, and therefore has already shown that it is competent to pronounce on these issues.

The onus is now on WHO to make the next move. Groups including the Food Commission are pressing both WHO and Codex itself to respond.<sup>2</sup>

The lead official for non-communicable diseases at WHO is Professor Robert Beaglehole, a New Zealander on secondment from the Department of Community Health, Auckland University. Beaglehole has championed the need to tackle the health-damaging effects of globalisation. He wrote in 2001:

*It is already evident, however, that policy measures are required to rectify the adverse effects of globalization on health and strengthen the positive ones. Policy should be guided by the following principles: (i) growth needs to be inclusive, equitable and sustainable, and this requires policy coherence between economic, social and environment sectors; (ii) opening up of borders should be gradual and preceded by appropriate protective conditions; (iii) international rules and institutions should promote the production of global public "goods" and the control of global public "bads"; (iv) special attention is needed to increase the transfer of financial and technical resources to those left behind in the development process; (v) strong national health policies, institutions, regulations and programmes are essential; (vi) the public health workforce must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to engage with partners across sectors and across borders to achieve health and other social goals.*<sup>3</sup>

And in 2003 he said:

*There is an increasing need to establish global norms, both legally binding and non-binding, across many spheres to balance otherwise unrestrained influences of powerful actors. ... [N]on-binding instruments important for non-*

*communicable disease control include the Codex Alimentarius Commission (with its probable increased focus on food labelling and health claims), but more will be needed.*

*... The pace of globalisation of the major risks for non-communicable diseases is increasing. However, the prospects for non-communicable disease prevention and control are only slowly improving. ... The challenges are enormous and the ongoing tobacco wars indicate that progress will remain slow until the response to non-communicable disease epidemics is scaled up in a manner commensurate with their burden.*<sup>4</sup>

These are fine words, But when challenged over the contents of the leaked report by Guardian journalist Sarah Boseley, he offered no encouragement. Negotiating changes to the Codex would be a long and difficult process, he said.<sup>5</sup> "It is not a huge priority."

We shall be putting pressure on him to ensure he appreciates that it is, in fact, a very high priority.

## References

1. World Health Organization. *Codex Alimentarius vis-à-vis the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health: Food standardisation to support the reduction of chronic diseases (food and diet for a healthy long life)*. Geneva 2004, unpublished.
2. Letter to Dr Stuart Slorach, Chairman of Codex Alimentarius Commission, from Bruce Silverglade, President of the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO), 30/11/04. (For details of IACFO, see [www.cspinet.org/reports/codex/iacfosum.html](http://www.cspinet.org/reports/codex/iacfosum.html))
3. N Drager and R Beaglehole. Globalization: changing the public health landscape. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 79 (9), 2001.
4. R Beaglehole, D Yach. Globalisation and the prevention and control of non-communicable disease: the neglected chronic diseases of adults. *The Lancet* 362: 903-08, 2003.
5. S Boseley. WHO 'buried' report to please food industry. *The Guardian*, 3 November 2004.

## Badvertisement

# Fine profits are made from the 'finest' water

We've already taken Tesco to task over their 'Finest' Pork Loin Steaks which contain an estimated one tenth added water, so we were intrigued when a reader asked us to take a look at the extra ingredients that go into Tesco's 'Finest' range of yogurts.

They certainly look and sound delicious. The packaging of their Bourbon Vanilla Yogurt boasts that it has 'The distinctive fresh taste of natural Bourbon vanilla extract blended with cream and West Country milk' and describes the contents as 'yogurt blended with whipping cream and Bourbon vanilla.'

Perhaps unsurprisingly the small print tells another story, revealing the main added

ingredient to be good old fashioned water, rather than the whipping cream and the Bourbon vanilla that one might have expected. The label doesn't declare just how much water has been added, but it's certainly over one tenth of the product.

Water has also been added to Tesco's 'Finest' Wild Blueberry and 'Finest' White Peach Yogurts. Modified maize starch is

used to soak up (and hide) the water, and added flavourings ensure that the yogurts' taste is given a little boost.



Whilst we are accustomed to finding 'economy' and cheap desserts padded out with water and starch, it's disappointing to find the UK's leading supermarket happily adulterating even its more expensive in-house brands.



# Improving food access for Londoners

**The Food Commission is undertaking a major piece of work for the London Development Agency, looking at how town planners and housing associations could improve access to healthy, affordable food.**

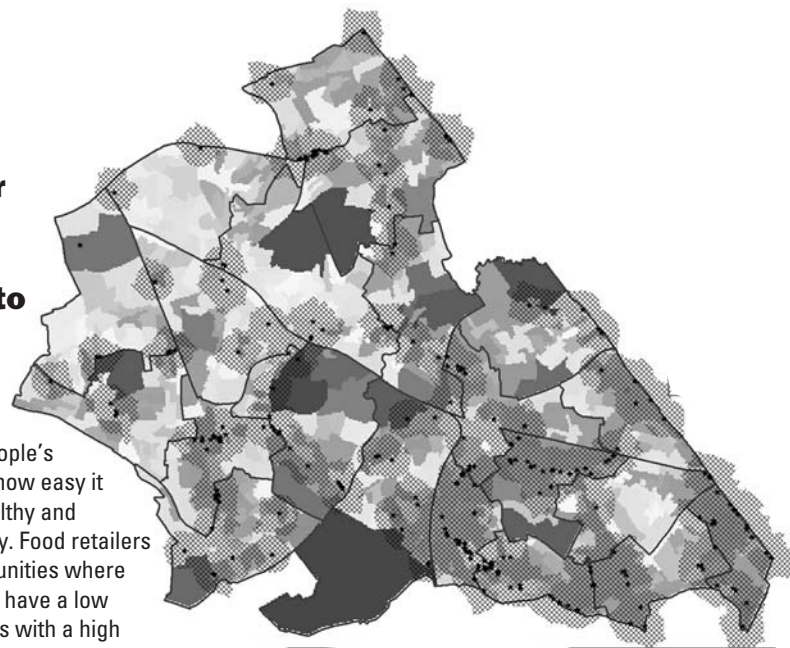
**L**ondoners living in deprived areas suffer not only from the more visible effects of poverty, such as high crime rates and poor housing. They also experience higher rates of disease – especially coronary heart disease, cancers and diabetes – with ill-health starting earlier in life than for their richer neighbours. Some London boroughs, such as Brent, report a ten-year difference in life expectancy between people living just a few stops away from each other on the underground line.

Local authorities working in London boroughs are responsible for the well-being of their residents, and are therefore increasingly concerned about these differences in health between poor and rich communities.

Such concerns have placed food access squarely on the public agenda, as a key factor

contributing to health inequalities, since people's health is affected by how easy it is for them to buy healthy and affordable food locally. Food retailers have deserted communities where households generally have a low income, such as areas with a high proportion of elderly people. In run-down housing estates, rising crime rates deter local shopkeepers. Meanwhile, large supermarkets are increasingly dominant in the food market, concentrating the food supply in large-scale shopping centres, which are most suited to customers with cars and secure incomes. Local street markets, meanwhile, are struggling to survive.

The Food Strategy Unit of the London Development Agency (reporting to the London



**Every journey starts with a map: The London Borough of Brent has surveyed the cost, quality and availability of five-a-day products and created a map to identify areas where healthy foods are simply not available.**

government departments such as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, we are investigating how local government could improve infrastructure, support local retailers and improve food access. The main aims are:

1. To produce guidance for borough planners on how to improve access to healthy and affordable food for low-income communities.
2. To produce guidance for housing associations working in the London area on how to develop, implement and sustain work to improve food access.
3. To support at least one borough working towards a neighbourhood retailing strategy, to improve food access in their area.
4. To help disseminate the food access guidance to relevant policy officers, local government officials, and public and private sector organisations.
5. To support promotion of the Open College Network food access course, coordinated by Community Food Enterprise (Newham).

We would be pleased to hear from people whose work is relevant to this research; for instance, staff from local-authorities (based in London or other urban areas), Primary Care Trusts, governmental and non-governmental organisations, food retail associations and housing associations.

■ **Contact: Kath Dalmeny, tel: 020 7837 2250; email: [kath@foodcomm.org.uk](mailto:kath@foodcomm.org.uk)**

## Badvertisement

### Buy salt to help hearts!

If you're a food manufacturer planning to link to a good

cause, this is how not to do it. Dina's Persian Curry Sauce declares it is 'in aid of heart & cancer research'. But nowhere on the pack does the manufacturer Hallpride explain the meaning of this

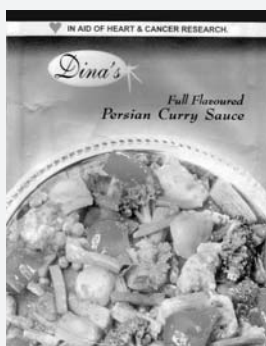
statement. There is no indication of how much money (if any) is given to such good causes. And there are no contact details for any

charity or research organisation, in case a

customer wishes to make their own donation or find out more about heart and cancer research. Nutritionally,

there are also questions about whether such a product should contain a 'heart research' message at all. The sauce is

high in salt, containing over 1g of sodium per 100g, which equates to 1.7g of salt per serving. Hardly a good advert for heart health!

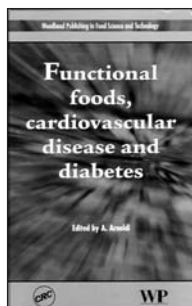




# reviews

## Functional foods, cardiovascular disease and diabetes

A Arnoldi (Ed)  
Woodhead Publishing  
(www.woodhead-publishing.com) 2004, £145,  
ISBN 1-85573-735-3.



This is an expensive series of 20 reviews primarily of value to researchers developing new food products. The book gains from having scientists who are among the experts in their field, but these same scientists are often the ones who receive substantial industry funding for their research institutes. And science books, though they look authoritative, are rarely peer reviewed.

## Technology of Reduced Additive Food

Jim Smith, Blackwell Science  
(www.blackwellpublishing.com) 2004, £79.50,  
ISBN 0-632-05532-4.

This is the second edition of a book first published in 1993 – which might say something about how slowly the industry has moved in taking additives out of our food.

As with the functional food book, many authors are industry consultants, which gives the book its strengths and its weaknesses.

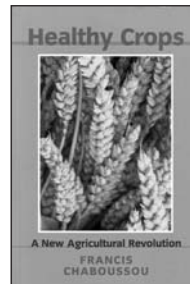
And, in its self justification, the book claims that industry uses additives as a response to consumer pressure for 'more appealing and convenient food products' but now consumers are demanding fewer additives.

Just how intelligent are these guys?



## Healthy Crops

A new agricultural revolution.  
Francis Chaboussou, Jon Carpenter Publishing,  
£9.99, ISBN 1-897766-89-0.



This is the first opportunity to read in English the work of Chaboussou, who has pioneered some revolutionary ideas on the ability of plants to resist pests and diseases. The book is based on a 1985 French text, and provides a clear description of the basic theory and a load of supportive information based on agricultural trials over the last half-century.

The gist of the argument goes like this: pests, from viruses through to insects, attack plants to gain access to the soluble nutrients they contain – and in particular the free amino acids, but also free sugars and trace minerals. If they cannot easily obtain these nutrients, the parasites fail to thrive.

A healthy plant is normally in one of two phases: either it is in 'repose', i.e. hibernation, when the plant contains few free amino acids as these were used up in making the longer chain proteins such as enzymes needed to prepare for hibernation. Otherwise the plant is in a growth phase, and again the level of free amino acids is poor as they are quickly used to create further cellular tissue. In both phases, the plant is not a good proposition for a pest.

An unhealthy plant is one which is ripe for attack. It may already be under attack from one source, making it more vulnerable to be attacked by another – and Chaboussou shows data in which the aphid population on a plant grows more rapidly if the plant is infected with the mosaic virus. But a plant may also be vulnerable to attack if its environment is hostile – and hostile environments include ones in which the balance of nutrients available to it are distorted, e.g. when being treated with mineral fertilisers, or if the plant is being sprayed with aggressive chemicals, such as organochlorides, organophosphates, carbamates and pyrethroids. Thus the theory leads to the conclusion that modern farming methods are dramatically undermining crops' defences while providing rich resources to their pests. Although the pests may be driven off by the agrochemical onslaught, they will return as soon as it is safe to do so, and will find their victims weak and weary. The farmer's response, of course, is to increase the spraying.

The thesis is seductive. Although the text refutes one of the alternative ideas: that well nourished plants can create phytochemicals to help them fight of predatory pests, and that these phytochemicals – such as antioxidants – are valuable additions to the human diet, there seems no inherent reason why both theories cannot coexist. Plants, like humans, may depend on several protective strategies simultaneously. And the end conclusion remains the same: organically produced plants make healthier crops.

## Seeds of Deception

Exposing corporate and government lies about the safety of genetically engineered food. Jeffrey M Smith, Green Books  
(www.greenbooks.co.uk) 2004, £9.95. ISBN 1-903998-41-7.

This is a wonderful romp through the recent history of food safety with respect to genetically modified foods. It holds back no punches – as the subtitle reveals, the author is convinced that big business and government have conspired to lie to the public to protect the market for GM crops, and he spends an enjoyable 250 pages proving his point.

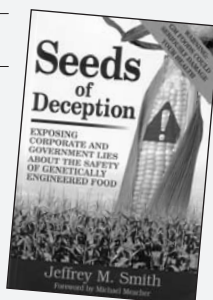
A friend to this UK edition, by Michael Meacher, enthuses over the book's ability to combine 'shrewd dissection of the true nature of GM technology' with 'scarifying examples of the manipulation of both science and the media by the biotech industry'. It is, adds Meacher, 'somewhere between a documentary and a thriller'.

But this is as much a weakness as a strength in such an extraordinary account of the bad science and worse politics behind the major stories concerning GM food safety. We get a detailed account of the dismissal of Arpad Pusztai's demonstration of GM potatoes causing damage to mice, we get a thorough description of how over 1000 people suffered from GM-produced L-tryptophan supplements, we get an analysis of the skulduggery surrounding the GM-

produced milk-boosting hormone Bovine Somatotropin, and we get several excellent lectures on the potential for GM foods to be a human health problem; all our prejudices are confirmed and no alternative views are allowed to unravel the plot – and that's the problem.

The book opens with a conversation between Arpad Pusztai's wife and a journalist on her doorstep, and continues with occasional dialogue between key players to dramatise significant events. This is a writer's device to engage the reader in a work of fiction, and it certainly brings the book to life – but it looks odd in a work with the serious intent of exposing bad science, greedy corporations, amoral politicians and corrupt bureaucrats. Many of the conversations presented in the book could not have been recorded at the time. They may have been recreated from interviews, but the footnotes show these interviews involved only some of the participants being quoted.

Yet it is worth suspending disbelief and enjoying the book as it is, with Smith peeling away layer after layer of deceit and corruption. And this book looks only at GM foods and human health – a second book is promised on GM and the environment.





## What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals

### Vitamin E has many faces

Vitamin E is not a single biochemical but a group of eight structurally related tocopherols and tocotrienols with different forms and functions, according to a recent review. The particular beneficial effects of these different isomers have to be considered when analysing the physiological impact of dietary vitamin E or supplements in clinical trials. Although mainly acting as an antioxidant, vitamin E can also be a pro-oxidant and it can act as a signalling molecule, as a regulator of gene expression and, possibly, in the prevention of cancer and atherosclerosis.

These considerations are also relevant for the design of transgenic crop plants with the goal of enhancing vitamin E content because an engineered biosynthetic pathway may be biased toward formation of one isomer. The review concludes that there is little hard evidence from clinical and epidemiologic studies on the beneficial effects of supplementation with vitamin E beyond the essential requirement.

■ Schneider C. *Mol Nutr Food Res*. Dec 2004

### Early nutrition affects psychiatric outcomes

A series of epidemiological studies have found that adults who were born with a low birth weight have an increased susceptibility to diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and stroke in adulthood. A new review has shown evidence linking prenatal malnutrition, low birth weight, and prematurity to an increased risk for neurodevelopmental disorders, schizophrenia, affective disorders, and schizoid and antisocial personality disorders.

Furthermore, controlled studies in medicated adult patients with psychiatric disorders suggest that supplemental treatment with omega-3 fatty acids, particularly long-chain eicosapentaenoic acid, may reduce the symptoms of major depressive disorder.

Additional studies are necessary to confirm any benefits for bipolar disorders and the implications for preventing these diseases through improved maternal nutrition.

■ Casper RC. *Curr Psychiatry Rep* 6:425-429, 2004.

### Glycaemic index linked to diabetes

The glycaemic index rates how rapidly blood glucose levels rise after eating different foods. Two studies have provided evidence linking the glycaemic index of foods in the diet with the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

In one investigation, over 90,000 subjects in the US Nurses Health Study were monitored over two decades, during which time 741 developed diabetes. These individuals were significantly more likely to have eaten a high glycaemic index diet, and a diet containing relatively low levels of cereal-derived dietary fibre.

In the second study, which monitored 2,800 middle-aged men with no history of diabetes, the risk of having insulin resistance, a precursor to diabetes, was significantly higher in those men who diets contained the least cereal fibre, the least whole grain foods, and had the highest total glycaemic load (i.e. foods of higher glycaemic index eaten in larger quantities).

■ Schulze MB *et al*, *Am J Clin Nutr* 80:348-356, 2004.  
McKeown NM *et al*, *Diabetes Care* 27:538-546, 2004.

### Vitamins can prevent premature birth

A survey of over 2,000 pregnant women in North Carolina has shown that women who took multivitamins prior to becoming pregnant were only half as likely to deliver their babies pre-term (<37 weeks) compared with women who did not take supplements. In contrast, women who took

vitamins around the time of conception or later in pregnancy showed no reduced risk compared with non-supplement users.

■ Vahratian A *et al*, *Am J Epidemiol*. 160:886-892, 2004.

### A healthy gut prevents cancer

Enterolactone, a product of intestinal bacteria acting on plant foods in the diet, may be protective against breast cancer and other hormone-dependent cancers. A cross-sectional study of 857 older women in Denmark showed that higher levels of these compounds were associated with diets containing cereals (especially whole grain

cereals), vegetables (especially cabbage and leafy vegetables) and beverages (especially coffee). Lower levels were associated with dietary fat and with overweight, smoking and frequent bowel movements

■ Johnsen NF *et al*, *J Nutr*. 134:2691-2697, 2004.

### Big portions encourage overeating

The suggestion by authors such as Young and Nestle that the increase in the portion size of food products may be responsible for the epidemic of overweight and obesity has received support from new evidence linking portions to actual consumption levels. Undergraduate students at Cornell University were given access to a buffet lunch on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and were told this was a test of flavour enhancers. They were instructed to eat as much or as little as they wanted. The protocol was repeated the following week, but subjects were divided into three groups. Each group was served either 100%, 125%, or 150% of the amount of food they had consumed the previous week. When larger amounts were served, significantly

greater amounts of food were consumed. Although the amounts served were greater than the students had felt were sufficient the previous week, consumption of each of the components of the meal (soup, pasta, breadsticks, ice cream) increased significantly in proportion to the extra portion size – i.e. there was a tendency for the subjects to consume all that they were given. The data clearly support the hypothesis proposed by Young and Nestle and support the powerful role that environment plays in determining energy intake and potential increases in body weight.

■ Levitsky DA, Youn T. *J Nutr*. 134:2546-2549, 2004.





## Not on the Label

Felicity Lawrence examines what really goes into the food on our plates in a series of undercover investigations that track some of the most popular foods we eat today. She discovers why beef waste ends up in chicken, why a third of apples are thrown away, and why supermarkets won't stock different varieties of wine unless they all taste the same. Investigative food writing at its best. £7.99

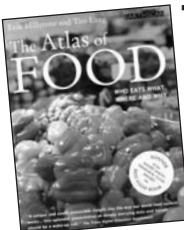
## Shopped: The shocking power of British supermarkets

Joanna Blythman investigates the handful of supermarkets that now supply 80% of our groceries. Meticulously researched, this is a book that will make you angry at just how far the supermarkets have misled us, seducing us with apparent convenience, choice and value whilst destroying our farming heritage and food culture. £12.99



## The Atlas of Food

The subtitle of this book is 'who eats what, where and why.' This extremely useful, well illustrated and comprehensive publication examines the food trade, food politics and new technologies, and their effects on the environment and human health. An ideal resource for secondary-school pupils, students, and anyone seeking facts and figures, and an overview of food production and its impact on our lives and livelihoods. £12.99



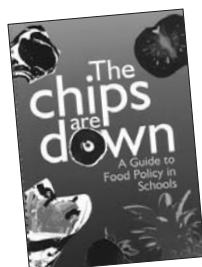
## The Food Our Children Eat – 2nd edition

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 enjoy a healthy wide-range of foods. No more tantrums, fights and refusals: her strategies are relaxed, low-effort – and they work. £8.99



## The Chips are Down

This is an excellent guide to the planning and promotion of healthy eating in schools, full of nitty-gritty guidance, such as how to gain support from teachers, parents, health workers and, most importantly, pupils. £15.00



## Dump the Junk!

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



## Fast Food Nation

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# feedback

letters from our readers



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

## Where are trans fats?

If a food contains trans fats, do they have to be listed in the ingredients and the nutritional information on the label?

Lila Savant, Bude, Cornwall

*Eds: We get a lot of enquiries about trans fats and hydrogenated fat. Trans fats (also called trans fatty acids) don't have to be included in the nutritional information provided on a food label unless a specific trans fat claim has been made such as 'low in trans fats'. And they don't need to be listed in the ingredients.*

*Low levels of trans fats are naturally present in some foods such as butter. However, most of the trans fat we consume is in hydrogenated fats. Trans fats are formed during the process of hydrogenation, which means that foods containing hydrogenated vegetable oil also contain trans fats. Hydrogenated vegetable oil must be declared in the ingredients list. So if the ingredients list includes hydrogenated vegetable oil, there are also likely to be trans fats in the product.*

*Trans fats count as part of the total fat in the nutritional information on the label. They are not classed as saturates, monounsaturates or polyunsaturates, so they won't be included in the figures for these.*

*The trans fats found in food containing hydrogenated vegetable oil are harmful and have no known nutritional benefits. They raise the type of cholesterol in the blood that increases the risk of coronary heart disease. Evidence suggests that the effects of these trans fats may be worse than saturated fats, and the government's Food Standards Agency has officially acknowledged this.*

*It's important to try to eat less of both saturated fat and trans fats. Food high in saturated fat includes meat, sausages, meat pies, hard cheese, butter, cakes, pastries, biscuits and food containing coconut or palm oil. Generally, people eat a lot more saturated fat than trans fats.*

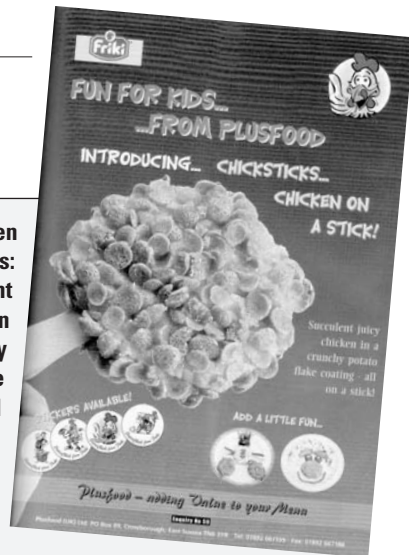
*Following high-profile campaigning in the US (including a legal case against cookie manufacturer Oreo, for failing to declare the trans-fat content of its product), an active UK-based campaign has sprung up. Its aim is to pressurise government to set a maximum limit for trans-fats in processed foods. See: [www.tfx.org.uk](http://www.tfx.org.uk)*

## Chicken lollies

I work for a catering firm that supplies food to schools. I have to say – congratulations are due to *The Guardian* for an excellent feature recently, revealing that Scottish school meal nutritional rules will exclude Bernard Matthews Turkey Twizzlers (didn't they look disgusting in the photo?!).

However, the article went on to say that schoolchildren in England can continue to be fed such ready-made foods, due to the more laissez-faire attitude of English politicians, and the loose rules governing nutrition in English schools. When will our government pull their fingers out and stop repeating that it's up to individual schools? Why should children's nutrition and health be down to a postcode lottery dependent on where they

**Chicken lollies:**  
**'Succulent juicy chicken in a crunchy potato flake coating – all on a stick!'**



happen to be born? I thought you would like to see the attached – an advert that I pulled out of *Cost Sector Catering* magazine recently. This is the sort of stuff I'm expected to feed to schoolkids. And you know what? I'm sick of it!

**By email, name supplied.**

## Olympic eating?

We have received contenders for the prize in our competition to find the fattiest, saltiest and most calorific meal deals and sandwiches, showing how easy it would be to pile on the pounds just by making the wrong choices at the sandwich counter!

Parents Jury member Susan Haddleton reports that she saw a Boots Meal Deal consisting of a BLT sandwich (651 kcal); standard size Walkers Cheese & Onion crisps (181 kcal) and a 500ml regular Coke (215 kcal), adding up to a grand total of 1,047 kcal, with 32.4g fat.

Our researcher Helen Sandwell found two hefty sandwiches on offer in Asda that didn't need the added products of a meal deal to set fat and calorie levels soaring. The Olympic breakfast roll contains 32g of fat, 564 kcal and 3.3g of salt per pack. But even with this Olympian effort, it was beaten into second place by Asda's Cheese & Spring Onion Giant Bap, containing 61g of fat, 3.6g of salt and 1,012 kcal.

In one day, an adult should aim to eat no more than 75g of fat (women); 99g fat (men); 5g of salt (women); 7g of salt (men); 1,940 kcal (women); 2,550 kcal (men).



## What's your reaction?

I've just discovered your website, and like the awards the Parents Jury do, and the information on food labelling for general health. For anyone with a life threatening allergy we rely on information from retailers and caterers. Retailers are getting better. Caterers are still hopeless. What I found interesting is that those retailers judged as hopeless on healthy food generally were among the ones I have had most difficulty with in terms of getting sufficient information to judge if food is safe for my son to eat.

**Julie Mellor, by email**

*Eds: In November, a new government report showed that one in 50 children in England is now allergic to nuts – almost a quarter of a million children, with one in 100 children allergic to sesame. The report found that the incidence of common allergies has tripled since the early 1980s.*

*A Health Select Committee enquiry also found that there is only one allergist per two million people, so that patients with severe reactions face long waiting times and the need to travel long distances for specialist care. It concluded that the Department of Health should train 40 new specialist allergy doctors, create a minimum of 40 allergy consultant posts, and set up a major specialist centre for each area of the country.*

*Such statistics show that people with life-threatening allergies have little backing beyond vigilance and support groups such as the Anaphylaxis Campaign. As you point out, reliable information is often lacking on food packets and especially in restaurants. The Anaphylaxis Campaign reports that the now infamous 'may contain nuts' warning appears*



# feedback

letters from our readers

on so many products, allergy sufferers face life on an extremely restricted diet – something especially difficult to promote to young people learning to manage their condition independently.

The allergy report can be found on the website of the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology: [www.bsaci.org](http://www.bsaci.org) or purchased from The Stationery Office, tel: 0870 600 5522. For details of the Anaphylaxis Campaign, see: [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk)

## Supermarket fibs

*Re: GM food reappearing on our shelves, FM67*  
May I suggest that to say 'the big stores denied they were selling any GM-containing foods' is misleading. They've been selling GM foods, for other companies, ever since the GM controversy began. I think you meant to refer to their OWN label foods, whilst they continue to sell products made by companies many of which are highlighted in the Greenpeace GM shopping guide as still containing GM – either as ingredients or via animal feed.

I have always felt that supermarkets were not responsible for, or indifferent to, other companies' GM policies, and are quite happy to sell them hoping the customer will assume they too are GM free. This smacks of hypocrisy and a willingness to make compromises on behalf of the GM industry. If the EU commission gives the green light for further GM contamination of our food, there will be even more of these 'junk' products on the shelves. Indeed, 'Junk' DNA could well be added to the Junk Food definition, with the added threats it poses.

Peter Brenton, by email

## Moulds trigger allergies

*Re: Quorn okay for babies? FM67*

Quorn is a mycoprotein made by fermentation using a species of *Aspergillus* mould. Many species of this mould cause allergy problems as it exists in normal household air and is inhaled. Mould allergy (and there are several hundred other mould species that may cause allergy) is becoming an increasing problem, and may be related to gut *Candida* problems. I advise my patients with *Candida* to avoid mouldy places or food as far as possible. Different moulds are being used increasingly in the food industry, without, I suspect, any thought for those who may be allergic to them.

Dr Diana Samways MBBS  
[www.allergydoctor.org.uk](http://www.allergydoctor.org.uk)

## Ainsley's idea of leek and tatties

I have just trawled my local Safeway and bought 'Ainsley Harriott' Scottish Style Chicken and Leek Cup Soup. The cover says 'crammed full of gorgeous chicken and leek flavour... give it a whirl.' There is a picture of Ainsley's smiling face and you would think that this is a great soup which will have been made from proper ingredients.

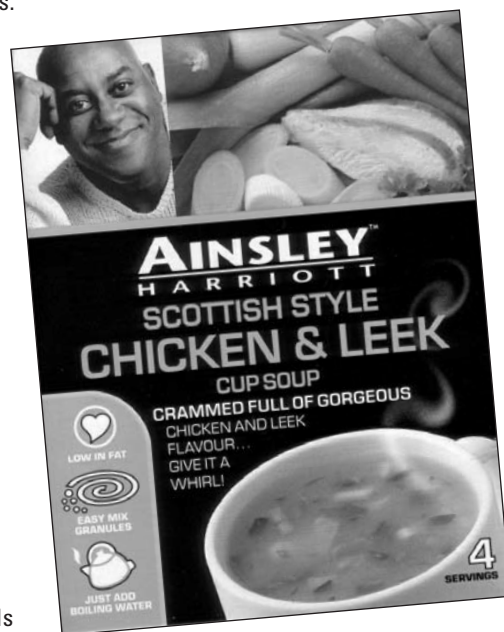
The ingredients read, in this order, as: Maltodextrin, modified potato starch, flavourings (contain wheat, egg), dried vegetables (leek carrot onion) (8%), salt, leek powder (4%), onion powder, dried glucose syrup, hydrogenated palm oil, dried chicken (1%), yeast extract, dried parsley, black pepper, milk protein, emulsifiers (dipotassium phosphate, trisodium citrate), colour (riboflavin).

It also says on the bottom of the packet in the smallest writing ever: Ainsley and Ainsley Harriott are trademarks of Ainsley Harriott and are used under licence. Produced in the UK by Brand Partnership Ltd.

This stuff has no resemblance to Scottish leek and tattie soup. What is more it is promoted by a famous cook saying 'get ready to tickle your tastebuds

with the most sensational cup soup we've ever created!' It is packaged to look authentically Scottish and made by Ainsley Harriott. I think this is a con.

Frances Taylor, Shetland



## A sugared pill

Last week I found this leaflet at my doctor's surgery in Colchester, and was very pleased to see them giving out healthy eating information. But my suspicions were aroused when I started to read a page with the title 'The right fuel'. There's a list of carbohydrate foods which the leaflet says would help me 'keep up my resolve', and are apparently a 'vital part' of a healthy lifestyle. I do enjoy jam and a little sugar on my cereal. But the list includes jelly, cereal bars and confectionery. The list also promotes regular (i.e. sugared) soft drinks and sports drinks.

Hardly the products I'd expect to see promoted by my GP! I should have known better. On the back of the leaflet is a website for the Sugar Bureau, which provided an educational grant for the leaflet. You probably know all about them, but I didn't until I looked up the website, and I've copied in the description from there:

*'The Sugar Bureau is the trade association for the UK sugar industry. It is funded principally by British Sugar and Tate and Lyle, with smaller contributions from Irish Sugar and the UK sugar merchants association. Since 1990, The Sugar Bureau has been involved in promoting nutrition research and raising awareness among academics, health professionals, the media and the public about the role of sugars in the diet.'*

No wonder they promote sugar! I was especially saddened to see this leaflet handed out in an NHS health centre.

Simone Jones, Colchester



Eating enough carbohydrates, in the form of starch and sugar, is a vital part of your new active lifestyle.

Questionable health advice from the Sugar Bureau.





## Some choice

The Food Standards Agency is very keen on consultation, and routinely sends us their circulars addressed to 'interested parties'. The latest concerned the regulation of bottled water, and concerned two issues:

1. to allow bottled waters to say on the label that they were suitable for use in making bottled baby feeds'
2. to limit the bromate content and adjust the pH requirements of bottled waters.

We believe that marketing bottled water as being suitable for infants could undermine breastfeeding and violate the International Code on marketing breastmilk substitutes; and that bottled water is an unnecessary extra expense when safe tap water is available and better for the environment. And remember



that baby milk manufacturer Nestlé owns Valvert, Vittel, Buxton, Perrier, Santa Maria and San Pellegrino bottled water brands.

But imagine our shock when we find the FSA has already predicted our answer, and offered us the following three options to choose from: (1) No change; (2) Allow the baby labelling but not the compositional changes, and (3) Allow both the baby labelling and the compositional changes. So if we want to limit the bromate in the water, we have to accept the baby labelling. No thanks!

**Nestlé's advert for bottled water in a Russian parents' magazine emphasised its suitability for baby bottle feeding '...be careful with the quality of his feed...we recommend mineral water which is ecologically pure. It is good for the baby's organs. It is natural...'**

## Iraqi gold

Foreign companies are considering whether to invest in Iraq. Pepsi has been refurbishing a bottling plant while Nestlé is planning to take over a local bottled-water factor. A group of Iraqi business leaders were lobbying at Nestlé headquarters in Geneva last August to get the firm to invest in Iraq.

But the baby milk company might want to think twice about building a plant in Iraq. The country once boasted a fine new factory near to the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. This was declared by US 'intelligence' in the 1980s as a possible site for making biological weapons, and at the first opportunity during the 1991 Gulf War was bombed to bits. No evidence for biological weapons was found when UN inspectors subsequently visited the site. And

indeed, what would you do if you think a place is storing anthrax, aflatoxin, botulinum and the like? Blow it up and wait for the next strong wind to wipe out most of Asia and eastern Europe?

No, you don't, so there must be another reason. Perhaps it follows the same pattern of all the rest of the bombing of Iraqi infrastructure. It provides a nice little earner for those reconstructing the place. Wars are marvellous opportunities for some...

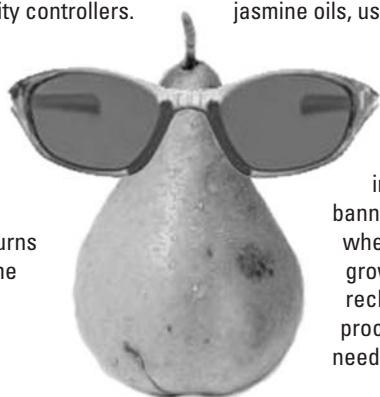
\* Footnote. War-ravaged Iraq is still handing out hundreds of millions of dollars from its oil revenues to companies that claim they lost profits as a result of the first Gulf War. The total so far is \$18bn. Nestlé has received over \$5m.

## Fruit cosmetics

US Agricultural Research Service scientists have been seeking ways of protecting fruit from strong sunshine, to reduce the risk that they develop bronzing or bleaching, and so upset supermarket quality controllers.

The answer could have been predicted by any sunbather – a nice cooling shower, to keep the precious fruit at the best temperature.

The optimum core temperature for a pear, it turns out, is more or less the same as it is for a human, somewhere in the 90s Fahrenheit.



Meanwhile, a new approach to developing the right shade of red has been tried successfully on Fuji apples. A gentle application of a blend of honeysuckle and jasmine oils, used in perfumery for centuries, gives the fruit a lovely blush, says the *Apple and Pear Industry News*.

Of course additives, including aromatics, are banned from fresh fruit, but when applied as part of the growing process they are reclassified from additives to processing aids – and don't need to be declared at all.

## Going for a gong?

What do you need to do to get a medal in the Honours List? According to Corporate Watch, here's one person's CV:

- Perverting the foot and mouth vaccination plan;
- Lobbying against the labelling of GM ingredients in food;
- Protecting processed and unhealthy food;
- Greenwashing the 'food miles' argument;
- Corrupting organic standards;
- Dictating the research agenda;
- Shamelessly defending industry representation on government committees.

The person in question is Sylvia Jay, Director General of the Food and Drink Federation. She was awarded her CBE for 'services to industry'. Not to consumers, obviously.

## PFI – Parents Furious Indeed!

Harry Carlton School in Nottingham is a newly built school serving over 1100 secondary pupils around the village of East Leake, Nottinghamshire. When the pupils started term they were surprised to find a range of vending machines had been installed, offering a range of crisp and chocolate items, courtesy of Nestlé.

The school's governors were furious. They hadn't asked for these machines, and didn't want them. The school's policy was to encourage healthy eating habits. So the governors told the company to take the machines away – only to be told that the machines were part of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract for the building and running of the school.

The PFI contract is run by Alfred McAlpine Business Services, who will provide fabric maintenance and service management until 2033. The chair of governors, Marion Shaw, has had to explain in a letter to parents that the presence of the vending machines 'is not the fault of the current management, who are vehemently opposed to them'. The machines make a significant profit, but none of this goes to the school. Indeed, the school pays for the electricity that powers the machines, she adds.

McAlpine has told the governors that the school will have to fork out a 'considerable' sum if it breaks the contract on the vending machines. We estimate such vending machines to have a turnover of some £20,000 per year each. The profits on five machines over 30 years could be as much as £1m. That's an awful lot of jumble sales and raffles.